

COLOR BLOCK

the color of

LOVE

FEBRUARY 2016

Editor in Chief Monique Jones

JUST ADD COLOR (colorwebmag.com) and COLOR BLOCK Magazine is owned and operated by Monique Jones. JUST ADD COLOR and COLOR BLOCK Magazine is a site focusing on critiquing and commenting on Hollywood and general entertainment's levels of racial, sexual, and gender inclusion or exclusion. JUST ADD COLOR and COLOR BLOCK Magazine are not affiliated with other sites or magazines with the word "color" in the title and/or sites or magazines focused on race and culture in entertainment.

JUST ADD COLOR and COLOR BLOCK Magazine uses photography, quotes, links, and social media embeds in a responsible manner. Referenced work, such as photos, quotes, etc., are provided with captions or other attribution. JUST ADD COLOR and COLOR BLOCK Magazine uses press photos, video, audio, and other provided content in accordance to press site rules and don't use materials in a way to promote racism, verbal or physical violence or hate speech, lewdness, or other forms of unlawful behavior. JUST ADD COLOR and COLOR BLOCK Magazine uses photography, video, audio, and other forms of content to comment, publicize, or provide coverage on movies and television.

In the future (2016 and beyond), usage of screenshots will be limited, but in the case a screenshot is/has been used, the screenshot will be/has been used under the fair use argument in a way to comment or critique on how the screencapped work contributes to the discussion about race and culture in Hollywood and international entertainment. If a studio/network/creator would like a screencap removed, please contact monique@colorwebmag.com and it will be removed promptly without need for legal force.

Any questions, comments, or requests concerning usage of quotes, audiovisual content or other forms of content can be emailed to monique@colorwebmag.com and the necessary action will be taken immediately without need for legal force.

These terms are written by a non-attorney.

colorwebmag.com

The logo for Color Block Magazine features the word "COLOR" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is a different color: 'C' is red, 'O' is blue, 'L' is purple, 'O' is orange, and 'R' is dark blue. Below "COLOR" is the word "BLOCK" in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello, reader! Welcome back! Last month was all about looking back at 2015 and looking ahead to a hopefully brighter 2016 (which is now debatable, seeing how January brought us the deaths of many beloved celebrities, including the deaths of Natalie Cole and David Bowie).

This month is all about love. It's the month of love, after all, so why not indulge in that feeling that can be so great and so pain-inducing at the same time? But, COLORBLOCK Magazine isn't getting too lovey-dovey when discussing love; you know the magazine has to look at things from a cultural perspective. In this issue, we're examining how LGBT and interracial relationships are portrayed in the media. We're looking at stats, critiquing films and television, discussing the meta readings of on-screen relationships, the *Star Wars* fandom and their favorite meta-textual relationship, and much, much more. It's an exciting issue, to be sure.

There will be more love talk at COLORBLOCK's home, JUST ADD COLOR (colorwebmag.com). We'll discuss more interracial relationships that aren't mentioned in this article, other fandom pairings, LGBT relationships in television including *Steven Universe* and *Sailor Moon*, and more.

Coming up soon will be a dive into America's history of racial propaganda and how that history ties into today's #OscarsSoWhite debate. There's a reason Hollywood goes back to old tropes, and why society chooses to believe such tropes. The middle ground of propaganda proves that entertainment, images, and a society's view of the truth go hand-in-hand. Look out for that.

I hope you enjoy this issue! Happy Valentine's Day (or, if you're currently going stag or doe, Happy Singles Day)!



Monique Jones

LG BT

Now

For decades, entertainment has focused on romance between a man and a woman, while people that fall outside of that range would be depicted as flighty, snidely, untrustworthy, or cartoonish. Nowadays, things have changed. There is now a variety of people and their romances represented in the media. But now the question is when will there be even more representation? When will entertainment properly and equally represent all couples in their audience? And, as for the romantic couples represented on TV and film now, is that representation of any quality?



**the
Heart
break
of
LGBT
Representation**

There's a lot of diversity in entertainment nowadays. Or is there? To say there's "lots of diversity" in the media is to at once tell the truth and to lie. While the amount of non-white faces has increased in television and that the biggest movie of 2015, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, had a good portion of its cast played by non-white actors, the fight for diversity still wages on, and not just "diversity" in a racial sense. There's also the fight for LGBT characters and relationships to be shown with as much regularity as straight characters and their relationships.

To get a good look at how LGBT characters and LGBT relationships have fared on the TV and film, let's take a look at some of the stats GLAAD has compiled between 2012 and 2015.

Viola Davis and Famke Janssen in the Nov. 5, 2015 episode of *How to Get Away with Murder*, "I Want You to Die."
Photo credit: John Fleenor/ABC.

LGBT TV STATS

Taking a look at the stats from the 2012-2016 GLAAD reports, television has done much better job of showcasing LGBT lives and love than the movies. However, when you take a look at the actual numbers, the truth is that television has done a better job of showcasing the lives of gay white men rather than all members of the LGBT community.

The biggest trend across the reports is that on the whole, gay white men make up half or more than half of the LGBT characters portrayed on television. Meanwhile, lesbian characters specifically usually make up half or less than half of LGBT characters; bisexual characters make up a paltry amount usually in the single-digit or barely double-digit numbers, but still more than transgender characters, who usually comprise about 2% of the LGBT character population.

On the whole, LGBT characters still comprise a small amount of the overall television character landscape. With a usual 96% straight character representation on television, only about 4% is comprised of LGBT characters.

The regularity to which LGBT characters are shown in relationships seems to be increasing, what with shows like *Modern Family*, *Rosewood*, *Empire*, *Transparent*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, *Orange is the New Black* and *The 100*, among others, showing gay relationships in a wide spectrum of emotion and depth. Overall, it seems television has shied away from the idea that LGBT people are the butts of jokes; increasingly, these characters are finally being portrayed with the same nuance that their straight counterparts have been for given for decades.

However, there's still a lot that needs to be done. Bisexual, transgender, and lesbian relationships still aren't shown at the rate that gay male relationships are, and if they are shown, they're typically relationships featuring white individuals. *Rosewood*, *Empire*, and *How to Get Away with Murder* are some of the standouts for their portrayals of non-white or interracial LGBT relationships, featuring LGB and T characters.



(L-R) Jussie Smollet and guest star Eka Darville in March 11, 2015 episode of *Empire*, "Sins of the Father." Photo credit: Chuck Hodes/FOX



(L-R) Gabrielle Dennis and Anna Konkle in the Nov. 4, 2015 episode of *Rosewood*, "Policies and Ponies." Photo credit: John P. Fleenor/FOX.

LGBT FILM STATS

Film, on the other hand, has been lagging behind television. Seriously. Between 2012 and 2014, the number of films featuring LGBT characters is only 51 out of 317. That's quite staggering. On top of that, the representation has been skewed; much like in television, the focus shifts primarily to gay white men, with lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender characters, not to mention any LGBT person who is also a person of color, are criminally underrepresented.

