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Manipulating Diversity: A Rhetorical Analysis of Annalise Keating's Intersectional Portrayal of Race and Sexuality on the Primetime Television Show How to Get Away with Murder

Melany Le
The College of Wooster, lle18@wooster.edu

THE COLLEGE OF
WOOSTER

MANIPULATING DIVERSITY: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF ANNALISE KEATING'S INTERSECTIONAL PORTRAYAL OF RACE AND SEXUALITY ON THE PRIMETIME TELEVISION SHOW *HOW TO GET AWAY WITH MURDER*

by
Melany Le

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the intersectional portrayal of the character Annalise Keating as a black queer woman, navigating complex interracial relationships and highly institutionalized environments of legal and higher education systems throughout the first two seasons of *How to Get Away with Murder*. Utilizing ideological criticism, this research found that despite her marginalized identities, Keating carefully constructs her image to resemble a white, heterosexual woman in order to alleviate, or completely avoid oppression from the major institutions that govern her life and work. Additionally, Keating's experiences and actions are unique within the world of *How to Get Away with Murder* as she simultaneously shares the same struggles as other marginalized characters, but also oppresses those characters to follow her own agenda.

Keywords: *How to Get Away with Murder*, intersectionality, race, queerness, television

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Before coming to the U.S, most of what I had learned about this country was through popular television shows such as *Friends* or *How I Met Your Mother*. These television series that I used to watch subconsciously formed my initial thoughts about America: a country made up of predominantly white, middle-class individuals living mostly in urban areas. Since my arrival in the country a few years ago, much of what I had come to believe from television was not the America I have experienced. Needless to say, diverse representations on television are essential, not only for the sake of foreigners like me who seek to learn more about America, but also for the citizens of this country who would benefit from the exposure to diverse individuals and their stories. Fortunately, in recent television series, more than ever before, viewers can now tune into primetime programs on major networks and see several characters who are non-White or non-heterosexual. One of the rare, prominent characters on current primetime television who possesses both aforementioned traits is Annalise Keating, a black queer woman who plays the role of a powerful law professor and attorney from the award-winning series *How to Get Away with Murder* (abbreviated as *Murder*). This character is the subject of my research, and in this chapter, I will preview my purpose and three rationales for this study. Furthermore, key definitions and the method of the study are also included.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the intersectional portrayal of Annalise Keating, the protagonist on the popular television show *How to Get Away with Murder* on the ABC Network. The study aims to deconstruct the complex nature of intersectional identity politics through the character's race and sexuality performances. Specifically, the study will analyze how Keating navigates different spaces that she occupies and her relationships with other characters,

while being part of the marginalized racial and sexual groups. My analysis particularly focuses on seasons one and two of the show. Season one first aired in September 2014 and ended in February the following year. Season two premiered in September 2015 and concluded in March 2016. While the emphasis of the study is on seasons one and two, the study will also encompass details from later seasons to fully deconstruct the character's progression and transition in racial and sexual performance.

Rationales

The study of this particular character is valuable for a number of reasons. First, this research extends current scholarship on intersectionality by offering an in-depth analysis of a distinctive mediated representation of both race and sexuality. Previous studies have tended to focus on race and sexuality representations as separate entities (Ott and Mack 178; Meyer, "Representing Bisexuality" 380). Aside from this dominant approach, some intersectionality studies of television programs do exist, but they are still relatively rare (Meyer, "The 'Other' Woman" 903). Moreover, previous scholarship on intersectionality on television had pointed out the consistency of whiteness and heterosexuality as the norm to most identity representations (Meyer, "The 'Other' Woman" 903). However, since *Murder* features a queer character of color as its protagonist, has diverse cast members, and is produced by a women of color, the constructed world within this show both challenges and reinforces dominant social norms. An intersectionality study of Annalise Keating's race and sexuality should therefore further extend current scholarship on intersectionality on television by analyzing a powerful yet marginalized character functioning on alternative norms in a unique world.

Second, though different popular productions by Shonda Rhimes, including *Grey's Anatomy* (e.g.; Quick 38; Warner 631) and *Scandal* (e.g., Monk-Payton 21; Pixley 28), have

been extensively studied in the past, *Murder* and its characters have not received much scholarly attention due to the show's fairly recent release in late 2014. The only published study on the show so far explores *Murder*'s viewers' reactions and discourses on black womanhood on Twitter (Williams and Gonlin 984). However, as part of *Murder*, Keating especially deserves scholarly attention since she is one of the few characters on mainstream television to achieve immense popularity while being both black and queer. Considering the scarce representations of these characteristics both separately and collectively on primetime television programs, a character such as Keating, who is at the crossroad of these traits, is worthy of scholarly attention. Therefore, it is essential to understand the messages underlying these representations due to the show's massive outreach and potential for shaping perceptions and inspiring social change.

Third, the study has important practical implications for producers of entertainment television. Specifically, the analysis of Annalise Keating could add to the thought process when major networks create new characters in the future. Producers would be more aware of the numerous frames through which they can choose to portray characters in light of this analysis. Additionally, understanding the complexity of this character would also enable television networks to continue writing thought-provoking characters who resonate more with reality.

Definitions

The key concepts that are foundational to this study are: *rhetoric, race,* and *sexuality*. Kuypers and King define *rhetoric* as "the strategic use of communication, oral or written, to achieve specifiable goals" (10). *Rhetoric*, in this particular study, refer to the series' texts, including characters' verbal exchanges, non-verbal gestures, and physical presentation, and how these details illustrate identities and underlying ideological assumptions. *Race* is a form of categorization that groups individuals based on their physical attributes, especially skin color

(Anemone 5). This study is primarily concerned with the racial representation of black characters on primetime television. According to the American Psychological Association, *sexuality*, or sexual orientation, is the sense of physical and emotional connection of an individual to others ("Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity"). A range of sexuality preferences exists, including heterosexuality, which means that one is attracted to others of the opposite sex, or bisexuality, which describes one's attraction to others of the same and opposite sex ("Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity"). An additional two terms that will frequently appear throughout this study are *queer* and *intersectionality*. *Queer* is an umbrella term that refers to the group of people who do not identify as heterosexual, while *intersectionality* refers to the research lens that focuses on the interconnectedness of identity factors such as race, class, and sexuality that affects people's lived experience. Particularly in this study, an intersectional analysis of Annalise Keating's portrayal aims to offer a wider perspective on this character's experience navigating her profession and managing her personal life. A more detailed elaboration on *intersectionality* is included in Chapter II.

