

Race, Gender and Social Class in TV series *Scandal*: Patterns of repetition, pronominal reference and refraction

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Abstract: This paper explores the issues of race, gender and social class in the TV series *Scandal*. Patterns of repetition, pronominal reference and refraction, in terms of deflection and the contrast of white/light and black/darkness, are examined. The representation of race, gender and social class on TV is first discussed diachronically, then the language of the TV series *Scandal* is analyzed. Our findings show that pronominal reference is exploited by one character in the series to distinguish race issues, while refraction, in all its forms – although very prominent throughout the series – is used by only one character to distinguish issues of race, and by the main character to deflect issues of race. Patterns of repetition are found to be the most important linguistic expedient in the series in terms of creating and upholding thematic bonds concerning race, gender and social class.

Keywords: Race, Gender, Social Class, Pronominal Reference, Repetition, Refraction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scandal, “a TV show that represents a glaring departure from the parade of white faces typically seen on television” (Pixley 2015: 29), is an American political thriller television series that debuted in 2012. The main character, Olivia Pope, was inspired by former President George W. Bush’s press aide Judy Smith, who also serves as co-executive producer of the series.

Scandal is what may be considered a hybrid genre, a mix of both the political drama and political thriller. The series, lasting seven seasons, revolves around Olivia Carolyn Pope, an exceptional career woman who heads Olivia Pope & Associates (OPA), a crisis management agency. The series kicks off seeing Olivia manage the electoral campaign of Fitzgerald Thomas Grant III (‘Fitz’), republican presidential candidate, with whom she begins a love affair. She dedicates her life to protecting the public image of the Washington D. C elite. Born to Eli and Maya Pope, Olivia is attractive, charismatic, and exudes power. Eli Pope, also known as Rowan, leads a double life: a mild-mannered director of a natural history department of the Smithsonian Museum, but also Command, a powerful figure that heads B6-13, a secret division of the CIA whose sole objective is to safeguard the Republic. Maya Pope, who was thought to have died in a plane crash when Olivia was a child is, in truth, alive and proves to be a dangerous assassin. Olivia’s parents – both dangerous and powerful – have always taught her that mediocrity is the worst of all evils. Her father paved her road to success, sending her to the best schools and universities money could buy and, like most of her associates at OPA, she is a lawyer. For all intents and purposes, Olivia was the U.S. capital city’s most renowned fixer.

The aim of this work is to get an angle on how, exactly, executive producer, head writer and show-runner of TV series *Scandal*, Shonda Rhimes, gave the cast a voice that has cut through and beyond the issue of race, in relation to both gender and social class. This is done by examining our corpus comprised of the scripts and audiovisual media of all seven seasons, i.e. one hundred twenty-four episodes, and singling out the most significant expedients that make it possible for Rhimes to pursue the issues of gender and race¹ while – at the same time – receive massive positive response to the series.

¹ See ‘On the Politics of Scandal’: <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics-scandal/>

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 5, Issue 4, pp: (19-29), Month: July - August 2018, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

Of relevance to the aim of this study is the analysis of repetition (§3.1), pronominal reference (§3.2) and refraction (§3.3), all three having been found to develop and sustain leitmotifs running through the entire series.

The following section (§2) acts as an introduction to how race, gender and social class have been represented on television in the U.S. in the period leading up to when the series *Scandal* first aired. We then discuss the language of the series (§3), describing overarching trends that have emerged in our analysis. We end the paper with a discussion of our findings and concluding remarks (§4).

2. REPRESENTATION OF RACE, GENDER, AND SOCIAL CLASS ON TV

When we speak of social class we usually have in mind a group of individuals that occupy a similar position within an economic system of a society. In the 21st century, however, the notion of social class is renegotiated and redefined day in and day out because of inequalities within our social fabric. Far from attempting to recognize differences between middle- and working classes, there is generally an orientation toward a more hierarchical ordering of classes to distinguish the elite from those who find themselves on the last rung of a social ladder. The boundaries separating the intermediate layers of the pyramid are much less discernable. We can, nonetheless, say that social class essentially derives from a concentration of three types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital (Savage 2015). Understanding this allows us to grasp how economic disparity translates into a disparity of class between the upper and lower echelons of the social pyramid.