To go along with that, most LGBT characters are still found in comedies instead of other genres of film. This could be because LGBT characters have historically been reduced to stereotypical farce as a way to "other" them against the straight, normalized characters.

However, *Tangerine*, a film featuring transgender characters played by transgender actors and featuring complex love and friendships (particularly the friendship between Mya Taylor and Kitana Kiki Rodriguez's characters Alexandra and Sin-Dee), has been critically acclaimed. It has also been confirmed that *Deadpool* will be 20th Century Fox's first film starring a pansexual character, who is of course, the lead character of the same name. Also, as you'll read about later on, there's been an astronomical push to have Finn and Poe Dameron, the two main male characters from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, to be in a relationship, as well as have Rey, the main female lead, be asexual and/or aromantic or lesbian.

However, with films like *Star Wars* (and to a lesser extent, all of the films released from major studios), the conventional worry is that a big player like Disney won't jeopardize their bottom line with countries like China, who has stringent censorship laws, by having a same-sex relationship. However, if *Deadpool* rakes in the dough domestically as well as internationally, especially if his sexuality comes into play in the film, it could provide major studios enough leverage to greenlight a same-sex relationship.

The data also shows that the upward momentum in film and TV is still at a snail's pace. In order for representation to exponentially grow, some studio is going to have to make the plunge. For instance, if it ever decided to listen to the very vocal portion of the fandom about same-sex relationships in film, it could very well be in Disney's court to be that pioneering studio. If Disney won't be the first, one of the other big studios will; regardless, after that particular studio steps up to the plate and succeeds, then the others will fall in line. Another way the status quo could change is by more indie films like *Tangerine* showing it's possible to create LGBT-based films that are also lucrative investments. Or, change could come as a combination of the two. The downside is that it's a shame that money has to be tied to a fight for representation at all.



Mya Taylor and Kitana Kiki Rodriguez in *Tangerine*, a Magnolia Pictures release. Photo courtesy of Magnolia Pictures.

LOOKING FOR LOVE IN INVISIBLE SPACES



META & THE GAP IN LGBT REPRESENTATION

(L-R) Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman in the Jan. 1, 2016 MASTERPIECE special *Sherlock: The Abominable Bride*. Courtesy of (C) BBC/Hartswood Films for MASTERPIECE

The patchiness of LGBT representation occurred due to several factors, such as cultural reticence, religious arguments, and entertainment companies worried about their bottom line domestically and internationally. The voids in representation have led to fans coming to their own rescue and creating alternate (and sometimes more accurate) readings of characters and their love lives.

The process of finding alternate interpretations of the characters not only provides fans who feel neglected by the entertainment world--such as LGBT fans and fans who are LGBT allies-- the ability to participate in their favorite film or TV fandom, but also eases the anxiety created when an LGBT metatextual reading of a character, especially characters who already have a foothold in discussions surrounding LGBT media, doesn't get the fair play it should in canonical tellings or retellings of a story. Basically, meta readings, and the subsequent fan creations that result from them, give fans the chance to tell the story from their point of view. They get to create a world that includes them in all of their complexity by allowing the canonical characters to have complexity not originally given to them by their original creators.

Sherlock Holmes and John Watson from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series of mysteries are two great examples of when the canonical and meta worlds collide.

Canonically, Sherlock and John are friends, the most classic example of platonic love and partnership. However, the two characters have also been one of the many touchstones of LGBT media theory, especially where it concerns audience interpretation.

"Fans use these parallel worlds to explore what could have been or might be, especially as regards sexualities that have not found mainstream representation," wrote Ashley O'Mara in her article, "Queering LGBT History: The Case of Sherlock Holmes Fanfic" for the site, Metathesis (metaistheblog.com). "There is no conclusive literary evidence that [Doyle] conceived of his Sherlock and John as 'homosexual;' their relationship presents as a romantic friendship although those were going out of fashion when he was writing. Likewise, despite queerbaiting, [BBC's Sherlock co-writer Steven Moffat] insists that his Sherlock is not gay, let alone [asexual]. In [fanfiction] however, literally any interpretation goes."

Those interpretations, which explore asexuality, aromanticism, bisexuality, and/or being gay, stem from said queerbaiting, which include suggestive moments in the BBC show, one of the biggest moments being during Irene Adler's introduction in Series 2, Episode 1, in which Irene basically makes a case as to why John was actually falling in love with Sherlock without realizing it by comparing John to herself. Both John and Irene have considered themselves people who weren't interested in men, yet, as Irene points out, both of them are very interested in Sherlock. There could also be a level of retroactive queerbating, as it were, happening within the original text itself; as O'Mara noted, Doyle was writing of romantic friendship when it was going out of style, with romantic same-sex friendship being replaced with a higher level of homophobia (at least among men; with women, romantic friendship and full blown same-sex romance was often overlooked by male society). The level of reticence around romantic friendships comes around the same time the term "homosexuality" was coined, which begs the question as to why Doyle would still consider writing Sherlock and John as a romantic

friendships comes around the same time the term "homosexuality" was coined, which begs the question as to why Doyle would still consider writing Sherlock and John as a romantic friendship during such a societal change.

Meta readings have also occurred with many of today's popular characters, such as characters in Marvel's cinematic and TV universe. There are tons of fan creations centering around the close relationship between Captain America and Bucky (aka the Winter Soldier), Captain America's other close relationship with the Falcon, Iron Man and The Hulk's friendship (as shown in the Avengers movies), and the friendship between Peggy Carter and waitress/aspiring actress Angie Martinelli in Agent Carter, just to name a few.

Despite canon interpretations falling short of fandom expectation, it's beginning to be par for the course for actors who are affiliated with the fandom to speak out on behalf of their fans' want for more inclusive entertainment. For instance, to address the Peggy/Angie fans, Peggy herself, Hayley Atwell, told fans at last year's Fan Expo Canada what Peggy and Angie's relationship meant to her. "The thing that stands out for me about Peggy and Angie is it's seldom that you see on television friendship between two women that isn't founded on the interest of a man," she said. "There's a genuine affection that they have for each other; whether or not you want to project the idea that it's romantic or sexual is entirely up to you and how you want to view it. I think there's a mutual respect that's quite rare that I want to see more of in film and stories."

As you'll read in the next article (about the meta pairing of Star Wars: The Force Awakens characters Finn and Poe Dameron), Captain America co-director Joe Russo also states that he welcomes all interpretations of Bucky and Cap's relationship. Also worth noting about the Star Wars pairing is that John Boyega recently confirmed to ShortList writer Chris

Mandle that while the Poe/Finn pairing isn't canonical, it was definitely something that existed in the mind of Oscar Isaac, who played Poe in the film.

With more and more actors co-signing fandom imagination, the day when there will be a mainstream LGBT couple in genre films and television could be coming soon. Maybe not soon enough, to be honest, but still sooner than originally thought possible.



