

Hella Black, Hella Woman, & Hella Lawyer

A Study on Molly Carter's Work-Life
as a Black Woman TV Lawyer on HBO's *Insecure*

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ABSTRACT

As a deductive thematic analysis, this thesis examines the extent to which Molly Carter's experiences as a Black woman lawyer in HBO's *Insecure* represent the plight of the average Black woman lawyer today, according to the literature. The codes in this study are organizational communication theories commonly affecting working Black women. All codes were derived from a comprehensive literature review about the trends facing Black women attorneys in the workplace. The codes were named according to the best-selling book *Inclusion on Purpose*, which focuses on how to create belonging at work for women with intersectional identities. Said codes were applied to the data set, which is the sample of scenes from *Insecure* chosen as most relevant to Molly's career as an attorney. Overall, this study focuses on how Molly's intersectional identity impacts how she experiences the organizational communication concepts in question.

Keywords: Representation; Intersectionality; Organizational Communication; *Insecure*; Molly Carter



Figure 1: Actress and Producer Kerry Washington wearing the Black Women TV Lawyers crewneck she created in partnership with the Black Lawyers Podcast (Fluker, 2022).

INTRODUCTION

In November of 2022, Actress and Producer Kerry Washington went viral on social media for posting the photo in Figure 1. The internet was reacting to her sweatshirt that lists the names of eight iconic Black women TV lawyers, including her famed character Olivia Pope in ABC's *Scandal*. The other seven characters are Clair Huxtable, from *The Cosby Show*, Joan Carol Clayton from *Girlfriends*, Maxine Felice Shaw from *Living Single*, Jessica Pearson from *Suits*, Annalise Keating from *How to Get Away with Murder*, Molly Carter from *Insecure*, and Jax Stewart from *Reasonable Doubt* (Fluker, 2022). This thesis focuses on Molly Carter and argues *Insecure* utilizes her as a representative character to depict how many Black woman lawyers are navigating today's workplace (Leavy, 2000).

I have experience studying Molly Carter as a representative character, as I focused my London School of Economics (LSE) Master of Science (MS) dissertation on Molly Carter's love life. Therein, I used deductive thematic analysis to inquire about how Molly's journey from singleness to marriage in the show was ripe with experiences similar to those of Black women, with backgrounds similar to herself, according to the literature. What my dissertation did not discuss, however, was Molly's work-life.

This thesis dives into Molly's depiction as the uber-successful corporate attorney in *Insecure*'s ensemble cast who, despite what may be happening in her love life, thrives professionally, amidst the myriad of challenges thrown her way. I chose to case study Molly as a Black woman TV Lawyer, instead of her counterparts as listed above, because at the end of the show, she ends up marrying a colleague who she works with at her Black-owned and operated law firm. Thus, her character offers a rare depiction of the Black TV Lawyer getting a happy ending and "having it all."

First, the paper begins with a context section that describes *Insecure* and Molly's character. Second, the theoretical chapter: contains a literature review that outlines the relevant themes and subthemes, provides theoretical frameworks to examine the contents of the study through and puts forth the research question. Third, the research and methodology chapter accounts for the chosen research strategy and my assumptions and limitations while using the method. It also details the data collection process, the design of research tools, and my ethics and

reflexivity procedure. Fourth, the results and interpretations chapter operationalizes a thematic map and a quantitative frequency table to offer qualitative analysis of the themes and subthemes present in the sample. Lastly, the conclusion highlights how Molly stands out in the lineage of Black women lawyers depicted on television while summarizing the social, political, and cultural implications of the study.

CONTEXT

Insecure is an HBO comedy series about Issa Dee and Molly Carter, two best friends who met at Stanford and are in their 30s living in Los Angeles, striving for personal and professional success. The show also discusses the lives of their close friends Kelli and Tiffany (see Appendix A for character breakdowns). The show debuted in 2016 and ran for five seasons until its 2021 series finale (IMDB, 2022, *Insecure*). The series creator, Issa Rae, also stars in the show as its protagonist, Issa Dee, alongside Yvonne Orji, who plays Molly Carter. Issa starts out working in the nonprofit world before becoming what she calls an “entrepre-noire” (Gauyo et al., 2021a). Molly is a successful corporate attorney who begins at a majority White firm and moves over to a Black-owned and operated firm (see Appendix A for character breakdowns). As this paper focuses on how Molly’s storylines represent societal realities, it is noteworthy that Molly’s character is based on Issa Rae’s real-life best friend (Bland, 2021).

A Stanford Alumna, Rae gained notoriety when her web series *Awkward Black Girl*, which chronicles her life experiences, went viral (IMDB, 2022, Issa Rae). These details encapsulate how Rae has always poured her own life experiences into her writing. Rae’s transparency and authenticity have been met with critical acclaim. The series boasts 14 Emmy nominations and one win. Including a 2020 nomination for Yvonne Orji in the category of Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series for her portrayal of Molly (Television Academy | Emmys, 2022, *Insecure*).

THEORETICAL CHAPTER

Literature Review

The literature review has three parts. The first reviews the topline challenges facing women of color in the workplace, according to *Inclusion on Purpose*, the 2022 novel which emerged as the foremost resource on how bias is impacting women of color in professional environments. The second wrestles with additional popular research that summarizes the experiences facing Black women lawyers today and echoes the trends found in *Inclusion on Purpose*. The third examines findings from studies similar to this one regarding how TV has depicted Black women TV lawyers thus far.

Organizational Communication Concepts from Inclusion on Purpose in the Context of the Black Female Attorney Experience

After George Floyd was murdered in 2020, companies around the world were forced to consider how their business practices and work environments were, or were not, fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). For conscious individuals and organizations, how to define these terms and advance them from knowledge into action became both moral and business imperatives. A seasoned DEIA practitioner long before the racial reckoning, spurred by Floyd's murder and pandemic times, author Ruchika Tulshyan seized this moment of worldwide attention on what creating inclusion at work looks like to write *Inclusion on Purpose: An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at Work*.

Since its release, *Inclusion on Purpose* has quickly become a primary source for DEIA practitioners and inclusion-oriented leaders. The book combines research studies and personal stories to explain the obstacles facing women of color in the workplace across industries and offers strategies leaders can use to drive change. Some big ideas from the book, that additional studies confirm Black women lawyers are facing, include; lack of mentorship and promotion opportunities, tug-of-war and tightrope biases, the issue of culture add versus culture fit, pay inequity and lack of pay transparency, and challenges surrounding work-life balance (Tulshyan &

Oluo, 2022). In the next few paragraphs, I define these concepts and contextualize how they are relevant to Black female attorneys.

Mentorship opportunities

Inclusion on Purpose hammers home the point that “the intersection of a person’s racial and gender identity can materially impact their access to high-paying, high status jobs, career advancement, mentorship, sponsorship and ultimately, decision-making and leadership opportunities” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 13). Thus, intersectionality not only impacts one’s ability to receive and sustain mentorship and sponsorship, but it also impacts one’s ability to give mentorship to others, which is a key component of being a leader. The book highlights that “research shows that while women have more mentors than men—people they can have casual conversations with about their career—men have more sponsors.” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 87). A career sponsor is a professional ally who uses their social and work capital to help progress the trajectory of the person whose behalf they’re advocating on. Black women attorneys have been outspoken about the need for more pathways toward mentorship and sponsorship opportunities to help advance their careers (Murph, 2020).

A statistic that crystallizes how detrimental it is for Black women lawyers do not receive mentorship opportunities at the same rate as their peers is that “three-quarters of senior leaders pick proteges who look like them, according to Center for Talent Innovation (now called Coqual), and considering that the majority of corporate leaders are White men, many women of color don’t get sponsored for career-making glamour work” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 87). Furthermore, the following statistic puts this problem into the context of the legal field for Black women attorneys; “Black lawyers made up only just over 2% of partnership ranks in 2020” according to a survey from the American Bar Association, the lack of mentorship opportunities is particularly damning for Black women who face not only racial discrimination but gender bias as well (Skolnik, 2022). Quantity is just as important as quality in this case. There is a dire need for more Black women attorneys who can mentor and sponsor Black women attorneys to up the representation of Black women in the partner ranks.

Promotion Opportunities

According to *Inclusion on Purpose*, the lack of equity in promotion opportunities available to Black women in corporate work environments is extremely problematic. The book suggests that “the staggering gap in opportunities between women of color and their White counterparts in reaching the highest levels of pay is what’s more insidious and underdiscussed. Women are underpromoted to reach the highest-paying jobs” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 137). McKinsey’s staggering data in the book about the lack of promotion opportunities suggests that, “if women are promoted and hired to first-level manager at the same rates as men, we will add one million more women to management in corporate America over the next five years.... While all women face barriers to promotion to these lucrative jobs, women of color are the most impacted” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 137).

Thus, women of color are facing a triple-edged sword in terms of promotion opportunities. Not only are men and White women being promoted at faster rates than them, but also, both groups are making more money than them. To emphasize how dire the lack of promotion opportunities is for women of color, here are some additional alarming figures; “White women make up 30 percent of entry-level jobs in US corporations and 27 percent of the next level up to manager. In contrast, women of color only make up 18 percent of entry-level jobs, and that drops to 12 percent represented at the next level as managers. Men are 70 percent more likely to be executives than women by mid-career” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 137).

Another dimension to why Black women attorneys face challenges surrounding promotion opportunities is the fact that White women and men receive “glamour work” at larger rates than Black women, and women of color in general, which leads to a faster track to promotion. The research from *Inclusion on Purpose* suggests that glamour work is “work [that] gets you noticed by higher-ups, gives you the opportunity to stretch your skills with a new challenge, and can lead to your next promotion. It’s the project for a major client, the opportunity to build out a new team, or the chance to represent the company at an industry conference” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 79). When discussing glamour work in *Inclusion on Purpose*, the book cites the research of Joan C. Williams, a feminist legal scholar who posits that women of color are disproportionately assigned “office housework.” That is, projects that allow the

workplace to run smoothly but do not lead to promotions or pay raises (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 79).

To ground how dire this issue of climbing the corporate ladder is in the legal sphere for Black women attorneys, next, I will highlight research from the National Association of Law Placement's 2021 Annual Report on Diversity. The report finds that "at U.S. law firms, 0.86% of partners are Black women, an increase of 0.06 percentage points since 2020, and only 0.26 points since 2012...The percentage of Black women associates stands at 3.17%, a share that has risen a mere 0.13 percentage points since 2020 and just 0.24 points since 2009. Currently, women of color make up approximately 25% of law firm summer associates, students who typically get hired by law firms. This suggests that talent retention is a stark issue, in many cases attributed to cultural implicit and explicit bias and the lack of formal mentoring and investment in diverse attorneys" (Crossley, 2022). Based on these numbers, one-fourth of summer associates are Black women. Given this figure, there should be at least one percent of partners that are Black women. However, the gap between being a summer associate and rising to the rank of partner is daunting when there is not only a lack of promotion opportunities but also all these other challenges facing Black women attorneys that this thesis discusses. Such challenges include: a lack of mentorship and promotion opportunities, tug of war and tightrope biases, issues of culture add and culture fit, pay inequity, and a lack of pay transparency and work-life balance struggles.

Tug of War Bias

Tug of War Bias is defined as the phenomenon, "when there's limited opportunity for women of color to progress, they may feel like they have to be pitted against each other to succeed. Feedback from a woman of color manager to a woman of color employee may be biased because there's a perceived threat due to this scarcity of opportunities" (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p.160). Paula Patton's study from the William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender and Social Justice, "Women Lawyers, Their Status, Influence, and Retention in the Legal Profession" dedicates an entire section to how fierce the competition is in law firms among women, and

particularly women of color attorneys. The study confirms that, “women entered the legal profession at a time when there was significantly less camaraderie and more competition among lawyers than there traditionally had been” (Patton, 2005, p. 178). This sentiment holds nearly 20 years after this paper was published, as Black women attorneys still remark on the fierce competition among one another from the gaze of higher-ups to succeed. The notion that Black women attorneys have to work twice as hard to get half as far as their White, and especially White male counterparts, echoes throughout the literature on how Black women attorneys experience tug of war bias (Giles, 2017).

Tightrope Bias

Tightrope Bias is defined by the fact that “a far narrower range of acceptable workplace behavior is allowed for women, especially women of color, compared with men and White people.. the same behavior that’s acceptable for men and White people frequently isn’t fine for women of color. While women in the workplace have to walk a narrower tightrope of being considered effective but not too aggressive and adhering to tricky standards of being respected yet likable, these expectations compound for women of color. Men do not have to do so, research shows” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 159). A recent American Bar Association study of nearly 3,000 female lawyers, with an emphasis on the experience of female lawyers of color, found that this tight-rope bias experience was extremely common (Elsesser, 2018). The study illuminates that, from the perspective of the attorneys in the study, “although assertiveness and self-promotion are often needed to succeed in the legal field, women often feel that they must walk a tightrope” (Elsesser, 2018). The attorneys in the study extrapolated on this feeling, suggesting that being too assertive deems them unladylike, yet not being assertive enough categorizes them as lacking the necessary confidence to thrive (Elsesser, 2018).

