

Christelle Martine Abes

**FIRST LADIES:
COMPARING *SCANDAL*'S MAIN FEMALE CHARACTERS**

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Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Cláudia Junqueira de Lima Costa

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Esta dissertação foi submetida ao processo de avaliação pela Banca Examinadora para a obtenção do título de Mestra em Letras e aprovada, em sua forma final, em 02 de Agosto de 2017, atendendo às normas da legislação vigente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras Inglês e Literatura Correspondente da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.

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Pro. Dr. Celso Henrique Soufen Tumolo
Coordenador do curso

Banca Examinadora:

Profa. Dra. Cláudia Junqueira de Lima Costa
Orientadora
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Prof. Dr. Raphael Albuquerque de Boer
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande

Profa. Dra. Maria Rita Drumond Viana
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

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ABSTRACT

Since its arrival in the 1920s, television has been an important medium of communication. It gradually gained power and influence, and by the 1980s it was a common item of the household. Television series, a popular culture product, have been available since the 1940s. Due to their increasing importance, they have been a source of analyses of the representation of women and therefore a window into the many changes which have been occurring and the recurrence of some representations in society. Thus the objective of this research is to investigate the portrayal of the two main female characters in the United Statesian series *Scandal*: Olivia Pope and Mellie Grant. The specific objectives are to verify the characters progression, through their representation, in order to investigate whether Olivia becomes less empowered than Mellie as they evolve in the series. For this purpose, scenes from season one and five are used in the analysis which is carried out through the lens of intersectionality. Hence, I look at how empowered the characters are as well as if the black female character is less empowered than the white female one.

Keywords: Television Series. Representation. Intersectionality.

RESUMO

Desde a sua chegada na década de 1920, a televisão tem sido um importante meio de comunicação. Foi gradualmente ganhando poder e influência, e na década de 1980 era um item comum nas casas. Séries de televisão, um produto da cultura popular, estão disponíveis desde a década de 1940. Devido à sua crescente importância, elas têm sido uma fonte de análise da representação das mulheres e, portanto, uma janela para as muitas mudanças que ocorreram e a recorrência de algumas representações na sociedade. Assim, o objetivo desta pesquisa é investigar o retrato das duas principais personagens femininas na série estadunidense *Scandal*: Olivia Pope e Mellie Grant. Os objetivos específicos são verificar a progressão dos personagens, através de sua representação, a fim de investigar se a Olivia se torna menos empoderada do que a Mellie à medida que evoluem na série. Para este fim, cenas das temporadas um e cinco são usadas na análise que é realizada através da perspectiva de interseccionalidade. Por isso, vejo o quanto as personagens estão empoderadas, e se a personagem feminina negra é menos empoderada do que o feminino branco.

Palavras-chave: Séries de televisão. Representação. Interseccionalidade.

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1. CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Television series first appeared in the late 1940s. Their presence in someone's life will vary, however, most people have heard about it and most of them have seen at least one episode of a series. For me, television series have been in my life since my youngest years, starting with series like *Hélène et les garçons* (1992 – 1994), *Premier baiser* (1991 – 1995), *Full House* (1987 – 1995), *Who's the boss* (1984 – 1992) or even *Starsky and Hutch* (1975 – 1979), and *Chips* (1977 – 1983). These were my grandmother's favorite and a bonding moment between us. It was a ritual, to come home from school and eat a snack in front of "my series". Back then, they were only recreational, but they already had the effect intended, I was hooked.

Later on, in my teen years, *Friends* (1994 – 2004), *Mad about you* (1992 – 1999), *The Nanny* (1993 – 1998), and *Will & Grace* (1998 – 2006) occupied my afternoons. Again, I would come home from school and rush to not miss one episode. These particular series are the most important since they are at the root of were the reason for my *interest* of the English Language. This had started at a very young age, however, it is with these series and I was able to practice and learn more. I often say it is thanks to *Friends* (1994 – 2004) and *Will & Grace* (1998 – 2006) that I speak English, even though it is not just that, they have their place in this crucial part of my life.

It is possible to say that television series were a major feature in my life; they were part of my growing up. As an adult I started to watch more complex genres, and it was in the Canadian series *Being Erica* (2009 – 2012) that I discovered my interest for combining feminism and television studies. From that moment on, my gaze towards this media shifted. This series was the object of my final undergraduate monograph and I knew I had to continue exploring this type of series, which had lead female characters.

Television series expanded immensely in the past 20 or 30 years (Butler 26) going from a frequent product of television to a program every channel and every broadcasting company had to have. Nowadays, there are hundreds of television series, each season new ones begin, old ones end. Many new series will not see past their first season; however, each new project shows how committed channels are to this genre, and how profitable it has become. Since television series have played such an important role in my life, it is in them that my interest for the way female characters are

portrayed began. In the quest for understanding these portrayals, this research took shape.

1.1. THE CONTEXT OF INVESTIGATION

The general context of the proposed investigation is television studies from a feminist perspective and through the lens of intersectional analysis as developed by authors such as Crenshaw (1989, 1992), and Brah and Phoenix (2004). When taking into account the importance television has been gathering over the decades, one cannot doubt its power to reach people. According to Bourdieu, in his article “On Television”, “by virtue of its reach and exceptional power, television produces effects which, though not without precedent, are completely original” (328), therefore, people find themselves hooked on the products it provides. Cashmore, in his book *...And there was television*, considers it “the most important artifact of the century, for its capacity of shaping and informing the daily life experience” (my translation 18).

Although the late 1940s marks the beginning of television series, it was only by 1952 that they were launched effectively due to the “emerging need to use the idle capacity of the technology industry” (my translation Cashmore 26). In the article “Narrative Form in American Network Television”, Jane Feuer indicates that “all television narrative is serial rather than linear” (102). As pointed out by John Ellis “the series implies the form of the dilemma rather than that of resolution and closure” (Ellis in Feuer 102). Therefore, the success of television series is due partly to the continuity and the non-linearity factors. Audiences tune in every week to see the follow up of the stories, which portray quotidian matters, making audiences relate to them. They have become the major product of television industry today.

Given the context of the media’s ideological impact, the way women are portrayed on television has been a great concern for feminist movements and for the academic fields of Feminist and Gender Studies, Media Studies, and Cultural Studies, to cite a few. Starting in the 1960s, the feminist critique of the media representation of women has been based on the argument that the screen not only reflects but also effects changes in society (Zeisler 12). Therefore, this study is particularly concerned with how women are depicted in one of the industry’s major products, the TV series. The specific context of the investigation is the representation of the two main female characters

in the TV series *Scandal* (2012 -), which went on air in 2012 and is airing its final season, 7, in fall 2017.

1.2. THE SERIES

The corpus of this study is the television series *Scandal*, a political thriller created by Shonda Rhimes, who is also the creator of the successful series *Grey's Anatomy* (2005 -), *Private Practice* (2007 - 2013), and the executive producer of *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014 -) -- a series that has gained attention due to its bold portrayal of the lead female role played by African American actress Viola Davis --, and *The Catch* (2016 -). The series are produced by Shonda Rhimes Production Company, named Shondaland, and they are part of what has been known as TGIT (Thanks God Its Thursday) This contemplates Shonda Rhimes' evening of shows lead by three complex powerful female characters – *Grey's Anatomy* (2005 -), *Scandal* (2012 -), and *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014 -), airing in this order, with the replacement of *How To Get Away With Murder* (2014 -) by *The Catch* (2016 - 2017) since both series have a smaller episode run – 10 episodes each.

Scandal debuted in 2012 and finalized its fifth season in 2016. The show, broadcast by ABC¹, presents episodes of approximately 43 minutes, with season 1 containing seven episodes, season two containing 22 episodes, and season three with 13 episodes. Seasons 4 and 5 present 22 and 21 episodes respectively. Its sixth season started in January 2017 with 16 episodes in total. It revolves around Olivia Pope and her associates at Olivia Pope and Associates, who work together to solve cases or scandals. Set in Washington, DC, Olivia was a consultant for the White House and worked with the President of the United States during the election campaign. Due to this proximity with state power, she has many contacts and she is called when scandals need to be fixed. She is hired to handle the most scandalous cases of the Capital city. Along with her team, she changes narratives, manipulates stories, battles for causes, and wears the white hat, the hat of justice, or so she believes.

¹ It is important to highlight that I am not going to analyze in depth, although I mention it in subsequent sections, the importance of ABC's representation of Black women characters since it is an open television channel.

Bearing in mind the diversity portrayed in this television series, this investigation is carried out with intersectionality as its foreground. This is due not only to the wide diverse range of characters and portrayals, but also to the great number of stories and topics that fall well between the intersections of race, class, sexuality, gender, among others, presented by the show. By bringing forward topics such as the shooting of a black man, abortion, Planned Parenthood², equal pay, women in politics, LGBTQ rights, to name a few, the TV series embraces and reflects upon the crossing of voices that inhabits feminism and, most specifically, intersectionality (Brah and Phoenix 2004). More on this topic will be discussed in the literature section of this chapter.

The series was nominated for great number of awards, winning several, and Kerry Washington was nominated in 2013 for the Emmy Award³ in the category “Lead Actress in a Drama Series” for her role as Olivia Pope. This nomination is the first time in 18 years that an African-American actress got nominated for that category (Obenson). Actress Viola Davis, also an African-American, won the same category prize for her role on *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014 -), becoming the first in the history of the award. Washington’s nomination is of the foremost importance since it speaks to the lack of diversity still encountered in television series. It took 18 years for an African American actress to be recognized for her work. In her acceptance speech, Viola Davis does not forget to mention the necessity of change and the undeniable conquest lead by Kerry Washington and Shonda Rhimes, to name a few.

This lack of representation has been challenged in the past few years, and audiences are voicing their discontentment. On a hopeful note, it seems that change is in the making since Washington’s nomination. For instance, there is a visible presence of diversity in the nominees, and the 2017 Golden

² Planned Parenthood is a private non-profit organization that provides health care services for women and men. Its main focus is on reproductive health and sex education. There are centers all across the United States and the organization also works with international affiliates.

³ The Emmy® Awards is a celebration, which rewards artists and executives of the areas of television and media. It is administered by three organizations: Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (primetime); National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (daytime, sports, news and documentary); International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (international).

Globe⁴ awarded actress Tracee Ellis Ross the prize “Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series – Musical or Comedy” for her performance in the series *Black-ish* (2014 -). This is a historical award since it is the first time in over 30 years that it is given to an African-American actress for this category – Debbie Allen in 1983⁵.

1.3. THE INVESTIGATION

The main criterion for selecting this television series *Scandal* (2012-) is that it features for the first time since 1974 an African-American actress as the main character. It is in itself a fact that cannot be minimized and that needs to be addressed considering the impact it has in the media, social networks, and awards shows. It is important to highlight that *Scandal*, being a network series, not a cable one, pushed some boundaries and took a risk by having a woman of color as the new leading role of a new series. Kerry Washington says, in an article on the page of “The Feminist Spectator”, that she is “proud that it’s on the network. That it’s mainstream America... Cable is known to take more risks, but it’s time to have a show with a black woman as a lead not seen as a big deal”. Her statement exemplifies the importance of having such roles on television; there is a need for more diversity television so that it becomes not a “big deal”. Other criteria are based on what has been previously mentioned: the diversity encountered in the series, its ease to be seen through intersectional lenses, and the round female characters.

Within these round female characters, there is one that is highlighted throughout the first season, gains importance, and becomes an indispensable character in the series – the First Lady, Mellie Grant. As was mentioned previously, Mellie Grant becomes Olivia’s counterpart. Rivalry is not easily perceived, as will be discussed in the analytical chapters, but it is undeniable that she becomes the second most important female character of the series. When taking into account her trajectory throughout the series, one can argue that she becomes equal if not superior to Olivia. In this sense, her character may overshadow the main character and therefore, since the main character

4 The Golden Globe is an award ceremony that celebrates and rewards artists in cinema and television. It is linked to the Hollywood Foreign Press Association and it is known to precede and give an idea of what can be seen in the Academy awards – Oscars which is the upcoming award event.

5 This information was checked in multiple sources including ABC news internet article “Golden Globes 2017: Tracee Ellis Ross' Historic Win 'Means a Lot'” by Leslie Messer.

is a black woman, rich and powerful, but black nonetheless, it became clear the necessity to analyze whether the two characters are portrayed as counterparts or if the white woman character is as has been seen in past television series, superior to the black woman character.

The objective of this research is to compare the portrayal of the two main female characters in the TV series *Scandal*: Olivia Pope and Mellie Grant. The specific objectives are to analyze these women's representation to see the extent to which they become more or less powerful throughout the narrative. In order to do so, I explore how they are introduced to the audience⁶⁶, and how they evolve in the series. This is done by analyzing scenes from season one and season five to verify how the two characters interact, how they are portrayed when sharing a scene. Bearing in mind that the series is considered feminist by critics from a diverse range of sources (see Review of Literature for more details), my analysis is carried out through the lens of intersectionality. Therefore, I examine the intersection of race and power vis-à-vis the two female characters.

Considering the objectives aforementioned, the major questions of this investigation are: a) how are Olivia and Mellie portrayed in *Scandal*? How are they introduced in the series? b) How are the characters portrayed in the progression of the series? c) How empowered are the two characters? Is Mellie Grant more empowered than Olivia Pope?

1.4. THE SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the proposed research is that it should contribute to studies related to feminism and television series in the PGI Program. Many studies in the English Graduate Program at the University of Santa Catarina, deploying a feminist perspective, have been conducted in either literary criticism or discourse analysis, the former focusing mostly on women writers or feminist analysis of written texts.⁷

⁶ This study does not look at Reception Theory due to space since it would require an analysis of its own.

⁷ Over forty Masters' theses and Doctoral dissertations have been held in PGI Program with this literary focus. In the area of Linguistics other twelve Master theses and Doctoral dissertations were held with feminism or women as one of the investigated issues. This particular study is Fabio Bezerra's MA entitled *Sex and the City: An Investigation of Women's Image in Carrie Bradshaw's Discourse as Narrator*, which was defended in 2008.

When considering television series, dissertation and theses defended in the Program follow theoretical approaches such as Queer and Gender Studies, Identity, Popular Culture, and postmodernism. In 2016, Larissa Pena Ribeiro de Carvalho defended her M.A. thesis entitled *SUBVERSIVELY, DEAR WATSON: The politics of Gender Representation of Doctor Watson from Victorian Literature to Postmodern Television*. Her study, focusing on television, uses intersectionality as one of her theoretical frameworks for the analysis of the representation of Doctor Watson in the series *Elementary*. Furthermore, her investigation is significant for my own theoretical pursuit for it builds on my undergraduate final monograph, further developing it.

1.5. THE LITERATURE

In the following sections I will introduce a brief review of some theories that are fundamental for this research on feminism and women on television, such as Andi Zeisler's perspective on popular culture and its relation to the portrayal of women on television, and Leela Fernandes' critique of the three-wave model of feminism. I also present an overview of the waves of feminism. My discussion of intersectionality is introduced through the articles of Brah and Phoenix, Crenshaw and Cho, and Crenshaw and McCall. It is important to highlight that the academic discussions of *Scandal* are fairly recent. This indicates that the series is still quite unknown in the academy, except for analyses related to reception, which is not my concern in this study. I also borrow from Bordwell and Thompson's filmic analysis theory, as well as from Shohat and Stam, and from hooks for my discussion of representation. Other relevant works permeate the Literature section of this research.

1.5.1. Television Studies

When discussing television series it is relevant to investigate the basic narrative structure of these particular programs. In the attempt of unveiling this information, I will present Jeremy Butler's definitions of television series and television serial. These can be found in chapter 2 of his book *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*. Butler brings forward in the Preface a simple question: Should we take television seriously? His answer is yes, because "television provides meanings, many meanings as it

entertains” (xi). Many new university programs include television studies, and there are more and more scholars investigating television products, despite the fact that, in our present time, many devices such as smartphones, TiVo, and videogames have gained popularity. Notwithstanding these new technologies, television continues to be the main resource for information and entertainment for the general public.

Considering television series, in the 1940s they had a great influence from the radio, which was still very much appreciated since the television only showed “fuzzy, indistinct, black-and-white pictures” (33). Television changed since then; however, the basic narrative structure it inherited from radio is still present today and it is called the series (33). Butler highlights that historically speaking there are three modes of narrative on television. First, we have theatrical film and the “Made for TV Film”. Then, we have, respectively, the series program and the serial program (21).

According to the author, the television series is “a narrative form that presents weekly episodes with a defined set of recurring characters” (34). The episodes are “basically self-contained”, which means that viewing them in the sequence is not a requirement for the overall understanding of the series (34). It does happen that episodes are separated in two parts, mainly close to a break in the broadcasting schedule, for instance over Christmas, when channels have a specific program. Another common aspect is when narrative arcs recur throughout a season, nevertheless, the characteristic of the television series is that “each episode does not begin where the previous one ended, as episodes do in the television serial” (34). This type of narrative is common until the present day in the police and investigation genre.

Considering television serial, we find “specific and substantial narrative connections between one episode and the next” (41). If in the series, the connection between the episode is not determined, in the serial, the connection is “fundamental to its narrative pleasures” (41). The principal difference between the two types of narratives lies in the way they develop the narrative from one episode to the next; while in the first one they are not automatically linked, in the latter, they are (41).

For a long time, the television serial was exclusive of the Soap Opera genre and it dominated daytime television. This genre was marginalized, because it was considered to be the storytelling narrative that only housewives could find interesting (41). However, “the late 1990s and 2000s saw a surge in popularity of the prime-time serial that has continued to the present day” (41). During this time, television serial gained ground and became the most successful form of television. Examples of programs that

follow the serial form are *Twin Peaks* (1990 – 1991), *The Wire* (2002 – 2008), *Grey's Anatomy* (2005 -), *The Sopranos* (1999 – 2007), and *Mad Men* (2007 – 2015).

According to Jason Mittell there is a new form of entertainment television in the past two decades. In his article “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television” he explores this form by exposing that this new “model of television storytelling is distinct for its use of narrative complexity as an alternative to the conventional episodic (series, as presented by Butler) and serial forms that have typified most American television since its inception” (29). There is a shift and this new narrative can be seen in shows such as *Seinfeld* (1989 – 1998), *Firefly* (2002 – 2003), *The Wire* (2002 – 2008), and *The Sopranos* (1999 – 2007). While television and cinema have several similarities, it is important for the author to highlight that television should be analyzed with its own lenses. Mittell states that “television’s narrative complexity is predicated on specific facets of storytelling that seem uniquely suited to the series structure that sets television apart from film and distinguish it from conventional modes of episodic and serial forms” (29).

