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HBO Series Girls and Insecure's Depiction of Race and Gender

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3 May 2018 and 22 May 2018

Abstract

In this research study the identification and representation of race and gender were looked at in the primetime HBO television series *Insecure* and *Girls.* The characters that were analyzed in two episodes were the young black women of *Insecure* and in two episodes the young white women in *Girls*. The method for this study was conducted using content analysis to identify the following variables focusing on identity, racial stereotypes and names used to address one another. Additionally, variables to identify gender included emotional approaches to situations, stereotypes and gender role expectations. The comprehensive findings revealed through similarities and differences of the episodes containing similar plot lines, as well as the overall analysis of each show, gave insight on how race and gender is being presented. Consistently throughout each of the episodes in terms of gender representation, emotional approaches to situations was the variable with a fair amount of content found. Although anticipated prior to conducting research, gender role expectations were shown less often by the women in each series. Race identity was another variable chosen that also resulted as being less

frequently identifiable. In terms of race and gender stereotypes that were looked at, gender stereotypes were more prominent within each of the episodes. The variable used to identify race in each episode, names used to address one another, were mentioned more throughout the episodes of *Insecure* than in *Girls*.

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Introduction

Growing up I would spend time watching fictional television shows such as *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air, Full House, The Cosby Show, Family Matters*, and *Boy Meets World.* Each show instilled basic values in me that I apply to my everyday life as a young adult. They were scripted in a way that resonated with me at the time. Many of which

focused on tackling issues as a family and usually concluded with a life lesson at the end

of each episode. As I have become more ingrained in understanding television, my

choices in genres have changed from broadcast sitcoms to premium television series.

Reflecting on my personal experiences, I have replicated character traits from television

in my everyday life which in turn can supersede reality. Therefore, I currently seek shows

with plot lines that address pressing issues occurring in society that help me stay

informed. Shows such as *Girls* and *Insecure* are series which have the creative freedom

to push cultural and controversial boundaries surrounding race and gender, which

portray messages that are important for educating viewers through the writer's

experiences. For example, David Stamps discusses in his article "The Social Construction

of The African American Family on Broadcast Television: A Comparative Analysis of *The*

Cosby Show and *Blackish*" how of all the various types of media available, television is a

platform that society seeks to access for many different purposes. (Stamps 406) Stamps

found from the article, "Twenty sources after Kerner: The portrayal of African Americans

on prime-time television" by authors C. Stroman, B. Merritt and P. Matabane, which

mentions the educational aspects of television and the ability it has to influence a

viewer's mindset and thought process on different topics. (Stamps 406) In the case of

Insecure and *Girls* the authors introduce new unseen experiences with minimal

restrictions that bring on more opportunity to gain insight of the young female

experience. In the article "Gender and sexual scripts in popular US teen series: A study

on the gendered discourses in *One Tree Hill* and *Gossip Girl*' Elke Van Damme

references M. Morgan's "Do Young People Learn About the World from Watching

Television?" N. Signorielli's "How Are Children and Adolescents Portrayed on Prime-

Time Television" and L. Bindig's "Dawson's Creek. A Critical Understanding" on their

interpretation of television's impact on society. (Van Damme 78) Van Damme reveals

how there is a consensus among these authors of seeing television as "the world's

primary storyteller" and how television can be used as a tool for learning. (Van Damme

78) The viewing experience is based on what resonates with the individual in a sense

one has the ability to sift through and retain what it is one wishes to interpret, similar to

the student-professor relationship. These claims provide insight into television as a

platform that can be used to portray information and for people to choose to be

receptive to it or not. As for Lena Dunham and Issa Rae they draw attention to race and

gender for their audiences to retain information on how these television identities are

constructed.

Race and gender are socially constructed through daily interactions and

observations. Social interactions include those that happen at home, in relationships, in

the workplace and the overall presentation of ourselves. By analyzing the content

displayed through the female character's interactions from these series I will be focusing

on the parallels being drawn from both *Girls* and *Insecure* as they live out their urban

lifestyles. As I have navigated through research on the topic of representation of race

and gender through television and media, I have established a research question. What information is being sent out about race and gender by HBO shows *Insecure* and *Girls*?

I am interested in further research that includes how gender and race are communicated via their on-screen representation. Particularly, the young heterosexual white females of New York City, in the series *Girls,* and young heterosexual black females of Los Angeles in the series *Insecure*. I think it is important to look outside oneself in order to be inspired by identifiable differences of others. Viewers are not able to relate to or indicate each cultural reference in the same way. However, to recognize these aspects of gender and race through research this creates a broader understanding of different demographics.

The approach for this research is to code specific episodes of each show using the method of content analysis to reveal the variables that are being shown involving race and gender. Additionally, the similarities and differences drawn from the comparison of each the shows, will be determined by the number of race and gender indications found. The study I have conducted looking at and comparing the casts of young women in their twenties, living urban lifestyles, and are eagerly willing to master relationships, friendships and the hardships that women often face. I am interested in how the information on race and gender aspects are being portrayed to viewers by each of these series. This analysis will contribute to prior research done on television series exposure of race and gender.