Mirroring society, the medium of television portrays social disparities, as can be gleaned by examining working class families in American sitcoms from the 1950s onward. The U.S. standard of living had considerably improved during the economic boom, allowing people to concentrate on satisfying their desires, thus leading to a consumerist mentality. During those years social class was represented by new positions offered to white-collar workers and by the fact that families started to move to the suburbs. Hence, White middle-class families residing in suburbs became the ideal family nucleus represented in sitcoms. Further, technological advancement had an extraordinary impact on the mentality of the consumer, especially with regard to the home, the housewife becoming a target for consumerism. Television broadcasters developed specific formats for the entire family and this, too, gave rise to sitcoms (Haralovich 1989: 61).

The introduction of cable TV lay the groundwork for new TV series projects and the 1990s went down in history as the golden age for television. In particular, we begin to see the minorities in the U.S. as conquering their share of the TV limelight. No longer are programs focused on the perfect American middle-class family, but rather on 'dysfunctional' family units where often typical male and female roles are inverted. Added to this is the trend of representing an individual as existing independently from the family nucleus, thus leading to the production of the main character's storyline (Butsch 2013).

With the onset of a globalized world, TV series tended to focus more on giving voice to those who have been ignored. We therefore see the creation of TV series such as *The Nanny*, featuring an Italian immigrant, *Family Matters* that focuses on an African American family and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* whose protagonist is a young African American from a difficult side of town who is sent by his mother to live with his relatives among the luxury villas of Bel-Air in Los Angeles. It is important to recall that all ethnic minorities were portrayed through a lens of stereotypes and fiction. Society, however, shows us a different reality, one still full of prejudice in relation to minorities in the U.S. (Olson 2004). What we witness is a dichotomy between a message communicated by popular American culture and what is viewed on TV. What is more, it should be pointed out for the purposes of this study that on television the African American community was customarily unduly associated to crime, violence, a low level of education and dependency on state subsidies.

The 21st century sees a change in terms of their social status on TV. One example is *Black-ish*, aired on ABC starting in 2014. It narrates the vicissitudes of a Black middle-class family, the title itself revealing that the issue of race is dealt with differently. Here there are no taboos: issues of inclusion, identity, police brutality, arms control and use of the 'n-word'/'nigga'/'bro' were all touched on with cutting irony (Adams-Bass *et al.*: 2014). Nonetheless, there still remains a marked difference in terms of how Black men and Black women are represented on television in relation to both their families (males as breadwinners, females as homemakers) and their societal roles (males hold representative roles in society, women being primarily caregivers) (Gary 1986).

According to Doyle (1989), who researched the construct of masculinity in TV children's programs, the male figure was described as "aggressive, dominant, and engaged in exciting activities from which they receive rewards from others for their 'masculine' accomplishments" (*ibid.*: 111). At all costs television shows strived to depict men as powerful, able to provide for their family and have all the women they wanted, i.e. virile. In the name of virility, a man's emotional sphere was forever repressed. If, on the one hand, a woman on TV represented an object of desire, a man had to be a fortress of masculinity, the apotheosis of virility.

As to women, one of the ways in which the media manipulate and distort reality is through the underrepresentation of women. Women have always been less present in TV news programs, prime time slots, children's shows and in productions aimed for movies. This only led to one truth: that men literally outnumbered women (Wood 2008: 259). Furthermore, when indeed women were present, they were represented through the lens of stereotypes that always saw them as sentimentally linked to a male figure or they appeared as being sexy, beautiful but 'air heads', fragile, fickle and submissive, with the sole aim of meeting 'a good catch' and having a family (Basow 1992). Indeed women were molded according to socially established canons, therefore female TV characters corresponded to idealized beauty standards in vogue at the time. They were not only young, but all necessarily tall and thin. Those few who were not, had roles not associated with femininity (*ibid.*).

