

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Analyzing the Portrayals of Black and
White Women in Television Sitcoms from
1990 – 2020

By

Payton Liberto

August 2023

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master
of Arts degree in the
Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

Faculty Advisor: Allyson Nadia Field

Preceptor: Resney Gugwor

Abstract

In this thesis, I asked, “How are Black women and white women portrayed differently in male-created sitcoms from 1990 – 2020 regarding their careers, personalities, and the number of their romantic partners?” I hypothesized that there would be differences observed across each category. The purpose of this thesis was to compare the portrayals of two groups of women and evaluate the messages that these portrayals communicate to viewers. I performed a content analysis of fifty-three male-created sitcoms and examined 127 Black (forty-nine) and white (seventy-nine) female characters. I utilized a variety of sources to gather data for this analysis, such as episode descriptions and clips from shows. I discovered that there were differences in the portrayals of Black and white women in the “Careers” and “Personalities” categories but virtually no differences in the “Number of Partners” category. Many of these portrayals relied on stereotypes and controlling images regarding women overall and Black women as a specific group. These images can be harmful to women in real life. Given that men created the shows in my sample, I suggest that women must have a role in creating female characters to avoid the reproduction of stereotypes and controlling images.

Introduction

Television is a globally popular mode of media, with billions of viewers each year. Television has many different show genres, each with their own style and thematic elements. Despite these differences, most TV shows communicate messages containing various social norms and values to viewers. These messages often shape viewers' perceptions of the social world and those within it.

Since television is a widely consumed mode of media, the messages presented in TV shows can reach and impact viewers in ways far beyond serving as a means of entertainment. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate TV shows and their portrayals of diverse groups of people and situations. This is especially true when it comes to TV portrayals of historically marginalized, exploited, and subordinated groups because the media has had a significant role in enacting and normalizing these injustices. Along with an analysis of these portrayals alone, it is also essential to examine them alongside that of the dominant social group to understand how the media reflects and depicts intergroup dynamics. One dynamic that is necessary to evaluate is the differences in the portrayals of Black and white women.

Numerous TV shows have depicted notable Black and white female characters. But what are these depictions? And what do they look like when placed next to one another? This prompted the research question evaluated in this thesis – “How are Black women and white women portrayed differently in male-created sitcoms from 1990 – 2020 regarding their careers, personalities, and the number of their romantic partners?” I hypothesized there would be significant differences in the portrayals of Black and white women in these categories.

First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge just how popular television is in contemporary society and why it is essential to evaluate it. According to a 2021 U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics report, watching TV was the leisure activity in which Americans of both sexes spent the most time (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). This data showed that men and women, on average, spend 2.86 hours a day watching TV. That amounts to approximately 1,044 hours of television viewing per year. TV watching is a central aspect of life and culture in the United States. As a result, it is necessary to evaluate TV depictions and portrayals of different groups. In this thesis, I evaluated the depictions of Black and white women in sitcoms.

The subjects of this analysis are Black and white female characters. My reasoning behind selecting female characters is that, in the patriarchal world, white men have subordinated women. There are existing gender norms for women regarding how they should behave and what roles they should fill. Historically, gender norms for *white* women encourage a passive and submissive persona that is a sexual object to be used by men. Along with this, white women have been assigned the role of the housewife, with their careers being childrearing/childcare and homemaking. Alternatively, their husbands acted as the head of the household and the sole financial provider for the family. Traditional gender roles and patriarchal values place white men at the top of the social hierarchy and women beneath them. Racial norms and the fact that whites have long been the dominant racial group, or the group with the most power, in the United States also influences white men's position in the social hierarchy.

Multiple forms of media, including television, reflect these gender norms. For example, the character "Margaret Anderson" in the 1954 – 1960 sitcom *Father Knows Best* perfectly represented the traditional homemaker who "effortlessly maintain[ed] the domestic space of the family environment" (Haralovich 1989/2003, p. 83). However, in the modern era, many women on TV and in the real world have strayed from this traditional norm and have taken on different roles in their lives and marriages. This does not mean that gender-based norms and inequality no

longer exist. In the social world, women, on average, are paid less than white men for the same labor (Kochhar, 2023). The wage gap between women and white men widens if women are non-white and non-Asian. For Asian women, this gap narrows (Kochhar, 2023). Not only this but women still, even if they have their own out-of-home occupations *and* make more money than their husbands, do more housework than men on average (Bertrand et al., 2015). These are just some of the many ways gender-based inequality persists. This, along with the fact that television has a history of reflecting and distributing the norms and values of a given time, is why it is essential to evaluate the portrayals of women in the media. It is because of this that I decided to focus on women in this thesis.

It is essential to note that the “traditional” gender norms for women that I previously discussed are typically associated with white women. In the social hierarchy, women, as a group, have been and continue to be placed below white men. However, *white* women’s racial status alters their positions in the social hierarchy and changes how they experience gender-based inequality. Black and other non-white women are not members of the dominant white racial group. As a result, these women have drastically different lives and experiences than white women. This is because one’s multiple *converging* identities weave together to impact their lived experiences. This is the concept of “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1991). While white women have a membership in the dominant white racial group, which influences their lived experiences and affords them certain privileges, Black women are part of a racial group that has been subordinated, exploited, and denigrated for hundreds of years, many times at the hands of white women. According to scholar bell hooks, Black women have been “residing collectively at the very bottom of this society’s social and economic hierarchy [and] have struggled to make space” where they can “work creatively” and develop their “skills and talents” (hooks, 1986, p. 14). In

other words, while white women can be both the oppressed and the oppressor, Black women do not have a group to oppress (hooks, 2015).

Black and white women often have different lived experiences. Along with this, perceptions and treatments of Black and white women also differ. Racial stereotypes and prejudice significantly impact how Black and other women of color are perceived and treated. For example, the media often portrays/stereotypes Black women as “bad-tempered, hostile, overly aggressive” (Asare, 2019) and/or as “nagging wives” (Morrison, 1971). Alternatively, social perceptions and media portrayals of white women often depict them as soft, helpless, modest “ladies” (Morrison, 1971). However, it is essential to note that the “nagging wife” role is also heavily applied to white women in many television shows and films (Bhatt, 2021).

The combination of gender norms and race-based stereotypes is why Black and white women specifically are the subjects of analysis in my thesis. Of course, the perceptions and portrayals of non-Black women of color are also an important area of analysis. However, the placement of Black women at, as bell hooks stated, the “bottom” of the social and economic hierarchy is why I decided to analyze TV portrayals of Black and white women (who are higher on these hierarchies due to their race) in this thesis.

According to Patricia Hill Collins, dominant social groups often depict Black women through a series of “controlling images” in order to maintain their subordination (2000). These controlling images attempt to condition certain behaviors in Black women and spread certain ideas about Black women to the social world (Collins, 2000). In her 2000 book *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins outlines six controlling images of Black women: the “m*mmy,” “matriarch,” “welfare mother,” “welfare queen,” “Black Lady,” and the “j*zebel.”

Collins states that the “m*mmy” image comes from the enslavement era, where whites forced Black women to work on their plantations, serve their families, and care for their children. The “m*mmy” is portrayed as loving the white family and as happy with her role. Collins argues that this controlling image is the “public face that Whites expect Black women to assume for them” (Collins, 2000, p. 81). In this thesis, I write the term for this image and the “j*zebel” image, with asterisks within them, as many individuals consider these words to be racial slurs against Black women (McLean, 2021).

The next controlling image is that of the “matriarch,” an unfeminine, aggressive, emasculating Black woman who heads the household (Collins, 2000). The third and fourth controlling images – the welfare mother and queen – go together. The former portrays Black women as “lazy” mothers who do not work and just “collect welfare” (Collins, 2000, p. 87). Collins notes that this evolved into the welfare queen, a materialistic, unwed, domineering woman. The fifth controlling image of Black women evolved alongside the welfare queen. This is the image of the “Black Lady,” a successful, highly educated Black woman who was career driven. The “Black Lady” is “the hardworking Black woman professional who works twice as hard as everyone else” (Collins, 2000, p. 89). While seemingly positive, dominant social groups have used this image to justify social welfare cuts and limitations on affirmative action in the United States. The final image Collins (2000) identifies is the “j*zebel.” This woman is promiscuous, sexually aggressive, and displays “deviant female sexuality” (p. 91).

Collins (2000) claims these images are central to and support “intersecting oppressions of class, gender, and race” (p. 84). These images have become ingrained within social institutions. Collins (2000) notes that forms of media, such as television, are means of circulating these

images. The circulation of these images in the media is essential for dominant social groups to maintain Black women's intersecting oppressions and shape public opinion towards them. The media exploits Black women's intersecting identities to create a particular set of images. These images are created by those who have long dominated the media: white men. Therefore, white men construct their portrayals of Black women through "white representations of blackness" (hooks, 1992, p. 117). However, in the modern era, many Black men have entered the media production industry and created Black female characters. Despite being from the same racial group, some Black men, according to bell hooks, have different scopes (perspectives) than Black women (hooks, 1992). Black and white men often have specific ideas and perceptions of Black and white women. The male gaze is frequently quite different than the female gaze. In other words, how men view Black and white women may not be how these women view themselves.

In this thesis, I am only evaluating shows created by men. A TV show creator is an individual who develops the overall show, including its storylines and characters (Writer's Guild of America West, n.d.). A show creator is often the "showrunner" of a given TV show; however, this is not always true. A "showrunner" is "in charge of a TV show's creative direction and administration" (Nashville Film Institute, n.d.). I focused on shows created by men because they are the individuals who initially created the characters and their initial depictions. In contrast, the showrunner eventually directs a character's storyline further along in a series.

Nevertheless, I tried to only use shows with male showrunners; however, a few shows had a showrunner for one to two seasons that were female. I still included these shows because the female showrunners were not present until a decent way into the series, meaning that the character had time to develop under the authority of a male creator/showrunner. I also decided to

include shows with women as producers, writers, and episode directors. Some shows, like *Home Improvement* (1991-1999), which many articles and individuals have praised for its portrayal of Jill Taylor (the main character's wife), had multiple female writers, directors, and producers. However, none of the shows had female creators. I decided to allow shows with women in these positions based on the fact that one, a man still created the character themselves, and two, eliminating these shows would leave me with next to nothing.

I decided to strictly use male-created shows in my sample because men are the dominant gender group in many areas of TV production to this day. For instance, according to the 2022 *Hollywood Diversity Report*, men comprised 68.8% of cable-scripted TV show creators and 68.2% of broadcast-scripted TV show creators in 2020 – 2021 (Ramón et al., 2022). Aside from this, men are the dominant group in the gender hierarchy as well. Men have a distinct perception of women that may or may not match women's perceptions of themselves. I wanted to evaluate and gain insight into the dominant gender's perceptions of womanhood. Since men have created many popular television shows, it is important to look at the messages about women that these men are communicating through the characters they create. Of course, not all men will have the same perceptions of women. I do not claim that the portrayals analyzed in this thesis reflect the perceptions of all men. Nevertheless, how do these perceptions then translate into TV sitcoms?

Sitcoms, or "situational comedies," are a subgenre of comedy containing a specific set of characters and settings (Sepinwall, 2021). Their unique style makes them a popular television genre. Many sitcoms have become pop-culture phenomena, with thousands of viewers and sustained popularity. Sitcoms create a perfect environment to facilitate and spread controlling images. They are often simply considered "harmless comedies" about funny characters who serve as couriers of jokes. However, what makes the stories and characters funny relies on

“wider social assumptions about people” (Mills, 2005/2008, p. 101). For something to be funny, those viewing the show must share a common idea about its portrayals of certain individuals or situations and agree that the show reflects “the way things are” (Mills, 2005/2008, p. 9). For example, a laugh track in a scene where a Black woman jumps on a couch shouting at her husband (as seen in an episode of the 2001 – 2005 series *My Wife and Kids*) indicates that this behavior is “normal” and just how things are.

I selected sitcoms because there are “hidden truths beyond the comedic maskings of the situation comedy genre” (Means Coleman et al., 2016, p. 289). The social world has these truths ingrained within it. My selection of Black and white female characters also draws off the notion that representations of white women in the media have “fared better than either Black men or Black women” (Larkin, 1988, p. 165). This comment, written by Black woman filmmaker Alile Sharon Larkin, illustrates that there has historically been differences in the portrayals of white women, Black women, and Black men. These differing portrayals and what they could look like in an examination of modern sitcoms is why I selected this topic and sample.

In this thesis, I analyze Black and white women in sitcoms across the portrayals of their careers, personalities, and the number of their romantic partners. The origins of these categories lie within existing stereotypes of Black women, paralleled with norms and values assigned to white women.

First, I evaluated Black and white female characters' careers in their shows. I assessed their careers because white and Black women have historically worked different jobs. One notable occupational difference between Black and white women is that of the housewife. While white women across history have been given/taken on the role of the housewife, many Black women could never afford not to work (hooks, 2015). Given the historical differences in Black

and white women's occupations, I hypothesized that the sitcoms in my sample would also demonstrate occupational differences between Black and white women, especially in the housewife occupation.

Second, I assessed each character's personality. As I have stated, dominant social groups have stereotyped Black women as "aggressive" or "ill-tempered" individuals, while they depict white women as softer and more "agreeable" individuals. Despite this, in sitcoms, women of most races have been portrayed as a nagging wife who disagrees and argues with her husband (Bhatt, 2021). My personality category of analysis assesses a character's main personality traits.

Finally, I assessed the number of romantic partners the character had across the series. This reflects a character's potential "sexuality" (in this sense, meaning sexual activities and promiscuity). Dominant male social groups often treat Black women like sexual objects (hooks, 1986). They also may portray Black women as highly sexual, as seen with Collins's "j*zbel" image (Collins, 2000). Alternatively, they may also depict Black women as "asexual" or sexless, which aligns with Collins' definition of the "m*mmy" controlling image. Dominant male social groups also treat white women as sexual objects. One common gender norm instructs women not to pursue or "have" sex but rather serve as something for men to use for sex. If a woman is sexually active by her own choosing, then many individuals in the social world shame her (Kreager and Staff, 2009).

I hypothesized that there would be differences across these three categories of analysis. I believed television would reflect the different stereotypes, norms, and perceptions regarding Black and white women I have discussed thus far. I hypothesized that Black and white women would have different careers. I also hypothesized that Black and white women would have different personality traits. Since existing stereotypes for Black women stereotype them as

“aggressive,” I hypothesized that many male show creators would translate this stereotype into their shows and portray Black women in this way. However, TV has a long legacy of portraying white women as “nagging” wives or girlfriends in their relationships or overtly hostile. Therefore, I also hypothesized that I would see these “nagging wife” portrayals during my analysis. Overall, I hypothesized that there would be personality differences in general.

Finally, I hypothesized that there would be a difference in the number of partners Black and white female characters had. I hypothesized that Black women could have multiple or no partners since controlling images regarding Black women, specifically the “m*mmy” and the “j*zebel,” represent two ends of a sexual spectrum. I hypothesized that white women also may or may not have multiple partners. Regardless of which direction this went, I hypothesized that there would at least be a difference in the number of partners between these two groups of characters. In addition, I hypothesized that if there were multiple partners, other characters would shame the woman for them.

This thesis aims to compare the portrayals of Black and white women and answer the following research question: “How are Black women and white women portrayed differently in male-created sitcoms from 1990 – 2020 regarding their careers, personalities, and the number of their romantic partners?” I am not, by any means, claiming that these portrayals are accurate or inaccurate or that one portrayal is better than another. I will *not* argue that the portrayals of Black and white women should be the same either. This is because Black and white women in the real world have different lived experiences. The sole purpose of this thesis is to compare and see the differences between these characters when one places them side by side.

This thesis is the first step in a project that I hope to continue. I intend to eventually study the perceptions/ideas of Black women that sitcoms condition in white Americans based on the

controlling images these shows circulate. I will interview white Americans in areas with little to no Black women to assess how these shows have shaped their perceptions of Black women. This thesis is the first in a series of studies I will conduct.