The HBO series *Girls*, created by Lena Dunham presents a group of young white female "Brooklynites" navigating their complex lives through the city. The female characters within the show include Hannah Horvath, Marnie Michaels, Jessa Johansson and Shoshanna Shapiro. Each character exposes their flaws, strengths and opinions throughout a variety of episodes which contribute to identifying themselves within their discourse as white women. (Dunham 2012-2017)

Issa Rae's HBO series *Insecure* features young black women in Los Angeles who want to control the direction of their lives. The female roles include a group of four best friends, main characters Issa Dee, and Molly Carter, and supporting characters Tiffany DuBois and Kelli. Together they tackle the challenging difficulties that life presents to them. Each of these characters promotes a genuine understanding of who they are as black women and their strong group dynamic. They approach issues that occur in the lives of modern day women which thereby is presented entirely to the audience. (Rae 2016-2017)

Literature Review

Racial Representation in Television

Research involving the medium of broadcast television and the many ways we as a culture interpret racial representation is significant in unveiling truths that have often been disguised or misrepresented in the past (Stamps 405). In David Stamps article, he

examines broadcast shows from separate time periods and the cultural issues African

American families face, including racial inequality, stereotyping, racial tensions in the

workplace and racial disparity (Stamps 405). Stamps is able to cross reference these

shows giving examples of their life experiences using both subtle references and direct

messages to unveil aspects involving race. Stamps uses textual analysis as a research

technique to give a theoretical contribution, focusing on what is being shown to viewers

of the shows *Blackish and The Cosby Show*, which includes race relations, classism, and

family dynamics. (Stamps 406) Stamps claims that the way television characters can be

portrayed as either negative or positive gives off a general understanding of a particular

race, which then translates into the form of stereotypes (Stamps 406-407). The situations

created in theses sitcoms are reflections of our daily lives, however they are manipulated

to fall under the category of entertainment. In "Can One TV Show Make a Difference?

Will & Grace and the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis," by Peter Gregg, Dean Hewes, and

Edward Schippa, suggests that if we take these constructed television characters

seriously and form certain beliefs regarding these "social groups," this "parasocial

interaction" can determine how we interact in "real life" (Gregg, Hewes, and Schippa 4).

Therefore, without careful articulation of how race is represented, we can misinterpret

these influences through inauthentic behavioral interactions in our own lives. Stamps

suggests that race is often refined within entertainment media, in order to give viewers a

comfortable viewing experience, characters must fit a certain mold (Stamps 407). In

terms of interpretation of race in television I think it is imperative that there is an equal distribution of opportunity for authentic television narratives to be created. In "HBO's Girls: gender, generation, and quality television," Sean Fuller and Catherine Driscoll, advocate for this notion they think that television series should be progressive and adaptable to what is prominent in terms of current sociological issues. (Fuller and Driscoll 258) As for broadcast television, this is generally known to not always be applicable, making it difficult for the accurate representation of race, because of the guidelines that must be followed, which ultimately leads to the existence of stereotypes (Stamps 407).

Stamps interpretation of *The Cosby Show* and *Blackish,* brings insight for new discussions, he explains how experiences in life shown by these television characters can be both relatable and reflected on regardless of the relation to the race of the character on screen and the race of the audience member. (Stamps 415-416) Stamps indicates that the ability to make cross-cultural connections in regards to life occurrences is possible, regardless of how one identifies themselves. (Stamps 416) Making these connections based on experience can make for alternate ways of handling situations that may not be customary in one's culture. Which leads to Stamps' justification, "There is not one specific culture that is superior to another. The identity that one draws from their culture, social circle and community should not be dismissed by social labels and social constructs that have been created and reinforced by external forces namely

media." (Stamps 407) There are several components that make up one's identity, aside from the culture one derives from, gender plays a major role in the forming of one's identity.

Gender Representation in Television

Elke Van Damme, calls attention to gender, sexuality and gender role representation using textual analysis. Entertainment television has the tendency to influence who we are as individuals based on how we perceive our reality as well as our level of media literacy (Van Damme 78). Outside influences such as the media, serve as an example when understanding different gender roles in society (Van Damme 79). In the article **"**How Shows Like 'Will & Grace' And 'Black-ish' Can Change Your Brain," Maanvi Singh explains, the concept discovered by psychologists known as the "parasocial relationship" is considered to be a deep connection that the viewer establishes with characters on television, and as a result can regard these characters as friends. In response to this, Van Damme suggests that by subjecting ourselves to the way television characters are represented as entirely accurate, we are then led to believe a stereotypical understanding of gender roles. (Van Damme 79)

Van Damme's textual analysis of *One Tree Hill* and *Gossip Girl* focuses on the following indicators, spoken language, facial expressions, body language and framing, which uncover details within each series that formulate gender representation (Van

Damme 82). A series of common stereotypical gender roles and common

misconceptions regarding women were found within each of the storylines. The themes

within these storylines include the submissive female, unrealistic career choices,

obsession of personal appearance, dieting and eating disorders (Van Damme 83-85).

These stereotypes reveal a negative reflection of the female, making it easy to

sympathize with, but difficult to admit to identifying with. Therefore, primetime

television networks strive to satisfy their target audience by withholding important

aspects of real life experiences and substituting this with a comfortable viewing

experience (Van Damme 87). Their goal is to maintain "dominant norms and values,"

rather than expose the realistic content to refrain from controversy. (Van Damme 87) As

for *Insecure* and *Girls* controversy and full insight into the lives of these twenty-year-old

women are at the forefront of each episode.

I chose *Insecure* to analyze for this study because of the main cast members

consisting of black women which made it possible to focus on the black female

experience. Issa, Molly, Tiffany and Stacy offer one another hard truths about each other

and overall provide the guidance they all need in terms of their personal and

professional lives. *Girls* was chosen for this study for a similar reason it is a series that

consists of white women demonstrating their daily practices. Hannah, Marnie, Jessa and

Shoshana do not refrain from telling each other the different aspects that they think

each other needs to change and improve their lives. Therefore, by examining the

parallels of these shows I was able to indicate how race and gender aspects stood out in each episode chosen.