Hayley Atwell in the Jan. 19 *Agent Carter* episode "A View in the Dark". Photo credit: Kelsey McNeal/ABC



STORMPILOT: THE BREAKOUT COUPLE OF 2015

Illustration by Monique Jones

Star Wars: The Force Awakens has indeed awakened the slumbering mass that is the Star Wars fandom, which has been waiting for the franchise's return to greatness. The film, starring John Boyega, Daisy Ridley, and Oscar Isaac (as well as the members of the original cast), has already surpassed *Avatar* as the highest-ever grossing U.S. film, and surely, the film will reach even greater heights the longer it stays in the theaters.

While the film is being touted as a tour-de-force of nostalgia and a refreshed look at a "galaxy far, far away," the film has also been an achievement in diversity due to having well-rounded and powerful female characters (with the exception of Gwendoline Christie's Captain Phasma, who—while cool—will hopefully be fleshed out in upcoming films) and two leads of color, Boyega and Isaac, who open the film. (The fact that their faces are the first faces we see in the movie immediately cemented the film as a break away from Hollywood's normal modus operandi.) Boyega and Isaac's characters, disillusioned ex-Stormtrooper Finn and Resistance fighter pilot Poe Dameron, have also acted as ambassadors to another type of diversity not usually found in films; characters who might not only be on the LGBT spectrum, but might also be in a same-sex relationship.



Actors John Boyega and Oscar Isaac attend the European Premiere of the highly anticipated *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* in London on December 16, 2015.
Photo credit: James Gillham/Sting Media (stingmedia.co.uk)

The fandom who propose Finn and Poe's relationship (named "Stormpilot" or "FinnPoe") to the masses provide several clues as to why they think Stormpilot is possible. First, Poe gave Finn his name; instead of continuing to call Finn "FN-2187" during their escape from Stormkiller Base, Poe immediately decides to call him Finn, thus giving Finn a new identity and a new lease on life. Second, Finn keeps Poe's jacket when, after the crash-land on Jakku, Finn assumes Poe's died in the crash. Third, Finn completes Poe's mission to get BB-8's message to the resistance base. Fourth, Finn and Poe passionately embrace after realizing the other is alive and kicking after all.

All bets are off when Poe lets Finn keep his jacket, saying "It suits you." Poe, biting his own lip before speaking, then says with bedroom eyes, "You're a good man, Finn." The playful punch to Finn's shoulder simply looks like a feeble attempt to cover up what could be construed as obvious flirting.

The clues start coming together after Isaac revealed on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, albeit with a little dry humor thrown in, that he was, in fact, playing up a romantic angle with his character.

Normally, fandom character pairings, or "ships" (short for "relationships") don't make headline news. But Stormpilot not only lit up fan spaces like Tumblr and Twitter, but also mainstream sites like E! Online, BuzzFeed, Hypable, Vanity Fair, USA Today, Metro, Pink News, Comic Book Resources, The Mary Sue, Bleeding Cool, MoviePilot and certainly many more.

Star Wars fan Stephanie wrote one of the many pieces on Stormpilot for The Geekiary. The post, called "Everyone is Talking About Our 'Star Wars' Slash Ship" (with "slash" fandom slang for same-sex pairings) focuses on Stephanie's cautious optimism when it comes to how those outside of the fandom ship world will accept Stormpilot's existence. "The best thing about mainstream coverage...is that it normalizes queer romances," she wrote in her article. "...When all these outlets are reporting on our fan activities as something worth noting, it sends a powerful message to studios that there's an audience out there that wants these narratives." However, Stephanie notes in her article, the usage of some outlets using the term "bromance" when describing a ship that much more than just friendship can be problematic and awkward. "The main issue with mainstream media's coverage of slash shipping is that, since we're so obscure and don't often leave our isolated communities, they don't quite know how to talk about it," she wrote.

“Even worse, this can be an indicator that mainstream press just doesn’t know how to talk about queer romance in general, even in regard to non-fandom inspired pairings.”

Stephanie stated in an email interview about her feelings behind her article. “I wrote my article because I was feeling so heavily conflicted about the fact that this ship was getting such a large amount of mainstream coverage so quickly. On the one hand, I’m elated that a slash ship is getting generally positive coverage. It helps legitimize LGBTQ+ relationships in general, and makes it possible for more visibility going forward. On the other hand, we don’t exactly have the best track record with mainstream press understanding fandom culture. It often feels like we are being gawked at, made fun of, or just outright misrepresented,” she wrote. “I’m really grateful that, so far, we haven’t had any coverage that’s treated us poorly. With any luck, we won’t and all of my worrying will be for naught. We definitely need to lose the term ‘bromance,’ though. Please. Romance is romance and we don’t need to ‘bro’ it up to soften it. But that’s been my only issue so far and it’s relatively small compared to what’s been done to us in the past.”

Stephanie didn’t immediately latch onto Stormpilot after her first viewing of *The Force Awakens*, but now sees the developing relationship as playing on classic romantic beats. “Unlike a lot of my friends, I didn’t walk out of the theater shipping them right away. I did, however, come out of the film

immediately drawn to Poe Dameron. When I got home and discussed it with friends I was introduced to the idea of shipping him with Finn within 24 hours of my first viewing and it didn’t take me very long to get on board with that idea completely,” she wrote. “There are a lot of romantic tropes that code them as being in the early stages of a romance such as clothing sharing, nicknames (or in Finn’s case, a name that isn’t a Stormtrooper number), and even that long dramatic run into each others arms when they realize the other isn’t dead. I’ve seen the film two additional times since my first viewing with my slash goggles on and everything just falls perfectly into place.”

Stephanie attributes *Star Wars* large fanbase for the reason Stormpilot became the phenomenon it is. “I think a lot of what has drawn people to Stormpilot is what draws people to slash pairings in general, but on a much larger scale since the *Star Wars* fandom is so huge. Many LGBTQ+ people like myself enjoy queer pairings because we just don’t get them that often in mainstream media. It feels good to see characters that reflect our own sexuality off on adventures,” she wrote. “Many heterosexual women are drawn to slash ships either because they like the idea of two men together in general, or because these specific characters in this specific story happens to speak to them regardless of gender. The interesting thing is that I’ve seen many straight men also shipping Stormpilot, which seems to be rare in a lot of my other slash pairings (though not

unheard of). There might be more visibility here because of how huge the fandom is. Or maybe straight men are just getting comfortable enough to admit that these guys are kind of perfect for each other. I’m not sure why there’s a higher visibility of heterosexual men shipping Finn and Poe, but it’s definitely unique.”

Geek Girl Diva, another *Star Wars* fan onboard with Stormpilot, wrote a similar response in an email interview to the fandom’s love for the pairing. “I think people connect with both the characters and how they are with each other. Poe and Finn already have a friendship that’s romantic in a sense,” she wrote. “They fell into immediate like with one another. You get the sense that both Boyega & Isaac would be totally down with playing gay characters and Isaac has a very open faced admiration. I think people connect to the deep liking these two have for one another, and it’s not a stretch to take it to the next level.”