Method

This study utilizes ideological criticism, a qualitative method that aims to analyze the patterns of ideas, values, beliefs, and cultural worldviews that manifest in an artifact (Foss 291). Ideological critics generally believe that texts are inherently political with foundational assumptions that usually benefit some dominant groups over others (Hart and Daughton 384; Foss 294). Therefore, exploring and analyzing texts, especially texts about or produced by marginalized individuals, would enable ideological critics to "listen to voices that have been systematically muted" (Hart and Daughton 385). Through the lens of this method, I will examine all *Murder* episodes in seasons one and two, identifying relevant scenes, dialogues, and

performances involving Annalise Keating and other characters in the overarching plot as well as the subplots. I will then decipher Keating's images, worldview, and her relationships with other characters to understand the underlying ideology conveyed through the portrayal of Keating as a queer, black woman.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the purpose of my study, which is to examine the portrayal of Annalise Keating on the television series *Murder* with regard to her race and sexuality. This study is valuable because it provides an intersectional portrayal of race and sexuality in a popular television program. In addition, the study will examine the latest television series produced by Shonda Rhimes, a prominent producer who has gained both critical and commercial success in recent years for normalizing the presence of marginalized characters in mainstream programming. I also hope this study will encourage television producers to explore the societal and financial potential of creating inclusive programs. Additionally, this chapter included key definitions for understanding the analysis and the method I will use to conduct this study. Chapter II will focus on the the literature relevant to this thesis.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the intersectional portrayal of Annalise Keating, the protagonist of the popular television drama *How to Get Away with Murder* (abbreviated as *Murder*). To fully understand the analysis of this character and the larger implications of her portrayal, this chapter aims to provide context relevant to the study. In this literature review, I first discuss the theories, as well as the essential concepts I utilized as lenses to examine my artifact. Then, I examine the history and contemporary representations of black women and queers on primetime television in the United States. Following these sections, I explore intersectionality as an overarching lens for my study, which combines identity factors such as race, gender, and sexuality in constructing a comprehensive character. Lastly, this chapter also includes a brief introduction of *Murder*, particularly its accolades and commercial success.

Standpoint Theory

This research utilized standpoint theory as its foundation. *Standpoint* refers to "a place from which to critically view the world around us" (Griffin 441), which is synonymous with words such as viewpoint, perspective, outlook, or position. Originally, standpoint theory focused on the marginalized position women occupy in relation to men, which results in unique worldviews between individuals of these sexes (Griffin 444, Warren and Fassett 109). However, standpoint theorists also acknowledge that besides gender, one's racial or ethnic background, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, age, and so forth, also affect a person's standpoint (Griffin 444, Warren and Fassett 109). For instance, the lived experiences of a queer woman of color in the corporate world would be much different from those of a heterosexual white woman in the same setting. Though these two individuals might share some common struggles since they are both marginalized in corporations as women, their viewpoints might differ greatly due

to other components of race and sexual orientation. The queer woman of color would face multiplicative segregations due to her being at an intersection of minority identities. Acknowledging the complex nature of what constructs identities and worldviews, standpoint theorists firmly emphasize that no marginalized groups are monolithic.

Standpoint theorists also argue that people from marginalized groups can offer a more objective view of the world as compared to individuals from dominant groups (Griffin 447; Warren and Fassett 110). More specifically, the marginalized individuals are able to perceive the world through their subjugated lens, but are also motivated to understand the perspectives of those in power (Griffin 447; Littlejohn et al. 82). This is because marginalized individuals need to negotiate their identity and standpoint within the dominant sphere, of which "they are not fully a part, but which is always a part of their realities" (Littlejohn et al. 82). Warren and Fassett illustrated this argument through the power relations between students and instructors in a classroom setting. In order to do well in a particular course, it is beneficial for students to understand the instructor's "interests, values and moods" (Warren and Fassett 110). However, since the instructors are in the positions of power, they are not obligated or motivated to understand students' viewpoints (Warren and Fassett 110). Therefore, the students, in this case, would have more comprehensive perspectives of the class since they are the ones who need to survive the courses (Warren and Fassett 110). Though the classroom space in this example is greatly simplified, it is important to recognize that these power relations exist in almost all social spaces, which means the marginalized groups have a better grasp of differing perspectives in order to sustain their existence.

Standpoint theory aims to uncover and highlight the perspective of marginalized individuals and their experience navigating dominant structures. In order to further consider

marginalization in sexual orientation and race, the following sections will discuss Whiteness and Queer Theory in relation to Standpoint Theory.

Whiteness

An important lens for examining the character in this study is *whiteness*, which is a concept that refers to a dominant racial category that possesses privileged social and economic status. This concept is so pervasive that it seamlessly and invisibly integrates itself into social discourse (Croteau and Hoynes 201; Vera and Gordon 11). For instance, in everyday conversations or academic rhetoric, "white culture," "the white community," or "the white vote" are terms that one would rarely see. Instead, expressions as such frequently appear alongside marginalized racial identifiers such as "the black community" or "Latino culture." This is because whites, in the Western context, are the norms while other racial identities are socially deviant. Consequently, these norms also dictate people's perceptions of marginalized groups' intellect and moral standards as inferior to that of white individuals (Vera and Gordon 101).

In the media studies context, the study of whiteness is significant since it aids media scholars' understanding of characters from marginalized racial groups (Shohat and Stam 88). Examining whiteness in relation to marginalized characters highlights the distinct representations among different racial groups, which complicates the nuances in racial portrayals and audiences' conceptualizations of race (Shohat and Stam 88). For instance, from examining mediated representations throughout history, scholars found a prevalent trend of depiction, commonly known as white savior, which is a stereotypical portrayal of white characters rescuing other characters of color from their plights (Hughey 1). This finding enriches scholars' understanding of how dominant racial ideologies shape the constructions of

white and marginalized characters on the media landscape. In combination with standpoint theory, whiteness as a framework aims to uncover the complicated lived experience of Keating navigating predominantly white systems from the perspective of her minority racial identity.

Queer Theory

Before discussing Queer Theory, it is essential to define *queer*, as well as explain how this term functions within the academic context. Historically, the term *queer* carried a variety of meanings. *Queer* was originally a descriptive word, alluding to something strange, weird, or out-of-the-norm. Derived from this definition, the term queer can be used in a derogatory manner when referring to individuals who do not identify with the man-woman binary (Barker et al. 175, 176). However, in spite of these negative definitions, *queer* can also act as a term of endearment when referring to gay or lesbian individuals; therefore, some people use *queer* as synonymous with homosexuality. In scholarly conversations, *queer* is "an umbrella term to refer to any and all people whose individual sexualities do not fit the traditional understanding of heterosexuality" (Ott and Mack 199). The term also includes gender fluidity, which breaks down the boundaries of other more confined words such as "gay" or "lesbian" (Duggan 157). The term *queer* is reclaimed in the academic and political contexts to generate inclusivity and to deconstruct the gender and sexual binaries.