The author also believes this is the era of narrative experimentation and innovation. This does not mean that all programs on television follow such path, however new formats are more and more available. He presents many key transformations that enabled the emergence of narrative complexity. Among them the legitimacy of the medium appears as the most important. Indeed, television was seen as inferior to cinema, until many successful names from the movies such as David Lynch, Joss Whedon, Barry Levinson, and JJ Abrams, started to work on projects for the small screen. In fact, television was appealing for them as this medium, differently from cinema and the power given to the director, seems to provide more autonomy and power to the creators and writers of a show (31). According to Mittell, “these writers embrace the broader challenges and possibilities for creativity in long-form series, as extended character depth, ongoing plotting, and episodic variations are simply unavailable options within a two-hour film” (31).

The fact that short lived and moderately popular series obtained a cult status, and are economically more profitable than certain movies, has also influenced the legitimacy and importance of television. A new culture grew around these series, the culture of collectables with DVDs, t-shirts, among other. Networks invested in narrative complex series, expanding their grip on this media product. Technology has also influenced the complexity of television narratives. For instance, audiences would go to fan pages and blogs

to discuss about their favorite shows, and today they talk live on Twitter with the cast. He claims that “audiences tend to embrace complex programs in much more passionate and committed terms than most conventional television, using these shows as the basis for robust fan cultures and active feedback to the television industry” (32).

Mittell indicates that “at its most basic level, narrative complexity redefines episodic forms under the influence of serial narration—not necessarily a complete merger of episodic and serial forms, but a shifting balance,” and adds that “rejecting the need for plot closure within every episode that typifies conventional episodic form, narrative complexity foregrounds ongoing stories across a range of genres [...]” (32). Therefore, according to the author, shows such as *Mad Men (2007 – 2015)* do not follow an episodic or serial format. Even though there is an overall plot line such as “the series follows the life of the men and women working in an ad agency in the 1960s” the stories being told are not resolved within the boundaries of a single episode or even a single season. On the contrary, they may extrapolate and extend for many seasons.

Starting in the 1980s, series tried innovating their story arcs; it is however, only with *Twin Peaks (1990 – 1991)* that the breakthrough occurred. *Twin Peaks* was a cult hit from the early 1990’s whose influence in regards to narrative strategies and stylistic and thematic originality had more impact than the series itself (33). Another common device used by narrative complex television is alterations in chronology. Although not unfamiliar to television, these devices are more frequent and regular, they “become more the norm than the exception” in these programs than on conventional television (36). Flashbacks are crucial for narrative backstory or even as the backbone for a whole episode, as can be seen in episode 11, entitled *A Criminal, a Whore, an Idiot and a Liar*, of season two of *Scandal (2012 -)*. Due to this temporal jump, a more vivid participation of the viewers is also required. In this sense, as these programs are built without fear of viewers being confused, they allow themselves to explore a greater awareness and participative initiative from the viewer’s (37).

According to Mittell, these “narrative complex programs invite temporary disorientation and confusion, allowing viewers to build up their comprehension skills through long- term viewing and active engagement” (37). Therefore, you cannot simply watch these programs without commitment; you need to dive into their complex storylines and narrative mechanisms with unmediated attention (38). As a final remark, Mittell suggest that in the last two decades “new paradigm of television storytelling

has emerged” and it brings with it “a reconceptualization of the boundary between episodic and serial forms, a heightened degree of self-consciousness in storytelling mechanics, and demands for intensified viewer engagement focused on both diegetic pleasures and formal awareness” (39).

When considering *Scandal*'s five seasons, one can perceive a change in its structure. The first two seasons are what Mittel and Butler would call serial. In fact, these seasons present a main episodic characteristic, since in each episode Olivia and her associates have a case to solve. These cases are not directly related to law, in fact they are any problematic situation characters are involved in and need help fixing. It starts with the conflict, the episode revolves around solving it, and finally it resolves the conflict. This formula persists mostly in seasons one and two. Seasons three, four, and five will not necessarily have a case, therefore partially losing this episodic feature. In this sense seasons one and two have an episodic arch, and a season arch which consists of a story developed throughout the season. An example of this is the affair of the president in season one. The first episode introduces the character of the mistress and the affair. The subsequent episodes carry on the arch culminating in the final episode of the season with the resolution.

Season three, four, and five continue in the serial format; however, they have an approach more similar to what Mittel describes as television complexity. Gradually, the clients, hence the cases, disappear of the narrative to give space to greater and more elaborated scandals involving the main characters. These scandals permeate the season and sometimes expand to the next without having an exact resolution. This is especially the case in season five, where we have significant shifts in the main characters narratives, and a more precise attention to the scandals involving them without the interruptions of cases. Hence, we are constantly facing cliffhangers and plot twists which only bring more rhythm to the already vibrant pace of the series.

1.5.2. Women on U.S. television series and Representation

Bearing in mind that Popular Culture is “any cultural product that has a mass audience” (Zeisler 1), one example would be television, among other media. Due to its cultural power and the fact that it is the most used medium, television is a significant place where women see themselves represented (Zeisler 9). For many years representation of women on TV were limited to “loving wives, dutiful daughters, gossiping girlfriends, fashion plates, and the occasional dowdy maid, nanny, or granny” (Zeisler 9). Andi Zeisler's book *Feminism and Pop Culture* is one study among many which analyze

feminism in relation to popular culture. With a wide range of examples and investigations, she argues that “(...) there’s nothing wrong with loving, consuming, and creating pop culture with an eye toward how it can be better: smarter, less insulting to women (and men, for that matter), more diverse, and less hell-bent on perpetuating ugly and unhelpful stereotypes.” (21).

Starting as early as in the 1940s, women have seen themselves portrayed on television. Back in the 70s, there were series that had their focus on a female character, such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970 – 1977). This show was a sitcom and made people laugh with women represented in mundane and comic situations. Many other series such as *Bewitched* (1964 – 1972), *The Brady Bunch* (1969 – 1974), and *All in the Family* (1971 – 1979), appeared on television throughout the 1960s and 1970s; however, the female characters were regularly set in fixed categories for women that were related to social and tradition conventions (Furquim 31). As pointed out by Cashmore, “women were under-represented and, normally, appeared in roles that reinforced sexist stereotypes on their natural inclination towards domestic activities” (my translation 140). He adds that attempts at escaping this mold were transformed in comedy, highlighting the high presence of women in the comedic genre (141).

At the end of the 1980s, we find a turning point in the portrayal of women. After the liberation movements of the 60s and 70s, television producers did not know how to construct and present new female characters. They believe it could bring controversies and rebellion, being therefore not good for the broadcasting networks (Furquim 123). Therefore, a few series released during this time tried to break conventions, portraying characters that challenged the norm and followed a feminist perspective (123). As an example, we have the series *Roseanne* (1988 – 1997), which broke down boundaries by portraying an unconventional woman who was funny, not beautiful according to patterns of the time, and led a life of her own. Another example is *Murphy Brown* (1988 – 1998), a very important series because the main character decides to be a working single mother, thus challenging conventions related to motherhood and career. It is important to highlight that these series are sitcoms, which was the main genre for women on television. Women were not part of the main cast in most drama or action series. They were delegated to comedy, considered an inferior genre which allegedly demanded less intelligence and attention from the viewers (Furquim 8).

With the arrival of the 1990s, television series producers had effective new ideas and formats influenced the social changes of this particular period. The audience was opening up to change. According to Cashmore, television

was following “the changes in the status of women” and presented characters that had “rejected the option of family or had reevaluated their role in it so that they could focus on their careers. (...) women had also gone higher in hierarchy and were not seen any more as do it all” (my translation 144). Series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 – 2003), *Ally McBeal* (1997 – 2002), and *Sex and the City* (1998 – 2004) are examples of this decade that portrayed more complex female main characters (Furquim 167). *Buffy*, for instance, is a major character for action series. She is brave, strong, and independent. She fights vampires and is the center of the narrative. As for *Sex and the City*, it can be said that it was the first series that openly talked about women’s sexuality and sexual desires. However, a more critical analysis of the series will reveal that the main goal of the female characters is to “find a man” that will conduct them to marriage. Nevertheless, the series challenged the norm by bringing forward for the first time the subject “women’s sexuality” on television. With *Ally McBeal* (1997 – 2002), we follow the life of a successful lawyer whose personal life is as chaotic as the atmosphere of the law firm in which she works. All the characters are eccentric and complex in their own way.

In the 2000s, female characters were more common not only as parts of the main cast, but frequently as protagonists. One important aspect to take into consideration is how screenwriters and creators have produced female characters as complex and with as much depth as their male counterparts, for instance *Gilmore Girls* (2000 – 2007), *Alias* (2001 – 2006), and *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005 -), and many more. Shows such as *The Sopranos* (1999 – 2007), *Six Feet Under* (2001 – 2005), and *The Wire* (2001 – 2008), to name a few, had opened up space on television for complex narrative series that would portray feminist female characters. The world had changed, and so did women’s portrayals on television. The audience was demanding such changes. Therefore, recent television series tend to depict more female characters than a few years ago (Furquim 249).

In recent years, television series such as *Orange is the New Black* (2013 -) and *Girls* (2012 - 2017) are examples that try to subvert stereotypical representations in favor of more realistic, challenging, and complex depictions of women today. *Orange is the New Black* (2013 -) takes places in a women’s prison and, through a cast mainly female, explore stories that challenge conventions. *Girls* (2012 -2017) portrays female characters in their twenties in “realistic” and struggling situations. Other recent series that have been making a statement in relation to their female characters are

Nashville (2012 -), *Revenge* (2011 – 2015), *Masters of Sex* (2013 -), *The Mindy Project* (2012 -), and *Grace and Frankie* (2015 -) to name a few.

The underrepresentation of women has been central to feminist when considering television and cinema products. Women have been fighting against the way they are portrayed on television and other media for a long time. However, only recently changes can be seen. From the examples discussed in this section, one can perceive a predominance of white women representation. It indicates that changes occurred mostly when considering some women and not others. Although, there have been many television series with black women characters, in general as part of an all-black cast series, and since the 90's television series have a more diverse cast, black women characters on television has not been significantly present.

As mentioned by Lydia Evans in her article “Representations of African American Political Women in Scandal”, African-American women began to take a more visible role on television in the early 80's in, for example, *The Cosby Show* (1984 - 1992) (2). This series had a mainly African-America cast with its lead women role, performed by Phylicia Rashad, portraying a lawyer, mother of five, and wife of a doctor. She embodied “the narrative of the successful and respected black woman: one who can balance both family and work” (3). Other examples can be highlighted such as *Living Single* (1993 - 1998), starring Queen Latifah. It is relevant to highlight that both series are sitcoms, the “lesser genre” on television, as I have mentioned previously.

In recent years, television series have given more emphasis in diversifying their cast. Nevertheless, black women were still overlooked until *Scandal* debuted in 2012. As was previously mentioned, it is in this series that a black woman character is given the lead role for the first time in 18 years. More examples of such inclusions besides *Scandal* are *How to get away with murder* (2014 -), *Blackish* (2014 -), *Empire* (2015 -), and *Being Mary Jane* (2013 -).

The underrepresentation or even misrepresentation of so called minority groups can be seen in cinema as well. Looking back historically, Shohat and Stam, in their article “Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle over Representation”, have discussed the matter of representation and its struggles in cinema and television. They highlighted and extensively exemplified that “Euro-Americans have historically enjoyed the unilateral prerogative of acting in “blackface”, “redface”, “brownface”, and “yellowface”, while the reverse has rarely been the case” (189). In this sense, white actors and actresses played the roles of people of color for a long time in cinema. This

was due to “the powerlessness of historically marginalized groups to control their own representation” (184). According to the authors, in order to understand fully representation, one must make a “comprehensive analysis of the institutions that generate and distribute mass-mediated texts as well as of the audiences that receives them” (184). Thus, the people producing the media and the audience targeted dictated, in a way, what was being produced and how. The lack of people of color behind the scenes reflects the representation, or lack thereof, of people of color on screen.

The communities that were portrayed negatively voiced their outrage and protested those misrepresentations (181). With time and much struggle, change started to be seen. It is unfortunate, however, that much still needs to be done in this regard. As can be seen in television series, there continues to be a very low percentage of series that have women in leading roles, not to mention black women. Therefore, even though “gestures towards” a more appropriate representation of the so-called minority groups have been made in recent years in Hollywood, it is “hardly sufficient if narrative structure and cinematic strategies remain Eurocentric” (190). The success achieved by Shonda Rhimes, creator and executive producer of two of the most important series on television today, given that both have black women in leading roles, is of great importance in breaking racial barriers imposed throughout the years and showing that, indeed, changes must be made in all instances of the media.

In regards to misrepresentation, the authors indicated that those representations would have a different effect on the audience, therefore perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing social conventions would have negative repercussions. In their own words stereotypes of some communities merely make the target group uncomfortable, but the community has the social power to combat and resist them; stereotypes of other communities participate in a continuum of prejudicial social policy and actual violence against disempowered people, placing the very body of the accused in jeopardy (183).

Thus the necessity to change the depiction of certain communities and so called minority groups was and still is fundamental. It was clear, according to bell hooks, that “when most black people in the United States first had the opportunity to look at film and television, they did so fully aware that mass media was a system of knowledge and power reproducing and maintaining white supremacy” (117). Therefore, through the oppositional gaze, as well as through raising their voices in indignation, among other practices undertaken throughout the years, the representation of disempowered communities has

been challenged and has changed, even of only a little. bell hooks discusses how black women saw themselves depicted in films and described the gaze of those women as being oppositional. She claims that by being told not to look, not to gaze, by people and the institutions responsible for the misrepresentation of black people, some women have developed an oppositional gaze. Therefore, “all attempts to repress our/black peoples’ rights to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality” (116). She highlights how for black women it was and is more complicated, exemplifying the development of an oppositional gaze.

As Zeisler puts it, popular culture “(...) come to define us. It is the main lens through which we look to understand ourselves and those around us: it helps us decide who we are, who our friends are, and who we want to be” (144). Since the way they were portrayed on television influenced female audience on how they should behave and who they should aspire to be, feminists took to task the critique of such representations in an attempt to change them. In addition, even though some transformations were achieved, there has been a continuous battle against this medium that insists on portraying women under a different light (119). The changes acquired by feminists did not automatically mean changes for all women. This battle is arduous, especially for black women. The relevance of *Scandal* when considering the representation of a black woman on television is undeniable.

1.5.3. Feminism and Intersectionality

Considering that the research was developed through the lens of feminist criticism, it is relevant here to highlight and situate this context. At the beginning, while doing the readings, my main focus was to give an overview of feminism and its trajectory to better contextualize my research. In the process of studying the significant debates, I came across the notion of the periodization of feminism into three waves. When reading for the final monograph of my undergraduate program, I focused mainly on the third wave, which is more intersectional. At the moment, the feminist view I bring in my analysis is rooted in intersectionality, therefore problematizing the periodization is of high relevance because it is restrictive and essentialist.

Thus, this section will first bring forward an overview of feminism, followed by a periodization critique, and finally an overview on intersectionality.

It has been consolidated by scholars that the First Wave started in the mid-1800s and ended in the beginning of the 20th century. It is described as the period in which women struggled for the right to vote, as well as for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and initiating women's right to an education (Hawkins and Howard 9). Throughout this period, women were entwined in the context of industrial society and politics. Their achievements are still affecting women today. Their voices were the first ones to be heard.

By the end of the Second World War, many women were working to keep the economy in place, and they sometimes occupied positions that were previously only undertaken by men. Nevertheless, when men returned from the war they needed employment, and scores of women were driven back to the household, as well as to take care of the children since so many lives were lost in the War (Zeisler 27). As Laura Mulvey points out, in her article entitled "Melodrama in and out of the Home", "American women were being tempted and dragooned back into the home to readjust the unsettling effects of the Second World War" (81). The perfect life for women was set as follows: find a husband with a proper job, answer to the husband's needs at all times, raise the children, run the house, and be socially engaged. This brought many women to be trapped in what Betty Friedan calls "the problem that has no name". In her book, entitled *The Feminine Mystique*, she describes housewives struggles as follows:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slip-cover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night, she was afraid to ask even to herself the question: 'Is this all?' (5)

These women were taught that to be feminine was not to want a career and higher education, independence and political rights; it was to do all those things listed by Friedan (5). The beginning of the 1960s marks the start of the so-called Second Wave of Feminism.

As mentioned previously by Friedan, women were required to be obedient housewives, very few risking going against the rules and defying the norms. It was in this atmosphere of western social movement – since it is during this period that movements such as student protests, lesbian and gay movements, and in the United States, civil rights and Black power movements, were taking place – that the second wave was born (Krolokke 8). Thus, the second wave can be characterized by demands for equality in the public sphere, gender equality and reproductive freedom (Hawkins and Howard 10).

The Third Wave of Feminism was consolidated in the 1980s. It can be characterized by the interventions of post-colonial, transnational, and queer theory, and thus to internal and intersectional differences. This aspect is relevant since it differs from the previous waves which, on the contrary, did not encompass them. According to Naomi Rockler-Gladen in her article “Third Wave Feminism: Personal Empowerment Dominates This Feminist Philosophy”

Third Wave feminism encourages personal empowerment and action. Third Wave feminism celebrates emotions and experiences that traditionally have been labeled as “unfeminine”. Women are invited to be angry, aggressive, and outspoken; they celebrate diversity. The Third Wave of Feminism is, as pointed out by Charlotte Krolokke, “in itself diverse and chaotic” (17).