Geek Girl Diva was immediately a part of the Stormpilot fanbase thanks to the ever-present chronicler of fandom things, Tumblr. “It was all Tumblr, bless its shipping heart,” she wrote. “Once I saw the meme, I fell in love with the ‘ship.’”

The fact that so many people, men and women alike, have latched onto Stormpilot could have implications for how Disney and the *Star Wars* movie team goes forward, right? Or could stuff stay at the status quo? With so many billions at stake, and with such a wide intersection of people in the *Star*

Wars fandom (some of whom aren't as open towards LGBT representation), it's difficult to say if Disney and Lucasfilm will take the promise of diversity to the next level.

"I think [the mainstream press is] great, wrote Geek Girl Diva, adding, "As much as I love the ship (and I love it like a house on fire), I don't think Stormpilot is in the cards on the big screen. But I do think Poe could very well be gay and he'd be a perfect way to bring an LGBT character into the Star Wars Universe."

There has been a Change.org petition asking Lucasfilm's president Kathleen Kennedy to include LGBT characters in the new Star Wars films. When it comes to whether the petition

could cause a rush of LGBT characters to enter the Star Wars film franchise is difficult to say. But both Stephanie and Geek Girl Diva point out that LGBT characters are already a part of the franchise, if just in books and games.

"Lucasfilm has already made the jump into showing LGBT characters, first in [Star Wars: The Old Republic] and then in a couple of the new canon books (Chuck Wendig's *Aftermath* & Claudia Gray's *Lost Stars*)," wrote Geek Girl Diva. "I don't know 100% that Poe isn't already the lead into an LGBT presence in the films. I think he might be, but it's a guess and nothing more. That said, I do think that the Stormpilot love could make it easier for [Lucasfilm] to flip that switch. But I'm not in a position to

make a decision on that."

"Thanks to Chuck Wendig, there are LGBTQ+ characters in the novels, but we are still lacking big screen representation. I have a feeling that if they were planning for Poe and Finn to be in an onscreen romance, that's already been decided and a petition wouldn't sway that," wrote Stephanie. "However, something like Poe's sexuality may still be negotiable and we could have an affect on that. Poe's sexuality hasn't been touched on and Oscar Isaac has been incredibly

"...UNFORTUNATELY WE OPERATE IN A 'STRAIGHT UNTIL PROVEN OTHERWISE' MINDSET WITH THE MAJORITY OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA, AND THE IDEA OF BISEXUALITY SEEMS PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT FOR A LOT OF WRITERS TO GRASP."

supportive in interviews. He's treated the idea of two men in a romantic relationship with respect and even said he'd go for a rainbow colored lightsaber. This could all be joking, of course, but I get a strong vibe from him that he's supportive of our community. It's hard to explain why, exactly, but these tidbits from his interviews don't feel like they [Lucasfilm] are 'making fun' of us at all."

"Finn's sexuality may be more difficult to sway. Unfortunately we operate in a 'straight until proven otherwise' mindset with the majority of mainstream media, and the idea of bisexuality seems particularly difficult for a lot of writers to grasp," Stephanie added. "With Finn expressing even a moderate interest in Rey, this could be

the writers coding him as heterosexual. But hey, it's possible that the people who are writing the next couple of scripts could have a good grasp on the idea that you can be attracted to more than one gender at a time and we may get bisexual Finn after all."

Some news that's made the social media rounds is that Captain Phasma will have an extended role in future films due to fan support. With the amount of fan support Stormpilot has, it's in the realm of possibility that

Disney and Lucasfilm could think twice about the extent of Poe and Finn's relationship. But again, it's tough to say since there's so much money and investment on the line.

"It's possible. Adding a few extra interactions without rewriting an entire script isn't too huge, but if the characters are written, say, on completely different planets for most of the film it may be hard," wrote Stephanie when asked if she thought there was a possibility for Disney and Lucasfilm to make fanon canon. "But if we don't cause enough enthusiasm for Episode VIII, there's always Episode IX. This is a trilogy and I'm sticking with Stormpilot for the long haul. Just have to keep my fingers crossed that neither of them die in the next film. That's pretty much the only thing that'd put a nail in the coffin for future interaction."

Geek Girl Diva differs slightly on the issue. "On [Phasma returning to the

series], I think that was a bit different. Phasma caught fire for a few reasons and it's a lot easier to beef up her story than it is to add in a relationship between two lead characters," she wrote. "In the end, I think that's entirely up to [Episode VIII director and Episode IX writer/director] Rian Johnson and the [Lucasfilm] Story Group. It all depends on what the arc is for the trio in the larger story. I don't think Disney & [Lucasfilm] will shy away from any interaction, but I don't think they'll play it up just for fans. I think, in the end, the filmmakers will do what they feel is the best fit for the trilogy and the story."

"If I have a personal hope, it's not for Stormpilot (even though I love the ship)," Geek Girl Diva added. "In a perfect world, where we get diversity of all kinds, we get a female lead, a hetero interracial couple and a gay character (maybe in a relationship with a male alien? Let's think big!), all of whom are great friends and join together to defeat the Darkness. I can work with that just fine."

If Poe and Finn do become canon, what will Disney do about LGBT representation for women? Of course, the franchise will add characters to subsequent films, but if fans want someone from the main Big Three characters, there seems to be a lot of support for Rey being asexual and/or aromantic. Much of the support for Rey as being along the LGBT spectrum seems to stem from the fact that even though there's ample time (and many open invitations from Finn) for Rey to take their friendship to the

next level, Rey seems to be more enamored with the idea of what Finn leads her to think he is; she's more fascinated by the idea of him being a part of the Resistance and belonging to something great rather than him being an available guy. Also, she's more concerned with the mission at hand, getting BB-8 back to the base, rather than hooking up. The final scenes find Rey not cementing a romance with Finn, but with her kissing his forehead while he's in a comatose state, a goodbye before she heads to the island Luke Skywalker is hiding on in the hopes of being trained by him. Her new mission is to focus on her handling of the Force, not being someone's girlfriend.

The call for making Rey along the LGBT spectrum would naturally add to the film franchise' commitment to diversity, but there's also a smaller contingent of the fandom who want Rey to be lesbian, bi, or asexual/aromantic simply at the expense of removing her characterization and forcing her into the box of a spectator or as a voyeuristic avatar for the fan him/herself. Several fans on Tumblr seem to imply that they want Rey to be asexual and aromantic not for reasons concerning diversity, but just so she won't interfere with Poe and Finn's possible relationship. Asexuality and aromantic individuals deserve to be showcased on the big and small screens, which is what happened on USA's *Sirens*, which featured asexual paramedic Valentina aka "Voodoo", who dated non-asexual fellow paramedic Brian. But asexuality and aromanticism—

two orientations that don't describe a lack of a person's desire for basic human affection, but just the levels to which a person might desire affection—shouldn't be used as a way to box a character in at the expense of two other characters' possible romantic relationship.

