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# Disrupting” the Broadcast: Female Showrunners as 21st Century “Fangirl” Feminist Rhetors

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“Disrupting” the Broadcast:  
Female Showrunners as 21<sup>st</sup> Century “Fangirl” Feminist Rhetors

A Thesis  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

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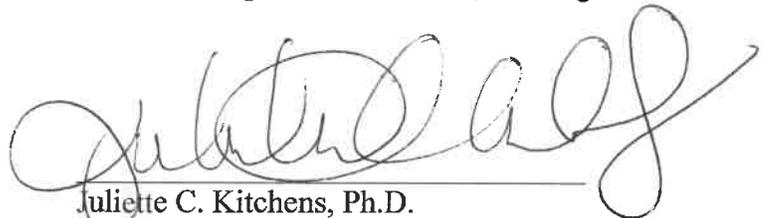
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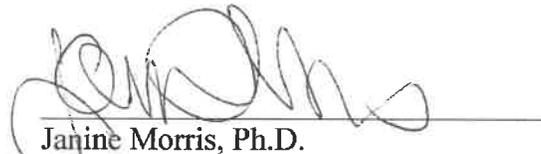
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## Abstract

Despite being considered a female-driven discipline, previous scholarship and personal testimonies indicate that composition remains solidly a “boys’ club.” Popular media is male-dominated as well, resulting in on-screen representations of women that, written from the male perspective, tend toward one-dimensionality. Recently, more women are permeating Hollywood writers’ rooms and producing multi-layered stories that offset the aforementioned portrayals. This thesis examines how showrunners Marti Noxon, Jenji Kohan, and Shonda Rhimes have redefined female representation on-screen—and subsequently, perceptions of women in real life—by crafting nuanced, female-driven narratives. Elements analyzed include: themes present in Noxon’s *Sharp Objects* (2018) and *Dietland* (2018), Kohan’s *Weeds* (2004-2012) and *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-2019), and Rhimes’s *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005- ) and *Scandal* (2012-2018); critical reviews of said shows; interviews given by each showrunner; applicable social media posts; and variations in circulation and creative leniency of each televisual work. Existing literature on composition studies, public-facing work, rhetorical feminism, and gender in popular media is also explored. An apparent correlation exists between feminist archivists’ “uncovering” of women’s historical and rhetorical contributions, feminist rhetoricians’ “disruption” of academic and professional spheres, and female showrunners’ insistence on the legitimization of women’s lived experiences. Thus, Noxon’s, Kohan’s, and Rhimes’s contributions further “publicize” counterpublic, female concerns by disseminating these stories to large audiences via the accessible medium of television.

### **Introduction: Staking a Claim in Composition**

[A] woman who has lived many things and who sees lines and colors as an expression of living—might say something that a man can't... I feel there is something unexplored about woman that only a woman can explore—Men have done all they can do about it.

—Georgia O'Keefe (1925)

Composition has long been considered a “feminized” field, both academically and professionally (Holbrook, 1991, p. 201; Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008, pp. 318-319; Stenberg, 2015, p. 35). This label has several connotations; it may refer to the number of women that have taught the discipline at various academic levels (Holbrook, 1991, p. 206; Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008, pp. 318-319). More women teach composition than men, therefore, the field is “feminized” by a majority rule. Composition’s “feminization” could also be attributed to female scholars’ significant contributions to the field’s inception. In perusing early texts on the teaching of composition, one would come across an abundance of scholarship produced by its “foremothers”—Lisa Ede, Janet Emig, Elizabeth Flynn, Linda Flower, Nancy Sommers, and Andrea Lunsford, among others (Flynn, 1988, p. 424; Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008, p. 312). These women helped lay the foundation for the burgeoning field and established their views as part and parcel with the tenets of composition.

Being that these women’s contributions were considered crucial to the discipline by a number of their colleagues—Robert A. Bennett, former president of NCTE, was a vocal ally (Ritchie & Boardman, 1999, pp. 589-590; Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008, p. 313)—one would assume that composition has always been a progressive, “safe space” for

female perspectives (Holbrook, 1991, pp. 206-207; Ritchie & Boardman, 1999, p. 594). While this notion is not necessarily incorrect, it does paint an incomplete picture, and is thus false by omission. Among the literature of the 1970s and 80s written by several of their White, male colleagues, there exists a through-line of derision that serves as a reminder of who ultimately decided what was of “common concern” for the field as a whole (Flynn, 1988, p. 425; Stenberg, 2015, p. 20; Warner, 2002, p. 108). When composition was first emerging as a field, “women’s work” was made manifest in the classroom; publishing power was a privilege afforded to very few women prior to the foremothers’ breakthrough(s). The women pioneering composition praxis were eclipsed by their male counterparts’ “scholarly status” (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008, pp. 318-319, 322), and the strides they took academically were belittled as “drudge work” (Holbrook, 1991, p. 207). Thus, the “feminization” of composition is also often associated with weakness, as the “authoritative” essence of the gatekeepers takes precedence over the “nurturing” nature of the practitioners, relegating the latter to inferiority (Flynn, 1988, p. 423; Stenberg, 2015, p. 29). Personal testimonies of women in the field further confirm this notion; many of them summarize their career paths as years of hard work with serendipitous opportunities sprinkled throughout (Flynn & Bourelle, 2018; Ritchie & Boardman, 1999, pp. 585, 588, 597; Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008, p. 314).

In the 1960s and 70s, women in academia participated in research and discussions that “cross-fertiliz[ed]” disciplines (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. ix) and in doing so, gathered scholarly support to ground their claims (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008). Notably, women in psychology worked with their complements in composition to examine women’s writing practices across time—where they wrote, what they wrote about, and

how their writing measured up on the scale of importance dictated by societal norms. They analyzed the available written work of women—student essays of that time, as well as “extracurricular” texts (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008, p. 320) like diaries, cookbooks, and letters of women throughout history (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 60). In doing so, scholars developed an understanding of the fundamental differences in men’s and women’s ways of writing, which stemmed from practices they were taught that influenced their ways of thinking (Flynn, 1988; Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008, pp. 315-316, 320). Their research reiterated a point with which women in academia were quite familiar: the things that came naturally to men—their privileged themes, techniques, and rhetorical tendencies—were deemed the rubric, and women en masse were forced to work within a system that constantly suppressed and reframed their experiences (Flynn, 1988, p. 425; Ritchie & Boardman, 1999, p. 591; Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008; Stenberg, 2015). The findings generated from this “extracurricular” textual analysis further emphasized that, as Sheridan-Rabideau succinctly puts it, “gender is a difference that makes a difference” (2008, p. 313). In short, the “feminization” of composition is both a blessing and a curse, as the niche afforded by the discipline allowed women’s rhetorical contributions to flourish, but never more than that of their male counterparts.

Because men have long dominated the discourse of composition, they have also set the field’s standards. Women responded by forming communities of support both within and outside of the discipline, engaging in a “subterranean” dialogue (Ritchie & Boardman, 1999, p. 587) and opening the floor for voices that tended toward the margins (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 34; Stenberg, 2015). Feminist scholars took note of these “subterranean,” cross-disciplinary conversations being had by women across academic

fields, and formulated methodologies that “disrupted” the status quo by interpreting women’s work on its own merits, further “uncovering” (Flynn, 1988, p. 434) previously disregarded patterns of thought and lived experiences (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, pp. 72, 79; Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008; Stenberg, 2015).

Women in composition can be considered the “Trojan Horse” of this text. Their status as a subset of their respective discourse community is a reflection of women’s place in most other academic and professional spheres, one being the film and television industry. I have chosen to further explore women’s “subterranean” existence in the arena of popular media, in an effort to draw a parallel to the cross-disciplinary relegation they continue to experience in academia and beyond. In analyzing the bodies of work of Marti Noxon, Jenji Kohan, and Shonda Rhimes, I posit with this thesis that, like the feminist scholars touched on above, these three female television showrunners are “uncovering” women’s lived experiences by repurposing the false narratives written by men that have perpetuated throughout time. As fans of television, they are recomposing the one-dimensional portrayals of women past, and in their stead are redistributing narratives that present women in a nuanced, “flawed” fashion. Using the highly accessible and circulatory medium of television, they are working to reframe perceptions of women and their ways of being in the minds of audiences en masse. Thus, these three women in particular are acting as 21<sup>st</sup> century “fangirl” feminist rhetors—“publicizing” the “common concerns” of women that until recently have been grossly misrepresented on-screen, as have women themselves.

In the first section of the review of literature that follows, I elaborate on the notions of publics, counterpublics, and subaltern counterpublics, as well as the ways in

which they interact and overlap. I also expand on feminist scholars' championing of the archive—a space that has served as a goldmine of women's discounted, “unrecorded” experiences—and provide examples of women who have been exhumed from archived materials and subsequently woven into history. In Section II, I define the television industry-specific constructs of “showrunner” and “writers' room,” and delineate the responsibilities and practices of each, as well as elaborate on their varied iterations and implementations over time. With this section in particular, my aim was to highlight the parallel experiences of women in the television industry to those of women in academia and female rhetors past: all are relegated to the margins. As a result, men continue serve as the primary cultural and historical lens for the general population, and thus continue to dictate what is of “common concern.” In the third and final section of the review of literature, I define rhetorical velocity and circulation, and highlight the importance of each in the maintenance and perpetuation of public/counterpublic rhetoric. Within this section, I also note the embodiment of rhetorical velocity in the participatory culture of Twitter, with a particular focus on the recent “hashtag movements” (e.g., #MeToo), and emphasize the opportunity for increased circulation through streaming platforms (e.g., Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime).

After a description of the methodology chosen for this project, the remaining chapters are dedicated to the case studies. Within each, I give a brief overview of their respective biographies and career chronologies, and then home in on descriptions and critical receptions of select shows—Noxon's *Sharp Objects* (2018) and *Dietland* (2018), Kohan's *Weeds* (2004-2012) and *Orange Is the New Black* (2013- ), and Rhimes's *Grey's Anatomy* (2005- ) and *Scandal* (2012-2018). I elaborate on the themes Noxon, Kohan,

and Rhimes each choose to highlight within their bodies of work and compare their descriptions to critic responses. Additionally, I consider the influence of Noxon's and Rhimes's Twitter accounts and analyze the messages they are recomposing and redistributing through that platform. In the conclusion, I note the overlap in the case study subjects' showrunning practices and thematic tendencies, and classify their contributions to the televisual landscape as culturally successive to those of feminist rhetors past.

Following the conclusion, the references for each show's reviews are located in the appendices.

## Literature Review

### Coming Together as a Counterpublic

Public spheres, as first explained by Jürgen Habermas, are spaces (both physical and theoretical) where people (both unfamiliar and acquainted) come together to discuss “common concerns” of society (Farmer, 2013, pp. 57, 97-98; Fraser, 1990, p. 58; Warner, 2002). As evidenced up to this point, the White, male lens has served as the standard in most academic and professional (i.e., “public”) spheres, as well as the ticket of entry required to participate in said discourse communities (Glenn, 1995, p. 289; Royster & Kirsh, 2012, pp. 30, 51, 98-99; Warner, 2002, p. 108). Historically, the response to women’s assumed lack of “authoritative knowledge” was to sequester them to private spaces, like the home, where they could engage in writing practices specific to their ascribed roles (Flynn, 1988, p. 425).<sup>1</sup> Women’s imposed seclusion, as well as that of other marginalized groups, led to the emergence “counterpublics”—spheres that allowed these subordinated subsets to commiserate and “expand discursive space” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) by making way for “alternative” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 8) ways of “thinking and writing” (Flynn, 1988, pp. 431-432), speaking and being (Farmer, 2013, p. 67; Warner, 2002, pp. 121-122).

Habermas’ public sphere is limited in its scope; by not accounting for the presence of counterpublics, his version can only exist in a vacuum of time and circumstance. Since he first released *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in 1962, responses to it have varied between criticism, deconstruction, and

<sup>1</sup> Sources that further detail women’s writing practices and ascribed spaces in history are: Flynn (1988, p. 425), Fraser (1990), Hastie, (2007), Jack (2009), Johnson (2002), Royster & Kirsch (2012, pp. 60, 98-99), and Stenberg, (2015).

reconfiguration. Likely the most comprehensive response to Habermas comes from Nancy Fraser in her 1990 essay, “Rethinking the Public Sphere.” In it, Fraser notes that the public is actually “constituted by a number of significant exclusions” (p. 59) and builds on the counterpublic construct by introducing the “subaltern counterpublic” (p. 67). The subaltern counterpublic is an amalgamation of Gayatri Spivak’s “subaltern,” referring to groups of people that are voiceless, “oppressed,” and “nonrepresented” (1988, pp. 83-84, 87); and Rita Felski’s “feminist counter-public,” that “challeng[es] existing structures of authority through political activity and theoretical critique” in order to “convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims” (1989, p. 168; Fraser, 1990, p. 79n22; Warner, 2002, p. 118). While Felski’s feminist counter-public relies on “a gender-specific identity” (1989, p. 167), Fraser’s subaltern counterpublic disrupts the “public-private divide” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 24) and exposes publicness as a spectrum (Farmer, 2013, pp. 26, 98; Fraser, 1990, pp. 61, 67). Subaltern counterpublics, Fraser notes, act as forums for a variety of groups whose identities do not meet the “public” requisite, as their inherent distinctions contest the “common concerns” dictated by the White, male hegemony (e.g., “workers, peoples of color, and [LGBTQIA+]”) (1990, p. 67). To participate in the public, “extended access” must be granted (Farmer, 2013, pp. 97-98), and because this happens so infrequently, the top tier maintains its exclusivity and homogeneity (Fraser, 1990, pp. 61, 64).

Eminent masculine domain over the public sphere, and the subsequent relegation of women to counterpublic status, are not unique to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Andrea Lunsford notes in her edited collection, *Reclaiming Rhetorica* (1995), “tradition has never recognized the forms, strategies, and goals used by many women as ‘rhetorical’” (p. 6).

As far back as ancient Greece, Aristotle deemed women the “inferior” sex, “subject” to the male “ruler” (Glenn, 1995, p. 295; Stenberg, 2015, p. 20). “Conduct literature” of the Civil War era instructed both men and women on their proper places in society, thus training women in the art of “parlor rhetoric” (Johnson, 2002, pp. 15-16, 79); World War II workplace laws served as “acts of institution” that emphasized the home as women’s ideal domain, despite their wartime traversal outside it (Jack, 2009, pp. 288-289, 297-298). Throughout history, many women—particularly White, cisgender, heterosexual women—found themselves “devis[ing] their own voices” (Lunsford, 1995, p. x) and fashioning alternate “access routes” (Fraser, 1990, p. 61) to successfully venture into the public sphere. These women did so despite the risks associated with “going public” (Farmer, 2013, p. 100): loss of respect from personal and professional contemporaries; loss of implicit protection entwined with private life; loss of a set place in any number of private and public spheres.<sup>2</sup> While many of these particular women did manage to permeate the public sphere—Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Kate Sanborn, and Susan B. Anthony’s “domestica[tion of] the podium” as 20<sup>th</sup> century suffragettes being one prominent example (Johnson, 2002, p. 144)—counterpublics offered “alternative” communities of internal circulation (Stenberg, 2015, p. 105): classrooms and clubs doubled as support groups, where conversations were had of issues that were “previously unseen and unconsidered” because they did not permeate the public sphere (Jack, 2009, pp. 287-288).<sup>3</sup> These spaces organically gave way to discussions surrounding “sexism,”

<sup>2</sup> Sources that elaborate on the potential dangers that counterpublics face in “going public” are Glenn (1995), Farmer (2013, p. 102), Jack (2009), Johnson (2002), Sheridan-Rabideau (2008), and Warner (2002, p. 13).

<sup>3</sup> Various examples of “subterranean” counterpublic communities of support are elaborated on in Flynn & Bourelle (2018), Gere (1987, pp. 41-52), Royster & Kirsch (2012, p. 8; 2018, pp. 171-172), and Stenberg (2015, p. 10, 27).

‘the double shift,’ ‘sexual harassment’” (Fraser, 1990, pp. 67, 71), “domestic violence” (Farmer, 2013, pp. 98-99), “reproductive rights [and] equal pay” (Larabee, 2018, p. 8). However, many other women across eras—particularly women who were any combination of non-White, non-wealthy, and/or LGBTQIA+—continued to be discounted. Only in the last four decades have feminist archivists pieced together the “cultural debris” (Farmer, 2013, p. 32) that revealed women’s “rhetorical capacity” as orators and agitators (Lunsford, 1995, p. ix).<sup>4</sup>

The archive has proven a “critical feminist space” (Graban & Sullivan, 2018, pp. 189-190),<sup>5</sup> as it has allowed scholars to “transform memories ... into histories” (Hastie, 2007, p. 14) and “locate a rhetorical presence, rather than absence” for women who were “silhouetted, if not altogether invisible” throughout history (Royster & Kirsch, 2018, p. 175; Stenberg, 2015, p. 19). Although their domestically-crafted compositions were often unlisted, many of those texts—cookbooks, scrapbooks, personal communications, medical records, oral histories, and financial ledgers—have recently been recovered by feminist archivists engaging in thorough recovery practices. By reassessing and resituating these “nontraditional” texts (Gaillet, 2019, p. 260; Jack, 2009, p. 287), feminist archivists are simultaneously calling attention to the partial “fallibility” of recorded history (Flynn, 1988, p. 425; Hastie, 2007, p. 16) and “broadening” the parameters of historical significance (Hastie, 2007, p. 14), “interrupt[ing] a seamless

<sup>4</sup> Additional women in history who have been uncovered as a result of feminist archival practices, as well as further detail on the above-mentioned, are noted in Gaillet & Bailey (2019), Glenn (1995), Graban & Sullivan (2018), Hastie (2007), Jack (2009), Johnson (2002), Royster & Kirsch (2012, p. 88; 2018, p. 175), Thompson (2015), Scott (1989), and Stenberg (2015).

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that not all women’s recovery projects are necessarily feminist (e.g., Lynée Gaillet’s recovery of George Jardine’s rhetorical contributions). However, I argue that those recovering women’s historical and rhetorical presence are engaging in feminist practices.

narrative” and fostering “understanding, exploration, connection, and conversation” (Lunsford, 1995, p. 6) stemming from these “scattered” pockets of history (Guglielmo, 2019, p. 2). By piecing together the widely accessible “extracurricular” “cultural debris”—in the form of critic reviews, relevant tweets, and assorted interviews—of my chosen case study subjects, I, too am engaging in a kind of 21<sup>st</sup>-century archival practice by emphasizing the significance of these three women’s bodies of work within the cultural landscape.

While feminist archivists were recovering women’s presence throughout history, the aforementioned “subterranean” counterpublic communities were also serving as spaces of preparation for *external* circulation—something that publics and counterpublics both depend on for maintenance (Warner, 2002, pp. 90-91). Those with guaranteed access to the public sphere had (and continue to have) the resources to maintain hold of the narrative and perpetuate specific “common concerns” (Farmer, 2013, pp. 97-98; Warner, 2002, p. 122). Counterpublics’ response to this exclusion was to engage in grassroots “DIY” circulation, like the proliferation of “anarchist zines” (Farmer, 2013, pp. 47-49) and self-started publishing houses and bookstores (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008, p. 322).<sup>6</sup> Over time, counterpublics’ amassing of resources coincided with the advent of the internet, which amplified circulation of those newly defined concerns and expanded their reach significantly (Farmer, 2013, p. 74; Hidalgo, 2017; Warner, 2002, p. 91). This new amplified presence, coupled with newly accessible and digitized historical materials, tremendously benefitted the varied causes of the subaltern counterpublic of women.

<sup>6</sup> For more details on the grassroots circulation methods of counterpublics past, as well as the kinds of issues they took up, see Farmer (2013, pp. 47-49, 71-72), Fraser (1990), Glenn (1995, 2018), Royster & Kirsch (2012, 2018), Sheridan, Ridolfo, & Michel (2012), and Warner (2002, pp. 36, 38).

### **"Women's Work" in Popular Media—Sometimes by Them, Oftentimes for Them**

As noted at the start of the previous section, publics and counterpublics exist in varying degrees—not only in opposition to one another, but *within* each other. While counterpublics' members share certain experiences, they must still contend with the dominant publics that dictate the parameters in which they exist societally, socially, professionally, and so on. These “alternative spaces” afforded by counterpublic culture (Stenberg, 2015, p. 105) have taken on many forms—one being the composition classroom, as mentioned in the introduction, and another being Hollywood writers' rooms. The film and television industries are very much dominated by the White, male perspective, and despite TV's status as “the writers' medium” (Hong, 2011), women who are staff writers, and even those in positions of relative power as executive producers, have attempted to reeducate the general public through authentic female portrayals but been stifled by the majority rule. But before delving into the kinds of work women in film and television have been consuming and, to a lesser degree, producing, some context must first be provided on the “showrunner” and “writers' room” constructs that scaffold the television industry.