It is crucial to evaluate this topic because what individuals are watching on television “helps to shape not only beliefs, values, and attitudes, but also subjectivities, people’s sense of themselves and their place in the world,” and it “portrays ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ social relations, defines norms and conventions, provides ‘common sense’ understandings,” (Morreale, 2003, p.xi). How TV shows portray different groups or scenarios can influence viewers’ perceptions of themselves, others, and the social world. Along with this, negative representations of Black women in the media “contribute greatly to the continuation of negative assumptions about Black womanhood,” which “help[s] validate the inhumane treatment of women and further justify society’s placement of Black women as inferior beings,” (Gammage, 2016, p. 13). This is all to say that what people watch on TV has real-life implications and consequences.

By understanding how the portrayals of Black and white women differ in television, especially in shows like sitcoms, which are often funny and relatable, I hope that white readers can become aware of these differences and realize the stereotypes these portrayals have conditioned in them. Black women have been asking and fighting for better representation and portrayals of themselves in the media for years. The white public must *support* Black women in this fight and *listen* to the wants/needs of Black women. Black women are aware of how the media portrays them. The purpose of this thesis is not to tell them what they already know. Instead, it is to encourage white viewers and also media makers to support Black women in their pursuit of better media representations.

It is essential to note that I am white and cannot, nor do I claim to, understand the lived experiences of Black women, how accurate they perceive these sitcoms' portrayals to be, and how they make them feel. I do not speak on behalf of or for Black individuals. I have no personal understanding of Blackness, Black intragroup dynamics, or Black interactions with non-Black individuals. I also am not claiming that Black men's portrayals of Black women are incorrect or wrong. In addition, I will not claim that any differences in the portrayals of Black and white women are correct/incorrect, good/bad, or right/wrong. My whiteness, white lived experiences, and subjectivity are potential limitations to this study. I also do not believe I am more qualified than Black individuals to study this topic. I strictly hope this study adds a dimension of analysis to the existing body of literature.

Literature Review

Given that television is a widespread source of media ingrained in American culture, a significant amount of research has been conducted on TV representations and portrayals. Many scholars have assessed how television/mass media shapes and is shaped by the norms and values that exist within the social world, with some scholars arguing that the mass media can even shape *viewer* perceptions and attitudes (Borah, 2016). Within this vast body of literature on television and media analysis is a subset of research that strictly focuses on sitcoms. Although a significant portion of the works crafted on media/TV and sitcom analysis are in media and communication studies, the works still apply to my thesis' social science/sociological perspective.

Oftentimes, the methodology used in media studies and sociology overlap. For instance, both utilize content analyses and ethnography. My thesis takes a sociological approach to media analysis. Like those who utilize methods in media studies, I perform a content analysis of a particular mode of media – sitcoms. However, I apply a sociological lens that connects my

analyses to sociological concepts such as intersectionality, social norms, intergroup relations between dominant and subordinate groups, and social inequalities. This is *not* to say that media studies scholars do not also make these connections; however, it is to say that my analysis is *rooted* in these connections. I also plan to focus my future research on how these images shape the social world and social perceptions by assessing the influence of media portrayals of Black women on white American attitudes toward them.

Despite the disciplinary differences between my thesis and a large amount of literature on sitcom/TV analysis, many of these works proved extremely helpful and applicable to my research. For this thesis, I evaluated three books on sitcoms and sitcom analysis along with two on Black women in the media to see how I could add to this existing body of literature.

The first sitcom analysis book I evaluated was *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader* (2003), edited by Joanne Morreale. In this book, Morreale strings together essays by various authors that assess the sitcom and its portrayal of gender, family, class, race, and ethnicity. Some essays also evaluate the real-life reactions and implications of these sitcom portrayals. The essays are organized into time periods starting in the 1940s to the 1990s.

I evaluated many of the essays in this book and then connected them to my research. One of these essays is “*Amos n’ Andy* and the Debate over American Racial Integration” (1983), where author Thomas Cripps discusses the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) boycott of the television version of a radio show called *Amos n’ Andy*. This radio show debuted in 1928; however, it was not until 1948 that it transitioned to television. Many scholars credit this show as the first-ever sitcom portrayal of Black individuals. However, the show “depended for its humor on stereotypical traits” of Black individuals (Cripps,

1983/2003, p. 25). The show's stereotypical portrayals of Black Americans resulted in the NAACP boycott.

It is important to note that, in this show, a Black female character named "Sapphire" was also introduced. Sapphire is a character primarily remembered for being a caricature of Black women. Black feminist scholar bell hooks, in recalling her feelings towards Sapphire, writes, "She was bitch—nag. She was there to soften images of black men, to make them seem vulnerable, easygoing, funny, and unthreatening to a white audience. She was there as man in drag, as castrating bitch, as someone to be lied to, someone to be tricked, someone the white and black audience could hate" (hooks, 1995, p. 120). Sapphire was one of the earliest Black women in sitcoms. The "Sapphire" character has become a stereotyped image of Black women, just like the images that Patricia Hill Collins had outlined in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000). The "Sapphire" caricature is "sassy, emasculating and domineering" (National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.). Remembering this character and how she evolved into a controlling image cast upon Black women is necessary if one looks at the trajectory of Black women's sitcom portrayals. It also illustrates the power that the media has in the real world.

Other essays I analyzed from *Critiquing the Sitcom* assessed representations of women in sitcoms, specifically the portrayals of the white American housewife and the white American working woman. Some additional articles focused on Blackness in sitcoms and how shows post-*Amos n' Andy* portrayed Black characters. The book is a collection of essays that assess sitcom portrayals of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other issues. For instance, one essay written by Mary Beth Haralovich evaluates the 1950s sitcom "homemaker" wife and her connection to the real-world (Haralovich, 1989/2003). One of the homemaker examples Haralovich provides is

“Margaret Anderson,” whom I mentioned in the previous section of this paper. Overall, each essay provides a unique perspective on sitcom portrayals throughout various periods of time.

While it provides an extensive, chronological analysis of sitcoms and their portrayals of certain individuals and topics, it does not include any essays that draw comparisons between different characters. This is what my research adds to the existing literature on sitcom analysis. My work also focuses on shows from 1990 – 2020, which is beyond the 1940s – 1990s time period assessed in *Critiquing the Sitcom*. Lastly, my thesis is an empirical qualitative analysis in which I collected a large sample of sitcoms and evaluated and compared their content. *Critiquing the Sitcom*, on the other hand, is a series of individual essays.

The second sitcom analysis book I evaluated in preparation for this thesis is *The Sitcom Reader* (2016), edited by Mary M. Dalton and Laura R. Linder. Like *Critiquing the Sitcom*, *The Sitcom Reader* is a compilation of essays evaluating sitcoms. The editors split the book up into sections organized by time period. However, *The Sitcom Reader* discusses shows up to the 2010s, whereas *Critiquing the Sitcom* discussed shows up to the 1990s. Some shows included in *The Sitcom Reader* are *Modern Family* (2009 – 2020), *The Big Bang Theory* (2007 – 2019), *The Office* (2005 – 2013), *Parks and Recreation* (2009 – 2015), and so on. I assessed many of these shows in my thesis.

Although many essays in this book were applicable to my thesis, one that was particularly insightful was “The Hidden Truths in Contemporary Black Sitcoms” (Means Coleman et al., 2016). In this essay, authors Means Coleman et al. evaluate Black sitcoms from the 1950s to 2010s. For context, “Black sitcoms” refers to sitcoms with primarily Black characters, which revolve around Black culture and life (Means Coleman et al., 2016). Some of the shows included in this essay are *The Cosby Show* (1984 – 1992), *The Hughleys* (1998 –

2002), and *Black-ish* (2014 – 2022). *The Hughleys* and *Black-ish* are two shows that are part of my sample in this thesis. In this essay, the authors evaluate the “central problems surrounding Blackness, representation, and definitions of the Black image” in TV and argue that TV brings its own interpretation and understanding of Blackness to the audiences and it does not “present the diversity of the Black experience,” (Means Coleman et al., 2016, p. 289). This essay emphasizes issues in how Black individuals are portrayed and represented on TV.

Like *Critiquing the Sitcom*, this book had many essays that connected to my thesis besides the one mentioned above. *The Sitcom Reader*, similar to *Critiquing the Sitcom*, evaluates a variety of shows, their content, and their portrayals of certain characters. In addition, *The Sitcom Reader* adds an analysis of more recent shows. However, *The Sitcom Reader* strictly uses works that examine one group/topic per essay. It does not draw any comparisons between different groups. My thesis provides an additional dimension of analysis in which I compare and evaluate the portrayals of Black and white women. In addition, my thesis is an empirical qualitative study, while *The Sitcom Reader* is a collection of essays.

The third sitcom analysis that I evaluated was Brett Mills’ *Television Sitcom* (2005/2008). Unlike *Critiquing the Sitcom* and *The Sitcom Reader*, Mills’ book is a collection of chapters he crafts himself. In these chapters, he discusses what the sitcom is, what genre it falls into, who watches sitcoms and how they respond to them, how actors perform in sitcoms, and sitcom representations of different groups of individuals. Although the only chapter directly applicable to my research was the one on representation, the other chapters helped me understand the sitcom, its narrative elements, its styles, and its genre. Additionally, Mills discusses why the sitcom must be analyzed. His arguments regarding this are that they rely on “wider social assumptions about people” (Mills, 2005/2008, p. 101) to be funny and that a show only achieves

funniness when viewers agree that a sitcom's portrayal of various individuals/situations reflects "the way things are" (Mills, 2005/2008, p. 9).

In the chapter on representation, Mills evaluates representations of gender, sexuality, and religion in sitcoms. He also performs a short case study on *The Cosby Show*, briefly mentioning other Black sitcoms such as *The Bernie Mac Show* (2001 – 2006). In his section on gender, which is the most applicable to this thesis, he notes the connections between gender and love/sex, masculinity, and femininity in sitcoms. Overall, Mills' book serves as a contextual device to understand what the sitcom is rather than an analysis of representation in sitcoms, save for the single chapter dedicated to representations. However, Mills does not extensively address sitcom representations of race and does not draw any comparisons between different groups of individuals. My thesis takes a direct approach to understanding representation between groups of women, and I place race and gender at the center of my analysis.

The three sitcom analysis books I evaluated aided me in discovering the direction of my thesis, and many of the articles/chapters within them gave me an understanding of the sitcom and its representations of women and minority characters. However, these books do not compare the groups it evaluates representations/portrayals of. They also are primarily collections of essays or brief analyses of a few shows. My thesis utilizes sociological and social science research methods to construct an empirical analysis in which I compare Black and white female characters. I analyzed how gender and race intersect and influence the portrayals of a given character. *Critiquing the Sitcom*, *The Sitcom Reader*, and *Television Sitcom* all functioned as a starting point for this thesis. My work adds to this existing body of literature by introducing a comparative qualitative analysis of sitcom characters rooted in sociological methods/approaches.

Along with reading these works on analyzing the sitcom, I also evaluated two books that examined the portrayals of Black women in the media. While one book looks at Black women in multiple modes of media, the other work strictly focuses on television.

The first book on this topic is *Representations of Black Women in the Media: The Damnation of Black Womanhood* (2016) by Marquita Marie Gammage, a prominent scholar in Black women's media studies. Gammage (2016) assesses images of Black women in the media and argues that these images reflect a "stereotyped notion of Black womanhood" (p. 149). She argues that these images are often racist and sexist and have the potential to become ingrained in viewers' minds. This can lead to widespread social acceptance of these images and, subsequently, the damnation of Black womanhood. Gammage (2016) defines damnation as "the purposeful condemning of Black womanliness as inferior, inhumane, or ungodly" (p. 4). She asserts that the damnation of Black women manifests itself within multiple modes of media. Throughout the book, she provides examples of the damnation of Black womanhood by evaluating newscasts, reality and drama TV shows, and rap videos. She utilizes an Africana womanist mixed-method approach to conduct quantitative and qualitative studies on the modes of media mentioned above.

Gammage (2016) argues that the media has damned Black women in five different ways: by demonizing Black women, hypersexualizing Black femininity, portraying Black womanhood as animalistic, hyper-masculinizing Black women, and criminalizing Black motherhood (p. 7). These five means of damnation are presented in each chapter and assessed through different modes of media. For example, she assesses reality TV shows and their portrayals of Black women as hyper-violent. To do this, she conducts a content analysis of show episode descriptions. She notes that, for a reality show titled *Love and Hip Hop Atlanta* (2012 – present),

70% of the episode descriptions used “hyper-violent terminology” to describe Black women’s actions (Gammage, 2016, p. 79).

Gammage’s book was instrumental in directing and conducting the research for this thesis. As I will explain in the Methodology section, I, like Gammage, utilized episode descriptions of various sitcoms to determine the personalities of the women in my sample. Gammage’s book was insightful and had a lot of rich, empirically collected data on the portrayals of Black women in various media sources. This empirical approach made Gammage’s work incredibly valuable for my thesis construction. I believe that my research is closest to Gammage’s out of all the books I have read in preparation for my research. However, her research and samples are much larger and more expansive than my own, and she also utilizes a mixed-methods approach while I use a strictly qualitative approach. My work differs from Gammage’s in evaluating TV and sitcoms specifically. Not only this, but I evaluate sitcoms for their portrayals of Black *and* white women to assess any differences in their depictions.

The second book on Black women in the media I evaluated for this thesis specifically evaluates Black women in television. In her 2018 book *The Evolution of Black Women in Television: Mammies, Matriarchs and Mistresses*, author Imani M. Cheers assesses Black women in television from 1950 – 2016 across three domains: their work behind the lens, their portrayals on screen, and their perceptions of these on-screen portrayals as an audience. Cheers is a scholar in media and public affairs; however, she utilizes works from sociologists and social scientists in her analyses throughout the book.

I drew off of Cheers’ analysis of TV portrayals of Black women for this thesis. This included an analysis of the “m*mmy,” “matriarch,” and “mistress” images presented in various genres of television. She primarily evaluates these images in comedies/sitcoms, reality shows,

and dramas. While she evaluates Black women as mistresses by assessing drama and reality shows, such as *Scandal* (2012-2018) and *Basketball Wives* (2010-2013), she evaluates the “m*mmmy” and “matriarch” images by assessing their presentations in comedies and sitcoms.

Many of the sitcoms Cheers discusses also appeared in the sample for this thesis. For instance, both Cheers and I assess shows like *The Hughleys* (1998 – 2002) and *My Wife and Kids* (2001 – 2005), *The Bernie Mac Show* (2001– 2006), *Everybody Hates Chris* (2005 – 2009), and *Black-ish* (2014 – 2022). Cheers argues that these shows have a “mainstream matriarch,” a term she uses to describe “Black women who rule a family or group” (Cheers, 2018, p. 33). Unlike Collins’ definition of the “matriarch,” Cheers’ definition takes a more neutral non-stereotyped meaning. Cheers uses the word in its literal sense, whereas Collins's definition ties in stereotypes about Black women.

Unlike Cheers’ research, my thesis solely evaluates sitcoms to maintain a strict focus on a specific TV genre. In my analysis, I also compare Black and white women, while Cheers evaluates Black women alone. Nevertheless, Cheers’ book provided insight into what I could expect to see while watching/researching the sitcoms mentioned in her book.

Much literature on media/television analysis spans multiple disciplines, such as media studies and sociology. Within this vast body of literature, many analysis subsets focus on sitcoms and/or the portrayals of characters belonging to different groups. This can include groups of various genders, sexualities, races, ethnicities, religions, and social classes. My thesis aims to add a dimension of analysis to the study of race *and* gender in TV. The researchers mentioned in this section have contributed to studying sitcoms and their portrayals of characters. They have also provided a close analysis of Black women in TV/the media overall. However, they do not compare the portrayals of Black *and* white women. It is essential to study these differences to

understand what messages male TV show creators communicate to viewers about these women. It is important to understand what it is that these men are communicating to the masses since men dominate Hollywood to this day. These analyses are crucial since TV can shape and influence the social world.