Insecure and Girls

Season one of *Insecure* premiered in October of 2016, providing new content for research in the field of communication and media studies. According to the Nielsen study "For Us By Us? The Mainstream Appeal of Black Content" the amount of non-black viewership of *Insecure's* 2016 and 2017 seasons was 61.54% compared to 38.46% of black viewers. By choosing to analyze the content of a current show that has a wide range of viewership, I think it gives a modern perspective on what premium television is offering in terms of gender and race related episodes. As an alternative series to *Girls,* Issa Rae's *Insecure* highlights black culture, making it a primary focus within each narrative. Rae has become instrumental in responding to lack of representation issue addressed in past research. In "Other Issues with Writing Black Characters," Nikita T. Hamilton states,

> The issue with how black characters are written is they are often created along a binary logic. The character is either preoccupied with race, or he/she ignores its existence. Neither is realistic, and it is possible that if writers took after Dunham's lead and channeled their own experiences and encounters, race would come into the picture in a way that is more realistic and nuanced. (Hamilton 53)

As the creator and star of the show, Issa Rae has a personal connection to the character, making the experiences represented throughout the series feel authentic and genuine in ways that many shows aim to achieve. Rather than producing easy-to-watch shows that make the viewer feel content, HBO series have raw content that integrate controversial and unsettling issues that generate questions and concerns for these issues (Driscoll and Fuller 258). I think research motivates television writers and creators to manifest content on the stories that have yet to be told, especially narratives that expose gender and race. According to Hamilton television writers Shonda Rhimes, Issa Rae, and Lena Dunham fall under the same category of having the capabilities of creating narratives that are reflections of themselves and their individual experiences. (Hamilton 54) Both Rae and Dunham give their viewers the opportunity to see their unapologetic selves which are represented by each of their characters as young black women and young white women. Therefore, by challenging the norm and addressing what it is often considered taboo, HBO revolutionizes the way we think, and feel with its streamline delivery of fully exposed drama. (Driscoll and Fuller 258)

Girls aired in April of 2012 and ran for five years, closing out the final season in April of 2017. Driscoll and Fuller identify the distinct similarities and differences made between HBO series *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and *Girls,* which mainly centered around the female character's expression of their sexuality and where each show lies on the scale of controversy (Driscoll and Fuller 259-260). Ruby Grant and Meredith Nash's

article, "Twenty-Something Girls v. Thirty- Something Sex and The City Women: Paving

the way for "post? feminism," interprets *Girls* as evolving from *Sex and the City,* while

continuing to exemplify the post-feminism era but in a different way that is more

suitable for young women in their twenties. (Grant and Nash 976) Female characters are

often scripted as complex, they are adaptable to the many ever changing constructs of

our society. For example, Grant and Nash state, "By reflexively questioning and

challenging its influences from earlier generations of second wave feminism and post-

feminism, we argue that *Girls* allows for a re-articulation and re-mobilisation of post-

feminism for a millennial generation." (Grant and Nash 977) While those such as Nikita

T. Hamilton who contributed a chapter of a book called "So They Say You Have a Race

Problem? You're in Your Twenties, You Have Way More Problems Than That," opposes

Grant and Nash's notion. Hamilton explains how *Girls* is not a replica or an extension of

Sex in the City in the post-feminism sense, but *Girls* does incorporate aspects of post-

feminism. (Hamilton 46) Hamilton justifies her statement by discussing the importance

behind this idea of creating female characters that constantly focus on themselves, and

continue to be progressive individuals. (Hamilton 46) *Girls* is a opportunistic platform

and represents a convoluted voice for women creating strong arguments in favor of

female empowerment (Driscoll and Fuller 261). Nash and Grant also state,

> The show is a kind of millennial consciousness-raising tool in which Dunham
>
> engages with the social processes that were instigated by second wave feminism

and that were aimed at developing experiential knowledge, giving women a

"voice" and unifying their experiences (although this is clearly contested in terms

of race/ethnicity, class sexuality), and "empowering" women in their relationships

to their bodies. (Grant and Nash 988)

For example, Lena Dunham uses her creative freedom under HBO to expose her

characters utilizing sex scenes, drug uses, and the topic of mental illnesses. (Driscoll and

Fuller 259) I think that the level of exposure Dunham uses to execute these roles gives

her the authority to claim how they should be interpreted. As Hamilton mentions

regarding the female characters of *Girls*, that they are not meant to be held accountable

as the ideal women that young women should look up to, but should be seen as realistic

representations of women who are both complex and imperfect. (Hamilton 48) Hamilton

reassures that Dunham is not representing her characters as prime examples and rather

than looking at each of them through a critical lens, we should recognize her form of

storytelling as valid. (Hamilton 48) Based on these analyses, there is an overall

understanding of women in television and how important it is to gain insight on the

female experience from different perspectives. To bridge them together Driscoll and

Fuller claim, "*Girls* is a story about girls who are both the products and the subjects of

feminism, incorporating validation, problematization and critique of the forms of

education, work, sex and romance currently available to girls." (Driscoll and Fuller 261) I

think *Girls* has instrumentally paved the way for shows like *Insecure,* to continuously

progress with open discussion keeping the important issues at the forefront by personalizing narratives.

Dunham and Rae have formulated their shows to bring together a group of women within their own demographics to provide comprehensive understandings of black and white women on television. *Insecure* and *Girls* deliver comparative content in terms of race and gender. This allows for interesting ways of interpreting the different female characters and how their lives and experiences often times coincide.

Methodology

This research study, involves the coding of cultural references centered around race and gender related aspects from four episodes; two from *Insecure* and two episodes of *Girls*. Using content analysis provides an explicit understanding of each female character being portrayed within each of the series. Identifying these cultural references involves seeking standard conventional images of young black women living in Los Angeles (*Insecure*) and young white women living in Brooklyn (*Girls*). These cultural indicators come from the interactions and common occurrences in each of the female character's daily lives, including relationships, within their career/job environment, and amongst friends. I chose to base my data collection on the HBO series *Girls* and *Insecure* because of their relevant themes directed towards women of the

millennial generation. At this time, while *Girls* has newly concluded its final season, and

Insecure has just recently finished a second season, with seasons to come, this creates

opportunities for further insight and research on these shows.