The categorization of feminism into waves, as seen in the previous paragraphs, is problematized in the article “Unsettling ‘Third Wave Feminism’ – Feminist Waves, Intersectionality, and Identity Politics in Retrospect” by Leela Fernandes. The author questions this division of feminism by claiming that it sets aside a number of debates and subjects that would otherwise enrich each one of these periods. She suggests that this model emphasizes a static element of the waves, arguing that it tends to “present an image of homogeneous waves of knowledge that underestimates the differences and divergences among writers located within specific waves” (102). By reminding us that according to historical narratives the second wave “was the preserve of white, middle- class women”, and third wave “marked a new phase in which feminists of color and questions of race and gender were now included” (100), she emphasizes that multicultural inclusion in these narratives appears only in the latter wave. However, issues

of inclusion and exclusion in feminism date back to Sojourner Truth in the 19th century and problematize the wave model.⁸

Fernandes focuses her criticism on the Third Wave, explaining that three main narratives center it: multicultural inclusion, identity politics, and intersectionality. The scrutiny of these narratives is the objective of her article. She concludes that the third wave cannot be merely separated into the three main narratives, since it is more complex and nuanced (99). In order to carry out this examination, she brings to her analysis the writings of Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the oppressed*, for whom “feminists of colour in the 1970s and 1980s--when second wave feminism occupied a central role among feminists in the academy-- provided the groundwork for an alternative theory and method of oppositional consciousness” (104-105). Fernandes suggests the intersectional theory of oppositional consciousness⁹ as an adequate alternative for the wave model because it takes into consideration the changes and evolution of time and space between these periods (114). However, she does not define intersectionality explicitly.

Furthermore, and in order to exemplify the nuances of the third wave, Fernandes discusses Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of the new mestiza in *Borderlands* (1987). Her analysis shows how this text goes beyond the oppositional binarism found between the second and third wave (108). She demonstrates that “the new mestiza tactically occupies and moves between fields that have been territorialized as second wave or intersectional locations” (108). Considering this analysis, Fernandes interrogates the homogeneity of the waves of feminism. To her, such subjectivities, for instance the ones present in Anzaldúa’s work, cannot be contained in a restrictive model as the wave one is.

This restrictiveness of the wave model is what she problematizes. In her point of view, much is lost in this categorization. Subjects and issues problematized by feminists of color are, for example, dislocated from their historical period by not being addressed as part of the second wave (100). She concludes that “the construction of such a narrative ends up removing a sense of dynamism and contestation from the historical periods associated with second and third wave feminism” (111). Therefore, Fernandes calls for

⁸ It is known that Alice Walker coined the term “womanism” that embraces all kinds of feminisms including Black feminism.

⁹ Oppositional consciousness is a means for changing the dominant order of power. It is set in five categories: equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, separatist, and differential.

another perspective that may contemplate greater complexity and richness within feminist.

The term intersectionality was coined in 1989 by professor of law Kimberlé Crenshaw in her article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”. She develops a “Black feminist criticism because it sets forth a problematic consequence of tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experiences and analysis” (139). She tackles this criticism by analyzing three lawsuits and showing how in different ways the categorization of race and gender has been most prejudicial to Black women. She brings forward the idea of intersectionality to challenge “the single-issue analyses” and indicates that a change of perspective is crucial and acknowledging the intersections is beneficial to all parties since it will bring forward a broader debate on the issues at hand (149).

Through presenting the cases and indicating the limitations of “the singles issue analyses” she suggests “that Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar and different from those experienced by white women and Black men” (149). Considering this suggestion she highlights that

the paradigm of sex discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of white women; the model of race discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of the most privileged Blacks. Notions of what constitutes race and sex discrimination are, as a result, narrowly tailored to embrace only a small set of circumstances, none of which include discrimination against Black women (151).

Intersectionality, therefore, would bring forward the needs of Black women and would give them the chance to be part of the equation and have their own experiences taken into consideration.

Crenshaw, through the use of the speech “Ain’t I a woman” by Sojourner Truth¹⁰, argues that women of color were overlooked by feminist theory and this exclusion is reinforced when it is only white women’s experiences that are considered as women’s experiences (154). With intersectionality, she believes a more complete view of women is possible

¹⁰ More on the speech is explored later on the text through the use of the article ““Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality” by Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix.

when taking into account the multitude axes present in each woman's lives and identities.

We can trace a parallel between Crenshaw's claim that feminist theory overlooked black women and the misrepresentation of black women on television. It seems that similarities are found there also, in the sense that, white women were privileged and black women had to challenge the norms in order to have a more visible place in the television scenery. As I have mentioned previously, this battle is still ongoing.

In the article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" (1992), Crenshaw once more analyzes cases in which the intersection of race and gender were not taken into consideration. She uses intersectionality

to describe or frame various relationships between race and gender. I have used intersectionality as a way to articulate the interaction of racism and patriarchy generally. I have also used intersectionality to describe the location of women of color not within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism (1265).

This way, she challenges the legal system and society to use intersectionality since it is not exclusionary. She clearly states that when speaking of gender, white middle class women are linked and when speaking of race it is Black men, therefore Black women are marginalized on both fronts. She, however, does not dismiss categories per se, but rather how these categories are perceived and what is attributed to them. Thus, intersectionality contemplates the multiple identity characteristics of the Black woman, and actually, of any other individual whom does not enter the pre-prescribed profile of certain categories.

The author tackles, in this article, representational intersectionality stating that the devaluation of women of color could be influenced by the way they "are represented in cultural imagery" (1282). She takes as the example the court case against the rap band 2 Live Crew, who were accused of having obscene lyrics. The debate on whether the band deserved or not the trial is not a matter at hand here, but her focus is rather on how the trial proceeded. Stating that the album being judged was indeed misogynistic, she reinforces that an intersectional analysis of the case acknowledges issues of gender as well as issues of race (1285). Crenshaw uses Madonna as an example of such controversy since the artist had not been prosecuted for obscenity, although she had "acted out masturbation, portrayed the seduction of a priest, and

insinuated group sex on stage” (1285). These trials are, therefore, selective, and one major aspect of it is that Black women’s interests are irrelevant. Finalizing, she says that “although collective opposition to racist practice has been and continues to be crucially important in protecting Black interests, an empowered Black feminist sensibility would require that the terms of unity no longer reflect priorities premised upon the continues marginalization of Black women” (1295).

Many years after her seminal articles, Crenshaw joined Leslie McCall and Sumi Cho in the article “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Application, and Praxis”, in which they give a panorama of the field. They highlight how the concept of intersectionality has been engaged in many different fields of study and has traveled around the world (787). Citing Lykke 2011, they state that intersectionality has been an open system, “a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities” (788). This exemplifies why so many scholars have included this concept in their analysis and therefore, have reflected upon it.

The questions of race and gender have been at its core, making it particularly useful for Black feminists. Nevertheless, each field and scholar will adapt this concept because it has “traveled into spaces and discourses that are themselves constituted by power relations that are far from transparent” (789). The authors present examples of works developed and articles published focusing on intersectionality, in order to provide a panorama of the current uses of the concept. They finalize by arguing that the future of intersectionality will

be dependent on the rigor with which scholars harness the most effective tools of their trade to illuminate how intersecting axes of power and inequality operate to our collective and individual disadvantage and how these very tools, these ways of knowing, may also constitute structures of knowledge production that can be the object of intersectional critique (796)

In the article, “Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality”, Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix debate the concept intersectionality. The writers exemplify the relation between Sojourner Truth’s speech and their article “not because there is a direct correspondence between slavery and 21st century forms of governmentality, but rather to indicate that some issues that emerged then can help illuminate and elucidate our current entanglements with similar problematics” (75). It is with this in mind that they revisit

debates on the category of woman and, to them; no other text could challenge this category more than Truth's 19th century political speech. In her speech Sojourner Truth "powerfully challenges essentialist thinking that a particular category of woman is essentially this or essentially that" (77).¹¹

Essentialism is indeed confronted by intersectionality, as Brah and Phoenix contend:

the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands (76).

My suggestion is that this concept contemplates what Fernandes meant by a perspective that captured greater complexity and richness. Throughout the examples introduced in the article, one can perceive how this perspective embraces cultural differences and works along them in order to construct an understanding of these differences (79). Therefore, essentialism can be defined as a belief in a pure essence. Essentialism is conceived as articulating an original femininity, a female essence, without conveying the socially constructed patriarchal discourses and the cultural differences of these women. The concept provides a single view of women as a unified category, without considering the intersectional axes such race, class and sexuality that differentiate one woman from the other.

Taking into account that "the main differences in feminist approaches tended to be understood broadly in terms of socialist, liberal and radical feminisms, with the question of racism forming a point of conflict across all three" (79), it is important to look at intersectionality as an anti-essentialist perspective. Being aware of its significance is fundamental to perceive the complexity and multiplicity of how each woman had different experiences depending on their race, social class, and sexuality, among others. This awareness challenges the essentialist notion of "woman", and problematizes homogeneous and universal representations of women (82). Therefore, it can

¹¹ Essentialism can also be articulated from Truth's speech, even though it was not coined during that time. Essentialism was critiqued by feminist mainly starting in the 1980s. They argued that it was hegemonic and represented the problems of privileged women as an extension for all women's issues. These privileged women were white, middle class, heterosexual, excluding thus those that did not fit these categories.

be said that the perspective of intersectionality embraces the crossing of voices that inhabits feminism.

Although the importance of the wave-model is undeniable, its problematization is fundamental. Understanding its structure and its path sheds light on the feminist movements and conquests; nevertheless, just as Fernandes pointed out, its restrictiveness makes it difficult to contemplate the multiplicities of women and their intersections. In this sense, and after much research, the intersectionality approach, as observed and presented by Brah and Phoenix, Crenshaw, Cho, and McCall is the one I use for my analysis.

1.5.4. Scandal

Scandal (2012 -), unlike other television series such as *Mad Men* (2007 – 2015) and *Breaking Bad* (2008 - 2013), did not generate much academic publishing; it is fairly recently that scholars are writing about it. Therefore, only a few are present in this review. On the other hand, many internet-based articles have discussed these series. Many opinions can be found and, because of this, it is easy to get lost in the mist of polar opposite personal points of view that have a very little toned down emotional critical approach. Nevertheless, due to its wide presence online, I have selected a few articles that I believe can contribute to this research and complement the academic articles. The major themes found in the articles both from academic and online sources are race and feminism.

When interviewing Kerry Washington, the actress who plays Olivia Pope, *The Guardian* points out that the popularity of the show is largely due to the fact that “it is the first network primetime drama to feature an African-American female lead in close to 40 years, and possibly the first ever whose colour is entirely incidental” (Aitkenhead). Incidental since it is not a fact that the show focuses on and certainly not a fact used for promotion and publishing. Thus, she is not defined by it; she just is an African-American woman. The overall audience of the show has been giving a positive feedback to this fact. They claim that it is important to see more leading women like Olivia Pope in order to have a diversified representation on television. The series is created, produced, and occasionally written, by an African American woman, another element highlighted by critics and audiences. Shows featuring a mainly African American cast are set into a specific category and generally they are targeting a specific audience, but this does not occur with *Scandal*. In this sense, many believe a breakthrough has

been achieved with this television series. In her article “Late to the party: ABC’s *Scandal*”, A. Lynn, for instance, speaks up about her wish that “these facts about *Scandal* were unremarkable--that we would be operating in a world where women of color TV leads and creators were as common as days that end in Y, but the reality is that this *does* set *Scandal* apart”.

In an article for *The New York Times*, Tanzina Vega talks about the success of the series. Entitled “A Show Makes Friends and History: ‘*Scandal*’ on ABC is Breaking Barriers”, the article gives its readers reasons why the show is successful. One important reason is the fact mentioned in the article discussed previously, an African American Leading Lady in a show that does not identify her through her race but through who she is. Tanzina Vega speaks of *Scandal* has being a post-racial series saying that it “represents a new era of post racial television, in which cast members are ethnically diverse but are not defined by their race or ethnicity”. The star of the series has on many occasions spoken about this topic; however, Shonda Rhimes, the creator and executive producer, declined the invitation and has several times mentioned that race is not a subject she will discuss in relation to her television series. The stance portrayed by the creator and her production crew exemplifies what audiences have been pointing out has a positive aspect of the show, that race and gender do not define the series, they only stand out since many series on television today are still defined by them.

These facts may be visible in the first two seasons of the series; nevertheless it changed in the third season when the character of Olivia’s father is introduced. What Aitkenhead, Lynn, and Vega claim does not lose its value since even the creator herself, Shonda Rhimes, had claimed such accounts, but a characteristic of television series is to be ever-flowing, therefore it can be perceived that the evolution was bound to head in that direction. Olivia’s father is the anchor for the topic of race. He talks about it in many of his speeches to Olivia Considering that even though Olivia is a successful African American woman “living” in a world dominated by white men, she seems to not take this fact as a relevant one; however, there came a point within the series that this fact had to be highlighted.

In this sense, it is not surprising that in season four the creator Shonda Rhimes, along with the writes Zahir McGhee, tackled the theme of African Americans killed by the police. In the fourteenth episode of the season called, “The lawn chair”, Olivia finds herself needing to fix the situation between the Washington police and the father of a young man that had just been killed. The episode starts with Olivia arriving at the scene of the crime ready to help

the police when the father of the young man arrives and demands to speak with the police officer who killed his son. In this first moment Olivia's power is emphasized when she guarantees that she can get the Attorney General of the United States to oversee the case. Meanwhile a crowd gathers and activist Marcus Walker (Cornelius Smith Jr.), who will later on become one of her gladiators, joins the father and challenges Olivia to the point where she claims she "is not the enemy"(07:25).

Halfway through the episode Olivia and Marcus have a heated discussion where she tells him that they want the same thing, however Marcus is not impressed by her and tells her that they "don't want the same thing. You (Olivia) want to put it to bed quietly and tell everyone in the hill that you came down to the hood and you saved us. No thanks, Olivia. Your Black card is not getting validated today" (13:57 – 14:07). Marcus, defying her and questioning her stand, makes her reflect on it and she chooses to stand with Marcus. She acknowledges for the first time her Blackness and by bringing forward this topic through a story that is unfortunately so relevant in today's news the series also takes a stand and takes an important step closer to the fact that the main character is a Black woman and that race is embedded in the series.

The intention of not labeling and openly identifying Olivia as a black woman and problematizing this in the series has its merits. Ultimately, the ideal situation would be for this to be true, for black woman to not be underrepresented on television, to have a real equality of representation. This ideal situation is nevertheless, far from our reality, and not acknowledging this may only feed the underrepresentation and undermine the importance of having a lead female role played by an African American. The relevance of acknowledging race in the case of *Scandal* is undeniable hence every academic article encountered brings forward this fact. It seems unlikely to talk about the series without mentioning race and blackness, and connecting it to the representation of black women on television.

Monique I. Liston mentions this issue in her article "There's No Sally and Thomas Here!' Scandal, Twitter, and Black Feminist Epistemology". She argues that "although race does not take center stage explicitly through the show's dialogue, it remains an elusive yet overarching ideal that permeates the relationship the audience has with the show" (5). She acknowledges that race is present in the show even if not explicitly and through her analysis she indicate how the show has giving space for black women to express themselves in the public sphere such as on Twitter since they identify with the character. A similar research was conducted by Kristen J. Warner in the

article “ABC’s Scandal and Black Women’s Fandom”. She investigates how Scandal affects black women’s presence online. Both articles have as their focus the reception and reaction of the audience. Most of all, they highlight how black women feel connected to the show due to the fact that the main lead is a black woman. For the first time, in a long time, fans identify with a character and engage in broad discussions on social media.

Historically speaking, fan studies have set black women’s presence to the margins, focusing mainly on mainstream white women and men. In more recent years, more studies have dealt more specifically with those in the margins. Considering that Scandal has for its lead role a black woman, it becomes logical to assess how fans are reacting to the show since there is a sense of identification and visibility¹². The author brings the example of “three interventions of imaginative construction, critical interpretation, and Black women’s social condition” which are 1), imagining a peripheral black female role as the lead, discussing this character as if it were the main character; 2) making use of race bending, which consists of rewriting characters in fan-fiction and other fan media into a different race, therefore negotiating “between the original actor’s performance and the audience’s acceptance of the performance”, it is commonly associated with color-blind casting, when characters are reimagined traveling through race boundaries; 3) the final intervention of black female fan consists of coupling white males, normally leading roles, with secondary black female roles, in order to bring give through the relationship more power to the black female character.

Audience acceptance and reaction has a great influence in how TV series evolve, in many occasions changes occur due to the audience’s disapproval or online discussions. This was the case with Mellie Grant’s character. The public’s reaction made it clear that she had to have a more prominent role, which made sense within the narrative of the series and was therefore, embraced by the writers. Warner, mentioning the ascension of Mellie’s character, implies that she could have dethroned Olivia, especially after the rape episode¹³. Considering that the analysis of Mellie’s ascension is part of my objectives I will not expand on this subject at this moment, nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the author does not go any further in the representation of Mellie.

¹² Page numbers are not included in the text due to it being an e-book.

¹³ Season three, episode 7 called *Everything’s Coming Up Mellie*, through a flashback the audience is transported back to before the campaign and the moment when Fitz’s father rapes Mellie. She does not tell anyone, however the topic will appear later on in the series.

The author does, however, just like Liston's, bring forward the fact that Shonda Rhimes does not explicitly highlight race in the series. She mentioned the very few moments in which an allusion to race can be interpreted in the first 3 seasons; she claims that Rhimes "builds characters that occupy a more universally normative appeal". By taking this stand, Rhimes leaves to the audience to fill in the gaps and have the discussion about race. In order to appeal to "mainstream (white) audiences who do not want to "see" race" the creator and writer "forgoes much explicit discussion of race, but also keeps Olivia from demonstrating any visible signs of blackness". Warner does not clearly state her opinion on this lack of race visibility, she does highlight how this condition made black female fans discuss and "fill in the gaps" vehemently in social media, allowing thus for them to be visible. I am inclined to emphasize that Warner's analysis takes into consideration the first 3 seasons of the series, therefore not considering the more significantly visible race discussions that emerged in seasons 4 and 5, as was exemplified in a previous moment in this research.

In the article "Representation of African American Political Women in Scandal, Lydia Evans tries to "comprehend the character of Olivia Pope and discover if she challenges or reinforces stereotypes of African American women in politics" (3). She shows through her analysis that in some instances it is a positive representation and in others, it does reinforce stereotypes. Olivia's education and constant demonstration of intelligence challenge the depiction of women in politics who are "merely examined by their appearances" (8). The second positive aspect brought forward by the author is that Olivia is poised and confident. She is articulate and professional. These character traits challenge the image of the black woman who is loud, unprofessional, and unsuccessful. As for the negative stereotype, Olivia "invokes the Jezebel narrative" (10). This term will be further explained in the next paragraph, but it is related to sexuality and power. Olivia's affair with the President associates her with the narrative that is quite familiar to black women's narratives on television. The author concludes with a positive outcome of the analysis. Even though there is a negative side to the character, overall the positive side overshadows it and the female audience "positively identifies with" her (11). In conclusion, it is more positive especially considering how this so-called minority group has been represented in the past.