Evaluating how gender and race intersect and influence the portrayal of a character's career, personality, and number of partners is important. Since what viewers see on television has real-world implications – such as shaping or confirming viewer perceptions and beliefs – it is essential to understand these messages. Yes, sitcoms are often funny and enjoyable. They can feel relatable, make us laugh, or seem harmless and silly. But the truth is that what is seen on TV matters, especially regarding the portrayals of groups that have been historically oppressed, subordinated, and stereotyped.

Methodology

Sitcom Sample

In this thesis, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of sitcoms in three categories - career, personality, and number of romantic partners. The population for this thesis was all male-created sitcoms from 1990 – 2020 and the Black and white female characters within them. Although the characters were the “subjects” being assessed, a sample of sitcoms had to be collected first. To do this, I Googled phrases such as “best sitcoms of all time,” “most popular sitcoms of all time,” and “best 90s/2000s/2010s sitcoms” and found articles ranking/listing hundreds of sitcoms. This initial search led to very few sitcoms with Black characters. I then searched the same phrases and added the word “Black” to the search. This yielded many shows for the sample.

After I searched these terms, I read through articles written by sources such as *Rolling Stone*, IMDb, Screen Rant, and more. I repeated this process across multiple articles to gather a

large sample. Before using this means of sample collection, I attempted to use Nielsen-rated sitcoms. Nielsen Ratings are a reliable TV measurement system that calculates what “audiences are watching – when, where, with whom, and how often” through “people-powered panels,” technology, and data from “TVs and cable/satellite set-top boxes” (Nielsen, n.d.). I initially went through the top Nielsen-rated shows for each year from 1990 – 2020 and pulled out every sitcom men created. This left me with a small sample overall and virtually no Black female characters. Therefore, I relied on the websites I have previously noted.

I used a total of seventeen articles to collect my sample of sitcoms. I then went through each list in these articles and added shows to my sample that met my criteria for inclusion. I found most of the information about each sitcom on the show’s IMDb page, on streaming platforms, on Wikipedia or Fan Wiki, and by watching the title sequence in a show. There were eight criteria that a show must have met to be included. I will now discuss each of these criterion in no particular order.

First, the show must have premiered within the thirty-year time frame I set at the beginning of my research process. I only included sitcoms that premiered between 1990 and 2020 in this thesis. This is because many sitcoms from these years are still relevant and watched to this day. Many individuals still stream sitcoms from the 1990s today. For example, in 2019, Netflix reported that the 1994 – 2004 show *Friends* had been streamed for thirty-two million minutes since it acquired the rights to the show in 2015 (Voytko, 2021). I only included sitcoms up to 2020 to ensure the shows had longstanding popularity.

Given that the shows in this sample span across a thirty-year time frame, I did consider the possibility that there would be changes in how sitcoms portray Black and white women over the years. Overall, there has been a shift in TV portrayals of women over time. Representations

of women in TV shows from the 1950s are typically quite different than representations of women in TV shows today. For instance, many white female characters in 1950s sitcoms, like Margaret from the sitcom *Father Knows Best*, were portrayed strictly as homemakers. However, in recent years, many white female characters have been portrayed in various occupations, such as Vice President and eventual President of the United States, as seen in Selina Meyer from *VEEP* (2012–2019). As a result, I considered the possibility that I might discover differences in television portrayals of Black and white women in my thesis’s smaller time frame as well. I eventually uncovered that the differences in the portrayals of women from 1990s sitcoms did not vary significantly from sitcoms in more recent years. Although some “jokes” and themes in these sitcoms may have changed, female characters overall did not change much; since I did not observe any significant shifts in the portrayals of 1990s sitcom women and 2010s sitcom women, I did not focus on the changes in sitcom content/portrayals between 1990 – 2020.

Second, the show must be a sitcom. I excluded shows in the “comedy” genre alone since I only sought to evaluate sitcoms because of their unique style, themes, and humor. Third, if a sitcom fell under *multiple* genres – such as “sitcom, comedy, and drama,” I decided to include it. However, I excluded any sitcom that fell under the fantasy, animation, and kids/teens genres. I excluded fantasy and animated sitcoms to compile a sample of sitcoms with some level of “realness” or real-life relatability. I excluded shows geared toward children/teenagers because I wanted to narrow my focus to adult sitcoms alone. This meant that I excluded Disney Channel or Nickelodeon sitcoms. However, analyzing children’s/teenager’s shows may be an important topic for future researchers to assess, given that they may serve as an agent of socialization for growing minds.

The fourth criterion was regarding sitcoms based on real individuals and whether these sitcoms were accurate in their portrayals or not. Initially, I excluded all shows based on real individuals, such as comedian Chris Rock's biopic *Everybody Hates Chris* (2005 – 2009) or Adam Goldberg's *The Goldbergs* (2013 – 2023). This was because the characters in these shows had real-life counterparts on whom they were based. These characters are typically reflections of a real person with unique lived experiences. I later altered this criterion.

My new criterion for including these types of sitcoms was that I would only include sitcoms "based on real people" in my sample if the Black or white female character was *not* a highly accurate portrayal of their real-life counterpart. For instance, in *Everybody Hates Chris*, actress Tichina Arnold played Chris Rock's mother "Rochelle." In real life, Rock's mother's first name is "Rose." Additionally, the real Mrs. Rock confirmed in *Tell Me More*, an NPR conversational podcast, that her job was different from her show counterpart and that her personality was exaggerated in the show (Martin, 2010). Since Mrs. Rock did not state that the show was a highly accurate portrayal of herself, I included this show. Alternatively, with *The Goldbergs*, which was based on producer Adam Goldberg's childhood, it was confirmed that Mrs. Goldberg's show counterpart was quite accurate (Persaud, 2020). Therefore, I excluded it.

The fifth criterion was that the sitcom must have been created by a man, regardless of that man's race. If a woman created or co-created a sitcom, I excluded it from my sample of shows. As I have stated, this was to assess the messages male show creators communicate to viewers about women. My sixth criterion for sitcom inclusion was that a show must have been an American sitcom. While sitcoms from other countries may be significant, I wanted the sitcoms to be reflective of American life and culture. One reason for this is that I eventually want

to interview white *Americans* to assess their perceptions of Black women based on their observations of American sitcoms.

The seventh criterion for inclusion was that the show must have at least one white and/or Black non-Hispanic/Latine female character. I excluded all Black Hispanic/Latine and white Hispanic/Latine characters from the sample because there are stereotypes for Hispanic/Latine women that are often different from that of non-Hispanic/Latine women. While ethnicity is an important factor to consider when analyzing media portrayals, I needed to keep my research focused and precise. Therefore, I elected only to compare the portrayals of non-Hispanic/Latine Black and white female characters.

The eighth and final criterion for inclusion was that the show must have at least three seasons. I created this criterion to gather a breadth of data that spanned multiple seasons rather than just one or two. Different seasons often indicate new storylines, which may reveal information about a character that viewers did not discover in a previous season. Additionally, a series' repeated renewal typically means that viewers watched a sitcom enough for networks and other media companies to renew it. However, this may not always be the case, as many highly-rated/viewed shows get dropped by production companies for different reasons.

Once a show met all eight criteria, I added it to an Excel spreadsheet where I noted information regarding its air dates, creator, number of seasons, and source from which I retrieved the show. The final number of shows themselves was fifty-three ($n = 53$). Of these fifty-three shows, twenty-five only had white female main characters, sixteen had only Black female main characters, and nine had both Black and white female main characters.

Character Sample

The sitcoms themselves were not the subject of analysis in this study; instead, it was the Black and white female main characters within them. The collection of shows created a pool of characters that I analyzed individually. There is an additional three criteria that a character must have met for me to include them in my sample of characters. To decipher whether or not a character met the criteria for inclusion, I looked up articles, fan pages, episode descriptions, title sequences, and episode clips.

First, the character must be a Black or white non-Hispanic/Latine cisgender woman. I excluded characters of different racial, ethnic, or gender identity groups from the study to maintain a narrow focus on Black and white cisgender women specifically. The portrayals of these other characters based on the intersections of their gender identity, race, and ethnicity are also crucial areas of analysis that future researchers should evaluate.

Second, the character had to be an adult or at least be an adult for half of the sitcom's series. This study focuses on adult cisgender women only, not teenage girls. Additionally, one's behavior as a teenager may not reflect how they would be as adults. Many of the characters in the sample were utterly different individuals during their teen years. One character that illustrates this is Mary Cooper from *Young Sheldon* (2017 – present). In her teenage years, she was said to have been promiscuous and drank/abused substances. However, when she had birth complications with one of her children, she vowed to God to become a devout Christian if he saved her. Since that event, her personality had a significant shift.

If a character was an adult for at least half of a show's seasons, I included her in my sample. This was because the character had time to grow and mature. One character that illustrates this is Haley Dunphy from *Modern Family* (2009 – 2020). In the first three out of eleven seasons, Haley is in high school. For the rest of the seasons, she is an adult. I included

characters like Haley, who spent half of the series as adults. However, I did not assess their actions, partners, and careers during their teenage years.

The third criterion for inclusion was that the character had to be a *main* character for at least two seasons. This means that they appeared in all or most episodes of these two seasons and were “starring” characters for them as well. The purpose of creating this two season minimum was to ensure that I had abundant available data on the character to perform a more thorough analysis. Seasons in which a character was recurring or a guest starring did not count toward my two-season minimum.

If a character met all three criteria, I added her to my final subject sample. The sample of characters in this thesis was a total of 128 ($n = 128$) characters. Seventy-nine of these characters were white women, while forty-nine were Black women. After solidifying this sample of characters, I put all of the show titles and character names into a document where I typed notes during the content analysis portion of this thesis. I then conducted my content analysis.

Procedure

There were three different categories that I analyzed – career, personality, and number of partners. To maintain objectivity, I crafted methods that would reduce the chance of bias. This included not making assumptions about a character that was not explicitly stated, written, or observed. I executed this method for each category.

Before I discuss these methods, I must note the sources from which I collected my data. To collect my data, I utilized a combination of Fan Wiki/Wikipedia pages, articles about the show or interviews with the character’s actor, IMDb pages, show/episode descriptions, and show quote compilations. I also watched clips of the show on YouTube or streaming services.

I began my analysis of each character with a Google search. This often pulled up an IMDb page, a Wikipedia page, and occasionally a Fan Wiki page. The latter is a Wikipedia page dedicated to a given fandom. Like Wikipedia, anyone can edit a Fan Wiki page. I used Wikipedia and Fan Wiki pages as starting points to get a quick background about the character and who they are in their shows. I did *not* solely rely on these pages. Once I had an insight into the character, I moved on to other sources to confirm whether or not the information on these Wiki pages were accurate.

After examining the Wiki pages, I evaluated show and episode descriptions from IMDb, streaming service platforms, and Wikipedia. I recorded any mentions of the character's career or relationship status and any words used to describe them in these show/episode descriptions. For example, the show description on the Amazon Prime Video page for the 1991 – 1994 sitcom *Roc* (1991 – 1994) refers to the titular character's wife, Eleanor Emerson (a Black woman), as Roc's "sassy" wife. I subsequently recorded the word "sassy" in my notes on Eleanor Emerson. Often, the episode descriptions on one website were missing information that an episode description had on a different website. I read through show and episode descriptions from multiple websites and streaming platforms to evaluate a character as thoroughly as possible.

After assessing each sitcom's show and episode descriptions, I searched articles and quotes about the character. Some searches pulled up articles an individual had written about a character, while others pulled interviews with the character's actor. I gathered data from each of these types of articles. I then cross-checked the information in the articles with other sources to ensure that I was not relying on one individual's opinion alone. When I searched for quotes from the character, there often were websites full of notable quotes directly from the show, all compiled onto one webpage. I went through these web pages and pulled quotes from the

character, to the character, and about the character. These quote compilations allowed me to gather quotes quickly and efficiently.

Finally, I also watched YouTube clips of the show and accessed the show on streaming services to find additional information or confirm any ambiguous information. I searched a character's name on YouTube and found various videos, including a compilation of the character's "best moments," specific scenes, and whole episodes. I also used episode descriptions to gauge what episodes to watch.

I used each of these sources to compile data for all three of my categories of analysis. I utilized these sources alongside my objective methods of data collection. The objective methods I applied to each category aimed to reduce the possibility of my biases and personal interpretations influencing the content analysis.

Objectively gathering data regarding the character's career was relatively simple. To do this, I used the abovementioned combined sources to find each character's occupations during their time on the show. In many cases, the character changed or quit/started different jobs throughout the series. I recorded all jobs that the character had in the series; however, I was primarily interested in the job that the character held for the longest amount of time in the show. For instance, in *Parks and Recreation* (2009 – 2015), Office Manager Donna Meagle (a Black woman) eventually starts her own real estate firm and eventually becomes a co-founder of a non-profit with her husband. However, Donna became a real-estate firm owner in the sixth out of the seven seasons of the sitcom and a non-profit co-founder in the seventh. Therefore, in the final compilation of data, her principal career is listed as "office manager."

I also developed an objective means of determining a character's personality. Instead of relying on my own perceptions of a character's personality, I relied on a combination of the

previously mentioned sources. I aimed to rely on quotes from the Black or white female character *themselves*, quotes said *to* them by other characters, and quotes said *about* them by other characters. I also used words written in show and episode descriptions about a character that indicated their personality. One example is in an episode description on Max (formerly HBO Max) for a character in *Mike and Molly* (2010 – 2016). In one of these episode descriptions, Mike’s mother, Peggy (a white woman), is called “overbearing.” Relying on the words used to describe the characters via quotes, episode descriptions, clips, and articles allowed me to reduce my subjective interpretation of each character’s personality.

Finally, for my objective analysis of the number of romantic partners a character had, I developed three subcategories that I used to sort the number of partners each character had. These subcategories were “One Partner” (one romantic partner), “Two Partners” (two romantic partners), and “Multiple Partners” (three or more romantic partners). There was an additional “Unknown” category for any character that did not mention being single or having a partner. None of the characters in the sample were confirmed to have no romantic partners in the series.

Given that there are various beliefs about what counts as a romantic partner, I elected to count a romantic partner as someone the character went on multiple dates with, was in a committed relationship with, and/or had sexual intercourse with. I did not count casual one-time dates or one-time kisses as romantic partners. Additionally, I did not count any pre-show partners. For example, in the show *Rules of Engagement* (2007 – 2013), Jennifer Morgan (a white woman) is engaged and eventually marries one man. However, other characters make references to her previously promiscuous past. Since she remained with her one partner the entire show, I did not count these alleged former partners.

All the data I compiled in this process was stored in a Word document and then condensed into an Excel spreadsheet. I did this by reviewing the document and pulling out the character's number of partners, the longest career they held, and any salient personality traits emphasized in the sitcoms. I then sorted the jobs into smaller subcategories that reflected a specific type of job. For instance, one subcategory was "Business Owners," including all characters who owned any business during their shows. The sorting of personality traits was tricky. However, I eventually grouped like traits together into subcategories such as "frequent yeller" or "rageful" traits into the "Aggressive" subcategory. There were hundreds of personality traits that I sorted through in my analysis, so I focused on traits that were salient in the show. By "salient," I am referring to any traits that the sources I used for my data collection (including character quotes and episode descriptions) emphasized. Finally, I created a table that sorted each character's number of partners into the three subcategories I mentioned previously. I then created tables (pictured in the following section) to place the data for Black and white female characters side-by-side to make my comparisons.