An interesting development in TV representation of African Americans came with 'crossover television' (Erigha 2015). Crossover television programs represent a post-racial depiction of a fictional United States where Blacks and Whites work together constructively, that is situated, by and large, beyond issues of racial inequality. Moreover, crossover characters lack cultural markers – such as vernacular, diction, fashion, hairstyles, extended family, or accompanying traditions associated with kinfolk. (*ibid.*: 11)

In sum, crossover works have actually distanced themselves from 'blackness' in an effort to appear racially non-threatening, particularly in relation to a middle-class white audience.\

In marked contrast to how both Blacks and women have been represented on television programs, TV series *Scandal* is "the first show to have a Black woman in the leading role in many years provides a way to identify the importance of popular culture in the evolution of racial politics" (McKnight 2014: 183). *Scandal* is a TV series that has emerged at a time in U.S. history when the issues of race, gender and social class of Black women – as represented on television – have taken a marked turn with respect to even the most recent past.

3. THE LANGUAGE OF SCANDAL: REPETITION, PRONOMINAL REFERENCE AND REFRACTION

This section reports on 'diagnostic procedures' effected to understand the scope of linguistic tools employed throughout the TV series, those that have emerged in an overarching manner, to see whether they tell us their own story about race, gender and social class in TV series *Scandal*.

3.1. Repetition: simple/complex repetition, patterned sequences, recall, dogma

There is no doubt that different forms of repetition have the function of organizing text (Hoey 1991, Monacelli 2004). Leaning on Michael Hoey's work (1991, 2005 2007; with Thompson 2001) with regard to his taxonomy of different forms of repetition that make for lexical cohesion and text coherence, I introduce here categories that allow me to address underlying themes in TV series *Scandal* with a bird's-eye view that scans the program's seven seasons. These also fall in line with Hoey's extended categories of repetition viewed within the framework of wider contexts (2007: 8):

- lexical colligations²
- semantic associations (with contrast relations, problem-solution patterns, narrative climax)
- pragmatic associations
- genres, styles, domains and social situations.

² Colligation is the syntagmatic attraction between grammatical categories, e.g. parts of speech or syntactic functions, whereas collocation is the syntagmatic attraction between lexical items (Firth 1968: 181). Colligation designates the attraction between a lexical item and a grammatical category (Sinclair 1998: 15, Tognini-Bonelli 2001: 163).

Here we examine: simple/complex repetition, where repeated lexical items may vary grammatically; patterned sequences of recurring lexis; memory elicited in forms of recall and reverie that also concurs in establishing thematic bonds (Altman and Köhler 2015: 3) that may be likened to forms of dogma, i.e. a shared code or tenet that serves as the series’ cohesive backbone. Figure 1 illustrates our model of repetition to analyze corpus texts.

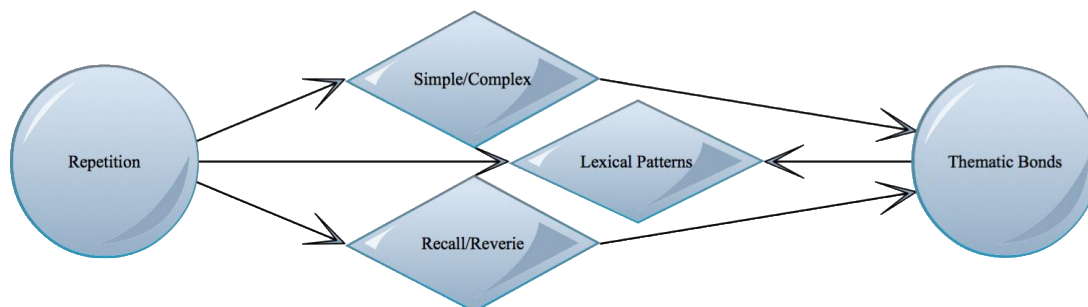


FIGURE 1: Model of repetition

Simple (and complex) repetition has to do with whether repetition is more or less explicit, albeit with varying grammatical forms (e.g. “repetition”, “repeated” and “recurring” in the last paragraph above). Sometimes a single word or phrase is repeated verbatim or the wording in the text may be intended as a paraphrase, a repetition of meanings but not of wording. Patterns of repetition are more net-like (Hoey 1991, Monacelli 2004) and can run vertically through a text, with particular concepts and events being recalled, thus building a network of relations. At the same time repetition patterns can function horizontally in a clause, or utterance, interacting with vertical chains of repetition. This makes it possible to recognize parallel patterns in the overall text. Repetition also binds a text together by signaling to the reader that there is an overall cohesive structure or thematic bonds, in the sense that repetition tells the reader that we are still talking about the same things and are still within the same textual framework (Hoey and Thompson 2001: 5-6). A striking example is the *Scandal* ‘dogma’, i.e. the recurrence of an underlying set of principles distinguished by those associated with main character Olivia Pope, that at times create mantra-like utterances.