A showrunner is, as Scott Collins succinctly put it, a “hyphenate”—someone who has to juggle the creative and logistical elements at play in the process of running a successful television show (2007). The term entered the general lexicon between the late 1980s and early 1990s, replacing “executive producer with creative control” (Hong, 2011; Nussbaum, 2011). Showrunners dictate the direction of the story, ensuring that the

final product is a reflection of their specific voice.<sup>7</sup> They also ensure that the concepts they propose are not compromised by staff writers' and executives' contributions, with premium cable and streaming platforms offering more creative freedom and budgetary support than ad-controlled network channels.<sup>8</sup>

While showrunners deal with the brunt of the work, there are “managerial hierarchies” in place—professional support systems that assist them in realizing their creative vision(s) (Mittell, 2015, p. 91). Because the duties of a showrunner are varied and often overwhelming, the hiring of a versatile writing staff is crucial to a show's long-term success. Writers' rooms are to television what peer review workshops are to academic writing. They are spaces that serve as springboards for ideas that will ultimately form the product seen on-screen—a product that must first jump through hoops in the form of notes and rewrites from studio and network executives. Writers' rooms are at the heart of the television creation process, having been established as standard practice as early as the 1950s with show pioneers like *The Goldbergs* (1949-1957), *Your Show of Shows* (1950-1954), and *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957) (Henderson, 2011; Press, 2018, p. 4). Though writers' rooms vary in size and process across genres, most fall into one of two camps: 1) the staff writers put each episode's story together, beginning to end, and hand the group effort to the showrunner for tonal rewrites; or 2) the showrunner delegates specific stories to each writer, who work on their respective drafts and submit them back

<sup>7</sup> Sources that elaborate showrunners' duties include Abbott (2018), Aziz (2018), Bennett (2014), Blakey (2017), Collins (2007), Hong (2011), Kallas (2014), Mittell (2015), Phalen & Osellame (2012), and Press (2018, pp. 8-10).

<sup>8</sup> The varying degrees of showrunners' creative freedom based on what platforms their programs air are alluded to in Amoruso (2018), Bennett (2014), Bielby (2009), Collins (2007), Blakey (2017), Gilbert (2018a), Harrod & Paszkiewicz (2017), Hazelton (2018), Kallas (2014), Littleton (2015), Mittell (2015, p. 91), Phalen & Osellame (2012), and Press (2018, p. 287).

to the showrunner, who will then offer notes before submitting a cohesive set of drafts to executives (Kallas, 2014; Mittell, 2015, pp. 90-91; Phalen & Osellame, 2012, pp. 4, 8; Press, 2018, p. 10).

To better suit contemporary audiences, both writers' rooms and showrunners have evolved with the medium they serve, adapting to the pace of streaming and binge-watching<sup>9</sup> and crafting new discourse communities by forging “public, engaged, and interactive” relationships with fans via social media (Mittell, 2015, pp. 100-101).<sup>10</sup> However, while Hollywood was quick to adapt technologically (arguably to ensure profit), it remains antiquated in other, more traditional ways. Statistics and anecdotal evidence show that, as is the case in most other professional spheres, men maintain control of the film and television upper echelon.<sup>11</sup> Executives in the industry typically demonstrate a “preference for male candidates” when hiring writers and directors (Heldman & Haggard, 2017, p. 5), claiming that women are “too risky” to consider (Bielby, 2009, p. 247; Erigha, 2015, p. 84) because their experiences are not generalizable and are therefore considered “small topics” (Schilling, 2017). This preferential practice homogenizes Hollywood professional circles and maintains the conditions of “comfort” established by and for those men—a point that is constantly

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Netflix, streaming, and the “binge-watching” phenomenon, see: Blakey (2017), Erigha (2015, pp. 87-88), Householder & Trier-Bieniek (2016), Kohan (2013), Lagerwey (2017), Littleton (2015), Mittell (2015, pp. 41, 165), Netflix Media Center (2017a, 2017b, 2018), Nussbaum (2017), Poniewozik (2018b), Press (2018, pp. 241-242, 287), and Rhimes & Stivers (2017).

<sup>10</sup> The rhetorical affordances of social media for television showrunners and larger public discourse are further detailed in Section III of this literature review (pp. 20-27).

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the lack of gender equality in the television and film industry, see: Abbott (2018), Bennett (2014), Bielby (2009), Erigha (2015), Heldman & Haggard (2017), Kallas (2014), Lauzen (2018), Mittell (2015, pp. 103-104, 149-150), and Press (2018).

reiterated when female showrunners are asked why women are seemingly unable to move up in the business.<sup>12</sup>

This hiring pattern also reinforces the highbrow/lowbrow programming binary. As early as 1950, television programming's "day-parted" nature took form (Householder & Trier-Bieniek, 2016, p. 12; Lagerwey, 2017, p. 199): "trashy" soap operas would air during the day, for housewives relegated to the domestic sphere to consume (Buonanno, 2017, p. ix), and "serious" evening programming would cater to the tastes of hardworking men (Mittell, 2015, pp. 233-234). Because women have had little say in writers' rooms and beyond, their on-screen portrayals—as penned by men—have walked the line between inanity and insult. Carmela Soprano and Skylar White are but two examples of women that were villainized in service of softening their antihero husbands' narratives (Gunn, 2013; Mittell, 2015, p. 347).<sup>13</sup> Without a voice to ground the work in reality, these depictions have perpetuated false stereotypes and kept women "one-dimensional" (Richwine, 2018)—examples including, but not limited to, the loving mother, the doting wife, the mild-mannered secretary (Buonanno, 2017, p. x), and the "manic pixie dream girl" love interest (Rabin, 2014). Any attempt by a woman to rectify these stock characterizations and accurately portray a woman onscreen was deemed "too female" for general audiences (Dockterman, 2019).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Sources that elaborate on obstacles women face when attempting to achieve heightened success in Hollywood are Bennett (2014), Bielby (2009), Boboltz & Williams (2016), Erigha (2015), Kallas (2014), Noxon (2016d, 2018u, 2018v, 2019a, 2019d), Nussbaum (2017), and Press (2018, pp. 7, 284).

<sup>13</sup> Sources that elaborate on women's inaccurate portrayals at the hands of male auteurs include Bennett (2014), Erigha (2015), Heldman & Haggard (2017), and Noxon (2012, 2013c, 2013d, 2014a, 2017h, 2017n, 2018r, 2018x, 2019j, 2019k).

<sup>14</sup> Other sources that list stereotypical female portrayals written from the male perspective, as well as those that lament the delegitimization of "women's problems" in popular media are Householder & Trier-Bieniek

As women permeated more primetime writers' rooms, some found themselves gravitating toward specific creative tropes—fast-paced plotlines and emotionally affective characters, among others. Because those conventions originated in soap operas, critics refused to take their work seriously, despite praising the “narrative complexity” of stories written by men who employed those same techniques (Lagerwey, 2017, p. 201).<sup>15</sup> Other female content creators worked as staff writers in genres that were “more accepting” of the female perspective like science fiction (Abbott, 2018) and serial melodramas, but feared being “pigeonholed” (Bennett, 2014, p. 72; Kallas, 2014, pp. 72-73) or “typecast” (Bielby, 2009, p. 245; Erigha, 2015, p. 79) if found to be too successful in any one arena. Others still have taken a more unconventional approach and opted to defy categorization altogether, instead “subverting genre paradigms” (Harrod & Paszkiewicz, 2017, p. 7) and existing in a state of “genre non-conformity” (Toomer, 2019)—a technique that gave rise to the dramedy subgenre.<sup>16</sup> Of particular note are shows that utilize “promiscuous protagonism,” a form of storytelling that employs a “roving narrative sympathy” across an ensemble instead of focusing on the redemption of one seemingly irredeemable antihero (Loofbourow, 2015). This narrative technique has proven to be fertile ground for authentic female-driven storytelling, as it allows for nuanced depictions of the various facets of female experience in ways traditional genre structures have fallen short. High ratings suggest that programming in this vein has struck

(2016, p. 5), Noxon (2012, 2013a, 2013c, 2013d, 2015a, 2017n, 2018b, 2018g, 2018l, 2018r, 2018w, 2018x, 2019c, 2019e, 2019f, 2019j, 2019k), O’Neill (2018), and Rhimes (2012a, 2014b, 2018a).

<sup>15</sup> Sources that further describe female content creators’ inability to legitimize work in the same vein as their male counterparts are Dockterman (2019), Goode (2016), Mittell (2015), Noxon (2019h), Nussbaum (2012, 2014b), Paskin (2013c), Press (2018), and Scott (2012, p. 51).

<sup>16</sup> Others that delve into the genre-bending habits of female showrunners include Erigha (2015, p. 79), Goode (2016), Harrod & Paszkiewicz (2017, pp. 7, 149), Mittell (2015), and Paskin (2018b).

a chord with general audiences, especially with women. However, genre non-conforming programming has also been derided by critics, as these shows' inability to be "pinned down" by genre conventions made them too convoluted and "tonally asynchronous" to merit any praise (Nussbaum, 2017; Press, 2018, p. 230). *Weeds* and *Grey's Anatomy* are two notable examples of shows that suffered from critical fallout, and both are elaborated on in their respective showrunners' case studies.<sup>17</sup>

Being a reflection of their overarching industry, writers' rooms perpetuate the same conditions of inclusion and exclusion. Originally, these creative spaces were populated by men pitching "off-color jokes" to one another (Henderson, 2011, pp. 150, 152), with the occasional woman quietly contributing (Phalen & Osellame, 2012, pp. 12-13, 17; Press, 2018, pp. 1-2). Writers' rooms have made progress in that they are no longer comprised of *just* men—in the 2017-2018 season, women made up 25% of broadcast network writing staffs, 23% of basic and premium cable writing staffs, and 27% of streaming services' writing staffs, though only making up 16% of writing staffs overall when men were in charge (Lauzen, 2018). From Lucille Kallen of *Your Show of Shows* (1950-1954) and Marlo Thomas of *That Girl* (1966-1971), to Jenny Bicks of *Sex and the City* (*SATC*, 1998-2004) and Janet Tamaro of *Rizzoli & Isles* (2010-2016), women in writers' rooms of all eras have had to deal with "othering" that forced them to compromise either their ideas or their integrity to keep a sought after seat at the staff writing table (Henderson, 2011, p. 147).<sup>18</sup> Because opportunities for female and ethnic

<sup>17</sup> *Weeds* is discussed in Jenji Kohan's case study section (pp. 52-56), and *Grey's Anatomy* in Shonda Rhimes's (pp. 65-70).

<sup>18</sup> Sources that detail various women's unpleasant experiences in writers' rooms throughout the industry's history are Bennett (2014), Bolonik (2007), Gilbert (2018a), Heldman & Haggard (2017), Kallas (2014), Kohan (2013), Noxon (2017g, 2018n, 2018u, 2018v), Nussbaum (2017), Phalen & Osellame (2012), and Press (2018).

minority writers are much fewer and further between, those who do break into the industry believe they must comply with their male colleagues' behavior to maintain the illusory "good fit" (Henderson, 2011, p. 152).

Women that are able to move up the industry ranks—past the "supervising producer" rut that so many seem unable to escape (Kallas, 2014, pp. 140-141)—have to contend with standards of conduct and success that are not expected of their male counterparts (Rhimes, 2015). Countless examples exist of male creatives who have engaged in inappropriate and unprofessional on-set behavior, but been given a "genius" pass and offered chances to redeem themselves with additional writing (and even showrunning) opportunities.<sup>19</sup> Being that they are serving as metaphorical representatives for an entire gender, women in those same positions have no choice but to "run tight ships" (Press, 2018, pp. 11-12), as they cannot afford to be labeled "difficult" and limit their chances for future work.<sup>20</sup> However, because they have been bound to these strictures, industry women have subsequently engaged in people-first, detail-oriented, emotionally conscious showrunning. The women in charge offer members of their writing staffs the ability to collaborate on a text that, while still stamped with the showrunner's voice, is "collectively produced" in a space that allows said collaboration

<sup>19</sup> Examples of men who have been given continuous opportunities in the industry despite abhorrent behavior are noted in De Maria (2017), Kallas (2014), Loofbourow (2015), Mittell (2015), Nussbaum (2017), and Press (2018).

<sup>20</sup> Women's experiences with industry criticism as compared to those of their male counterparts are alluded to in Bennett (2014, pp. 118-119), Dockterman (2019), Noxon (2016c, 2016h, 2018o, 2018t, 2018v), and Vineyard (2018).

to occur without fear (Loofbourow, 2015).<sup>21</sup> The resulting storytelling benefits from the input of various perspectives (Bennett, 2014; Kallas, 2014; Kohan, 2013).

In counterpublic fashion, female showrunners have created a tight-knit “sisterhood” of support (Littleton, 2015)—“The Woolf Pack”—whose members communicate frequently, offering each other advice and opportunities (Press, 2018, p. 288).<sup>22</sup> Women in showrunner positions work to recover “silhouetted” experiences by ensuring that they are creating opportunities for marginalized voices both on-screen and behind the scenes (Royster & Kirsch, 2018, p. 175). For every show in the 2017-2018 season that had a woman at the helm as either a showrunner or high-level producer, 42% of major characters reflected female experiences, a direct result of the 45% of writers and 32% of editors being women (Lauzen, 2018). Those with industry clout wield it in an effort to widen the “tiny apertures” women have been given to showcase their skills and portray their narratives (Kallas, 2014, p. 155).<sup>23</sup> Woolf Pack members Noxon, Kohan, and Rhimes, for example, each have their own production companies—Tiny Pyro, Tilted Productions, and Shondaland, respectively—that routinely hire women, forming “alternative spaces” (Stenberg, 2015, p. 105) that foster the creation and perpetuation of

<sup>21</sup> Differences in women’s and men’s showrunning practices are elaborated on in Bolonik (2007), Kallas (2014), Kohan (2013), Lauzen (2018), Littleton (2015), Nussbaum (2017), Paskin (2013c), Press (2018), Ryssdal & Hollenhorst (2018), and Schilling (2017).

<sup>22</sup> The Woolf Pack—named after Virginia Woolf and “her quest for a space for female creativity... ‘a room of one’s own’” (Press, 2018, p. 288)—is a yearly meeting of female TV showrunners that was created by Jenny Bicks, creator and showrunner of ABC’s *Men in Trees* (2006-2008), in conjunction with the Humanitas Foundation. Bicks started this “informal” gathering to better proliferate opportunities for writing, directing, and mentoring among women in the industry. The group has since grown tremendously and includes such names as Lena Dunham of HBO’s *Girls* (2012-2017), DeAnn Helene of ABC’s *The Middle* (2009-2018), Mindy Kaling of FOX’s *The Mindy Project* (2012-2017), and Liz Tigelaar of Hulu’s *Casual* (2015- ), among many others.

<sup>23</sup> Instances of women in the industry helping other women are noted in Dockterman (2019), Halcombe (2018), Hidalgo (2017), Kallas (2014), Littleton (2015), Kallas (2014, p. 143), Kohan (2013), Noxon (2016d, 2016e, 2017d, 2018h, 2019i), Nussbaum (2017), Press (2018), Rhimes (2019a), Schilling (2017), and Shondaland (2019u).

“previously unseen and unconsidered” stories *about* women (Jack, 2009, pp. 287-288). In offering these opportunities, they are taking advantage of a widely accessible source of cultural circulation—television—to “rewrite social scripts” (Harrod & Paszkiewicz, 2017, p. 6) by “writing about other women” (Hastie, 2007, p. 12) from a place of authenticity rather than imagination (Heldman & Haggard, 2017, p. 4; Hidalgo, 2017).

### **Rhetorical Velocity and Circulation of Female-Driven Narratives**

As previously noted, circulation is a crucial facet in both the formation and maintenance of the “various and overlapping” iterations (Sheridan, Ridolfo, & Michel, 2012, p. 29) of publics and counterpublics (Farmer, 2013; Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002). Such is certainly the case for members of the subaltern counterpublic of feminist rhetoric—a movement that seeped its way into the mainstream narrative by employing a variety of grassroots circulatory methods that publicized “women problems” (Noxon, 2019c).<sup>24</sup> These “DIY” circulatory means were successful in shedding light on topics that were widely experienced by many women, but oft ignored (Fraser, 1990, p. 71; Larabee, 2018; Warner, 2002). However, those means had finite ends: circulation of print materials required a budget for supplies and labor, as well as ample time and (wo)manpower to both produce and distribute the finished product(s). These material restraints, in addition to the parameters for publicness already in place, heavily restricted the kinds of “public” conversations that persisted. Nevertheless, their efforts did lay the groundwork for future feminist rhetors—a category within which I am including television showrunners—to capitalize on the more attainable means of production and

<sup>24</sup> Feminist rhetors’ grassroots circulatory methods are mentioned in Sec. I of the review of literature (pp. 7-11), as well as in Farmer (2013, pp. 15-17), Flynn (1988, p. 425), Fraser (1990), Ritchie and Boardman (1999), Royster and Kirsch (2012, p. ix; 2018), and Sheridan-Rabideau (2008).

distribution afforded by the increasingly digital nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These “fangirl” TV showrunners (Scott, 2012, p. 51) are taking the inaccurate female portrayals previously written by men that have saturated the medium and “repurposing” them (Jenkins, 2006, p. 137), making and disseminating new projects that are diversifying the televisual landscape and adding shades to perceptions of the female experience. These showrunners are also highly “interactive” (Nussbaum, 2011; Mittell, 2015, pp. 100-101), engaging directly with fans online in the “participatory culture”<sup>25</sup> afforded by social media (Arroyo, 2013; Scott, 2012, p. 51).

To properly situate female TV showrunners’ contributions in the larger body of work that stems from feminist rhetorical practices, rhetorical velocity (and its resulting increased circulation) must be further deconstructed. As defined by Ridolfo and DeVoss (2009), rhetorical velocity “is the strategic theorizing for how[/why] a text might be recomposed ... by third parties, and how this [recomposition] may be useful or not to the [rhetorician’s] short- or long-term objectives.” When rhetors compose texts with rhetorical velocity in mind, they are taking into account:

- Potential speed of release and subsequent circulation of content,
- Potential audience(s) that will consume said content, and
- And potential recombination and redistribution of content by said potential audience(s).

The dawn of participatory culture with platforms like Twitter and YouTube that allow for near-instant content reconfiguration made rhetorical velocity highly accessible;

<sup>25</sup> Per Henry Jenkins (2005), participatory culture is a “culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (p. 290). It invites people to remix, recompose, repurpose, and re-appropriate content.

this has resulted in an increased circulation (and recomposition) of texts (Arroyo, 2013). Access to affordable materials gave more people the opportunity to “disrupt” established public discourse and create online enclaves for counterpublic discussion, support, and discovery (Hidalgo, 2017; Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2009; Sheridan et al., 2012, p. 32). As noted earlier in this review of literature, feminist archivists have recovered female-authored texts from print obscurity. Because the “digital tools” at researchers’ disposal influence their “interpretation of historical research subjects,” feminist archivists’ work of assembling digital repositories of women’s lived experiences is critical in that the practice “[re]shapes the histories that researchers find themselves more or less inclined (or able) to write” (Solberg, 2012, p. 55). By analyzing and subsequently digitizing these “extracurricular” texts, feminist archivists utilize technology to establish both a rhetorical and a digital presence for these once-forgotten women (Gaillet & Bailey, 2019; Solberg, 2012).

Per Warner (2002), “both publics [and counterpublics]... have activity and duration” that necessitate circulation of texts to keep them relevant (p. 97). The recovered (and digitized) texts can be construed as feminist archivists’ “recompositions” of the print originals, and the resulting increased circulation and availability of said materials is such because they kept rhetorical velocity in mind. So, too, did the counterpublic of feminist rhetoric adjust its means of production and dissemination, as “technologies and cultural practices ... shift[ed]” (Gries & Brooke, 2018, p. 10) and “print [became] neither necessary nor sufficient for publication in the modern sense” (Warner, 2002, p. 91). Gone are the days of relying on self-published zines; in their stead are a “storm of feminist blogs and voices” (Hidalgo, 2017) that can be circulated instantly online—like *Medium*,

*The Seventeen Magazine Project*, and similar critical blogs (Keller, 2012, pp. 441-443), or the personal stories propelled by Twitter hashtags like #YesAllWomen (Edwards & Lang, 2018), and more recently, #MeToo (Heldman and Haggard, 2017, pp. 7-9; Noxon, 2011, 2017l, 2017m; Richwine, 2018). These online “alternative spaces” give women and allies a forum to come together, as well as a way to perpetuate particular messages with recomposition and increased circulation in mind (Hidalgo, 2017; Sheridan et al., 2012, pp. 84-87).