Results

In this thesis, I analyzed fifty-three male-created sitcoms for their portrayals of 128 Black and white female characters across three categories – career, personality, and number of romantic partners. In this section, I will individually discuss my findings in these categories. At the end of each category's section are tables summarizing its main findings. I created two tables for the career and partner categories in this analysis. The first of these tables (1.1, 2.1, and 3.1) illustrate the percentage of each subcategory comprising Black and white women. The other tables (Tables 1.2 and 3.2) show the percentage of the subject pool of Black and white women the characters in each subcategory make up. I did not create a second table for the personality category of this

analysis because, unlike in the other two categories, where each character was only sorted into one subcategory, characters in this category could be placed into multiple personality trait subcategories.

Careers

I organized all 128 women's careers into twenty-six main subcategories. One of these subcategories is "unknown," which contains three individuals whose occupations are never explicitly mentioned. Another subcategory is the "miscellaneous" category, which houses five individuals whose occupations do not fall within any of the subcategories I created. Overall, there were some differences in the types of careers held by Black and white female characters. Table 1 summarizes my findings from this category.

The largest subcategory in the sample was "Business Owners," with nineteen characters owning their businesses. Of these nineteen women, twelve of them were white. The types of businesses owned by white female characters in this category include real-estate firms, interior design companies, and even a minor-league baseball team. The businesses owned by the seven Black women include a hair salon/hair care line, a real estate firm, and a sandwich shop.

There were five subcategories in which only white women held occupations. These five subcategories are "Retail," "Art/Music/Writing," "None/Unemployed," "Scientists," and "Politicians/Government." The largest of these subcategories is "Politicians/Government," which contains six white women. This includes characters such as Leslie Knope, a Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation in Indiana from the sitcom *Parks and Recreation* (2009 – 2015).

There is one career subcategory in which Black women were the only individuals to hold occupations. This is in the "Education" category, which houses four Black women. Two women in this category come from the same show – *Hangin' with Mr. Cooper* (1992 – 1997). These

characters were teachers and principals at the same school. Some white characters held occupations in education; however, their employment in these occupations was short-lived. This is the case for the titular female character in the show, *Mike and Molly*, who worked as a fourth-grade teacher in the sitcom's first season but quit and spent most of the series as a writer. As a result of this, I did not count Molly and other white women like her in this subcategory.

The top two largest subcategories for white characters – aside from “Business Owners” and “Politicians/Government” – are “Sales/Office” and “Stay at Home Mom/Wife.” White women comprised seven of the eight women in the Sales/Office subcategory. Many of the white women in this subcategory came from *The Office*, which includes characters like Meredith Palmer, a supplier relations representative, and Phyllis Vance, a saleswoman.

The next largest subcategory for white women was “Stay at Home Mom/Wife.” Six of the nine women in the entire sample who were Stay-at Home Moms/Wives were white. Some white characters in this subcategory include Heather Short from *Life in Pieces* (2015 – 2019) and Debra Barone from *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996 – 2005).

The largest career subcategories for Black women in the sample were “Business Owners,” “Education,” “Assistant/Secretary/Receptionist,” and “Nurses/Medical Professionals.” Since I have already discussed the first three subcategories, only the “Nurses/Medical Professionals” must be evaluated here. Out of the five women total in this subcategory, four of them were Black. Some women who make up this sample include Eleanor Emerson, a night shift nurse from *Roc* (1991 – 1994), and Sasha Brown, a head nurse at a hospital from *Tyler Perry's Meet the Browns* (2009 – 2011).

There were more white women than Black women in the following subcategories: “Design/Style,” “Food Service,” “Housekeeping/Cleaning,” “Law Enforcement,” “Lawyers,”

“Media/Media Production,” “Medical Doctors/Veterinarians,” “Real Estate,” and “Therapist/Counselors/Social Workers.” These subcategories had one to three more white women than Black women. There were more Black women than white women in the following subcategories: “Retired,” “Public Relations/Agents,” “College Students,” and “Business Executives.” These subcategories had one to three more Black women than white women.

While there are differences in many occupations held by Black and white characters in the sample, there is one job subcategory with an equal amount of Black and white women. This is the “Assistant/Secretary/Receptionist” subcategory. Ten characters in the sample work in these positions, with half being Black women and the other half being white women. Two examples of Black women with these jobs are personal assistants Janelle Cooper from *Spin City* (1996 – 2002) and Pamela James from *Martin* (1992 – 1997). Two examples of white characters that hold these jobs are Erin Hanon, a receptionist from *The Office* (2005 – 2013), and Karen Walker, a personal assistant from *Will and Grace* (1998 – 2006; 2017 – 2020). This is the only subcategory with an equal number of Black and white women.

Although there are differences in the amount of Black and white women in various occupational subcategories, the magnitude of these differences was reduced when I compared what percent of the Black and white female character groups themselves were comprised of characters in a given subcategory. For example, there were nineteen women in the “Business Owner” subcategory, and the number of white women (twelve) in these occupations was almost double the number of Black women (seven). I realized that I must consider the influence of the different amounts of Black ($n = 49$) and white characters ($n = 79$) in my sample. Therefore, I created a ratio in which I assessed the number of characters in a subcategory relative to the size of the group they are a part of. In the case of the “Business Owner Subcategory,” I found that,

since there were forty-nine Black characters in the sample and seven in this subcategory, 14% of the Black character group owned their own businesses. For the white character group, which had seventy-nine total characters and twelve in this subcategory, 15% were business owners in these shows. The differences in the amount of Black and white female characters who hold these occupations still exist; however, this additional level of analysis enabled me to adjust for the different sample sizes. Most of the differences I discussed in the previous paragraphs were observed, albeit reduced, even after I compared the percentage of Black and white women in each subcategory relative to their sample. Table 1.2 illustrates these findings.

Table 1.1

Black and White Female Sitcom Characters and Their Occupational Subcategories

Occupational Subcategory	Black Female Characters	White Female Characters
Art, Music, Writing (n = 2)	0% (0)	100% (2)
Assistant/Secretary/Receptionist (n = 10)	50% (5)	50% (5)
Business Executives (n = 3)	67% (2)	33% (1)
Business Owner (n = 19)	40% (7)	60% (12)
College (n = 3)	67% (2)	33% (1)
Design/Style (n = 5)	40% (2)	60% (3)
Education (n = 4)	100% (4)	0% (0)
Food Service (n = 6)	20% (1)	80% (4)
Housekeeping/Cleaning (n = 3)	33% (1)	67% (2)
Law Enforcement (n = 3)	33% (1)	67% (2)
Lawyer (n = 3)	33% (1)	67% (2)
Media/Media Production (n = 6)	17% (1)	83% (5)
Medical Doctor or Veterinarian (n = 3)	33% (1)	67% (2)
Miscellaneous (n = 5)	60% (3)	40% (2)
None/Unemployed (n = 2)	0% (0)	100% (2)
Nurses/Medical Professionals (n = 5)	80% (4)	20% (1)

Politicians/Government Personnel (n = 6)	0% (0)	100% (6)
Public Relations/Agents (n = 4)	75% (3)	25% (1)
Real Estate (n = 3)	67% (2)	33% (1)
Retail (n = 3)	0% (0)	100% (3)
Retired (n = 4)	75% (3)	25% (1)
Stay At Home Wife/Mother (n = 9)	33% (3)	67% (6)
Sales/Office Staff (n = 8)	13% (1)	87% (7)
Scientists (n = 2)	0% (0)	100% (2)
Therapist/Counselor/Social Worker (n = 5)	40% (2)	60% (3)
Unknown/Unsure (n = 3)	0% (0)	100% (3)

Note. Table One illustrates the racial composition of each job subcategory of all Black and white female sitcom characters in the sample. The value to the right of the subcategory name indicates the number of both Black and white women in this subcategory. The percentage values indicate the racial composition of each occupational subcategory. The numeric values in parentheses indicate the number of Black and white women in each subcategory.

Table 1.2

The Percent of Occupational Subcategories within Black and White Female Character Groups

Occupational Subcategory	Black Female Characters (n = 49)	White Female Characters (n = 79)
Art, Music, Writing (n = 2)	0% (0)	2.53% (2)
Assistant/Secretary/Receptionist (n = 10)	10% (5)	6.33% (5)
Business Executives (n = 3)	4% (2)	1.27% (1)
Business Owner (n = 19)	14% (7)	15.18% (12)
College (n = 3)	4% (2)	1.27% (1)
Design/Style (n = 5)	4% (2)	3.80% (3)
Education (n = 4)	8% (4)	0% (0)
Food Service (n = 5)	2% (1)	5.06% (4)
Housekeeping/Cleaning (n = 3)	2% (1)	2.53% (2)
Law Enforcement (n = 3)	2% (1)	2.53% (2)
Lawyer (n = 3)	4% (1)	2.53% (2)

Media/Media Production (n = 6)	2% (1)	6.33% (5)
Medical Doctor or Veterinarian (n = 3)	2% (1)	2.53% (2)
Miscellaneous (n = 5)	6% (3)	2.53% (2)
None/Unemployed (n = 2)	0% (0)	2.53% (2)
Nurses/Medical Professionals (n = 5)	8% (4)	1.27% (1)
Politicians/Government Personnel (n = 6)	0% (0)	7.59% (6)
Public Relations/Agents (n = 4)	6% (3)	1.27% (1)
Real Estate (n = 3)	4% (2)	1.27% (1)
Retail (n = 3)	0% (0)	5.06% (3)
Retired (n = 4)	6% (3)	1.27% (1)
Stay At Home Wife/Mother (n = 9)	6% (3)	7.59% (6)
Sales/Office Staff (n = 8)	2% (1)	8.86% (7)
Scientists (n = 2)	0% (0)	2.53% (2)
Therapist/Counselor/Social Worker (n = 5)	4% (2)	3.80% (3)
Unknown/Unsure (n = 3)	0% (0)	3.80% (3)

Note. Table 1.2 illustrates the racial composition of each job category for all Black and white female sitcom characters in the sample. The value to the right of the occupational category name indicates the total number of subjects in this subcategory. The values underneath the “Black/White Female Characters” indicate the number of Black and white women in the sample. The percentages in the columns show what percent of the Black and white character samples are in each occupational subcategory. The numeric values in parentheses next to them indicate the number of Black and white women who are in these categories. The “White Female Characters” column was *not* rounded to the nearest whole number due to an inability to have all rounded numbers add up to one hundred.

Personality

After compiling data on each character’s personality, I sorted all salient personality traits into subcategories based on their likeness to one another. For example, if a character was called “sweet,” I merged them into the “Kind” subcategory. Since there were hundreds of traits to sort through, there were some that I had to exclude because they did not fit within any subcategory. I sorted most of the traits into seventy-six subcategories. I must note that the characters could, and

likely were, placed in more than one personality trait subcategory. There were many differences in the personality traits exhibited by Black and white female characters. These findings are summarized in Table 2.1 at the end of this section.

The personality trait subcategory with the most characters was the “Alcohol/Substance User” category. While alcoholism and substance abuse are not necessarily “personality traits,” these characters’ storylines, character arcs, and interactions with other characters heavily emphasized and focused on their frequent alcohol or recreational drug use. In this subcategory, I did not count characters who went out casually drinking or only had a few drinks a week. This was for characters who claimed to have alcohol/substance use problems and were made the subject of jokes by other characters for their use/abuse problems. Based on this criteria, there were a total of twenty-three out of 128 female characters who were in this subcategory. Twenty of them were white women.

Some of the white women who made up this category were Meredith Palmer from *The Office*, whose boss tried to force her into an alcohol rehabilitation facility, and Jules James from *Brockmire* (2017 – 2020), who did cocaine and was called a “functional alcoholic” by her coworker. In this subcategory, there were only three Black women.

The next largest subcategory of personality traits was characters who were called or called themselves “Crazy/Weird/Neurotic/Delusional/Obsessive.” This subcategory held eighteen white women and four Black women. White women such as Annie Edison from *Community* (2009 – 2015) and Rose from *Two and a Half Men* (2003 – 2015) were all called or called themselves some variation of the words used in the name of this subcategory. The Black women in the sample who were called or called themselves a variation of those words were Janet Kyle from *My Wife and Kids* and Nicolette Vandross from *Malcolm and Eddie* (1996 – 2000).

The next largest subcategory of personality traits was characters who were “Overtly Sexual.” This is different from the “Number of Partners” main category of analysis. Characters who were “Overtly Sexual” were very expressive of their desire for sexual intercourse, were prone to talking about sex/having sex frequently, and/or had jokes made about them for their sexual activities or were called names for them. Having multiple partners over the course of a show meets the criteria for placement within the “multiple” subcategory in the next section of this paper; however, to be added to this personality trait subcategory, a character’s sex drive/their sexuality had to be such a prominent aspect of their personality that it is repetitively acknowledged throughout the series by themselves or other characters. There were eighteen women in the sample who met this criterion. Fifteen of these women were white. Some of these white women include Nikki Faber from *Spin City* (1996 – 2002), who called herself a “slut,” and Roz Doyle from *Frasier* (1993 – 2004, 2023), who was often the subject of other characters’ teasing and jokes.

All other subcategories had under fifteen women within them. Twenty personality subcategories have five or more white female characters within them, and seven subcategories have five or more Black women within them. These subcategories are illustrated in Table 2.1.

Some characters had shifts in their personalities over the course of a series that coincided with their shifting character arcs and storylines. Like many other aspects of human life, personality is fluid and subject to change and growth. Many sitcoms have undoubtedly reflected this. While this is important, and how a character changes or does not change may influence viewer perceptions of that character, my focus was on the *overall* portrayals of these characters. I accounted for all emphasized aspects of a character’s personality across a series, even if that

included any changes or shifts in personality. Character arc matters, but since I am looking at portrayals as a *whole*, it was not the focus of this thesis.

Additionally, since personality is often interpreted subjectively in the real world, I do not know, nor do I assess, how viewers interpreted each character’s personality. It is possible that, although a character is written in one type of way on the show, viewers may interpret her entirely differently. For instance, another character may call the Black or white female character “controlling,” but viewers may interpret her as “abusive.” This analysis does not assess viewer perceptions of these characters but rather just what the portrayals themselves are. This will be the purpose of my future research.

Unlike in my analysis of each character’s occupation and the number of partners they had, I did not create a second table for this category. This is because each character was often sorted into more than one personality trait subcategory. In other words, if I utilized the secondary measure of analysis I applied to the other categories, I would be counting one character across multiple subcategories, which would make my sample appear as if it had changed. For example, in Table 2.1 below, I list a variety of personality trait subcategories. If I added all of the characters from the “White Female Characters” column based on the values listed in parentheses, my sample would appear to include 184 white women, which is inaccurate. This is why I did not create a secondary table for this category.

Table 2.1

Main Personality Trait Subcategories of Black and White Female Sitcom Characters

Personality Trait Subcategory	Black Female Characters	White Female Characters
Accuses Partner of Cheating (n = 9)	44% (4)	56% (5)
Alcoholic/Substance Abuse (n = 23)	13% (3)	87% (20)

Anger/Rage/Yelling (n = 13)	31% (4)	69% (9)
Career-Focused (n = 9)	56% (5)	44% (4)
Cheater (n = 6)	17% (1)	83% (5)
Competitive (n = 7)	14% (1)	86% (6)
Controlling/Control Freak (n = 6)	17% (1)	83% (5)
Crazy/Weird/Neurotic/Obsessive (n = 22)	18% (4)	82% (18)
Criminal/Arrested (n = 12)	8% (1)	92% (11)
Critical (n = 7)	14% (1)	86% (6)
Dislikes or Hates People (n = 5)	0% (0)	100% (5)
Feeling Underappreciated (n = 7)	71% (5)	29% (2)
Glue That Holds Group Together (n = 5)	100% (5)	0% (0)
Good Parent (n = 7)	29% (2)	71% (5)
Hard-Working and/or Values Job (n = 14)	64% (9)	36% (5)
Overtly Sexual (n = 18)	17% (3)	83% (15)
Mean/Not Nice (n = 9)	78% (7)	22% (2)
Narcissistic (n = 6)	0% (0)	100% (6)
Not Smart (n = 7)	0% (0)	100% (7)
Overprotective (n = 7)	29% (2)	71% (5)
Religious (n = 13)	77% (10)	23% (3)
Sassy (n = 10)	80% (8)	20% (2)
Selfish (n = 11)	18% (2)	82% (9)
Smart/Sensible (n = 13)	38% (5)	62% (8)
Smother/Overbearing//Interfering (n = 10)	20% (2)	80% (8)
Uptight (n = 5)	0% (0)	100% (5)
Violent or Abusive (n = 10)	20% (2)	80% (8)

Note. Table 2.1 illustrates the racial composition of each personality trait subcategory for all Black and white female sitcom characters in the sample. The value to the right of the personality trait subcategory name indicates the number of Black and white women who exhibited personality traits aligned with this category. The percentage values indicate the racial composition of each subcategory, and the numeric values in parentheses indicate the number of Black and white women in each category.