Culture Add & Culture Fit

Culture Add is defined as, “people who are different and will add diversity to your team” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 119). Whereas Culture Fit is defined as the similarities an employee can bring to the workplace, neither adding nor detracting from the status quo of the work environment (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022). A 2015 article, “Why ‘Cultural Fit’ Hiring is Detrimental to Law Firm Diversity” brilliantly encapsulates why Black women attorneys suffer from law firms relying on culture fit instead of culture add in the hiring and retention processes. The article summarizes findings from a Vault Law Rankings Survey. Vault is a company that annually surveys law firm associates regarding their firm's work environment, responsiveness to diversity, equity, and inclusion concerns, and overall experience. Two noteworthy takeaways from this article surround the issues of culture add and culture fit. First, according to the Vault surveys, “the vast majority of associates told us that their firms prize ‘personality’ and ‘fit’ when making hiring decisions” (Weber, 2015). Second is that, “while most associates acknowledge that their firms are ‘trying’ to hire more diverse candidates and to foster a more inclusive environment, the running theme is that retention continues to be a major problem. And nobody is happy about that; yet they don’t question the firm’s practice of finding people who ‘fit in well with the firm’s culture’.”(Weber, 2015).

Pay Inequity & Pay Transparency

Pay Inequity refers to the unfair earning gap between men and women, and more specifically women of color and people of majority identities, including White men and women (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022). Taking this concept further, Pay Transparency refers to employers and employees openly sharing salary ranges upfront to, “reduce the unintentional creation of a pay gap” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p.114). Both Pay Inequity and Pay Transparency are issues facing Black women attorneys. The glaring headline when it comes to pay inequity for Black women attorneys, is that “according to the National Women’s Law Center (NWLC), Black women are paid \$0.63 for every dollar paid to their White male counterparts,” (Morris, 2022).

This wage gap translates to, “an annual median loss of \$24,110 for Black women...over a 40-year career, this loss is around \$1 million for Black women” (Morris, 2022).

In addition to experiencing pay inequity, Black women attorneys also face a lack of pay transparency. A 2018 American Bar Association Journal article calls out Jones Day, one of the largest global law firms in the world, for their ‘black box compensation system’ as well as their ‘enforced code of silence’ around pay. The ‘black box compensation system’ is one, “in which a small group of influential partners sets associate compensation without sufficient controls, transparency and oversight” (Cassens Weiss, 2018). The article calls out partner pay as another issue since that is also entirely subjective and left up to the guise of the managing partner or the small group of partners (Cassens Weiss, 2018). The ‘enforced code of silence,’ is “regarding associate pay and productivity...partners maintain confidentiality about compensation. As a result, female lawyers were unable to discover and try to equalize their pay” (Cassens Weiss, 2018). Overall, the article underscores that Jones Day is one of the many culprits in the legal profession that lack pay equity and pay transparency, which both have a disproportionately negative impact on Black women attorneys.

Work-Life Balance

Although the term “work-life balance” wasn’t coined until 1986, it has been used since the early 20th century. A work-life balance is said to exist when “there is a proper functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict” (Meenakshi et al., 2013, p.31). *Inclusion on Purpose* emphasizes that organizations and individuals struggle to foster environments that promote work-life balance. This already prevalent struggle became especially pronounced after 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic when employees were forced to work from home and caregiving responsibilities seemingly quadrupled. Women of color face disproportionately negative circumstances.

Inclusion on Purpose puts forth that, “lack of caregiving support and the prevailing global gender expectations about women’s caregiving responsibilities continue to be a major barrier to their participation as well as success at work. We saw this gender inequality writ large during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even in non-pandemic times, women everywhere are impacted by the lack

of workplace and societal support to better distribute their caregiving responsibilities so that they can advance. For many women of color, working outside the home was never a choice, and not much consideration was given to the challenges that they faced to balance these responsibilities. Of course, women of color have the most to gain from better policies.” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 12). The book puts a crescendo on this point by suggesting that the infrastructure of corporate workplaces was concocted by White men who in most cases did not have traditional caregiving responsibilities for children or family members and thus did not adequately consider work-life balance when making the policies, procedures, and programs that dictate work culture.

2022 Research published by the American Bar Association highlights how much Black women attorneys value work-life balance, yet struggle to find it, in large part because of the history of White men dominating the legal field. The ABA finds that “more than two-thirds—68%—of women and lawyers of color said a better work-life balance is ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ important for them in deciding whether to switch jobs. For men, that number was 44%, and for White lawyers, it was 51%, according to the survey data compiled by the American Bar Association this week” (Maloney, 2022). A throughline from the research on the work-life balance struggles facing Black women attorneys is the idea that, “throughout history, White women have used the labor of women of color to reduce their own domestic burden and free themselves up for corporate and civic pursuits. Simply put, the labor of Black, Hispanic and Asian American women has raised White women’s standard of living” (Seals-Allers, 2018). Again, the literature shows the careers of White women advancing at the expense of Black women’s livelihoods.

Studies on What Research Shows Black Women Lawyers are Experiencing IRL

The literature suggests there are themes in the hurdles to success facing Black women lawyers. These include but are not limited to, higher attrition rates of Black women attorneys due to being fired, or leaving their posts due to low job satisfaction, receiving fewer promotions than White counterparts, or lack of mentorship opportunities (Dias, 2021). Additional issues include

the fact that Black women are often othered in the work environment because there are not large numbers of Black women attorneys. Because of this, Black women lawyers often struggle to fit the desired 'professional image', and stereotypes of Black women permeate the minds of colleagues, which impedes their rise to success (Pratt, 2012).

One of the first and most recognized journal articles about the unique workplace challenges facing Black women attorneys was by Nina Burleigh and Stephanie Benson Goldberg in the American Bar Association Journal. The paper, titled, "Black Women Lawyers Coping With Dual Discrimination" was published in 1988 and foreshadows many of the challenges Black women are still facing today. A memorable sentiment from the paper is that "what happens with Black women is not the same as what happens with White women" (Burleigh and Benson Goldberg, 1988, p. 65). A study done by the American Bar Association says that Black women lawyers are keenly aware that oftentimes these negative experiences occur because of the stigma around Black women being angry at work and specifically Black women lawyers in the study admitted that they believed colleagues "caricatured them based on both gender and race" (Epner, 2006, p. 10).

The global racial reckoning in the United States and abroad spurred by George Floyd's murder in 2020 heightened the magnifying glass on Black women attorneys at work according to a 2022 Vanderbilt University study that focuses on the connection between inclusion and lawyer well-being (Lee, 2022). The research therein suggests that today, more than ever, law firms must prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility principles into their ethos so that Black women lawyers can stop suffering the most from issues plaguing legal offices such as, "stress, substance abuse, and depression" (Lee, 2022, p. 323).

Sociologist Tsedale Melaku is often cited for her research on this topic and her work echoes the above ideas. Specifically, Melaku comments on how COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement are impacting the path to partner for Black women attorneys in her 2021 article titled, "The Awakening: The Impact of Covid-19, Racial Upheaval, and Political Polarization on Black Women Lawyers." In the paper, Melaku explains that "concrete barriers have always played a significant role in preventing Black lawyers from reaching the coveted position of partner. These barriers include an inability to gain initial access into firms, the lack of professional development and training, and being shut out of networking opportunities and

sponsorship. Compounded by the pandemic brought on by COVID-19 and racial upheaval, Black women lawyers now face even tougher challenges breaking through these barriers.” (Melaku, 2021, pg. 2519). Here, Melaku highlights many of the challenges *Inclusion on Purpose* outlines that Black women lawyers face as well. Namely, lack of mentorship opportunities and issues with hiring and retention based on culture add versus culture fit.

One additional gut-wrenching notion that Melaku stresses in “The Awakening” is the fact that whether working from home or in the office, Black women attorneys, often are asked by colleagues to take on the spokesperson role for the Black community to explain the nuance of the Black lives matter movements in the workplace (Melaku, 2021). Melaku describes this thankless and painful job assigned to Black women attorneys in the office, as one of “the various ways that Black women are required to pay an inclusion tax through uncompensated invisible labor and more specifically emotional and cognitive labor during the COVID-19 pandemic, racial upheaval, and political polarization” (Melaku, 2021, pg. 2519-2520).

Melaku speaks further on how Black female attorneys intersectional identities impact their workplace experience when she says, “all associates suffer from the demands of corporate law firms such as working long hours, exclusion from social activities and limited family contact...however, the accounts of Black female lawyers...are richly pronounced by how their particular experiences tend to be shaped by the intersection, combination and/or overlap of race and gender” (Melaku, 2016, p. vii). In a separate study, Melaku spotlights the experience of a Black woman attorney named Hannah who shared how “she did not ‘fit in’ to the role of a lawyer based on her appearance...regardless of how hard Hannah worked, how great the quality of her work, or how many compliments her work received from respected clients, it is her conviction that she failed to be viewed as a legitimate attorney” (Melaku, 2019, p.20). This notion of ‘not fitting in’ to the legal corporate work environment is a common theme many Black female attorneys face that should be addressed by DEI initiatives and work culture overhauls within the legal community.

Similar Studies on how TV has depicted the experiences of Black Women TV Lawyers

A non-academic article about how *Insecure* authentically depicts Molly Carter as a Black woman attorney shuts down negativity surrounding Molly's portrayal. The author writes, "as an attorney myself, with plenty of friends in the profession, it's obvious that a lot of who Molly is, and how she shows up in her relationships is informed by her identity as a lawyer...Although Molly's behavior may not be the most becoming at times, it's certainly consistent with the qualities we love to hate about lawyers" (Gayle, 2020). This sentiment highlights how important representation is. A Black female attorney confirms Molly's character is not unfamiliar to her and her network.

Similarly, another article posits that *Delilah*, a show on OWN (the Oprah Winfrey Network), "spotlights a Black female lawyer, Delilah who seeks justice at every turn while simultaneously juggling family and personal responsibilities" (OWN's New Show "Delilah"). The article explains how the actress who depicts Delilah prepared for her role by connecting with Black female lawyers about their experiences so she could more authentically embody them on screen. Delilah's character is similar to Molly Carter's in the sense that both on-screen depictions are informed by real-life experience, thus exemplifying the power of representation.

There are very few academic studies on how television shows have historically depicted Black female lawyers. Of those existing, none are positive in terms of how the media has depicted the Black woman's experience in the legal profession. A prime example of this is the study featured in the National Black Law Journal about how problematic the character of Annalise Keating is in *How to Get Away with Murder*. The study puts forth that *How to Get Away with Murder* depicts Annalise Keating as a Jezebel, Mammy, and Angry Black Woman. Further, the study adds that this is problematic because it is a hit show that messages to audiences that Black women lawyers operate like that in real life (Toms-Anthony, 2018, p. 59). The study offers that "the show's negative depiction of Keating as a Black female attorney can lead to the formation of implicit biases about Black female attorneys, and may contribute to why Black women are having a difficult time excelling in law firms, which are 92.75 percent White." (Toms-Anthony, 2018, p.59).

A 2016 study out of the William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law emphasizes that Annalise Keating's depiction typifies how negative portrayals of Black women lawyers on screen can worsen biases towards Black women lawyers. Therein, the paper says, "reactions to attorney and law professor Annalise Keating from ABC's *How to Get Away with Murder* may impact the perceptions of Black females in the real world, and other attorneys and judges may be more likely to be influenced by implicit biases. How television lawyers and judges behave, and how females are portrayed and treated in the television courtrooms and law offices, influence juror expectations about their behavior in the real world" (Goodman, 2016, p.183).

This research on *How to Get Away with Murder*'s Annalise Keating is one of the few existing studies about how popular television series have depicted Black female attorneys. This thesis fills this gap by capitalizing on the rich example that Molly Carter's character in *Insecure* offers of a Black female attorney who navigates professional challenges. What makes this study on Molly most significant is the fact that it builds on the lessons learned from the study done on Annalise Keating and exemplifies the true power of representation. Additionally, it typifies why deductive thematic analysis should be used more widely to study how intersectional storytelling in television can be a powerful tool for representing, and commenting on, social, political, and cultural issues.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is important to consider herein, as it honors the compounding ramifications of belonging to multiple marginalized communities (Crenshaw, 1989). In this paper, race and gender are the primary coinciding identities for black women lawyers, who this thesis focuses on. Coined in 1989, by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is a term used to encapsulate the heightened discrimination Black women experience due to their coinciding race and gender (Rathinapillai, 2022, p. 233).

Patricia Hill Collins' scholarly body of work also discusses intersectionality. Collins emphasizes the importance of considering intersectionality because it appraises Black women in

the totality of their otherness as opposed to bifurcating their existence by individualizing their persecuted identities. Collins says, “as opposed to examining gender, race, class, and nation, as separate systems of oppression, intersectionality explores how these systems mutually construct one another” (Collins, 1998, p. 63).

Dr. Racquel Gates, who specializes in racial representation in African American media, underscores the importance of considering intersectionality in representation studies for the sake of Black women in audiences. Gates says, “Black women viewers who, because of their own intersectional identities, seek not only representations of their bodies in the images on screen but also representations of the complex experiences of living under what Deborah K. King refers to as ‘as multiple jeopardy and multiple consciousness’” (Gates, 2015, p. 624).

Representation

Representation is essential to the theoretical framework of this thesis, as it describes the process, and implications, of storytelling commenting on the realities of the world. This study invokes representation as it examines how *Insecure* draws from the real-life experiences of the show’s creators, writers, and research to depict the Black woman lawyer via Molly’s character. Cultural Theorist Stuart Hall defines representation most aptly as, “an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, signs, and images which stand for or represent things” (Hall, 1997, p. 15).

The following research objectives statement presents the research question that this study addresses while also offering my hypotheses, a rationale for the research, and the potential contribution this research can make to the field of media and communication.

Research Objectives Statement

The research question this study addresses is:

According to the literature, to what extent do Molly Carter’s professional experiences as a Black woman lawyer in HBO’s *Insecure* represent the workplace realities facing Black women lawyers today?