More recently, in 1990, Teresa de Lauretis chose "queer theory" as the title for a conference she coordinated at the time to "disrupt the complacency of lesbian and gay studies" (Littlejohn et al. 83). The original disruptive mission for queer theorists still continues today. Particularly, queer theory, as an interdisciplinary perspective, seeks to challenge heteronormativity, which refers to "a diverse set of social practices that function to perpetuate

the heterosexual/homosexual binary and privilege heterosexuality" (Ott and Mack 198). Combining the essential motive of queer theory with standpoint theory, my study aims to decipher Annalise Keating's perspective of her own social reality, which motivates and explains her choice of actions pertaining to heteronormativity in *Murder*. More specifically, since Keating's queer identity is not public in the show, combining standpoint theory and queer theory would allow for deeper understanding of her choice to remain closeted queer person navigating the spaces she occupies.

Primetime Television's Black Women and Queer Characters

Primetime television series are featured between 8:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. Eastern time from Monday to Saturday or between 7:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. Eastern time on Sunday (Signorielli 299). Since these time windows are convenient for people of various age groups and occupations, primetime programs attract millions of viewers across the United States each night. With a plethora of television shows in a variety of genres, such as drama, sitcoms, horror, and so on, most television viewers can surely find at least one program that caters to their interest. On the surface level, these primetime programs serve to satisfy viewers' immediate needs, such as the desire for entertainment or a way to pass time. However, primetime television series also have to the potential to cultivate ideas and alter viewers' worldviews.

With extensive viewership, the representations of notable characters become widely recognized and accessible to the public. These representations convey messages about identities and ideologies that can possibly have a profound impact on a large number of audience members. Crucial to the characters' representation are profile elements such as race and sexuality that affect the messages these characters carry. In this section, I first focus on past scholarship

relevant to the representation of women generally and black women specifically on primetime television and then turn to queer representations, first in film and then on television.

Black Women in Primetime Television Series

Before narrowing down to scholarship on black women portrayal, it is essential to consider how women are portrayed overall on television. All women, not just women of color, have been underrepresented on mainstream television programs. A study published in 1975 confirmed that for every three male characters, only one female character would appear on a drama television series (McNeil 261, 262). This finding also aligned with the results from a study published in 1990, which stated that women only appeared on television for a third of total television running time with the rest of the program time featuring male characters (Davis 329). A strikingly similar result was recorded in a study published later in 1999 (Elasmar et al. 27). However, by 2014, the trend slightly changed in that women, especially on drama and comedy series, appeared on screen for more than half of the total television program time (Hunt et al. 9). Despite the increase in women's visibility, females in lead roles remained scarce as only 37% of lead roles on primetime television series went to women (Hunt et al. 9). With the underrepresentation of female roles on screen, television programs contributed to a culture that already undermined women's roles in society (McNeil 268) and confined women's spaces to specific locations, such as in the home (McNeil 266). This tendency of women's underrepresentation, whether for supporting or lead roles, has remained consistent to the date of this research (Erigha, "Race, Gender, Hollywood" 78).

Regardless of race, women's roles on television continuously perpetuate different stereotypes. The two overarching stereotypes include women's overt dependence on their partners, and women's lack of interest in career advancement (Kim et al. 152; McNeil 263).

First, many female characters are completely dependent on their male counterparts, whether they be husbands or love interests, in a variety of environments. For instance, women characters frequently show little interest in advancing their professional careers since they are often occupied with domestic and motherly duties, such as taking care of the kids, cleaning the house, or making meals. Even when the female characters are not portrayed as homemakers, these women tend to have lower-tier, insignificant jobs which would allow them more time to take care of the family. In the context of seeking romantic partners, female characters often do not initiate contact first between the two parties since this action would be perceived as too forward and unladylike (Kim et al. 152).

Evolution of Black Women Representations, 1950-2017. For all of the stereotypical behavior depicted by female characters in primetime television generally, however, black women characters on television often suffer from the perpetuation of unique gender stereotypes in correlation to their race. Many representations of black women on screen are one-dimensional with a focus on the role of caregiving and the trait of dependability, which once were associated with slaves (Hall 106; Mask 4). One example that fits these characteristics is the Mammy, a character type who is usually a black, heavy woman who takes care of the white owner's house and kids (Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film* 79). The Mammy character appeared on *The Beulah Show* (1950-1953), which featured Hattie McDaniel as a loyal and trustworthy maid of a white family (Wright 16). Another example would include *Gimme a Break!*'s Nell Carter, who played the role of a black female housekeeper of a widowed white policeman's family with three children (Wright 24). Additionally, black female characters are typically shown as other male characters' subordinates and are even portrayed as sex objects in some cases (Cartier 154; Kim, et al. 151; Wood 32). Often, these characters who exhibit their sexuality end up dead early in the

series because of their "sin" (Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film* 79). Furthermore, women of color, especially black women, are frequently presented as less professional, which implies their poor work ethic, unpreparedness, and limited skillsets (Tukachinsky et al. 32). These trends illustrate a profound lack of representation of dynamic, powerful, Black women on the small screen.

Though the aforementioned stereotypical traits are still prominent in contemporary television series, recent popular black female characters, such as Abby Mills in *Sleepy Hollow* (2013-2017), Terri Lacroix in *American Crime* (2015-2017), and Crazy Eyes on *Orange is The New Black* (2013-present), were portrayed in manners that distanced them from dominant stereotypes (Everett 35). For instance, Cookie Lyon, the black female protagonist from the award-winning television show *Empire*, co-owns a million-dollar hip hop record label with her ex-husband (Daniels and Strong). In the series, Lyon earns respect and eventually dominates other characters for different reasons. First, Lyon was a drug dealer and went to prison for seventeen years before taking the responsibility of managing the record label (Daniels and Strong). Because of her criminal past, other characters respect and even fear Lyon for her toughness. Additionally, Lyon demonstrates ambition and fearlessness by standing up against her ex-husband when his work contradicts her moral beliefs. Using large network connections, critical strategic thinking, and a lot of negotiating skill, she steps out from her ex-husband's label to create her own (Daniels and Strong). Not only does Lyon exemplify an image of a woman who works, but she also demonstrates independence by separating herself, both financially and emotionally, from her male counterpart.