Much like their contemporaries in the general public, women in Hollywood are engaging in repurposeful recovery work of their own. They have utilized “feminist curiosity”<sup>26</sup> to both reconfigure the conversations occurring on the highly accessible medium of television and redirect attention toward more nuanced, realistic portrayals of women. As previously noted, being that they are fans of television, female showrunners are repurposing the false narratives they have long consumed. In addition to using strategically contemplative practices—e.g., ensuring the ethical and accurate representation of their chosen subjects; hiring a diverse cast and crew (Hidalgo, 2017)—female showrunners have also taken to connecting with their audiences by perpetuating their personal and professional messages online, building fan trust and substantial followings in the process. Twitter in particular has revolutionized the way fans and creators communicate. Given that the actions of recomposing and redistributing content are built into the platform, and that the messages these women choose to perpetuate via this medium—support for women-led companies, amplification of women across

<sup>26</sup>As defined by Cynthia Enloe in *The Curious Feminist* (2004), feminist curiosity “provokes serious questioning about the workings of masculinized and feminized meanings. It ... prompts one to pay attention” to people and experiences that were “imagined to be without explanatory significance” (p. 220).

professional spheres, etc.—have a high chance of achieving wider circulation, they can directly “affect changes in public opinion” (Farmer, 2013, p. 58). Tidbits that are “live-tweeted,” or shared in real time (Rhimes & Stivers, 2017; Turchiano, 2018), like behind the scenes photos, insider gossip, opinions, and general responses to fans, “enhance the entire viewing experience” (Brown, 2018) and cultivate an online proximity between fans and the shows’ creative teams. The techniques initiated by these women<sup>27</sup> have shifted the practices of televisual creation, as it is now standard to take into account establishing a social media presence for shows and their stars (McNamara, 2013; Turchiano, 2018). The platform has made the show-watching and show-creating processes “shared experience[s],” organically giving way to audience engagement, especially with fans who are seeing themselves reflected onscreen for the first time (Rhimes and Stivers, 2017).<sup>28</sup>

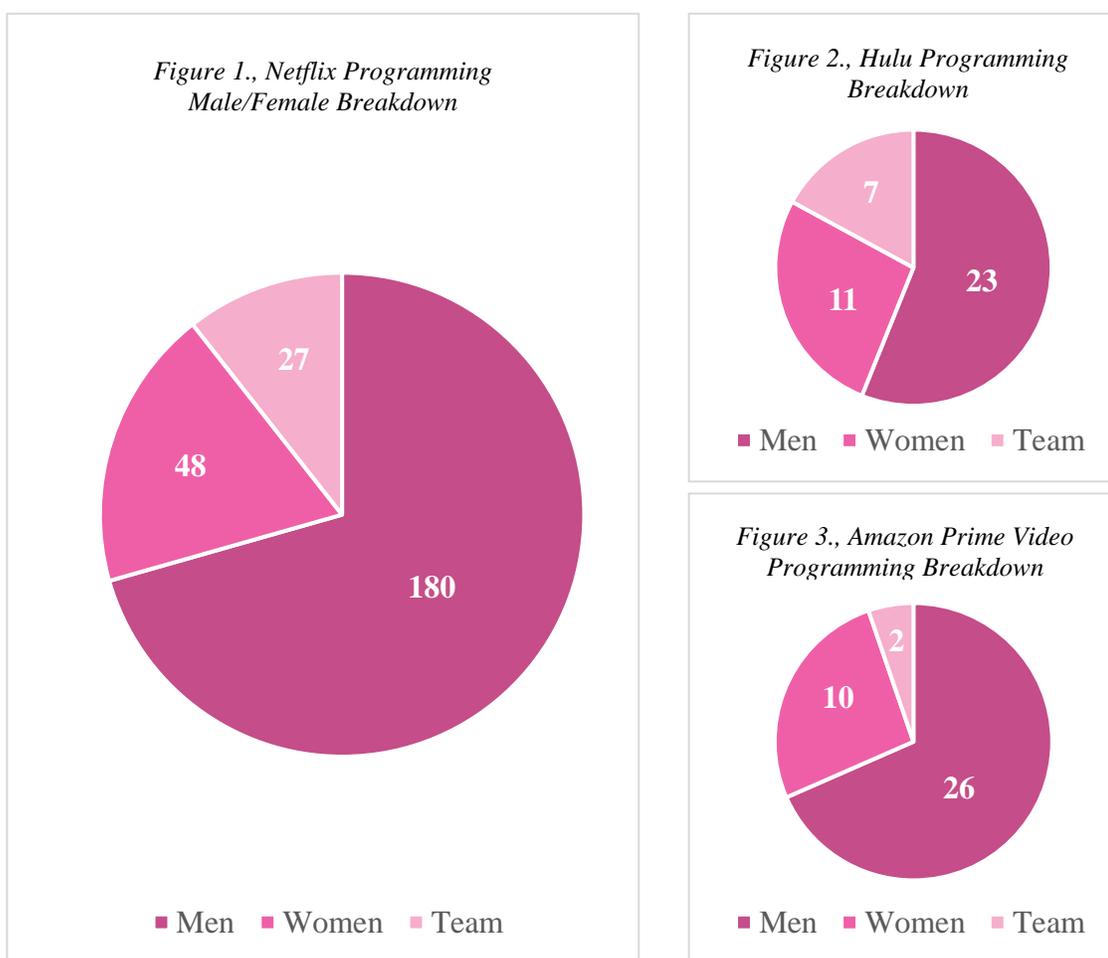
As noted in the section prior, both cable and network television continue to be male-dominated. However, looking at the kinds of content produced on streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime—*Dead to Me* (2019- ), *Shrill* (2019- ), *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017- ), and *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017- ), to name a few—as well as the way these platforms mass-market themselves, one would assume that streaming services would be more receptive to optioning female-run and female-driven stories.<sup>29</sup> However, upon a thorough analysis of the original content produced on each of

<sup>27</sup> This point is further elaborated on in Rhimes’s case study (pp. 63-75), as she was the first to “live-tweet” a television show.

<sup>28</sup> Sources that detail the potential rhetorical benefits of social media for showrunners are Bennett (2014), Erigha (2015, pp. 87-88), Everett (2015, pp. 34-35, 37-39), McNamara (2013), Mittell (2015, pp. 13, 100-101, 103), Nussbaum (2011), Oberman (2015), Paskin (2013c), Rash (2014), Rhimes & Stivers (2017), Scott (2012, p. 51), and Turchiano (2018).

<sup>29</sup> Marketing and other assorted sources that perpetuate the false notion of “female empowerment” on streaming services are Amazon Prime Video US (2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019b), Amazon Studios (2011, 2018), Boboltz & Williams (2016), Dockterman (2019), Hulu (2017, 2019a, 2019b), Moreau (2019), Netflix (2014, 2017, 2019a, 2019b), and Noxon (2019c, 2019f).

those platforms, the resulting data prove otherwise. As noted in Figure 1, of Netflix's current original program lineup of 337 shows, 255 have accessible information regarding showrunners and creators,<sup>30</sup> and the gender breakdown of the latter was as follows: 70% were run exclusively by men and 19% were helmed by women, with the remaining 11% being run by a mixed-gender team. Figures 2 and 3 show that women at Hulu and Amazon Prime Video do not fare much better, despite both platforms providing a much smaller sample of original programming from which to draw conclusions.<sup>31</sup>



<sup>30</sup> This coding process is further explained in the forthcoming methodology section.

<sup>31</sup> For Hulu, 41 of the platform's 42 original shows had accessible showrunner/creator data, 56% are run by men, 27% by women, and 17% by a team. For Amazon Prime's 58 original shows (all of which had accessible showrunner/creator data), 79% are run by men, 17% by women, and 4% by a team.

Despite marketing themselves as “chipping away at the Hollywood rulebook,” streaming services still have to go far before differentiating themselves from the “boys’ clubs” of cable and network and actually embodying the representational ideals they espouse (Boboltz & Williams, 2016).

In the wake of the recent hashtag movements that broke open the misogynistic culture of Hollywood, many in the industry expected a radical shift toward more empowered, female-centric storytelling. While there are certainly more television shows that fit this bill, statistics show that the gender parity uptick behind the scenes and onscreen has been marginal as compared to previous years (Heldman & Haggard, 2017, p. 5; Lauzen, 2018; Richwine, 2018). Female showrunners have been skeptical to accept that #MeToo would drastically alter the industry, and several have argued that there has been no “discernible difference” (Bahr, 2018) before and after the “[Harvey] Weinstein moment” (Shapiro, 2018).<sup>32</sup> The ripple effects of these hashtag movements, however, seem to signal an industry-wide effort to move toward a more gender-balanced environment, particularly within streaming services. While the current numbers seem to negate that very claim, Netflix and Hulu have made forthcoming long-term commitments with several prominent female content creators that, upon implementation, would further skew the numbers toward equality.<sup>33</sup>

Networks and premium cable continue to lag in terms of gender parity, so while streaming service executives’ moves may seem negligible, they will ultimately have a

<sup>32</sup> Further elaboration on the hashtag movements, the expected shift, and the actual results can be found in Bahr (2018), Gilbert (2018a), Heldman & Haggard (2017), Noxon (2017n, 2018x, 2018y), Press (2018), and “Shonda Rhimes Makes TV” (2018).

<sup>33</sup> Sources that detail deals made by Netflix and Hulu with female showrunners are Lowry (2018a), McAlone (2019), Netflix Media Center (2017a, 2017b, 2018), and Poniewozik (2018b).

large cultural impact because of the platforms' increasingly accessible and affordable nature. Not only are more people in the United States opting to drop expensive cable packages for affordable streaming deals (Binder, 2019; Graham, 2019), international audiences are also able to access these platforms, and thus, consume their content (Boboltz & Williams, 2016). With greater creative opportunities in these environments, female showrunners can capitalize on streaming services' "attempt[s] to offer stories that [are not] often told on television" and perpetuate change by countering gendered inaccuracies of shows past (McCormick, 2017). If "rhetors become producers of culture itself" (Sheridan et al., 2012, p. 146) and "meanings are given expressive possibility through the form of televised stories" (Mittell, 2015, p. 4), female showrunners are in a unique position to shift discourse and adjust perceptions of both women and "women's problems" in the minds of global audiences through authentic female-centric storytelling.

## Methods

For this project, I engaged in thorough qualitative research that, as Creswell (2014) defines, involved “emerging questions and procedures” (p. 4). I conducted in-depth case studies that allowed me to “inductively build from particulars to general themes, and [thus make] interpretations of the meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2014, pp. 4, 14). I chose three female showrunners as the foci of my research: Marti Noxon, Jenji Kohan, and Shonda Rhimes. These women in particular were chosen from the existing pool of female TV showrunners for a number of reasons:

1. Name recognition: each subject has established a presence in the television industry, and because of this, each has ample social material (e.g., interviews) from which I could draw conclusions.
2. Amount of content created: each subject has a robust enough body of work to analyze.
3. Varied platforms: prior to their long-term deals with Netflix, each subject aired their content on different platforms—Rhimes on network television; Kohan on premium cable/streaming; and Noxon on both premium cable and network TV. Each mode of distribution varies in creative leniency (e.g., network executives typically have more control over content, premium cable offers showrunners more leeway, and streaming services give showrunners free reign).

### Texts and Coding

Within the case studies, two of each showrunner’s works were analyzed—Noxon’s *Sharp Objects* (2018) and *Dietland* (2018), Kohan’s *Weeds* (2004-2012)

and *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-2019), and Rhimes's *Grey's Anatomy* (2005- ) and *Scandal* (2012-2018). These shows were chosen due to their viewing accessibility and thematic focus on "flawed" women. Print, audio, and video interviews given by each showrunner were also considered, in an effort to gain a comprehensive understanding of each showrunner's style, and interpret the shows' contents and intentions based on their self-descriptions.

Character interactions from particular episodes that were written by each of the showrunners were spotlighted within each case study. In choosing the dialogue to include, I wanted to ensure that their unique writing styles were displayed, and that the interactions were indicative of characters' personalities.

Additionally, reviews relevant to each show were coded and analyzed. In combing through reviews, I looked for author overlap across well-known web and print publications to establish name recognition within the pool of reviewers as well. My goal was to gather a robust sample of reviews from both male and female critics to then analyze for patterns within responses to certain stylistic choices/thematic tendencies.

Applicable Twitter posts for Noxon and Rhimes were also analyzed (Kohan does not use the platform, and thus was excluded from this particular analysis). Noxon's personal account (@martinoxon) and both Rhimes's personal and curated production company accounts (@shondarhimes and @byshondaland, respectively) were searched using Twitter's advanced search feature. With this feature (depicted in Figure 4), I searched each profile for any and all instances of the phrases "man," "men," "woman," "women," and "Netflix." Each term was searched for within yearly brackets, beginning with January 2008, and concluding with June 2019. This was done to note any messaging

patterns from each showrunner (e.g., Noxon’s derision of Aaron Sorkin’s female portrayals, Rhimes’s fan interactions from her career’s inception, and both of their championing of women in other fields) across their time in the industry.

**Advanced search**

**Words**

All of these words

This exact phrase

Any of these words

None of these words

These hashtags

Written in

**People**

From these accounts

To these accounts

Mentioning these accounts

**Places**

Near this place

**Dates**

From this date  to

**Search**

*Figure 4., screenshot of Twitter’s advanced search function.*

Lastly, for each showrunner, I quantified the number of female writers and directors under their respective employ at each of the analyzed shows. This data was compiled using the cast and crew lists made available via the Internet Movie Database

(IMDb), in tandem with in-depth research of each writer's and director's name and photograph.

I quantified the streaming services data noted in Section III of the literature review using available lists of original program names from Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime. Using cast and crew data from both IMDb and the actual streaming platforms' content, I was able to locate showrunner/creator names for 255 of Netflix's 377 original series, 41 of Hulu's 42 original series, and all 58 of Amazon Prime Video's original series. I wanted to generate these statistics to call into question streaming services' marketed espousal of female empowerment. Programs currently on air (including foreign language programming), as well as those announced with attached dates for production, were considered. Children's programming was not included in the analysis, as it does not cater to the target 18 to 34 year-old demographic for networks, premium cable channels, and streaming services. Programs with inaccessible showrunner/creator data (i.e., unlisted credit both in online databases and in the credits of the programs themselves) were also excluded from this analysis, as were shows with names/photographs that could not be distinguished as either explicitly male or female. Those that were considered were classified as either male or female through in-depth research of their names and photographs.

### **Methodologies**

In an effort to construct the fullest understanding possible of my case study subjects and said subjects' circumstances, I elected to engage in the approaches delineated by Royster & Kirsch in their 2012 text, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*. Though critical imagination, strategic contemplation, and social circulation stem from feminist

rhetorical practice specifically (Royster & Kirsch, 2012), these strategies can be used interdisciplinarily to further enrich the knowledge landscape by emphasizing a “no stone unturned” research ethic while upholding a set of core principles. These approaches build on each other, ensuring that the researcher focuses on “careful, respectful, critically reflective, flexible, dialogic, [and] transparent” work (McKee and Porter, 2010, pp. 155-156) that is “anchored in an ethos of care, respect, and humility” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, pp. 67-68). When implementing these practices, researcher and subject are “engaging in a dialogue” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 21)—either literally or metaphorically, dependent on a subject’s availability and accessibility—to ensure that the work produced is representative of the subject’s experience, while simultaneously taking into account the researcher’s personal interpretations, so as to bring about a positive social change. As noted in the final section of the literature review, female showrunners engage in similar practices on-set and in writers’ rooms (Hidalgo, 2017).

Critical imagination (CI) asks that researchers engage in a deeper exploration of “unlikely sources,” setting aside expectations and prepare for revelations upon “look[ing] beyond” what they initially set out to accomplish (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, pp. 72, 79), “reassess[ing] both what makes up a historical text as well as what makes for a critical one” (Hastie, 2007, p. 10). By asking scholars to question “‘claims’ to truth,” critical imagination implores “clarif[ication] of contexts and conditions” of existing knowledge, and encourages a potential reconfiguring of “whether and how we value and accredit” established histories (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, pp. 19-20). The very act of feminist recovery is critically imaginative at its core—as my chosen case study subjects are implementing CI by questioning inaccurate female portrayals past, so, too, am I

engaging in CI by “looking beyond” traditional sources to amass this scholarship and parallel the work of my three case study subjects to that of feminist rhetors.

Strategic contemplation asks scholars to “pay attention to how lived experiences shape [their] perspectives as researchers and those of [their] research subjects,” as these unconventional, “often-neglected” sources are rife for exploration (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, pp. 21-22). As noted earlier, this technique encourages “engaging in a [metaphorical] dialogue with the women who are ... rhetorical subjects” to gain a greater understanding of their practices and experiences, and ensure that the finished product is indeed representative of their input (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 21). Because my chosen research subjects are not directly accessible, my “metaphorical conversations” with them are pieced together from the interviews and social posts available for public consumption.

Lastly, social circulation asks researchers to reframe and reinterpret the cultural capital of women’s work in the now-public spaces they inhabit, “mapping visibility ... at the convergence of images, text, forms, formats, and perspectives” (Royster & Kirsch, 2018, p. 175). In practice, social circulation allows researchers to contextualize “the accomplishments of women not only as historical figures but also as important contributors to their respective disciplines” (Gaillet & Bailey, 2019, p. xi). With this final step, I juxtaposed critic descriptions of Noxon’s, Kohan’s, and Rhimes’s work with each showrunners’ self-descriptions. I also framed each of their contributions relative to the notion of rhetorical velocity, as increased access to and circulation of “underrepresented” texts creates opportunity for the “fully textured” disruption of history, as well as the perpetuation of accurate representation in place of reductionist stereotypes (Royster & Kirsch, 2018, p. 175).

## **Limitations**

My research focuses on the male-female narrative dichotomy seen when comparing Noxon's, Kohan's, and Rhimes' bodies of work to those of male showrunners past. This choice narrowed the scope of this project significantly, but provides a springboard for future research on exploration of the spectrums of gender/sexuality and race/ethnicity as rhetorical categories. Though gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity are acknowledged as topics covered by the aforementioned showrunners, they are not the focus of this research and are not presented as such, so as to not further relegate already marginalized topics. This project's female focus can also serve as a foundation on which to then research and analyze female-centric narratives written by men in the post-#MeToo era.

Additionally, the scope of this project was narrowed to focus solely on the aforementioned showrunners, all of which are American. This can be misconstrued as seemingly negating the experiences of and content created by non-Western women. Future research can build on the ideas established in this study, and can enact Royster and Kirsch's final strategy of globalization to track the themes presented in the work of non-Western female showrunners, as well as shed light on perspectives that differ from the established "norm" (2012, pp. 24-25).

## Case Studies

Within the case studies, I first give a brief biography and career chronology of each showrunner to frame their respective bodies of work, touching on their personal showrunning styles. I then analyze two shows specific to each showrunner and compare their self-descriptions to critics' responses, noting any overlaps and/or misconceptions. Within the show subsections, I also include excerpts of dialogue from episodes written by each showrunner that showcase their particular writing styles. I conclude each case study by noting thematic and stylistic commonalities present in both shows analyzed.

### **Marti Noxon: Embracing the “Pain and Chains”**

Marti Noxon has done much for nuanced female televisual representation throughout her tenure in Hollywood. Her early work boasts impressive credits—*Grey's Anatomy* (*Grey's*, 2005- ), *Mad Men* (2007-2015), and most famously, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*Buffy*, 1997-2003)—that helped define her unique creative voice and vision.<sup>34</sup> Her more recent work, affectionately referred to as her “self-harm trilogy,”<sup>35</sup> pushes the envelope well past standard limits of palatability (Gilbert, 2018a; Noxon, 2018c, 2019g; Schilling, 2017). After over 20 years in the industry, Noxon continues to insist on “uncovering” (Flynn, 1988, p. 434) “problems [of] women” in her work (Noxon, 2019c)<sup>36</sup>—a choice constantly met with executive pushback.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Additional details on Noxon's biography can be found in Aziz (2018), Gilbert (2018a), Mathis (2013), Noxon (2019c, 2019g), and Ryssdal & Hollenhorst (2018).

<sup>35</sup> Components of Noxon's “self-harm trilogy” include: HBO's limited series *Sharp Objects* (2018), the Netflix film *To the Bone* (2017), and AMC's *Dietland* (2018).

<sup>36</sup> Noxon's penchant for highlighting “women's problems” in her work is detailed in Amoruso (2018), Aziz (2018), Gilbert (2018a), Hazelton (2018), Noxon (2016n, 2018b, 2019f, 2019g) Perry (2009), Ryssdal & Hollenhorst (2018), Schilling (2017), Shapiro (2018), and Vineyard (2018).

<sup>37</sup> Her industry power struggles are elaborated on in Amoruso (2018), Gilbert (2018a), Noxon (2016d, 2018w), Ryssdal & Hollenhorst (2018), Schilling (2017), Shapiro (2018), and Vineyard (2018).