Number of Romantic Partners

I sorted the number of partners each character had into three different subcategories. These subcategories were “One Partner” (one partner), “Two Partners” (two partners), and “Multiple Partners” (three or more partners). There was an additional “unknown” category for any character whose romantic partner status was ambiguous or unknown/not mentioned.

The subcategory with the most characters was the “Multiple Partners” subcategory. Sixty of one-hundred-twenty-eight women had three or more partners during their respective shows. Thirty-nine of these women were white, and twenty-one of them were Black. An example of a Black female character with multiple partners was Ms. Edna Jackson from *Tyler Perry’s Meet the Browns* (2009 - 2011). In the series, Edna, who is in her late sixties, is a woman who enjoys talking about and having sex – specifically with younger men. Edna eventually marries later in the show, but not before having multiple partners. An example of a white female character who had multiple partners is Laurie Keller from *Cougar Town* (2009 - 2015). Laurie is a middle-aged woman who pursues sex with younger men. At the end of the series, she has a child with her friend’s twenty-something-year-old son.

The next largest subcategory was the “One Partner” subcategory, with forty-six women in the entire sample of female characters only having one partner for their entire series. Twenty-seven out of seventy-nine white characters had one partner, while nineteen out of forty-nine Black women characters had only one partner. One example of a Black woman in the sample with one partner is Ella Payne from *Tyler Perry’s House of Payne* (2006 - 2012; 2020 - present). In a series with over 300 episodes, Ella Payne has stuck by her husband, Curtis, since Episode One. *Modern Family’s* Claire Dunphy is a white woman who, like Ella, also stuck by her husband from the series beginning to its end.

Not including the “Unknown” subcategory, the “Two Partners” subcategory had the smallest amount of women. Only fifteen women out of the entire sample had two partners. Nine of these women were white, and the remaining six were Black. An example of a white female character who has two partners in the series is Pam Halpert from *The Office* (2005 - 2013). The series begins with her engaged to Roy, a warehouse worker at the company she works for. However, Pam soon falls in love with her co-worker, Jim Halpert, and the two marry later in the series. Shirley Bennett from *Community* (2009 - 2015) was a Black female character with two partners. Shirley gets divorced at the start of the series and then, later on, has sex with one of her fellow students at her community college. Seven women (three Black, four white) were in the “unknown” subcategory. These characters either did not mention any romantic relationships, or the relationship they had with another individual was too ambiguous. These findings are summarized in Table 3.1.

Although there are differences between the numbers of Black and white women in each “Number of Partners” subcategory, the magnitude of these differences shifted when I calculated the percentage of Black and white characters in each subcategory relative to their respective groups and then compared that number to the other group. For example, thirty-nine white women in the “Multiple Partners” subcategory and twenty-one Black women. While this data was insightful, I acknowledged that I needed to account for my sample's differing amounts of Black ($n = 49$) and white characters ($n = 79$). Therefore, I created a ratio in which I assessed the number of characters in a subcategory relative to the size of the group they are a part of. In the case of the “Multiple Partners” subcategory, I divided twenty-one (the number of Black female characters in the subcategory), by forty-nine (the total number of Black female characters in the sample) and found that 43% of the Black character group was part of the “Multiple Partners”

subcategory. Repeating this for the white character group, I found that approximately 49% of the group was in this subcategory. This decreased the magnitude of differences between the groups. Interestingly, this additional dimension of analysis showed that a greater percentage of Black female characters had one or two partners with respect to their sample size than white women did. Accounting for sample size allowed me to see how these subcategories were proportionately represented in Black and white character groups.

Table 3.1

Number of Partners for Black and White Female Characters

Female Characters (n = 128)	Multiple Partners (n = 60)	Two Partners (n = 15)	One Partner (n = 46)	Unknown (n = 7)
Black Female Characters (n = 49)	35% (21)	40% (6)	41% (19)	43% (3)
White Female Characters (n = 79)	65% (39)	60% (9)	59% (27)	57% (4)

Note. Table 3.1 illustrates the racial composition of each partner amount subcategory for all Black and white female sitcom characters in the sample. The value next to the number of partners subcategory indicates the number of Black and white women in this subcategory. The percentage values indicate the racial composition of the subcategory, and the numeric values in parentheses indicate the number of Black and white women in each category.

Table 3.2

The Percent of Partner Subcategories within Black and White Female Character Groups

Number of Partners Subcategory	Black Female Characters (n = 49)	White Female Characters (n = 79)
Multiple Partners (n = 60)	43% (21)	49% (39)
Two Partners (n = 15)	12% (6)	11% (9)
One Partner (n = 46)	39% (19)	34% (27)
Unknown (n = 7)	6% (3)	5% (4)

Note. Table 3.2 illustrates the racial composition of each “Number of Partner Subcategory” for all Black and white female sitcom characters in the sample. The value to the right of the “Number of Partners” subcategory indicates the total number of subjects in

this subcategory. The values next to “Black/White Female Characters” indicate the number of Black and white women in the sample. The percentages in the columns show what percent of the Black and white character samples are part of each “Number of Partners” subcategory. The numeric values in parentheses next to them indicate the number of Black and white women who are in these subcategories.

Discussion

The research question under investigation in this thesis was “How are Black women and white women portrayed differently in male-created sitcoms from 1990 – 2020 regarding their careers, personalities, and the number of their romantic partners?” I also developed individual hypotheses for each category of analysis. To best answer this question and address my hypotheses, I will individually evaluate each of my three categories.

Career

I hypothesized that Black women and white women would have different careers, especially in the housewife occupation, since Black women have a history of not having the opportunity to be stay-at-home wives/mothers (SAHW/SAHM) like white women have. I hypothesized that there would be fewer Black than white SAHW/SAHM in my sample of sitcoms. This hypothesis was supported after analyzing the longest-held careers of each character in my sample. Out of nine women in the sample who were SAHW/SAHM, only three were Black women. There were half as many Black SAHW/SAHM as there were white. Even though the differences between the number of Black and white SAHW/SAHM is not particularly large, it is still worth acknowledging. The three Black women who were SAHW/SAHM in their respective shows were Cynthia Carmichael from *The Carmichael Show* (2015 – 2017), Yvonne Hughley from *The Hughleys*, and Big Dee Dee Thorne from *Half and Half* (2002 – 2006).

Both Yvonne Hughley and Big Dee Dee Thorne were married to wealthy husbands. Neither of these women had to work for pay to support their families. However, both women did

work within their households. One character praised Yvonne Hughley's hard work, and her judgmental mother-in-law even told Yvonne that she was very good at being a mother. Big Dee Dee Thorne, on the other hand, states that she molded her husband into the successful man he is during the show. Unlike these two characters, Cynthia Carmichael was not married to a wealthy man. However, she still preferred to keep a more "traditional" role in her family, and she performed household labor.

Some Black women in the sample started their shows off as SAHM/SAHW; however, throughout their series, they obtained college degrees or got professional jobs. Three women that this was the case with are Janet Kyle (*My Wife and Kids*), Jerri Peterson (*The Parent 'hood*, 1995 – 1999), and Ella Payne (*Tyler Perry's House of Payne*). Janet Kyle pursued a bachelor's degree in psychology and went to graduate school after obtaining it. Jerri Peterson obtained her law degree and became a lawyer. Ella Payne obtained a college degree and then became the director of her church's Help Center.

Some of the differences in occupations I must discuss are those in politics/government, business ownership, education, sales/office work, and media/media production. These career categories had a difference greater than three between the two groups of women. The category with the largest difference between Black and white women is the "Sales/Office Work" category, which houses seven white women and one Black woman. However, one crucial thing to note here is that four white women in this category come from the show *The Office*, which, as the name suggests, takes place in an office environment. The one Black woman with an office job is Donna Meagle from *Parks and Recreation*. Alternatively, this subcategory had the second largest group differences when I accounted for the sample size of Black and white female characters.

While approximately 9% of white women worked these jobs, only 2% of Black women did. This leaves a gap between the groups of about 7%.

The second largest difference between Black and white women's careers is in the "Politicians/Government Personnel" subcategory, with six white women and no Black women. Two of these characters come from the show *VEEP*. These characters are Vice President turned President Selina Meyer and her Chief of Staff, Amy. Although Sue, a Black woman on the show, eventually works as a Chief of Scheduling in season four out of seven in *VEEP*, she primarily works as the Vice President's secretary, which places her in the "Assistant/Secretary/Receptionist" subcategory. Another woman in this category is city hall accountant Nikki Faber from *Spin City*. Nikki Faber is included in this category because she helps perform a governmental function rather than an office management position (like Donna from *Parks and Recreation*) or an individual assistantship (like Sue from *VEEP*). This occupational subcategory had the largest difference between Black and white women when I accounted for the size of each sample of women. While approximately 8% of the white women in the sample worked in these positions, 0% of Black women did.

The third largest difference between white and Black women's careers is in the "Business Ownership" subcategory, which has twelve white women and seven Black women. However, as I noted in the previous section, this large difference is significantly reduced when one accounts for the sample size of each group. This was the career subcategory with the most Black and white women within it, respectively. The fourth largest difference between black and white women's careers is in the "Education" subcategory, which has four Black women and no white women. This subcategory only has Black women within it.

Another difference in the careers held by Black and white female characters also appears in the “Media/Media Production” subcategory, where there are five white women and one Black woman. The white women in these positions serve as a reporter (Lisa Miller from *NewsRadio*, 1995 - 1999), a news anchor (Robin Schrebatsky from *How I Met Your Mother*, 2005 – 2014), a talent booker (Paula, *The Larry Sanders Show*, 1992 – 1998), and so on. The sole Black woman in this field is Catherine Duke, an anchor on *News Radio*.

Two smaller differences between the number of white and Black women in specific careers are in the “Nurses/Medical Professional” category, which has four Black women and one white woman, and in the “Food Service” category, which has four white women and one Black woman. Besides these differences, most career differences between Black and white women were marginal, with a one to two-person difference between the groups. Only one career subcategory had an equal number of Black and white women within it. This subcategory was “Assistant, Secretary, Receptionist” occupations, with five Black and five white women holding these occupations.

These results suggest that sitcom portrayals of Black and white women’s careers vary in occupations such as politics/government, sales/office work, business ownership, education, and media/media production. Given that, in the real world, there are massive divides in the occupations held by men, women, and individuals of varying races, I had hypothesized that there would be a prominent divide in the careers Black and white women had in sitcoms. Although there were observable differences in the jobs held by these characters, the differences were not as prominent as I hypothesized. As a result of this, I believe my hypothesis was partially supported.

As of 2019, women’s participation in the labor force is around 58% on average, and Black women’s labor force participation is higher than white women’s (Zhavoronkova et al.,

2022). Despite the number of women in the labor force, white men work in higher-paying occupations, such as physicians, lawyers, and high-level business executives, at significantly higher rates. While white women follow behind white men in these positions (albeit at a distance), the employment rate of Black women in these positions is one of the lowest out of all demographics (Zhavoronkova et al., 2022).

Many of the jobs white female characters in the sample had were ones where an employee could reach a high-paying or even higher-powered status. For instance, if a woman was to be successful in her career as a Vice President, she may have the opportunity to ascend to the position of President in future elections. Or, in the case of Selina Meyer from *VEEP*, if that Vice President was there when the incumbent President resigned.

Quite a few Black characters in the sample also held the same higher-paying/potentially higher-paying jobs as white characters, albeit at a lower rate. For instance, Leslie from *Tyler Perry's For Better or Worse* began the show with her own real-estate firm. Over the course of the series, Leslie worked towards building her firm and increasing her success. Many Black characters in the sample had highly successful businesses and careers that they built on their own. However, it is still important to acknowledge that there are differences, no matter how slight, between the types of jobs that Black and white women have. In the real world, Black women are some of the least employed individuals in high-paying positions, such as “chief executives and legislators” (Zhavoronkova et al., 2022). While white women comprised 23% of the individuals employed in these positions in 2019, Black women made up only 2.3% of them (Zhavoronkova et al., 2022).

Although five of the occupations in the sample had a noticeable disparity in which group of women had these jobs, the other twenty (not including the “unknown” category) only had

marginal differences. Whether or not this is an intentional act on behalf of male show creators is unknown. Perhaps the men who created these shows portrayed Black and white women in similar occupations to give viewers the illusion of equality and sameness between the groups. Perhaps they meant to present the image of the career-driven, successful “Black Lady” (Collins, 2000) to convince viewers that real-world social policies such as affirmative action are no longer needed. These are all just potential inquiries on the topic. I am in no way insinuating that these statements are true for all male show creators.

This is not to minimize the accomplishments of Black women in the real world or suggest that Black women cannot hold the same jobs as white women. It is also not to assume what these portrayals meant for Black female viewers; instead, I intend to ponder why the dominant social group crafted their characters and careers in these ways.

In answering the research question I posed at the beginning of this analysis regarding how male show creators portray Black and white female characters' occupations, I assert that male sitcom creators portray Black and white women as having different occupations in some, but not all types of jobs; and that accounting for the variation in the sample size of Black and white women reduces the magnitude of these differences. Nevertheless, these occupational differences exist across multiple subcategories, small as they may be.

Personality

I hypothesized that there would be a difference in the portrayals of Black and white female characters' personality traits in sitcoms, specifically with shows portraying Black women as “aggressive.” I based this hypothesis on existing stereotypes regarding Black women in the media. However, since TV has a history of portraying white women also as “nagging” wives or girlfriends in their relationships or overtly hostile (Bhatt, 2021), I also hypothesized that male

show creators would portray white women in “aggressive” ways. Other than this, I mainly hypothesized that there would be differences in the personalities of Black and white female characters in general.

While controlling images about Black women being “bad-tempered, hostile, overly aggressive” (Asare, 2019) and/or as “nagging wives” (Morrison, 1971) are immensely prominent in modern society, the data yielded in this thesis illustrates that this is *not* the case for the sample of sitcoms I analyzed. However, I must note that a different version of the “aggressive Black woman” stereotype – the “sassy Black woman” stereotype – did emerge. Additionally, my hypothesis about white female characters and their potential portrayal as “nagging” or “aggressive” was observed in the data.

Many of the sitcoms in my sample depicted white female characters as individuals who were prone to fits of rage, anger, yelling, and bitterness. Of the thirteen women in the “Anger/Rage/Yelling” personality trait subcategory, nine were white women. It is worth noting that, of the nine white women in this subcategory, eight of them were wives and/or mothers. For these white women, their husbands and, sometimes, their children became a lightning rod for their rage and anger.