The different forms of repetition are not discrete categories, as can be gleaned from our model (Figure 2). For example, Table 1 provides us with an example of two, overlapping forms of repetition.³

TABLE 1: S03E01 02.25-02.49

Eli Pope	Did I not raise you for better? How many times have I told you you have to be what? You have to be what?
Olivia/	Twice as
Eli Pope/	Twice what?!
Olivia/	Twice as good
Eli Pope	Twice as good as them to get half of what they have

There are three examples here of simple repetition: “what?”, “twice” and “twice as good”, with “twice as” being part of two dialogical turns. Moreover, this entire conversation serves as a leitmotiv throughout the series, thus making for a patterned sequence in *Scandal* and, at the same time, it qualifies as a thematic bond (Fig. 1).

Table 2 exemplifies a patterned sequence with embedded forms of simple and complex repetition, and reference to one of the dogmatic themes in the TV series. Jeannine Locke is a former White House spokesperson unjustly accused by the Grant administration of being the president’s lover, in order to dissuade the public from suspecting Olivia was his lover. Ms. Locke returns to Washington seeking revenge after having her career ruined by the fake scandal. She writes a book

³ Text samples are presented in tabular format, are labeled sequentially and indicate where the sample is extracted from. Therefore S01E01, 44.33-44.58 means the text is from season one, episode one, appearing between minutes 44.58 and 44.33 of the episode. The first column in the tables list speakers’ names. Words in **bold** are meant to stand out to the reader for ease of reference. Underlined text is also used for ease of reference when discussing other elements not relating directly to text samples being considered. Spaces between utterances refer to pauses that exceed two seconds. Punctuation marks serve to indicate any prosodic emphasis, and “/” after the speaker’s name signifies overlapping talk with previous or subsequent turn. A hyphen after a word signifies talk as being cut off, or an incomplete or interrupted utterance.

about the alleged tryst, earning national acclaim and offering tabloids fodder. The White House calls on Olivia Pope to fix the problem. Olivia and Fitz begin discussing why he wants Andrew to withdraw his candidacy as vice-president; his wife Mellie is running for president and Andrew is her lover. The text extract offers an example of repetition with a circular pattern, typical of sitcom narratives (Schulz 2005: 169; Walker 2000: 96). Circularity is a recurring process of destabilization and restabilization in talk or dialogue, the narrative being transformed when it relies on circular patterns with some modification of the basic situation, even when no actual change occurs (Voigts-Virchow 2005: 215) and where the beginning and end segments provide some form of repetition. In this text sample Olivia uses the same expression, to “make nice with Andrew and Mellie” to open and close the segment.

TABLE 2: S03E16, 07.30 - 10.11

Olivia	This Jeannine Locke thing is big, you can't be underestimated but it can be counteracted. It means you're gonna have to make nice with Mellie and Andrew
Fitz	[...] I want Andrew Nichols off the ticket
Olivia	We're not taking Andrew off the ticket
Fitz	I want a list of new VP picks on my desk by the morning
Olivia	You're not getting a new VP
Fitz	I am not running with that son of a-
Olivia	You knock Andrew off the ticket now it's an amateur move , it's too late - it'll ruin you! You picked him, he's your guy, so too bad for you he stays on the ticket. That's final. What else do you need?
Fitz	What else do I need? What else do I need?
Olivia	What else do I need? What service can I render for you today, am I here to stroke your ego, am I your cheerleader, am I here to wipe your tears, am I your nanny, am I here to fight the bullies, am I your body guard today? Maybe I'm here to make you feel good, maybe I'm your dealer, or maybe I'm here to make you feel hot, and manly, and ready so you're not jealous of your wife's boyfriend. Is that it? Am I your fluffer today, Fitz? Is that what I am? What service am I billing you for today?
Fitz	You're being disgusting!
Olivia/	Oh, I'm being disgusting-
Fitz/	And petty! -
Olivia/	Right, I'm the petty one
Fitz/	And jealous!-
Olivia (after a silent pause)	What else am I supposed to be? I lie in bed, every night, and I play our relationship over and over in my head like a movie. We meet, we fall in love. We can't stop ourselves, we're meant to be , I give up everything inside me and then it stops! The movie just stops. I don't know how it ends! It's just me, waiting for a house in Vermont that I can't live in and a man who makes me promises he can't keep.
Fitz	I am not the bad guy, I am not the guy who lured you into some degrading!
Olivia/	I know that-
Fitz	You want this to be easy, you want this to be simple, it is not easy or simple
Olivia/	I know that-
Fitz/	So you can't just stand here, staring at me with dead eyes like I'm some... This didn't happen to you, I didn't happen to you!
Olivia	I know, I should go
Fitz	Fine, go!
Olivia	If Andrew leaves the ticket, you lose . If Mellie doesn't stand by you, you lose . And losing is not an option, we're winning this election so make nice with Andrew and Mellie