Such fear of Rey being a wedge between Poe and Finn should be left by the wayside, since directors are beginning to, at the very least, not write fans off for their non-canonical opinions. One example is *Captain America* co-director Joe Russo stating in an interview (via *Vanity Fair*) that while he has always personally viewed Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes' relationship as brotherly, he doesn't begrudge or limit anyone else from their own points of view. "People can interpret the relationship however they want to interpret it...People have interpreted that relationship all kinds of ways, and it's great to see people argue about...what that relationship means to them," he said. "We will never define it as filmmakers, explicitly, but however people want to interpret it they can interpret it."

This movement towards fan inclusivity, as well as actors like Isaac suggesting he was playing at romance with another male character, means a lot when it comes to the struggle to get proper LGBT representation. But, as the *Vanity Fair* article linked above points out, the road towards true inclusivity might be even longer than fans are prepared for. However, something

can be said for progress happening in leaps and bounds after years of stuttering steps. Take a look at marriage equality; it has taken over a decade to get marriage equality in a majority of the states, and then, one day, marriage equality was nationwide with the swift smack of the Supreme Court's gavel. So who knows as to what kind of romantic future Finn and Poe (or Rey) have. While we could be going to the theaters in 2017 with Finn in a relationship with a girl, we could find Finn and Poe in same-sex relationships (if not with each other) and Rey exploring the universe of sexual identity while she hones her Jedi skills. The ball is in Disney and Lucasfilm's court; let's see what play they make.



A view of the stage and screen during the World Premiere of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* at the Dolby, El Capitan, and TCL Theatres on December 14, 2015 in Hollywood, California. (Photo by Alberto E. Rodriguez/Getty Images for Disney)



LOVE WINS, BIASES DON'T

(L-R) Teri Polo and Sherri Saum in the Aug. 15, 2015 *The Fosters* episode "Lucky".
Photo credit: Eric McCandless/ABC Family

Looking at the TV stats GLAAD compiled, it's clear there's a severe oversaturation of stories about gay men and not enough about lesbians, bisexual men and women, and transgender men and women. Even more interesting is that the stories featuring LGBT characters, particularly stories involving gay men are overwhelmingly white. This proves the notion that just like diversity and inclusion are intersectional, biases, discrimination and, in some case, outright racism, are also intersectional. In plainer words, just because a person represents one type of minority doesn't mean they always see the value in representing another.

The false idea that gay white men can't have racist or discriminatory tendencies somehow developed in a myopic way over time. Perhaps it's because gay white men have also been discriminated against because of their sexuality. But regardless of how the idea came about, there is still the fact that despite their sexuality, gay white men still have privilege in their whiteness. This privilege can be found in the scathing audit the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) had commissioned to better understand the non-profit's practices and ideology.

The audit, which was first reported by BuzzFeed, is damning in scope and provides context for how privilege

affects how women, minorities, and transgender, lesbian, or bisexual individuals are viewed in society (and, by extension, entertainment). The non-profit's staff was categorized as "judgmental," "sexist," homogeneous" and "exclusionary," and after surveys and focus groups with staff members, the findings portrayed a massive amount of problems including "treatment of employees, including those who are transgender, to concerns about human resources and organizational commitment to diversity and inclusion."

To narrow it down, the findings exposed the organization for what it actually was.

"Leadership culture is experienced as homogenous--gay, white male," stated the audit according to Buzzfeed. "Exclusion was broad-based and hit all identity groups within HRC. A judgemental working environment, particularly concerning women and feminine-identified individuals, was highlighted in survey responses."

The report also found that one in five staff members didn't see "diversity and inclusion" as a necessary part of the organization's goals and values, and "[t]here is a general perception that current diversity efforts are not working and that there's a lack of diversity understanding broadly."

Buzzfeed wrote that in the audit, one focus group member stated that people who were "personally invested" in diversity efforts had their opinions "smothered or pushed away." That feeling was backed up by the official findings, which called the organization a "White Men's Club," specifically citing the culture being "rooted in a white, masculine orientation which is judgemental of all those who don't fit that mold," which includes treating women and individuals, men and women, with what they described as "soft skills" in a discriminatory fashion. "More than half of multiracial and Latino people and 83% of genderqueer people feel they are not treated equally based on their identity," the audit stated.

HRC's president, Chad Griffin, stated to Buzzfeed that the organization had already begun to tackle the problems

within its ranks, but the findings prove that there is a sense of entitlement that pervades even one of the most (seemingly) inclusive organizations in the country. If that ideology can exist in the HRC, imagine what ideology could exist in a writers' room or producer's chair.

LGBT entertainment is still up against a "White Men's Club" similar to the one the HRC is fighting. For instance, Ryan Murphy's shows tend to portray gay white men, especially gay white men in relationships, in a reverent light, so much so that the storylines are swallowed up by needless scenes of inconsequential fluff. Blaine and Kurt from FOX's *Glee* is one example, as is NBC's *The New Normal* characters David and Bryan.

While their relationship was written with too much preciousness, other main characters like their surrogate Georgia and Bryan's assistant Rocky Rhoades were treated either like dead weight that wasn't worth fleshing out (in Georgia's case) or like an over-exaggerated "Loud, Sassy Black Woman" stereotype (in Rocky's case; the name alone says it all). With both of these shows (and most certainly for Murphy's FX anthology *American Horror Story*) women (lesbian, bi, or otherwise), and women of color are treated with a broad, quasi-stereotypical brush that makes them cardboard cutouts of other stereotypical characters in the media. Murphy's latest FOX show, *Scream Queens*, has also had accusations of stereotyping leveled against it.

Many characters outside of the gay white male "norm" have either been introduced as bottle characters or have yet to be fully fleshed out. Take FOX's *Empire*'s pop star character Tiana. She was initially introduced as Hakeem's girlfriend, but by middle of the first season, we saw she had a woman lover on the side. After *Lucious* provided Hakeem with an antithetical point of view (i.e. viewing women lovers as sex objects for male objectification, while denying his gay son Jamal the right of fatherly love), nothing more was done with exploring Tiana's life with her other love. Instead, Tiana has been reduced to a minor character in the second season (at least thus far).

Other characters, particularly bisexual women, have been introduced solely as sexual objects. Over the years, you'll find that a show (pick any show) will have a scene in which a man is at a bar or a wild party. During such a scene, two women will make out for seemingly no reason. There's no exploratory device being attempted here; it's just two women making out for the male audience. Probably the most serious portrayal of a bisexual woman has been that of Kalinda Sharma on CBS' *The Good Wife* and Annalise Keating on ABC's *How to Get Away with Murder*. On the flipside, there hasn't been a serious portrayal of a bisexual man since Jack Harkness of BBC's *Torchwood*.