One example of this anger-filled personality trait is Lois Wilkerson from *Malcolm in the Middle* (2000 – 2006). In the show, Lois frequently yells at her children. In one episode, Lois yells so loud and intensely that she throws out her back. Another example is Susie Greene from *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000 – 2020). Many episode descriptions for the show utilize words like “angry,” “mad,” and “furious” when describing Susie. She is also prone to yelling and using swear words, particularly at her husband and his friend. Rochelle Rock from *Everybody Hates Chris* is the only Black female character that comes close to a “Susie” or a “Lois” in terms of

how often the sitcom shows her getting angry or yelling. This is acknowledged by the narrator, comedian Chris Rock, numerous times throughout the show. This is exemplified in a Season One, Episode Seventeen quote where narrator Chris Rock states, “Sometimes it felt like all my mother did was yell at everybody” (Rock et al., 2006).

In conjunction with these male sitcom creators portraying white female characters as angry individuals, they also depict them as violent and borderline abusive to their spouses. In the “Violent or Abusive” personality trait subcategory, eight of the ten women were white. Many of these characters overlapped with the characters in the “angry” subcategory. One of these characters is Debra Barone from *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Viewers often see Debra frequently angry with her husband, Raymond. Numerous episode descriptions and quotes from the show have also demonstrated Debra’s anger. Along with this, many articles about the show have classified Debra as abusive towards Raymond because of her frequent yelling and physical aggression on at least one occasion.

In a related subcategory, many sitcoms portrayed white women as individuals who occasionally engaged in criminal activities or were even getting arrested. Out of twelve women in the “Criminal/Arrested” subcategory, all but one of them was white. Not every arrest in this category was because of violent behavior. For instance, in *Raising Hope* (2010 – 2014), Maw Maw Thompson, a grandmother with dementia, was arrested for undressing in a courthouse.

Overall, the sitcoms in this sample did not portray many Black women as openly aggressive, angry, or “nagging” in the ways that they portrayed white women. This partially aligns with my hypothesis since I did hypothesize that the “nagging” wife trope would rear its head in sitcoms.

As mentioned in the results section, there were three personality subcategories that white women heavily dominated. These personality subcategories were about these characters' excessive alcohol/drug use, “crazy/obsessive” nature, and their overt sexuality.

Aside from these personality traits, white female characters also made up most of the following subcategories: “Smother/Overbearing/Oversteps Boundaries/Interfering,” “Selfish,” and “Smart.” I will briefly discuss each of these categories. In the “smothering” personality subcategory, some characters were overbearing towards their children, friends, and/or partners. Eight out of the ten women in this category were white women. One example of a character with this overbearing/smothering personality trait is Jules Cobb from the sitcom *Cougar Town*. In the show, Jules has an adult son whom she is described, in both episode descriptions and quotes, as being very clingy with. There is also a quote from her son directly telling her that she was smothering him.

Nine of the eleven characters in the “Selfish” personality subcategory are white women. Many of these women have been called “selfish” by other characters or themselves. One character in this category is Riley Perrin from *Baby Daddy* (2012 – 2017), who was called “selfish” by her friend for continuously putting her own needs before everyone else’s.

Lastly, nine of the thirteen female characters in the “smart” personality subcategory were white women. Many sitcoms emphasized white female characters’ intelligence throughout their shows. In juxtaposition to this, some sitcoms portrayed white women in the sample as “Not Smart.” No shows in the sample explicitly portrayed Black female characters as unintelligent.

Male show creators’ depictions of white women as having many of the abovementioned personality traits can be connected to the “hysterical woman” trope and social perception. There are existing social perceptions of women that they are more emotional and irrational than men,

even though studies have shown that this is not true (Weigard et al., 2021). Despite this, many women in the media portrayals of women rely on the “hysterical woman” trope, which “characterizes women as less rational, disciplined, and emotionally stable than men, and thus more prone to mood swings, irrational overreactions, and mental illness” (TV Tropes, n.d.a). Numerous media makers apply this trope to women of all races. I firmly believe that multiple male sitcom creators relied on this trope for their portrayals of women. Many of the personality trait subcategories and the characters within them, such as the “Crazy/Weird” subcategory and the “Anger/Rage/Yelling” subcategory, can be connected to this “hysterical woman” trope. The portrayals of women as overly emotional or irrational have real-life consequences. For example, one study conducted by Doctor Victoria Brescoll at Yale found that “gender stereotypes of emotion present a fundamental barrier to women's ability to ascend to and succeed in leadership roles” (Brescoll, 2016, p. 415). Another study, conducted by Frasca et al. (2022), found that, when they presented an argument in which a woman was labeled “emotional,” study participants were less likely to view her argument as legitimate (Frasca et al., 2022). Male sitcom creators’ portrayals of women as overly emotional and irrational can impact women of all races in the real world, although the additional stereotypes associated with non-white women definitely have their own influences as well.

Black female characters predominantly made up three main personality subcategories. These major subcategories are “Religious,” “Sassy,” and “Hard-Working/Values Job.” Ten out of thirteen characters in the religious personality trait subcategory were Black women. This makes “Religious” the largest personality trait subcategory for Black women in the sample. I used this category to sort characters who emphasize their religion in their daily life and in their interactions with other characters. Black women’s religious values in these shows were

frequently twisted into jokes. One prime example of this is Shirley Bennett from *Community*. Shirley is a devout Baptist woman in the show who often talks about Jesus and her religion. In Season One Episode Twenty-Two, a Jewish woman, another character named “Annie Edison,” recalls Shirley inviting her over for a pool party that was actually a “surprise” baptism. Shirley responded to Annie’s recollection of this event by saying, “Well, excuse me for trying to sneak you into Heaven.” (Harmon and McKenna, 2010).

In the personality trait subcategory “Sassy,” eight out of ten women were Black. A character’s “sassiness,” like all other personality traits, was determined through episode descriptions and articles about the character. There is a long and complicated history between Black women and the word “sassy.” This word links to the controlling “m*mmy” image from the enslavement era (Pilgrim, 2008/2023) as well as Collins’ image of the aggressive “matriarch.” Black women and “sassiness” have become tied together to form the “sassy Black woman” trope, which is a “lighthearted form of the ‘angry black woman’ stereotype” (Applewhite, 2019). This stereotypical image of Black women is a “caricature of finger-waving, eye-rolling black women at whom everyone loves to laugh” (Cooper, 2018).

This connects back to my hypothesis about male show creators portraying Black women as “angry” or “aggressive.” While many of the sitcoms in this analysis depict white women as angry individuals, some also take a “light-hearted” approach to portraying Black women as “angry.” It is possible that male show creators utilized this trope to fulfill one primary goal of sitcoms: to make an audience laugh. Alternatively, it may also be possible that this is how these male show creators actually perceive Black women. These are simply my thoughts about the potential reasons why male show creators have portrayed Black women as “sassy” in their sitcoms.

Like many of the controlling images of Black women discussed by Collins (2000), the “sassy Black woman” image is a stereotypical portrayal of Black women with real-world implications. This image of Black women “work[s] to perpetuate discrimination in a sense that makes black women seem unapproachable, short-tempered and ill-mannered” (Applewhite, 2019). This is to say that, even if the “sassy Black woman” image is a more “light-hearted version of the ‘angry black woman’ stereotype” (Applewhite, 2019), there are still severe real-world consequences that come as a result of its circulation.

On one website called “TV Tropes,” there is a massive list of Black female characters across multiple modes of media, including television, that exhibit the “sassy Black woman” stereotype (TV Tropes, n.d.b). Upon searching this list, I discovered that many of my sample's characters were present. I utilized this source to note multiple stereotypical “sassy” portrayals of Black women in my sitcom sample. For characters not included on this list, I found the word “sassy” used to describe Black female characters in episode descriptions, quotes, Fan Wiki pages, and other articles. Two characters that various articles have described as “sassy” are twin sisters Sky and Jazz Forester from *Grown-ish* (2018 – present). The pair is labeled as “sassy” on a Fan Wiki page and a Black Entertainment Television article (BET, 2021).

In addition to these twins, Pamela James from *Martin* is labeled “sassy.” Pam often gets into arguments and trades insults with the show’s titular character, Martin. This resulted in her placement on the “Sassy Black Woman” page on the TV Tropes website.

Nine out of the fourteen women in the “Hard-Working/Values Job” subcategory of personality traits were Black women. Individuals in this subcategory were either described as hard-working in an episode description or article, were praised for their hard work by other characters, or described themselves as hard-working. One example of these characters is Doctor

Rainbow Johnson from the show *Black-ish* has asserted that she worked hard to get where she was in her career as an anesthesiologist. Additionally, one episode description notes that Doctor Johnson's peers elected her to the "California Board of Medicine," a "prestigious" institution. Another episode description describes her as a "trailblazer" in her field.

While this hard-working personality trait is seemingly positive in nature, it actually could be tied to the "Black Lady" image that Collins outlines. Again, the "Black Lady" is "the hardworking Black woman professional who works twice as hard as everyone else" (Collins, 2000, p. 89). By frequently portraying Black women as extremely hard-working, male show creators may be utilizing the "Black Lady" image. Alternatively, these portrayals could positively reflect Black women's drive and dedication in the real world. Again, these are just questions one could ask when assessing male show creators' purpose behind their portrayals of Black women.

Overall, different personality traits were associated with Black and white women in the sample of sitcoms utilized in this thesis. The personalities of white female characters *in the sample* often painted them as individuals who commit crimes and are overtly sexual, aggressive (violent and angry), rageful, overbearing, selfish, intelligent, and also frequent users of alcohol and other substances. This is not to say that these are the only images of white women put forth; however, it is to acknowledge that these are recurring personality themes for white female characters in my sample of sitcoms. Alternatively, the sitcoms portrayed Black women as religious yet sassy hard workers. The high prevalence of "sassy Black woman" characters is a stereotypical portrayal of Black women and is harmful. It ties to the "matriarch" image that Collins (2000) discusses because of its linkage of Black women to aggression (Applewhite, 2019). The "hard-working" trait may also tie to Collins' "Black Lady" image, which dominant groups have historically used to cut welfare programs. Aside from this, it appears as though the

“religious” personality trait that was common for Black characters has more positive connotations.

Despite this, I am unwilling to claim that either portrayal of Black and white women is inherently “positive” or “negative.” I also do not claim that white women are portrayed in “worse” ways than Black women. Dominant social groups have historically denigrated, abused, and exploited Black women. Many forms of the media have aided in normalizing and maintaining these injustices. While the portrayals of white women in these sitcoms can be harmful, and they may communicate male show creators' negative and sexist opinions towards white women (especially white women who are wives and mothers), one cannot deny the media's longstanding history of aiding in the subordination of Black women. To argue that modern-day portrayals of white women are “bad” while portrayals of Black women are suddenly “good” would be dangerous.

In answering the research question I posed at the beginning of this analysis regarding how male show creators portray Black and white female characters' personalities, I assert that male sitcom creators portray Black and white women as having different personality traits.

Number of Partners

My last hypothesis for this thesis was that Black women could either have multiple or no partners since controlling images regarding Black women, specifically the “m*mmy” and the “j*zebel,” represent two ends of a sexual spectrum. I hypothesized that white women may or may not have multiple partners. However, I did hypothesize that if she had multiple partners, other characters would shame her for it.

The results of my content analysis illustrate that 47% of the Black and white women in my sample of 128 characters had “Multiple Partners.” Approximately 36% of the sample had

only “One Partner” across their entire series, and 12% had only “Two Partners” throughout. The remaining 5% of characters were women with unknown or ambiguous romantic relationships/statuses. None of the characters in this sample were confirmed to have had zero partners. This disproves one aspect of my hypothesis, which was that some Black characters might be portrayed as “sexless” in junction with the “m*mmy” image.

There were more Black and white female characters in the sample that had multiple partners than there were that had one or two partners. At face value, the differences in the percentages for the makeup of each category are quite significant. For example, 65% of the characters in the “Multiple Partners” subcategory were white, and 35% of them were Black. However, this gap decreases when one compares the number of characters in each category to the total number of characters in their racial group. This shows that 49% of white characters in the sample had multiple partners, while 43% of Black women had multiple partners.

In addition to this, a greater percentage of Black female characters had one to two partners than white women. For example, when I compared the number of characters in these subcategories to their overall sample group, I found that 39% of Black women had one partner across the series. In comparison, 34% of white women had one partner. When accounting for sample size, the differences between the number of Black and white female characters’ partners was not particularly large and did not vary beyond 6%.

As a result, I believe that the data disproves my hypothesis that there would be a significant difference between the two groups of characters. Although there was some difference, it was not as prominent as I anticipated. However, when some of the characters in this sample had multiple partners, other characters often shamed her, called her words such as “whore” or “slut” and made constant jokes made about her women’s sexual activities.

Some controlling images of Black women portray them as hypersexual (as seen with the “j*zbel” image) or void of all sexuality (as seen with the “m*mmy” image). Women overall have often been placed into the “sexual object” gender role. When women deviate from this role and take their sexuality into their own hands, they are subject to ridicule or called names like the ones I mentioned in the previous paragraph (Kreager and Staff, 2009). These images and gender roles may have influenced male show creators when they crafted their characters.

In answering the research question I posed at the beginning of this analysis regarding how male show creators portray Black and white female characters' number of partners, I assert that male sitcom creators do not portray Black and white women as having significant differences when it comes to their romantic partners; instead, these differences are marginal.

Evaluation of Research Design

In this thesis, I utilized a qualitative content analysis methodology. I analyzed fifty-three sitcoms containing 128 Black and white characters for their portrayals of these characters with respect to their careers, personality, and the number of partners they had. I assessed each character by using a combination of methods. After collecting and compiling my data, I analyzed the content carefully to decipher my results. Now that I have completed my analysis, I will assess some of the limitations of my thesis' research design.

First, as I mentioned in my introduction, I am white and cannot, nor do I claim to, understand the lived experiences of Black women or how accurate they perceive these sitcoms' portrayals to be. I also have no personal understanding of Blackness, Black intragroup dynamics, or Black interactions with non-Black individuals. My whiteness, white lived experiences, and subjectivity are potential limitations to this thesis.

Second, the sources from which I collected this sample are often subjective. I utilized articles from sources such as *Rolling Stone*, IMDb, Screen Rant, and more. Many of these articles' authors strictly give their own subjective opinion about what shows are popular and/or “the best.” This was the case for the articles from *Rolling Stone* and Screen Rant. For IMDb and other website articles, the list of popular and/or “the best shows” were determined by voters on the site itself. IMDb also uses “proprietary algorithms” to gauge the popularity of the media it measures (IMDb, n.d.). Given that IMDb’s means of determining popularity is ambiguous and how it (and other sources) rely on votes from individuals who use the website, these sources may be subjective.

Third, while the sample of sitcoms themselves was fairly equal in terms of what characters they had within them, the total sample of the characters themselves was not. There were fifty-three shows in this sample. Twenty-five of these shows only had white female main characters, sixteen had only Black female main characters, and nine had both Black and white female main characters. This, of course, is not an equal sample; however, the difference is not *too* large. Alternatively, the actual number of characters in the sample was imbalanced. In the sample, there were seventy-nine white women and forty-nine Black women. This thirty-character difference had a significant impact on the study. Since there were significantly more white than Black women characters in this study, there was more available for white women than for Black women. This undoubtedly had some influence on the results of this thesis. Although I did attempt to combat this limitation by evaluating the data from each category within the context of the sample size, this was still the largest limitation of this study.

The fourth limitation of this study, perhaps, was the sitcoms used. I collected a sample of sitcoms that met numerous criteria. However, I should have added an additional criterion that

would specify which *kind* of sitcoms I would use. By this, I mean that I should have decided to only focus on “family sitcoms” or “workplace sitcoms.” By expanding my search across all types of sitcoms (unless they did not meet the above criteria), I opened my sample up to the possibility of shows with very different storylines, plots, and themes.

The fifth limitation of my analysis is that I partially utilized Fan Wiki sites and other articles to aid in analyzing the characters' personalities. Although I *did not* primarily rely on these sources and instead used them as starting points and supplemental additions to my analysis, it is essential to note that these sources are inherently subjective. In addition, Fan Wiki allows *anyone* to edit its pages. This is a minor limitation since I did not rely solely on these sources. Nevertheless, it was necessary to note.