In Olivia's 5th dialogue turn (Table 2) there is a tirade of “am I” and “am I here to”, along with other forms of simple and complex repetition in the entire text extract: “Andrew Nichols off the ticket”, “Andrew off the ticket”, “new VP”, “what do you need?”, “what else do I need?”, “disgusting”, “petty”, “am I here to [...]”, “am I your [...]”; “What service can I render for you today?”, “What service am I billing you for today?”, “I am not the bad guy”, “I am not the guy”, “this didn't happen to you”, “I didn't happen to you”, “I should go”, “go”, “you lose”. Alongside this, in Olivia's 8th turn we find her pointing to another repetitive device: forms of recall that run throughout the TV series (“I play our relationship over and over in my head”). Here she recalls the beginning and development of their love affair: “We meet, we fall in love. We can't stop ourselves, we're meant to be”. Olivia then mentions the theme of “Vermont” which evokes the dream or illusion of a possible life together for them.

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Table 3 offers an extraordinary example of the repetition category ‘recall/reverie’. Olivia has decided to ‘come clean’ in the sense that only by fully revealing all the behind-the-scenes goings-on of her activity will she be able to reclaim her life. The eve before she faces the Senate Committee she sits at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial and passes her professional life in review. In Table 3 there are three intertwining dialogical turns: her recall of conversations with her father Eli, her assistant Abby, and with Fitz. At the same time there is evidence of the light vs. dark theme that runs throughout the series, “In the face of **darkness**, you drag everyone into the **light**” (see §3.3 on refraction).

TABLE 3: S07E17, 15.32-16.48

Eli	How many times have I told you, you have to be what?
Abby	You are the gladiator . I would gladly follow you over a cliff .
Eli	You have to be what?!
Olivia	Twice .
Eli	What?!
Fitz	"We the people". It's everything [Fitz is with Olivia at the National Archives Museum viewing the original Constitution of the United States]
Olivia	Twice as good .
Eli	Twice as good as them to get half of what they have.
Abby	But you got to show up. You got to be a warrior . You don't get to pick and choose when the real Olivia Pope walks through that door.
Eli	If there are no more white hats , if the deck is always stacked, and if everyone you love is a monster, there is, in fact, someone worth saving.
Olivia	Who?
Eli	Everyone!
Abby	You are the gladiator .
Eli	Everyone is worth saving, even the monsters, even the demons. Everyone is worth saving.
Eli	You have to be what?
Abby	But you got to show up. You got to be a warrior.
Fitz	"We the people". It's everything
Eli	In the face of darkness , you drag everyone into the light . That is the point. At least, I'd like to think that is the point of you.
Olivia	It's a new world. [Olivia responds to Fitz, looking down at the original Constitution]

Here (Table 3) we again see reference to “twice” and “twice as good” and the recurrence of different forms of the *Scandal* dogma: “gladiator”, “follow you over a cliff”, “warrior”, “white hats”. These, along with other expressions that also create thematic bonds throughout the series (e.g. “it’s handled”, “Vermont”, “standing in the sun”) are part of the TV series idiolect.

3.2. Pronominal reference:

The use and meaning of pronouns in discourse is influenced by the social ‘spaces’ within which people and groups are positioned or position themselves (Chilton and Schäffner 1997). Pronouns can be used to indicate or obscure collectivity and individuality (Fairclough 2003), to include and exclude the audience, to refer to ‘self’ or ‘others’, or as a means of polarization between in-groups and outgroups (Van Dijk 2001).