My hypotheses

I suspect that *Insecure* utilizes Molly as a representative character of today's Black woman lawyer to bring attention to the positive and negative circumstances facing attorneys with this intersectional identity. This opinion is based on my knowledge that Molly's character is based on a Black woman attorney who is the show creator's best friend in real life (Bland, 2021). Furthermore, *Insecure*'s writers' room has been outspoken about how the storylines in the show are not purely fictitious, but largely based on lived experiences by the writers themselves or loved ones (Young, 2021).

Rationale for this research

This research question emerges from the fact that there is a lack of research, within the organizational communication field, that uses films and television shows to spotlight the impact of on-screen depictions of Black women TV lawyers. Existing studies show that workplaces in the legal field are particularly ripe with inequity plaguing Black women due to their intersectional identity. Furthermore, research shows that divisive representations of Black women lawyers on television only worsen the experiences Black women lawyers have in today's society. Thus, this study stresses how representation can positively and negatively impact lived experiences. Particularly for people of color, and Black women.

Potential contribution to this field

A unique feature of this study is its timing and data set. This is given the fact that Black women lawyers' hypervisibility and invisibility at work intensified after George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. The chosen data for this study, which focuses on Molly Carter's storyline in *Insecure*, is fascinating because it has yet to be studied in research. Most magazine articles and research studies on *Insecure* focus on the main protagonist in *Insecure*, Issa, instead of Molly, who is her best friend. And overall, the existing literature looks more in-depth at their love lives versus their work lives. Therefore, this study offers a significant

contribution to literature in the fields of organizational communication, and media and communication.

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

The research design and methodology chapter of this thesis has five components. Research Strategy is the first, which explains and justifies using deductive thematic analysis as the methodology and details its advantages and disadvantages. The second acknowledges the assumptions I make as the researcher approaching this study as well as the limitations of the method. The third is the Data Collection Process, which describes the unit of analysis and sampling process, and explains why the chosen texts are most appropriate to analyze to answer the research question. The fourth is the Design of Research Tools, which defines the phases of thematic analysis and explains the approach to coding the data. The fifth addresses Ethics and Reflexivity by proving the trustworthiness of the research design while acknowledging my positioning as the researcher.

Research Strategy

The themes I highlight in the literature review are intersectionality and organizational communication concepts, as defined by *Inclusion on Purpose*. The subthemes for intersectionality are race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and age. The subthemes for organizational communication concepts are mentorship opportunities, promotion opportunities, tug of war bias, tightrope bias, culture add, culture fit, pay inequity, pay transparency, and work-life balance.

After broadly surveying sociological literature that explains the workplace climate for Black women lawyers in today's society, I chose to focus on these select themes and subthemes for the following three reasons. First, because they disproportionately stood out as the main trends Black women lawyers are facing. Second, because they encapsulate the themes I anticipated finding in *Insecure* based on my watching the series before. Third, because due to time constraints within this thesis, I had to be deliberate on which themes to highlight.

The above reasons for selecting the themes and subthemes discussed in this thesis align with the procedure in a deductive thematic analysis as, "a deductive approach involves coming to the data with some preconceived themes you expect to find reflected there, based on theory or

existing knowledge” (Caufield, 2022). In this case, theory is the literature review, and existing knowledge is my familiarity with *Insecure* from watching the series before undertaking this research.

Deductive thematic analysis is the most appropriate methodology for this study as the research question at hand focuses on representation in terms of how what is portrayed in *Insecure* discusses what is happening in society, according to the literature. A deductive approach allows me to analyze the themes in Molly’s storyline using codes that have been translated from the themes in the literature about the hurdles facing Black women lawyers in the workplace. Molly’s character is the only Black woman attorney of the principal cast in *Insecure*, which justifies the choice to analyze her career journey storyline. Using intersectionality and representation as the theoretical frameworks when analyzing the data unearths the social, cultural, and political implications of Molly’s character as a Black woman attorney in *Insecure*.

Furthermore, deductive thematic analysis is appropriate for this research as it allows me to focus broadly on Molly’s storylines, and the dialogue she and her co-stars use, that discuss the themes and subthemes within the literature. Another methodological approach, such as content analysis, or audio-visual analysis, would have forced me to dive into more granular details of the series including elements of mise-en-scene. This would have detracted from the goal of answering the research question, which has a more thematic focus (Mikos, 2018).

In that vein, the strengths surrounding thematic analysis revolve around how flexibly it can be used to collect and qualitatively analyze data. Braun and Clarke support this assertion in their description of the methodology saying it, “can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions. It is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2).

On the other hand, the biggest drawbacks to this methodology surround the limited literature that outlines best practices to apply it. Specifically, “only a small portion of qualitative studies have adopted a deductive approach...Since deductive qualitative analysis has been neglected, there is little guidance and few examples offered that illustrate the application of these techniques” (Pearse, 2019, p. 264). I am using this thesis as an opportunity to contribute to this

gap in research and show how deductive thematic analysis can be used to study issues of representation in entertainment.

Assumptions and Limitations

Following up on the biggest drawbacks to embracing Thematic Analysis as my methodology, I will now own the assumptions made when using it and discuss the limitations of this approach. First, I will discuss elements of Molly's intersectional identity this paper does not focus on. Then, I consider what my positionality means for the research. Finally, I consider what an inductive approach to this research could have looked like.

One assumption I make while using this methodology is that the reader will understand that this thesis focuses on how Molly's blackness and womanhood impact her work experiences more than the other elements of her intersectional identity. However, this does not negate the other important aspects of who she is including her age, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and so forth. Much of this thesis focuses on the hurdles Molly experiences as a Black woman attorney because of her intersectional identity. However, it is noteworthy that Molly does still have many privileges, despite them not being discussed in the thesis. One of them is the fact that she is a heterosexual woman. It is a relevant assumption that if she were a Black woman attorney who identified as lesbian, for example, she may have been depicted differently in *Insecure*.

My positionality impacts the research in positive ways. I have several 'Mollys' in my life. That is, close friends and familiar members who are Black women attorneys living in Los Angeles, or other big cities, who have shared with me some of their workplace experiences that are comparable to Molly's. For this study, I was able to secure an interview with Deanna Hall, who is one of the 'Mollys' in my life. During the interview, Deanna reflected on how she felt *Insecure* represented her work experiences through Molly's character.

In addition, my proximity to the data aided in the research process because I was so familiar with *Insecure* having watched it for enjoyment multiple times, and also for my LSE dissertation. However, I had never watched it focusing on Molly's work life. Therefore, I bring an unbiased perspective on what to expect finding when comparing Molly's experiences to the

themes in the literature review. In my Ethics and Reflexivity chapter, I speak more about how Molly and I share similarities as well.

It is also notable that there is a rich tradition of using inductive studies when analyzing television shows and films. That being said, there are fewer examples of deductive thematic analysis of television shows, which creates limitations in terms of being able to model this study off others successfully done in the past. However, that is the point of using deductive thematic analysis for this study, as well as my LSE dissertation. I am confident that deductive thematic analysis is effective to study representation in television and film. First surveying sociological literature to learn about societal trends and then seeing how a related TV show or film characterizes said trends, using deductive thematic analysis, works extremely well and should be done more often.

The only advantage of using inductive thematic analysis, which one cannot achieve with deductive thematic analysis, is this element of surprise in terms of themes you may not have seen or recognized in the literature that the content presents. However, there is always room to note such findings in the results and interpretation section of your research while using deductive thematic analysis. In addition, the point of deductive thematic analysis, as I employ it, is to see to what extent a piece of content is reflecting what is happening in the world, as described by the best-in-class literature.

Data Collection Process

In the data collection process, I rewatched every episode of *Insecure* paying special attention to the plot points focused on Molly's career journey. This spans from when we meet her as an Associate at a predominantly White big law firm, to her rise at a Black-owned and operated firm. I took notes on every scene Molly appears in, or is mentioned in, that focuses on her professional experiences.

Again, as this is a deductive thematic analysis, all themes and subthemes in the codebook emerge from the literature review and name the organizational communication concepts that Black women attorneys experience in the workplace. These themes and subthemes mainly revolve around the bias linked to their intersectional identity. The subthemes for intersectionality are race, gender, socio-economic status, gender, and age. The subthemes for organizational communication concepts are mentorship opportunities, promotion opportunities, tug of war bias, tightrope bias, culture add, culture fit, pay inequity, pay transparency, and work-life balance.

Unit of Analysis

Episodes of *Insecure*, and specific scenes within the episodes, are the unit of analysis. Appendix D outlines each sampled scene by the subtheme it represents, the title of the episode it comes from, including the number of the season and the number of the episode, the timestamp for the selected scene, and a description of the scene. Each sampled scene typifies how Molly's experiences exemplify what the literature reveals many Black women lawyers face in the workplace today.

Sampling

There are 44 episodes total in *Insecure*. This study samples 51 scenes within the series that embody the challenges Black women lawyers most often face. The sample selection criteria for the scenes revolve around the need for the scene of *Insecure* to feature Molly's character at the center of a discussion or action that represents one of the subthemes presented in the literature review. The scenes selected to analyze were chosen because they explicitly feature

words, and/or, actions that include the subthemes introduced from the literature as outlined in Appendix B, the codebook, and the results and interpretation chapter.

I chose to spotlight Molly's character in *Insecure*, as opposed to one of the other famed Black TV lawyers, for two reasons. First, I wanted to build on my extensive knowledge of *Insecure*, and Molly's character, because of my LSE dissertation. I knew that Molly's career in the show would make a terrific case study of matters of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. In addition, having studied the series before, I knew Molly's storylines are fraught with dialogue and actions that embody the themes this study is interested in. This sample selection approach exemplifies intensity sampling which, "involves selecting samples that are excellent or rich examples of the phenomena of interest...intensity sampling involves prior information and judgment on part of the researcher" (Shaheen et al., 2019, p. 30).

Given the time constraints of this study, I chose not to focus on other elements of Molly's life, including her love life and friendships, as they would not contribute to answering the research question. With more time, I would also add audio-visual analysis as a methodology as *Insecure*'s cinematography and soundtrack are well-known for their contributions to the series' storytelling (Bland, 2021).

Design of Research Tools

There are six phases of thematic analysis; 1) transcribe, re-read, and annotate data 2) produce the original codes 3) divide the data into themes 4) review and map themes according to the codes 5) finalize themes and 6) analyze themes in the results section using a selection of examples from the data that best characterize each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, by selecting scenes from each episode that were most relevant to the themes and subthemes presented in the theoretical chapter, I pre-coded the data (Saldana, 2016). Within the codebook (see Appendix B), I rely on semantic codes derived directly from the themes presented in the literature review. Semantic coding describes explicit word use and actions that capture the themes (Byrne, 2021).

In addition to these original six steps of thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke, I added a seventh step, which helps establish trustworthiness in the study. This step required me to interview a subject whose personal and professional identity is similar to Molly's. The person I interviewed, Deanna Hall, attended Cornell University for undergrad, during which she pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. She went on to graduate from the University of Chicago's School of Law before moving to LA where she currently resides and practices law.

The results and interpretation section outlines how the interviewee helps answer the research question in two ways. First, she shares how her intersectional identity has impacted her work-life as well as whether or not she's experienced the organizational communication concepts in question in this study. Second, she discusses to what degree she feels represented by Molly's character. I chose to interview Deanna because she and Molly are both Black women, who are members of the same sorority and who both attended equally competitive undergraduate and graduate institutions. As mentioned earlier, Molly attended Stanford for undergrad with Issa and then she attended the University of Michigan, for law school. Third, Deanna weighs in on how she feels Molly represents the plight of the average Black attorney and rates the job *Insecure* does in depicting Molly as a Black woman attorney on the show.

Ethics and Reflexivity

It is noteworthy that before commencing this research, a proposal for this study was approved by a supervisor and the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism for meeting its ethical guidelines (Grinfeld, 2022). Given that the data being analyzed herein are episodes from *Insecure*, which is a show I have access to via my HBO Max subscription, I did not identify any significant ethical issues (Grinfeld, 2022).

To ensure the research undertaken in this study is ethically sound, I rely on Lincoln & Guba's 1985 guide to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research. The framework suggests researchers demonstrate the ability to prove their data collection and analysis processes meet four main criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to demonstrate the

noteworthiness of their study (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). Credibility refers to the reliability of a researcher's interpretation of the data.

Thus, a third-party needs to be able to read a researcher's analysis of the data and understand its basis. Transferability addresses "the generalizability of inquiry" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3). That is, how applicable are the research process and findings to other related studies. Dependability demands the research process is "logical, traceable, and clearly documented" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3). Finally, confirmability requires evidence that the process of arriving at conclusions in the analysis and results section is fully data-driven. Referring to the data throughout the analysis and results section is therefore critical.

In this study, establishing trustworthiness is especially important given my proximity to the data. I am confident that I check and balance my positioning with the trustworthiness criteria outlined above. Next, I will dive into reflexivity and detail my relevant positioning. I highlight this reflexivity to confront the obvious impact my alignment with Molly's character makes on my interaction with the data.

Topline similarities between myself, the researcher, and Molly, the character I am analyzing in this study, are as follows. Molly and I both: received undergraduate degrees from highly competitive universities: Stanford and Cornell, respectively. Molly has a Juris Doctor, and I am currently pursuing a Master of Science and a Master of Arts. We are both members of the first historically Black college sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Our moms both died in our relatively young adulthood. Overall, Molly and I are Black women first and educated and career-driven professionals navigating hurdles because of our intersectional identities second.