Method of Analysis

The method of analysis features nominal and descriptive variables regarding race

and gender which include the context that the references are made, and whether these

references are directed towards a character or generally stated. Once the indicators have

been tallied the data was translated into graphs and tables. This was the best possible

method to gain perspective on what the current climate is regarding what premium

television is doing to educate the public viewers on these specific discourses. I think

that this is a significant form of analysis because while actively participating as an

"audience member," and consciously observing and documenting gender and race

related references, provides a substantial number of valid findings. From an academic

standpoint, this provides a direct understanding of the amount of gender and race

related content provided through these shows and how they are deciding to expose

these discourses on screen.

Scope of Analysis

I have chosen to code these four episodes at a time when female representation

in television is being discussed most prominently in the media. For each of the four

episodes I selected, I focused on related plotlines within *Insecure* and *Girls*. For example,

In the episode from *Girls* titled "Beach House" (S03E07) and from *Insecure* "Broken as

Fuck" (S01E08) both episodes feature a "girls trip" where each group of four best friends

spend a weekend away together. These episodes provide exposure of the friendships

between these four women within each series and how they react toward each other's

personalities and lifestyle choices, while in an environment outside of their daily lives in

the city. The episodes "Leave Me Alone" (S01E09) of *Girls* and from *Insecure,* "Hella

Questions" (S02E02) both focus on the struggles for women in the working world as well

as their personal lives. For example, from *Insecure* the character Molly faces the difficulty

of her internal struggles having to deal with the outsider feeling as a young black

woman working as a lawyer alongside white men. Although by Molly addressing how in

addition to her success, being as young black professional woman has its obstacles. In

Girls, Hannah struggles with finding her voice as a professional writer and therefore

succumbs to working in a coffee shop for basic income to pay back her rent money. This

reveals a case of a recent college graduate having to initially accept a low paying job

while working towards applying her degree and fulfilling her professional goals.

 I decided to examine the four female characters and the quality performances

that they provide within each of these shows to get an understanding of how the female

protagonist and their female counterparts are being individualized rather than

generalized. The measurable variables in the shows that qualified as indicators of gender

include gender stereotypes, gender role expectations and emotional approaches to situations. All of which exposed who they are as females within their demographic. The variables chosen to indicate race within each episode include, race/cultural identity, racial stereotypes that are revealed and names used to address one another within a racial group. How these characters present themselves through creative expression are standard in what qualifies as a reflection of who they are as women and often have a message attached. When researching how to define race identity for this study I found in the article "Blurring boundaries: race and transatlantic identities in culture and society "by Elizabeth Kenney, Sirpa Salenius and Whitney Womack Smith, and their discussion of race identity on how it can be defined as one's sense of inclusion within a particular racial group. (Kenney, Salenius and Womack Smith 120) A specific example of race/cultural identity that makes a statement includes, the graphic T-shirts that Issa from *Insecure* wears throughout these episodes, such as Harriet Tubman hoodie and a Tupac Shakur shirt, both of which represent her expression of influential people that embody black culture. According to Stamps article, racial stereotypes are defined as preconceived notions that can be interpreted in different ways in regards to the inherent features that describe a person of a specific racial group. (Stamps 409) An example of a racial stereotype from *Girls* was seen in the episode "Beach House" while on their vacation to the Hamptons, Hannah, Marnie, Jessa and Shoshana were taught a Broadway dance routine by one of their gay male friends. For the variable names used

to address one another within the group of black women from *Insecure* when talking

collectively frequently included "y'all" and "ladies" whereas the women in *Girls* used the

term "guys" as a way of addressing one another. Variables that are classified as

representing a young woman, would include instances that are used to identify and

define who these women are as distinctly young white females and young black

females. For instance, in the episode "Hella Questions" from *Insecure* the main character

Issa suffers from a difficult breakup and finds out from her friends that her ex has

moved on from her. Issa tries to refrain from being jealous but finds it difficult not to

feel emotional and vindictive towards the new girlfriend. Similar to the episode from

Girls "Leave Me Alone" where Hannah (a writer) and her friends attend Hannah's former

college classmate's book party. Hannah expresses a lot of cattiness and jealousy toward

her former classmate because of her success. These examples reveal how women project

their emotions in circumstances regarding their personal and professional lives, that

involve people they care about and their own perspectives pertaining to their

accomplishments. To define the variable gender role expectations, I found in the book,

Young People and Gendered Media Messages by Maria Jacobson, that gender roles are

defined as the ways in which a man or woman is expected to act in given social

situations and can be based on cultural, ethical, economic and political influences.

(Jacobson 6) For example in the episode from *Girls* "Beach House," Marnie fills the

gender role as a "homemaker." A gender stereotype according to definitions from Van

Damme's article and Jacobson's book is said to be a preconceived notion that is made

about someone who identifies themselves as a male or a female. (Jacobson 6, Van

Damme 79) For instance, a gender stereotype occurs, in the episode "Beach House"

when Marnie and Hannah discuss their "daddy issues" the main cause of their behaviors

that lead them to approach their relationships with men negatively. In *Insecure* from the

episode "Hella Questions" and "Broken as Fuck" the women frequently justify their

relationships with the men in their lives to their group of friends. I reviewed all four

episodes with total of 1 hour 1 minute and 36 seconds in coded content. The episodes

from *Girls* consisted of 30 minutes and 21 seconds and from *Insecure* 31 minutes 15

seconds.

Findings

     Girls and *Insecure* brought about thought-provoking findings based on the

variables I chose. The analysis of gender related indicators from each of the four

episodes (emotional approach to situations, stereotypes, and gender role expectations)

as well as race related indicators (race/cultural identity, stereotypes and names used to

address one another) were identified throughout each of the four episodes based on

female-female character interactions primarily among the main friend groups (See

Appendix for graphs and tables pgs. 27-29).