Unlike Lyon, Olivia Pope, the black female protagonist of *Scandal*, has received much attention from the public as a rare portrayal of a minority woman in a position of tremendous

political power (Everett 37; Mask 8). Specifically, Pope owns a crisis management firm, where she frequently welcomes high-profile clients, such as important political figures, and solves whatever issues the clients might have. Other than running her legal firm, her opinions and suggestions also affect the decisions of important officials, such as the Chief of Staff and even the President. Situated in a racially diverse environment, whether it be her usual office or the White House, Pope exercises full control over many other characters from different backgrounds and ethnicities (Erigha, "Shonda Rhimes" 11). The fact that Pope is a woman of color in a powerful position strikes at the heart of black women's stereotypical television portrayals as Pope is furthest away from being subordinate to any character on *Scandal*.

Despite the popularity of recent black female characters like Lyon and Pope, critics have still pointed out some negative trends and implications that emerged from these popular portrayals. For instance, in the case of Olivia Pope, though Pope displays immense power over other important political figures on the show, her role as the President's mistress does not stray too far from the subordinate, enslaved characters that were designated for black females in the past (Mask 4). Moreover, Pope's massive popularity indicates a larger issue in mediated representations and society as a whole. The fact that a character like Pope in our current age could bewilder, amaze, and even confuse large populations of viewers highlights the scarcity of diverse black roles in mainstream media (Mask 7). Second, it is crucial to understand that having better quality representation is much more important than pushing to increase the number of minority characters on media (Tukachinsky et al. 32). Therefore, knowing that the number of marginalized characters is certainly increasing, scholars and the audience members alike are simply expecting better representations. Lastly, when a positive minority character is presented on television, it is likely that they will be viewed as unrepresented of their racial or ethnic

background (Tukachinsky et al. 33). While the stereotypes of black women characters have their origins in culture, they are also perpetuated by the lack of women and minority women, especially in television production.

Women in Television Production. The underrepresentation of female roles on screen could be partially attributed to the absence of female producers and staff members behind the scenes. A recent report in 2016 indicates that "women comprised 28% of all creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs," which clearly illustrates a significant imbalance in gender distribution in television production ("Boxed in" 3). Based on this statistics, women are evidently underrepresented off-screen and have been for quite some time, which limits the creation of on-screen female characters (Erigha, "Race, Gender, Hollywood" 78; Glascock 97). When women are employed more to work behind the scenes, diversity on screen—in the contexts of both television and film—increases as a direct result (Smith and Choueiti qtd. in Erigha, "Race, Gender, Hollywood" 86; Glascock 97). The female characters in these media also appear to be more complex, engage more frequently with other characters, and gain more attention resulting from women workers' input on the production team (Erigha, "Race, Gender, Hollywood" 86). However, with very few women currently working in television production, it would be challenging for the industry to suddenly start adding more women and overturn the vicious cycle of underrepresentation both behind the scenes and on-screen (Erigha, "Race, Gender, Hollywood" 86). While I could find no statistics on the number of black women working in television production, the numbers are undoubtedly even lower, which speaks to the quantity and quality of roles available on screen for black women as well.

A rare exception to this general trend in the contemporary television industry is Shonda Rhimes. An African-American woman, she has written, directed, and produced several hit series that are both commercially successful and critically acclaimed, such as *Grey's Anatomy*, *Private Practice*, and *Scandal* (Everett 34). Rhimes's shows all incorporate racially and sexually diverse cast members (Warner 6), which is part of her agenda to eradicate discrimination, and to give minorities a voice on mainstream media (Everett 37). A common thread that connects Rhimes's female protagonists across her shows is the fact that these women characters are all competent, complicated, powerful, and sexual beings (Everett 38). These women often face innumerable obstacles both in their professional and personal lives, which ultimately highlights these characters' struggles, conflict management techniques, intellects, and inner strengths in navigating their own worlds (Everett 38). It is important to note that Rhimes is not the creator of *Murder*, but serves as the producer for the show. However, Rhimes's influence remains prominent on *Murder*, which is evident through diverse cast members, as well as the complicated characters and plot development.

In regard to Rhimes's success, scholars have reported divided views. Though many agree that Rhimes's magnitude of success is unparalleled (Hunt et al. qtd. in Erigha, "Race, Gender, Hollywood" 82; Erigha, "Shonda Rhimes" 13; Everett 34; Tukachinsky 195), not only for an African-American woman, but also for the television industry in general, some view Rhimes's breakthrough as deeply individualistic and with no long-lasting impact to the industry (Hunt et al. qtd. in Erigha, "Race, Gender, Hollywood" 82). However, Everett argued that Rhimes's success and ideology expressed in her work have important implications for the future of the industry. For instance, with the commercial success Rhimes achieved over the years, major

networks might feel encouraged to include more racially diverse casts on primetime television since this decision could potentially prove profitable (Everett 40).

Queer Representations in Primetime Television Series

In addition to black women's representations on television, another population that has been largely marginalized in the media landscape in general is the queer community. An overview of representations on both the large and small screens provides a useful context for my study. In the following sections, I will discuss the history of queer representations in both films and television, notable works that include queer characters, the contemporary media landscape, as well as prevalence of queer representations.

Historical Context of Queer Representations in Film, 1895-1968. The film that is often credited with featuring the first queer imagery is Thomas Edison's *The Gay Brothers* in 1895 (Brown 1; Davies 6). Some scholars argue that a specific scene in the film where the two male characters dance to the music portrays queerness (Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film* 310; Brown 1; Merskin 291). This scene is particularly problematic since viewers' interpretation can vary greatly. There is a chance that these characters were heterosexual and simply danced together as friends (Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film* 310; Butler 92). Also, since no females worked for Edison's studio at the time, two males were selected to act out the scene instead of a male and female pair (Brown 1). Therefore, having two male characters dance with one another in this case seems unintentional. However, the word "gay" in the title, despite its dominant interpretation as "happy" at the time of production, led many to infer homosexuality (Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film* 310). Dating back as early as the eighteenth century, "gay" was also a slang word meaning "prostitute," which was how the word had long carried

sexual connotation (Butler 92). Regardless of one's view on the portrayal of the male characters, media studies scholars often credit *The Gay Brothers* as the first film to feature queer images.