RESULTS & INTERPRETATION CHAPTER

The results and interpretation chapter of this thesis has six components that work together to answer the research question. The first is a Thematic Map Rationale that describes the thesis's relevant themes and subthemes. The second introduces the concept of the Representative Character, which I argue describes how Molly's work-life represents the themes identified in the literature review regarding the plight of Black women lawyers in today's society. The third is an introduction to the thematic analysis, which describes how I quantitatively and qualitatively analyze the sampled scenes to exhibit why Molly is a representative character. The fourth presents a quantitative frequency table that shows how many times *Insecure* shows Molly experiencing the themes and subthemes this thesis concerns itself with. This fourth component also offers explanations for the patterns in the data. The fifth component uses the data from the quantitative table to select five scenes, one per season, that best exemplify Molly encountering the organizational communication concepts most relevant throughout the series. Finally, the sixth component discusses the findings from the interview with Deanna Hall, the attorney who has a similar intersectional identity to Molly's.

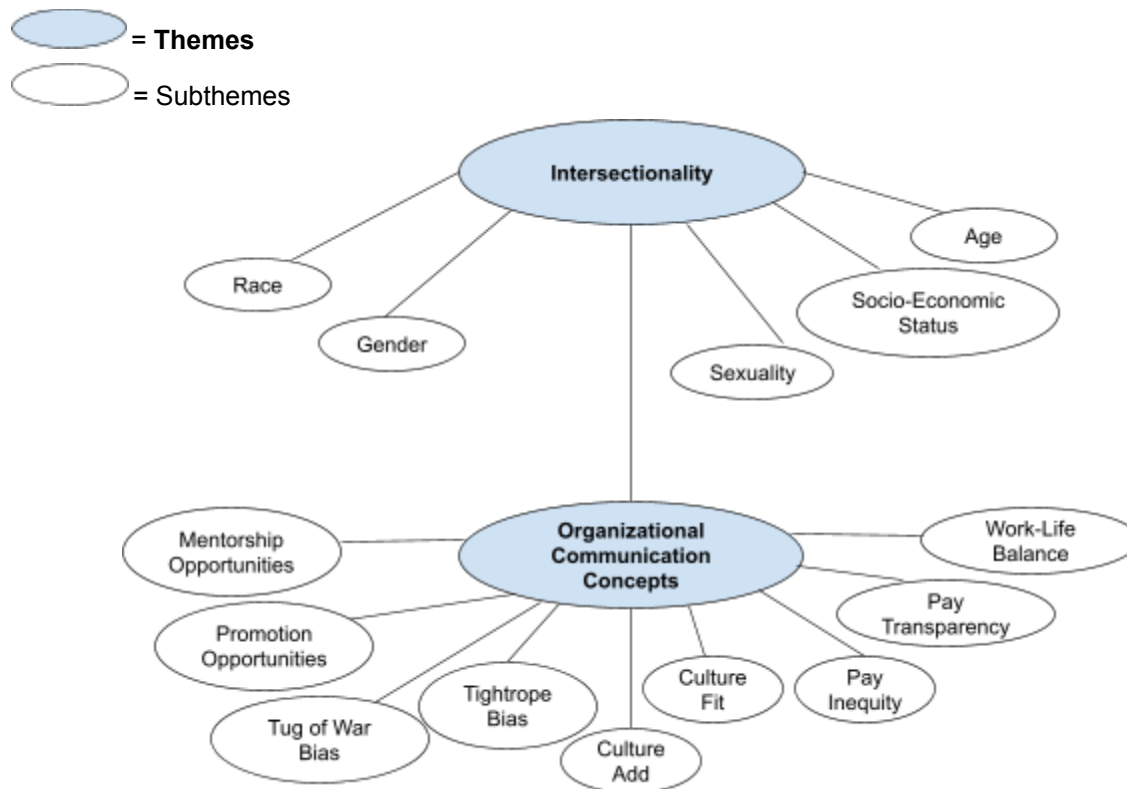


Figure 2. Thematic Map: *Insecure's* Representation of the Black Female Attorney Experience in the Workplace

Thematic Map Rationale

As this study is a deductive thematic analysis, the predominant themes were derived from the literature review, which focuses on research about the plight of Black female attorneys in the workplace. Figure 2 shows that there are two themes this thesis considers; intersectionality and organizational communication concepts. The subthemes for intersectionality are race, gender, socio-economic status, gender, and age. The subthemes for organizational communication concepts are mentorship opportunities, promotion opportunities, tug of war bias, tightrope bias, culture add, culture fit, pay inequity, pay transparency, and work-life balance.

Again, I derived these themes and subthemes from the most cited literature on the topic of the workplace experience of Black women attorneys. The organizational communication concepts were named by the foremost resource on the workplace experiences of women with

intersectional identities: Ruchika Tulshyan's *Inclusion on Purpose*. Later in this chapter, I trace how Molly's experiences with these themes and subthemes evolve from season to season.

The central operating theme here is intersectionality (see Figure 2). Braun and Clarke define the central operating theme as the throughline, or core concept, that all themes relate to (Clarke, 2018). Thus, throughout this results chapter, I will analyze how different elements of Molly's intersectional identity impact how she experiences each of the organizational communication concepts throughout the series. Next, I will introduce the concept of the representative character, which accounts for representation being an essential part of this thesis.

The Representative Character

S.P. Baty, a scholar whose work focuses on American political thought, women's studies, and media originated the idea of the representative character. In her book *American Monroe*, Baty puts forth that representative characters are fixtures in culture whose experiences reflect the social and political lives of the communities they belong to (Baty, 1995). Baty says, "the representative character's life is made to chart various cultural courses... one representative character's story may be written as a cautionary tale, while another may be erected as a monument to human achievement" (Baty, 1995, pp. 8-9).

I model my argument that Molly Carter is a representative character in *Insecure* after Dr. Patricia Leavy's analysis of Ally McBeal as a representative character in the 1990s series *Ally McBeal*. Leavy argues that Ally McBeal's character "discuss[es] the larger socio-cultural-political American context in which the show and character have emerged" (Leavy, 2007). Some of the themes Leavy identifies that Ally McBeal's character explores are feminism, body image issues, and postmodernity.

In *Insecure*, Molly is a representative character as the storylines surrounding her work-life reflect the challenges facing Black women attorneys because of their intersectional identities, according to the literature. The following thematic analysis illustrates how Molly's intersectional identity influences her experiences with the organizational communication concepts this thesis discusses.

Thematic Analysis Introduction

I do three things in this thematic analysis section that work together to answer the research question. First, I use a quantitative frequency table to highlight the extent to which Molly experiences the themes and subthemes within the codebook. I explain the trends this table exhibits and why they typify her as a representative character for today's Black woman attorney. Second, I pull out scenes from the larger sample (see Appendix D) that exemplify how Molly's intersectional identity impacts each of the organizational communication concepts she encounters. I organize this section by season. Therefore, I give an overview of which organizational concepts are most prominent in each season and cite specific scenes to detail Molly's experience. Third, I discuss the findings from the interview with Deanna Hall, the attorney who has a similar intersectional identity to Molly's. Using the questions I crafted for my interview with Deanna (see Appendix C) I compare and contrast Deanna's experiences encountering the organizational communication concepts to Molly's and get a sense of how Deanna felt *Insecure* did or did not, embody her experience as a Black woman attorney through Molly's character.

Quantitative Frequency Table of Themes/Subthemes

Theme	Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Season 4	Season 5	Series Total
Subtheme						
Intersectionality	21	16	11	3	4	55
Race	9	8	6	1	0	24
Gender	7	8	5	1	1	22
Socioeconomic Status	2	0	0	0	0	2
Sexuality	0	0	0	1	3	4
Age	3	0	0	0	0	3
Organizational Communication Concepts	24	29	17	8	11	89
Mentorship Opportunities	6	2	1	1	0	10
Promotion Opportunities	0	5	0	0	0	4
Work-Life Balance	0	0	1	1	6	8
Culture Add	4	2	1	1	1	9
Culture Fit	7	7	4	2	1	21
Pay Inequity	1	7	1	0	0	9
Pay Transparency	1	4	0	0	0	5
Tug of War Bias	2	1	5	1	3	11
Tightrope Bias	3	3	4	2	0	12

Table 1: Quantitative Frequency Table Demonstrating Appearance of Themes/Subthemes in the Series

Table 1 identifies how many times Molly encountered the various themes and subthemes in this study, as defined in the codebook (see Appendix B). Next, I offer explanations for the patterns in the table, explaining why the numbers look the way they do, based on my familiarity with the series and the scenes selected for the sample (see Appendix D).

First, I will note what the quantitative frequency table reveals about the prevalence of the theme of intersectionality and its subthemes; race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and age. There were 55 total mentions of various elements of Molly's intersectional identity from Season 1 to Season 5. Of the five elements of intersectionality this study concerns itself with, Race was the predominant identity, with 24 mentions across the seasons. Gender was a close second with 22 mentions across the seasons. Then sexuality, age, and socioeconomic status appeared less frequently, with 4, 3, and 2 mentions respectively.

What is most interesting about this data is that the mentions of intersectionality decrease steadily throughout the series. 21 mentions in Season 1, 16 mentions in Season 2, 11 mentions in Season 3, 3 mentions in Season 4, and 4 mentions in Season 5. I largely attribute this consistent decrease to two factors. Foremost, is Molly's interpersonal growth from Season 1 to Season 5. The writers were intentionally stretching Molly's capacity to be a better person in all of her relationships, personal and professional. So though her intersectional identity didn't change at all, she's still the same Black woman we met in season 1 that we see in Season 5, her ability to withstand certain situations, and interact with others, changes so we don't see her encountering the same scenarios.

The second factor is that in season 3, we see Molly transition from working at a predominantly White corporate law firm to a Black-owned and operated law firm. Molly's intersectionality not impacting her work-life as much can be attributed to the fact that she's no longer in a White male-dominated space. Many of the challenges she's presented with after transitioning firms have nothing to do with race and gender anymore, but more so other factors. Many of which are the other organizational communication concepts she experiences which vary from those she experienced working at the White firm.

There were 89 total mentions of the organizational communication concepts from Season 1 to Season 5. The nine organizational communication concepts this study focuses on are; mentorship opportunities, promotion opportunities, tug of war bias, tightrope bias, culture add, culture fit, pay inequity, pay transparency, and work-life balance. Of these nine concepts, Culture

Fit appeared most prevalently with 21 mentions, followed by tightrope bias, which had 12 mentions, Tug of War Bias, which had 11 mentions, and Mentorship Opportunities, which had 10 mentions. Both Pay Inequity and Culture Add had 9 mentions while Work-Life Balance had 8 mentions, Pay Transparency only had 5 mentions and Promotion Opportunities only had 4 mentions. My interview with Deanna speaks a lot to Pay Inequity and Work-Life Balance, so I will save analysis of those concepts for that space later in this chapter. However, I will use this space now to discuss my theories on the higher number of appearances for culture fit, tightrope and tug of war biases, and mentorship opportunities.

Given Culture Fit is defined as, “the similarities an employee can bring to the workplace, neither adding nor detracting from the status quo of the work environment” it is no surprise this was the organizational communication concept subtheme that appeared most frequently since the literature review emphasized how small the amount of Black female attorneys is (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022). The fact that Black female attorneys are most often “others” in the workplace, they are automatically bringing differences to the workplace by showing up as who they are. Black female attorneys are most often double minorities in the workplace because of their Blackness and womanhood. Add any additional dynamics, as this study suggests, such as gender, SES, or age, and there are so many intersectionality factors at play that can impact a Black female attorney’s workplace experience.

One example of why this culture fit number is high in Molly’s case is that fact that there’s an entire storyline in Season 1 dedicated to Molly being asked to help Rasheeda, who is a Black woman summer associate at Molly’s original law firm, MJ&S, who is severely struggling with the culture and Molly is asked to help mentor her (Kittrell et al., 2016). That being said, this story about Molly and Rasheeda both existing as Black women attorneys at MJ&S typifies one explanation for why there higher number of appearances of tightrope bias, tug of war bias, and mentorship opportunities throughout the series relative to the other organizational communication concepts.

Molly and Rasheeda’s storyline exemplifies tightrope bias in the sense that tightrope bias says there is a less acceptable range of behavior for women in the workplace than there is for non-POC and men. Rasheeda is called out by the partners at MJ&S for not adjusting to the culture because she wasn’t conforming to the more formal company culture. Tug of War Bias and

Mentorship Opportunities are relevant to Molly and Rasheeda's story arc for two reasons. First, because Molly tried to warn Rasheeda about the need to fit in at MJ&S, and their conversation didn't go well, and because at MJ&S because Hannah, one of the Partners, who is a White woman, asks Molly to speak with Rasheeda because Hannah and the partners don't think Rasheeda is thriving (Kittrell et al., 2016).

Tug of War Bias is relevant here because when Molly pulls Rasheeda aside and tries to give her some tips on succeeding at MJ&S, Rasheeda pushes back and feels Molly is giving her biased advice that she does not need (Lynne North et al., 2016). Another example is in the initial conversation between Hannah and Molly where Hannah asks Molly to talk to Rasheeda, Molly jokes to Hannah that she needs to watch out in case one of the Summer Associates tries to take her job (Kittrell et al., 2016). Both of these examples fit the appearance of tug of war bias as it is defined as, "when there's limited opportunity for women of color to progress, they may feel like they have to be pitted against each other to succeed. Feedback from a woman of color manager to a woman of color employee may be biased because there's a perceived threat due to this scarcity of opportunities" (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p.160).