Overall Analysis of Girls

Based on the results I found *Girls* revealed that gender is the predominant

representation of identity for these women. This was found through the way their

friendships were forged together by the exposure of each individual character's

expressions and behaviors. The gender driven basis of this show is propelled by the

dominant variable the emotional approach to situations. For example, in the episodes

"Beach House" 45% of the content collected was derived from the angst, tough love,

jealousy and frustration conveyed by each of the characters and 56% from the episode

"Leave Me Alone." (See Table 2 in Appendix pg. 27) As a whole Hannah, Marnie, Jessa

and Shoshanna challenge each other within their friendships by building each other up

but at the same time they would tear each other down. In the episode "Beach House"

many built up emotions towards one another were revealed. Terms such as "mean"

"hurtful" and "rude" were used in response to the exchanges made throughout their

group argument as they described as their "healing" session. I think that through these

emotional and expressive arguments Hannah, Marnie, Jessa and Shoshanna were able to

expose their female personas, also expressing how they feel about each other as friends.

For example, Shoshanna states "You guys treat me like I'm a fucking cab driver. You

have entire conversations in front of me like I'm invisible" (Dunham, 2014). By Shoshana

lashing out in this manner her reaction explains how expression of emotions plays a major role in the construction of the female identity. I found that stereotypes were also exposed during the character's emotional approaches to situations which was represented by 31% in the episode "Beach House" and 28% from "Leave Me Alone". For instance, in the episode "Beach House" the form of stereotypical female friends was found in each of the members of the group examples of this were Marnie, the overbearing friend, she felt the need to control the entire itinerary of the trip, rather than allowing events to occur naturally. Then you have Shoshanna who represented the submissive friend she conformed to everything anyone suggested. Hannah was always the apologetic friend she engaged in heart to heart talks with Marnie regarding the entirety of their friendship and finally Jessa who was the sympathetic friend offering her support and empathy to each of the girls in all their decisions and feelings throughout the episode. These characters make a conscious effort to present themselves as valid female counterparts and thereby displaying this to viewers, but ultimately their flaws are exposed. I think this creates an element of realness and that although these characters are scripted they have the qualities to show that they are relatable as modern women. In terms of race the content was minimal and not addressed as frequently as I expected. In each of the episodes I coded the women in *Girls* did not use race identifying terms. There were also an insignificant number of racial stereotypes indicated within both "Beach House" and "Leave Me Alone". This shows how Lena Dunham's role in television

writing has the ability to include or not include these specific race identifiers as a way of addressing being a part of white culture.

Overall Analysis of Insecure

In the episodes from *Insecure* the results from the analysis varied in regards to race and gender aspects. Both race and gender stereotypes in the episodes represented a low percentage compared to middle to low range of identity and a high percentage of names used to describe each other. Overall gender was seen as more dominant throughout over race representation. Although race/cultural identity indicators didn't appear as frequently and resulted in a lower percentage, in my opinion they still stood out within each of the episodes. For example, in the episode "Broken as Fuck" Molly wore a graphic T-shirt with pop singer Janet Jackson at the beginning of the episode and a Michael Jackson shirt towards the end. In "Hella Questions" Issa wore a hoodie at the start of the episode with Harriet Tubman on it, a sweater that read "The Last Poets" and at the end of the episode, she wore a T-shirt with rappers Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. Each of these outwardly show their pride for being a part of black culture. The common theme of wearing this apparel with black cultural icons, shows a simple and subtle way of communicating one's identity. For indications of gender stereotypes there were occasions where these women felt that they needed to explain the context of their relationship involving the man in their lives as well as situations that

involved gossip. For example, in the episode "Hella Questions" Tiffany talks about how her relationship had gone through a rough patch with her husband and felt the need to overcompensate and explain how all relationships go through difficult times. There was also a situation addressed in "Hella Questions" where Tiffany and Kelli had been gossiping about Issa's ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend before talking to Issa about it. Both of these instances also occurred in a discussion between Issa, Molly, Tiffany and Kelli I the episode "Broken as Fuck" when they are drinking in the hot tub and argue over each other's relationships and behaviors which all represent common female stereotypes. In terms of an example of a racial stereotype, in the episode "Hella Questions" Molly is seen as a hard worker in her law firm but frequently has to justify her abilities and finds herself having to compete at a disadvantage being a black woman compared to her white male counterparts. In turn, the variable gender role expectations did not pertain to the women in this series other than Tiffany's role as a wife. In the next section I will reveal more examples of the variables that were coded from the episodes containing similar plot lines from *Insecure* compared to episodes of *Girls*.

Comparing Episodes "Broken as Fuck" and "Beach House"

Beginning with the comparison of episodes "Broken as Fuck" (Insecure) and "Beach House" (Girls), I was able to detect similarities and differences within the plotlines

and narratives. In "Broken as Fuck" Issa, Molly, Tiffany and Kelli go on a trip to Malibu for

Kelli's birthday, despite a recent fallout between Issa and Molly. The tensions continue

and issues with one another arise within the entire group as the trip unfolds. Similar to

the episode "Beach House" where Marnie takes on a demanding leadership role in the

group, which raises issues as she antagonizes the rest of the girls who are just looking to

have a good time in the outskirts of the Hamptons. More strain on the group dynamic

occurs between Issa and Molly when Molly and Kelli bring back guys to the house from

the nightclub. Comparable to an instance when Hannah runs into a group of her gay

male friends outside a supermarket and invites them back to the beach house, which

then leads to conflict between her and Marnie. These instances show how each group of

women approaches working out their issues with one another.

The differences I found were reflective of the narratives and how these scripted

characters were utilized to represent young black women and young white women.

Within the episode "Broken as Fuck", I found that in regards to racial representation 56%

was shown through the names they call each other. Specific examples include, "bitch,"

"y'all," "girl," "nigga," "ladies," "hoe," "Stacey Dash," "ratchet" and "basic". The number of

names used by the black women of *Insecure* was significantly more than racial identity

and stereotypes. Whereas, in the episode of *Girls* names used to address one another,

racial identity and stereotypes all resulted in an even percentage of 33.33…%. There was

one name that the women in *Girls* used to address each other as, "guys". Occurrences

like these differentiate the female black characters of *Insecure* and the female white

characters of *Girls* in terms of verbal expressiveness towards each other.