The sixth limitation is also regarding my analysis of a character's personality. Since personality is complex and fluid, I likely did not gather every detail of a character's personality. My goal was to focus on the personality traits that were the most salient and emphasized throughout the show (as indicated by quotes, character biographies, episode descriptions, etcetera). I also had to exclude some personality traits that did not fit into my qualitative personality categories. These were typically traits that only one character had. I only created a category if two or more characters demonstrated a shared trait.

The final main limitation of my analysis is that it does, no matter what objective methods I executed, have a bit of researcher bias. As is the case for many qualitative studies, avoiding researcher bias in interpreting and analyzing results is not always a 100% guarantee. Despite this, I applied reasonably objective analysis methods and strategies. For example, when assessing a given character's personality, I relied on quotes and other sources rather than my interpretations of a character. I am confident this allowed for a more objective analysis of each character's

personality. Despite the potential limitations of this study, I believe that I uncovered some interesting results about the portrayals of Black and white women in modern-day sitcoms.

Future Research

There are multiple avenues that future researchers can take to expand upon the research I conducted in this thesis. Television is a massive mode of media with various genres, stories, and characters that researchers must assess. I am confident that future researchers can uncover new topics of analysis. These researchers may also expand their analyses to other historically marginalized groups such as Hispanic/Latine individuals, transgender individuals, and so on. Not only should future research continue to assess and compare the onscreen portrayals of various groups, but it is also crucial to analyze how media portrayals influence the social world. This is why I plan to conduct my future research on white American perceptions of Black women based on the images they see in various modes of media, such as sitcoms.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I asked, “How are Black women and white women portrayed differently in male-created sitcoms from 1990 – 2020 regarding their careers, personalities, and the number of their romantic partners?” While I hypothesized that there would be significant differences in these three categories, I primarily observed differences in two categories.

The sample's Black and white female characters in this sample occasionally varied their careers. While Black women mainly held jobs in education and nursing, white women had more careers in politics, business ownership, and sales/office work. This is potentially reflective of the demographic composition of real-life jobs. For categories in which minimal differences occurred, it is *possible* that these lack of differences specifically enforced the controlling image of the successful “Black Lady,” which has been used by dominant social groups to justify taking away

welfare programs and cutting down on affirmative action (Collins, 2000). Overall, male sitcom creators portrayed Black and white female characters as occasionally varying in their occupations. I believe that these findings partially supported my hypotheses.

There were a few main differences in how male show creators portrayed Black and white women's personalities. While I hypothesized that there would be overall differences between the groups, I specifically hypothesized that these shows would depict Black women as "bad-tempered, hostile, overly aggressive" (Asare, 2019) and/or as a "nagging wife" (Morrison, 1971). These hypotheses were rooted in the controlling images of Black women outlined by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and other scholars. I also hypothesized that male TV show creators may pigeonhole white women into the "nagging wife" role that viewers often see in TV and film portrayals of women (Bhatt, 2021).

While my hypothesis regarding the portrayal of white women as "nagging wives" was supported, my data partially supported my other hypothesis. Many of the shows in my sample depict white women as individuals who commit crimes and are overtly sexual, aggressive (violent and angry), overbearing, selfish, intelligent, and frequent users of alcohol and other substances. Many of these traits are applicable to the idea of the "nagging wife" who yells and screams at her husband nonstop. These traits are also consistent with the "hysterical woman" trope that I discussed in the previous section.

Black women in the sitcoms were portrayed as religious, sassy, and as hard-workers. The stereotypical portrayal of the "sassy Black woman" is a close adjacent to the controlling image of the "angry Black woman" or the "matriarch," if one is going by Collins' depiction of controlling images. Like all controlling images of Black women, presenting Black women as "sassy" in the media has real-life implications, such as aiding in the maintained subordination of Black women.

Although the other two personality traits associated with Black women in this sample are favorable, one cannot ignore the “hard-working” trait’s link to Collins’ “Black Lady” image.

In this thesis, I am not claiming that white women in these shows are portrayed in worse ways than Black women, that any of these portrayals are correct or incorrect, or that white women are “victims” of male TV show creators. What I intend to illustrate is that there are different personality traits that male TV show creators assign to Black and white women and that the traits assigned to each group can have real-world consequences.

My final hypothesis was also partially supported. While my hypothesis that male show creators would portray Black and white women as having different amounts of partners was not supported, since the two groups each had a relatively equal amount of women in each “Number of Partners” subcategory, the data I uncovered supported my additional hypothesis that other characters in the sitcom would shame women for having multiple partners.

Overall, my hypotheses about the differences in the portrayals of Black and white women were partially supported. There are differences between the careers and personalities of Black and white women, but only a very slight difference in the number of partners these women have. I conclude that there are differences across *some* categories in the portrayals of Black and white women in sitcoms.

Despite this, I am not claiming that television and other modes of media should portray Black and white women the same. Given the differences in the lived experiences of Black and white women, it would make sense for their portrayals to be different. However, these differences in their portrayals must be crafted by or alongside Black and white women to ensure that the media accurately reflects their lived experiences. Media creators should consult women of all races when crafting characters in order to reduce the production of harmful images and

their reliance on tropes such as the “sassy Black woman” or the “hysterical woman.” This is especially true regarding the portrayals of Black women since dominant social groups have depicted them in a series of controlling images and subordinated them across history. As Marquita Marie Gammage states, “Representations in the media contribute greatly to the continuation of negative assumptions about Black womanhood in society,” and that these “misrepresentations help validate the inhumane treatment of women and further justify society’s placement of Black women as inferior beings” (Gammage, 2016, p. 13). It is because of these real-world consequences that Black women must be recruited as consultants when show creators craft Black female characters so that their actual lived experiences, rather than dangerous misrepresentations, are depicted. Media portrayals are extremely important, especially when it comes to groups that have long been stereotyped and caricatured.

Watching television can be fun, simple, and sometimes mindless. However, what is being engaged matters because it can shape real-world perceptions and understandings of a particular group or topic. Regardless of whether it’s a drama show, an action-packed saga, or yes, even a funny sitcom, representations and portrayals matter.

References

- Amodeo, J., Adelstein, M., Allen, T., Clements, B., Levy, S., Messina, R., Baker, R., Hench, K., Abbot, K., Teverbaugh, M., Yeager, E., Berry, M., Shipley, M., Youngers, S., Bullard, P., Calandra, V., Haukom, M., Teverbaugh, L., Pasquin, J., Doyle, T., Gutierrez, J., Astrof, L., Gordon, A., McCall, M., & Burditt, J. (Executive Producers). (2011 – 2021). *Last Man Standing* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company; Fox.
- Anderson, A., Barris, K., Dobbins, E.B., Doyle, C., Fishburne, L., Sugland, H., Petok, M., Shahidi, Y., Bean, J., Rice-Genzuck, J., Rothstein, H., Elverenli, L., Alexander, Z.,

- Boysaw, M., Lilly, C., Spencer, C., Jeffrey, R., & Doyle, C. (Executive Producers). (2018 – present). *Grown-ish* [TV series]. Freeform.
- Anderson, A., Barris, K., Dobbins, E.B., Fishburne, L., Groff, J., Sugland, H., Saji, P., Shockley, L., Nickerson, C., Lerner, G., Lilly, C., Principato, P., Young, P., Smith Jr., K., Bryant, L.M., Rice-Genzuck, J., Petok, M., Lander, C., Wilmore, L., Halpern, E., Haskins, S., Laybourne, S., Traub, S., Gutin, L., Patel, V., Rothstein, H., Chavis, R., Horsted, E., Adams, N., Fitzgerald, M., Griffiths, J., Amador, R., Diamond, J., Doyle, C., & Russo, T. (Executive Producers). (2014 – 2022). *Black-ish* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company.
- Applewhite, D. (2019, April 14). *Stereotypes of black women in entertainment need to end*. The Rotunda Online. http://www.therotundaonline.com/opinion/stereotypes-of-black-women-in-entertainment-need-to-end/article_2b26d578-5d4a-11e9-b0b1-0b49f4c45ff3.html
- Areu, O. & Perry, T. (Executive Producers). (2011 - 2017). *Tyler Perry's For Better or Worse* [TV series]. Turner Broadcasting System; Oprah Winfrey Network.
- Areu, O., Reuben, C., Perry, T., Sneed, M., & Ballard, P. (Executive Producers). (2006 – 2012, 2020 – present). *Tyler Perry's House of Payne* [TV series]. Syndication, Turner Broadcasting System, Black Entertainment Television.
- Arquette, D., Biegel, K., Cox, C., Lawrence, B., Winston, R.K., McCormick, B., Goldstein, J., Pietrosh, C., McDonald, M., Mettler, G., Derloshon, M., Figueiredo, L.V., Swartzlander, R., Lisbe, M., & Reger, N. (Executive Producers). (2009 – 2015). *Cougar Town* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company; Turner Broadcasting System.

- Asare, J. G. (2019, May 31). Overcoming the angry black woman stereotype. *Forbes*.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2019/05/31/overcoming-the-angry-black-woman-stereotype/?sh=49b1896d1fce>
- Azaria, H., Church-Cooper, J., Farrell, J., Farah, M., D'Elia, V., Kirkby, T., Marable, M., Wenger, A., Spiegel, M., & Williams, W. (Executive Producers). (2017 - 2020). *Brockmire* [TV series]. Independent Film Channel.
- Baldikoski, S., Behar, B., Boyett, R.L., Franklin, J., Miller, T.L., Stamos, J., Brown, M.A., Engelberg, A., Engelberg, W., Keyes, B., Keyes, D., Hale, B., Beck, J.D., Hart, R., McCall, M., Cohen, N., Collins, J., Figueiredo, L.V., Cardillo, E., Keith, R., Griffin, K.R., & DeLoatch, M. (Executive Producers). (2016 – 2020). *Fuller House* [TV series]. Netflix.
- Bays, C., Fryman, P., Thomas, C., Mamann-Greenberg, S., Harris, C., Lloyd, S., Kang, K., Tatham, C., Rhonheimer, J., Greenberg, R., Malins, G., Mulligan, T., Kelly, J., Sagher, T., Adler, B., Falconer, E., Romano, C., Newman, K., Hemingson, D., Lord, P., Miller, C., Heisler, E., Heline, D., & Ungerleider, I. (Executive Producers). (2005 – 2014). *How I Met Your Mother* [TV series]. Columbia Broadcasting System.
- Becky, D., Greenblatt, B., Hughley, D.L., Janollari, D., Rock, C., Rotenberg, M., Wickline, M., Hawthorn, C., Friese, K.C., Boone, E.T., Astle, T.J., & Pennette, M. (Executive Producers). (1998 – 2002). *The Hughleys* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company, United Paramount Network.
- Bertrand, M., Kamenica, E., & Pan, J. (2015). Gender Identity and relative income within households. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(2), 571–614.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv001>

- BET. (2021, March 12). *NAACP Image Awards: 10 funny scenes from “grown-ish.”*
<https://www.bet.com/article/31hfrk/naacp-image-awards-10-funny-scenes-from-grown-ish>
- Bhatt, J. (2021, August 2). *Twitter thread explains why men don't realise their wives are unhappy.* Hauterrfly. <https://hauterrfly.com/culture-2/twitter-thread-husbands-nagging-wife-trope-unhappy-marriage/>
- Bobb, R.M., Areu, O., Perry, T., & Cannon, R. (Executive Producers). (2009 – 2011). *Tyler Perry's Meet the Browns* [TV series]. Turner Broadcasting System.
- Boomer, L., Glouberman, M., Reid, A., Murphy, G., Thompson, N., Carlson, M., Orenstein, A., Kaplan, E., Ulin, R., Higgins, A.J., Stevens, B., Borkow, M., Kogen, J., Holland, T., Hanning, R., Celotta, J., & Richardson, D. (Executive Producers). (2000 – 2006). *Malcolm in the Middle* [TV series]. Fox.
- Borah, P. (2016). Media Effects Theory. In *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118541555.wbiepc156>
- Bowser, Y.L., Wooten, J., MacGillvray, H., & Mathious, L. (Executive Producers). (2002 – 2006). *Half and Half* [TV series]. United Paramount Network.
- Brescoll, V. L. (2016). Leading with their hearts? how gender stereotypes of emotion lead to biased evaluations of female leaders. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(3), 415–428.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.005>
- Brillstein, B., Grey, B., Simms, P., Lieb, J., Sather, D., Furey, J., Johnson, S., Marcil, C., & Isaacs, B. (Executive Producers). (1995 – 1999). *NewsRadio* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company.

- Carmichael, J., Stoller, N., Sanchez-Witzel, D., Scully, M., Katcher, A., Nandan, R., Stoll, B., Covington, H., Shorr, R., Ulin, R., & Sahgal, A. (Executive Producers). (2015 – 2017). *The Carmichael Show* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company.
- Carsey, M., Werner, T., Cosby, B., Renwick, D., Belanoff, A., Steinberg, N., Paulsen, J.J., Straw, T., Middleton, V., LeRose, N., Klein, D., Mandabach, C., Landsberg, D., Tortorici, P., Mula, F., Meyers, H., & Staretski, J. (Executive Producers). (1996 –2000). *Cosby* [TV series]. Columbia Broadcasting System.
- Casey, P., Lee, D., Grammer, K., Angell, D., Lloyd, C., Baker, L.K., Keenan, J., O’Shannon, D., Sherman, J., Johnson, S., Marcil, C., Daily, B., Richman, J., Kogen, J., Hanning, R., Reisman, M., Zicklin, E., Perlman, H., Morris, L., Rauseo, V., & Levitan, S. (Executive Producers). (1993 – 2004, 2023). *Frasier* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company.
- Caspe, D., Groff, J., Tarses, J., Bycel, J., Sommers, E., Russo, A., Russo, J., Lerner, G., Winston, H., & Fener, J. (Executive Producers). (2011 – 2013). *Happy Endings* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company.
- Cheers, I. M. (2017). *The evolution of black women in television: Mammies, matriarchs and mistresses*. Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- Cooper, B. (2018, March 15). *Black women are not “sassy” - we’re angry*. Time.
<https://time.com/5191637/sassy-black-woman-stereotype/>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241 – 1299.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>

- Cripps, T. (2003). Amos n' Andy and the debate over American racial integration. In J. Morreale (Ed.) *Critiquing the sitcom: A reader* (pp. 25–40). Syracuse University Press. (Reprinted from *American History, American Television: Interpreting the Video Past*, pp. 33 – 54, by J.E O'Connor, Ed., 1983, Ungar)
- Dalton, M. M., & Linder, L. R. (Eds.) (2016). *The sitcom reader: America re-viewed, still skewed* (2nd ed.). State University of New York Press.
- Daniels, G., Gervais, R., Merchant, S., Silverman, B., Klein, H., Lieberstein, P., Novak, B.J., Forrester, B., Weinberg, T., Kaling, M., Spitzer, J., Sullivan, H., Shure, A., Celotta, J., Lieberstein, W., Rogers, D., Grandy, C., Chun, D., Schur, M., Eisenberg, L., Stupnitsky, G., Zbornak, K., Aust, J., Silverman, A., Feig, P., Ocko, P., Green, J., Miller, G., Sterling, D., & Kwapis, K. (Executive Producers). (2005 – 2013). *The Office* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company.
- Daniels, G., Holland, D., Klein, H., Sackett, M., Schur, M., Miner, D., Yang, A., Goor, D., Wittels, H., Muharrar, A., Murray, M., Cary, D., & Rushfield, A. (Executive Producers). (2009 – 2020). *Parks and Recreation* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company.
- David, L., Garlin, J., Polone, G., Schaffer, J., Streicher, L., Gibbons, T., O'Malley, E., Weide, R.B., Charles, L., Berg, A., Mandel, D., Chanley, S., & Corey, J. (Executive Producers). (2001 – present). *Curb Your Enthusiasm* [TV series]. HBO.
- Finestra, C., McFadzean, D., Williams, M., Ferber, B., Shoenman, E., Bendeston, B., Cadiff, A., Morris, H.J., Allen, T., Gelman, L., Moore, R., & Hauck, C. (Executive Producers). (1991 – 1999). *Home Improvement* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company.