Jezebel, Sapphire, and Mammy are three common representations of black women in cinema and television. Analyses have shown that characters tend to fit these portrayals thus perpetuating sameness and stereotypes in

those portrayals. Kendall King has done a descriptive character analysis of Olivia in her article “Do African-American Female Stereotypes Still Exist in Television? A Descriptive Character Analysis of Olivia Pope” in which she considers whether Olivia representation fits any of those stereotypical ones. Based on the bible character named Jezebel, this stereotype refers to women as being promiscuous, manipulative seductresses who will derail men and sexually insinuate themselves (46). Meanwhile, the Sapphire is in reference to the portrayal of Ernestine Ward’s character in the television show from the 1950’s *The Amos n’ Andy (1951 - 1953)* and it is known as the “mad black woman”. Thus, in this representation black women are seen as stubborn, bitchy, bossy and hateful (46). On the other hand, the mammy, third and final representation, is “described as being the caregiver (...) stems from slavery when African-American women raised the children of their masters” (46). Neglectful with her own children, she is seen as unattractive and overweight (46). King concludes that Olivia does encompass the three depictions, nevertheless, she does so in a more challenging manner, and in a manner not “often seen in today’s mainstream media” (48). In this sense, Olivia does not perpetuate those representations, she challenges them.

While delving the internet searching for articles on Scandal, I encountered another frequent topic, feminism. Many have written about whether or not the series is Feminist. It can be said that the majority considers it a feminist series, even though it has not been labeled openly as such, pointing out episodic outbursts of feminism. For instance, the article “How 'Scandal' Gives Unsuspecting Viewers Subtle Lessons In Feminism, Week After Week”, written by Jessica Samakow for the Huffington Post Women, gives examples of these feminist moments. Samakow claims that Rhimes “has found an effective way to put women's issues in front of the masses. All season long, she has worked subtle ideas about feminism into her plot lines” and by doing so she is bringing forward the topic without making it the center of attention, and just as race, something that would define the series.

Another instance in which feminism was the topic at hand is in the article “Is ‘Scandal’ the most feminist show on TV?” published by the *New York Post*. Lindsay Putnam starts her article by saying there is no doubt Olivia Pope is one of the strongest leading female characters on television today; however, she detaches Scandal from the other series created and produced by Shonda Rhimes. She claims that this particular series does more since it “strives to unveil the ways in which women are undermined in our day-to-day lives with each and every episode”. She justifies her theory by saying that “while characters on Rhimes’ other shows are invested in their own

success, the women in “Scandal” are more concerned with breaking down barriers for all womankind”. Topics such as sexual assault, sexual autonomy, and sexist terminology are examples presented by the writer. For her, Scandal goes “above and beyond to portray women as equals to men”.

This television series has been gathering a great number of followers. What the articles here emphasized are examples and reasons for it. A strong complex leading female character is not often found, especially if she is African-American. *Scandal* fulfills this role agreeably and even though critiques have been shown, many have agreed that this portrayal is more beneficial than not. The controversy on the matter of race representation and visibility has been central in all investigations and written pieces produced about the series. It seems evident, in my opinion, that such invisibility could not remain, and the narrative changes that occurred in seasons 4 and 5 have been a proof of that. Such opportunity cannot be neglected. Olivia is black, and considering today’s continued lack of black representation in television, is it crucial to problematize, challenge, and rewrite popular culture in order to obtain change.

1.5.5. Film Analysis

In order to analyze the selected episodes and scenes, two major textbooks served as my theoretical background. One is Jeremy Butler’s book, *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*. In this work, Butler gives an overview of television. Separated in three parts, the book focuses on a diverse range of aspects about television from historical ones to more technical ones, such as image and sound. Because it does not provide in depth analytical tools, the book was used in a more general manner. Its relevance is not questioned; on the contrary, it is used as a necessary instrument when discussing television. It is used in this study as basis for not only the filmic analysis but the research as a whole.

The other book used for my analysis is Bordwell and Thompson’s *Film Art*. This iconic textbook has become a classical for film analysis worldwide. Although the book brings an array of elements dealing with film, I have focused on discussions of mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing.

Mise-en-scène is understood as everything that appears in the frame or in the image. Originating in the theater, where all the props and instruments were staged, cinema studies have borrowed the term from its original context.

The aspects that involve the *mise-en-scène* are, for example, setting, lighting, costume, and the behavior of the individuals in the scene. This implies that the director stages every feature we see on the screen, giving them a purpose and meaning. Sometimes it can even “transcend concepts of reality” as is exemplified by Bordwell and Thompson through Georges Méliès¹⁴ use of *mise-en-scène* to “enable him to create a totally imaginary world” (171).

As mentioned, for the *mise-en-scène* the director stages an event and this will be part of the scene filmed. This shot only exists when “light and dark patterns are inscribed on a strip of film”, therefore we must glance at how this shot is being filmed. The analytical term used for this technique is cinematography. In this sense, cinematography looks at “three factors: (1) the cinematographic aspect of the shot, (2) the framing of the shot; and (3) the duration of the shot” (210). Hence it is this area that will, for instance, oversee the visual and tonality textures of the shot, whether a shot is darker or in bright colors since it is part of the cinematographic aspect. The speed of motion is also part of cinematography, how fast or slow is an action being depicted and what in veil behind this decision of speed. Finally, the angle of the camera, the perspective it is showing, and how it is framed are essential elements since it defines what the audience sees.

The final film element used for my analysis is editing. Editing which is “the coordination of one shot with the next” and how it can affect the viewers’ cinematic experience (270-71). Depending on the film genre, it may be faster, i.e., edited with a great number of short shots that unveil before our eyes an action and has the purpose to, for example, increase the adrenaline. In the case of *Scandal*, as an example of editing that influences the spectator’s experience, the first shot of the series is an aerial night time view of Washington, DC (figure 1.1). What seem to be flashes of a photographic camera cuts the shot and changes the frame to a close-up of the Capitol (figure 1.2). More flashes and we are at street level with a shot of a street in a neighborhood of the Capital that has in the background the Capitol (figure 1.3). The shot is still and a woman appears running across the street, the camera follows her in a series of intercut frames (figure 1.4).

¹⁴ Georges Méliès (1861 – 1938) was a French film director who became famous for his innovative technics in the use of special effects.

Figure 1.1 (00:01)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 1.2 (00:02)

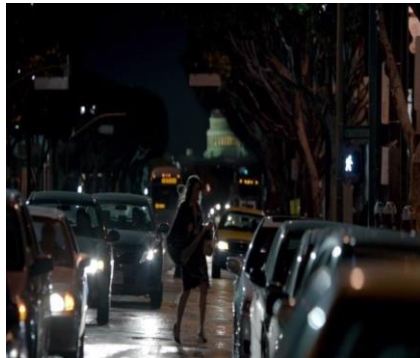


Figure 1.3 (00:02)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 1.4 (00:04)



What can be said of this opening sequence? First, it is Washington, DC and the aerial view shows us the Capitol with the Obelisk and the White House in the background, this suggest that a thematic of politics is plausible. The photographic camera flashes confirm the importance of the news and press in the narrative. It is at night indicating that news and scandals never sleep. Cutting the frames with the flashes highlights the speed and gives a specific rhythm to the narrative; it shows that constant movement is a characteristic of the series. In terms of editing, it is important to indicate also the use of graphic match with the image of the Capitol. A graphic match is when “shapes, colors, overall composition, or movement, in shot A may be picked up in the composition of shot B” (274). By linking the shots through

the presence of the Capitol we have a graphic match. Therefore, this sequence gives us an overview of what can be expected of the series in terms of editing movement, setting, and narrative. The fast paced, flashy, fragmented editing is crucial for the overall *Scandal* experience.

1.6. THE PROCEDURES

My decision to analyze the portrayal of the two main female characters in this series was based on the richness of their representation. Due to space and time constraints, I will not consider in this study all the female characters depicted in the series. Considering I am interested in seeing Olivia and Mellie's progression throughout the series, I decided to select season one and five to analyze. I chose Season one due to its introductory characteristic, and season five because it presents a shift in the portrayal of the characters (I elaborate more on this topic in chapter III). Then, readings of the theoretical framework took place in order to build the literary apparatus of the analysis. Finally, the seasons were analyzed and annotated with the theoretical guidance of Butler, Bordwell and Thompson's filmic analysis theory.

1.7. THE STRUCTURE

Four chapters divide the present research. Although each chapter has a specific focus, they are, however, interlinked, co-dependent for the overall analysis. In the appendix, a list of all the episodes of the television series is presented along with a list of the figures that permeate chapters II and III. This appendix not only helps the reader understand the format of each television series, it also acknowledges the people who created each episode. A list of all the series mentioned in the research, along with their main technical information, is also provided.

In the introduction chapter, I presented the context of the investigation, its corpus, and objectives, followed by research questions and the conceptual framework I used, along with the review of literature. Thus, this first chapter aims at clarifying what the study discusses.

Chapter II, entitled *We were on the same team*, has as its focus on the first season of the television series *Scandal*. This chapter focuses on the analysis of the main female characters Olivia Pope and Mellie Grant as they are introduced to the audience.

Chapter III, entitled *I left for the same reason you stayed* investigates the portrayal of the main female characters in season five of the series. Here, I present a reintroduction of the characters by looking at their progression in comparison to the first season.

The fourth and final chapter, *Final remarks*, consists of presenting the general and specific conclusions found in the analysis by referring to the principal questions of the investigation. Final remarks and implications of the study for future research in the area finalize the chapter.

2. CHAPTER II

SEASON ONE - “WE WERE ON THE SAME TEAM”

The second chapter focuses on initiating the analysis of *Scandal*. Firstly, the World of *Scandal* is brought to light with details of the production and narrative. An overall presentation of the characters and a deeper understanding of the plot are given in order to have a more complete view of Olivia Pope and Mellie Grant’s surroundings. Secondly, Olivia Pope and Mellie Grant are introduced through the analysis of the first time they appear in the series. The following chapter considers the first season of the series as the object of analysis. Both characters first appearance is in the first episode, entitled *Sweet Baby*. Finally, the final section of the chapter encompasses the analysis of a scene of the two characters together. This scene is taken from the last episode of the series entitled *Grant: For the people*.

2.1. THE WORLD OF SCANDAL: FIRST ENCOUNTER

As aforementioned, the television series *Scandal* was created by Shonda Rhimes, who is also the producer and one of the writers of the show. Her name is connected to other television series such as *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005 -) and its spin-off *Private Practice* (2007 - 2013), *How to get away with murder* (2014 -), and *The Catch* (2016 - 2017). It is through *Grey’s Anatomy* that she established a name for herself and therefore, created a buzz when in 2011 it was announced that she was working on a new pilot. In 2012 *Scandal*’s pilot aired on ABC¹⁵¹⁵ taking the spot of *Private Practice* which was showing its last season. The success of the first episodes guaranteed a renewal for a second season which was even more critically acclaimed, by critical websites such as Metacritic and Indiewire, ranking the show as one of the highest rated dramas on television. .

The series is based on the life of Judy Smith, a crisis manager from Washington DC, who worked behind the scenes during the Bush presidential years and on many political crises. Olivia Pope is inspired by her, as well as the setting and context in which she was inserted. As was mentioned by Neely Tucker in the internet article "D.C. Insider Judy Smith Is Basis for ABC

¹⁵ ABC is a mainstream network which main aim is to lure the audiences. It does bring forward recent society issues, but seems to be limited to its public television structure. For instance, even though it has a black female lead character, her blackness is not problematized in the first 3 seasons.

Drama”, even though the television series “is clearly based on Smith’s career — an African American crisis manager who once worked at the White House —, Rhimes says none of the episodes stems from behind-the-scenes drama Smith told them, because Smith told them almost nothing”. It is all television, as it was mentioned by Smith herself; her high profile job requires an extreme confidentiality level. Therefore, all Rhimes did, when first writing the episodes, was to ask her how she would handle the situations presented to Olivia. Smith’s consulting figure is key to the blossoming of the show as well as all its basic structure including a few tag lines Smith told her clients and is used by Olivia such as “I need more”.

The series is set in Washington DC in the world of politics and public life. It revolves around Olivia Pope and her associates at her firm Olivia Pope and Associates. It is understood that they are lawyers, however, they do not practice law, they fix problems, handle situations trying to not let them get to court, their jobs, therefore, require constant investigations and negotiations to have control of the situation at hand. Many minor cases come through Olivia Pope and Associates, approximately one per episode in the first season, while other more important cases can last a few episodes or sometimes an entire season. Throughout the season details of the main cast past is revealed as well as Olivia’s past connections with the White House. As aforementioned, we follow the lives of a complex and diverse group of people in their quest for justice and problem fixing.

Olivia Pope and Associates is formed in the first season by Abigail “Abby” Whelan (Darby Stanchfield), Quinn Perkins/Lindsay Dwyer (Kathie Lowes), Harrison Wright (Columbus Short), Stephen Finch (Henry Ian Cusick), and Huckleberry “Huck” (Guilhermo Diaz). Outside the lawyers’ milieu, we are presented to the second main female character Melanie “Mellie” Grant, the First Lady of the United States. This title of First Lady will change later on in the series as it will be discussed in Chapter III. Other main characters include the President of the United States, Fitzgerald “Fitz” Thomas Grant III (Tony Goldwyn), and Cyrus Beene (Jeff Pery) as the Chief of Staff of the White House, Vice-President and later on television host Sally Langston (Kate Burton), and Elizabeth North (Portia de Rossi). These White House characters are more present through the second season and on, due to an intertwining of plots.

Characters such as David Rosen (Joshua Malina) and Jake Ballard (Scott Foley) finalize the main characters of the series, nevertheless it is important to highlight that many more expressive characters are presented each season, some minor other more recurrent, maintaining and

strengthening the complex and diverse aspect of the series. Some of these characters have not been present in all the seasons, for example, in season two, the character of Stephen Finch was excluded of the arc, and in season four Harrison Wright was excluded. Another example is Elizabeth North who entered the plot in season four. These changes in casting are recurrent in a television series. Because the plot spans over a long amount of time, characters come and go according to the way the narrative conducts the story.

The first season of the series starts with a woman (Quinn) rushing to a bar in the streets of Washington DC. She meets a man (Harrison) and mistakenly thinks that it is a blind date; he soon makes her understand that it is a job interview. He tells her who he works for and this is the first time we will hear the name “Olivia Pope”. The woman’s reaction when she hears this name is an indicator that the woman in question is not an ordinary woman. Going on in a nonstop speech, a characteristic of the series, he explains to her that the job is hers if she wants it, because that is what Olivia wants, she already gave her the job. He finishes his speech saying she should accept the job because “Olivia Pope is as amazing as they say” (01:56) and he concludes saying “I am a gladiator in a suit, cause that’s what you are when you work for Olivia; you are her gladiator in a suit. Do you wanna be a gladiator in a suit?” (02:00). She then accepts to be a gladiator in a suit.

This opening sequence sets the tone of the series. This tone will persist along the seasons and it is the guiding light. It is fast paced and fragmented. The cuts between scenes are presented with clicks and flashes in a journalistic manner emphasizing the importance of the investigative job Olivia and her associates perform. The opening sequence also highlights the fact that in a Capital city, everything is news and therefore, the press and how the news is revealed needs to be controlled. The fast pace and fragmentation of the narrative is an influential factor as well. Through this technique we have an overview of what Olivia’s life is, and in a sense, how her brain works since she is always connected the world of politics and called upon for cases.

Another characteristic of the series is that the characters are wordy. Sequences of long wordy speeches are fairly common and not restrictive to any one character. Nevertheless, Olivia, being the main character, has an impressive ability to quickly deliver a speech and it defines the character. She is good with words and we embrace this feature of hers since it also brings rhythm to the narrative. One liners such as “I need more”, “Fix it”, and “It’s handled” are common ground for most episodes.

Besides that when looking at Mellie, we perceive that she also provides a great amount of wordy speeches and she is perceived by many

critics as the only match to Olivia as can be seen in Claire B's online article named "In Defense of Mellie Grant: Why Scandal's Scorned First Lady May Be Its Most Feminist Character". These speeches become more frequent as the character evolves in the narrative. This is due to the fact that at first Mellie Grant's character was not going to have the spotlight in the series as it turned out to have. Her counter-energy in comparison to Olivia makes their interaction in the series intriguing. As pointed out in the article, the presence and potential vibrant interactions brought by Mellie, made her gain an increasing arc in the series becoming a regular.

2.2. INTRODUCING OLIVIA AND MELLIE

In this section I start by introducing Olivia and Mellie as they are presented to the audience in the first episode of season one. Thus, after the pace and tone of the series was set with Quinn and Harrison's scene, we are then introduced to Olivia Pope. The scene begins with Olivia and one of her gladiators (Stephen) in an elevator. The pace is slower, changing the rhythm, and emphasizing the characters presence in the scene. The first shot (figure 2.1) begins with a view of the characters from behind. It switches to a frontal view and Olivia is highlighted in the frame (figure 2.2). They are filmed from a bottom up angle with low-key light. The elevator is old; highlighting the sketchiness of the situation since it seems to be an old building or a building in construction. The darkness in the elevator exposes her in the frame. While Stephen wears a dark gray and black suit and trench coat, she wears a white shirt and white trench coat.

Figure 2.1 (02:18)



Figure 2.2 (02:21)



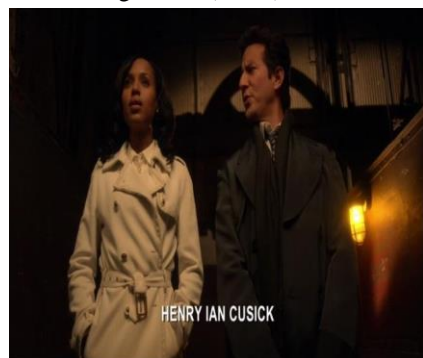
Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Although she is not the center of the frame, our attention is drowned towards her since she is the light in the scene. The whiteness of her coat can be interpreted as justice, she is the one who will bring it to the situation, and that holds the power to handle this case. Later on in the series, the prop and allegory of the white hat will play a significant role, taking us back to the strategic decision to place Olivia on the screen for the first time dressed in white. They are heading to finish a job after all he is visibly worried. Here, the camera moves and goes from a close on Olivia with her in the focus from the side (figure 2.3) to going back to the both of them from a bottom up perspective (figure 2.4) to a close on Stephen with him in the focus (figure 2.5). She seems calm yet deep in thought. In order to distract Steve she asks him about his marriage proposal to his girlfriend, he tells her to focus and do “her thing”. The next scene exemplifies what “her thing” is, which is to take over the situation and fix it.