Another significant difference regarding the episodes was the gender role

expectations that were displayed throughout. *Insecure* exhibited only 3% of the gender

role representation whereas *Girls* revealed 24%. In the "Beach House" episode Marnie

fulfilled the "homemaker" role while on the trip, being that the beach house belonged

to her relatives. Marnie felt obligated to assign sleeping arrangements, initiate the

grocery shopping, cook the dinner and arrange for activities to take place. To conclude

the episode there was a scene where all four of the women wake up in the morning and

came together to clean the mess that had been made in the kitchen from the night

before, while all of the men continued to sleep. In the episode "Broken as Fuck" the

instance where Tiffany arranges for the group to attend a wine tasting was the only

example of a gender role expectation. This reflects how the black women of Insecure

were less likely to succumb to gender role expectations while together as a group of

female friends, as opposed to *Girls* where Marnie felt the need to take on the role as the

"mother" of the group.

Comparing Episodes "Hella Questions" and "Leave Me Alone"

In episodes "Hella Questions" and "Leave Me Alone" there are underlying

similarities that arise from the comparison of these episodes. Starting with the themes,

each episode involves the personal and professional lives of these characters, Issa, Molly, of *Insecure* and Hannah and Marnie of *Girls*. The analysis reveals that indications of gender representation were expressed through emotional approaches to situations by 42% of the content in *Insecure* and 56% of the content in *Girls.* The common shared emotions that were linked to the themes of these episodes were jealousy and frustration. For example, Issa is jealous of her ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend because she still has feelings for him. Molly, Tiffany and Kelli try to be supportive, to help her find out more about the new girl and talk badly about her to make Issa feel better. Although Issa chooses an alternative to express her feeling by her series famous venting technique of rapping to herself in the mirror. This is how she chooses to expresses her emotions rather than getting angry or reveal any sort of pettiness in front of her friends. Another emotional approach Issa takes in regards to the new girlfriend is by stalking her on Instagram and Facebook to uncover more about her and compare her life to her own. This is how modern women of the millennial generation deal with jealous thoughts and emotions.

In the episode "Leave Me Alone" Hannah shows jealous and judgmental behavior during her former classmate's book party. After sensing Hannah's jealous tension Jessa and Shoshana use humor and sarcasm to lighten the mood and make Hannah feel better. Hannah then decides to approach her former classmate and disingenuously congratulates her on the success of her book and the book party

followed by passive aggressive compliments and undermines her lack of interest with her as a writer and her attendance at the party.

Throughout these episodes frustration is a common emotion expressed by these women. Molly is frustrated by her inability to stand out amongst her white male colleagues at the law firm. Therefore, she pushes herself to work extra hours and takes on additional cases with a former female coworker in Chicago. Molly goes out of her way to prove herself when she engages in conversation with the female receptionist upon hearing that the firm is attending a hockey game and therefore decides to expresses interest in the sport. After feeling overwhelmed in having to juggle several tasks and work to impress others, Molly seeks validation and clarity from her therapist about the way her life "should" be as a successful black woman.

Hannah talks with Marnie about how she was a "bitch" towards her old classmate at her book party and how the problem isn't with her classmate's success it's a reflection of her own self-pity. Then discusses how she needs to take chances in order to become the successful writer she wishes to be by taking part in an essay reading. In terms of the content I found from these episodes I could see how emotional approaches to situations happen regularly when a woman is passionate about something they instantly act by putting their emotions first. As opposed to race stereotypes, gender role expectations and race identity which were mentioned infrequently throughout each of the episodes (See Appendix pg. 29-31)

Discussion

HBO series *Girls* and *Insecure* define race and gender in a way that young

modern women are able to deliberately see themselves represented on television.

Which thereby answers how information regarding race and gender are being sent out

to the viewing public. The most prominent variable of this study was the emotional

approaches to situations displayed throughout each of the series episodes. There were

limited indications of gender role exceptions in both, and more of a focus on gender

stereotypes than racial stereotypes shown throughout each series. Conclusively, there

were more indications of race identity and names used to describe one another seen in

Insecure than in *Girls*. As writers and creators of the series Issa Rae and Lena Dunham

highlight what it is like to be a young black woman and a young white woman and

uncover truths within the millennial generation. As Stamps states in his article, "For

viewers who only witness other races from their television set, they now get to witness

diversity among people and also similarities in how other races interact, their family

structure, and engage in their emotional and social encounters." (Stamps 417) The

women of these series command their places in society and don't conform themselves

to how a male audience member would expect them to be portrayed. They seek to defy

where Van Damme states, "Men are attributed greater worth and importance than

women of the same race and class, even if their activities are similar or alike (as in the

glass ceiling-syndrome)." (Van Damme 79) As a millennial, I can advocate that women now have more of a dominant role in taking responsibility for themselves financially, sexually and politically and shows like *Insecure* and *Girls* thereby reflect upon this. This is where the "parasocial relationship" between the character and viewers that Hewes, Gregg, Schippa and Singh discuss in their articles and this comes into play in my life. (Hewes, Gregg, Schippa 4, Singh) I find that I am able to connect with and relate to the experiences that occurred in the lives of the female characters in both series. The main takeaways from this research are as follows, in regards to *Girls*, neither Hannah, Marnie, Jessa or Shoshanna addressed themselves as being a "white woman" in either episode. This shows how typically white society is less stigmatized and therefore refrains from using self-identifiers. In *Insecure* the women's expression of race identity was seen through identifying with cultural icons I think this is ultimately a way in which people feel they can both connect and relate themselves to a specific discourse. I think the names used to address one another in the series *Insecure* showed a sense of endearment, camaraderie, and humor expressed within the group. As opposed to the women in *Girls* which I found particularly interesting considering how in a group of women they would collectively use the term "guys" instead of "ladies" or "girls." In the social context, by using the term "guys" to address an entire group of women this represents how the male dominant society effects women's subconscious by referring to a group of women as "guys". By analyzing each of the women within these shows, I

think that with the variety of variables I chose for this study each provided further understanding of the specific aspects of race and gender. Ultimately explained through the higher percentages of names used to describe one another and emotional approaches to situations versus lower percentages of race identity and gender role expectations.