Pronominal reference or ‘indexical expressions’ need be considered within their context in order to understand what intention is being conveyed. In a process of ‘pronominal scaling’, Chilton (2004: 58) uses a three-dimensional approach to deictically indicate a person’s position in a spatial axis:

The speaker (Self, which may be *I* or a *we*-group) is at *here*. The entities indexed by second-person and third-person pronouns are “situated” along *s*, some nearer to, some more remote from *self*. It is not that we can actually measure the

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‘distances’ from Self; rather, the idea is that people tend to place people and things along a scale of remoteness from the self, using background assumptions and indexical clues. (original emphasis)

The use of pronominal choices could thus determine physical distance or closeness to the speaker, but they can also be used metaphorically and “create alignments between talkers and their topics and their hearers” (Malone 1997: 58). Looking at first person pronouns ‘I’ and ‘we’ is of interest because they indicate who the speaker identifies with: inclusive vs. exclusive ‘we’ because it has the power to include and exclude the audience; ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ because they can separate the ‘self’ from ‘other’. The second person pronoun ‘you’ could refer specifically to someone or, as a generic pronoun, it can be used in a very general way referring to anyone. Third person pronouns are used as an exclusive strategy for other-presentation where ‘they’ is used to create an image of ‘other’, to divide people in groups, sometimes with a negative connotation, and to distance the ‘self’ from ‘others’, to completely avoid responsibility by distinguishing an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ separation.

Table 4 gives us the ultimate example of the manipulation of pronominal reference on the part of Eli Pope, alias Rowan, where he deposes before the Senate Committee in the season 7 finale, which ends the TV series.

TABLE 4: S07E18 29:24-30:45

Chairman	Mr. Pope, moments ago, you stated that you
Rowan	Rowan.
Chairman	I'm sorry?
Rowan	Eli Pope is a civilian. I'm not speaking before this committee as a civilian. I'm speaking before this committee as Command of B6-13. As Command, I am Rowan .
Chairman	Apologies. “Rowan” is your spy name? [SENATE COMMITTEE MEMBERS CHUCKLE]
Rowan	My kill name.
Chairman	So, as this Command, you testify that you , and you alone , were responsible for the organization known as B6-13?
Rowan	No
Chairman	No?
Rowan	No.
Chairman	Forgive me, but I'm confused .
Rowan	I said that I created B6-13. I built it with my own two hands, my own sweat, my own blood, but I did so in response to a need. I did so because of you .
Chairman	Because of me ?
Rowan	Well uh all of you . <u>The ones in charge</u> . <u>The masters of the universe</u> . <u>White men</u> whose complacency, whose privilege left this country, this republic in a state of neglect. You are all children who did not appreciate their toys, who left them out in the rain to molder, to decay. I was not born with your privilege. I was taught to respect the things that I had , to care for them, to nurture them, which I have done for the past 30 years.

From the very start of this exchange, Rowan makes a stark distinction by defining who he is (“Eli Pope is a civilian. **I'm not speaking** before this committee as a civilian. **I'm speaking** before this committee as Command of B6-13. As Command, **I am Rowan**.”), and by counterposing the Committee’s “you” with his “I”. This is compounded by enforcing the notion that his (“Rowan”) is simply not a pseudonym or “spy name” but rather a “kill name”, thus setting the stage for his power to unfold before the Committee. When the Committee tries to pigeonhole him into admitting his responsibility for B6-13 (“**you and you alone**”), Rowan turns the tables to unveil how it was through his sheer will that B6-13 was created (“**I said ... I created ... I built**”), in response to a specific need (“**I did so ... I did so** because of **you**”).

We here finally become privy to exactly – according to Rowan’s “I” – how B6-13 all started and the ‘philosophy’ behind it, i.e. the diastatic clues, if you will, underlying *Scandal*. On one side of the divide we have “**all of you**”: “The ones in charge. The masters of the universe. White men ...”, “**You are all** children ...”. On the other side of this divide we have Rowan’s world: “**I was not born** with your privilege. **I was taught** to respect the things that **I had**, to care for them, to nurture them, which **I have done** for the past 30 years.” We see that Rowan depicts himself as being, or having been, on the ‘underdog’ side of the stick and, at the same time, he distinguishes this status as having made it possible for him – as Rowan – to rise to the power of B6-13 Command, possessing the discretionary power to kill.