Before the 1930s, many characters could not outrightly perform queer characteristics due to legal and societal consequences. Therefore, performers masked their queer expressions through visual cues or coded dialogue. Since queer sexuality performances were not immediately recognizable, many queer traits were hidden; only a viewer's intentional reading of a character could decipher a character's queerness (Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film* 310). For instance, male characters would cross-dress as women to exhibit femininity (Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Cinema* 6). These acts depicted gender inversion, which only discreetly hinted at queerness. As another example, male companions would allow bodily contact, such as an embrace or kiss, to take place on films. Nevertheless, these intimate actions were thought to be symbolic of friendships rather than other kinds of relationships (Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film* 312)

During the 1930s, the Great Depression took place in the United States and impacted American culture greatly, though many would think of the Great Depression only as an economic crisis (Connelly 34). More specifically, this crisis directly affected the lifestyles of middle class males and females in America (Lugowski 5). Before the crisis, men worked outside of their homes to provide for their families, which turned employment into one of masculine identity's defining characteristics (Connelly 34). However, when the Great Depression came along, the crisis took away jobs from many working men, which was a massive strike to masculinity (S. Meyer 8). As the result, many men during this time were no longer the proud providers of their families by fulfilling the traditional roles of breadwinners (Holmes 260; Lugowski 5; S. Meyer 83). With this abrupt attack on not only the economy, but also masculinity

identities as a whole, many men began to question their identities in this changing social scene (Lugowski 5). With masculinity in a vulnerable state due to unemployment, men no longer looked at gay and lesbian characters the same way, though these characters were simply comedic in films before this crisis. In fact, the experiences of these characters started to become more relatable considering the social scene at the time, which prompts queer imagery to blossom (Lugowski 5).

Queer representations on screen face a number of challenges, such as the emergence of the Production Code in 1930. When first introduced, the Code was initially very strict in censoring and prohibiting a range of representations, such as explicitly illustrating murders, certain crimes such as theft or robbery, scenes involving liquor; and "lustful" kisses or embrace (Leff and Simmons 287). The display of explicit homosexuality was also among the list of prohibitions (Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film* 314). However, throughout the '50s and '60s, the Production Code Administration became more relaxed and amended the regulations against queer representations in movies (Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Cinema* 8). Particularly, queer representations during this period were acceptable to be shown in movies as long as these characters, plots, or the overall subject of queerness were depicted in a negative light (Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Cinema* 8). One particularly common depiction that would fulfill this requirement was to link queerness to various tragic consequences, such as deaths. For instance, in the film *Advise and Consent* (1962), a character committed suicide after his past queer relationship became public; similarly, another character also decided to hang herself after confessing that she was lesbian in *The Children's Hour* (1962) (Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Cinema* 8). In November of 1968, the Motion Picture Rating System, the system that is still

currently in use, replaced the Production Code with the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) film rating system (Friedman 191).

Evolution of Queer Representations on Primetime Television Series, 1954-2017. Queer characters have gained more and more visibility on primetime television in the last few years. Across major television networks, viewers can tune into primetime shows on almost any day of the week and find a number of recurring queer characters on popular series such as Cameron Tucker on *Modern Family*, Emily Fields on *Pretty Little Liars*, Callie Torres on *Grey's Anatomy*, Elias Harper on *Quantico*, and Luisa Alver on *Jane the Virgin*. The following sections include previous scholarship on significant events in queer history juxtaposed with the progress of queer visibility on primetime television and some underlying issues with current queer representations.

One of the most culturally significant events in queer history was the Stonewall Riots. The riots started when police began raiding Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village of New York City, in the early morning hours of June 28th, 1969 (Carter 1; Bausum 3; Kuhn 4). Most of Stonewall's clients at the time were gay men, though lesbian women and other queer individuals would also visit the bar every now and then (Bausum 7; Kuhn 4). The bar patrons at the time of the incident resisted police efforts to raid the bar, which sparked protests and street demonstrations on and off for the next six days (Carter 1-2). It is important to acknowledge that at this point in American history, specifically at the end of the 1960s, same-sex sexual intercourse was still illegal in all states except in Illinois; there were no laws protecting the rights of queer individuals, which made it possible for them to be fired or denied housing on the basis of their sexual preference (Carter 1; Bausum 4). Considering the larger context, the Stonewall Riots were foundational to the LGBTQ rights movement (Poehlmann 15).

In the media context, from the 1950s to the late 1990s, queerness sporadically made appearances on television in different mediated forms such as talk shows, documentaries, and television series. The queer topic did come up on television a number of times but in the form of a medical problem, where doctors would be invited to deliver their thoughts on this particular "illness" or medical condition (Tropiano 2). It was not until 1954 that the tabloid talk show, *Confidential File*, aired an installment called "Homosexuals and the Problem They Present," which discussed homosexuality publicly on television, still as an issue, but from a societal perspective (Tropiano 3). For the first time on television, a self-identified queer person publically spoke about his own experience. Seven years after this installment of *Confidential File*, *The Rejected*, a documentary about homosexuality premiered on a public television station in San Francisco in 1961 (Tropian ix). Throughout the next few decades, queer characters continually appeared on an array of television series, such as *N.Y.P.D.* (1967), *The Corner Bar* (1972), and *Heartbeat* (1988). The queer characters on these series often played small, insignificant roles in parts of the story where they would appear for only one or a few episodes before exiting the show. However, during the 1990s, before the coming out of Ellen DeGeneres in 1997, some television shows, such as *Chicago Hope* (1994), *The Crew* (1995), *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1995), and *Fired up* (1997), started to explicitly and prominently feature queer personalities on television (Becker, "Prime-Time Television" 36). Undoubtedly, these characters were foundational for later producers to create queer characters on screen (Meyer, "Representing Bisexuality" 366).

It is important to acknowledge that though much progress in queer visibility on television took place throughout the '60s to the '90s, during the 1980s, the AIDS epidemic started and marked a new chapter for the gay community, and queer people at large. Medical documents first

discussed the epidemic in 1981; at the time, doctors referred to this disease as "Gay-related Immune Deficiency" or GRID for short (Andriote 1; Feldman and Miller xxv). This name stemmed from the first cases of AIDS discovered in America, which exclusively affected gay males. Though there are still ongoing debates on the exact origins of AIDS, unprotected sexual intercourse was identified as the major factor that spread the disease and led to the epidemic (Feldman and Miller xxx, xxvi). In the early 1990s, Congress even "withdrew funding for the first national study of sexual behavior in the United States" despite the National Research Council's explicit warning that no one, including the government, knows enough about AIDS to properly fight against the disease (Hunter 34). This governmental decision, among many others, clearly demonstrated the public's ignorance of the issue as well as the discrimination against queer individuals, since AIDS was seen as a punishment for the queer lifestyle. These forms of discrimination were incredibly public and apparent; for instance, during the peak of the AIDS epidemic in the 1990s, organizations such as the American Family Association and Family Research Council claimed that "gays support pedophilia, incest, bestiality, and give children AIDS" (Hunter 36). Despite such open discrimination and lack of support, AIDS was the cause that united gays, queer individuals, and allies like never before (Andriote 2; Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Cinema* 4). For the first time, this group of people "came out" as a community and held massive marches, such as the demonstrations in 1979, 1987, and 1993, which all took place in Washington, D.C. (Andriote 2). Since AIDS was so significant in queer history and American history in general, the epidemic had major impacts on queer visibility and representations on television.