Growing up in Los Angeles with family in the business—her father worked as a National Geographic documentarian—she frequently “sn[uck] onto lots” to witness firsthand the practical crafts of television (Amoruso, 2018; Gilbert, 2018a; Rosen, 2015, p. 32; Schilling, 2017). Despite her initial interest in acting while at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Noxon ultimately preferred “manipulat[ing] reality” (Amoruso, 2018) and shifted her focus to writing (Rosen, 2015, p. 32; Shapiro, 2018). After years of idolizing the industry as an assistant—first for director Rick Rosenthal, then for producer Barbara Hall—she met the agent that got her in the door at *Buffy*, the “little enclave of feminist thought” (Gilbert, 2018a) where she “found her footing” (Rosen, 2015, pp. 32-34) in her early 30s (Amoruso, 2018; Schilling, 2017).

Having joined Joss Whedon’s *Buffy* in its second season, she immediately gelled with the existing writing staff; even Whedon himself leaned on her when crafting female characters (Amoruso, 2018; Mathis, 2013, pp. 2, 5; Perry, 2009, p. 20; Rosen, 2015, pp. 36-37). While at *Buffy*, Noxon experimented with topics that were not “commercial” (Hazelton, 2018) and was able to influence the show’s short- and long-term narrative development (Mathis, 2013, p. 2). As a result, she earned Whedon’s respect and a reputation as the “pain and chains” girl (Gilbert, 2018a; Perry, 2009, pp. 18, 20; Rosen, 2015, p. 38). Noxon was named *Buffy* showrunner in its thematically divergent sixth season, and regardless of Whedon’s continued creative control, she was the target of fan outrage.<sup>38</sup> Despite the backlash at the time, scholars and critics alike now consider Season 6 a precursor to the kinds of unapologetically female-driven narratives seen on-screen

<sup>38</sup> Sources that delineate the backlash Noxon faced as showrunner for *Buffy*’s sixth season are Gilbert (2018a), Mathis (2013), Perry (2009, pp. 13, 20), Rosen (2015, p. 37), Schilling (2017), Scott (2012, p. 51), Shapiro (2018), and Soloski (2018).

today—certainly for the kinds Noxon herself champions (Gilbert, 2018a; Schilling, 2017; Shapiro, 2018).

In the years that followed her *Buffy* exit Noxon shuffled through several other series, deftly navigating the male-dominated entertainment terrain outside Whedon’s “safe space” (Noxon, 2016f; Schilling, 2017; Vineyard, 2018). For a time she worked under self-proclaimed *Buffy* fan Shonda Rhimes at both *Grey’s* and *Private Practice* (2007-2013).<sup>39</sup> Noxon ultimately left Shondaland, though, because she felt she was “losing [her] voice” as a cog in the formulaic, plot-driven machine (Noxon, 2019g).<sup>40</sup> Upon wrapping up with Rhimes, Noxon worked on a few seasons of *Mad Men* and ran a story arc on *Glee* (2009-2015); this cycle continued for several years and was peppered with a few failed series attempts of her own.<sup>41</sup> The Bravo comedy *Girlfriends’ Guide to Divorce* (*GG2D*, 2014-2018) became her first successful showrunning venture. To the unease of network executives, she used *GG2D* to address issues common to women but unique to television—divorce, menopause, etc.—and redefined the complexities of “sexual politics” (Ryssdal & Hollenhorst, 2018) by approaching them from an unmined, non-male perspective (Gilbert, 2018a; Shapiro, 2018). While filming *GG2D*’s first season, she and Sarah Gertrude Shapiro co-created Lifetime’s *UnREAL* (2015-2018), a dark comedy that centered on the behind-the-scenes drama of a reality TV dating show. *GG2D* and *UnREAL* were immediate critical darlings, and their success solidified Noxon’s status as an industry power-player.

<sup>39</sup> Mentions of her time working for Rhimes are noted in Gilbert (2018a), Mathis (2013), Noxon (2019g), Rosen (2015, p. 38), and Ryssdal & Hollenhorst (2018).

<sup>40</sup> Rhimes’ denial of this very point is touched upon in her case study, on p. 73.

<sup>41</sup> Additional points in her career chronology are addressed in Amoruso (2018), Aziz (2018), Gilbert (2018a), Mathis (2013), Rosen (2015), and Schilling (2017).

With professional success came personal turmoil, as Noxon was thrust out of sobriety and into battle with her inner “demons”—eating disorders, memories of sexual assault, and suicidal ideation (Shapiro, 2018).<sup>42</sup> Although she has since remained sober, she continues to draw creatively from her trauma and leans on the “dark part of [her] personality” (Perry, 2009, pp. 19-20) to craft stories of “difficult women” that mirror (and rival) those of “difficult men” (Gilbert, 2018a; Noxon, 2019g; Ryssdal & Hollenhorst, 2018).<sup>43</sup> In her work, she “show[s] women in all of their colors” (Amoruso, 2018) and maintains that “a successful character ... doesn’t need to be liked” (Schilling, 2017), leaving delineations of good and bad ambiguous and resulting in an “urgent” kind of “truthful storytelling” (Noxon, 2019g). She is often inspired by other women’s creative work and uses her relative position of industry power to bring the stories she comes across that would otherwise remain “hidden” to on-screen prominence (Noxon, 2019g). This creative “recovery” practice led to her aforementioned trilogy, of which two parts are adapted from books she read by female authors. Each part embodies a “stage” of self-harm and explores the personal and societal repercussions women face when they engage in said behavior (Noxon, 2018c).

Part 1, Noxon’s directorial debut *To the Bone* (2017), chronicles a young woman’s battle with anorexia—a reflection of her own battle with the disorder (Rosen, 2015, p. 39; Soloski, 2018). Because portrayals of anorexia on-screen were limited, she wanted to ensure that the film did not “fetishize” the condition (Noxon, 2019g). Rather,

<sup>42</sup> More information on Noxon’s personal struggles can be found in the following: Gilbert (2018a), Noxon (2014b, 2014c, 2016g, 2016k, 2016n, 2017a, 2017l, 2017m, 2019g), Rosen (2015), Ryssdal and Hollenhorst (2018), Schilling (2017), and Soloski (2018).

<sup>43</sup> Other sources that detail Noxon’s thematic tendencies are: Amoruso (2018), Aziz (2018), Giorgis (2018), Noxon (2015d, 2016i, 2016j, 2018d, 2018k); Paskin (2018b), Perry (2009), Poniewozik (2018a), Rosen (2018), Schilling (2017), Shapiro, (2018), Soloski (2018), and Vineyard (2018).

her goal was to present that “underrepresented” experience (Noxon, 2019c) through an authentic lens, so those who had it would feel seen and those outside it would gain a deeper understanding of the condition (Ryssdal & Hollenhorst, 2018). The film—made with the support of three female film producers (Schilling, 2017)—was a “hard sell” to studios (Gilbert, 2018a; O’Neill, 2018; Noxon, 2018j, 2019f) that eventually found a home at Netflix, and garnered widespread popular acclaim through the amplified circulation afforded by the platform’s worldwide streaming capability.<sup>44</sup> While her subsequent trilogy projects were on premium cable and network television, respectively, Noxon recently signed a long-term production deal with Netflix. The platform’s lax approach will likely allow her the creative freedom to continue to expose the “the inner lives and struggles of complex, modern women” (Netflix Media Center, 2018), “disrupting” and “rewriting” the cultural norm of demeaning female stereotypes that has persisted (Ritchie & Boardman, 1999).<sup>45</sup>

Noxon’s showrunning style embodies the “delicate balance” she has perfected from merging her various writers’ room experiences (Amoruso, 2018). She offers writers an “enthusiastic and collaborative” space, so that they can feel “comfortable discussing everything” (Schilling, 2017). Mirroring the practices of her female showrunning contemporaries—Jenny Bicks, Jane Espenson, Dee Johnson, Margaret Nagle, and Janet Tamaro, to name a few (Bennett, 2014; Kallas, 2014)—she employs caution and patience when “managing [several] personalities” within the writers’ room, in order to “figur[e]

<sup>44</sup> *To the Bone*’s exposure to audiences through Netflix’s worldwide streaming capabilities is touched upon in Noxon (2018b, 2018j, 2019c, 2019f, 2019i), Ryssdal & Hollenhorst (2018), and Schilling (2017).

<sup>45</sup> Noxon’s opportunity to shift cultural perspectives with Netflix is noted in Chavez (2018), Giorgis (2018), Noxon (2012, 2013a, 2013c, 2013d, 2015d, 2017z, 2018r, 2018x, 2019j, 2019k), Poniewozik (2018b), and Schilling (2017).

out the best way to tell that story” (Amoruso, 2018). She also encourages, rather than imposes, her creative vision on her staff, and emphasizes that the job “is mostly about being a good team leader” (Aziz, 2018) and “letting people do their jobs” (Ryssdal & Hollenhorst, 2018). She combats the industry’s culture of “comfort” by routinely hiring women and giving them the opportunity to tell their own stories (Framke, 2018a; Littleton, 2015; Noxon, 2017b, 2017d, 2018h, 2019d; Schilling, 2017). She also uses her elevated status on social media to draw attention to various stories and topics that encompass everything from resources for women of all ages, to gun violence statistics, to praise of her female industry contemporaries, to strong opinions of “bad men” both in and out of Hollywood.<sup>46</sup>

*Sharp Objects*. Adapted from Gillian Flynn’s novel of the same name, *Sharp Objects* centers on Camille Preaker, a reporter living in St. Louis who returns to her hometown of Wind Gap, Missouri, to cover a string of local murders. Preaker is a high-functioning alcoholic with a penchant for self-harm—a coping mechanism for both her Wind Gap past and strained relationship with her mother, Adora. Fascinated by Camille’s ability to be “wildly self-destructive, but also brave and functioning” (Gilbert, 2018a; Noxon, 2019g), Noxon understood the urgency in sharing a story that “explor[ed]... female anger and violence, [where] the catalyst was not men” (Amoruso, 2018). The story’s initial focus on the “unraveled protagonist” (Patterson, 2018b) expands into “an examination of anger through three generations of women”—Camille, Adora, and

<sup>46</sup> Stories and causes she chooses to amplify, as well as those she wishes to denounce on a large scale, are noted in Noxon (2011, 2013c, 2015a, 2015c, 2016l, 2016n, 2016p, 2016q, 2017c, 2017e, 2017i, 2017j, 2017n, 2017o, 2017p, 2017q, 2017r, 2017s, 2017t, 2017u, 2017v, 2017w, 2017x, 2017y, 2017z, 2018i, 2018m, 2018n, 2018p, 2018r, 2018t, 2019a, 2019d, 2019i, 2019m).

Camille’s young half-sister, Amma—that illustrates “what happens when [they] don’t have agency over those feelings” (Hazelton, 2018).

*Sharp* was widely acclaimed by critics; there was only one negative review among the fourteen that were coded and analyzed.<sup>47</sup> Critics unanimously praised Amy Adams’ “transfixing” portrayal of Camille (Poniewozik, 2018a), Patricia Clarkson’s turn as “delicate[ly] theatrical” Adora (Gilbert, 2018b), and Eliza Scanlen’s performance as “dangerously ill-behaved and duplicitous” Amma (McFarland, 2018c). The combination of Noxon as showrunner and Gillian Flynn as executive producer resulted in “honey-coated but often barbed dialogue” (Roeper, 2018) that brought to life a sprawling “horror story of matrilineal dysfunction” (Paskin, 2018b). Noxon and Flynn utilized the story’s inherent “pulpiness” as a conduit for feminist rhetoric, choosing not to erase but “relegat[e the men] ... to the periphery” and instead highlight the women (Chavez, 2018). Camille, Adora, and Amma each grapple differently with the societal expectations they have internalized, yet all three are victims to the emotional ramifications of their chosen behavior. While Camille self-inflicts harm in response to her trauma, her mother and sister each project their anger toward others—Adora onto the unsuspecting daughters she poisons, and Amma onto the neighboring girls she murders (Gilbert, 2018b).

Noxon, who wrote the series premiere (“Vanish”) and co-wrote the finale (“Milk”) with Flynn, offers moments within the characters’ contemplative actions that emphasize the heightened dynamic at play between Camille, Amma, and Adora (“Marti Noxon,” 2019). As excerpted below, viewers are made privy to long-held resentments

<sup>47</sup> Reviews of *Sharp* are as follows: Chavez (2018), D’Addario (2018), Fienberg (2018), Franich (2018), Gilbert (2018b), McFarland (2018c), Paskin (2018b), Patterson (2018b), Poniewozik (2018a), Roeper (2018), Saraiya (2018b), Sepinwall (2018), and Zoller Seitz (2018); Stuever (2018) was the anomalous negative review.

through the dialogic subtleties exchanged within *Sharp*'s female triumvirate as early as the season premiere:

Adora: Camille, I'm happy you're here, but please don't embarrass me... Not again.

Camille: What?

Adora: When you're here, everything you do comes back on me, understand?

Camille: Honestly, no. 'Cause that might have been true when I was a kid, but I'm an adult now.

Adora: Not in Wind Gap. When you're here, you're my daughter. You can move away and forget, but I can't.

...

Amma: You know how she is. I'm just her little doll to dress up.

Camille: Easier to go along.

Amma: You never did, though. Mama says you were incorrigible.

Camille: I bet she does.

Amma: I'm incorrigible, too. Only she doesn't know it. We're alike. I knew we would be.

*Season 1, episode 1 (S.1-E.1), "Vanish" (Noxon & Valleé, 2018).*

Not only does Noxon's dialogue give insight into each character's distinct personality, it also emphasizes the show's female-centric nature. *Sharp* often passes the Bechdel test,<sup>48</sup> as the narrative focus hardly ever deviates from the dynamic displayed above.

<sup>48</sup> Per Alison Bechdel's comic strip collection, *Dykes to Watch Out For* (1986), the Bechdel test is a series of points that determine female characters' autonomy in popular media (in the comic, women in films, specifically). The points are: 1) At least two women have to be present in the work; 2) The two women talk to each other; 3) The women "talk to each other about ... something besides a man" (Bechdel, 1986).

Despite Noxon's contributions as showrunner, she is not explicitly mentioned in each of the coded reviews. This could be a result of Jean-Marc Valleé's directorship throughout the entire series—an anomaly in television, where a different director typically oversees each episode. Valleé is lauded in every review, showcasing a potential internalized gender-bias among critics, and *Sharp* draws constant comparisons to his other HBO series, *Big Little Lies* (2017-2019). Noxon experienced difficulty working with Valleé at first, as he pursued stylistic choices that she felt were departures from the crucial language of the text. However, they ultimately came together and “made a good team” (Hazelton, 2018), without either having to totally compromise their artistic integrity (Shapiro, 2018).

Though *Sharp* was mostly lauded, it did garner mild criticism. Most of the reviewers analyzed agreed that the pacing often dragged, and that the graphic imagery (considered by some as gratuitous) should have been preceded by a trigger warning (Franich, 2018; McFarland, 2018c; Roeper, 2018; Stuever, 2018). *Sharp* also suffered from a glaring dearth of diversity; it insinuated the town had Confederate roots with an episode depicting a “Calhoun Day” a celebration (Gilbert 2018b), which could explain the racial homogeneity. Despite these critiques, all analyzed reviewers did enjoy the show overall. They also struggled to confine *Sharp* to just one genre, as the show constantly juxtaposed “realism” and “extravagance” (Gilbert, 2018b), and balanced being both “thrilling” and “tragic” (Sepinwall, 2018). *Sharp* was referred to as a “chimera,” or a hybrid, of genres, akin stylistically to other female showrunners' work (Saraiya, 2018b). Because genre non-conformity is often associated with female-created content, reviewers often rely on this criticism to undermine said shows' quality, even when comparing them

to male-run/male-centric shows employing similar choices (Scott, 2012; Toomer, 2019). Being that Noxon only mildly leaned into the technique with *Sharp*—it skewed more toward drama—the show was wildly successful regardless of the critiques, quashing doubts that women could make “prestige” television and drive morally ambiguous narratives, and proving that these stories could indeed resonate with general audiences (Paskin, 2018b).

*Dietland*. Adapted from Sarai Walker’s titular novel, AMC’s *Dietland* is a dark comedy that ran for one season in June 2018. The story’s protagonist is Alicia, “Plum” Kettle, a heavysset woman with the personal goal of attaining society’s definition of the ideal feminine physique and the subsequent happiness assumed to come with it. She also happens to be a ghost writer/advice columnist at a popular women’s magazine. Her plan comes to a halt when she is approached by two groups of women who offer her opportunities to be her best self without having to physically change. One encourages self-reflection and isolation, while the other, a rebel group named “Jennifer,” opts for a more direct approach. “Jennifer” takes matters of sexual violence into their own hands, removing the middleman and sticking it *to* “the man” by engaging in violent acts of reparation. This initially peripheral plot point quickly envelopes the main narrative and audiences see Plum wrestle moral choices that have implications beyond her personal happiness, calling into question what would happen if women en masse acted on their “silenced,” vengeful impulses.

Noxon has called *Dietland* the “fight-back part” of her self-harm trilogy, and emphasized that it encourages women to “change [their mindset] to change the world” (Gilbert, 2018a) rather than alter themselves to conform (Noxon, 2019b, 2018c, 2019g;

Soloski, 2018; WomenintheWorld, 2018). Despite seemingly leaning into #MeToo, Noxon actually began shopping *Dietland* around as a series in 2015 after she finished the novel. But despite her track record, it took years for any network to show interest (Amoruso, 2018; Hazelton, 2018).<sup>49</sup> The karmic timing of the hashtag movements, coupled with the critical success of *To the Bone*, convinced AMC executives to greenlight the project and assign Noxon as showrunner (Hazelton, 2018). In response to Noxon's vocal support of her *Mad Men* colleague Kater Gordon's sexual assault accusation against series creator Matthew Weiner,<sup>50</sup> they pushed *Dietland*'s release date up several months (De Maria, 2017).

Like *Sharp*, this show centers on “violence [that] women inflict upon themselves and other women” (McFarland, 2018b) in response to a male-dominated society's messaging (Chaney, 2018; Kang, 2018). *Dietland* takes the relatable experience of internalized misogyny and transforms it into outward action, asking bystanders (both in the storyworld and in reality) to “envision a world in which [women's] pain is taken seriously” (Giorgis, 2018)—a sentiment that has served as a through line in generations of female-authored texts exhumed by feminist scholars and archivists. Noxon's “characteristic” combination of “quippy and intense” writing (Gilbert, 2018a) can be seen most clearly in the episodes she wrote: the pilot, “Tender Belly” (ep. 2), “Woman Down” (ep. 9), and “Bedwomb” (ep. 10) (“Marti Noxon,” 2019). The topics addressed depict

<sup>49</sup> Instances of *Dietland*'s kismet timing with the current sociopolitical climate are noted in Framke (2018), Gilbert (2018a), Giorgis (2018), McFarland (2018b), Paskin (2018a), Ryssdal & Hollenhorst (2018), and Vineyard (2018).

<sup>50</sup> Noxon's Twitter thread delineating her belief in Kater Gordon: Noxon (2017n, 2017o, 2017p, 2017q, 2017r, 2017s, 2017t, 2017u, 2017v, 2017w, 2017x, 2017y).

issues relevant to both the 2015 novel and the hashtag movement-era during which the show was released:

Julia: They get us to pay them to tell us how broken we are, and then we pay for the products to fix it. But we're never fixed. Because there's always some new way we don't please the eye of our big brother beholder. I say "Enough." Time to change the game.

Plum: But it's not a conspiracy. It's human nature. People like pretty things.

Julia: You're not a thing. You are a woman, and you should decorate yourself however it pleases you.

*S.1-E.1, "Pilot" (Noxon, 2018e).*

Leeta: I'm so impressed that she did it. Plum! Like... do you need *more* evidence that girls need us? ... We have a Cutter. Cutter. Exercise addict. Incest. Rape. Rape. We got *so* much rape.

Julia: Anyone can see our Plum has a secret rebel heart. Ooh! I could just eat her up... Whatever you're thinkin', cut it out. You are done with her as of right now.

Leeta: But what if we could help—

Julia: Done, dear heart. We've already got what we needed. And we don't know if we can trust her. And I'm not sure she's ready for us.

Leeta: OK, please just hear me out for a minute—

Julia: Let it go. Now I know I taught you to question authority, but not mine.

Leeta: That seems a little second-wave.

*S.1-E.2, "Tender Belly" (Noxon, 2018f).*

Apart from the dialogue, the show is peppered with other allusions to reality, one being “Malleck Ferguson”—a fashion photographer that routinely preys on his clients, modeled in the image of Terry Richardson. As is the norm in the fashion and film/television industries, among others, many of the men accused rarely face repercussions other than damnation in the court of opinion. The show addresses this pattern by depicting a dismissal of certain characters’ unease working with Ferguson by the editor-in-chief of the magazine, with her saying, “You know the lines get blurry with creatives” (Noxon, 2018f). While this scenario mirrors reality, Ferguson’s fate borders on the absurd; he and the other misbehaved men of *Dietland* are brought to justice often through grisly means.