Mentorship Opportunities are relevant here because Hannah frames coming to Molly specifically because, "it wasn't so long ago Molly was a Summer Associate," however, Molly knows Hannah chose her to speak to Rasheeda because they're both Black women and Hannah thinks this makes Molly the easiest person to mentor Rasheeda (Kittrell et al., 2016). This idea that only Black women can mentor other Black women is why Black female attorneys are lacking mentors. Until this idea is dispelled this problem will persist. The next section will discuss standout scenes from each season that exhibit how Molly's intersectional identity impacts how she encounters the organizational communication concepts this study concerns itself with.

Qualitative Analysis of the Subthemes by Season

As the thematic map shows, this thesis examines how Molly experiences the theme of intersectionality, and its five subthemes; race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and age while also navigating the theme of organizational communication concepts and its nine subthemes; mentorship opportunities, promotion opportunities, tug of war bias, tightrope bias, culture add, culture fit, pay inequity, pay transparency, and work-life balance (Figure 2). There are 51 scenes total in the sample (see Appendix D) that demonstrate Molly experiencing the various subthemes. Given the space constraints of this thesis, I cannot examine each scene and how it relates to the findings from the literature review.

Thus, this section highlights whichever subthemes from intersectionality and organizational communication concepts are most relevant to each season. I support that assessment by dissecting a scene from the sample (see Appendix D) that illustrates Molly experiencing said subthemes. To select which subthemes are most relevant to each season, I use the Quantitative Frequency Table (see Table 1). Whichever subthemes have the most mentions per season deem them most relevant. After assessing each scene, I also refer back to the findings in the literature review, to underscore how Molly's professional experiences in *Insecure* align with the workplace realities facing Black women lawyers today.

Season 1

In Season 1, race is the most relevant subtheme from intersectionality (9 mentions) and culture fit is the most relevant subtheme from organizational communication concepts (7 mentions). The scene that best demonstrates race and culture fit at play in Molly's work-life is in Episode 1, "Insecure as F**k," from 4:01 - 4:21. In this scene, all via voiceover, Issa calls Molly, "the Will Smith of Corporate" and says, "White people love Molly," as the audience sees Molly nailing a presentation in an office full of smiling White people (Rae et al., 2016). Issa goes on to say, "Black people also love Molly," as the audience sees Molly playing dominoes with a group of Black men, who are seemingly security guards at her office, and dapping them up (Rae et al., 2016). This scene illustrates race and culture fit at play in Molly's work life as it shows Molly effectively code-switching to receive acceptance from both Black and White people while she is

in the workplace. This is a critical scene for Molly's character, as it foreshadows Molly spending the entire series wrestling with issues of race and culture fit at work.

This relates to what the literature review says about race and culture fit as the literature revealed that law firms historically hire and retain talent that fit in most seamlessly with their company cultures. Said cultures are most often created and nurtured by White men for White men. A study called, "Diversity, Hierarchy, and Fit in Legal Careers: Insights from Fifteen Years of Qualitative Interviews" corroborates this notion. It discusses firsthand accounts from attorneys, some of whom are Black women, about many of the organizational communication concepts this thesis concerns itself with. Namely, mentorship opportunities, promotion opportunities, culture fit, culture add, tightrope bias, and tug of war bias. A quote from the study that illustrates this reads, "a supervisor's conscious and unconscious behavior can have negative impacts in the workplace, such as unequal access in gaining mentors and getting clients, presuming an ability to attract and retain clients, a willingness to forgive mistakes, getting to know people well and identifying with their situation, deciding to whom to give work and with whom to travel, and listening to what an individual has to contribute to a team. The list can go on" (Garth and Sterling, 2018, p. 129).

Season 2

In Season 2, race and gender tie as the most relevant subthemes from intersectionality (8 mentions each) and culture fit and pay inequity tie as the most relevant subthemes from organizational communication concepts (7 mentions each). The scene that best demonstrates how race, gender, culture fit, and pay inequity impact Molly's work-life is in Episode 1, "Hella Great," from 22:21 - 22:50. In this scene, Molly vents to Issa, Kelli, and Tiffany about how she saw Travis's paycheck and how he's making more than her despite them having the same level of experience and doing the same work (Rae et al., 2017). Molly asks the group, "what am I supposed to do? Roll up to the partners and say, 'hey guys, I accidentally noticed that you're paying this White man more than me.'" Molly goes on to say that she knows that she's, "one of the best lawyers they have," and that she's not a "work twice as hard get half as much type of bitch" (Rae et al., 2017). This scene stresses how Molly experiences race, gender, culture fit, and pay inequity in *Insecure* as she's forced to grapple with the reality that her workplace is not providing equal pay for equal work. In addition, her race and gender are a clear difference

between her and the White man who is earning more than she is. Finally, she is struggling with knowing her worth and refusing to stay silent to fit in at work.

This relates to the findings from the literature review because the consensus from the research is that, by and large, Black women attorneys do make less money than their White male colleagues for doing the same work. A statistic to buffer this notion comes from the National Women's Law Center, which confirms that "Black women are paid \$0.63 for every dollar paid to their White male counterparts," (Morris, 2022). This figure cements that Molly's experience with Travis is one facing many Black women attorneys today.

Season 3

In Season 3, race is the most relevant subtheme from intersectionality (6 mentions) and tug of war bias is the most relevant subtheme from organizational communication concepts (5 mentions). It is noteworthy that gender was a close second to race in terms of the most relevant subthemes from intersectionality (5 mentions). That being said, the scene that best demonstrates how Molly experiences race, gender, and tug of war bias is in Episode 4, "Fresh-Like" from 14:00 - 14:24. In this scene, Molly is at a therapy session when she explains how she feels hopeless in her new role at Hayward & Associates, which is a majority Black firm because she's facing similar challenges to what she experienced at MJ&S, which was a majority White firm (Lynne North et al., 2018). She says, "apparently there is only room for so many stars at the table" and that Felicia and Stacy have "the woman thing on lock" and that with Taurean "she can't get a word in edgewise." She states that these kinds of challenges are exactly why she left MJ&S because of "the pecking order, the boys club bullshit" (Lynne North et al., 2018).

Race is relevant here because Molly left MJ&S with the expectation that she would have fewer challenges navigating the workplace as a Black woman attorney because her colleagues would also be Black. However, to her surprise at Hayward, the challenges remain. Gender stands out as a challenge here when Molly hammers home feeling like Taurean, a man, dominates the conversation to the point where she can't contribute, and that there is a "boys club" to success at Hayward. Then, tug of war bias, defined as, "when there's limited opportunity for women of color to progress, they may feel like they have to be pitted against each other to succeed" is clearly what Molly is feeling when she mentions feeling like there is not enough room at the

table for her to shine, as Felicia and Stacy are already commanding attention as Black women (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p.160).

There are eerie similarities, between what the literature reveals Black women attorneys today face at work surrounding race, gender, and tug of war bias and what Molly encounters. There is an article titled, “Big Law Is Still an Old Boy’s Club” that outlines why, “the legal industry needs to come to terms with its gender bias, unconscious or not” that cites Molly’s experiences on *Insecure* (Dorn, 2018). The article has two quotes that emphasize how Molly’s experiences with race, gender, and tug of war bias, at both MJ&S and Hayward, mirror the challenges facing Black women attorneys in real life.

Referring to Molly’s time at MJ&S, the article says, “Molly struggles to bond with the firm’s powerful, White male partners who seem to care only about golf. These scenes demonstrate Biglaw’s seemingly impenetrable glass ceiling, as well as how it remains an ‘old boys’ club’” (Dorn, 2018). Then the article doubles down on how Molly’s work experiences on the show resonate with real-life attorneys when it reads, “my friend Sarah*, who worked for four years in Biglaw before moving to a smaller firm, recounted a situation resembling that of Molly’s on *Insecure*: The men at her former firm had an obvious camaraderie, which translated to the men being assigned better cases and getting to work with the firm’s decision-makers. As it was harder for women to penetrate the boys’ club, Sarah told me, they were given less meaningful assignments” (Dorn, 2018).

Season 4

In Season 4, race, gender, and sexuality tie as the most relevant subthemes from intersectionality (1 mention each), and culture fit and tightrope bias tie as the most relevant subthemes from organizational communication concepts (2 mentions each). Because there are ties here, I am going to highlight the scene that best exhibits Molly’s race and gender playing into how she experiences culture fit and tightrope bias. I will focus on sexuality for the next season. Therefore, the scene that best shows these subthemes at play together is in Episode 7, “Lowkey Trippin” from 3:44 - 4:14.

In this scene, Molly cracks down on her assistant, Karen, who is also a Black woman for making a mistake (Rae et al., 2020). Molly asks Karen, “why was I not informed of this meeting until last minute?” to which Karen responds, “I really apologize, Malcolm did email me earlier,

but it's been so crazy with the case when I saw it—" to which Molly interrupts and says, "ok but you need to be on top of it, because when you make a mistake, it makes me look dumb, and you don't get paid to make me look dumb" (Rae et al., 2020). In this scene, Molly is typifying tightrope bias, which is defined by the fact that there is, "a far narrower range of acceptable workplace behavior allowed for women, especially women of color, compared with men and White people" (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 159). The scene shows Molly snapping under the pressures of tightrope bias because she feels like she's under a microscope at work largely because she is a Black woman.

Additionally, this scene begs the question of whether or not Molly would have given such a visceral reaction if her assistant was a White man instead of a Black woman. This nods to the fact that this scene also demonstrates tug of war bias which is also defined by the fact that, "feedback from a woman of color manager to a woman of color employee may be biased because there's a perceived threat due to this scarcity of opportunities" (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 160).

The patterns in the literature review support the fact that Molly's experience here with race, gender, and tightrope bias are challenges that Black women attorneys have faced throughout history. There's a study titled, "When Will Black Women Lawyers Slay the Two-Headed Dragon: Race and Gender Bias?" that begins with a quote that says, "racism remains the most debilitating virus in the American system and the consequences spill over into almost every facet of life" (Williams Pinder, 1993, p. 1053). This sentiment rings more true today than ever, particularly for Black women attorneys.

This study speaks exactly to what is going on in this scene with Molly when she blows up on her assistant because she is cracking under the immense pressure of being a Black woman attorney. The article says, "obviously being 'put on display' creates a great deal of tension and pressure for that attorney. If she fails to live up to the 'status' heaped on her, she disappoints herself and other minorities may suffer by comparison" (Williams Pinder, 1993, p. 1061). Therefore, Molly's struggles with tightrope bias, and the isolating feeling of being othered at work, are not exclusive to her, according to the literature, but rather they are historically common stressors for Black women attorneys in the workplace.

Season 5

In Season 5, sexuality is the most relevant subtheme from intersectionality (3 mentions) and work-life balance is the most relevant subtheme from organizational communication concepts (6 mentions). The scene that best demonstrates the connection between Molly's sexuality and work-life balance is in Episode 10, "Everything Gonna Be Okay?!" from 6:02 - 6:18. In this scene, Issa hosts a birthday party for Molly and one of the guests asks what the work dynamic is like now that Taurean made partner and he and Molly are officially in a relationship (Gauyo et al., 2021b). Kelli jokingly asks the question, "is it erotic? In my head it's erotic." To which Stacy responds, "it's actually very professional. They're pretty good at keeping everything separate. But I do see Molly having to check him every now and then" (Gauyo et al., 2021b). Sexuality comes into play here with Kelli saying what many may think about Molly and Taurean forming a workplace romance through her question about whether or not there is anything steamy happening in the office. Additionally, work-life balance is relevant through Stacy's comment that verifies that Molly and Taurean are intentional about separating their personal relationship from their professional interactions at work.

Molly's experience here departs from the literature review in the sense that there is an overwhelming amount of research that spotlights how Black women attorneys struggle to achieve work-life balance because of the tremendous demand on them to lead in their personal and professional lives. Therefore, Molly's ability to achieve this work-life balance by the end of the series, through her relationship with Taurean who is a colleague, offers a rare glimpse of hope for Black women attorneys. A point that stood out from the literature review was the notion that the COVID-19 pandemic and racial reckoning of 2020 spurred by George Floyd's murder made this already looming challenge of striking a balance between work and home for Black women attorneys even harder. A Reuters article stresses this notion as it mentions, "the result of an earlier ABA survey of attorney experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, conducted in the fall of 2020, in which women and minority lawyers reported higher rates of stress and work-life balance challenges" (Sloan, 2021).

Takeaways from Deanna's Interview

As the research question interrogates the extent to which Molly's work-life experiences reflect those that Black women attorneys today are facing, I use this section to share the key takeaways from an interview with Deanna Hall, a Black woman attorney who shares a similar personal and professional background to Molly Carter. I chose to interview Deanna hoping that she could shed light on whether or not she felt *Insecure* authentically represented the plight of Black women attorneys via Molly's character. Appendix C lists all the questions I asked Deanna in our hour-long conversation. Fortunately, my hypothesis was correct and Deanna was able to provide stellar insight into answering the research question. Using personal anecdotes, Deanna shared her workplace experiences navigating all the themes and subthemes this thesis investigates. Therefore, I dedicate this section to highlighting the themes and subthemes Deanna underscored as hallmarks of her experience as a Black woman attorney and discussing how Deanna's experience compares to Molly's.