One of the most significant queer figures who inspired queer visibility and representations in contemporary primetime television is Ellen DeGeneres. She first appeared as

the main character of her show *Ellen*, a primetime show that started in 1994 on the ABC network. Eventually, DeGeneres became a household name to many Americans, as the result of her charisma and sense of humor (Shugart 33). In 1997, however, DeGeneres confirmed her queer identity publicly via the character of her show and also later in numerous interviews (Dow 123; Joyrich 15; Reed 23). At the time, queerness as an identity concept was already publicly known but was not yet a generally accepted or normalized phenomenon (Dow 123). DeGeneres received mixed responses when she broke the news to the public. Many became interested in her story, so she was invited to multiple talk shows, including one hosted by Oprah Winfrey, and gave exclusive interviews, such as for *Time* magazine (Dow 124; Reed 24). On the other hand, many news outlets wrote about how DeGeneres was a disgrace to family values (Hubert 31). A number of her key sponsors at the time, including J.C. Penney and Chrysler, terminated their affiliation and support of DeGeneres, along with the ABC Network (Hubert 31). Though DeGeneres's show was eventually cancelled after her "coming out," there was a noticeable rise in the number of queer characters and gender-inclusive programs on television (Joyrich 15; Skerski 364). Therefore, DeGeneres deserves credit for altering the media landscape to be more inclusive.

Ellen DeGeneres paved the way for many queer characters to be featured on primetime television series, such as the sitcom *Will & Grace*, which debuted on NBC in 1998 (Tropiano 249), a year after DeGeneres went public with her queer identity. The show featured two gay characters who were portrayed in opposition to one another. In the series, Will Truman's portrayal went against the effeminate gay stereotypes since Truman was uptight and often dressed conservatively to maintain his professional image as a lawyer (Kohan and Mutchnick). On the other hand, Jack McFarland, the second gay regular on the show, was much more

feminine, outspoken, and confident about his sexual identity (Kohan and Mutchnick). The relationship between these two very different gay characters, as well as their relationships with others on the show, addressed some underlying difficulties that gays and other queer individuals face on a daily basis, such as shame and discrimination. *Will & Grace* went on to be commercially and critically successfully, consistently pulling in viewers for NBC and winning numerous prestigious awards over other popular television programs at the time, such as *Friends*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and *Sex and the City* (Becker, *Gay TV* 136).

In contrast to *Ellen* and *Will & Grace'*s emphasis on comedy as the medium to portray queer lives, *Queer as Folk* came along in the year 2000 and continued queer visibility in a much different fashion. The series *Queer as Folk* centered around the lives of several homosexual characters and how they navigated their sexuality in relation to one another and to other family members and friends who were non-queers (Cowen and Lipman). The show dealt with a number of problematic issues within the queer community, such as same-sex marriage, gay adoption, drug addiction, HIV, and discrimination in the workplace, which were not explicitly portrayed in previous television series. Because of the straightforward and explicit portrayal of these issues, the show prompted backlash from some queer viewers who feared that its portrayals would negatively influence others' outlooks on the queer community (Panisch). Critics also commented on the show's lack of diversity since it featured predominantly white gay culture, which neglected other queer populations such as transgendered individuals or queers of color (Noble 147). Despite such criticism, *Queer as Folk* is historically significant since it remains one of the few series to depict queer lives in such a detailed, graphic manner (Noble 147). The kind of exposure *Queer as Folk* provided throughout the course of the show paved the way for later television series to portray queerness in dynamic characters and stories.

Unlike previous queer characters on television, many recent television shows develop plots and subplots for these characters based on their personality traits and personal circumstances, rather than making sexual orientation the central theme for these characters (Kessler 144). For instance, the character Kurt Hummel on *Glee* (2009-2015) was much more than just a gay personality on the hit television series. Hummel's gender performance, including the way he dressed, talked, and conducted himself, gave the audience clues to his sexual orientation. However, right after the revelation that Hummel was gay at the beginning of season one (Meyer and Wood 435), Hummel's plot focused on his aspiration to become a Broadway singer, his compassionate personality, and his relationships with other characters (Kessler 144). Therefore, Hummel's portrayal was dynamic and enhanced the overall story in *Glee*; he was not just a token gay character on the show.

Another character to illustrate this trend of character building is Nolan Ross from the television series *Revenge* (2011-2015). In *Revenge*, Ross is one of the youngest billionaires in the world because he founded a successful software company. Ross is a loyal friend who assists the female protagonist of the show in taking down other characters who framed her father for a crime her father did not commit (Kelley). Throughout the four seasons of *Revenge*, Ross maintains romantic and sexual relationships with other male and female characters, which makes Ross a queer character. However, his sexuality never plays a central role in the plot. He moves from having one partner to another seamlessly regardless of his partner's gender. There was no "coming out" moment and the gender of his partner has never been emphasized. It is Ross's genius hacking skills, manipulative nature, and unwavering friendships that are highlighted in his character development.

Despite the positive portrayals of the aforementioned characters, audiences will still find that realistic, interesting, relatable, and truly satisfying queer characters are difficult to find on mainstream television (Kessler 143). In the most recent study done on primetime television series season ’17-’18, it was reported that out of the 901 characters who were regulars in primetime shows, 58 were queer characters, which accounts for 6.4% of the total characters (“Where We Are on TV ’17-’18” 5). Though the number of queer representations seems insignificant compared to the total number of characters, these representations have been increasing yearly. However, television viewers should not draw correlations between quantity and quality, as queer characters might be growing in number, but many representations remain mediocre and insignificant to the overall plot (Kessler 141). One particularly negative trend in queer representation is the imbalance between subgroups since many television shows only promote certain populations within the queer community, and ignore other subgroups such as bisexual individuals.