The Fosters is one of the strongest

shows featuring lesbian characters and families spearheaded by same-sex households. The two lead characters, Stef and Lena Adams Foster, provide a counterweight to immature portrayals of lesbian characters on other shows. CW's *The 100* deserves special commendation as well for the relationship between Clarke--a bisexual character--and Lena. As writer/co-producer Kira Snyder told *AfterEllen*, Clarke's bisexuality is being treated in a real-world way. [Bisexuality is] not...her defining characteristic, it's just something we also wanted to do and have t so it's not, 'Oh my gosh! It's a big revelation!'...The way in which [the relationship] unfolded was something we were committed to treating responsibly in a grounded way." Films featuring lesbians and same-sex female relationships have also been few and far between, with the most recent ones being *Carol* and 2010's *The Kids are All Right*.

Despite the work of *Orange is the New Black* (featuring Laverne Cox) *How to Get Away with Murder* (featuring the history-making actress Alexandra Billings), and *Transparent* (also featuring Billings), films *Tangerine* and *The Danish Girl*, and reality shows like *I Am Cait* and *I Am Jazz*, there hasn't been much of an effort to showcase transgender characters on television or in film. And, in the case of *I Am Cait*, which focuses on the life of Caitlyn Jenner, some of the messaging has been seen as counterintuitive to the cause, particularly since much has been made of Jenner's bizarre reluctance towards same-sex marriage rights and her seeming focus on her outward "passing" appearance.



Alicia Vikander and Eddie Redmayne in *The Danish Girl*. Focus Features.

Even more rare in film and TV is the person who identifies with either both genders or neither gender. The Prancing Elites Project is a good example of a show that does showcase an individual who is a third gender or genderfluid. Tim Smith, one of the Prancing Elites, dresses in a female fashion and uses female pronouns, but doesn't identify as transgender. YouTube seems to be the best place to find a wide spectrum of the LGBT community represented, such as YouTube star Miles Jai, who dresses in a female fashion, but identifies as a gay male.

Will we see a wider exploration of LGBT characters and LGBT love in the film and television in the future? One can hope so. With more people working up the ranks of the industry, it only grows inevitable that more diverse stories will be greenlit, especially when studios begin to see the lucrative effects of embracing such stories. But for now, the battle is still being waged against the "White Men's Club" that dictates just how much of the rainbow audiences will be allowed to embrace.

INTERRACIAL



Daniel Wu and Madeleine Mantock in the Nov. 15, 2015 episode of *Into the Badlands*. Photo Credit: Patti Perret/AMC

People of color have had a boon on television, and with the recent developments with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences taking a big step towards increasing its membership of people of color (as well as women of all races and people of other marginalized backgrounds), “diversity” has been the buzzword du jour. But how far have we gotten in terms of said diversity, and has any of that diverse outlook spread over into telling complex stories, such as stories featuring interracial relationships? The numbers GLAAD compiled in their television audits proves that while 2015 was a banner year for POC characters, there’s still a long way to go.



The Stats of Interracial Relationships in the Media

(L-R) Guest star Marc Evan Jackson, Andre Braugher, Stephanie Beatriz, and guest star Nick Cannon in the April 26, 2015 *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* episode, "AC/DC." Photo credit: Erica Parise/FOX

According to GLAAD's reports on television, people of color have only constituted about one-fourth of the amount of characters on television at any given time between 2012 and 2014. There was a marginal uptick in their 2015-2016 report, with 33 percent, but that's still 67 percent of white characters who are being overrepresented by the media. With these stats, it's easy to conclude that not many interracial relationships make their way into modern television.

Within recent years, some of the most popular interracial relationships between characters on television (and streaming) include Demetri Noh and

Zoey Andata from ABC's *FlashForward*, Capt. Ray Holt and Kevin Cozner, Ray's nephew Marcus and Det. Rosa Diaz, Det. Jake Peralta and Det. Amy Santiago and Jake and attorney Sophia Perez from FOX's *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Olivia and President Fitzgerald "Fitz" Grant from ABC's *Scandal*, Dr. Cristina Yang and Dr. Preston Burke from ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*, Annalise Keating and Sam Keating, Annalise and Eve Rothlow, Wes Gibbins and Rebecca Sutter, Laurel Castillo and Kan, and Oliver and Connor Walsh from ABC's *How to Get Away with Murder*, Barry Allen and Iris West from CW's *The Flash*, the kid romance between Eddie Huang and Alison on ABC's *Fresh off*

the Boat, Mindy Lahiri and Danny Castellano (and her other white boyfriends) from FOX/Hulu's *The Mindy Project*, Sunny and Veil from AMC's *Into the Badlands*, Cookie Lyon and Laz Delgado, Jamal Lyon and Michael Sanchez, Hakeem Lyon and Laura Calleros, Hakeem and Valentina Galindo, and Andre Lyon and Rhonda Lyon from FOX's *Empire*, Dev and Rachel from Netflix's *Master of None*, and Det. Abbie Mills and Det. Luke Morales, Jenny Mills and Nick Hawley, and Jenny and Joe Corbin from FOX's *Sleepy Hollow* (the only canonical pairings Abbie and Jenny have had on the show; Abbie's colleague Andy Brooks liked her, but the feeling was one-sided, and if you

want to get into the endgame scenario, it's more than likely that Abbie will end up with unwitting time-jumper Ichabod Crane). Spelled out, it seems like a lot of interracial pairings, but in reality, the tally of the relationships named here only equals 25 (26, if you want to count the other Annalise and Beaumont from FOX's *Rosewood*, because they are only a stone's throw from becoming an item). That number seems like a lot, but many of these couples listed are in the same show, which illuminates exactly how sparse representation for interracial relationships is on multiple shows and, by extension, multiple networks. Compare this simple anecdotal evidence to the possible hundreds of same-race pairings there have been between 2012 to 2015, much less the large number of same-sex relationships highlighted in 2015 alone.

Film has fared even worse than this; rarely does film focus on interracial relationships, and when it does, many times it's in a basic, sometimes clumsy "race relations 101" way that doesn't do anyone any good in the long run. Tyler Perry's 2013 film *A Madea Christmas*, for instance, has an interracial relationship in it by way of characters Lacey (Tika Sumpter) and Connor (Eric Lively), but the film is less of an exploration of interracial relationships and more of an avenue to get Madea to interact with southern white hillbillies for the comedic factor (as well as set up an extremely soap-operatic reveal as to why Lacey's mother Eileen, played by Anna Maria

Horsford, doesn't want her daughter with a white man).

But there are some movies that earnestly attempt to show the ups and downs in interracial relationships and interracial acceptance (including family and friends). One example is Ashton Kutcher playing off Bernie Mac's protective father character in the 2005 comedic remake of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, called *Guess Who*. There are tons of funny scenes of racial and cultural misunderstanding, such as when Kutcher's character Simon gets on a roll of making the family of his fiancée (played by Zoe Saldana) laugh at racial jokes, until he goes too far without realizing it. But there are also moments in which Mac's character Percy has a heart-to-heart with Simon about what it'll be like marrying a black woman, particularly when people won't see eye-to-eye with an interracial relationship.

2013's *The Best Man Holiday* also attempts nuance through Nia Long's character Jordan's relationship with Eddie Cibrian's character Brian. Jordan is not only concerned with how her friends interact with Brian, but if she's the right woman for commitment. But still, it could be argued that more could have been done to explore the relationship.