Figure 2.3 (02:22)



Figure 2.4 (02:28)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

The scene proceeds with the same light and speed. The contrast of the pace of this first part of the scene allied with the impression we have from Harrison’s speech in the opening scene of the series is quite relevant in the sense that it gives us time to acknowledge her, to see her, and to get acquainted with her. Olivia is serene and gives the impression of having everything under control, demonstrating a confidence that will be proven later on in the scene. The switching side of the focus of the camera brings movement which is highlighted with a shot from the top down into the elevator shaft (figure 2.6). She is in the middle, ascending into the screen, rising to the occasion. The much dimmed light coming in from the side brings

light only to her coat, Stephen is barely visible. This darkness and light illuminating her emphasizes how in moments of darkness it is ultimately her who will be the center of the resolution.

Figure 2.5 (02:35)



Figure 2.6 (02:40)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

The first part of the scene ends with a close on her after Stephen claims the situation is not very good and she has to do “her thing” (figure 2.7). Her look is determined even though she grunges a little when Stephen says those final words. She is all in the light; the focal point of the frame, the camera angle is in a straight line emphasizing her. The elevator arrives to destination and they both exit. Here, the fast paced rhythm is back. The character has been introduced and her presence has been established; now the audience will see her in action. She walks with poise and determination. Besides, it is important to remember that this is the first impression the audience has of the character. The first to speak to the men, she negotiates with shows that she wants control of the situation. As it can be seen in figure 2.8, a widescreen establishing shot, it is a shady building and two men wait for them. Shades of gray dominate while her white coat continues to be the focal point. She is the only woman present and does not seem uncomfortable with this fact. It is understood here that she will start doing “her thing” which is to fix the situation and handle the case.

Figure 2.7 (02:50)



Figure2.8 (02:57)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

In this second part of the scene Olivia delivers the first of her speeches of the series. In another fast paced nonstop speech pattern, we have the continuation of the introduction of the character. She is shown as an intelligent, resourceful, and enigmatic woman. Showing no fear, she tackles the situation with agility (figure 2.9). She leans on the table not in a suggestive matter, as it could be assumed since she is a woman, but as a way to show confidence, security. The camera moves around the characters, Olivia is somehow in almost all the shots, whether as seen in the figures or by being in the reflection on the window. Her presence is felt and seen. Quick cuts, many frames, fast paced rhythm are part of this scene. All male characters are dressed in suits with shades of gray shedding a light once more on her white coat.

Figure 2.9 (03:04)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 2.10 (03:15)



producer
SCOTT COLLINS

The men have guns, Stephen is worried but hides it well, and Olivia wraps up the negotiation. She is in the light, although her face is not visible, the widescreen shot establishes the relation between her and the “bad” guy, she is confronting him and address him with power and emotionless (figure 2.11). She does not fall in the woman condition of being emotional; she is strong and does not flinch at the sight of a gun or a powerful man. She delivers the last part of her speech while the camera stops moving around them and focuses on her with a medium close-up frame (figure 2.12). It is set, this is Olivia Pope; the character has been formally introduced. She is the center, she is the power, and most of all, and she is the one who dominated the situation and the scene. Therefore, in this first introduction, she challenges the common representation of black women characters, which are most commonly portrayed as supporting roles with less power. It is important to remember that this is the first impression the audience has of the character, thus it will possibly change and this will occur by the end of the episode when it is clear that the character is complex and will endure many alterations throughout the series. This scene ends with Olivia and Stephen taking the package they came to get and leaving the building walking towards the elevator. Clicks and flashes cut the scene to introduce the next one. We have witnessed the power and fierceness of Olivia Pope.

Figure 2.11 (03:34)

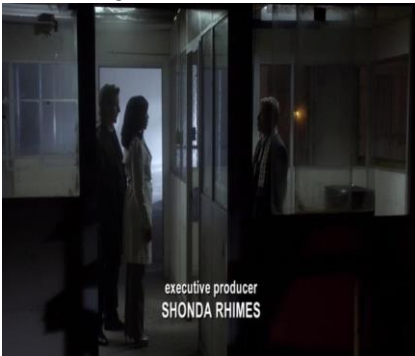


Figure 2.12 (03:48)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

The following scenes will navigate through the scandals, the gladiators, and how everything functions in order for the audience to familiarize with the setting and narrative. For instance, the gladiators begin

showing to the new girl how they handle their cases and we, the audience, are pulled into the explanation as well. Although it is a participative firm, they all have roles, in the end it is Olivia's decision that matters. Another example is that we discover that she used to work for the President of the United States and that she recently stopped working for him. She is called by a White House employee whom we later find out is the Chief of Staff of the White House (Cyrus Beene) and a friend of Olivia's, to help him fix a problem the President is facing. This particular case is important for her since it involves the Presidents love life; a girl is accusing him of having an affair with her. This case is especially close to home for Olivia since it is insinuated throughout the episode that her relationship with the President was more than professional. By the end of the episode it is confirmed that they had an affair: "You left me" (35:51), she replies: "Because you are married. Because you said you were going to try to dedicate yourself to your marriage. You are the leader of the free world and I wanted you to be a better man" (35:52). The tension is clear and so is what it represents, this is the *Scandal* that is at the basis of all the narrative.

Halfway through the episode, when the rhythm and main features of the series had already been established, we are introduced to what would become the second main female character, Mellie Grant. She is the First Lady and becomes Olivia's counterpart in the series. The scene she is first introduced to the audience takes place at Camp David, the President's second residence where Olivia goes to meet him and discuss the affair he is being accused of. It begins with Olivia entering a room and talking to Cyrus Beene, that we had been previously introduced as the Chief of Staff of the President, she asks him why the First Lady is there and if she knows about the scandal. He explains to her that the marriage is going very strong and that she is involved in many things. During this dialogue the First Lady is seen in another room in the center of the frame (figure 2.13). She is not the focus, yet she is present in the scene. Shades of brown and beige are dominant in the room. Olivia wears a gray pantsuit reinforcing the image of a business woman. She remains poised and determined, her speech and voice are assertive while speaking to Cyrus, however, and it all changes when Mellie enters the room (figure 2.14). We see the First Lady for the first time.

Figure 2.13 (18:08)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 2.14 (18:16)



Mellie smiles while walking towards Olivia indicating they like each other. Her beige sweater and pearl necklace contrast with Olivia's gray suit. She is white, elegant, and has a graceful presence; she fulfills the expected portrait of the wife and mother.

Their embrace and Mellie's genuine smile reinforces the idea that they have a good relationship (figure 2.15). The camera highlights Mellie's reaction and then Olivia's, who is more reserved and cautious. Next, we have the two ladies in a medium shot frame (figure 2.16). The wife mother portrait is amplified with the conversation the two women engage in. Olivia asks about the children and Mellie answers with enthusiasm showing once more there is a familiarity between them. The sudden contrast in conversation topic, from politics and investigations to children and men, seem to aim at separating the two women, and placing them in different spheres of the spectrum, making Olivia belong to the public, the professional, the political, and Mellie to the private, the home, the family. This challenging aspect is intriguing and illuminates Mellie's character. Why are they portrayed with what seems to be such opposite characteristics? This question emerges especially since it is known by this point that there is history between Olivia and the President.

Figure 2.15 (18:21)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 2.16 (18:24)



Mellie is the center of the scene. The camera focuses on her. Although it alternates between the two women, it is her who is emphasized. As it can be seen in figure 2.17, a medium close-up with sidelight gives Mellie an angelical trait. There is a certain innocence conveyed in her image reinforcing once more the wife and mother position. The camera switches back to a wider shot where both women are visible, yet still focusing on Mellie (figure 2.18). She is self-assured and assertive looking Olivia in the eyes and talking like friends. Mellie continues the conversation by asking Olivia if she is dating anybody and implying she has the perfect candidate for the job. Being the center of the scene The President of the United States walks in the room at this exact moment (figure 2.19). The audience knows about the affair, thus the interruption of the conversation about men can mean that the President is still the man in her life.

Figure 2.17 (18:26)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 2.18 (18:30)



When he walks in he calls out to Olivia and looks only at her, as if neither Mellie nor Cyrus were in the room. One can say he has only eyes for her, and this gaze is not void of meaning. As I will mention later on, it becomes clear that they had an affair and they are actually in love. The two women are in the front of the frame looking at Fitz, the President coming in. He is in the center of the frame between the unfocused silhouettes of the women demonstrating that he divides them and therefore, they are caught in a love triangle. Olivia replies to his arrival with a handshake, Cyrus is seen smiling, and finally the camera focuses on Mellie (figure 2.20), portraying her again through a medium close-up and a sidelight she smiles, angelical, again, innocent, again, possibly unaware of the secrets floating in the room. The scene ends with this frame and this representation of Mellie.

Figure 2.19 (18:35)



Figure 2.20 (18:40)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

In less than one minute the portrayal of the First Lady is drawn. Elegant, innocent, poised, and well-mannered she represents the epitome of what her function demands. The kindness expressed between the two women shows that they respect each other. The soft and sidelight along with the use of plain color clothes reinforce the image of a sophisticated and solicit woman. It seems that her only interests are her family and home. Mellie seems not to have proper agency as her representation is tangled to being a wife and a mother. Comparing with Olivia, as it was previously mentioned, they are opposites. Olivia represents power, movement, and action while Mellie represents wholesomeness, tranquility, tradition. All the main cards are being dealt during this episode, we get to know the main characters and some of their personal traits, we understand the major plot line, and we get familiarized with the style and aesthetics of the series.

2.3. “WE WERE ON THE SAME TEAM”: PORTRAYAL OF EMPOWERMENT

The following episodes of the first season accompany the gladiators in fixing problems. We also follow the continuation of the President’s affair problem since his ex-lover became Olivia’s client. Mostly, the relationship between Olivia and the President is more visible and explored in every episode. It evolves and intrigues; it is through it that we see the vulnerability of Olivia and the controlling powers of the President. We witness the ascension of Mellie. Subtle, she appears more and more with the passing of episode and hints at a more political participation in her husband’s decisions. She slowly steps away from the role of wife and mother and shows the audience she is aware of everything that happens.

There are many strong female characters seen throughout the season and their presence is a reflection of what the series convey through Olivia and it turns out, through Mellie as well. The women in the series are complex, independent, and determined just like the two leading ladies. Olivia’s vulnerability is her love for the President, this reinforces the biased idea that matters of the heart weakens women, however, it is also perceived that he needs her as well, she is his weakness. When considering Mellie, it is still not clear at this point what her weakness is, although what one can comprehend is that she likes the power she has as the First Lady, and perhaps, she aspires to achieve a more rewarding political role. Nevertheless, she needs Fitz, also known as the President, to continue to be the President in order to attain it.

The final episode of season one, entitled *Grant: For the People*, is packed with motion and fast cut scenes as the plot is reaching its peak. The President finds himself in a very bad situation because an audio of him having sex with a woman is released, and the press speculates on who the woman is. Olivia is called to help handle the scandal. The solution they find is for Fitz to resign. This perspective, although unsettling, seems also a happy one once he will be able to have a “normal” life. This indicates that perhaps they, Olivia and Fitz, will finally be able to be together publicly. This decision would jeopardize his career as a politician, however, he is determined this is the only solution. Olivia decides to talk to Mellie and try to find in her an ally; because she believes they both have Fitz’s best interest at heart, which is for him not to resign. She then schedules a meeting with the First Lady.

The scene begins with a wide shot of a living room and dining room. The First Lady speaks to an employee; suitcases are placed on the corner right

of the frame. She is going away with the children and is planning the final details of the trip. A secret service man enters the room and announces the arrival of Olivia Pope. She enters and the two women face each other (figure 2.21). The room is filled with shades of brown, beige and yellow and so is Mellie's outfit. In this scene, we have once more Mellie dressed in plain clothes while Olivia is wearing black pants and a white jacket. The color scheme of Mellie's clothes make her blend with the surroundings engaging in the idea that she, unlike Olivia, belongs there, in that room, in that house. Olivia explains that he is talking about resigning. Mellie smiles and then looks at Olivia saying that she must be happy about this news. The camera is facing Mellie while Olivia is sideways in the frame (figure 2.22). Our attention is on Mellie's expression while she hints at knowing about the Olivia and Fitz's affair.

Figure 2.21 (30:23)



Figure 2.22 (30:35)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

The camera switches to a medium close-up on Olivia, and although it seems the light comes from the back it is actually on the side illuminating and smoothing her expressions (figure 2.23). She claims that he cannot resign and that there must be some kind of deal they can come up with. Wide shot on both women from the same angle in the living room and Mellie is in the center of the frame (figure 2.24). She is standing between the window and under the chandelier; one could argue that she is literally in the light. This scenario highlights the beigeness of her clothing and the curtains, the fusion of herself and the House. Olivia is the outsider here, standing on the side, contrasting with her black hair and white jacket. Mellie sighs and says: "I try to be pleasant. I am the First Lady there are sacrifices, there is a price, and for a time that was fine." (30:47 – 30:58). We encounter here an indication

that it was all part of a plan and that she has been playing this role for a greater purpose. She has been fulfilling her “job” as the First Lady, taking it very seriously, and it was finally letting the mask down. This mask, however, was put on by her as an empowering tool, not to hide behind. Thus, she unveils herself to Olivia.

Figure 2.23 (30:39)



Figure 2.24 (30:49)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

With a switch of angle and direction from the camera we are now looking at the woman from the other side as Mellie moves towards the suitcases (figure 2.25). She stops briefly to face Olivia who has not moved. In this frame, she is taller than Olivia, almost looking down; she is the one in control of the situation. Continuing on her path she says: “You and I wanted the same thing: Fitz in the Oval. We were on the same team you and I. Everything was fine, I just don’t understand what happened.” (31:00 - 31:08). During this talk, she walks towards the suitcases that are still on the right corner (figure 2.26). Olivia is in the background unfocused, it is difficult to distinguish her expression, but she seems to be a little perplexed or at least a little lost not understanding what Mellie is referring to. Mellie is still in the light and in the foreground of the frame. She is controlling the situation and seems not disturbed. Her speech is self-assured, she has the power, and she has the voice.

Figure 2.25 (30:59)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 2.26 (31:04)



Olivia questions Mellie about what happened confirming she does not understand her. Mellie turns around to explain to Olivia what happened (figure 2.27): “You let that girl get into his pants. You left the team Liv. You fell down on the job. You broke his heart and left him open and vulnerable” (31:10 – 31:20). Olivia is surprised; she was not expecting such a vivid reaction from Mellie (figure 2.28). The idea of the team brought by Mellie refers to the election campaign when they were all working towards getting Fitz elected and that was when the affair started. Mellie blames Olivia for what is happening, she claims that Olivia only had to keep his heart in check and she would take care of the rest. Here Mellie raises her voice; she demonstrates that she is not touched by Olivia’s power and fierceness. She looks at her as an equal and this is new in the series.

Figure 2.27 (31:13)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 2.28 (31:14)



The camera switches back and forth between the two women at a medium close-up angle (figure 2.29). Mellie continues to explain to Olivia how her staying away from Fitz is the reason why he cheated with the other woman (figure 2.30). She gives her perspective of the facts and Olivia listens, surprised, and somewhat powerless. Nothing indicates that Olivia thought of Mellie solely as the stereotypical wife and mother, with no agency and power of her own, but it becomes clear with this scene that she did not expect to be challenged this way. This is what Mellie does; she challenges Olivia, because in the end, they each have their own power and fierceness. During the exchange of camera perspective, we perceive that although they are almost in the same position it is Mellie who is illuminated by the sidelight. This reinforces the fact that she controls the situation; she is the one in charge. Olivia is passive, voiceless, for the first time.

Figure 2.29 (31:27)



Figure 2.30 (31:29)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

In the sequence, Mellie tells Olivia: “I do my job. I smile, and I push him, and I make sure he has what he needs. I do my job. Why couldn’t you do yours?” (31:30 – 31:42). It is clear at this point that she has not been only the wife and mother, the First Lady, but that she has been a key player behind the scenes without the President’s knowledge, and this fact is perceived later on in the evolution of the series. Olivia’s reaction to Mellie’s statement highlights her perplexity (figure 2.31). She finds out Mellie knew about the affair. Mellie’s response is of mockery; she smiles and mocks Olivia’s naiveté (figure 2.32). She had known for a time and knew that it was best for everyone to live with it and exploit its advantages. Here, for instance, the fact that when Olivia is close to the President he does not make mistakes. It is not

exemplified at this point how she deals with the affair in a more personal note; the emphasis is on the professional one. For this medium close-up shot, Olivia is also in the light because the truth has been revealed.

Figure 2.31 (31:43)

Figure 2.32 (31:51)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Mellie takes up Olivia on her proposal to make a deal: “You wanna deal? Fine, let’s deal.” (31:53 – 31:57). Here, the camera returns to a widescreen shot with Mellie as the center (figure 2.33). As can it be seen in the figure, her presence is undeniable. She is tall and imposing. Standing in the light once more, she has complete power over the situation, power over Olivia. Olivia is petite, looking up. Mellie points at the sofa giving Olivia the order of sitting down. They are going to fix the scandal together, as a team. Nevertheless, it is clear that the idea is Mellie’s and Olivia will accept it with no arguments. They sit down in front of each other and once more Mellie is in the center (figure 2.34). Her tilted head catches the attention; she is looking down at Olivia who cannot believe what she is hearing and seeing. Mellie is not who she thought she was.