Bisexuality as a Subcategory. Since bisexuality is one of the subcategories of queerness not as prominently featured on primetime television, I intentionally chose to focus on bisexuality in these following sections because of the subject of my study, Annalise Keating. Throughout the first and second season, Keating never defined her sexuality using any specific vocabulary. However, it is reasonable to view her as a queer character since she consistently developed feelings and performed sexual acts with other male and female characters on the show. Nevertheless, though it is obvious that Keating is queer, narrowing down or assuming her sexual identification is unjust and unfitting since she chooses not to label herself. However, for the goals of this thesis, I have chosen to explore bisexuality further in this chapter because Keating's emotional and physical activities align closest with bisexuality as a category of sexuality

identification. In the next sections, I will discuss scholarship that deals with perceptions of bisexuality, common bisexual performances, and include an example of a prominent bisexual character.

On television, bisexual individuals are often portrayed negatively and linked with promiscuity (Raley and Lucas 31; Meyer, “Representing Bisexuality” 380). Because of this sexual orientation’s negative and controversial connotation, television series favor showing only popular queer character types onscreen, such as gays and lesbians. This lack of representation contributes to the audience members' view of bisexual individuals as deviant, unstable, or temporarily confused (Meyer, “Representing Bisexuality” 380). As a result, since the categorizations of gay and lesbian are less fluid, these identities are deemed more desirable and suitable for television compared to other identities on the queer spectrum (Meyer, “Representing Bisexuality” 380). Additionally, primetime television limits bisexual representations to specific backgrounds or plotlines. According to Meyer, bisexual females are more frequently featured on television series than bisexual males (“Representing Bisexuality” 372). These females are predominantly non-White and often have short-lived sexual or casual relationships with the female protagonists so as to complicate the overarching plot (Meyer, “Representing Bisexuality” 379). With such a fleeting presence, these bisexual characters consequently play the subordinate roles to heterosexuals, gays, and lesbians on television shows (Meyer, “Representing Bisexuality” 380).

Despite the negative connotations and the somewhat scarce representation of bisexuality in mainstream media, one prominent bisexual character who remained on primetime television for ten years was Callie Torres in *Grey's Anatomy*. Torres first appeared on the program in season two and exited the show after season twelve. With this ten-year time span, Torres was one

of the longest-standing bisexual characters in the history of primetime television. On the show, Torres was a non-white, orthopedic resident, who had dated many of her colleagues at the hospital, both males and females (Rhimes). She was married twice; first to another surgeon who later passed away and a second time to a pediatrician (Rhimes). Both times, her marriage ended in divorce (Rhimes). Torres's second marriage was more prominent since the pediatrician she married was lesbian. The relationship had its ups and downs and at times became the central plot for the entire series. It comes to show the importance of this character as a bisexual individual. Instead of being marginalized, her story, thoughts, and feelings took the spotlight throughout significant portions of the series.

Queer Individuals in Television Production. There are currently no studies on the number of queer individuals in television production or their direct impact on the industry. However, many contemporary queer producers, creators, and writers for television shows address their gender identity publicly. A few of these notable figures include Peter Nowalk, the creator of *Murder*; Andrea Sperling, the producer of *This is Me* and *Transparent*; Angela Robinson, one of the writers for *Murder* and *True Blood*; Ryan Murphy, the creator of *Glee* and *American Horror Story*; and Ann Donahue, the producer for the entire *CSI* franchise (Bernard; Lambe; Sager). All of the aforementioned individuals have spoken publicly about their queer identity on various media channels. Several of these queer figures, such as Nowalk and Murphy, also stated that because of their queer identity and the lack of current representations of the queer community, these creators have intentionally incorporated queer characters to promote diversity and address queer issues on their shows (Lambe; Sager).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, as a theoretical framework, assumes that "social identity categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability are interconnected" (Smooth 11). Black feminists were among the first scholars to utilize the intersectionality lens in their research (Hardy-Fanta 177). Therefore, it is understandable that the earlier intersectionality studies focused primarily on black women's identities and experiences as compared to other women of color or black men (Bhopal and Preston 2; Hardy-Fanta 177). In academia today, however, many scholars utilize the intersectional lens for their research in diverse disciplines, such as healthcare, or education (Hardy-Fanta 178). For instance, an intersectional study in healthcare examined the link between poor birth outcomes among Muslim as well as Arab American women right after 9/11 and the heightened discrimination these women experience specifically during this time period (Lauderdale 185). Intersectionality is a crucial lens to this study since it allows the scholar to observe how multiple identity factors, such as the women's gender, religion, and race, interweave and contribute to the aforementioned health concern. Another example of an intersectionality study analyzed the way female professors with working class backgrounds from different races perceive themselves in the context of academia (Jones 803). This research is inherently intersectional as it deals with "the intersection of class, race, and ethnicity" (Jones 803).

There has been growing interest in utilizing intersectionality as a lens of research since it allows for revelation, and new interpretation of diverse human experiences among different marginalized groups (Hardy-Fanta 178). However, despite this call for increased attention to intersectionality, few studies of television representation examine images intersectionally (Meyer, "The 'Other' Woman 903). Meyer referenced a few existing intersectional research studies on television shows such as *One Tree Hill*, *The Jerry Springer Show*, and *Gilmore Girls*

("The 'Other' Woman" 903-904). For instance, the intersectionality study on the series *Gilmore Girls* analyzes the lived experience of the main character, Lorelai Gilmore, as a single mother (Meyer, "The 'Other' Woman 904). Despite the critical acclaim this character received, the intersectional analysis shows that Gilmore is privileged to have tremendous support from her wealthy parents and caring local community (Meyer, "The 'Other' Woman 904). The conclusion ultimately pointed out that the series ignored the harsh reality of raising children as a single parent (Meyer, "The 'Other' Woman 904).

How to Get Away with Murder

Murder is a popular and successful television series in mainstream media that includes intersectionality of race and sexuality. The show is both critically celebrated as well as commercially successful. The performances of several actors have been critically acclaimed, especially Viola Davis winning the Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series at the 67th Emmy Awards for her role of Annalise Keating (Wang). She was also the first black female actress to win in this category. The show is highly rated on several trusted entertainment measurements such as IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes. Furthermore, the pilot episode in the first season set the record for the highest number of DVR viewers in television history based on Nielsen ratings, with fourteen million live viewers and six million playbacks (Kissell). A preview of the series' plot will be included in Chapter III.

Important for understanding the analysis of Keating are the main settings in which she functions. Specifically, two major components of Keating's social construction, aside from her personal life at home, are her jobs as a law professor at a prestigious private college and as an attorney running her own law firm. I now turn briefly to the scholarship on the contexts of

academia and the legal system, both of which pose special challenges to black female professionals.