As was the case with *Sharp*, *Dietland* was also difficult for critics to box into one genre, “def[y]ing] facile definition or simple fit” (McFarland, 2018b) by juxtaposing intimate character interactions with over-the-top visuals and varying “wildly” in tone as a result (Saraiya, 2018a). *Dietland* attempted to hold up a “fun-house mirror” (McFarland, 2018b) to universally understood “problems of women”—“toxic beauty standards, the weight-loss industry ... rape culture, feminist infighting” (Gilbert, 2018a)—with Noxon again bringing to light subjects that typically make male television executives “uncomfortable” and are thus ignored in popular media (Chaney, 2018; Noxon, 2018w, 2019b; O’Neill, 2018). However, according to some, her effort to “challenge ... all things women have accepted as status quo” (WomenintheWorld, 2018) by building a bridge between these “different territories” (Soloski, 2018) fell short. Unlike *Sharp*, *Dietland*’s reception was fairly mixed. Of the eleven coded reviews,<sup>51</sup> all celebrated Joy Nash’s

<sup>51</sup> Reviews for *Dietland* are as follows: Chaney (2018), Baldwin (2018), Framke (2018a), Giorgis (2018), Inhat (2018), Kang (2018), McFarland (2018b), Paskin (2018a), Patterson (2018a), Saraiya (2018a), and Soloski (2018).

“effectively understated” (Baldwin, 2018), “multidimensional” (Chaney, 2018) portrayal of Plum; beyond her performance, though, many agreed that the show was attempting to address too much. In these criticisms, one can again note the minimizing effect aimed at genre non-conforming programming. The “muddled” messaging (Inhat, 2018) and “heavy-handed” storytelling (Giorgis, 2018) divided critics into two camps: those that had faith in Noxon’s ability to right the ship, and those that felt it was a lost cause. Noxon was proud of the various “territories” the show traversed, and prouder still of the majority female crew that put it together. Audiences responded well, telling Noxon that *Dietland* “ke[pt] [them] feeling like [they were] not alone” (Ryssdal & Hollenhorst, 2018). Despite *Dietland* having characters of color and an accelerated pace, the focused intensity of *Sharp* was more palatable to critics than this show’s more exaggerated genre-bending, and it was ultimately cancelled after its inaugural season.

In all of her creative works, Noxon opts to excise “comfort” and “likability” (Vineyard, 2018) in service of the compelling and “truthful” end results (Noxon, 2019g; Rosen, 2015, p. 33). She works to highlight topics that many are experiencing, but few are seeing depicted onscreen. Noxon also does her best to give women professional opportunities both in front of and behind the camera: both *Sharp* and *Dietland* had writers’ rooms that were majority female (“*Dietland*,” 2019; “*Sharp Objects*,” 2019). She is also “look[ing] outside of [herself] more” (Noxon, 2019g) with her projects, to ensure that the stories she perpetuates to mass audiences accurately depict the plight of “the other” (Ryssdal & Hollenhorst, 2018). She feels “responsible” for portraying diverse perspectives (Amoruso, 2018), and aims to continue to do so at Netflix, where the stories she crafts can work as international “empathy machines” (Noxon, 2019g).

### **Jenji Kohan: Deconstructing the “Trojan Horse” of Privilege**

Jenji Kohan grew up in Los Angeles, California, with her own familial proximity to the industry: her father produced various award show broadcasts and variety specials in the 1960s and 70s, and her older brother co-created NBC’s *Will & Grace* (1998-2006, 2017- ) (Kohan, 2013; Nussbaum, 2017; Press, 2018, p. 226; Willmore, 2013). Despite being encouraged by her parents to go into a more stable profession, she was unable to shake her creative inclinations and won several writing contests while studying at Columbia University. Kohan used this underestimation to set her Hollywood career in motion, but had an indirect journey to success (Kohan, 2013; Nussbaum, 2017; Press, 2018, p. 227).

Through a family friend, Kohan secured her first Hollywood job at *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (1990-1996). Unfortunately, the *Fresh Prince* writers’ room was notoriously “dysfunctional” (Press, 2018, p. 227) and exaggeratedly so toward Kohan and the only other female writer on staff, who were constantly subjected to harassment and derogatory name-calling (Kohan, 2013; Nussbaum, 2017). While *Fresh Prince* did allow her to foster relationships and experiences that would later prove fruitful, she left the show after one season (Bolonik, 2007; Nussbaum, 2017). She then found work writing on several other well-known series—including *Friends* (1994-2004), *Mad About You* (1992-1999), *SATC* (1998-2004), and *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007)—but never quite fit in any of those rooms either, as her outspoken nature strained her interactions with executives and colleagues alike (Kohan, 2013; Nussbaum, 2017; Press, 2018, p. 228; Willmore, 2013). In her tenure as a staff writer, she also faced her fair share of sexist Hollywood obstacles: inappropriate workplace behavior, name rescission from work, even denial of job

opportunities because male industry contemporaries “[weren’t] comfortable working with women” (Nussbaum, 2017). Things changed, though, when Kohan began writing for premium cable at HBO’s *Tracey Takes On...* (1996-1999); under Tracey Ullman’s wing she witnessed a “healthy” writers’ room (Kohan, 2013; Press, 2018, p. 228) that took more storytelling risks because of premium cable’s creative leniency (Nussbaum, 2017). Kohan’s *Tracey Takes On...* experience inspired her to create and run a show of her own, and in the years that followed she drafted and sent out several pilot scripts—a practice she still engages in today despite her prominence (Gilbert 2018a; Nussbaum, 2017; Press, 2018, p. 228). While her first foray into showrunning was dismal—*The Stones* (2004) was ordered and cut by CBS within its inaugural season—her subsequent pilot, *Weeds* (2004-2012), was a “Hail Mary” that paid off (Press, 2018, p. 229). Executives at then-fledgling cable channel Showtime were eager to compete with their competition, and *Weeds*’s immediate success catapulted both Kohan and the network into critical consciousness (Lowry, 2005b; McNutt, 2012a; Snyder, 2014).

With *Weeds*, Kohan was able to create the “safe space” she envisioned while being “battered by the network sitcom system” (Press, 2018, p. 233) and enduring the “cycle of abuse” (Kohan, 2013) directed at non-male, non-white staff writers (Bielby, 2009; Evans, 2019; Henderson, 2011). Her creative process is similar to the models in place industry-wide:<sup>52</sup> writers draft individual episode scripts and submit them to her for a final “pass” that ensures the show’s “consistency of voice” (Kohan, 2013). She calls herself a “benevolent dictator” (Kohan, 2013) who trusts those that work on her shows to do their work well (Bolonik, 2007, p. 7). Current and former staff say that Kohan

<sup>52</sup> These practices are further detailed in Section II (pp. 12-20), as well as in Bennet (2014) and Kallas (2014).

maintains her “leadership ability” while “keep[ing] it fun” (Bolonik, 2007, pp. 102-103), making them comfortable enough to openly voice their opinions and ideas (Evans, 2019; Goldberg, 2014; McHenry, 2017). Kohan also staffs by scouting outside the traditional Hollywood sphere, diversifying the perspectives within the room by employing novelists and playwrights alongside staff writers (“*Orange Is the New Black*,” 2019; “*Weeds*,” 2019), while abiding by a “no assholes” hiring policy that keeps the environment drama-free (Kohan, 2013; Press, 2018, p. 233).

Despite setbacks like “creative differences” with lead actress Mary-Louise Parker, Kohan worked to cultivate an environment on *Weeds* that embodied “a delicate balance of collaboration and discipline” (Press, 2018, p. 251). This technique proved successful, as the trust she established with her co-workers led to deep personal and professional relationships that persist today (Littleton, 2015; Nussbaum, 2017; Villareal, 2019). Rather than confine them to the writers’ room, Kohan has her staff supervise their respective scripts from preproduction to final edits (Bolonik, pp. 97-98). Additionally, she mentors several of her writers and actors—including Lauren Morelli of *Tales of the City* (2019), Stephen Falk of *You’re the Worst* (2014-2019), and Natasha Lyonne of *Russian Doll* (2019)—and executive produces, or “godmothers,” some of their shows—among them Carly Mensch’s *GLOW* (2017- ) and Jamie Denbo’s *American Princess* (2019- ) (Nussbaum, 2017).<sup>53</sup> In lending her name, Kohan both amplifies atypical voices and perpetuates empathetic, “democratic” showrunning techniques (Evans, 2019).

<sup>53</sup> Instances of Kohan “godmothering” and mentoring her current and former staff, as well as her impact on their own showrunning/writing techniques, are noted in Evans (2019), Goldberg (2014), Houston (2014), McHenry (2017), Miller (2019), Robinson (2017), Strause (2013), and Villareal (2019).

As a storyteller, Kohan has a penchant for the “gray area” that “reflects reality” (Willmore, 2013), and her characters often inhabit a liminal space in which their morality fluctuates (Bolonik, 2007, p. 1; Press, 2018, p. 226). She often expresses distaste in the expectation of “likability” (Nussbaum, 2017; Willmore, 2013) and notes that for audiences, it is “actually easier to identify with people who are flawed” (Press, 2018, p. 226). Kohan is particularly interested in nuanced depictions of lawbreaking, “antiheroine” women. Her characters’ dismantling of their ascribed domesticity, and their “transgressive,” “masculine” means for doing so (Giomi, 2017, pp. 107, 112; McNutt, 2012b), distort audiences’ traditional understandings of right and wrong.<sup>54</sup> Her shows broaden the boundaries of onscreen female representation by acknowledging women’s fallibility and allowing them the space to contend with their own litany of flaws instead of servicing those of the men in their lives (Brennan, 2014; Loofbourow, 2015; Stuever, 2014). By presenting oft-relegated issues on a widely accessible platform, Kohan asks of an expansive viewership a “complex empathy” typically reserved for “difficult” male characters—a core tenet of “promiscuous protagonism” (Stuever, 2014).<sup>55</sup>

***Weeds.*** Showtime’s *Weeds* explores the life of suburban mother Nancy Botwin who, upon the sudden death of her husband, resorts to selling marijuana to maintain her upper-middle class lifestyle. Nancy learns to maneuver this territory while flanked by a vivid array of supporting characters—Silas and Shane, her two school-aged sons; Celia, her cynical friend and occasional rival; Heylia, Conrad, and Vaneeta, the African American family that supervises her marijuana dealings; and Andy, her deadbeat brother-

<sup>54</sup> Kohan’s exploration of antiheroines’ moral ambiguity as a response to their antihero counterparts is elaborated on in Buonanno (2017), Nussbaum (2017), Press (2018), and Snyder (2014).

<sup>55</sup> Promiscuous protagonism is elaborated on in Section II, pp. 16-17.

in-law, among others. Over time, she becomes comfortable (though not necessarily successful in) dealing with high stakes situations (e.g., commiserating with drug lords, committing arson, etc.). Inspired by *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), Kohan felt the urge to “forge an antiheroine in a feminine shape” (Nussbaum, 2017), and as a result made Nancy—a “real, idiosyncratic person” (Franklin, 2005) who, despite being “morally compromised” (Frey, 2005), still incites empathy as a widowed mother (Bolonik, 2007, pp. 1-2; Press, 2018, p. 252). Kohan ascribed to Nancy a dual personality (Bolonik, 2007; Press, 2018, p. 231), and the character swaps out nurturing for vengeful when necessary to “configure a reworking of gender power relations” within the “patriarchal structure[s]” of her life (Giomi, 2017, pp. 110-112).

As is often the case with female-driven/female-run shows, executives were “uncomfortable with [*Weeds*’s] twisted [female-centric] morality,” and Showtime was reluctant to give Kohan a creative free pass for fear of alienating the target young, White, male demographic (Nussbaum, 2017). Some of the actors were hesitant as well, fearing it would “kill their careers” to be on a show that was so thematically and syntactically candid in its dialogue (Bolonik, 2007, pp. 6-7; Stevens, 2005b). But Kohan insisted on using “dangerous dialogue” (Frey, 2005) to spotlight unaddressed topics—“sexual trauma” (Young, 2016, p. 33), deviant behavior, and women’s responses to both—and felt the two facets were crucial to her vision for the show (Bolonik, 2007; Nussbaum, 2017). She was right to insist: *Weeds* was an instant success that made Showtime a contender against HBO, and signaled the start of the channel’s eventual “flawed heroine” programming bent (McNutt, 2012a; Press, 2018, p. 225).

Critics lauded the women of *Weeds* in the first few seasons,<sup>56</sup> particularly Parker's Nancy and Elizabeth Perkins's Celia, saying they were "infuse[d]... with pain and humanity" (Lowry, 2007a). Many clamored for longer episode run-times, as 30 minutes of the "well-written and engrossing" (Stanley, 2005b) balancing act of "sentiment and satire" (Stanley, 2006) were seemingly not enough (Havrilesky, 2006). Kohan and her staff kept *Weeds* "addictive" by crafting a series-long journey instead of individual episode arcs (Bolonik, 2007, pp. 101-102) and emphasizing the complex, "imperfect" characters (Cinquemani, 2008). In the 22 episodes Kohan herself wrote, the dramedy dynamic is on full display:

Nancy: Doug, we need to talk.

Doug: Oh, no. No, no. Don't tell me you're dry.

Nancy: I'm not dry, Doug, I'm broke.

Doug: Thank *God*.

Nancy: Maybe I should save some money by firing my accountant ... I can't believe I trust you with my money, you're an *idiot*.

Doug: I'm an idiot *savant*.

*S.1-E.2, "Free Goat" (Kohan & Dannelly, 2005).*

Isabelle [Celia's daughter]: I knew it wouldn't last.

Celia: What?

<sup>56</sup> Reviews coded and analyzed for all eight seasons of *Weeds* are as follows: Alston (2010), Bellafante (2007, 2008), Cinquemani (2008, 2011), Flynn (2005), Franklin (2005), Frey (2005), Gonzalez (2005), Havrilesky (2006), Koski (2008a, 2008b, 2008c), Leung (2009), Lowry (2005b, 2006, 2007a, 2008a), McNutt (2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b), Riccio (2010), Stanley (2005b, 2006), Stevens (2005b), and VanDerWerff (2009a, 2009b). Those that praised the actresses portrayals in particular, apart from those cited in-text, are Flynn (2005), Frey (2005), Stanley (2006), and Stevens (2005b).

Isabelle: The new and improved you. You're feeling better aren't you? You're not gonna die.

Celia: No. I'm going to live for a long, long time. [takes a puff of a cigarette]

Doctors say I'm doing really, really well.

Isabelle: You know, maybe you should double-check just to be sure. I mean, there's still some chance you'll die, right?

Celia: Why would you say that?

Isabelle: Because when you think you're gonna die, you're a much better person.

*S.1-E.10, "The Godmother" (Kohan & Spiro, 2005).*

However, as seasons passed, *Kohan* struggled to sell the series' "frenetic" narrative structure, and critics were ultimately divided on how well its increasingly escalating plotlines were handled (Koski, 2008a, 2008b; Leung, 2009; Lowry, 2006). The show's once-celebrated genre non-conformity was now denounced as tonal asynchronicity. Those that continued to review *Weeds* through its eight-season run were frustrated by its seeming inability coalesce after "constant reinvention" (McNutt, 2012b), and wondered how it could continue once the acclaimed parallel male narrative of *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) emerged (Alston, 2010; Press, 2018, p. 235; VanDerWerff, 2009a, 2009b).

*Kohan*'s depictions of people of color also drew criticism. At times they were glaringly stereotypical—despite some characters having significant roles in the story, all were confined to being drug dealers, gang members, and housekeepers (Franklin, 2005; Frey, 2005; Gonzalez, 2005; Stanley, 2005b, 2006; Stevens 2005b). While the

“stereotypes [did] soften” (Stanley, 2005b), critics were confused by the curt dismissal of Heylia, Conrad, and Veneeta in Season 4, given that Kohan once called them “the heart of the show” (Bolonik, 2007, pp. 5-6).<sup>57</sup> Despite the assurance of her staff writers (some being people of color) that Kohan’s “empathy and talent outweighed [her White] identity” (Nussbaum, 2017), making her “the best writer” for those characters (Bolonik, 2007, pp. 102-103), critics and scholars took issue. These factors were cited as the impetus for critics eventual disregard of the show.<sup>58</sup>

In spite of its flaws, *Weeds* is widely acknowledged as one of the first explorations of women occupying roles “culturally coded as masculine” (Giomi, 2017, pp. 107-109; Mittell, 2015, pp. 247-248), and skewing the societal lines drawn for both the “nurturing mother” and the “professional woman” (Snyder, 2014, pp. 18, 22). Nancy Botwin broke the mold so that future antiheroines—Jackie Peyton (*Nurse Jackie*, 2009-2015), Elizabeth Jennings (*The Americans*, 2013-2018), Rachel Goldberg and Quinn King (*UnREAL*, 2015-2018), and Oksana “Villanelle” Astankova (*Killing Eve*, 2018- ), to name a few—could exist (Press, 2018, p. 235). Toward the end of *Weeds*’s tumultuous eight-season run, Kohan began drafting a project that would spread creative focus across a *spectrum* of flawed women, building on the momentum of Nancy Botwin and adding a slew of names to the ever-growing antiheroine list.

<sup>57</sup> Other sources that chastised Kohan’s treatment of POC are Alston, (2010), Cinquemani (2008), McNutt (2010), and Press (2018, p. 246).

<sup>58</sup> In addition to those cited in-text, critics who felt the show had lessened in quality and thus stopped reviewing it are Cinquemani (2011), Lowry (2007a, 2008a), Riccio (2010), and VanDerWerff (2009a, 2009b).

*Orange Is the New Black*. Adapted from Piper Kerman’s 2011 titular memoir, *Orange Is the New Black* (*OITNB*, 2013-2019) is a critically acclaimed<sup>59</sup> Netflix dramedy that centers on Piper Chapman, an upper-middle class White woman who is arrested on a long-forgotten drug charge and thrust into the culture shock of the prison system. It is immediately evident, though, that Piper was merely serving as a “Trojan horse.”<sup>60</sup> Kohan has been transparent about her strategic use of “White ... well-educated, straight-appearing” Piper (Sullivan Barak, 2016, pp. 46, 53) as a familiar touchstone for executives that would ultimately lead to a “deep group portrait” (Brennan, 2014) of compelling characters within Litchfield Penitentiary.

Kohan shopped *OITNB* around to premium channels and network stations but was denied at every turn—even at former *Weeds* home, Showtime (Kohan, 2013; Press, 2018, p. 236). Netflix executives, however, were eager to compete with existing players and felt the partnership would prove mutually beneficial: Kohan would get the freedom (creatively and financially) to produce the show she envisioned, and they would boost their credibility with her name attached to the platform (Press, 2018, p. 236). Netflix ordered an entire season (13 episodes) after her initial pitch and slated the show as one of their first “originals” (Kohan, 2013; Nussbaum, 2017). Kohan was not aware of the platform’s “all-at-once [release] model” (McNutt, 2015a), but her prior techniques

<sup>59</sup> Reviews coded and analyzed for the seven seasons of *OITNB* are as follows: Baldwin (2019), Brennan (2014), Chaney (2016), Clark (2015), Framke (2018b, 2019a), Goldberg (2012), Gonzalez & Cabin (2016), Hale (2013a, 2014), Lowry (2013, 2014, 2015, 2019), McFarland (2019), McNutt (2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019a, 2019b), Nussbaum (2013, 2014a), Paskin (2013a, 2014a, 2015), Saraiya (2015, 2016, 2017, 2019), Selinger (2017, 2018), Stuever (2013, 2014, 2015), VanArendonk (2018), Wolfson (2013), and Zoller Seitz (2013b, 2014, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> Piper Chapman’s status as *OITNB*’s “Trojan Horse” is noted in Baldwin (2019), Brennan (2014), Framke (2019b), Gilbert (2018a), Kohan (2013), McFarland (2019), Nussbaum (2013), Press, (2018, pp. 237-238), Poniewozik (2019), Stanford (2019), Sullivan Barak (2016), and Willmore (2013).

worked well, servicing the story as an overall series rather than individual episodes (Bolonik, 2007; Kohan, 2013; Saraiya, 2019). Thus, Kohan succeeded in amplifying “ignored,” stories of non-White women, and getting them onto a platform that would ultimately have an expansive reach (an unintentional, positive consequence) (Baldwin, 2019). As one of Netflix’s “flagship” original series (Saraiya, 2015, 2019), *OITNB* significantly increased the platform’s subscribers and set Kohan up as a TV power player (Hale, 2014; Nussbaum, 2013; Stuever, 2013; Zoller Seitz, 2014).