Figure 2.33 (31:55)



Figure 2.34 (32:06)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Mellie starts explaining the deal: “For starters I am gonna need to take my husband back, because clearly I have to do everything myself from now on.” (32:03 – 32:12). Olivia’s reaction is straight forward (figure 2.35) - surprised. She has found her match. A woman who does not feel strengthened by her power and presence, and that she cannot manipulate. The scene ends on a shot of Mellie (figure 2.36). She is determined to fix the scandal and not let her husband’s mistake ruin everything. Her severe expression contrasts with the grace of her pearl necklace. This contrast through the choice of costume accessory is no coincidence since here we have the image(ry) of the two Mellie’s clashing and intertwining. There is more to her than what it was previously suggested. More can be expected and it is certain that they will counterpart and they will challenge each other in the episodes and seasons to come. This difference in Mellie’s character and representation highlights the ascension she undergoes throughout the first season. After this scene, it is certain that her ascension is going to continue and gain more power. Audiences expect it to happen and it seems that this is what Olivia needs, to be challenged by an equally strong character. Nevertheless, a question emerges here: Will Mellie’s ascension in the series dim Olivia’s powerful presence?

Figure 2.35 (32:08)



Figure 2.36 (32:12)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

As it can be perceived from this final scene I analyze, much is revealed about the characters, especially about Mellie. Every female character is portrayed with care, but they are not as powerful as Olivia. The only one that stands up to Olivia's power is Mellie. As we have seen, she is also a very complex and well enigmatic character. Nevertheless, in this first season, Olivia's presence is felt even before the series begins. In the first episode, Harrison, one of her gladiators, talk about her, we understand this is not an ordinary woman. Thus, when she graces the screen we comprehend what he was referring to, she waltzes on the screen with elegance and style, poise and confidence. Everyone, including men, lean on her for advice, for help, in her fixing business she reminds them that she is the one in control. Mellie challenging her and unveiling herself sheds light to potentially intriguing progression in the narrative. Olivia loses ground with Mellie, she loses power. This is due not only because she has had an affair with her husband and therefore she is guilty of betrayal. It is, however, due to the agency and power that Mellie transcribes for her, without considering the affair. It can be seen that she is not a wounded wife. She is not emotionally driven because her husband cheated on her. She is angry because she cannot accept to have all the sacrifices she has made in her life for him to be president to be in vain. This statement will become clearer in the next chapter.

Thus, Mellie's phrase "we were on the same team" is crucial for the development and progression of the series. They worked together, although without their complete awareness of it, towards a common goal. When Olivia stepped away, she unbalanced the equation and brought destruction to it. Mellie cannot accept that, neither can Olivia. Even though she is the one who

has the final word, she needs assistance to carry out her business, to fix the scandals that erupt. In the case of the President it is the same situation, and Mellie reminds her of that. Therefore, it can be said that without the two women, the President would, not only not be the President, but would also not be able to do his job since it is them, the women, who are the architects of it all. They are the ones who hold the power over the “President’s” weaknesses.

3. CHAPTER III SEASON FIVE –“I LEFT FOR THE SAME REASON YOU STAYED”

In the previous chapter, we were introduced to the series by gazing at the first season. In chapter II, I first presented a panorama of the series with an in-depth introduction to the series as a whole – plot, characters, and aesthetics. After that, I introduced Olivia Pope and Mellie Grant through the first scene they appear in, and finally, I analyzed the characters in a scene where they interact, in order to investigate the two female characters facing each other. In the present chapter, I first discuss the seasons, in between the first and fifth in order to have an overall understanding of the development of the series. Next, I reintroduce the characters by analyzing the first scene they appear in season five. Finally, I analyze a scene where the two female characters interact. All scenes are analyzed through the prism of representation and intersectionality.

3.1. THE WORLD OF SCANDAL: IN-BETWEEN SEASONS

Season one, although short in number of episodes (it has seven episodes), sets the tone of the series. We are not only introduced to the main characters, we are also introduced to the fast-paced, fragmented, journalistic style of the series, which permeates all the subsequent seasons. The finale brings a resolution to Fitz’s affair, and both Olivia and Mellie save his presidency by following First Ladies plan. Season two begins with Mellie pregnant and Olivia estranged to the White House. It is clearly a few months later, and with the passing of the episodes we witness the tumultuous relationship between Olivia and Fitz, as well as Mellie being degraded by Fitz, who tells her she is ornamental and has no business in politics. Throughout season two, secrets are revealed on every character, cases are fixed, and scandals erupt.

In season two, new characters emerge such as Edison Davis (Norm Lewis) who was Olivia’s former boyfriend. They rekindle their relationship, to the point where Edison proposes to Olivia. The character of Vice-president Sally Langston (Kate Burton) also takes a more prominent role. The most important addition to the cast is Jake Ballard (Scott Foley) who becomes a fundamental part of Olivia’s life and of the series as a whole. Flashbacks are a common narrative strategy in this season. Through them we are introduced

to a more detailed gaze on Olivia and Fitz's relationship, as well as other characters such as Cyrus and Mellie, and how they have evolved, in order to better understand the situation in the present time. Season two finishes through tumultuous scandals of affairs and revelations, betrayal and Cyrus' heart attacks.

Throughout the second season we see Olivia in conflict. Her gender and skin color are not questioned during the two first seasons. We cannot forget to mention that she was at the time of the first and second season one of the only leading black female characters on television. She is complex and rich, powerful and smart, there is no one else like her, she is Olivia Pope. When considering Mellie, we see that she blossoms; she becomes a main character in the series. She is more present and more inquisitive. Her positioning and interest for politics is clear, and she does not seem to wish to maintain her "ornamental" role as a First Lady. Her strength becomes clear in episode ten, entitled *One for the Dog*, when after forging her husband's signature she says "I did not sign this paper lightly. I did not sign this without using my head. I am not some man reacting out of rage and thinking late. I am a woman, so I thought about it and I made my decision" (10:42 – 10:53). This poignant declaration shows how she is rational and not emotional, as could be understood through the use of the term ornamental. Therefore, this season is an important continuation of the series and it can be perceived how the characters Olivia and Mellie evolve, and specifically, how Mellie gains space in the narrative.

With only 17 episodes, season three begins reintroducing the scandal of the previous season finale; Olivia presented as being the President's mistress. Together with the President and Mellie, the First Lady, Olivia comes up with a plan. Many characters take center stage in this season such as Olivia's father. He appears in the first episode and soon becomes a recurring character and later, in season four, a main character. Olivia's mother is also present in this season, along with other key characters such as Mellie's children and the President's father. Olivia continues to be portrayed as powerful and complex, yet she seems more conflicted and flawed. This is due to her relationship with her parents, with Jake, and with the White House family. As for Mellie, she continues her ascension taking part in politics, and by having more revealed about her background and ideals.

The tension between the characters is visible and it permeates the season. Conflicts and important scandals emerge mixed with revealing flashbacks. This technique is widely used in this season, more than in season two, and it brings forward crucial information for the narrative, as well as for

the understanding of certain characters. Flashbacks to Olivia's childhood reveal the type of life she had shaping her to be the successful powerful woman she is. Flashbacks to the campaign sheds light on the role Olivia and Mellie played in Fitz's election. Among them all, the most relevant flashback is the one regarding Mellie and the President's father. This one takes us back to before the campaign, when Fitz was governor and deciding whether or not to run for President. In this flashback, which takes place in episode 7 entitled *Everything's coming up Mellie*, Mellie is raped by her father-in-law. This disturbing scene gave the character even more visibility. Mellie's strength and the narrative were essential for her ascension in the series. The public switched their gaze towards her throughout this season. She definitely becomes a no ornamental character anymore.

Season three ends with Olivia and Jake, who had come closer in season three, flying out into the sunset. This occurs after Olivia's father convinces them it is their only way out of the scandals that occurred. The President wins the reelection, however during the celebration his and Mellie's eldest son is killed by Olivia's father, as revenge against Fitz and his relationship with Olivia. Therefore, season four begins with a while after the events. After receiving a newspaper clipping of the death of one of her Gladiators, Olivia and Jake return from an island into the chaotic life in Washington

D.C. Much is different, for example, Olivia Pope and Associates does not work anymore, Abby (one of the Gladiators) is the press secretary of the White House, the President is having troubles in his presidency, Mellie is devastated and does not care for anything anymore. She is portrayed as having given up on life. She does not shower, does not wear her regular outfits, drinks and eats uncontrollably, she does not do her job as the First Lady and mostly, she does not care about politics anymore. Olivia's return will change everything.

Episodes pass and the scenery changes. Mellie finds her way out of her grief and Olivia reopens her business. Olivia is torn between her feelings for Jake and for the President. Finally she chooses herself and decides to enjoy life because she likes them both. At this point, she is kidnapped by the new Vice-president Andrew Nichols (Jon Tenney). Several episodes focus on the kidnapping and everything that it entails. In the end, the Presidents makes a mistake in order to save Olivia and she, upon her return, does not forgive him for it. This interrupts their relationship and they do not see each other anymore for a moment. A new Vice-president is chosen, Cyrus gets married, more is revealed about Abby, Fitz and Mellie are in a good place in their relationship, and other, are part of this season. Nevertheless, one highlighted

moment is when Mellie announces she is running for Senate. This will ignite her political career.

Olivia's father and mother are present in this season. Her father will bring forward the matter of race, as well as the specific episode on a policeman killing a young black boy (as was previously mentioned). This way, it can be seen that race is no longer a neutral domain in the series. We have a more expressive representation of black characters, but mainly there seems to be a greater awareness of Olivia's blackness. This begins through the discourse of her father and it will be consolidated in season five. Papa Pope, as he is known, delivers powerful speeches to his daughter reminding her of her history and privilege as a black woman. Olivia is still shy in this season in demonstrating she is aware of her blackness, nevertheless, it began to be explored and it mingled into the narrative¹⁶.

Season four ends with a scandal involving Mellie on episode 22. It is all orchestrated by Olivia's father and makes Mellie responsible for the death of many people. When the President finds out what happened he tells her to leave the White House even though she had no idea that those killings was the end game for Papa Pope. On one hand, she has to leave the White House, and on the other, she is elected for the Senate. With all these events, Olivia goes to the President's encounter and they rekindle their relationship, thus promising finally a happy ever after for them. Considering the eventful season it was, it is no surprise that it ended also in an eventful manner. Throughout this season we not only had scandals and dramatic attempts at fixing them, we also had main characters in constant conflict. A focus on the complexity and development of the core characters is visible in this season. This focus did not leave aside Olivia and Mellie who go through an emotional rollercoaster and bring forward certain aspects of their portrayals such as strength, determination, and vulnerability.

3.2. REINTRODUCING OLIVIA AND MELLIE

In this following section of the research, I begin the analysis of the scenes in season five. In order to better understand the scenes analyzed, I

¹⁶ Considering Olivia's blackness, it is possible to say that it is anesthetized. For instance, she straightens her hair. Due to the importance of the hair for black women's identity, it is remarkable to highlight that Olivia's hair is very rarely natural. The few moments which it is, she is vulnerable, therefore, it is associated to weakness. Further research could be done analyzing this feature of the character since it questions the whitening of her blackness.

provide a panorama of the plot. The section begins therefore, with the reintroduction of the characters. This is presented in three scenes, two with Olivia and one with Mellie. This is due to the fact that there is a shift in the narrative and Olivia's character goes through a transformation extremely relevant for her representation.

Flashes and images of the capital city, *Scandal* returns for season five with its established structure. The next scenes of episode 1, named *Heavy is the Head*, are intertwined among scenes of the former Vice-president Sally Langston (Kate Burton), the White House staff preparing for a formal dinner, the royal family of Caledonia, the dinner, and Olivia and the President in bed together. The former Vice-president turned television host (figure 3.1) narrates and comments on the President's decision to have an expansive dinner in honor of the royal family of Caledonia in order to distract the people from the real issue, which are the troubles with the First Lady and his affair with Olivia Pope. Staff members prepare the dining hall (figure 3.2). The insistence on showing the preparation indicates how important this dinner is for the President. Indeed, he has military deals to discuss with the Queen.

Figure 3.1 (00:38)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 3.2 (01:08)



The next shots to be intertwined with the ex-Vice-President's narration are the ones of Olivia and Fitz. They are together in bed making love, happy, carefree (figure 3.3). They are apparently at the White House, even though at this point it is not clear if they are there indeed, but through the bed sheets it is possible to come to this conclusion through association with past references, such as scenes of the President and the First Lady in the bedroom, or even, scenes of Olivia and the President. As it can be seen in figure 3.4, they are back together, they are linked. There is a visible complicity between them. It seems they had found each other again.

Figure 3.3 (01:36)



Figure 3.4 (01:40)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Shots of the dinner preparation appear again, now with Elizabeth North (Portia de Rossi) taking care of the details since she is the new Chief of Staff of the President after Cyrus got fired. Following those shots, Olivia is seen adjusting her dress in front of a mirror and she is definitely at the White House. Fitz comes up from behind embracing her (figure 3.5). She is the center of the shots; her beauty and poise are highlighted by the camera. She is wearing a black and white dress continuing with the scheme of colors she had been wearing since the beginning of the series. Discreet colors, bold cut, and elegant are characteristics of her dress and perhaps even of her. Discreet in the secrets she must keep, bold in fixing the scandals she faces, and doing it all always with elegance.

They are standing in front of the window and looking at their reflection in the mirror, she is comfortable. This environment is familiar, as if it was her bedroom. Their bodies are emphasized by a sidelight suggesting they both belong to that setting. In figure 3.6 the camera zooms in with a medium close-up frame highlighting their facial expressions and mostly, their smiles. They

are happy and in love. They play around about having sex again and so they do – the scene is cut with images of the Vice-president narrating, the couple in bed, and them heading to the bed with their clothes on. The whiteness of Fitz’s shirt contrasts with Olivia’s black dress and black hair. In figure 3.5, for instance, even though she is in the center of the frame, it is his home. This can be indicated by the sidelight hitting his shirt giving it a particular glow and depth. It is the beginning of the season, they are happy together.

Figure 3.5 (02:08)



Figure 3.6 (02:15)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

The Vice-president guides us to the royal family where shots of them leaving the hotel and going to their cars to head out to the White House are seen (figure 3.7). There are also shots of the preparation of the dinner. In her narration, Sally, the former Vice-President, sheds a light on the political agenda between the President and the Queen, and shots of the two together appear (figure 3.8). The parallel between the princess of Caledonia and the stereotyped role of the First Lady, which include taking care of the house, organizing dinners, standing quietly next to the powerful husband, is no coincidence. Although not explicit at this initial point in the episode and the season, this parallel will reemerge several times and will be used by Olivia as an argument for her choices. This also reminds us of Mellie and her ornamental role as the First Lady.

Figure 3.7 (02:30)



Figure 3.8 (02:50)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Close up from behind on Olivia and Fitz's hand while they are walking (figure 3.9). The camera follows their walk filming their hands playing together in a loving and affectionate manner. Flashes of frontal shots intercut this scene (figure 3.10). We see them laughing heading towards a common area of the White House. They are the central focus of these shots; however, as it can be seen in figure 3.10, they are small in comparison to the grandiose room they are in. The greatness of the room can represent the strength of the White House on them, and mostly, on their relationship. It seems they have finally made it, together in this big great House, but what comes with it may have not hit them yet. They are small in comparison. All of Olivia's power and presence is lost under the weight of what it means to be in this House. Considering this shot and the metaphor of the Princess and First Lady, their smiles seem to have an expiration date.

Figure 3.9 (02:52)



Figure 3.10 (02:56)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Arriving in the middle of the room, Olivia is in the center of the shot (figure 3.11). By having her centering the shot it is understood that she is the center of the plot. Her blackness, including here her skin, hair, and dress, is highlighted contrasting with the beige and white tones of her surroundings. At this point in the season, although she is in the center, it is him who is tall and present. Half her body is covered by a flower bouquet; she is small and hidden, he overshadows her. Since it is the beginning it can be said that she is not in charge yet, she is still leaving the fantasy, and he being the President is in charge, due to the fact that they are at the White House, his House. Before separating and taking each an elevator, they face each other, she adjusts his bowtie, and he tells her that they should walk in together (figure 3.12). The commitment is clear, and the challenge is clear, also. She says no, however, this will be crucial for the narrative.

Figure 3.11 (03:02)



Figure 3.12 (03:13)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

In the elevators, the camera frames them with a medium close-up shot. Fitz says: “Last chance.” (03:24). She looks at him (figure 3.13) and smiles, she cannot accept his offer. Accepting would mean erupting an international scandal even she would have trouble fixing. Her position in the frame of the elevator shows strength. She is not small here; she is not lost in the greatness of the White House. Through this powerful shot she shows she is the rational one. The following images are of the dinner and Fitz is finishing a speech. The Vice-presidents is still narrating, but we hear the end of the President’s speech, when he says: “To new beginnings” (03:35). People raise their glasses, shots of the Queen, the Princess and Prince, the guests, they repeat in choir after the President. And finally we have a shot of Olivia, raising her glass to Fitz (figure 3.14). He answers with a smile and it is clear a new beginning has arrived.

Figure 3.13 (03:30)



Figure 3.14 (03:43)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

After this opening sequence, focused on Olivia and Fitz, the former Vice-president is continuing with her narration and this time she speaks about Mellie and the fact that she is not attending the dinner due to the flu. At this moment, we see Mellie for the first time in season five (figure 3.15). The scene is very short, only a few seconds long (04:11 – 04:35), and it happens between Mellie, her assistant, and Abby, the press secretary. Mellie says they cannot have a State dinner without the First Lady and Abby tells her the situation had been handled and the press had been told that she was sick with the flu. She is outraged and cannot believe she is in this situation. Considering this short, but extremely significant scene, it is clear that the relationship between Mellie and Fitz is still the same as it was at the end of season four

when he expelled her from the White House. She is dressed up and ready to go to the dinner exemplifying her how this situation is not real and will be solved soon (figure 3.16).

Figure 3.15 (04:12)



Figure 3.16 (04:25)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

The episode continues with scenes at the dinner and also scenes of the scandal of the episode. The princess dies in a car accident and Olivia is called to handle the situation. The next scene with Mellie is not a filler scene and has the length of a couple minutes (14:31 – 16:33). Due to its importance and the fact that the previous scene with her was so short, I am bringing this one as well into my analysis. In it we are taken to Mellie's office as a Junior Senator through a wide shot of the office. She is reading and annotating a document while Elizabeth North, the Chief of Staff of the White House, is sitting in front of her waiting (figure 3.17). Here, she is in the environment she wanted. She is the one who holds the power because she has made it to a political position that cannot be called ornamental.