One film that attempted to show the nuances of interracial relationships was Sanaa Hamri's 2006 film *Something New*. In it Sanaa Lathan and Simon Baker play two people who come from different sides of the tracks (Lathan's character Kenya being a

powerful accountant from a powerful black family, Baker's character Brian from the working class sect and the landscaper Kenya hires to fix her backyard) as well as different races and therefore, different racial upbringings. There are some interesting moments in the film, such as when the two characters get in a heated argument while in line at the grocery store after Brian states something that could be considered an insensitive racial remark, leading Kenya to say something racially insensitive as well. But there are downbeats to the film, including the almost comical focus on sex (which could be argued is being portrayed as wilder and fetishized because it's sex between two different races) and the seemingly out-of-date portrayal of Kenya's family and friends, many of whom frown upon her dating a white man.

Some of these tropes come up in Spike Lee's 1991 film *Jungle Fever*, but it could be argued that they are better analyzed, seeing how Wesley Snipes and Annabella Sciorra's characters Flipper and Angie both try to find themselves within their affair, which tests the limits of how far they'll go beyond monogamy (both are promised to other people) and their racial boundaries before they decide to stay within societal norms. The film, like *Something New*, also has an exclusive scene focusing on Flipper's black wife Drew (Lonette McKee) and her friends, who talk about whether or not they'd date outside the race. Some say the wouldn't mind, while Drew specifically says she'd never date

outside her race for social and political reasons (such as her statement that a strong black woman needs a strong black man, which leads one to think that she assumes someone who dates outside of the race is a race traitor).

While Flipper and Angie's relationship goes kaput, having been, aside from extramarital, only founded on fetishized sex in the first place (with each thinking that sex with the other would be wilder and more untamed), Lee decides to show how simple love regardless of race can be, when Paulie (Angie's ex-boyfriend, played by John Turturro) and Orin (one of Drew's friends) decide to become an item with a simple conversation. Paulie also had the talk about dating outside of the race with his friends and family, and many of them, he was mildly shocked to find, weren't open to dating black women at all, at least not for a long-term commitment. This conversation, and the conversation Orin had with her friends, cements in their mind that they don't want to be close-minded or racist at all; if love is what they wanted, then love was what they would find, whether that was with a black person, white person, or a person of any other race.

2014's *Infinitely Polar Bear*, starring Mark Ruffalo and Zoe Saldana, is probably the only film in recent years to have an interracial relationship and not make it the priority of the storyline. Their characters are indeed in a relationship, but the state of their family and their children's lives comes first and foremost in the

storyline, not any differences between the two parents. Also, if you want to get really specific, the *Night at the Museum* franchise features a relationship between Teddy Roosevelt (Robin Williams) and Sacagawea (Mizuo Peck), and despite what we know about the real life counterparts, including the fact that they weren't even in the same time period, their wax stand-ins weren't written with any racial or cultural boundaries interlaced between character quirks. Again, it's just a relationship based on mutual attraction.

Will 2016 offer up any nuanced representations of interracial love? It's difficult to say, but hopefully in the future, beyond 2016, we'll see more focus on love that doesn't live within racial guidelines.

Five Groundbreaking Portrayals of Interracial Relationships

Lucy and Ricky Ricardo ("I Love Lucy")

portrayed by **Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz**

First interracial couple on television

Grace Farrell and Oliver Warbucks (1999 "Annie")

portrayed by **Audra McDonald and Victor Garber**

First portrayal of a black Grace Farrell

Cinderella and Prince Charming, Queen Constantina and King Maximilian (1997 "Cinderella")

portrayed by **Brandy and Paolo Montalban, Whoopi Goldberg and Victor Garber**

First portrayal of a multiracial *Cinderella*, first portrayal of interracial couples in *Cinderella*

Dominique Devereaux and Garrett Boydston ("Dynasty")

portrayed by **Diahann Carroll and Ken Howard**

First interracial couple on a nighttime soap opera

Helen and Tom Willis ("The Jeffersons")

portrayed by **Roxie Roker and Franklin Cover**

First portrayal of a black-white marriage on television



RELATIONSHIP OR FETISH?

TWO ON-SCREEN RELATIONSHIPS EXAMINED

(L-R) Tony Goldwyn and Kerry Washington in the Nov. 12, 2015 *Scandal* episode "Rasputin." Photo credit: Eric McCandless/ABC

Showing representations of interracial relationships is necessary in order for fans to be able to see themselves and their lives represented on screen. But, like with any representation of any group, there comes a set of responsibilities. One of the responsibilities that comes with representing interracial relationships is deciding exactly what message you're going to send and how deep you're going to dive into the challenges that can come with certain interracial relationships. By "certain," that means relationships that are based on fetish and not actual love.

Representations of interracial relationships will, at their best, show how people of any race and culture can find common ground. But it's also pertinent to show how a person can bring their own racial baggage into a relationship that's supposed to represent racial and social unity. One relationship that can be meta-read as being a relationship based solely on fetish is Fitz and Olivia from *Scandal*. Fitz and Olivia's relationship is one that is, at its core, lustful; it's an extramarital affair while Mellie, Fitz's wife, stewes in anger. But for viewers who are also readers of history, there is an uncomfortable undertone of racial and power-based domination being forced onto Olivia by Fitz.

Kiara Moore wrote in her article for the site The Elizabethian, "Why the SCANDALous 'Olitz' Needs to End" that Fitz has used his power as President to keep Olivia at bay even though she has wanted to move on plenty of times.

“Remember when Cyrus and James Novak had baby Ella's christening, when Fitz chased Olivia down the hallway, and they proceeded to have hate-filled sex in the electronics closet? Let's not forget the disgusting way Fitz treated her afterwards,” she wrote. “Or the myriad of times Fitz used his limitless power as President of the United States to summon her. How are you supposed to get over your ex-boyfriend and move on when he literally won't let you? It's easy to see these gestures as a man hopelessly in love, but even Olivia knew the disturbing implications when she told him, "I'm feeling a little, I don't know, Sally Hemings/Thomas Jefferson about all this." The reference Olivia is using is the “relationship” between Jefferson and his slave.

It must be said that Hemings was a slave, she didn't have a choice in who she would be in a relationship with. Jefferson was an abuser. Of course, Hemings and Olivia are women in completely different circumstances; Olivia's a free woman who initially chose to follow through with the affair with Fitz. But the allusion still tickles the mind because in both scenarios, there's a white man in power in a “relationship” with a black woman in a submissive role. Hemings' submissive role was something she couldn't escape, unfortunately. Olivia, though, has allowed herself to be put in this role, which makes Olitz even worse; Olivia chose to put herself in a awful situation.