Two subthemes from the theme of intersectionality and four subthemes from the theme of organizational communication concepts dominate Deanna's experiences as a Black woman attorney. The subthemes from intersectionality are race and gender; and the subthemes from organizational communication concepts are culture fit and culture add, mentorship opportunities, and work-life balance. When asked which intersectionality traits dominate her workplace experience, Deanna says, "I would say the major ones that stand out to me are definitely race and gender. I think there should be more Black men in Biglaw or in law in general. I'm starting to see more Black women than men but as a woman, we're still in the minority greatly in this profession" (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023). Furthermore, Deanna says, "it's so so clear, I feel like the men set the tone, they set the culture" (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023). It's noteworthy to stress here that, as the Quantitative Frequency Table revealed, these are the subthemes from intersectionality that were most relevant to Molly in *Insecure* as well.

That segues nicely into when Deanna spoke about culture fit and culture add, which were also highly relevant to Molly's professional experiences in *Insecure*. What Deanna shared about her experience with workplace culture revolves around the assumptions her White male colleagues sometimes make about attorneys who look like her. She says, "I think they assume

that you must fit the culture in some ways...they feel like because you made it here, because you're so smart...they expect you to maintain the culture because of that. Like oh, okay, well you graduated from this school. So why don't you act like that? Or when you do rock the boat, or show your true self it's more of a shock to them because even though you are a woman, even though you are Black, you made it here and you should be able to fit in. That's what makes it harder" (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023).

Deanna gave the concrete example of having to question whether or not she could wear her hair naturally at the office because of this challenging workplace dynamic based on culture add and culture fit. She says this workplace environment dominated by White men who question you, "gives you more anxiety about wearing your natural hair at work or like just being different in any way" (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023).

Deanna adds nuance to the challenges surrounding mentorship opportunities for Black women attorneys as described by the literature review and characterized by Molly's character. Deanna said, "I feel like the mentorship programs and opportunities are sometimes overly institutionalized for people of color" (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023). She adds, "we have affinity groups and other programs in and outside of the firm that are geared towards helping Black people and other affinity groups build those connections, but I feel the most long lasting genuine kind of mentorship opportunities are going to take you further and those are still so rare with Black women because there's not enough in the field" (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023). The takeaway here is that Deanna feels the most genuine workplace relationships and mentorship connections are often made organically at a peer-to-peer level or supervisor-to-employee level based on kinship and rapport. As opposed to forced connection encouraged through organized channels. However, the challenge here is that until there is more representation of Black women attorneys, these natural mentorship opportunities will be hard to achieve.

In addition, I must mention how Deanna emphasized her experience of lacking work-life balance as a Black woman attorney. Deanna says at the crux of the issue of work-life balance for attorneys is, "the sheer amount of work and how many hours we're expected to work" (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023). Specifically, Deanna points to the episode of *Insecure* where Molly had to miss the first night of Coachella because she raised her hand to work on a project at her new firm, Hayward & Associates, in hopes of connecting with the

partners (Hicks et al., 2018). About whether it was realistic that Molly had to miss some of Coachella because of work, Deanna says, “That’s very accurate” (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023). Deanna continues about Molly in that episode saying, “she took that assignment on because she wanted to show how dedicated she was. Because you have to go above and beyond and show that you’re a team player, show that you can do the work, and that you want to do the work” (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023).

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention how Deanna shared a different experience with pay inequity and pay transparency than Molly did in *Insecure*. As the previous section mentions, a big storyline for Molly in Season 1 was that she found out her colleague at MJ&S, Travis, a White man, was making more money than she was for doing the same work. Molly openly complained to her closest friends, Issa, Kelli, and Tiffany about this pay inequity and lack of pay transparency. However, Deanna has had the opposite experience.

Deanna makes it clear that she has not struggled with pay inequity and pay transparency at this point in her law career. She explains, “in Biglaw, I think it’s helpful that we’re on a lockstep compensation system. So we all know each other’s base salary. Bonuses are also lockstep, but I would say a majority of firms also have incentive bonuses on top of that. So that’s an extra tier of income that we don’t know what the amounts are or what is necessary to get there” (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023). I thought this admission from Deanna was a critical departure from the narrative we see *Insecure* promote with Molly’s career. Of course, it likely depends on which law firm you’re working at, but it’s reassuring to know that Deanna is not experiencing the pay inequity and pay transparency issues that Molly is in *Insecure*.

The role that bonuses play in law does add a layer of interest in the conversation around how pay inequity and pay transparency impact Black women attorneys. Deanna does acknowledge, “I feel like the pay inequity piece I haven’t experienced yet, but it’s like some eerie thing that I know is out there. I know people are making more than me in bonuses and I want to know how you contribute to get that extra tier of income” (D. Hall, personal communication, February 11, 2023). The “yet” Deanna says here speaks to the greater issue facing Black women attorneys as described in the literature review and seen in Molly’s depiction on *Insecure*. The higher you climb in your career as a Black woman attorney, your workplace challenges don’t dissipate, they just evolve in nature. We see this clearly in this results and

interpretation chapter through the explanations of the themes and subthemes quantitative frequency chart, the qualitative scene breakdowns by season, and Deanna's interview. Therefore, this chapter proves why Molly is a representative character of the plight of Black women attorneys.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this thesis answers the question of to what extent *Insecure*'s depiction of Molly Carter's experiences as a Black woman attorney reflects the experiences of Black women attorneys in U.S. society today. Adopting intersectionality and representation as its main theoretical frameworks, this thesis examines the research question using these lenses to examine Molly's experiences. As a deductive thematic analysis, this paper includes a thorough literature review that sums up the most pressing issues facing Black women attorneys according to a range of research. Ruchika Tulshyan's *Inclusion on Purpose* is the foremost resource this literature review relies on, as it names the organizational communication concepts this study delves into from Molly's perspective on *Insecure*. The results and interpretation section dedicates itself to explaining how the themes within the literature review appear in the storylines in *Insecure* dedicated to Molly's work-life.

Overall, the study reveals that *Insecure* is one of the best recent examples in television history of the power of representation. Its use of Molly Carter as a representative character for the plight of Black women attorneys is a prime example of why. This thesis exemplifies why deductive thematic analysis should be more widely adopted as a way to study issues of representation in television shows and films, as it affords researchers the foundational tools, but also the flexibility to get creative in unearthing the implications of intersectional storytelling in television today.

Through its interrogation of the degree to which Molly Carter's experiences as a Black woman attorney reflect the experiences of Black women attorneys in today's society, this thesis finds that intersectional storytelling in television is a powerful vehicle for social change. I arrive at this conclusion in the sense that shows like *Insecure* shine much-needed light on issues that are happening in real life but aren't getting the attention they need. Furthermore, this thesis speaks to the current political and cultural moment in the U.S. where Black women attorneys are suffering more than ever due to the concrete ceiling that exists for them. The organizational communication concepts discussed in this thesis explain the contributing factors to the concrete ceiling. In addition, the paper outlines how the resounding effects of COVID-19 and the racial reckoning that began in the U.S. in 2020 also add insult to injury for Black women attorneys.

Molly is just one character in a long legacy of Black women Lawyers on television who have come before her, and those that will continue to come after her. Such characters have been, and will continue to be, depicted on screen navigating peaks and valleys in their personal and professional lives because of their intersectional identities. A great example of a show that came before *Insecure* that represented the quintessential experience of a Black woman attorney is *Living Single* and its characterization of Maxine Shaw. Maxine Shaw's character underscores the power of representation as it was inspired by Nina Shaw, the powerhouse Hollywood lawyer who is constantly named on lists of top attorneys in entertainment law to this day (Baranowski & Shulklapper, 2021).

An example of a show centered on a Black woman attorney that came after *Insecure* is *Reasonable Doubt*. It is noteworthy that Jax's character in *Reasonable Doubt* is infamous for her characterization paying more attention to her sex life, and the upheaval in her personal life, than to the controversial depiction of her career as an attorney (Komonibo, 2022). This portrayal of Jax has created conversation around whether Jax's character plays into the pitfall of historic tropes of Black women on screen such as the Jezebel and Mammy. I highlight the representations of both Maxine and Jax, in contrast to Molly, to show that intersectional storytellers must be intentional as they craft humanity into their characters to ensure they're not doing more harm than good.

To finish this paper the way it started, I harken back to its beginning when I explain the viral moment of Kerry Washington wearing the sweatshirt that has the names of the most famed Black women attorneys in television history (see Figure 1). My biggest takeaway from this sweatshirt, and this social media moment, is that there is strength in numbers. Especially when it comes to the quality and quantity of intersectional storytelling in television. There would be no Molly in *Insecure* without Clair in *The Cosby Show*, Joan in *Girlfriends*, Maxine in *Living Single*, Jessica in *Suits*, Olivia in *Scandal*, and Annalise in *How to Get Away with Murder*. And there would be no Jax in *Reasonable Doubt* without Molly.

Representation, and intersectional storytelling in television shows specifically, are so important. The adage of "if you see it you can be it" is true, and this thesis proves the dire need for there to be more Black women attorneys in the workplace to ameliorate their workplace

experiences. In addition, if writers and creators see shows with characters like these made, then they know their show can get greenlit as well, and these stories deserve to be told. Therefore, this thesis is dedicated to Black women attorneys. On-screen and in real life. You and your personal and professional experiences matter. May you have them most authentically and see them translated into television shows and films that make you proud.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: *Insecure* Character Breakdowns

Character Name	Actor	Character Description
Molly Carter	Yvonne Orji	Late 20s – Early 30s. Black woman. Graduate of Stanford Undergrad. Member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (First Black Women’s Sorority). Corporate Attorney. Issa’s best friend. Part of the friend group with Issa, Kelli and Tiffany who all went to undergrad together.
Issa Dee	Issa Rae	Late 20s – Early 30s. Black woman. Graduate of Stanford Undergrad. Works at a non-profit, then drives Uber for a period before becoming a successful Entrepreneur.
Kelli Prenny	Natasha Rothwell	Late 20s – Early 30s. Black woman. Graduate of Stanford Undergrad. Accountant.
Tiffany DuBois	Amanda Seales	Late 20s – Early 30s. Black woman. Graduate of Stanford Undergrad. Member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (First Black Women’s Sorority). Publicist.
Hannah Richards-Foster	Heather Mazur	Early 40s. White woman. Partner at Molly’s Corporate Law Firm (Merrell, Johnson & Schwartz/MJ&S).
Diane Nakamura	Maya Erskine	Late 20s – Early 30s. Asian woman. Fellow Associate at Molly’s Corporate Law Firm (Merrell, Johnson & Schwartz/MJ&S).
Travis	David Hull	Late 20s - Early 30s. White man. Fellow Associate at Molly’s Corporate Law Firm (Merrell, Johnson & Schwartz/MJ&S).
Quentin	Lil Rel Hoewry	Early 30s. Black man. Fellow Associate, in the Chicago Office, at Molly’s Corporate Law Firm (Merrell, Johnson & Schwartz/MJ&S).
Stacy Sutton	Nikiva Dionne	30s. Black woman. Fellow Associate, at Molly’s New Corporate Law Firm (Hayward & Associates).
Felicia	Kelsey Scott	30s. Black woman. Fellow Associate, at Molly’s New Corporate Law Firm (Hayward & Associates).
Karen	Donielle Artese	30s. Black woman. Molly’s Assistant at Hayward and Associates.
Jered	Langston Kerman	Late 20s – Early 30s. Black man. Did not attend College. Works at Enterprise Rent-a-Car as a Manager.
Alejandro ‘Dro’ Peña	Sarunas Jackson	Late 20s – Early 30s. Afro-Latino man. Unknown level of education/career but is portrayed as professional and successful.

Taurean Jackson	Leonard Robinson	Early 30s. Black man. Partner at the same Black owned/operated Corporate Law Firm where Molly works.
Curtis Carter	Richard Nevels	20s. Black man. Molly's younger brother. Portrayed as working class. Still lives at home.
Carol Carter	L. Scott Caldwell	60s. Black woman. Molly's mom. Working class. Lives in the Florence/Crenshaw area in LA, which is lower income.
David Carter	Gregg Daniel	60s. Black man. Molly's dad. Working class. Lives in the Florence/Crenshaw area in LA, which is lower income.

Appendix B: Codebook¹

Theme: Intersectionality

Definition:

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to Molly's intersectional identity as a Black woman. Particularly how her intersectionality impacts her work-life as a lawyer. This theme is an example of deductive thematic analysis as I derived it and all respective codes from the literature.

When to use:

Whenever the data, that is episodes of *Insecure*, exemplify any of the subthemes that fall underneath this theme, it should be coded. The subthemes within this theme are race, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, and age. It is important to highlight when multiple subthemes are concurrently impacting Molly's work-life. For example, if Molly's identity as a Black woman impacts her ability to get promoted as opposed to just her Blackness or womanhood impacting her ability to get promoted.

Subtheme: Race

Definition:

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly's race. Particularly regarding how her race impacts her work-life as a lawyer.

Subtheme: Gender

Definition:

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly's gender. Particularly regarding how her gender impacts her work-life as a lawyer.

Subtheme: Sexuality

Definition:

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly's sexuality. Particularly regarding how her sexuality impacts her work-life as a lawyer. This could be whether she is dating someone at work or if love life comes up in discussion at work.

¹ Gilchrist, K. R. (2020). *Singledom and feminine subjectivity: fantasy, contemporary popular culture and lived experience*. (PhD thesis). London School of Economics and Political Science, London.

Subtheme: Socioeconomic Status**Definition:**

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly's socio-economic status. Particularly regarding how her socio-economic status impacts her work-life as a lawyer. This could be regarding her parents' socioeconomic status as well.