As a consequence of this dialogue, Eli Pope/Rowan was let free, as were all OPA members. It was established that responsibility for all that occurred had lied in the ‘system’, in the ‘establishment’.

3.3. Refraction:

The issues of race, gender and social class in TV series *Scandal* are dealt with in a delicate manner, albeit in a contradictory fashion throughout the series. Gomez and MacFarlane (2016) use the term ‘refraction’ to describe language practices that draw attention to, or magnify, inconsistencies in the representation of identity markers. They further distinguish refraction as a diastatic concern, i.e. significant to the issues of race, gender and social class, defining it as a “tension that ultimately depoliticizes” factors such as race and gender while seeking to conceal that depoliticization (*ibid.*: 363). They argue that refraction is more than “just simple contradiction or obfuscation” in current representations of identity and community, it is “a conceptual process of revealing and concealing, a constant bending that has a tendency to depoliticize” racial, ethnic, gender and sexual minorities (*ibid.*: 364–365). Gomez and MacFarlane carry out a case study on the TV series *Scandal* and report having found numerous occasions of refraction. The protagonist Olivia Pope both embodies and critiques specific race and gender tropes, resulting in the depoliticization of race and gender issues by – at the same time – calling attention to, and drawing attention away from, these issues.

Another side to the notion of ‘refraction’, as emerges in the series, typically concerns the meaning of the term that has to do with the phenomenon of light. Throughout the series the theme of light vs. darkness – or being in plain view vs. being hidden - along with varied other shades of light-tinted lexis, highlight diastatic issues. Table 5 gives us a prime example of refraction while, at the same time, hinting at “optics”, the secondary significance of refraction that will be touched upon in Table 6.

In season 4 episode 14 Olivia is hired by the police department to help them when a young Black man is shot by a policeman. The policeman tells Olivia he had a weapon, but some people on location are inciting a riot, saying the boy was unarmed and not a criminal. The Washington Metropolitan Police Department hopes Olivia can help minimize the "optics" (Olivia’s 2nd turn). Within minutes of her arrival, the dead teenager’s father appeared by his son’s body, fired a shotgun in the air, and demanded the police bring out to find the agent who had killed his son. Trying to intervene, Olivia found herself in conflict both with the client who had hired her, and a neighborhood activist who condemned her for being on the wrong side.

TABLE 5: S04E14, 01:00-01:41

Chief Connors	Thanks for coming down. I heard you weren't available. Wasn't sure I'd get you.
Olivia	What's his name?
Chief Connors	Brandon Parker, 17. Matched the description of a suspected shoplifter a couple blocks away. Officer stops to question him, kid pulls a knife, officer shoots him well within his rights and now we've got a dead black kid put there by a white police officer.
Olivia	You need me to handle the optics ?
Chief Connors	I run a clean force. The last thing I want is a riot that sets my city on fire.
Olivia	How long has the body been here?
Chief Connors	Half an hour. Waiting for the coroner.
Olivia	The coroner needs to get here fast. You need to move that body out of the street as soon as possible. We are four short blocks from the Capitol, within the shadow of the White House. One misstep.. [a shot is fired]

At the moment of this exchange Chief Connors speaks of a “suspected shoplifter”, clearly aware that all elements have not yet ‘come to light’. In Olivia’s last turn we see talk of hiding ‘out of sight’ (“move that body out of the street”), because it is “within the shadow of the White House”, again highlighting the theme of refraction, i.e. light vs. darkness and black vs. white.

In Table 6 there is an example of both refraction and pronominal reference to distinguish diastatic issues.


TABLE 6: S07E18 05:02-05:34

Eli	What did I do wrong?
Olivia	What you did, Dad, was the very same thing all those years of protecting the Republic, doing their dirty work for their government. That was you leading by example. So tell me, what's the difference?
Eli	It wasn't their government. It was mine. I was in charge, I made the rules, but I stayed in the shadows.