Franklin, J., Bickley, W., Warren, M., O'Brien, B., Kallis, D., Alu, C., Chambers, D., Gard, C., Williams, S.A., & Ross, M.K. (Executive Producers). (1992 – 1997). *Hangin' with Mr. Cooper* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company.

Franklin, J., Jackson, G., McHenry, D., Warner, P., Duclon, D.W., Langford, S., Menteer, G., Perzigian, J., Madison, J., Alu, C., Vigon, B., Walla, T., Devanney, T., Weiskopf, K., & Brown Jr., C. (Executive Producers). (1996 – 2000). *Malcolm and Eddie* [TV series]. United Paramount Network.

Frasca, T. J., Leskinen, E. A., & Warner, L. R. (2022). Words like weapons: Labeling women as emotional during a disagreement negatively affects the perceived legitimacy of their arguments. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 46(4), 420–437.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843221123745>

Gammage, M. M. (2016). *Representations of black women in the media The damnation of black womanhood*. Routledge.

Giarraputo, J., Stoll, B., Hertz, T., McCarthy, V., Robinson, D., Sikowitz, M., Wernick, B., Haukom, M., Sandler, A., Ross, M.A., Doyle, T., Videtti, L., Richman, J., Kopelman, D., Glarum, S., Jamin, M., Barnow, A., Firek, M., Leifer, C., Ackerman, A., Sherman, J., Cohen, T., & Reich, A. (Executive Producers). (2007 – 2013). *Rules of Engagement* [TV series]. Columbia Broadcasting System.

Greenberg, M.J., Bowman, J., Evans, B.K., Williams, S.A., Frank, S., Wickline, F., Lawrence, M., Vigon, B., Walla, T., Carew, T., Milmore, J., Zandt, B.V., Kellard, P., Moore, T., Buford, K., & Lawrence, R. (Executive Producers). (1991 – 1997). *Martin* [TV series]. Fox.

Grey, B., Shandling, G., Apatow, J., Tolan, P., Simms, P., Forbes, M., Riggi, J., Vitti, J., Day, R., Resnick, A., Zisk, C., Levitan, S., & Barron, F. (Executive Producers). (1992 – 1998). *The Larry Sanders Show* [TV series]. Home Box Office.

Haralovich, M. B. (2003). Sitcoms and suburbs: positioning the 1950s homemaker. In J. Morreale (Ed.) *Critiquing the sitcom: A reader* (pp. 69–85). Syracuse University Press. (Reprinted from *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 11(1), pp. 61 – 83, 1989)

Harmon, D., & McKenna, C. (Writers), & Davidson, A. (Director). (2010, April 29). “The Art of Discourse” (Season One, Episode Twenty-Two) [TV series episode]. Harmon, D., McKenna, C., Kienlen, P., Russo, A., Russo, J., Bobrow, A., Krasnoff, R., Foster, G., Donovan, G., Goldman, N., Winston, H., Shapeero, T., Hobert, T., Bandur, M., Guarascio, D., Port, M., Sommers, E., Schrab, R., Young, D., Stegemann, M., Wexler, B., Fino, J., Russo II, J., Morewitz, A.J., Bellavia, M., Moore, K., & Amburg, C.V. (Executive Producers). (2009 – 2015). *Community* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company; Yahoo! Screen.

Harmon, D., McKenna, C., Kienlen, P., Russo, A., Russo, J., Bobrow, A., Krasnoff, R., Foster, G., Donovan, G., Goldman, N., Winston, H., Shapeero, T., Hobert, T., Bandur, M., Guarascio, D., Port, M., Sommers, E., Schrab, R., Young, D., Stegemann, M., Wexler, B., Fino, J., Russo II, J., Morewitz, A.J., Bellavia, M., Moore, K., & Amburg, C.V. (Executive Producers). (2009 – 2015). *Community* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company; Yahoo! Screen.

Hart, M.J., Hart, P., Kendall, D., Lawrence, J., Young, B., Glickman, J., Kurland, S., Ziffren, J., Curtis, M., & Schulman, R.S.H. (Executive Producers). (2010 - 2015). *Melissa and Joey* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company Family.

Hertz, T., Fox, M.J., Lawrence, B., Hobert, T., Goldberg, G.D., Nader, M., Pollack, J., Cadiff, A., Rosenthal, D.S., Henchy, C., & Day, R. (Executive Producers). (1996 – 2002). *Spin City* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company.

hooks, bell. (1986, Summer). Black Women Filmmakers Break the Silence. *Black Film Review*, 14–15.

hooks, bell. (1992). *Black looks: Race and Representation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

hooks, bell. (2015). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. South End Press.

IMDb (n.d.). *Help Center*. <https://help.imdb.com/article/imdbpro/industry-research/starmeter-moviemeter-and-companymeter-faq/GSPB7HDNPKVT5VHC#>

Jones, L.C., Townsend, R., Fields, G., Rinsler, D., Warren, M., Smith, D., Nicholls, A., Vickers, D., & Hutcherson, W. (Executive Producers). (1995 – 1999). *The Parent 'hood* [TV series]. The Warner Brothers.

Kaplan, V., Fisch, J., Pollack, B., Rich, M., Edwards, R., Dutton, C.S., Lowe, E.V., Daniels, S., & Abugov, J. (Executive Producers). (1991 – 1994). *Roc* [TV series]. Fox.

Kochhar, R. (2023, March 1). *The enduring grip of the gender pay gap*. Pew Research. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/03/01/the-enduring-grip-of-the-gender-pay-gap/>

Kohan, D., Mutchnick, M., Kaiser, T., Burrows, J., Kinnally, J., Poust, T., Herschlag, A., Barr, A., Marchinko, J., Greenstein, J., Wrubel, B., Lizer, K., Janetti, G., Lerner, G., Martin, S., Quaintance, J., Malins, G., Rudell, K.J., Hirsch, J., Riggi, J., & Flebotte, D. (Executive Producers). (1998 – 2006; 2017 – 2020). *Will and Grace* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company.

- Kreager, D. A., & Staff, J. (2009). The sexual double standard and adolescent peer acceptance. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 72(2), 143–164.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/019027250907200205>
- Larkin, A. S. (1988). Black Women Filmmakers Defining Ourselves: Feminism in Our Own Voice. *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, 157–173.
- Lawrence, B., Winston, R.K., Donovan, G., Goldman, N., Schwartz, M., Allan, G., Weinberg, E., Hobert, T., Callahan, B., Tarses, M., Bakken, J., Fordham, D., Stegemann, M., Quill, T., Nissel, A., Braff, Z., Bycel, J., & Groff, J. (Executive Producers). (2001 – 2010). *Scrubs* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company; American Broadcasting Company.
- Levitan, S., Morton, J., Corrigan, P., Walsh, B., Zuker, D., Higginbotham, A., Richman, J., Lloyd, C., Ko, E., Wrubel, B., Lloyd, S., Chandrasekaran, V., O’Shannon, D., Pollack, J., Karlin, B., Gordon, A., Tatham, C., Burditt, J., Ganz, M., Wernick, I., Chupack, C., Spivey, E., Schwartz, K., Weiner, R., Winer, J., McCarthy, V., & Murphy, M. (Executive Producers). (2009 – 2020). *Modern Family* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company.
- Lorre, C., Bean, J., Gross, M., Higgins, A.J., Filisha, C., Foster, D., Roberts, M., Daly, B., Burrows, J., & Holliday, C. (Executive Producers). (2010 – 2016). *Mike and Molly* [TV series]. Columbia Broadcasting System.
- Lorre, C., Prady, B., Goetsch, D., Molaro, S., Chakos, P., Kaplan, E., Holland, S., Ferrari, M., Reynolds, J., Belyeu, F.O., Del, A., Hernandez, T., Howe, J., Aronshon, L., Gorodetsky, E., Patterson, S.K., Gordon, A., & Cohen, R. (Executive Producers). (2007 – 2019). *The Big Bang Theory* [TV series]. Columbia Broadcasting System.

Lorre, C., Tannenbaum, K., Tannenbaum, E., Collier, M., Gorodetsky, E., Patterson, J., Aronsohn, L., Beavers, S., Burg, M., Koules, O., Foster, D., Roberts, M., Reo, D., Richardson, D., Abugov, J., Tompkins, S., Ackerman, A., & Foster, D. (Executive Producers). (2003 –2015). *Two and a Half Men* [TV series]. National Broadcasting Company.

Louis-Dreyfus, J., Rich, F., Smith, W., Pritchett, G., Godsick, C., Gray, S., Blackwell, S., Iannucci, A., Laing, S., Roche, T., Addison, C., Axler, R., Gregory, A., Huyck, P., Hyman, D., Kimball, B., Mandel, D., Morton, L., Sackett, M., Allan, G., Cohen, T., Crittenden, J., Hely, S., Maxtone-Graham, I., Margolis, J., & O’Keefe, D. (Executive Producers). (2012 – 2019). *VEEP* [TV series]. Home Box Office.

Mariano, M., Stack, T., Garcia, G.T., Aron, E., Young, J., Gutierrez, J., Kaplan, P.A., Stegemann, M., Torgove, M., Bowman, B., Zander, C., Pennie, M., Stratton, C., Astrof, L., & Fresco, M. (Executive Producers). (2010 - 2014). *Raising Hope* [TV series]. Fox.

Martin, M. (Host). (2010, March 30). *Comedian Chris Rock’s mom offer parenting advice*. [Audio podcast episode]. In *Tell Me More*. NPR.
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125344896>

Marx,T., Pines, F., Bakken, J., Berendsen, D., Clements, H., Lembeck, M., Cheung, V., Montanio, B., Ziffren, J., & Lewis, L. (Executive Producers). (2012 – 2017). *Baby Daddy* [TV series]. Freeform.

McLean, Y. (2021, February 14). “*Jezebel*” is one of three common racial slurs against all black women and girls. Baptist News Global. <https://baptistnews.com/article/jezebel-is-one-of-three-common-racial-slurs-against-all-black-women-and-girls/>

- Means Coleman, R. R., McIlwain, C. D., & Moore Matthews, J. (2016). The Hidden Truths in Contemporary Black Sitcoms. In M.M Dalton & L.R. Linder (Eds.) *The sitcom reader: America re-viewed, still skewed* (2nd ed., pp. 279–294). State University of New York Press.
- Mills, B. (2005/2008). *Television Sitcom*. British Film Institute.
- Molaro, S., Parsons, J., Spiewak, T., Lorre, C., Howe, J., Kaplan, E., Holland, S., Hernandez, T., Ferrari, M., Mahmood, J., Bickel, D., Bakay, N., Joe, S., Ulin, R., & Favreau, J. (Executive Producers). (2017 – present). *Young Sheldon* [TV series]. Columbia Broadcasting System.
- Morreale, J. (Ed.) (2003). *Critiquing the sitcom: A reader*. Syracuse University Press.
- Morrison, T. (1971, August 22). What the Black Woman Thinks About Women’s Lib. *The New York Times*.
- Morton, J., Adler, J., Kaplan, A., Copeland, B., Wake, L., Adler, B., Winer, J., Melograne, M., Butler, K., Young, J., Belleville, J., & Wenick, I. (Executive Producers). (2015 – 2019). *Life in Pieces* [TV series]. Columbia Broadcasting System.
- Nashville Film Institute. (n.d.). *Showrunner - everything you need to know*.
<https://www.nfi.edu/showrunner/#:~:text=A%20showrunner%20is%20in%20charge,stick ing%20to%20the%20episode%20budget>.
- National Museum of African American History and Culture. (n.d.). *Popular and pervasive stereotypes of African Americans*. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/popular-and-pervasive-stereotypes-african-americans>
- Nielsen. (n.d.) *National TV measurement*. <https://www.nielsen.com/solutions/audience-measurement/national-tv/>

- Persaud, C. (2020, September 16). *Where else you've seen the cast of the Goldbergs*. Screen Rant. <https://screenrant.com/goldbergs-cast-members-other-projects/>
- Pilgrim, D., (2008/2023) *The sapphire caricature*. Jim Crow Museum. <https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/antiblack/sapphire.htm>
- Ramón, A.-C., Tran, M., & Hunt, D. (2022). *Hollywood Diversity Report*. University of California – Los Angeles Entertainment Media & Research Initiative. <https://socialsciences.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/UCLA-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2022-Television-10-27-2022.pdf>
- Reo, D., Wayans, D., Lorey, D., Himelfarb, D., Gold, E.L., Valley, J., Rooney, K., Hirsch, J., Cadiff, A., Boone, E.T., & Morris, H.J. (Executive Producers). (2001 – 2005). *My Wife and Kids* [TV series]. American Broadcasting Company.
- Rock, C., LeRoi, A., & Fouse, A. (Writers), & Shakman, M. (Director). (2006, March 23). “Everybody Hates Funerals” (Season One, Episode Seventeen) [TV series episode]. In Rock, C., Michaels, J., LeRoi, A., Barnes, R., Becky, D., Rotenberg, M., Orenstein, A., Reo, D., Abrams, A., Thompson, G., Turner, K., Gewirtz, H., & Leschin, L. (Executive Producers), *Everybody Hates Chris*. United Paramount Network; The CW Television Network.
- Rock, C., Michaels, J., LeRoi, A., Barnes, R., Becky, D., Rotenberg, M., Orenstein, A., Reo, D., Abrams, A., Thompson, G., Turner, K., Gewirtz, H., & Leschin, L. (Executive Producers). (2005 – 2009). *Everybody Hates Chris* [TV series]. United Paramount Network; The CW Television Network.
- Rosenthal, P., Rosegarten, R., Smiley, S., Letterman, D., Schneider, L., Jackson, L.H., Stevens, J., Romano, R., Skrovan, S., Cawley, T., Caltabiano, T., Stumpe, K.A., Shure, A., Royce,

- M., Crittenden, J., Chupack, C., Sandler, E., Caveny, L., Scully, M., Kirschbaum, B., & Nathan, S. (Executive Producers). (1996 – 2005). *Everybody Loves Raymond* [TV series]. Columbia Broadcasting System.
- Sepinwall, A. (2022, September 30). The 100 Greatest TV Shows of All Time. *Rolling Stone*.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/tv-movies/tv-movie-lists/best-tv-shows-of-all-time-1234598313/>
- TV Tropes (n.d.a). *Hysterical woman*.
<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/HystericalWoman>
- TV Tropes. (n.d.b) *Sassy Black Woman*. TV Tropes.
<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/SassyBlackWoman>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022, August 22). *Men Spent 5.6 Hours Per Day in Leisure and Sports Activities, Women 4.9 Hours, in 2021*. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/men-spent-5-6-hours-per-day-in-leisure-and-sports-activities-women-4-9-hours-in-2021.htm>
- Voytko, L. (2021, June 30). 'Friends' leaves Netflix at midnight, returns in May on HBO. *Forbes*.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisettevoytko/2020/12/31/friends-leaves-netflix-at-midnight-returns-in-may-on-hbo/?sh=61a3a3b13514>
- Weigard, A., Loviska, A. M., & Beltz, A. M. (2021). Little evidence for sex or ovarian hormone influences on affective variability. *Scientific Reports*, *11*(1), Article 20925
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-00143-7>
- Writers Guild of America West. (n.d.). *Determining separated rights on a television series*.
<https://www.wga.org/contracts/know-your-rights/determining-separated-rights>

Zhavoronkova, M., Khattar, R., & Brady, M. (2022). *Occupational Segregation in America*.

Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/occupational-segregation-in-america/>