Conclusion

This study's sample was regulated to include four episodes based on similar plot lines within each of the shows that were coded to obtain information on race and gender. With several episodes of *Girls* and prospective seasons of *Insecure* to choose from this makes for more research and discussion on identity representation on television. Alternate variables to identify race and gender within these series could also be selected to expand the research further. The future analysis of the show *Insecure* could focus on the show as it progresses with new seasons, if the representation of gender and race continues to evolve and how societal issues influence the content within the show. Additionally, research based on television shows could include the representation of male characters and races other than black and white. Taking it one step further future research could focus on mixed race represented in television and whether or not the topic of multiculturalism is addressed enough on television. In terms of gender related content the topic of transgender representation in television is

another area that could be explored to identify the direction of identity construction

stories. This could be influential for the transgender community and informative those

outside of the LGBTQ community. The main takeaway from this research study is for the

conversation and curiosity to continue on how young white women and young black

women are being presented to the viewing public on primetime television.

Appendix

Table 1. Race Defined Within Episodes of Girls and Insecure. (%)

Episode	Identity	Stereotypes	Names Used to Describe One Another
Insecure: "Broken as Fuck"	16%	28%	56%
Girls: "Beach House"	33.33…%	33.33…%	33.33…%
Insecure: "Hella Questions"	34%	17%	49%
Girls: "Leave Me Alone"	30%	0%	70%

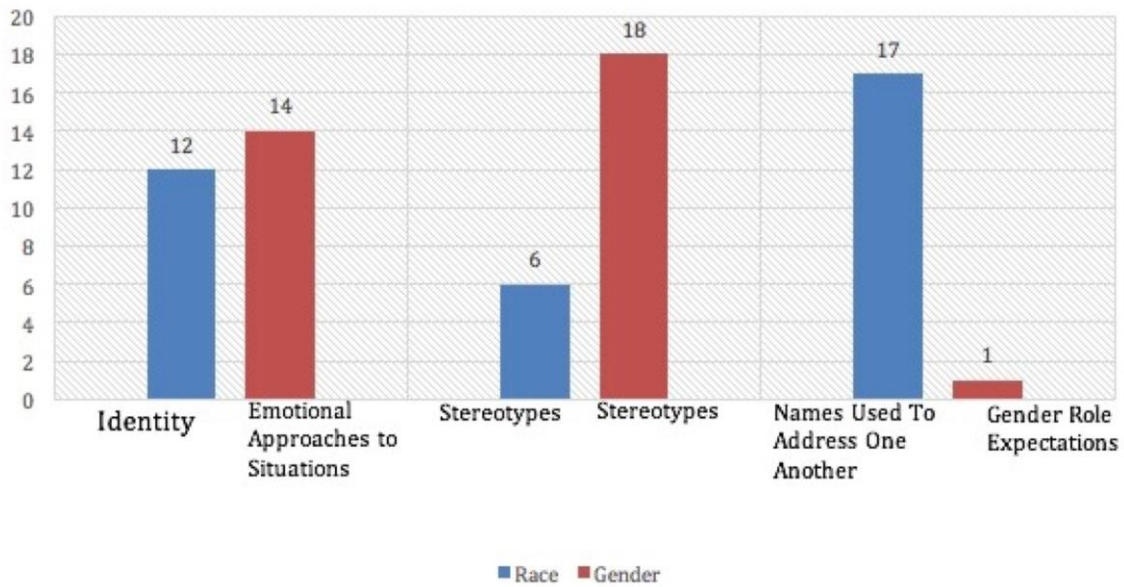Table 2. Gender Defined Within Episodes of Girls and Insecure. (%)

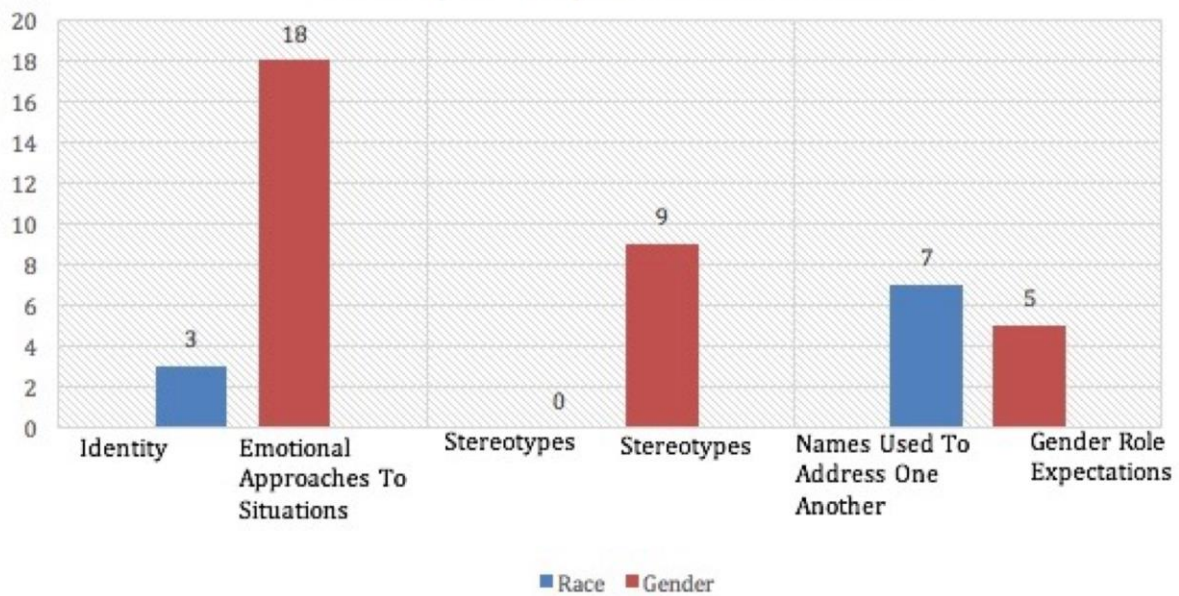| Episode	Emotional Approach to Situations	Stereotypes	Gender Role Expectation
Insecure: "Broken as Fuck"	52%	45%	3%
Girls: "Beach House"	45%	31%	24%
Insecure: "Hella Questions"	42%	55%	3%
Girls: "Leave Me Alone"	56%	28%	16%