There's another side to Olitz that's troubling; Olivia's seeming fetish of

white men. Olivia has a naive sense of what a mate should be. In short, she wants her men to be perfect knights in shining armor who will save her from herself. In a masochistic turn, she also lives from drama, which makes her want men that will ultimately hurt her. What is interesting (and someone lends more credence to the Olivia's own worry about the Hemings/Jefferson look of her relationship with Fitz) is that Olivia seems propelled to constantly find this type of man in white men. This is not to say that white men are Jefferson; far from it. The problem is with Olivia herself; for some reason, she has fetishized white men in power as people who can dominate her.

Like how the show analyzes Fitz's issues, *Scandal* takes a look at Olivia's problems as well, usually through Olivia's father Rowan. Earlier in the show's run, Rowan takes Fitz to task for white privilege, calling Fitz a “boy” and a spoiled brat who didn't have to work hard to get where he is. When explaining Rowan's rant to Buzzfeed, actor Joe Morton said of his character, “[Rowan's] talking about, *I'm black. You're white and you're privileged. And here's what I think about this particular privileged individual that happens to be the president of the United States and is sleeping with my daughter. I don't like that as well and the way you talk about it with me makes me pissed off even more.* All of those things together become what that speech becomes.”

Rowan uses the same term “boy” in

Season Four to address the guys Olivia gets involved with. “You may love these boys, Olivia, and they may even love you. But they are not your family,” he tells her. “These boys may go to battle for you. They, perhaps, might even kill for you. But after the conquest, after they've enjoyed the spoils, they will move on to other battles, other conquests, other spoils.” Of course, Rowan is also saying this to manipulate Olivia into loyalty to him; again, there's always a man dominating Olivia. But for whatever reason, Olivia tends to act out her father issues exclusively on white men in power. Probably because Olivia herself has terrible ideas about power. Olivia equates power with being outside of the mainstream, hence her job as a “fixer.” But she also seems to associate power with assimilation and acceptance, and a white man in power is the ultimate form of assimilation. Olivia constantly wants to live beyond her parents - both murderous, scandalous people themselves - and become her view of greatness, which is to be accepted. However, instead of learning how to accept herself, Olivia tries to find acceptance in domineering men. It's probably due to America's political set up, with most of the politicians and D.C. elite being white, that Olivia constantly finds herself involved with domineering white men. But one could also say that with America's penchant for believing that “white” equals “default,” it's probably this that makes Olivia drawn to powerful white men. If she's with a white powerful man, Olivia might feel like she can attain some of the assimilation she's wanted. (It's only

after her relationship with Fitz goes public and she becomes the new First Lady that she realizes a life with Fitz isn't what she wants after all).

Mindy Lahiri of *The Mindy Project* is also a character who has been criticized for fetishizing white men. It was alluded earlier in the magazine, but the character's insistence on dating white men has been notable, and mostly for the wrong reasons. E. Alex Jung for Al Jazeera wrote an article called "Mindy Kaling is not your pioneer," exposing the show's lack of focus on racial micro- and macro-aggressions that can occur on the dating scene and how the show seems to promote a fantasy of assimilating through a white partner.

"It is no accident that Dr. Mindy Lahiri, the character Kaling plays on the show, dates white, upper-middle-class men - Wall Street bankers, NYU Latin professors, lawyers and web designers," wrote Jung. "The recurrence is not a question of fate running into you but the perpetuation of the great lie of romance, which suggests that love and marriage are not somehow informed by class, race, and gender conventions. Lahiri's project of finding Mr. Right, in other words, holds the ultimate promise of assimilation."

Jung acknowledges other criticism of the show, stating how others have asked for Mindy Lahiri to date other men of other races. "But the problem here is not that Lahiri exclusively dates white men. It's that there is never any confrontation of race within these

relationships. It's aggressively naive to suggest that none of her tall white boyfriends has never said that he has a proclivity for Indian women, clumsily attempted to prove his familiarity with Indian culture or dismissed her for her race," Jung wrote. "Neither does Lahiri show any anxiety, glee or resentment about being the sole Indian woman in a mostly white male environment. There is not even the barest acknowledgement that her desire might be shaped by the expectations of a white male establishment. 'The Mindy Project' perpetuates a white power structure by masking how racial fantasies operate on an interpersonal level. Race is ornamental, like a Kate Spade purse."

Kaling herself has responded to the criticism many people have, telling *Entertainment Weekly*, "Do people really wonder on other shows if female leads are dating multicultural people? Like I owe it to ever race and minority and beleaguered person. I have to become the United Nations of shows?" Other fans have an alternative view of Mindy Lahiri's dating patterns.

Blogger Nisha Chittal told Jezebel that she is happy with Mindy Lahiri dating non-Indian men. "'I actually think it's really interesting that Mindy Lahiri dates white men - I saw it as Kaling making a conscious decision to refute the stereotype that South Asians can only date other South Asians...To me, it's refreshing to see an Indian American woman on TV dating white men because it challenges the audience's assumptions of Indian

American women,'" she wrote. Still, she addresses that it could be worth it to have more diversity among Mindy Lahiri's dating pool. "That said, could she date more diverse dudes beyond just tall white blonde men? Probably, but I'm just a tad bit relieved that she isn't taking the easy route of pairing her character with other Indian guys," she wrote.

At the end of the day, both of these relationship examples can be argued until the cows come home. But both examples do showcase important moments in which the media sparks conversations about the role fetish can play in some interracial relationships and how those fetishes have come to exist. Racial fetish can make someone believe that someone is a "prize," "sexually promiscuous," "some fun before marriage," or "attainment into social and cultural acceptance." Some might see it as dangerous to create an interracial relationship for a television show or a film that will divulge into the more unseemly side of dating, but if done right, such representations can teach audiences about how they view others and themselves in society.

Both examples do showcase important moments in which the media sparks conversation about the role fetish can play in some interracial relationships.

The Future of On-Screen Interracial Relationships

Interracial dating has been around forever; it's only in recent memory that interracial dating has begun getting on the media radar. However, it needs to get on the radar even more. There is still that moment when someone watching a TV show or film will think, "Oh, so they put her with him?" The fact that people are still surprised by interracial relationships on screen show that there's still more work to do. Entertainment only reflects what society provides, and if entertainment is still showing a lack of nuance when discussing interracial relationships, then that only means that society, as a whole, hasn't come as far as it thinks it has in accepting interracial relationships, even though interracial relationships have become the norm for America. More likely than not, we all know someone who is in a relationship with someone outside of their race; why is it that their lives aren't seen as viable for representation?

The country is fastly approaching the moment when the groups that are considered the "minority" will be the majority. America is also quickly becoming racially mixed. National Geographic states that most of America will be biracial or multiracial by 2050. With that stat out there, it would behoove Hollywood to cater to this demographic, because this demographic is America. But Hollywood would move faster if society decided to stop treating interracial relationships like a taboo or something risky. Once society moves the needle and begins to accept interracial relationships as just relationships, then Hollywood will follow suit.

JUST ADD COLOR

THE SITE FOR **COLORBLOCK** MAGAZINE

**FOLLOW. SUBSCRIBE. JOIN THE FANBASE.
COLORWEBMAG.COM**