In figure 3.18, Elizabeth North starts speaking and Mellie stops her with only one gesture of the finger without even lifting her head. The power embedded in this gesture shuts Elizabeth North up and it is felt by the viewers. She is dressed in red and is the focal point of the scenes. Highlighted among the tones of beige, white, and brown of the room, she is the center. By appearing wearing red she maintains her connection to the First Lady role she has since this is one of the colors of America. The Chief of Staff is dressed in black contrasting with Mellie but still, blending in with the décor.

Figure 3.17 (04:31)



Figure 3.18 (04:34)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

After Mellie is finished reading the document, they start the conversation (figure 3.19). Mellie's swearing in as a Junior Senator is that day, the following day of the dinner and car accident, and she inquires and demands Fitz to be there. She does not let Elizabeth speak imposing herself and cutting her off every time (figure 3.20). The camera flows in a non-stop motion back and forth between the characters. This movement is guided by the tone of the conversation. It also combines with the fast pace characteristic of the series. The camera's medium close-up on Mellie when she mentions Fitz showing up for his wife indicates this is a relevant subject for her and still believes Fitz is going to change his mind. He must come take her back, she is the First Lady.

Figure 3.19 (04:51)



Figure 3.20 (04:58)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

The camera continues its motion from one character to the other. Mellie is speaking about the President's appearance and Elizabeth indicates it is not going to happen. The camera closes-up on Mellie laughing at Elizabeth; this happens while she says she does not appreciate being summoned to the Capitol (figure 3.21). Mellie laughs and calls her ungrateful. Elizabeth is getting upset and attempts to get up saying the meeting is over (figure 3.22). Mellie is still in control; she continues speaking and asks her why she betrayed her after all she had done for her. Mellie's shots are closer than Elizabeth's shots in terms of camera distance. Thus highlighting she is the main character in this scene.

Figure 3.21 (15:06)



Figure 3.22 (15:08)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Mellie goes on reminding Elizabeth, and the audience, what she had done for her, and finally asks her why she betrayed her (figure 3.23). Up until this moment, the close-up shots were only on Mellie, now they will also include Elizabeth (figure 3.24). She starts explaining why numbering the reasons and making it clear what she thinks about Mellie Grant. Her disdain for the First Lady exemplifies how she is misunderstood by many people in Washington. Saying things like, Mellie only cares about herself and her agenda, Elizabeth enjoys this moment to unravel and be honest with Mellie. She, on the other hand, is surprised by the bold move taken by the Chief of Staff. However, she lets her speak. In figure 3.23, Elizabeth's head covers half the shot, but Mellie's face is lit by a sidelight coming from the right, where the windows are, thus showing that she is the focus of the shot. A similar light is perceived in the next figure (3.24) this time placing Elizabeth in the center.

Figure 3.23 (15:27)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 3.24 (15:28)



In figure 3.25, we have Elizabeth North explaining to Mellie that she made her the new Senator for the state of Virginia; therefore she does not owe her anything. At this moment, the camera presents a wide shot of the office. The focus of the camera is on the office itself not on the women in the shot. A white blur is seen on the right of the shot (figure 3.26). A reflection from the lighting, probably, nevertheless it is relevant to highlight that this blur appears only when Mellie is in the shot. Thus emphasizing she is the one in the spotlight, even though it is Elizabeth who is speaking and holding the power in that particular moment. Elizabeth mentions that Mellie is no longer important to the President; however, she is since she is his Chief of Staff. Mellie finds it amusing because she knows this is an illusion and Elizabeth is just another pawn.

Figure 3.25 (15:46)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Figure 3.26 (16:12)



Elizabeth North stands up to finish her speech and leaves Mellie's office with the last word. She looks down on the First Lady (figure 3.27). She tells her the President is not going to attend the swearing in at the Capitol. Her face is completely lit up; the shadows made by the sidelight are minimal, showing she is in control. The camera, which did not stop its movement, continues to go back and forth at a medium close-up range of the characters. Mellie looks up at Elizabeth accepting everything she is saying (figure 3.28). In that moment, it seems there is nothing she can say or do and just accepts it all. The white blur is present again. Mellie is powerless, but not defeated. She is determined and goal oriented, it is not Elizabeth North that will step in her way. The audience knows Mellie does not take no for an answer and indeed, she ends up having what she wanted: the President goes to her swearing in. This happens because Olivia speaks to him and shows him it would be bad for his image not to show up for his wife, and that is what Mellie was trying to make Elizabeth understand.

Figure 3.27 (16:21)



Figure 3.28 (16:24)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Mellie begins season five in a controversial situation since Fitz has kicked her out of the White House, however she got elected Senator of the State of Virginia. She seems to believe the situation with her husband is only a misunderstanding, but this is soon crushed by Fitz himself when he gives her the divorce papers. This happens in the first episode of the season, right after the swearing in. She promptly says she is not going to sign. Again, she is thinking about his political career, however, this time she is also thinking about hers since finally she has one to concern herself about. Her weak

marital situation is balanced by her powerful political advancement. At this point, in the early stages of the season, she is facing a difficult situation.

By the end of episode one, Fitz has asked Mellie for the divorce and Olivia has told him how she thinks that was not a smart move on his behalf. As she is the one who knows how to handle delicate situations like this, she tells him he has to wait to divorce and they have to wait to appear to the world as a couple. He agrees on waiting. However, the wait is not long and pictures of them together are revealed. Mellie tells him she can fix the situation, but he does not fix it since it is what he has wanted for a long time. Olivia confirms she is the Presidents' mistress. Mellie keeps denying the divorce and tries to make the President understand she is still the best choice.

The following episodes develop around Mellie, Fitz and the divorce, Olivia and Fitz trying to figure out their relationship, along with other scandals as Papa Pope continuing his "business" deals, Jake investigating cases in Paris, and the gladiators working the cases. The press is enjoying the opportunity of talking about Olivia and the affair. This goes on until episode 4 when the new gladiators decide to turn the tide and make the discourse of the media turn against itself. They point out that the only reason they attack her is because she is a black woman. The situation starts to change and even Olivia takes the lead and goes on television to talk about her rapport with Fitz. Nevertheless, Fitz is investigated by the Senate because of their relationship. Meanwhile, Mellie continues to grow as a Senator and finally she decides to sign the divorce papers in episode 6.

After various revelations, Mellie declares that Olivia is not her enemy; on the contrary, she is her freedom, her ticket out. She then proposes a deal to Olivia, she would help her release her father and in exchange Olivia would run her campaign for the presidency. Olivia cannot believe what she had done and denies helping her become president. She, however, is still with Fitz and it is understood she is the one making some of the important decisions at the White House. We are taken into Olivia's world as the First Lady since Mellie is no longer performing those duties. She plans dinners and looks pretty next to the President. But this is not the life for her, she is suffocating, she cannot be herself and has to play a role she cannot undertake.

Importantly, episode 9 marks the end of a phase and what will be the beginning of the switch. It is a Christmas episode, therefore there is the Christmas party to organize, and Olivia finds herself living the life that belonged to Mellie. Mellie, however, is standing up for women's rights at the senate by trying to protect the budget of Planned Parenthood. Much is happening in both their lives and much is going to change. Olivia feels

trapped, it is possible to remember the metaphor of the princess, and this feeling reaches its limit when she has an abortion. She cannot live this life anymore and after a fight with Fitz she leaves the White House for good.

It is six months later and the switch is visible by the first image of Olivia (figure 3.29). She is dressed in orange and later on in the continuation of the scene, she is wearing an orange and purple jacket (figure 3.30). Olivia has never worn these colors, other than at the White House Christmas celebrations when she was playing house with Fitz. This change in her outfit indicates a rebirth. She is not just back to her old self as a powerful fierce gladiator; she is a new version of that. Due to all she has gone through, it seems she is being bolder, more daring, and accepting the new image of herself by expressing that with her wardrobe choices. This device in the narrative is used to tell the audience to get ready because a new Olivia has emerged.

She is having dinner with her father and people are recognizing her. She is now a celebrity. They discuss how she had the power by being so close to the oval office which is the name used to talk about the Presidential office. Her father questions her choice of stepping away, however, she explains to him she was feeling trapped in a cage. Of course he does not agree and instead of fighting they move on to another topic: Jake. Jake is leaving with papa Pope and Olivia does not understand this situation. The following scene, where she appears with the jacket, we see Jake waiting for her at her apartment. It is clear they have a relationship, even if only sexual, and still she does not know the whole truth and she senses there is something going on. This controlled come back with Jake also exemplifies how she has taken control over her life once again.

Figure 3.29 (01:13)



Figure 3.30 (03:12)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

When considering Mellie, the change is also visible. Perhaps in a lesser impactful manner as with Olivia, nevertheless, there is a sense of serenity emanating from her. Her first appearance back is at Olivia Pope and Associates. Olivia comes into the office and Huck, one of the gladiators, tells her Mellie Grant is in her office (figure 3.31). She is sitting reading what seems to be a manuscript. The sidelight coming from the direction of the window illuminates her smile and the manuscript in her hands indicating this is going to be an important item of the scene. The smile she reveals appears to be calm and this is also reflected in the color of her outfit. The light blue tone brings out serenity, seriousness, and calm. She stands out in the room among the color brown of the wood and setting.

Olivia enters the room and Mellie explains she had written a book (figure 3.32). Therefore, the manuscript in her hand was the book itself which she was asking Olivia to read and give her opinion. She continues with the idea that Olivia will run her campaign for President and Olivia continues to deny it. As a last attempt, she leaves the book on Olivia's desk and leaves the room before she has time to stop her. When looking at the way she is portrayed here, it does indeed seem she is calm and serene, that she has been working on herself for a change. In this sense, instead of worrying about Fitz, she is for the first time considering her career and desires. She is working hard towards achieving her dream of becoming the next President of the United States.

Figure 3.31 (12:46)



Figure 3.32 (12:51)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

It is possible to say that season five is of great importance since it does present significant changes in its characters. Throughout the season they are

portrayed under different lights, and most of all, they are shown to grow within the narrative. The switch from First Ladies to independent women because they can no longer live a life that cages them and does not let them be who they really are and want to be. This change and decision making by them is unveiled in the rest of the season. Olivia finally accepts to help Mellie and they both work on the campaign. Therefore, the following episodes of the season will evolve around the primary to see which candidate from each party will run for President. Olivia and Mellie are working together, closely, indicating the respect they have towards each other's work and accomplishments.

Their history is not the smoothest and neither one seems to forget that, however, there is a feeling of mutual respect and admiration. They perceive each other's strength and weaknesses, and they know how to use them. It seems they develop a certain kind of friendship by the end of season five. It is perceived that Mellie and Olivia constitute this bonding, this union, because they identify with each other's experiences, psychic, and support each other emotionally.

3.3. "I LEFT FOR THE SAME REASON YOU STAYED": PORTRAYAL OF EMPOWERMENT

There is a sense of friendship, and it is certain that the two women get closer together in this season. One aspect must be taken into account, however, and it is the fact that they challenge each other. This challenging condition is what sparks the respect, admiration, and friendship. All of this truly comes to light in episode 11, called *The candidate*, when Mellie and Olivia are working on the book. There were situations of challenges and discussions in previous episodes, but it is in this episode that they take down their guards and are vulnerable and honest with each other. It all begins because Olivia asks Mellie to write about why she stayed in the relationship even though she knew about the affair. Mellie is unable to answer and does not think she needs to answer this question to the person responsible for that particular situation. They discuss and Mellie leaves after making it clear she had nothing to justify to her ex-husband's mistress.

Later on in the episode, after Mellie has encountered Cyrus and thought about the whole situation, she returns to see Olivia. Here, for the first time she goes to Olivia's apartment. Olivia answers the door and their interaction turns out to not be what she expected it would be. This scene is

central to their relationship and to the continuation of the season. It is cut in two parts, having a scene with the Vice-President in between (21:14 – 25:42 and 27:59 – 31:34). It is at night and the concept of the scene is not to directly emphasize one over the other, therefore the lighting is neutral and dimmed, as can be seen in figure 3.33. Mellie enters the room and comments on it being the love shack.

Olivia is dressed in black with a bright pink coat while Mellie is dressed in black and gray with a bright blue coat. The bright colors are highlighted among the tones of beige and gray of Olivia’s living room. Mellie standing in the middle of the room is the center of it, she is the one who has the power and who has much to say. She came in and straight ahead started explaining why she stayed. She says: “It was working. Fitz and I and you, it was working. That’s why I stayed.” (21:31 – 21:38). She continues and discusses powerful men (figure 3.34). She mentions they believe they deserve everything and take everything for granted because it is all handed to them, which here can be understood that she is making a comparison with women. “It makes them so weak”, she says (21:59), again comparing with women. This comment from Mellie highlights how she sees men and their privilege. Although she does not openly identify as feminist, it is possible to say that she is through this comment and others she makes throughout the seasons.

Figure 3.33 (21:30)



Figure 3.34 (21:43)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Mellie continues speaking about Fitz as one of the powerful men and then she mentions the affair. She tells Olivia the truth. She thought she deserved that situation that she had called that upon her, she was the one to blame (figure 3.35). Olivia looks at her with a serious look trying to make sense of it all, but also understanding where that was coming from (figure

3.36). The sidelight is on her, Mellie’s face highlighting the hardship she is going through by admitting all this. The medium close-up on Olivia also highlights her reaction to the revelation. They are starting to understand each other and be vulnerable with each other.

Figure 3.35 (22:39)



Figure 3.36 (22:40)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Continuing with her explanation, she tells Olivia that it was humiliating, but that she understood why it was happening (figure 3.37). She was not giving him anything because she had nothing to give. Someone’s wife and someone’s mom that is all she was. This time of her life was complicated, because she had lost track of which she was, she felt suffocated by him and by her duties as his wife. However, when Olivia came in the picture, as Fitz “beautiful kept thing” (23:27 – 23:28), the situation changed for her (figure 3.38). Suddenly, she was alone, she did not have him with her all the time and she could start thinking about herself and what she wanted. Olivia’s expression reveals she feels for Mellie, but it is not pity, she might actually be identifying with those feelings. When speaking about Olivia, the camera changes focus and turns to her.

Although both women are in the shot, it is Olivia who is facing forward and therefore the center of the shot.

Figure 3.37 (23:11)



Figure 3.38 (23:29)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

The camera switches back and forth from medium shot frames to medium close-up frames (figure 3.39). When filming Olivia the shot is closer showing her from the shoulders up in a more traditional close-up frame (figure 40). Thus, the audience can see how Mellie's words are affecting her and how she relates to them. The emotional charge of this scene is due to the topics being finally addressed by the two women. They are speaking openly and honestly, as it can be seen in figure 3.39 where Mellie toasts the fact that she was finally free. Her husband's affair with Olivia allowed her to feel free, to be her own person again. The sidelight highlights her face and smile, as well as the jar of alcohol she is holding, emphasizing the importance of this feeling. Freedom and independence are important for Olivia; the audience knows it from previous episodes, in this sense Olivia's heartfelt reaction (figure 3.40) to Mellie's words is sincere. It is a pivotal moment and after this episode, their relationship evolves.

Figure 3.39 (23:49)



Figure 3.40 (23:58)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Mellie concludes her thought by explaining why she stayed with her husband, she says

I stayed because it was working. I stood by and allowed the affair to continue because it was working for all of us. He was occupied, thanks to you, he was happy, you lit is fire, we made it all the way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. And one day it was gonna be my turn. Fitz would make me President of the United States because he owed me at least that much. And so I stayed. Because the three of us, we worked.” (24:02 – 24:35)

In figure 3.41, it is possible to see how relieved Mellie feels by declaring that. Again, it is clear they are speaking freely. This statement also brings us back to the scene analyzed in the second chapter when Mellie refers to them being a team. Each had their role towards a common objective, get to the White House. The sidelight coming from the left highlights her in the center of the shot. Olivia is shown defensive and attentive to Mellie’s statement.

Figure 3.41 (24:35)



Figure 3.42 (24: 38)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

This first part of the scene ends with Mellie sitting on the couch and asking Olivia if that is a good enough for her. Olivia quickly tells her she cannot write this in her book. Mellie is aware of that; however, it is clear the narrative developed towards this bonding moment. It is part of the pivotal aspect of the episode. The alcohol Mellie had been drinking in this scene is a moonshine made by her father that she keeps with her for moments of distress. This jar is used throughout the series as a prop that connects the two women. To name a few examples, Mellie drinks it when she is unhappy and stressed, in a previous episode Olivia finds Mellie drinking it in the White House, later on in a subsequent episode it is Olivia who is drinking it in the White House, and thus it works as a linking prop between the characters.

It is, therefore, no coincidence it is part of this scene considering how they are getting closer and opening up to each other (Olivia's sharing happens in the second part of the scene). It is also relevant to underline how it is Mellie how offers the drink, indicating that everything is alright between them (figure 3.43). Their relationship is complex yet this gesture shows that complexity is not a negative aspect. It just makes them the strong women (characters) that they are. Olivia sits down and after hesitation, accepts the drink (figure 3.44). The final shot is of the two of them together thoughtful and taking part fully in the bonding moment previously mentioned.

Figure 3.43 (25:17)



Figure 3.44 (25:33)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

A scene with the Vice-president cuts Olivia and Mellie's scene in two parts. When the second one begins (27:59 – 31:34), they are both sitting on the floor of the apartment (figure 3.45). The jar is almost empty implying they had been drinking and chatting. The camera moves in the room penetrating the conversation. They are talking about how Mellie treated Olivia and how they both expected to behave in a certain way due to the situation they were in. Mellie says Olivia was a good mistress and Olivia replies that she is an overachiever and once she puts her mind to something, she commits (figure 3.46). In the sequence of this dialogue, they burst into laughter because of the irony of the situation. The camera moves from one to the other with a medium close-up frame in order to highlight the connection between the two women, the female bonding.

Figure 3.45 (28:07)



Figure 3.46 (28:42)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Olivia asks for more alcohol and Mellie gets up to get another jar from her purse. At this moment Olivia starts to speak and open up (figure 3.47). She admits she was also happy when the three of them were in the relationship because Mellie was her out. With her around she did not have to take on the role of the wife and first lady. Olivia is in the front of the shot. The backlight and sidelight highlight the contour of the body and face. The background, where Mellie is, is blurred yet she is in the center reinforcing that even though she is not the main focus, she is an important piece of this moment. The camera switches sides and focuses on Mellie (figure 3.48). The front light shows her perplex expression after Olivia's revelation. Once more the background is blurred yet Olivia with her pink jacket is visible in the shot.