Girls- (S03E07) "Beach House"
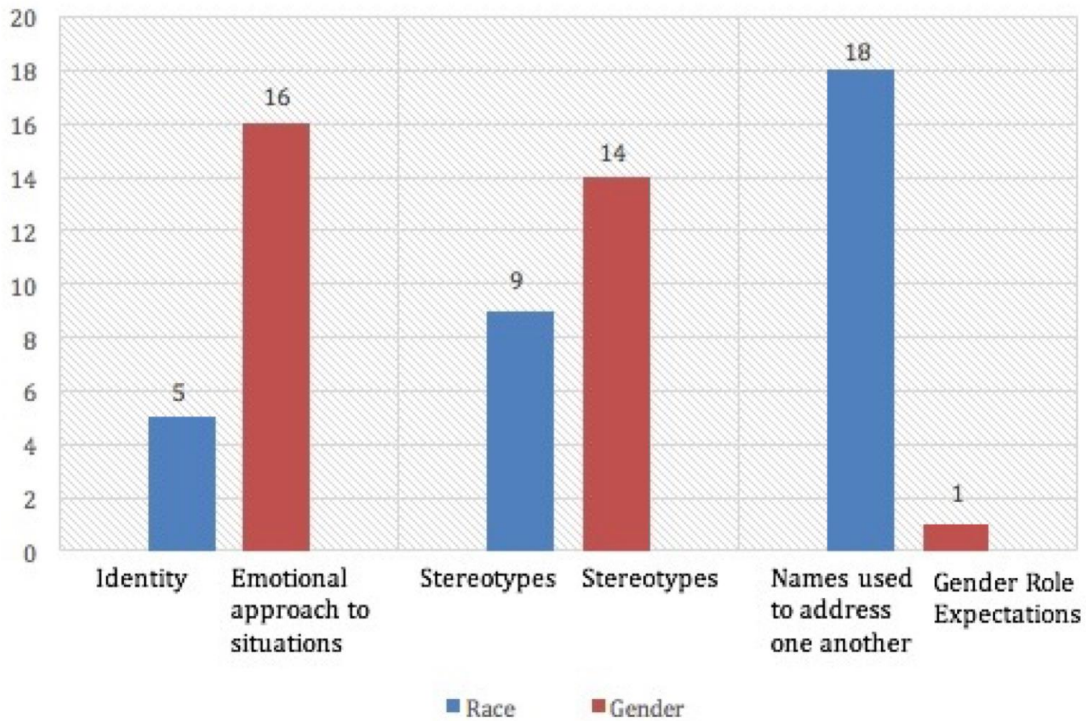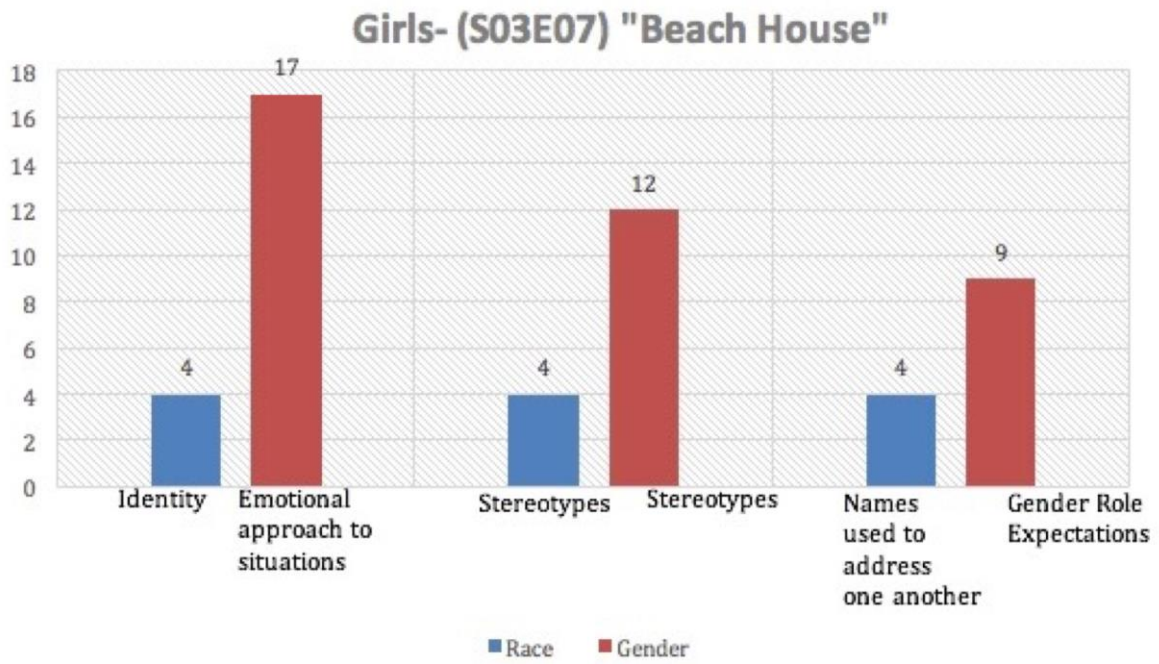
Insecure- (S02E02) "Hella Questions"

Girls- (S01E09) "Leave Me Alone"

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