	Why? Because in the end, they don't care what happens to us . You think because they pet you on the head and tell you that you're smart and pretty that you matter to them?! You are in the light so that they can stay in the dark .
Olivia	After this investigation is over, no one will be in the shadows. No more tricks, no more dirty, little secrets, no more B6-13 everyone equal. And this country will be better for it.
Eli	You sure about that?

In Elias 2nd turn we clearly see his perspective in relation to the (White) government (“their”, “they don’t care”) and his role (“I”, “mine”), as well as how he sees Olivia’s role (“you are in the light”) in relation to the government (“so that they can stay in the dark”).

Also in relation to the analytical tool of refraction, Figure 3 offers a sampling of ‘white hat’ concordances. As mentioned in relation to Table 3, the term ‘white hat’ in relation to a ‘black hat’ is another iconic phrase in *Scandal* and originates in the language of hackers. Their world seems to be polarized into a) those wearing white hats, i.e. ethical hackers who oppose exploiting information technology, and b) those wearing black hats, i.e. immoral hackers with criminal intent.

Term 8 (142.48 per million) 

doc#0 , oddly enough. Then help me. Put on your **white hat** and go after billy chambers With whatever you
doc#0 I gotta do my job. Gotta be the sheriff. The **white hat** looks good on you. (Johnnie Walker's "I believe
doc#0 She's fried, Stephen. She's not wearing a **white hat** anymore. I'm not lying. Olivia? Hey, it's me.
doc#0 . I am a knight for the people. I wear the **white hat** , and you, Olivia Carolyn Pope, you are a pain in
doc#0 , wouldn't you? Do you have one of those? My **white hat** 's bigger than your white hat. Can you at least
doc#0 of those? My white hat's bigger than your **white hat** . Can you at least pretend you aren't enjoying
doc#0 gone. Right. Unless you're not actually a **white hat** and what you were after was the high-profile
doc#0 by my side, and Olivia Pope she wears the **white hat** . I'm here, okay, but we do this on my terms. You

FIGURE 2: ‘White hat’ sample concordances

This polarization characterizes *Scandal*, where a distinction is made between people with lofty goals and corrupt individuals, the ideological backbone being that only those who act for the supreme ‘good’ of the Republic are worthy of wearing white hats. In the ‘darkest’ of moments in the series, a white hat represents a lighthouse in the night, a moral compass. As previously mentioned for ‘handled’, the potential meaning of ‘white hat’ also extends to extenuating circumstances for crimes committed.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The role of Olivia Pope in *Scandal* provides us with a window of opportunity to be free from the discourse that usually conditions issue of race. The unique nature of *Scandal* is that its main character is a rare find, i.e. a successful African American woman who employs a racially diverse group of professionals, without using the racial dynamic as a trope. Olivia is a middle class ‘fixer’, someone important to the Washington D.C. elite. She establishes the social status of Black women professionals as middle class: successful parents, the right educational qualifications, her heterosexual relationships with attractive, powerful men, and her importance to the society at large. McKnight suggests (2014: 187)

Olivia Pope does not occupy the space of Whiteness; she does not become White in her relationships with others and her access to economic and political resources. Her social and material success do not change the salience of race for her and others, but rather how it is realized experientially. The viewer is made to think that her success is in spite of race, that if she can do these things what then does race matter except as a condition that defines her personal identity.

In line with this, it must be pointed out that the only person who exploits pronominal reference to distinguish issues of race is her father in the TV series, Eli Pope. Refraction, likewise, is something that ‘happens’ to Olivia, as her father repeatedly points out to her (light vs. darkness). She, however, deflects these issues and moves in circles impervious to racial distinctions, another side to refraction. The most important ‘player’ in this TV series is repetition, in all its forms. It is indeed what holds together the entire series’ one hundred twenty-four episodes, the glue acting both anaphorically and cataphorically to remind us of the thematic bonds running throughout the series concerning race, gender and social class.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

 Vol. 5, Issue 4, pp: (19-29), Month: July - August 2018, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

Our analysis give us enough evidence to sustain that issues of race, gender and social class are evaded in this TV series produced and written by Shonda Rhimes. However, it may seem to the average viewer that *Scandal* just intended to be a show that wasn't about race, a show that was simply a story about a brilliant career woman with a compelling, sophisticated personal life, who just happened to be Black. Our findings reveal another story.

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