Figure 3.47 (29:35)

Figure 3.48 (30:00)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

The camera stays in the same angle but moves from Mellie to Olivia (figure 3.49). She says to Mellie: “I left for the same reason you stayed” (30:11 – 30:15). She is referring here to when she left the White House after finally being freely in a relationship with Fitz. She also refers to Mellie’s statement, pointed out earlier in this scene, of her staying in the relationship after finding out about the affair. The power of this confession is the reason why it is the title of this chapter. The connection between these two women goes beyond the man that attached them. Moreover, it is related to the complex feeling of empowerment or sometimes disempowerment they were living while in that relationship. What they both wanted was to be able to live their lives in their own terms. By being a first lady they had to abdicate of part of this will and that was something neither one of these powerful women could stand. Each one of the ladies, in a situation with its particularity, was

seeking to be free and in control of their own lives. The camera switches direction and films Mellie (figure 3.50). It is a medium close-up shot with a soft sidelight emphasizing her emotions. She simply replies “Okay” (30:27). The melodic piano soundtrack that accompanies this moment of the scene highlights the vulnerability of the characters. They are being honest and vulnerable with each other for the first time.

Figure 3.49 (30:17)



Figure 3.50 (30:27)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Suddenly, Olivia has an idea. Her expression changes and the audience, who is familiar with what has been known to be an Olivia moment, know this is one of those moments. She says

Mellie, that’s what you write. You write that you were scared. You write that you never could have imagined standing up in front of the entire senate for as long as you did filibustering the hell out of that bill protecting every woman’s constitutional right to make her own decision about her own body, because you never thought you would be able to do any of that on your own. You write that you didn’t need Fitz. You didn’t need some man to give you the power. You had the power the whole time it just took you a little longer to realize. That is what you write. (30:41 –31:18)

Mellie listens while Olivia delivers her speech. She knows it is difficult for Olivia to talk about this and it can be perceived in Olivia’s expressions and voice how hurt she is. Nevertheless, her idea is based on the revelations they both shared and therefore, there is truth in it. The reference to filibustering takes us back to the previous episode when Mellie took the

senate stage to speak about cuts in the budget and protect Planned Parenthood. This practice is used in order to delay or prevent the vote of a proposal. Mellie who stood for hours was saved by Olivia and able to go quickly to the bathroom in order to go on for a few more hours. This moment is extremely important for Mellie's political career and Olivia take part in it.

Olivia has turned to face Mellie and she looks at her throughout the speech delivery (figure 3.51). Although the camera also films Mellie, it is mostly focused on Olivia showing her in the center of the medium close-up shot. She has found the solution to Mellie's problem. She is in control. And Mellie agrees. They both feel touched by this situation and it is even possible to feel compassion and admiration from Mellie's behalf (figure 3.52). The focus is on Mellie for a longer medium close-up shot so one can perceive how emotional she is as well. The sidelight on both characters had emphasizes to their centrality in each shot. The soundtrack, that had continued, increases as a dramatic effect from an emotional piano to a powerful piano and cello presence in the scene. Olivia tells her to take her laptop and start writing. Mellie obeys and the scene ends on a shot of Olivia.

Figure 3.51 (31:18)



Figure 3.52 (31:20)



Font: Screenshot, personal archive.

Along this chapter, important changes in the characters' portrayal were shown. How Olivia dealt with being the First Lady and how this affected her relationship with Fitz was crucial since it was something five seasons in the making. In the sense that it seemed that is what they wanted since the beginning because it is believed they are each other's true love. Nevertheless, the weight was too heavy and the change inevitable. Mellie's situation, although more constant in its development, is also revealing since for the first time she is not placing Fitz before herself and she is taking control of her life.

Both characters are evolving in this season. Both women are depicted in a more complex and empowering light.

The same goes for the final scene analyzed. They are for the first time speaking freely and openly. It is not a situation of advantage for either one of them and therefore, they are vulnerable and honest. Their interactions until that point had been through the circumstances of the affair or for political reasons; mainly Fitz and his well-being were a central key of their interactions. Despite the affair and how it connected them still being central to their interaction, the two women exchange truths that had never been shared. There is a mutual respect and it is visible in this scene. They know each other's power and they respect and admire it. Due to their proximity and intricate relationship they know each other well and this is important also for the remaining episodes of the season. In the end, Olivia takes on Mellie's campaign and they both embark in the race for the presidency.

Taking into consideration what I analyze in this chapter, I conclude that both characters went on a revealing journey throughout the episodes. From Olivia being the mistress to being the First Lady to being Olivia again and Mellie from being the First Lady to being a divorced Senator, they both deal with internal conflicts that shape the tone of the season. The switch present in season five and mentioned in the analysis, demonstrate the strength of the characters and their empowerment. In this season they focus on themselves and they get closer. It is perceived that Olivia and Mellie through challenging each other empower each other. They know the kind of women they are and they respect each other. This proximity and mutual understanding indicates that their relationship with Fitz does not undermine this bonding they have been creating and are consolidating. In the next chapter, I conclude the present research by bringing forward my final remarks and further studies suggestions.

4. CHAPTER IV FINAL REMARKS

The television world is in constant movement. By the time I was writing these final remarks the *Scandal* team had already announced that season seven, which will be released in 2017, is its last. Rapid changes are some of the aspects that make discussing and analyzing television series so intriguing. Much can shift from one season to another, including cancelation, making television series appealing sources of analysis, yet they can sometimes leave analysis open-ended because the series has not yet been completed. Considering this fact, I would like to highlight that the present research focuses on the series up to season five, in this sense, when looking at season six and the upcoming season seven, it is possible that some of the conclusions found here could undergo alterations. Thus, in order to check possible changes, further research could be done including the final two seasons.

In this thesis, I aimed at analyzing the two main female characters of the series: Olivia Pope and Mellie Grant. This analysis verified how their representation progressed from season one to season five to investigate whether Mellie was more empowered than Olivia. In a first moment I presented and analyzed them individually, to see how they were introduced to the audience. Moreover, in a subsequent moment, I analyzed scenes of them interacting. The analysis was carried out through the lens of intersectionality and representation focusing on whether the white female character is more empowered than the black female character.

In chapter one, I presented the introduction with the main literary references which are part of the areas of intersectionality, representation, television series, and filmic analysis. I also introduced the television series and the main characters. I concluded with the objectives and paramount questions which guided the analysis.

Chapters II and III focused on the analysis of the episodes and the overall understanding of the series since I brought forward a summary of each season in order for the reader to have an overview of the whole.

Chapter II, therefore, began with the first episode of the series and it aimed at analyzing the characters according to season one. Thus, we are introduced to Olivia Pope and Mellie Grant. In regards to Olivia, I concluded that even before appearing on the screen, she is spoken of as being a woman of power and respect. Consequently, the first time the audience sees her, they

seek those aspects in her and she delivers them diligently. Through my analysis I concluded that she represents strength and fierceness. She is what the Gladiator had implied in the first scene of the episode. Her determination and intelligence is perceived as well through her quick thinking and ways to handle the situation. There is a confidence in her portrayal that emanates power. Being the first black female character as the leading role in a television series in over thirteen years, to be represented with such features is greatly remarkable. Even though, it is aired by a mainstream network, in this case ABC.

When considering Mellie, I concluded that her portrayal is somewhat the opposite of the one seen in Olivia. While Olivia is power, fierceness, politics, the public, Mellie is constraint, house, family, the private. She is depicted as a housewife, even though it is the White House, she is a housewife nonetheless. Her concern for Olivia's love life and her conversation about the children exemplify that. I have concluded therefore, that Mellie does not have the power or fierceness. At first glance, in this first moment, she is fragile and innocent in comparison to the force present in Olivia. Mellie's character at this point in the series is not considered a main character. She has the potential to be important, but she will grow gradually and the contrast between them will fade and transform.

Throughout the season, Mellie gains power and screen time, reaching the end with a transformation and revealing interaction scene. For this scene, I concluded that when Olivia faces Mellie she is not as powerful. This is due to their history and mainly the fact that Olivia is the President's mistress. Nevertheless, it is possible to perceive that Mellie is more powerful, determined, and fierce than was lead to believe. Her characters' representation shifts from innocent and a housewife to a powerful and political strategist. She promises to surprise the audience in the episodes to come and mostly, to be a real counterpart to Olivia.

In chapter III, I firstly presented a brief overview of all the in-between seasons (2 – 4) since this chapter focuses on season five. This season is different due to its two parts in the narrative. As it was mentioned in the chapter, the first ten episodes portray Olivia through the light of the First Lady while Mellie through the light of the former First Lady. I have concluded that they both struggle in this first moment; nevertheless, Olivia's character is the one who seems to be quietly changing the most. She perceives that now that she finally has the life that she wanted, a life with Fitz, it is not all that she expected it to be. She is in conflict, she has lost control over her life, and she belongs to him and to the White House giving in to male

supremacy. The second part begins with a new Olivia. I concluded that it is a rebirth. She is not portrayed the same way she was in previous seasons, it is a bolder, energetic, and determined Olivia. She is free to be herself again.

Mellie, on the other hand, is portrayed following an expected course of action. At first, she does not want to believe her marriage is over, but she soon realizes she should focus on herself and her career. She does so and when the second part of the narrative begins, her plan is well on the way. I concluded that we are faced with Mellie taking care of herself. The President is no longer her main concern, because he is her(ex) husband they will always be connected, however she is not placing his life higher than hers. She is determined and will stop at nothing. She is going to be President. Through the analysis it is seen that she is more serene and focused and perhaps she is finally free from being in Fitz's shadows.

The interaction scene brought forward in chapter III contemplates many crucial aspects of the relationship between the two characters. For example, it is the first time they speak calmly and also genuinely laugh together. Most scenes with the two characters involved the President directly, for instance, they had to come up with a solution to help him and his career, moreover, we encounter a scene where they open-up to each other and speak freely about their feelings. I concluded that for the first time they are vulnerable. This vulnerability and female bonding moment highlights the respect they feel for each other. They are aware of the power and intelligence they both share.

Finally, the present research concludes with chapter IV. Here, I introduce the final remarks of the analysis. In order to do so in more details, in the next section I discuss and answer the research questions that guided the analysis. I finalize the thesis with suggestions for further research.

4.1. FIRST LADIES

In the following section I discuss the research questions of this investigation. Considering that the questions have guided the analysis, they may have already been answered previously. Nonetheless, I am going to go through each one in order to conclude my final remarks.

The first question was: a) how are Olivia and Mellie portrayed in *Scandal*? How are they introduced in the series? As it can be perceived in the analysis presented in

chapter II, Olivia is introduced in the series as being a phenomenon. Since the first scene, with the gladiators in the bar, the audience understands that she is a powerful woman. She has not yet been seen and already she is revered and respected. She confirms this fact in her introductory scene. Her portrayal is of an independent, smart, powerful woman, who will stop at nothing to get what she wants. She is elegant and poised, always showing control and quick thinking. Meanwhile, Mellie is home-oriented, focused on her husband and children. She is the First Lady; therefore, her job is to take care of the House. Her joyous and bland appearance is a contrast to Olivia's power and speed.

In the scene where they interact, there is a switching of positions. Mellie is in control and powerful while Olivia is quiet and shy. It must be highlighted here that Olivia was the Presidents mistress, making her keener to behave in a more humble way next to Mellie since she was in the wrong. Still, Mellie's portrayal in this scene makes her more resembling Olivia. She shows power and determination; she demonstrates that she has been working behind the scenes influencing her husband's political career without him noticing. Ambition and intelligence are two other aspects visible in this scene. She is in charge and she is the one who handles the situation.

The second question was: b) how are the characters portrayed in the progression of the series? Throughout the seasons Olivia struggles with different aspects of her life and emotions. Because she is the main character, her struggle is intertwined with the entire plot. However, it is possible to maintain the portrayal mentioned in the previous question, she is seen as a powerful, intelligent, determined, complex woman. On the other hand, Mellie has a more steady growth. Each season, her character gains more power and complexity. At times it may seem that Olivia is struggling to maintain her power and position while Mellie is slowly unveiling hers. This movement made the character into the second main female role of the series.

In season five, the biggest scandal of them all is finally confirmed: Olivia is the President's mistress. This revelation changes the game. Mellie gets divorced, Olivia takes on the White House and she is more conflicted than ever. Mellie's portrayal, after accepting Fitz's decision, focuses on showing her as a career woman. Her objective is to become the next President and she starts working for that purpose. She goes from distressed to focused and engaged into her own life and future. Concurrently, Olivia starts living at the White House and little by little starts taking the First Ladies' place. In the first scene, the secret has not yet been revealed, and she is portrayed as happy and accomplished. With the passing of the episodes, this happiness fades

away giving space to a feeling of entrapment. When she sets herself free, in the second part of the season, she is radiant. Her wardrobe changes to emphasize her rebirth. Her portrayal is of a free woman. She is no longer at Fitz's mercy; she is in control of her life again.

When looking at the two characters in the last scene analyzed, it is possible to conclude that they are at a vulnerable state. In a first moment, they both play their role, Mellie slightly aggressive and Olivia defensive. Yet, the tone and subject of the discussion makes it that they get to speak sincerely and forget the labels of wife and mistress. They are portrayed as complex, smart, powerful, and also, flawed women. Women, who at one time or another, had placed Fitz above their own desires. This moment of sharing and bonding brings the characters closer and highlights the fact that they are not so different after all. Each with its own history, experience, and struggles, lived a life that made them fight for what they believed in and for what they wanted for themselves.

The final paramount question of this research was: c) how empowered are the two characters? Is Mellie Grant more empowered than Olivia Pope? To answer this final question it is necessary to look at seasons one and five together. It is seen that Olivia is an empowered woman, even in times of conflict and distress; she manages to use her influence, her wit, and her power to deal with any situation she faces. Whenever she is in a moment of crises, such as the struggle when she was playing the role of the First Lady, she picks herself up and demonstrates to be an empowered woman. This is due to the fact that power and strength are part of the character. She has weaknesses, Fitz could be an example, and nevertheless, there are inherent characteristics present in her representation that aim at empowering her throughout the narrative.

Mellie's presence in the narrative does not follow the same pattern. Her empowerment is gradual. From the innocent housewife to the future President of the United States, she is more empowered by the seasons. Even though she undergoes difficulties as well, her growth is clear cut and direct. The audience sees her gaining power. The narrative follows her empowerment in a less chaotic manner. This does not mean she is not portrayed as flawed, on the contrary, but she is portrayed as making the best of a situation. For instance, she knows Olivia is the best option to be her campaign manager and she goes after it. As Olivia says in season five, she had the power without her the whole time, and the audience witnessed this power being unveiled. Meanwhile, even though Olivia also had the power within herself the whole time, at times it seems this power is taken for granted

since it had been demonstrated since the beginning. In seasons 4 and 5, the audience also witnesses Olivia portraying her black power. Considering the series slowly inserts this topic in the narrative.

Taking into account the remarks presented above, whether Mellie is more empowered than Olivia, it is a relevant question to ask. After concluding the analysis, my answer is that they each have power and they are each empowered according to their own narrative paths. What is more interesting to highlight is not a battle between the two women, but how they complement each other. Due to the fact that they are both powerful characters, they work as counterparts, and in the end they challenge each other. By having a white female character more empowered than the leading female character that is black, would have been a problematic aspect of the series. One of *Scandal's* most valuable aspects is the fact that it has a female lead being played by a black actress; therefore, shifting the roles back to a white actress having the power role would eliminate the impact the television series made by bringing up as the main role a black character.

Considering the aspect previously mentioned it is important to bring forward another aspect that emerged when placing the two characters in front of each other and analyzing them through the lens of intersectionality. Olivia's race is never mentioned by Mellie. Although race was included in the series, as was seen in chapter I, Mellie never refers to it in regards to Olivia. When Mellie speaks of Olivia she mentions her intelligence, her beauty, her power and influence, however, she never mentions the fact that she is black.

I conclude that in the case of the two women, considering the circumstances of the life and experience they shared the fact that Olivia's race is not mentioned is a positive aspect. It is positive since there is a tendency to portray black female characters as inferior to white female characters. In *Scandal's* case, they are equals in certain moments and in others, it is Olivia who is more powerful. To have this representation on public television is an important achievement. Audiences have demonstrated through the success of the series that they are prepared and are indeed, demanding, to see a powerful, complex, smart, beautiful, black woman as the leading lady on their night time television series.

4.2. FURTHER RESEARCH

The television series *Scandal* was chosen as the object of this research due to its relevance in the television scene at the time of its release. Since then, other series with main black female characters have emerged; nevertheless, not many have been broadcasted on public television. Netflix original series have demonstrated to challenge the mainstream structure, and it seems to have an overall understanding that changes have to occur, and because of it, television series are portraying a more diverse cast, crew, and plot. Cable television, here including Netflix, is however, still the main source for this type of series. Therefore, the importance of *Scandal* is still relevant today.

Many different aspects could be analyzed through this series. These aspects include comparison studies with series such as *How to get away with murder*, the analysis of the relationship adding the President, or even analyzing all the female characters. Considering the great amount of options and the time constraints, I chose to focus on the two main female characters through the spectrum presented in previous chapters. It is important to highlight that my study has not exhausted the possibilities of analysis of these two women, thus further research could be taken into consideration.

I hope the present study will encourage further studies on television series with black female characters in the leading roles. Further research combining representation and intersectionality with objects such as television series can highlight how changes in society are being reflected on the small screen. How and what these representations depict is crucial for the continuing changes feminists are aiming to achieve. By seeing all women represented on the screen, more power will be given to the women at home as audiences will possibly identify with strong female characters on television. This is due to the fact that now, their voices are being heard, and they are identifying with the characters, being this way more visible.

The present study might contribute to my Graduate Program – Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários – as a study in the area of Literary Studies focusing on television studies, representation, and intersectionality. Not many works are presented encompassing this prism; therefore, its contribution might encourage further studies in these areas. The fact also that it presents and analysis a black female leading role may be an incentive for further analysis on black women in cinema and television series since the focus has been mainly on literary works.

Television series have been a great part of my life. As I mentioned in the beginning of this research, since my youngest years I have had contact with them and they have influenced my daily life. Thus, to be given the

opportunity to study them is quite satisfying not only for my personal connection to them, but also to the potential power they hold. Television series have influenced and increased my interest for feminist studies and, consequently, for intersectionality and how women are represented on the small screen. I intend to continue exploring this world, as a personal and an academic interest.

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