*OITNB* is promiscuous protagonism steeped in genre non-conformity, offering audiences a “kaleidoscope of experiences” (Nussbaum, 2013) that “undercuts rather than dramatizes” any one character’s arc (Loofbourow, 2015), while “effectively melding” comedy and drama to present a more authentic (if not Hollywood-heightened) narrative (Wolfson, 2014). The show has been compared to past crime dramas—specifically HBO’s *Oz* (1997-2003)—but differs from those and the aforementioned antihero shows because of its ensemble emphasis (Hale, 2013a; Nussbaum, 2013). Of note is Kohan’s weaving flashbacks of inmates’ pasts into *OITNB*’s current timeline, layering each of their stories by “isolat[ing] a character’s perspective” while showing an overlap of “their personal journ[ies] and the series as a whole” (McNutt, 2014a; Willmore, 2013). Initially hailed as the “real treasure” of the series (Stuever, 2014), the flashbacks reframed audience expectations surrounding “the dehumanizing qualities of incarceration” (McNutt, 2016a) and “restor[ed] the humanity” (Nussbaum, 2014a) of women banished

to “the margins of society” (Gilbert, 2018a). However, critics wavered on their effectiveness in subsequent seasons.<sup>61</sup>

In greenlighting this uniquely “promiscuously protagonistic” storytelling, Netflix execs allowed Kohan and her creative team to find actresses that embodied a full spectrum of races and sexualities. In doing so, they were able to amass a “wealth of talent” (Kohan, 2013) that looked nothing like any other show on television, and offered opportunities to women “who on other shows would be no more than extras” (Lowry, 2013; Nussbaum, 2013, 2017; Press, 2018, pp. 238; Willmore, 2013). While critics were hesitant to wipe Kohan’s slate clean with regard to portrayals of people of color, those that reviewed *OITNB* over time noted that characters developed and became more nuanced as seasons progressed, only initially falling into stereotypes (Framke, 2019b; McNutt, 2013b). Staying true to her flawed, female-centric roots, Kohan did flesh out the show’s male characters but “pushed them to the margins” (Press, 2018, p. 252) and made them ancillary to the core female ensemble (Nussbaum, 2017; Paskin, 2013a; Poniewozik, 2019; Stuever, 2014). Kohan felt a responsibility to break people out of their “feedback loops” (Press, 2018, p. 241) by exposing them to unfamiliar stories, and described *OITNB* as “a call to awareness, a call to empathy and a call to feel injustice and want to do something about it” (Stanford, 2019). She used *OITNB* as a vehicle to have “national ... and international conversation(s)” (Press, 2018, p. 250) about issues like race and class divisions, sexual violence, and the state of American prisons, that have had difficulty permeating the public sphere because of their pertinence to marginalized

<sup>61</sup> Mention of the flashback technique, as well as its perceived effectiveness, can be found in Framke (2019a) Hale (2013a), Lowry (2013, 2014, 2015), McNutt (2013a, 2014a, 2015a, 2016a, 2016b, 2017b, 2019b), Nussbaum (2014a, 2017), Press (2018, pp. 242-243), Stuever (2014, 2015), VanArendonk (2018), Willmore (2013), and Zoller Seitz (2013b).

populations (Nussbaum, 2017; Young, 2016). Just as in *Weeds*, *OITNB*'s dialogue is "sharp" (Hale, 2013a) and "darkly comedic" (Lowry, 2015), and Kohan's ability to keep "uncovering [characters'] new, meaningful layers" (Gonzalez & Cabin, 2016) through the actresses' "standout" performances (Saraiya, 2017) invoked critical praise across the board.<sup>62</sup> Throughout the duration of show, but particularly in the 14 episodes she wrote, Kohan constantly "slam[med] comedy up against tragedy" to both "mirror life" (Stanford, 2019) and ease viewers into complex, issue-centric conversations:

*[Cindy, Joanne, Poussey, & Taystee are African American; Soso is Japanese American]*

Taystee: Yo, is anybody worried that Suzanne is AWOL?

Soso: Yeah, we're all worried. But we're stuck. And we're all moist and uncomfortable.

Joanne: And I'm mostly dry.

Soso: Damp. Is that better? Is "moist" like some kind of trigger word for you?

Joanne: What did you say?

Poussey: "Trigger," man. She said "trigger."

Cindy: [whispering] She said [expletive].

Taystee: Come on, now. Don't even.

Cindy: What? I'm bored! Can't we have a race war? It'll be fun!

*S.4-E.1, "Work That Body for Me" (Kohan & McCarthy, 2016).*

The "Kohanesque" dialogue that drove the show, as it did *Weeds*, proved difficult for critics to assess, resulting in mixed reviews and muddled award season opportunities

<sup>62</sup> Additional reviews that highlight certain actresses (e.g., series regulars like Danielle Brooks, Selenis Leyva, Taryn Manning, and Taylor Schilling, and guest stars like Blair Brown) are Chaney (2016), Hale (2014), Lowry (2019), McNutt (2014a, 2016a, 2019b), Nussbaum (2013), Saraiya (2016, 2017, 2019), and Selinger (2017).

in the long-term (Lowry, 2015; McNutt, 2010, 2012a; Poniewozik, 2019; Saraiya, 2016, 2019). Despite its strong start, by season three most critics agreed that *OITNB* had “outgrown” Piper altogether (Clark, 2015),<sup>63</sup> and that the plot had “gone a bit stale”—par for the course for a show that is both narratively and aesthetically confined (Lowry, 2014, 2015, 2019; Stuever, 2015). More critics began to jump ship as season progressed: for some, the flashbacks felt unnecessary, like “a vestigial organ” (VanArendonk, 2018); for others, it was the tonal asynchronicity of Kohan’s writing, with comedy and drama now clashing instead of meshing; for others still, it was the structural direction the show took in season five, having all 13 episodes take place within a three-day period, resulting in a standalone “bottle season” (Selinger, 2017).<sup>64</sup>

In spite of the criticism, *OITNB* was largely celebrated for its unapologetically female backbone. The show was “made by, about, and arguably *for* women” (Householder & Trier-Bieniek, 2016, p. 6), with a majority female cast and crew that wanted worldwide audiences to “recognize the emotional truth of [the] human experience” (Stanford, 2019). With its final season in July 2019, rather “rest[ing] on its beige-uniformed laurels” (Saraiya, 2017), Kohan continued to push boundaries by “complicating [the show’s] own viewpoint” (Saraiya, 2019) and exploring lived experiences it had yet to address (e.g., undocumented immigrant abduction and deportation, prisoners’ societal reintegration upon release, etc.). *OITNB*’s steady popularity over its seven seasons serves as proof that a show centered on counterpublic

<sup>63</sup> Additional reviews that echo the sentiments of having outgrown Piper and losing the creative spark to keep the show’s plot relevant are McNutt (2015b, 2019a), Paskin (2015), and Saraiya (2015, 2019).

<sup>64</sup> Other critics who felt the show had lost its footing for any reason, including the aforementioned, are Framke (2018b), McNutt (2017a, 2017b), Paskin (2015), and Zoller Seitz (2017).

concerns can resonate with general audiences, if not better than those that have perpetuated the status quo (Brennan, 2014; Paskin, 2013a; Zoller Seitz, 2014).

Kohan's privilege as a White woman and as an established name in the industry served as a "Trojan Horse" of sorts for access to stories of flawed, marginalized women, as well as for opportunities for women to staff and create these shows.<sup>65</sup> Both *Weeds*'s and *OITNB*'s focus on the moral gray area their characters inhabit distinguishes them from media within their shared dramedy genre, and from shows across the general television landscape. Television's accessible, "domestic" nature (Buonanno, 2017, p. ix; Lagerwey, 2017, pp. 199-200) lends itself to an amplified circulation, with a unique ability to spotlight themes that were previously pushed to the margins and introduce them to unfamiliar audiences on a larger scale.<sup>66</sup> Kohan's deft use of Netflix's wide circulatory net to recompose and redefine women's television portrayals builds on the foundation of traditional feminist rhetorical vehicles (Hidalgo, 2017; Sheridan et al., 2012, p. 143). While both of her shows were successful in perpetuating narratives of "flawed heroines," *OITNB* went a step further by blazing the trail for the Netflix "binge-watch," an entirely new method of consuming media (Householder & Trier-Bieniek, 2016, p. 1).<sup>67</sup> Television series "[have] the ability to shape what cultural conversations are happening" (Householder & Trier-Bieniek, 2016, p. 4) and as Caroline Framke points out her review of *OITNB*'s final season, "[the show] leaves behind a television landscape that looks nothing like the one in which [it] premiered, and the medium as a whole is better off for

<sup>65</sup> Per data available on IMDb, Kohan doubled the number of women on-staff from *Weeds* to *OITNB*, both in the writers' room and in the director's chair ("Orange Is the New Black," 2019; "Weeds," 2019).

<sup>66</sup> As discussed in Sec. III of the review of literature, pp. 20-27.

<sup>67</sup> Sources that touch upon the Netflix "binge-watching" phenomenon are Framke (2019a), Kohan (2013), Littleton (2015), Nussbaum (2017), Press (2018, pp. 241-242), Stuever (2013), and Willmore (2013).

it” (2019a). Given that Kohan inked an exclusive multi-year deal with Netflix, one can expect more “game-chang[ing]” programming to come (Littleton, 2015), and with it (hopefully) a shift in “public” discourse (Netflix Media Center, 2017b).

### **Shonda Rhimes: “Dark, Twisty” and Unapologetic**

Shonda Rhimes—one of the most successful showrunners in Hollywood—had no intention of working in the industry. Growing up with parents employed in higher education, Rhimes had aspirations of becoming a novelist (Press, 2018, p. 105; Rhimes & Stivers, 2017). She parlayed this dream into an MFA in screenwriting from the University of Southern California, graduating with a completed script in tow called *When Willows Touch*. The *Willows* script made it to Miramax Films, but despite initial executive support and a three-picture contract, the project never materialized (Press, 2018, p. 106). She sold a second script for an unproduced project, *Human Seeking Same*, and used the money to support herself as she wrote scripts full-time (Ogunnaike, 2006; Paskin, 2013c; Rhimes, 2006). It was then that she produced her three most notable film projects: the award-winning HBO biopic, *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* (1999), the Britney Spears film *Crossroads* (2002), and the second installment of the *Princess Diaries* (2004) (“Shonda Rhimes,” 2019).<sup>68</sup>

Rhimes adopted her first child between projects and subsequently spent a majority of her time watching television, particularly shows like *Buffy* and *24* (2001-2010) (Holmes, 2014; Ogunnaike, 2006; Paskin, 2013c; Press, 2018, p. 106; VanDerWerff, 2013b). Inspired by the kinds of creative risks she saw being taken on TV, Rhimes wrote pilots to fill a void of nuanced female portrayals. Her first pitch to ABC—a melodrama

<sup>68</sup> Additional sources that delineate her filmic body of work include Everett (2015, p. 35), McDowell (2006), Ogunnaike (2006), Paskin (2013c), Press (2018, p. 106), and Rhimes (2006).

about female war correspondents—was not picked up, but she continued to write and pitch projects in that same vein (Ogunnaike, 2006; Paskin, 2013c; Press, 2018, p. 107; Rhimes, 2006). In response to then-CEO Bob Iger’s request for a medical drama to round out the channel’s 2005 fall lineup, she used her experience as a high school candy striper and her fascination with medical procedures to pen the pilot for *Grey’s Anatomy*, the unexpected mid-season sensation that reignited ABC’s status as a primetime contender (Ogunnaike, 2006; Press, 2018, p. 108; Rhimes, 2006).

The success of *Grey’s* gave Rhimes the authority to continue to work in the industry on her own terms. After a few instances of pushback from higher-ups—one being the alleged overuse of the anatomical term “vagina,” for which she coined the colloquial workaround “vajayjay”—she eventually stopped receiving notes from executives (Press, 2018, p. 117; Rhimes, 2006). Being that this level of creative freedom is highly unusual for a showrunner working in network television,<sup>69</sup> she took full advantage of the lenience while showrunning *Scandal* (2012-2018), her third project for ABC (Jung, 2018; Rash, 2014). As a result, her level of involvement has wavered from season to season between the hands-on writer and the supervisory showrunner roles, but she continues to leverage her clout when necessary. For *Grey’s* in particular, she handed the reins to Krista Vernoff in season 14 and no longer ensures scripts’ consistency of tone, as Vernoff is a Shondaland veteran who “has [Rhimes’s] sensibility and understands the voice” of the show well enough (Rice, 2018).

Rhimes has a particular interest in depicting women onscreen as she knows them to be in real life: “complex, ambitious, clever, confused” (McDowell, 2006) and not

<sup>69</sup> Notes from executives are standard practice in network television. The variation of creative leniency in network, cable, and streaming programming is delineated in Sec. II of the literature review, pp. 12-13.

necessarily “likable” (Jung, 2018; Press, 2018, p. 110; Rash, 2014; “The Showrunner,” 2017).<sup>70</sup> She realized that, save for a few exceptions—*Buffy* and *Weeds* among them—female portrayals on television up to that point perpetuated “domestic” societal strictures women have been conditioned to accept and internalize: “the norm” is settling down and starting a family, and anything other than that warrants an explanation or apology (“The Showrunner,” 2017). She presented alternatives that were just as valid and representative of reality, and these depictions struck a chord across demographics, defying network expectations and “conventional wisdom” (Aurthur, 2005) that assumed female-centric shows would not resonate with general audiences (Everett, 2015, p. 40; Kallas, 2014, p. 155; McDowell, 2006; Vega, 2013). Her creative practices—similar to those of Noxon, Kohan, and other showrunners—in tandem with her unintentional “colorblind casting” process (Paskin, 2013c; Press, 2018, p. 112) led to an onscreen diversification that made minority portrayals on par with their White onscreen counterparts (Keslassy, 2016; Ogunnaike, 2006; Rhimes, 2006, 2013b, 2014f). Like Kohan and Noxon, Rhimes also uses her position of power as leverage for others trying to establish themselves in the industry, and works to diversify perspectives in the room as much as she does her casts (“*Grey’s Anatomy*,” 2019; Press, 2018, p. 105; “*Scandal*,” 2019). She, too, frequently lends her creative clout to former writers and serves as executive producer on their shows (Davies, 2019; Holmes, 2014; Prudom, 2014).

***Grey’s Anatomy.*** *Grey’s* is a medical melodrama that initially centered on a diverse group of “great-looking, sharp-talking, bed-hopping, work-obsessed” surgical interns (Paskin, 2013c). The protagonist through which the audience experiences the

<sup>70</sup> Tweets in which Rhimes emphasizes this sentiment are Rhimes (2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2014b, 2018a), and Shondaland (2019i).

show is Meredith Grey, played by Ellen Pompeo. However, within the show's first season, the narrative focus quickly expanded to include much of the rest of the hospital staff—the remaining interns, residents in various specialties, the chief of the hospital, and as seasons progressed, newer classes of interns—employing promiscuous protagonism to make *Grey's* more of a formidable ensemble show than a singular character study (Garron, 2005; Loofbourow, 2015; Lowry, 2005a; Siede, 2015).

As critics were quick to point out, *Grey's* was not reinventing the wheel in its first season, as it utilized several genre tenets (like disposable “cases-of-the-week”) in its core structure (Lowry, 2005a; Shales, 2005).<sup>71</sup> As a result, it drew constant comparisons to other medical shows—*ER* (1994-2009), *House* (2004-2012), and *Scrubs* (2001-2010)—whose male protagonists seemed more palatable, and thus more appropriate, in the high stakes hospital environment.<sup>72</sup> *Grey's* was rarely taken seriously on its own merits, with many critics panning the melodramatic soap opera-style on which Rhimes leaned. While some praised the show for allowing its “heroines [to] aspire to meaningful work as well as meaningless sex” (Stanley, 2005a) others denounced *Grey's*, comparing its perceived detriments to characteristics employed on successful female-centric, male-run programs (e.g., Meredith's narrations at the start of each episode were similar to, but not as effective as, Carrie Bradshaw's voiceovers in *SATC*) (Lowry, 2005a).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Reviews coded and analyzed for the 11 seasons of *Grey's* on which Rhimes wrote episodes are as follows: Armstrong (2010), Aurthur (2005), Baldwin (2005), Carmichael (2007), Flynn (2007), Garron (2005), Harris (2014, 2015), Havrilesky (2007), Inhat (2014), Leonard (2005), Lowry (2005a, 2007b, 2008b), Maerz (2012), Raisler (2012), Rosenblum (2007), Shales (2005), Siede (2013), Stanley (2005a, 2007), Stevens (2005a), VanDerWerff (2011, 2013b), and Weber (2015).

<sup>72</sup> Critics that compared *Grey's* to the aforementioned medical shows (and others) within their reviews are Aurthur (2005), Garron (2005), Lowry (2005a), Shales (2005), Stanley (2005a), and Stevens (2005a).

<sup>73</sup> Critical derision stemming from Rhimes's soap-operatic storytelling style with regard to *Grey's*, as well as acknowledgement of this unfair assessment, can be found in Flynn (2007), Harris (2014), Nussbaum (2012, 2014b), Paskin (2013c), Press (2018, p. 116), Shales (2005), Siede (2013), Stanley (2007), and VanDerWerff (2013b).

Shonda Rhimes's interpretation of a medical drama is more along the lines of a "thinking woman's soap opera" (Maerz, 2012). It presents characters (particularly women and people of color) acting and reacting in ways atypical to the televisual standard. Women are allowed to stray further from the confines of "traditional feminine likability" (Press, 2018, p. 110) as they compete for time and opportunity in the professional sphere ("The Showrunner," 2017). Rhimes created Meredith, Cristina Yang, and Izzie Stevens in response to the women she had seen on television who were simply "ideas of what women [were]" (Rhimes, 2006) rather than complicated, sometimes altogether unpleasant, but actual (Everett, 2015, pp. 36, 38; Rhimes, 2017b; "The Showrunner," 2017). As a writer, she has a "bedrock belief in the pleasure principle of TV" (Paskin, 2013c), and produced *Grey's* as "[a] program she would watch herself" as a fan of television (Keslassy, 2016). With fast-paced, well-written dialogue and increasingly complex interconnected plotlines, *Grey's* gave audiences and critics a first glimpse at what would become "Rhimesian trademarks" (Poniewozik, 2014). These trademarks are seen throughout the show as a whole, as Rhimes's voice permeates the series in its entirety, but are especially prominent in the 28 episodes she wrote herself:

Addison: Well, a gathering of men outside the delivery room. How mid-century of you...

Webber: How's [Bailey] doing?

Addison: Takin' it like a woman. Six centimeters dilated, 50% effaced, and refusing all pain meds, which I think is stupid, but I'm not in labor, so ...

Bailey: [*waddling out of her examination room*] What are you people doing out here?

Webber: Are you doing alright? Can I get you anything?

Bailey: A boy the size of a ten-pound bowling ball is working his way out of my body. Can you give me something for that? Can you get me a new vagina?

Webber: Oh, well—

Bailey: I didn't think so. Look everybody, I appreciate the concern, but I'm fine. It's just childbirth.

*S.2-E.16, "It's the End of the World" (Rhimes & Horton, 2006).*

The above excerpt in particular emphasizes the female characters' autonomy in *Grey's*, a phenomenon scarce in mid-2000s network television. Bailey and Addison (along with the other women on the show) display a variety of issues and experiences, accomplishing as much as their male colleagues and adjusting viewers perceptions of "feminine" existence both personally and professionally.

Throughout its 15-season run, critical responses to *Grey's* have varied: disdain in season one (Garron, 2005; Shales, 2005; Stevens, 2005a); appreciation for both the diverse cast and the progressive female portrayals in two next seasons (Havrilesky, 2007; Lowry, 2007b; Stanley, 2005a); frustration with the plot's predictability in seasons four through six (Carmichael, 2007; Lowry, 2008b; Rosenblum, 2007; Stanley, 2007); relief with season seven's "reset" (Armstrong, 2010; VanDerWerff, 2011); and so on. Eventually, critics stopped reviewing the show altogether, with only certain publications continuing to recapitulate episodes each week. Viewership for the show, however, has remained steady, proving that Rhimes can still "emotionally connect" with audiences (VanDerWerff, 2013b), and securing *Grey's* as one of the most popular shows with the target 18- to 49-year-old demographic (Rice, 2019).

Critics and audiences alike constantly praise the authenticity of the show's women, specifically Sandra Oh's Cristina Yang, Kate Walsh's Addison Montgomery, and Sara Ramirez's Callie Torres.<sup>74</sup> Of particular note is the "beautiful, multi-layered" friendship (Harris, 2014) that Oh's Cristina shares with Pompeo's Meredith, lauded as one of the most accurate depictions of female friendship in television history (Inhat, 2014; Maerz, 2012):

Cristina: You have a "feeling"? ... What kind of feeling?