Subtheme: Age**Definition:**

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly's age. Particularly regarding how her age impacts her work-life as a lawyer. This could be regarding the expectations she's set for herself, or society has set for her, regarding milestones in her career dependent upon her age.

Theme: Organizational Communication Concepts**Definition:**

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly experiencing the organization communication concepts derived from the literature that Black women lawyers are experiencing IRL as well as that Black women TV lawyers are most often depicted as experiencing.

When to use:

Whenever the data, that is episodes of *Insecure*, exemplify any of the subthemes that fall underneath this theme, it should be coded. The subthemes within this theme are mentorship opportunities, promotion opportunities, tug of war bias, tightrope bias, culture add, culture fit, pay inequity, pay transparency, and work-life balance.

Subtheme: Mentorship Opportunities**Definition:**

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts the mentorship opportunities available to Molly in her legal career. Particularly on the job at the law firms where she works.

Subtheme: Promotion Opportunities**Definition:**

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts the promotion opportunities available to Molly in her legal career. Particularly on the job at the law firms where she works.

Subtheme: Tug of War Bias**Definition:**

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly experiencing tug of war bias in her work-life as a lawyer. Tug of War Bias is defined as the phenomena, “when there’s limited opportunity for women of color to progress, they may feel like they have to be pitted against each other to succeed. Feedback from a woman of color manager to a woman of color employee may be biased because there’s a perceived threat due to this scarcity of opportunities” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p.160).

Subtheme: Tightrope Bias**Definition:**

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly experiencing tightrope bias in her work-life as a lawyer. tightrope Bias is defined by the fact that there is, “a far narrower range of acceptable workplace behavior is allowed for women, especially women of color, compared with men and White people.. the same behavior that’s acceptable for men and White people frequently isn’t fine for women of color. While women in the workplace have to walk a narrower tightrope of being considered effective but not too aggressive and adhering to tricky standards of being respected yet likable, these expectations compound for women of color. Men do not have to do so, research shows” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 159).

Subtheme: Culture Add**Definition:**

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly experiencing culture add in her work-life as a lawyer. Culture Add is defined as the diverse background an employee can bring to the workplace.

Subtheme: Culture Fit

Definition: Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly experiencing culture fit in her work-life as a lawyer. Culture Fit is defined as the similarities an employee can bring to the workplace, neither adding nor detracting from the status quo of the work environment (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022).

Subtheme: Pay Inequity

Definition: Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly experiencing pay inequity in her work-life as a lawyer. Pay Inequity

refers to the unfair earning gap between men and women, and more specifically women of color and people of majority identities, including White men and women (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022).

Subtheme: Pay Transparency

Definition: Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly experiencing transparency in her work-life as a lawyer. Pay Transparency refers to employers and employees openly sharing salary ranges up front to, “reduce the unintentional creation of a pay gap” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p.114).

Subtheme: Work-Life Balance

Explicit words said, implicit meaning conveyed, or actions done, directly related to how *Insecure* depicts Molly’s work-life balance in the context of how she navigates balancing her work-life, that is rising through the ranks within her legal career, and her identity as a daughter, sister, friend, girlfriend, fiancé, and, or, wife.

APPENDIX C: Interview Question Guide for Meeting with Deanna Hall, Esq. (the Attorney who has a similar background to Molly's).

1. How do you feel your intersectional identity impacts your experience as an attorney?
2. Defining intersectionality in terms of race, gender, sexuality, SES, and age, do you feel like certain parts of your identity impact your work-life more than others?
3. Research shows that the following organizational communication concepts are some of the most prominent challenges facing Black women attorneys today. Have you experienced any of them, if so how? (I will list each challenge and give you the chance to respond).
 - a. Tug of War Bias
 - i. Tug of War Bias is defined as the phenomena, “when there’s limited opportunity for women of color to progress, they may feel like they have to be pitted against each other to succeed. Feedback from a woman of color manager to a woman of color employee may be biased because there’s a perceived threat due to this scarcity of opportunities” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p.160).
 - b. Tightrope Bias
 - i. Tightrope Bias is defined by the fact that there is, “a far narrower range of acceptable workplace behavior is allowed for women, especially women of color, compared with men and White people.. the same behavior that’s acceptable for men and White people frequently isn’t fine for women of color. While women in the workplace have to walk a narrower tightrope of being considered effective but not too aggressive and adhering to tricky standards of being respected yet likable, these expectations compound for women of color. Men do not have to do so, research shows” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p. 159).
 - c. Culture Add
 - i. Culture Add is defined as the diverse background an employee can bring to the workplace.
 - d. Culture Fit
 - i. Culture Fit is defined as the similarities an employee can bring to the workplace, neither adding nor detracting from the status quo of the work environment (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022).
 - e. Pay Inequity

- i. Pay Inequity refers to the unfair earning gap between men and women, and more specifically women of color and people of majority identities, including White men and women (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022).
 - f. Pay Transparency
 - i. Pay Transparency refers to employers and employees openly sharing salary ranges up front to, “reduce the unintentional creation of a pay gap” (Tulshyan & Oluo, 2022, p.114).
 - g. Lack of Mentorship Opportunities
 - h. Lack of Promotion Opportunities
 - i. Lack of Work-Life Balance
4. To what extent did you feel *Insecure* captured your experience as a Black woman attorney through its depiction of Molly?
- a. What elements of Molly’s work-life really resonated with you? Did you have any moments where you were like, “oh my goodness.. that has happened to me!”
 - b. What elements of Molly’s work-life did you feel were missing based off of seminal moments in your career journey thus far?
5. In Season 3, Molly switches law firms. From a majority White corporate firm to a Black-owned/operated firm. You recently switched law firms as well. Though your new firm is not Black-owned/operated. What drew you away from your last firm and towards your current one?
- a. Did any of the organizational communication elements we’ve been discussing play a part in your decision to leave your first firm?
6. What is your hope for future TV shows that represent Black women TV lawyers? What do you want to see that you haven’t seen in *Insecure* or other TV shows that represent Black women TV lawyers? What do you not want to see anymore?

APPENDIX D: Sampled Scenes

Table 2: Qualitative Table Demonstrating Appearance of Subthemes in Season 1

Subtheme (s)	Episode #: "Episode Title"	Timestamp of Selected Scene (s)	Description of the Scene (with Quotes)
Culture Add Culture Fit Race	Episode 1: "Insecure as F**k"	4:01 - 4:21	Issa calls Molly the "Will Smith of Corporate." She goes on to say, "White people love Molly." This is all in voice over as we see Molly doing a presentation to a room full of majority White people. They laugh and smile as Molly presents. Then Issa says Black people also love Molly and we see Molly playing dominoes with a group of Black men and dapping them up.
Mentorship Opportunities	Episode 1: "Insecure as F**k"	4:25 - 4:38	Molly is sitting in her office when her colleague/office mate, Diane Nakamura, asks Molly about how she got her client to settle. Diane asks Molly to "please, please, teach her her ways" to which Molly coyly responds, "one day."
Culture Add Culture Fit Gender Race	Episode 2: " Messy as F**k"	16:36 - 16:52	Diane tells Molly "she's so fucking smart" and Hannah compliments Molly for making "great points" in a meeting they were in together earlier.
Gender Pay Inequity Pay Transparency Race	Episode 3: "Racist as F**k"	3:19 - 3:28	Molly tells her colleague that, "he just got that big White guy bonus" so he shouldn't worry about money when he is complaining about his wife wanting to add a deck and them as a family adjusting to the expenses of having a child to which he responds "how did you find out about those."
Age Culture Add Culture Fit Gender Mentorship Opportunities Race Socioeconomic Status	Episode 3: "Racist as F**k"	3:35 - 4:02	Molly introduces herself to the new intern at the law firm, she is a Black girl. Molly tells Rasheeda that if she needs anything, Molly is there for her. Rasheeda tells Molly that she loves seeing "us" in high places. This is in reference to the fact that Molly is a third year Associate. The Black girl says her name is Rasheeda, but tells Molly that she can call her "DaDa."

Age Culture Add Culture Fit Gender Mentorship Opportunities Race Socioeconomic Status Tightrope Bias Tug of War Bias	Episode 3: "Racist as F**k"	19:18 - 20:34	Molly pulls Rasheeda into her office after she hears Rasheeda being loud in the hallway speaking to another intern. Molly tells Rasheeda that "she knows how these White people are" and in order to be successful in that corporate law environment, you have to know when to "switch it up." Rasheeda gets offended and says thanks but no thanks to Molly's advice. Molly says to herself that she was just trying to help.
Culture Fit Gender Race Tightrope Bias	Episode 4: "Thirsty as F**k"	5:29 - 5:48	Here, we see Rasheeda loudly recounting how she handled a legal matter to her fellow law interns while Molly gives her the side eye for being loud. Molly says, "Black people stay loud" while rolling her eyes in reference to Rasheeda's office behavior.
Culture Fit Gender Mentorship Opportunities Race Tug of War Bias	Episode 4: "Thirsty as F**k"	10:19 - 11:04	Hannah, A Partner at Molly's corporate law firm, who is a White woman, approaches Molly in her office to chat. She starts by talking about how great the new summer associate class is. Molly remarks "I better watch out or one of them might try and take my job." Hannah tells Molly that Rasheeda is "really funny," however, that she and the others have noticed that Rasheeda isn't "quite adjusting to the culture at the firm like some of her fellow interns." Hannah says she feels like it would be great for Molly to have a chat with Rasheeda "because it wasn't so long ago that Molly was a summer associate."
Culture Fit Gender Mentorship Opportunities Race	Episode 4: "Thirsty as F**k"	14:21 - 15:27	Molly is on a date with a Black guy who is also an attorney, but at another firm. She confides in him about the incident with Hannah at work. She describes the situation as one of the partners asking her to talk to the other Black girl at work. Molly said the partners thought the new intern was being a little extra, which Molly admits she was. Molly agrees with her date that at work they want her to act as if she's "Django". Molly's date empathizes, saying that one of the partners at his corporate law firm tries to fist bump him everytime they talk.
Age Mentorship Opportunities Race Tightrope Bias	Episode 4: "Thirsty as F**k"	17:22 - 18:07	Molly goes into Hannah's office and respectfully declines having the conversation with Rasheeda about toning it down in the office in order to fit in. Molly says that it would be better for Hannah to have the discussion because she's a partner, whereas Molly isn't as senior and was a summer associate not too long ago.

Table 3: Qualitative Table Demonstrating Appearance of Subthemes in Season 2

Subtheme (s)	Episode #: "Episode Title"	Timestamp of Selected Scene (s)	Description of the Scene (with Quotes)
Gender Pay Inequity Pay Transparency Race	Episode 1: "Hella Great"	12:14 - 12:29	Molly accidentally opens up the paycheck for her colleague Travis. Before she realizes that the paycheck was addressed to Travis, and not her, she is seemingly excited that the check is for an amount way higher than she's used to receiving. Once she realizes the check is for Travis she looks dismayed. Travis is a White man.
Gender Pay Inequity Pay Transparency Race	Episode 1: "Hella Great"	17:00 - 17:20	Molly goes over to Travis, and tells him that because the partners are drunk, she's going to inquire about a raise. She asks Travis if he's already been buzzing about a raise, and he tells her "why? So they can expect more from him? Fuck no!" Molly does this to see if Travis got a raise and that's why he makes more than her, or if it's because of something else, i.e. because he's a White male, or because he negotiated a higher salary in the first place, etc.
Culture Fit Gender	Episode 1: "Hella Great"	17:48 - 18:15	Travis remarks that Hannah is a "force that they forced out" and that the "Chicago office is a step down" he thinks that Hannah "couldn't handle the pressure and the partners could tell." Molly pushes back and says that Hannah was always working harder than anyone else and that she left LA because she didn't feel valued. Travis retorts that "closed mouths don't get food" to which Molly scoffs at and responds, "yea because everyone automatically listens to a woman when she opens her mouth."
Gender Pay Inequity Pay Transparency Race	Episode 1: "Hella Great"	22:21-22:50	Molly tells Tiffany, Kelli and Issa about how she saw Travis's paycheck and how he's making more than her despite them having the same level of experience and doing the same work. Molly asks what she is supposed to do— roll up to the partners and say "hey guys, I accidentally noticed that you're paying this White man more than me." Molly says she knows she's one of the best lawyers they have and she is not a "work twice as hard get half as much type of bitch." Tiffany shares how her aunt found out she made less than some of her White employees, however even after speaking up about it, nothing happened and she still has to work there.
Culture Fit Gender Tightrope Bias	Episode 2: "Hella Questions"	3:01-3:20	Molly is at therapy and compares herself to Travis by saying how she has more billable hours, she's on the partner track, etc. She settles on the fact that it is an "all boys club" at

			work and whatever she has to do to get in, she will do it and it will be fine. Molly's therapist later remarks about how many Black women feel invisible at work.
Culture Add Culture Fit	Episode 2: "Hella Questions"	12:15-12:35	Molly stops by Renee's desk. Renee is a Black woman Executive Assistant at the law firm where Molly works. The two women pay each other compliments. Renee says she likes Molly's suit. Molly acknowledges the tassels on Renee's earrings (which are large/oversized and colorful with tassels). Molly asks Renee if one of the partners will be at the LA King's game, which is hockey. Renee says yes, but she didn't know that Molly was a hockey fan. Molly says she will be. Implying that she'll do anything to fit in at work or create rapport with the partners by liking what they like.
Culture Fit Mentorship Opportunities Tightrope Bias	Episode 2: "Hella Questions"	21:41-22:04	This scene takes place after Molly attended the Kings game and joked with one of the partners about the lobster rolls being so good that he took two home in his pocket. However, his wife wasn't happy about it. In this scene, we see Molly attempt to form a bond with said partner by following up and asking how those lobster rolls tasted for breakfast. He said he didn't actually take them home and then brushed Molly off while talking to one of the White male associates who the partner in the same breadth offers to come over to his house.
Mentorship Opportunities	Episode 2: "Hella Questions"	26:11-26:41	Molly offers to give Hannah any help she may need as she settles into the Chicago office. Hannah says that as long as Molly doesn't mind splitting her time between LA and Chicago for a few months, Hannah welcomes the help.
Culture Fit Promotion Opportunities	Episode 3: "Hella Open"	3:34-3:39	Molly says "out here, you can get promoted for being an asshole" in reference to the work culture in LA.
Tightrope Bias	Episode 3: "Hella Open"	13:13-13:24	Molly and Travis are walking in the hallway together when they both throw passive aggressive remarks towards each other. After Molly tells Travis she is going to see Hannah in Chicago, Travis goes first and says, "I wish I could sneak vacations in Chicago too," which implies that going to Chicago isn't a business trip, but it's slight work. Molly fires back and says, "why, you already vacation here at work, so what's the difference." Molly apologizes after Travis says ouch, but they go their separate ways and the conversation ends there.
Gender Pay Inequity Pay Transparency Race	Episode 5: "Hella Shook"	2:26-3:11	Molly sits in Quentin's office in Chicago. He asks her if she ever spoke up about realizing that Travis (the White guy who is her fellow Associate in LA) makes more money than her for doing the same work. After she says that she can't speak up about it, Quentin reminds her that there are other firms out there and that she brings a lot to the table, so she shouldn't be afraid to leave so she can go somewhere else and feel valued.

Gender Pay Inequity Promotion Opportunities Race Tug of War Bias	Episode 7: "Hella Disrespectful"	4:15-4:48	Molly is in Chicago, riding in the car with Quentin when he asks her when her "White boy meeting" is. This is in reference to the fact that she has an upcoming performance review with the partners. Quentin wishes her good luck and tells her he will be in LA in a few weeks. Molly asks if he's coming to try and take her job, he pushes back saying no, but he does want her to take him out.
Gender Pay Inequity Promotion Opportunities Race	Episode 7: "Hella Disrespectful"	9:17-9:54	Molly has her meeting with the partners, during which they say it's premature for her to get promoted or begin renegotiating her salary. However, they do recognize her hard work. She tries to stand up for herself regarding the timing by naming other counterparts who have gotten promoted to partner ahead of schedule, but that did not make a difference to them.
Culture Add Culture Fit Race	Episode 8: "Hella Perspective"	11:50-12:18	Molly interviews at Hayward, which is a Black-owned/operated law firm. They tell her that they were impressed with her resume, but are even more interested in her joining the team after meeting her. One Partner in the interview even says that he loves that she's an LA Native. She said she grew up in Florence/Crenshaw, and the partner was familiar with that area, saying his dad grew up there and asked if the McDonald's was still on the corner, to which she says yes
Pay Inequity Promotion Opportunities	Episode 8: "Hella Perspective"	12:19 - 12:51	Molly grabs dinner with Quentin and tells him about her plan regarding securing more money/a promotion from their current firm. She said she got an offer from Hayward three days ago. So her plan is to gather a few more offers until she can go to the partners at her current firm to hopefully get them to offer the best deal to keep her. She says "what it's really up to is that paper."
Culture Fit Race	Episode 8: "Hella Perspective"	16:14-17:00	Kelli asks Molly if she's decided what she's going to do about work. Whether she's going to "stay with the Whites or go with the Blacks." Molly lists the pros and cons for Kelli and Issa. Molly says at MJ&S she knows what she's getting and she's put a lot of time in there. However, at Hayward, she feels like "they get her." Overall, she says she just wants to go with whoever values her the most. Kelli and Issa proceed to list the pros and cons of working with White people vs. Black people.
Promotion Opportunities	Episode 8: "Hella Perspective"	17:32-17:45	Molly meets with the partners at MJ&S after they realize she's been interviewing with other firms. Instead of offering her a promotion, they offer her "the Rising Star Award." That is meant to show she is valued and that they know she will go far in the legal field. They promise her photo will be permanently featured on the firm's website.

Table 4: Qualitative Table Demonstrating Appearance of Subthemes in Season 3

Subtheme (s)	Episode #: "Episode Title"	Timestamp of Selected Scene (s)	Description of the Scene (with Quotes)
Gender Pay Inequity Race	Episode 1: "Better-Like"	19:30-20:00	Molly is at the nail salon in the scene when Dro calls her to check on how her negotiations went. She tells Dro that her new firm, Hayward & Associates, which is Black-owned/operated, accepted all of her terms.
Culture Fit Race	Episode 3: "Backwards-Like"	2:43-2:51	Molly says she's excited to start work at Hayward & Associates. She talks about how she's never had all Black co-workers before and guesses how they probably have shea butter dispensers in the bathrooms.
Race	Episode 3: "Backwards-Like"	14:48-15:44	Molly argues that Black-owned businesses need to do better. She compares Hayward & Associates to MJ&S because she has to log her own billable hours, the storage issues, etc. She basically says if it's a century city law firm then it needs to act like one. Issa says she's being judgemental/hard on it because it is a Black law firm.
Culture Fit Mentorship Opportunities Race	Episode 3: "Backwards-Like"	20:44-21:26	Molly joins her first monthly meeting at Hayward & Associates. One of the fellow associates tells her that they started the meeting to better strategize/collaborate and as an opportunity to mentor the first-year associates. Molly makes a joke about where Malcolm is. She asks if he is on CP (color people) time and remarks about how the firm is so Black they can't even start anything on time. One attendee fires back and says "maybe at her old firm, they started all meetings on time" taking a jab at the fact that Molly is still adjusting to the new culture overall at Hayward.
Culture Add Culture Fit Race	Episode 4: "Fresh-Like"	3:32-3:49	Molly does the Wakanda forever symbol across her chest after Issa encourages her to be more positive at work and just show up as her authentic self
Gender Race Tightrope Bias	Episode 4: "Fresh-Like"	7:25-7:55	Molly asks two of her new coworkers, Felicia and Stacy, who are Black women, about Taurean's behavior in their meeting. One of them remarks that "they didn't teach modesty at Morehouse" This implies that Taurean is outspoken. Molly felt like he kind of stole her thunder in the meeting.

Gender Tug of War Bias	Episode 4: "Fresh-Like"	14:00-14:24	Molly says "apparently there is only room for so many stars at the table" and that Felicia and Stacy have "the woman thing on lock" and that with Taurean "she can't get a word in edge-wise." She feels like she's starting all over again and that these struggles she's facing at Hayward and Associates are exactly why she left MJ&S – "the pecking order, the boys club bullshit."
Tug of War Bias	Episode 4: "Fresh-Like"	27:26-27:56	Felicia and Stacy approach Molly and ask to work on a case during the evening. However, Molly says that will be difficult, because she has to help Taurean. Stacy says she can see that Molly is busy because Molly is heading into Taurean's office.
Tug of War Bias Work-Life Balance	Episode 5: "High-Like"	4:26-5:01	Molly raises her hand to work on a document over the weekend, so that the partners see she is a hard worker despite Taurean offering to handle it. She feels she has to prove herself against him. She says that she is available to work on it over the weekend, but really she is not. She is going to Coachella with Issa, Kelly, and Molly.
Tug of War Bias	Episode 7: "Obsessed-Like"	14:46-15:32	In a desperate attempt to gain approval from the partners at her new firm, Molly decides not to wait for Taurean and presents the work they've done on their case all by herself. She celebrates on the phone with Issa after presenting alone saying "I just killed a fucking presentation."
Gender Tightrope Bias	Episode 8: "Ghost-Like"	2:32-3:09	Molly and Issa are at lunch, at Stuff I Eat, when Molly tells Issa how men are allowed to do things at work that women are not. She explains that Taurean should have been happy that Molly did good work, despite the fact that it didn't make him look good. Molly makes it clear that she was just trying to stay ahead and that men do it all the time - she says "the double standard is real" "for guys, it's all business, for women, it's shade." She says to smooth it over with him, she will do what a man would do, "tell him he's pretty."
Gender Tightrope Bias	Episode 8: "Ghost-Like"	5:44-6:14	Taurean facetiously tells the partners that he is glad to have a teammate as "aggressive" as Molly when they pair them up to work on another assignment after the fiasco where Molly presented their work without Taurean.
Culture Fit Tightrope Bias Tug of War Bias	Episode 8: "Ghost-Like"	23:51-24:21	Molly looks sad when she realizes Taurean has decided to work on a case with Felicia and Stacy instead of with her after she took over the presentation they were originally supposed to present to the partners together. He decided he doesn't want to work on cases with her at this point.

Table 5: Qualitative Table Demonstrating Appearance of Subthemes in Season 4

Subtheme (s)	Episode #: "Episode Title"	Timestamp of Selected Scene (s)	Description of the Scene (with Quotes)
Culture Add Culture Fit Tightrope Bias	Episode 2: "Lowkey Distant"	22:41 - 23:41	Taurean goes into Molly's office to discuss the case she had insider knowledge on from her time at MJ&S. Molly apologizes for how she acted when she and Taurean were working on a case together. She admits she wasn't being a team player. Taurean doesn't accept her apology but says ok after hearing what Molly had to say.
Culture Fit Mentorship Opportunities Sexuality	Episode 4: "Lowkey Losin' It"	6:10-7:10	Stacy and Felicia tease Molly about liking the Associate BJ/Bennett who she mentored in Law School. Stacy and Felicia clown Molly because they think she and BJ have something going on. Molly corrects them and says she was he and all his friends mentor in law school and that she thinks he only likes Abigails (aka White girls).
Gender Race Tightrope Bias Tug of War Bias	Episode 7: "Lowkey Trippin"	3:44-4:14	Molly is so hard on her assistant Karen when she makes a mistake of informing Molly late about a meeting. Molly says "you don't get paid to make me look dumb."
Work-Life Balance	Episode 10: "Lowkey Lost"	8:19-9:04	Molly and Andrew argue over her work schedule dictating their relationship. Molly argues that when she was working late, Andrew didn't like that. But now that she's inviting him to her work events, so that they can spend time together, he still doesn't like that.

Table 6: Qualitative Table Demonstrating Appearance of Subthemes in Season 5

Subtheme (s)	Episode #: "Episode Title"	Timestamp of Selected Scene (s)	Description of the Scene (with Quotes)
Tug of War Bias Work-Life Balance	Episode 5: "Surviving, Okay?!"	12:22-12:59	Taurean calls to ask Molly if she's coming into the office today. Molly tells him no and explains that she's handling personal things. She tells him that she told her assistant she wouldn't be in today. Taurean tells her the assignment that Molly is on a deadline which is a priority for the partners and that Felicia is available if Molly can't do it.
Work-Life Balance	Episode 6: "Tired, Okay?!"	6:20-7:20	While Molly is away at the Hayward & Associates retreat, she calls Issa three times while is at the hospital with her family to make sure everything is OK with her mom. Molly admits to feeling so guilty for being away, but also relieved that she can be at the work retreat, since she already missed so much work being at the hospital. Taurean interrupts their conversation and makes Molly leave the phone call early.
Culture Add Culture Fit	Episode 6: "Tired, Okay?!"	10:05-10:22	Molly admits that her first impression of Hayward was that her coworkers "didn't really rock with her." Stacy agrees with this sentiment, and Taurean and Felicia chime in and agree that at first Molly seemed like she was so stuck on her last firm that it was hard to like her (they made references to her Docusign request) but now they do like her.
Work-Life Balance	Episode 6: "Tired, Okay?!"	18:27-20:10	Taurean inquires about what Molly has been going on. She confides in him about her mom having a stroke. She says "I'm an idiot for trying to do everything." Taurean tells her about how his brother was battling cancer and reassures her that they're on the same team and that work can't matter more than real life and he's there for her if she never needs anything. They joke about how they never get personal. Taurean jokes to Molly, "I didn't even know you had a family!"
Sexuality Work-Life Balance	Episode 7: "Chillin, Okay?!"	9:52-11:07	Molly tells Issa, Kelli and Tiffany that she and Taurean have had a shift in their relationship dynamic since the retreat. She describes how he calls to check in about her mom, he texts her late at night about work, and generally inquires a lot about what she's up to. Ultimately, she decides she does want to initiate a date or romantic hang out with him.
Gender Sexuality Tug of War Bias Work-Life Balance	Episode 9: "Out, Okay?!"	3:45-4:30	Taurean makes partner and approaches Molly, Felicia, and Stacy while they're talking. Stacy guesses correctly that Taurean makes partner and Molly's gut instinct is to give him a huge hug. This is the dead giveaway to Stacy and Felicia that they're now dating. After

			Molly and Taurean go their separate ways, Stacy says to Felicia, "so they're definitely fucking right?!" Felicia agrees emphatically.
Sexuality Tug of War Bias Work-Life Balance	Episode 10: "Everything Gonna Be, Okay?!"	6:02-6:18	Issa is hosting a birthday party for Molly at Molly's apartment and one of the guests asks what the work dynamic is like now that Taurean made partner and he and Molly are officially in a relationship. Kelli jokes that she thinks the dynamic at work would be "erotic" between Molly and Taurean but Stacy says they keep it very professional and separate their work from personal, despite Molly having to check Taurean from time to time. Taurean jokes saying how could she check him when he's always right.