Meredith: Like I might die.

Cristina: Today? Tomorrow? In 50 years? We're all going to die eventually. But now, we're late. Let's go.

Meredith: ... I just need something to happen. A sign that things are gonna change. I need a reason to go on. I need some hope. And in the absence of hope, I need to stay in bed and feel like I might die today.

Cristina: [*pauses*] Whatever. Everybody has problems. Now get your[self] out of bed and get to work!

*S.2-E.16, "It's the End of the World" (Rhimes & Horton, 2006).*

Her insistence on presenting "well-meaning, but complex and flawed," genuine female experiences (Everett, 2015, p. 36)—the question of women's ability to "have it all," the logistical and emotional aftermath of sexual violence—has led to several influential television moments (Paskin, 2013b, 2013c; Rhimes, 2017b; "The Showrunner," 2017). Most recently, *Grey's* had a scene showcasing the hospital's working women in support of a patient who was a rape victim—a storyline that Rhimes, as creator and now-

<sup>74</sup> Critical acclaim for the above noted individual performances are found in Armstrong (2010), Havrilesky (2007), Inhat (2014), Lowry (2005a, 2007b), Stanley (2005a), and Stevens (2005a).

executive producer, eagerly fought for on behalf of the show's cast, crew, and current showrunner (Goldberg, 2019). The show continues to offer nuanced depictions of women in the public, professional sphere, and served as the prototype for Rhimes's subsequent ABC venture.

*Scandal*. Inspired by the professional life of Judy Smith, a former Washington, D.C., public relations agent and “fixer,” *Scandal*'s Judy was Kerry Washington's Olivia Pope (Lowry, 2012; Nussbaum, 2012; Stuever, 2012; Vega, 2013). The show also features Pope's associates, referred to as “gladiators in suits;” as well as President “Fitz” Fitzgerald Scott; his wife, Mellie; and other assorted White House and Capitol staff. Pope was the first African American female television protagonist in nearly forty years, molded in Smith's image, but with an additional, melodramatic twist: her character was embroiled in an extramarital affair with the President of the United States (Nussbaum, 2012; Vega 2013). Upon pitching this to ABC, they approved all but the executive infidelity and asked that she amend the script to avoid audience “discomfort” (Nussbaum, 2014b). But Rhimes refused, and the network ultimately let her vision come to fruition (Jung, 2018; Rash, 2014).

As if amplifying the “trademarks” she employed in *Grey's*, *Scandal* features “breakneck pace” dialogue and multiple plotlines (and cliffhangers) per episode, of which Rhimes wrote fifteen (Saraiya, 2013). Rhimes also consistently emphasized the power interplay between Olivia and Fitz, often having them speak to each other as equals while maintaining an awareness of his White, male privilege:

Olivia: Don't you have a swearing-in ceremony to get to?

Fitz: What?

Olivia: Mellie.

Fitz: Liz North and I decided I'm not going.

Olivia: What do you mean you're not going?

Fitz: Liv—

Olivia: Don't "Liv" me. It's a hugely public event. If you don't attend, all it will do is raise questions. And you owe her this.

Fitz: I *owe* her?

Olivia: She's the junior senator from Virginia, and she's a woman that everybody thinks of as nothing more than your wife. And she's looking for respect. How many times do you think she's done this for you, whether she wanted to or not?

*S.5-E.1, "Heavy is the Head" (Rhimes & Verica, 2015).*

Critics were skeptical of buying into *Scandal*, calling it a “deliciously dumb” (Stuever, 2012) example of “TV nepotism” (Lowry, 2012), and claiming it fell short of political predecessors like *The West Wing* (1999-2006), *State of Play* (2003), and its contemporary, *House of Lies* (2012-2016).<sup>75</sup> They criticized the show’s narrow focus on Pope, wondering what happened to the diverse promiscuous protagonism of *Grey’s* for which Rhimes was well-known. While having a strong, flawed African American woman as the lead was a step forward, the “plot gopher” associates (McGee, 2012) had little to

<sup>75</sup> Reviews coded and analyzed for the seven seasons of *Scandal* are as follows: Alston (2014, 2015a, 2015b), Butler (2017), Crouch (2013), Hale (2013b), Inhat (2015, 2016a, 2016b), Lowry (2012, 2018b), McFarland (2017, 2018a), McGee (2012, 2013), Nussbaum (2012), Patterson (2012), Paskin (2012), Ray-Harris (2017a, 2017b, 2018), Saraiya (2013, 2014), Stanley (2012), Stuever (2012), VanDerWerff (2013a, 2013c), Vega (2013), and Zoller Seitz (2012, 2013a). Those that compared *Scandal* to political shows past (negatively or otherwise) are McFarland (2018), McGee (2012), Patterson, (2012), Saraiya (2014), Stanley (2012), and Zoller Seitz (2012, 2013a).

no distinguishing characteristics of their own (Zoller Seitz, 2012). This shifted over time, though only slightly, as the narrative remained primarily fixated on the relationship between Pope and Fitz. Rhimes also opted to address race more explicitly with *Scandal*, making it a prominent recurring theme as seasons progressed (Jung, 2018; Nussbaum, 2014b; Paskin, 2013c; Stuever, 2012; Tillet, 2018):

Fitz: Mellie, this phase of our lives—capitalizing on public support as a definition of marriage—is over. Make no mistake, you are going to leave the White House . . . My relationship with Olivia is going to spark a *real* dialogue about race in this country, and it is going to blow the Republican Party wide open and let some light and air into places that haven't seen change in far too long. So the party will *love* her. And you want to be on the right side of history here, trust me, you do.

*S.2-E.22, “White Hats Back On” (Rhimes & Verica, 2013).*

Despite its primetime placement, *Scandal*'s viewership was not at the level of *Grey's*, and the show was on the brink of cancellation before Rhimes employed a previously unheard-of marketing strategy. At the recommendation of Washington (who worked on outreach for Obama's 2008 presidential campaign), the cast and crew of *Scandal* began to “live-tweet” the show as it was airing, engaging with viewers on a more personal level, sharing behind the scenes knowledge, and engendering a sense of community between fans and stars.<sup>76</sup> As a result, *Scandal* garnered a large, passionate fan base and its viewership skyrocketed, with one critic aptly calling it “the show that Twitter

<sup>76</sup> Sources that elaborate on Rhimes's use of Twitter to market *Scandal* are Brown (2018), Everett (2015, pp. 34-35, 37-39), McNamara (2013), Rash (2014), Rhimes & Stivers (2017), Tillet (2018), Turchiano (2018), and Vega (2013).

built” (McNamara, 2013). Executives and creators realized the opportunity for expanded narrative reach through increased fan engagement online, and as a result, the “live-tweet” model is now standard across networks.

*Scandal* ran for seven seasons, and while it maintained a robust viewership, critics had a difficult time staying onboard. Similar to *Grey’s*, *Scandal* was dismissed as soapy fanfare and over-the-top “camp” (Lowry, 2012; Mittell, 2015, p. 224).<sup>77</sup> “Quality television” with male protagonists (e.g., *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*) often employed “soapy” techniques (Mittell, pp. 233-234, 245), but were given a pass as the tropes were “reimagined as narrative complexity in service of stories about men” (Lagerwey, p. 201). While Washington’s portrayal was mostly lauded, factors surrounding her character—exaggerated plotlines and overstuffed episodes; the aforementioned “plot gopher” ancillary characters—were denounced (McGee, 2012). An additional element of Rhimes’s shows that is routinely criticized is the “formulaic,” “plot-driven” nature of their narrative structures.<sup>78</sup> While she has insisted that her shows are driven by characters, Rhimes has also noted that her writers often “back-engineer” episodes from a major event, and even reset from season to season without any regard for prior character development (Holmes, 2014; Jung, 2018; Rhimes, 2014d, 2014e). Despite critical contempt, the audience reception surrounding *Scandal* and *Grey’s* has cemented Rhimes’s legacy as a showrunner. Her portrayals “good, bad, flawed, selfish, [and]

<sup>77</sup> Reviews that chastised *Scandal* for its melodramatic leanings, or acknowledged the bias of most toward the “soap opera” genre, are Butler (2017), Crouch (2013), Lowry (2018b), Patterson (2012), Paskin (2012), VanDerWerff (2013a), and Zoller Seitz (2013a).

<sup>78</sup> Critics of *Grey’s* and *Scandal* and other assorted sources that have pointed out her penchant for plot-driven storytelling, as well as instances in which she has refuted that claim, are Alston (2015b), Garron (2005), Gilbert (2018a), Hale (2013b), Holmes (2014), Inhat (2016a), Jung (2018), Noxon (2019g), Rash (2014), Rhimes & Stivers (2017), Ryssdal & Hollenhorst (2018), Siede (2013), Tillet (2018), and VanDerWerff (2011).

competitive” women (Ogunnaike, 2006) have inspired those outside the business to live authentically, and those within it to tell more stories in that same vein (Rhimes, 2014g).

Building on the momentum of *Scandal*’s social media surge and her own prior engagement online, Rhimes continues to utilize Twitter as a conduit for meaningful dialogue. The accessibility of the medium, and the seeming accessibility *to* her that it provides, has proven to be a powerful tool for enhanced awareness of underserved topics. Rhimes has a dual presence on Twitter, with a personal account and a corporate one for her Shondaland production company, and she utilizes both to respond to fans directly,<sup>79</sup> as well as amplify women’s contributions to and progress across a variety of industries,<sup>80</sup> issues underdiscussed in the public sphere because of their “feminine” nature,<sup>81</sup> and resources she feels could benefit a wide swath of the female population.<sup>82</sup>

With network channels’ limited capabilities, Rhimes managed to irreversibly alter the television landscape by crafting a highly interactive showrunning approach to *Grey’s* and *Scandal*. In addition to her continued social media activity, Rhimes’s programming will now be even more accessible in the wake of her multi-year Netflix deal (Netflix Media Center, 2017a). Not only will she have additional creative and financial leniency within Netflix’s “clear, fearless space” (Netflix Media Center, 2017a), she will also have

<sup>79</sup> Tweets in which Rhimes engages directly with fans via the reply feature: Rhimes (2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012b, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2014e, 2014f, 2014h, 2014i).

<sup>80</sup> Tweets in which Rhimes sheds light on women’s contributions, as well as the obstacles they face, across industries: Rhimes (2013c, 2014j, 2014k, 2015, 2016, 2018d, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019h), and Shondaland (2017c, 2017d, 2017f, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018e, 2018f, 2018g, 2018h, 2018i, 2018j, 2018k, 2018l, 2018m, 2018n, 2018q, 2018r, 2018t, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e, 2019f, 2019j, 2019k, 2019l, 2019n, 2019o, 2019p, 2019q, 2019s, 2019u).

<sup>81</sup> Tweets in which Rhimes disseminates information on issues ignored because of their “feminized” status: Rhimes (2017a, 2019d, 2019f, 2019g), and Shondaland (2017a, 2017e, 2018a, 2018b, 2018o, 2018p, 2019b, 2019g, 2019h, 2019m).

<sup>82</sup> Tweets in which Rhimes increases awareness of “women’s problems” and resources relevant to those issues, as well as assorted resources for general female well-being: Shondaland (2017b, 2017g, 2018d, 2018n, 2018s, 2019h, 2019m, 2019n, 2019r, 2019t).

a wider audience with which to share “limitless” stories that continue to redefine onscreen women as ambitious and authentic (Lowry, 2018a; Poniewozik, 2018b, “Shonda Rhimes Makes TV,” 2018).

## Conclusion

Within their respective bodies of work, the showrunners analyzed in this research spotlight female-specific experiences that deviate from “normalized” portrayals that, as written from the male perspective, have saturated television. Noxon’s *Sharp Objects* and *Dietland* focus on their respective protagonists’ internalization of personal traumas, and the women’s responses to those experiences in both the “private” and “public” sphere. Kohan’s *Weeds* and *Orange Is the New Black* explore the repercussions—physical, emotional, individual, societal—that women deal with when they engage in deviant behavior. Rhimes’s *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Scandal* propose realities in which gender does not hinder a woman’s ability to attain professional success. These shows further complicate the ever-evolving definition of womanhood by offering viewers across gender lines a cultural conduit within which they can inhabit “crossroads” outside their comfort zones (Stanford, 2019).

Joining the recovery efforts of feminist rhetoricians, Noxon, Kohan, and Rhimes are working in real time to “uncover” (Flynn, 1988, p. 434) previously “silhouetted” stories (Royster & Kirsch, 2018, p. 175), filling in gaps and “disrupting narrative[s]” (Ritchie & Boardman, 1999) when necessary to round out women’s place in popular culture, and reconfiguring ideas of “defective femininity” (Scott, 1989, p. 17) to encompass, accept, and understand women’s experiences, rather than simply classify them as “other.”<sup>83</sup> The stories championed by each of the analyzed showrunners work to deconstruct societal expectations of women by allowing them to exist publicly as flawed and complex. They have chosen these topics at the expense of male executives’ and

<sup>83</sup> As discussed in the Sec. I of the literature review, pp. 7-11.

colleagues’ “comfort”<sup>84</sup>—an excuse used by those who wield power to suppress women’s voices and rhetorical clout, both on the page and in the professional sphere.

Noxon, Kohan, and Rhimes have each at one point shared their disdain for “likability,” as it taints otherwise authentic storytelling.<sup>85</sup> The characters present in the shows analyzed—Camille, Plum, Nancy, the women of Litchfield, Olivia, and the women of Grey Sloan Memorial Hospital—embody a slew of qualities that, by former onscreen standards, render them “unlikable.” Their flawed personalities force audiences to wrestle with the decision to invest (or not) in their journeys and comb through the moral “gray area” they perpetually inhabit. While geniusity was used to defend the antiheroes of TV yesteryear, audiences consuming these women’s narratives are not given the luxury of that thematic crutch. Instead, they are shown characters that make mistakes and face repercussions as anyone else would and are invariably drawn to that authenticity. The heightened, Hollywood nature of those mistakes is but a by-product of the medium, and viewers are willing to suspend disbelief with regard to plot if the characters themselves feel genuine.

The promiscuous protagonism Noxon, Kohan, and Rhimes each employed in varying degrees is an ideal technique for genre non-conformity, as it “distributes” attention and empathy among large ensemble casts of flawed characters and provides ample opportunity for both comedy and drama to coexist (Loofbourow, 2015). While

84 Mentions of “comfort” as a crutch for male executives’ hiring choices can be found in Bennett (2014, p. 116), Erigha (2015), Gilbert (2018a), Hazelton (2018), Heldman & Haggard (2017), Kallas (2014, pp. 91-92, 114-115) Nussbaum (2017), Press (2018, pp. 2, 7, 284), Ryssdal and Hollenhorst (2018), and Shapiro (2018).

85 The three showrunners’ mentions of doing away with “likability” are noted in each of their respective case studies—Noxon on p. 48, Kohan on p. 52, and Rhimes on pp. 65, 67—as well as in Jung (2018), Nussbaum (2017), Press (2018, p. 110), Rash (2014), Schilling (2017), Vineyard (2018), Willmore (2013).

certainly not the first shows to use this narrative tool, they were the first to employ it from the female angle, in front of and behind the camera. *SATC* and *Desperate Housewives* (2004-2012) came before them, but were created and helmed by men; as a result, the shows' narratives were groundbreaking for putting women at the forefront, yet "distorted" because said women would act in stereotypical, unnatural ways (Heldman & Haggard, 2017, p. 3). As 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist rhetors, female showrunners work not to erase these existing, "foremother" characters, but to contextualize their portrayals—acknowledging them, moving beyond their boundaries, and "reoccupy[ing]" the spaces they leave behind (Hastie, 2007, p. 5) by redistributing in their stead repurposed and recomposed authentic female narratives. "Women's experience[s] ... [are] worthy of recuperation" (Flynn, 1988, p. 434); as feminist rhetoricians, Noxon, Kohan, and Rhimes are not only contributing to the evolving landscape of popular culture, but to the broader context of women's history. If, as Mittell notes, "meanings are given expressive possibility through the form of televised stories" (2015, p. 4), by generating conversations through their televisual work and engaging (to a degree) in said conversations online, Noxon, Kohan, and Rhimes are adjusting existing perceptions of women by perpetuating "televised stories" to mass audiences that defy cultural norms and challenge established meanings. As a result of theirs and others' efforts, the "common concerns" being openly discussed begin to reflect those of a larger, sprawling, existing public that looks significantly less White and male (Mittell, 2015, pp. 4, 150).

While one could argue that the #MeToo era is apt for strides to be made, change has been slow to come. Noxon and Rhimes were asked their opinion of this current "cultural reckoning," and each responded with a skeptical optimism that illustrates the

situation's actuality: the excitement and fulfillment of seeing women's rights championed and represented do not effectively change the structural hierarchy of the industry (Gilbert, 2018a; Noxon, 2018u, 2018v, 2018y; Shapiro 2018; "Shonda Rhimes Makes TV," 2018). The lack of gender parity among showrunners, directors, writers, and crew members persists, with little uptick since 2016. What makes Noxon, Kohan, and Rhimes unique is that they have each achieved a level of success and recognition atypical of women in the industry. As part of the "first class" of female showrunners their work has served as a springboard for others, and they often "godmother" projects that would likely not get much traction without their names attached—Noxon's involvement with *Code Black* (2015-2018), Kohan's with *GLOW* (2017- ), and Rhimes's with *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014- ), are a few examples (Nussbaum, 2017).

Noxon, Kohan, and Rhimes have also each capitalized on the unique opportunity to expand their reach through the use of Netflix's streaming capabilities, creative freedoms, and budgetary affordances. As noted in the earlier review of literature,<sup>86</sup> the circulation through which television distributes underrepresented narratives is amplified further through services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime. While the showrunning statistics gleaned from first-hand analysis do not currently differ much from the existing data on their network and cable counterparts, Netflix's push to hire more "voices yet to be heard" could signal the beginning of a shift toward a more equal playing field (Netflix, 2019; Netflix Media Center, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). As more female showrunners, executives directors, and writers crop up and produce shows in the "genre non-conforming" vein—shows that are proven to resonate with audiences that encompass

<sup>86</sup> Noted in Sec. III, pp. 20-27.

many a target demographic—critics will have to attune their practices to ensure their comments are coming from a place of objectivity, rather than subjectivity.

This project is in no way exhaustive or representative of the larger fields researched, as there were themes that were touched upon in each of the case studies that could have been explored further (e.g., how Rhimes's experience as a woman of color in a position of power differs from that of Noxon's and Kohan's experiences coming from a place of privilege). Rather, what the case studies were meant to do was highlight the overlap in women's storytelling via the medium of television, note patterns present, and provide a foundation for further research. In time, as each of their deals with Netflix unfolds, it will be interesting to explore various loose ends, such as: audience and critical responses to the kinds of content these showrunners produce; reactions to the anticipated gradual shift toward gender parity; and an in-depth analysis of female-centric, #MeToo era programming created, written, and run by men (e.g., *The Handmaid's Tale* [2017- ]).

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## Appendix A: Noxon-Specific Additional Resources

### Reviews: *Sharp Objects*

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- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2014a, June 2). #YesAllWomen Because almost EVERY woman I know (including myself) has been the victim of sexual harassment or a violent sex crime. Or both. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/473371669415735296>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2014b, June 2). #YesAllWomen Cause self-loathing in women is PROMOTED, consistently, in the media. (WORST BEACH BODIES, !) to sell us crap. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/473375084128649217>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2014c, Apr. 16). Couldn't have said it better, Schumer. "A woman's life is worth nothing unless she's making a great man greater." [http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2014/04/15/inside\\_amy\\_schumer\\_s\\_aaron\\_sorkin\\_parody\\_starring\\_josh\\_charles\\_watch\\_the.html...](http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2014/04/15/inside_amy_schumer_s_aaron_sorkin_parody_starring_josh_charles_watch_the.html...) [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/456372085988679680>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2015a, Jan. 13). #WoodyAllen @amazon Wow. This news makes me uncomfy. The same place that is home to @transparent\_tv is giving voice to an adult woman hater. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/555217317634641920>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2015b, Feb. 4). @robogreen But don't want to exclude men from the conversation, right? And too often "feminism" is seen as a woman's issue only. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/563008117081145344>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2015c, May 3). #GG2D Let's take a moment NOT to celebrate Mayweather. He's committed 7 attacks against 5 different women & arrested or issued a citation. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/594958961402638337>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2015d, June 5). #UnREALtv #GG2D why do I try to make TV for REAL and flawed women? Because of this shit. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/594958961402638337>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016a, Jan. 24). Thank YOU! So many wonderful women (and wonderful men) make the show! From actors to crew -- we are so very lucky.

[Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/691406160885223425>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016b, Jan. 26). Thanks for this! It's a very exciting time for women and other less-heard voices in TV, film, etc. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/691518537928560640>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016c, July 1). have gotten nasty comments on the interweb about my looks, tho. "Crazy old bitch" etc. bet Joss doesn't get that.. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/748789388214022144>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016d, Aug. 19). Until recently (4 me anyway) it was HUGE FIGHT to get women w/out current TV credits hired! [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/766672074282852352>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016e, Aug. 19). But I hear you. And we have WAY more women directing this year. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/766672860861632512>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016h, Oct. 13). Want to know what it's like being a woman in hwood? In @THR today I'm both most powerful showrunner and petty absentee hysteric. #unreal. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/786687633183432705>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016l, Nov. 2). How about some women?? I'll do it with #gillianflynn and it'll be way more murder. Or @shondarhimes and #betsybeers! Or @GunnerGale or... [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/793907389036535808>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016m, Nov. 2). My forthcoming piece for Newsweek deals w/man who sexually assaulted me and kept me captive 4 hours while he made me promise not to tell. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/793907389036535808>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016p, Nov. 30). Mass shootings are scary, more scary is HOW MANY PEOPLE DIE FROM ROUTINE GUN VIOLENCE. Most likely? Women in domestic situations. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/803997641176530944>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2016q, Dec. 8). Oh my God you are THE Hollywood power woman in my book. Everyone needs to see @13THFilm and @QueenSugarOWN. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/806880276756336641>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017a, Jan. 6). I was drugged and raped by a man I met that same night. Thank god not a "stranger" or it would have been really bad! [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/817504075260407808>

- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017b, Jan. 12). So many amazing women and men help make this show. I adore them all and am so proud to work with this brill gang. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/819593367076020224>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017c, Jan. 13). Great women like you blaze the way for all of us. Taking my directorial debut #ToTheBone to Sundance because of u, @jillsoloway and others! [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/819968360284766208>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017d, June 20). THE TRAILER, YO! Look, a bunch of women (and a few dudes) made a thing I'm so proud to share! Trailer <http://ew.com/movies/2017/06/20/to-the-bone-trailer-lily-collins-marti-noxon/> ... via @ew [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/877234597284659200>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017e, July 11). Women and POC are disproportionately affected by gun violence. @nra/ gun lobby has that blood on their hands & they don't care. DONATE. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/884952312141107200>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017f, Oct. 6). But the fact is -- women navigate a world of fear every day that most men can't comprehend. Except for the ones who do. And use it to hurt. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/916451050290167808>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017g, Oct. 6). Women in our business try to share the “bad guy” list -- warn others off, etc. But we're getting tired of the game. We're not “snowflakes.” [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/916451412325707776>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017h, Oct. 19). LOVE THIS “I am sick of having to suffer so a man can grow. What is this, every Hollywood movie ever made?” [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/920875767852163072>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017i, Oct. 26). “a life shaped where scarcity is inflated.” We can't know what we can't see. We have to BELIEVE people and facts. Sound familiar, wht women? [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/923686171707871232>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017j, Oct. 27). No, Brett. The problem is you. And all other guys like you in our business who think ALL women are whores because you couldn't get any. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/924069741903433728>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017k, Nov. 4). Oh boy, I feel another RANT coming on... It's NOV & can we talk about HOW MANY MOVIES that are considered serious have MEN on the poster? 1/. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/926921599235715072>

- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017l, Nov. 10). I was raped 29 years ago. I only told a few people and not the authorities because I believed I would be blamed for it. If one of those men (!) Ran for office I would have to speak up. RT if u have similar story. #metoo [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/929872553245659139>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017m, Nov. 10). #RoyMoore When I was 14, in part because of what older men had done to me, I was trying to starve my curves off and slowly die. #MeToo [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/928894257770852352>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017n, Nov. 17). On the subject of Matt Weiner and #MadMen About a week ago Kater Gordon, a young female writer who worked on Mad Men bravely came forward with her account of being sexual harassed by Matt Weiner. While sharing writing duties with him, she recalls that he causally (sic) mentioned 1/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931586350222061568>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017o, Nov. 17). something to the effect of “you owe it to me to show me your naked body.” I believe her. I was at work with her the day after what she described transpired. I remember clearly how shaken and subdued Kater was -- and continued to be from that day on. 2/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931586480505524224>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017p, Nov. 17). Responding to her statement, Matt claimed he would never make that kind of comment to a colleague. But anyone with an even cursory knowledge of the show Mad Men could imagine that very line coming from the mouth of Pete Campbell. 3/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931586600840187904>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017q, Nov. 17). Matt, Pete’s creator, is many things. He is devilishly clever and witty, but he is also, in the words of one of his colleagues, an “emotional terrorist” who will badger, seduce and even tantrum in an attempt to get his needs met. 4/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931586761049944065>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017r, Nov. 17). This personality type can not help but create an atmosphere where everyone is constantly off guard and unsure where they stand. It is the kind of atmosphere where a comment like “you owe it to me to show me your naked body”... 5/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931586933591076865>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017s, Nov. 17). may -- or may not -- be a joke. And it may -- or may not -- lead to a demotion or even the end of a career. 6/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931587033902043136>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017t, Nov. 17). Everyone at Mad Men, regardless of gender or position, was affected by this atmosphere. Why did we not confront him more or report him to our parent companies? Well, for one, we were grateful to him for

the work and truly in awe of his talents. 7/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931587163845808129>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017u, Nov. 17). For another, it was hard to know what was real when moods and needs shifted so frequently. Self-advocacy is important and I agree we all need to do it more and rely on less on faulty institutions to do it for us 8/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931587355282165760>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017v, Nov. 17). But it is very difficult when the cost is, at best, fear and uncertainty -- and at worst the loss of a job and ruined reputation. Taking that action is one thing to contemplate if you have money in the bank and family to fall back on 9/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931587646647885824>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017w, Nov. 17). but quite another for people from all walks of life without a safety net. And when sexual favors are lightly added to the bag of tools one might use to stay employed and valued, it can be destabilizing or even devastating. 10/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931587799047864320>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017x, Nov. 17). It may not be illegal, but it is oppressive. I witnessed it and, despite the fact that that I was a senior consultant on the show, I also experienced it in my own way in my days at Mad Men. 11/ [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931587900579381248>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017y, Nov. 17). I believe Kater Gordon. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/931588356173189120>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2017z, Dec. 2). Since this got lost in the #Lauer of it I'd like to remind you re: #Sorkin retro ideas about women and his clear ambivalence about women & power. His smart ladies only support great men. And talk endlessly about THEM. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/937085039808057344>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018a, Jan. 23). Holy cow. What a ride. I'm gonna cry a little now. Of happy tears. @lilycollins has been a gift to my life. As an actor and a pal. And all the actors, crew, producers were such a generous capable group. The support for #ToTheBone from @netflix was great. Xoxo <https://twitter.com/bluewinterrose/status/955807424144924672>... [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/955870021372207105>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018b, Mar. 30). Yeah I may have gotten a little steamed that one time. Or all the times. The response to #ToTheBone has been so gratifying because it has touched such a wide variety of people. I've heard from all races of women, men, old, young, LGBTQ... turns out EDs > Jazz drummers. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/979726031883001861>

- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018c, Apr. 23). I suggest you pop between @SharpObjects\_Tv and @DietlandAMC, with maybe a lite dusting of #ToTheBone on @netflix. I call it my self harm trilogy 1: turn pain on yourself & seek truth (Sharp). 2: decide to live bravely (TTB). 3: get mad (DL) [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/988529079748997120>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018d, June 4). Aw man, I gain nothing by hiding who I am. It's all in the work, anyway. And if I say it, it can't be used against me! :) It helps that I cleaned up my act. If I was still drunk it's be a different story. Also lots more typos. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1003742709708873729>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018g, June 5). Hmmmmmmmmmmmm. Um. Yeah. As a woman who makes woman shows... Yeah. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1004003832521637888>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018h, June 15). Yes but statistically, we are half the population and that number of powerful women is more miniscule compared to our numbers. We're just trying to help our sisters level up. I know there are wonderful men who support us but we need them to understand why this language is [okay]. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1007592906859929601>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018i, June 19). And I still think about it. Every day. Every marginalized person is made to feel this way. Every day. But YOU HAVE A VOICE. We are here to hear it and amplify it. And also the voices of all decent humans, including white men. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1009143272076382211>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018j, July 9). That's how I feel about #ToTheBone. People all over the world found that movie, and still do. One of the very, very few projects to deal with eating disorders... anywhere in film. Say what you will about the amount of programming, @netflix has changed the kinds of stories we see! [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/10161869605351219201>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018k, July 10). For the #gg2d viewer. Yes! You've heard that wisdom before, but this time from a different kind of kept man. It's one of my favorite things to remind myself and other women of. Too many women (and a bunch of other people) are too concerned with being "okay" with everyone. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1016543142244278272>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018l, July 17). Really? You don't say? And God forbid your work is about women specifically and doesn't include robust male voices or ideas. Or you don't fit some limited idea of "cool" or genre. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1019191258856738816>

- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018m, Aug. 3). Oh my glob I am a fan of you and the story of your Co. I was so glad to support @YellowberryCo when my 13 year old was ready to buy her own undies. At last a place that understands how to show women to women! [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1025558180099633152>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018n, Sept. 12). It ends the simple freedom of walking in the sunlight, it ends feeling like a human being with God given dignity. Thank you to people like @RonanFarrow and @TaranaBurke and the brave people who come forward - they are shining so much light into this cesspool that we finally SEE. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1039904364196839424>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018o, Sept. 12). @ConstanceZimmer Oh hell lady, we KNOW it still happens. Women are consistently penalized unfairly for daring to have the same opinions and confidence and feelings as men. And yes let's talk loud about things that happen TODAY - newer stories are still being silenced through power and fear. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1039906604798201857>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018p, Sept. 14). We SHOULD all know by now that American women are usually shot by intimate partners - but here's The Untold Story of Gun Violence @shannonwatts <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/a23088401/domestic-violence-coercive-control/> ... via @Cosmopolitan. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1040699630537781248>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018q, Sept. 14). We need to do better - and promote media that shows ALL KINDS OF WOMEN who are loved and valued for WHO THEY ARE, not how they look. And women who value THEMSELVES, no matter how they look. Sigh indeed. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1040706635667202048>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018r, Sept. 17). To be clear – I'm also talking about the BULK of his work. His ambivalence about adult women with opinions is portrayed over and over - and his fetish with youth, with the impressionable mind, is too. I'm not a fan. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1041787379974004736>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018s, Sept. 25). Who got the greatest #dietland wrap gift ever from my dear friend and muse @JoyNash? (Me! It was me!). What strange days to decide that a show about sexual and emotional violence toward women should end... But we'll fight on. Believe it. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1044623717240688641>
- Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018t, Oct. 2). I wear my difficult badges (given on various projects and not on others) with pride. But too often women don't get another chance, no matter [how] strong the film. Hmm. She Broke Records With

‘Twilight.’ Then Hollywood Called Her ‘Difficult.’  
[https://thebea.st/2NdJhpm?source=twitter&via=desktop ...](https://thebea.st/2NdJhpm?source=twitter&via=desktop...) via @thedailybeast.  
 [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1050084989293887488>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018u, Oct. 10). It’s important to note that the whole “auteur” world is often a very MALE one. It’s a macho myth of exceptionalism that leads to misogyny on set and in the business. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1050044662596030465>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018v, Oct. 10). I’ve worked with some celebrated, “difficult” men & am always gobsmacked at how little room is made for women with a fraction of their “standards” or “quirks”. Not to some outright misogyny and harassment. I’m GLAD we are talking about it. And making TV. Power on. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1050084989293887488>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018w, Oct. 16). Oh yeah. I did. Turns out making a radical feminist show about a fat woman was a tough sell after all. :). [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1052281055615442944>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018x, Nov. 26). Yes. Exactly. When I was working on the same lot while The Newsroom was filming, I went around and changed all the signs to The Lunchroom. It makes me irrationally angry how his portrayal of women always seems to get a pass. Oh well. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1067133490129321984>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2018y, Dec. 6). Yep. Yep. When people say “how does it feel post reckoning?” I’m like - people are more careful to not be TOTALLY (and sometimes criminally) abusive, but women and all marginalized people have a loooong way to go before we’re fairly represented. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1070706609137958914>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019a, Jan. 9). Can’t say this surprises me at all. It’s a frustrating reality. Too often “a woman” is diversity instead of MANY women in actual positions of power. I worked for a big deal animation house not that long ago - was the only woman in a non-support role on the project. The ONLY one. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1082860866272292866>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019b, Jan. 15). It’s a pretty brutal place for women in general and aging is not celebrated here. So keeping it tight also feels compulsory. But I question it more and more as I dig deeper into feminism and body acceptance. #dietland changed me and continues too. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1085384261027446784>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019c, Jan. 17). I’m gonna brag on this for a moment! I found out that To The Bone has been viewed in 20-40 Million households on Netflix. That’s around the world, yo! Eating disorders are underrepresented in media

because they are seen as “women problems” – let’s see MORE in films and TV pls. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1085952653320806400>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019d, Feb. 4). That is ALSO my Super Bowl tweet! I saw it as alternative programming then went and finished Russian Doll on @netflix Two amazingly good projects that came from female directors. Now I understand why men to keep wanted women out. They’re really good at this. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1092519640243159040>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019e, Feb. 25). Someone today commented that 8th Grade didn’t get its due because it was about a teen girl, but the truth is film has been dominated by men and the disproportionately favor entertainment that centers men. Even in films with “strong female leads.” [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1100247322129297411>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019f, Mar. 2). A-fucking-men. Thank you @franklinleonard for saying this. It was hard as hell to get a movie about typically female issues, “To The Bone”, made. No way a regular studio was going to support or distribute it. But @Netflix made sure it was seen by millions around the [world]. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1101905018515447809>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019h, Mar. 29). YES YES YES what she says. You can’t put the vagina back in the bottle. As they say. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1111567174479552512>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019i, Apr. 18). Hey Showrunners! I know of a few super people who I would staff in a heartbeat if I were staffing right now. DM me! #WGAStaffingBoost [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1118906432961728512>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019j, May 8). Reading excellent thoughts on how [women] come to an end in #got and #AvengersEndgame (thanks @IWriteAllDay\_ @jes\_chastain @ava among others) Women written by men - shocker - fall into tropes. Like, we don’t want to write and direct these BIG series. That’s a male idea too. Also wrong [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1126018747049730048>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019k, May 8). I heartily agree - and some men write GREAT FEMALE characters (8th Grade was like somebody saw into girl soul and took dictation) but generally not in fantasy genre. Shouldn’t have just said “men” but “most men!”. Write better (all of us) by listening more and imposing self less [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1126242973652406272>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019l, July 1). Thank you Academy. Not many people know that #ToTheBone is one of Netflix’s MOST successful low budget movies. Seen by between 20-40 million world wide. And sold to them at Sundance for 8mil.

[Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1145771161340375040>

Noxon, M. [martinoxon]. (2019m, July 5). Hey folk! I will match your donations to @RAICESTEXAS to help humans at our borders until end of day SUNDAY. I still have about 22k left in my kitty for matching funds!! @sydneemcelroy @DietlandAMC on @hulu @BravoGG2D on @netflix #SharpObjects on @HBO [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/martinoxon/status/1147227105316315137>

## Appendix B: Kohan-Specific Additional Resources

### Reviews: *Weeds*

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## Appendix C: Rhimes-Specific Additional Resources

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don't have that access. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
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Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2018a, Feb. 1). Okay. Entertainment industry, time to stop using the phrases “Smart Strong Women” and “Strong Female Leads”. There are no Dumb Weak Women. A smart strong woman is just a WOMAN. Also? “Women” are not a TV trend -- we're half the planet. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
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Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2018b, Mar. 7). Correction: a black woman built an empire of Humanity-themed tv shows. Do your homework. Get woke. Black is not a theme. I am not a token. But I am a night of television. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
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Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2018d, Aug. 24) The game seems quite content to be played no matter what women wear. Perhaps this man should focus on his own fashion choices and respect the GOAT's rights to wear whatever the hell she pleases. #getoffhercourt. [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
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Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2019a, Jan. 28). So @byshondaland makes mostly TV but I fully support this challenge. Women directors make great art regardless of medium. And I find it's quite easy to work with a female director — JUST HIRE ONE. #TIMESUPX2 #4percentChallenge I am here for this! Who else? [Tweet]. Retrieved from  
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Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2019c, Mar. 26). Happy 75th, Ms. Ross! With grace & glamour @DianaRoss blazed trails by proving that, in a male-dominated industry, Black women can succeed by showing up as their authentic selves. And when we do, we win. Support non-profits by getting a tee at <http://phenomenalwoman.us>.

[Tweet]. Retrieved from  
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Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2019d, Apr. 2). Women in the US lose a combined total of 900 BILLION each year because of the wage gap. It's time to close the gap! Join @JenSiebelNewsom @TIMESUPNOW and @CCSWG and find out how here: <http://bit.ly/EqualPayCA#EqualPayCA> #TIMESUPPAYUP [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/shondarhimes/status/1113140923876036609>

Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2019e, May 1). @WhenTheySeeUs is shorthand for brilliant searing truth. Thank you, @ava. You have made a way for an important story to be told. Bravo to these five men for your bravery, dignity, and strength. This is a must watch @netflix experience for everyone. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/shondarhimes/status/1123620400993148928>

Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2019f, June 20). Lack of representation plagues the ad industry. 7/10 women don't see themselves in images they're bombarded w/daily. @Dove & I are challenging the decision makers at #CannesLions to #ShowUs real women from all walks of life. <http://Dove.com/ShowUs> #dovepartner [photo]: Kholood Eid [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/shondarhimes/status/1141722399760474113>

Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2019g, July 5). In most of the country, it is not illegal to discriminate against Black women for wearing natural hairstyles. I'm standing with @Dove to change this by supporting 'The CROWN Act'. Sign the petition and help us get to 100,000 signatures. #DovePartner <https://bit.ly/2KeSiRx> [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/shondarhimes/status/1147173696303271936>

Rhimes, S. [shondarhimes]. (2019h, July 8). This. "These athletes generate more revenue and garner higher tv ratings but get paid less simply because they are women. It is time for the Federation to correct this disparity once and for all." [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/shondarhimes/status/1148255768686104576>

### **Tweets: @byshondaland**

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2017a, July 6). Check out today's piece on The State of Women's Health Care written by @CecileRichards! #shondalandnewsletter <http://www.shondaland.com>. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/882978364587376648>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2017b, Oct. 15). For your Halloween movie list, a feminist horror flick that doesn't glorify violence against women by @KendraJames\_. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/919654318583832576>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2017c, Nov. 22). "Maybe, someday, a Hollywood studio will employ a Native woman to write and share Pocahontas' truth."

@MKNAGLE on righting the wrongs done to Pocahontas' true story. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/933406994328719360>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2017d, Nov. 28). "We've all helped create the culture of over-privileging and excusing the toxic behavior of men while objectifying and oppressing women." - @sallykohn on who's to blame for toxic masculinity. (Hint: It's all of us.). [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/935539184785395712>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2017e, Dec. 9). So you're telling us, pregnant women in prison are shackled during childbirth? Yeah, that's not okay. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/939585656795357184>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2017f, Dec. 11). Souped-up plants that could soak up all the extra CO2 we put into the atmosphere? Yeah, a woman did that. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/940355620334645248>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2017g, Dec. 9). @KendraJames\_ rounds up the sci-fi books you need (by badass women, obv) to feed your post #TheLastJedi glow... [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/942800505868230656>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2018a, Jan. 31). "Sometimes it feels like men view librarians as the 'Mad Men'-era secretaries they never had." @msmacb lays out the daily harassment female librarians face: #TimesUp <http://www.shondaland.com/act/a15876574/timesup-on-harassing-your-public-librarian/> ... [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/958769965565292545>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2018b, Mar. 15). "There's zero reason that it shouldn't be 50-50 in terms of men and women." From her campaign with @GirlsWhoCode, to being an everyday role model, @gixofit's CEO @selinato is working to get more women and girls into computer science. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/974269156550946822>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2018c, Mar. 20). Imagine what a woman can do when she has the opportunity and real resources to achieve greatness. #WomensHistoryMonth. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/976081114321350656>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2018d, Apr. 3). For the men in our life: Here's all the books they should be reading. For all the guys in your life who need a little schooling about what it's really like to be a woman. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/981267681147064320>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2018e, Apr. 25). "In other words, she was the go-to designer for any woman who sought to turn heads in a one-of-a-kind freakum dress." Meet Zelda Wynn, the original designer of the @Playboy bunny suit.

[Tweet]. Retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/989193599719002113>

Shondaland. [byshondaland]. (2018f, May 16). “To experience a story with other people, I think, really changes your understanding of it.” Meet @anitabadejo, the woman behind the “weird, exciting, and often unexpected” @PopUpMag. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/byshondaland/status/996812628780601344>

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