In the context of academia, black women scholars face numerous challenges. Some of these challenges include unwelcoming or even hostile institutional climate, lack of respect from fellow colleagues and students, and insufficient support from mentors when advancing in their career (Thomas and Hollenshead 175). Furthermore, the works of black female scholars, and women of color in general, often meet with the obstacle of gaining legitimacy "through traditional channels" since "the gatekeepers of those channels are white men" (Moore 200). Other than these scholars' academic labor, black female professors are also expected to perform more service work, such as advising students' committees or engaging in extracurricular activities with students, comparing to their white male counterparts (Moore 201). Therefore, it becomes more difficult for black female professors to obtain desirable positions, such as tenure, since a lot of their time is already spent on responsibilities that are largely irrelevant to considerations for promotions (Moore 202).

On the other hand, in the legal system, the number of minority women working as lawyers only accounted for approximately 7% of the total number of active lawyers in 2016 ("2016 Report on Diversity" 8). Though this figure illustrates a significant underrepresentation of minority women in the field, statistics since 2010 on this demographic had demonstrated a consistent upward trend, which means that there were more minority women lawyers in 2016 than ever before. It is also important to note that since the minority status in this report also included other women of color such as Asians and Hispanics, the exact number of black female lawyers was not specified on this report. On the other hand, black women practicing law encounter "unique challenges arising from the intersection of their race and gender" (Pratt 1779).

For instance, many spaces within the legal profession, such as corporate law firms, consider black women's naturally kinky hair, braids, or cornrows, to be unprofessional, which forces black women lawyers to conform to white beauty standards of straight, or slightly curled hair (Pratt 1782-83). Also, since black women lawyers working in a white, male-dominated profession, they suffer numerous stereotypes such as the perception that black women lawyers are lazy and incompetent or perform sexual favors to advance in their career (Pratt 1788).

Aside from being a black female professional in the legal system and in academia, Keating is also marginalized due to her queer sexual identity. Though it is crucial to include research on queer individuals in the aforementioned professional settings, there are no available studies that generalize any dominant trends of experience other than individualized anecdotes. This lack of research is understandable since one's sexual orientation is very private and also fluid, which may hinder scholars' ability to fully research this topic. It is important to note that despite presenting no scholarship on the topic of queer individuals' experiences in the workplace, Keating's queerness remains an important factor in her portrayal that will be analyzed in later chapters.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed standpoint theory, whiteness, and queer theory as frameworks for examining Keating's racial and sexual identities. The chapter also covered the overall evolution of black women and queer representation on television. The chapter ended with some information on intersectionality as a scholarly approach to conducting research, as well as some contextual information pertaining to the show *Murder.* While Chapter II provides a relevant context for my study, the next chapter provides information on the methodological approach and how I completed my intersectional analysis of Keating's character.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

As I have examined previous scholarship to provide context for my research, this chapter shifts to discussing the method used for my own study examining Annalise Keating in *How to Get Away with Murder* (abbreviated as *Murder*). As mentioned in Chapter I, this study utilized rhetorical criticism, particularly ideological criticism, to decipher the construction of Annalise Keating as a black queer woman of tremendous social power. This chapter aims to provide my justification for choosing my method, an introduction to my artifact, and an outline of the methodological steps in conducting this study.

Justification of the Methods

In the simplest form, *rhetoric* is defined as "the human use of symbols to communicate" (Foss 3). Considering this definition, engaging in rhetorical analysis would encourage critics to decipher symbol usage, how this functions in a particular artifact, and eventually how these symbols are organized to affect our thinking (Foss 3). One form of rhetorical criticism is ideological criticism, which is the method I employed in conducting this study. As discussed in the previous chapter, Foss defined ideology as "a pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world," or as a "mental framework" that individuals use to make sense of the world around them (209). Therefore, ideological criticism seeks to identify ideologies relevant to a society and analyze how artifacts contribute to and/or challenge these dominant ideologies. Specifically, ideological criticism is a method "that analyzes and challenges the ways in which the status quo of unequal power relations is maintained" (Hart and Daughton 284). The purpose of this method proves to be compatible with my study of Keating since she is a marginalized character who manipulates different facets of her identity to establish unwavering control in multiple settings.

Ideological criticism is fitting for this research for two main reasons. First, ideological criticism allows the study to identify and critique rhetoric that maintains or disrupts social injustice. Through this method, I was able to decipher Keating's beliefs, characteristics, roles, and actions, which all contributed to the dominant ideology that is embodied in *Murder*'s world. Since Keating, as well as *Murder* overall, both challenge and reinforce gender and racial norms, deciphering the ideology that forms the character's portrayal also uncovers the show's underlying attitudes and messages towards various social issues, such as racial and sexual discrimination. Secondly, situated within the rigorous power structures such as academia and the legal system, Keating's portrayal emphasizes and de-emphasizes certain aspects of her experience that ultimately contribute to the character's overall portrayal. As previously mentioned in Chapter II, both academia and the legal system are institutional spaces that have historically disadvantaged black women. Therefore, Keating's portrayal as a respected professor and lawyer allows her to confront the dominant ideology of what a minority woman's experience should look like.

Artifact

The central artifact to this study is the collection of dialogues, actions, and images of the character Annalise Keating on seasons one and two of *Murder*, a television series produced by Shonda Rhimes, that premiered on the ABC network in September 2014. Since the series' first episode until the most recent season in 2018**,** *Murder* has consistently taken the Thursday primetime slot at 10 pm on ABC. The following paragraphs will outline the major plotline for seasons one and two, which are the focus of this study.

The first season of the show commences with the story of a law professor, Annalise Keating, at a fictional Middleton College situated in Philadelphia. The name of the series derives

from the title of the criminal justice course Keating teaches at this esteemed college. In this course, she forms a group of five students including Wes Gibbins, Connor Walsh, Michaela Pratt, Asher Millstone, and Laurel Castillo to assist her in real-life court cases. Though the five are initially thrilled to be chosen for the coveted assistant positions working alongside Keating and her associates, the students begin to acquaint themselves with a different side of their professor, particularly Keating's twisted logic, crisis management techniques, and complicated interpersonal relationships. Season one of the series mainly focuses on the mysterious murder of Lila Stangard, a college sorority girl who had an affair with Keating's husband, Sam Keating, a psychology professor at Middleton. Later in the season, Keating's students are also involved in the murder of her husband, which creates profound complications and chaos for Keating personally and professionally (Nowalk).

For the first half of season two, Keating and her students take on a new case of Caleb and Catherine Hapstall, who are both suspected to be involved in the death of their adoptive parents. While the main case progresses, each of Keating's students is also dealing with personal issues. For instance, Walsh encounters numerous relational struggles with his boyfriend, Oliver Hampton, who discovers that he is HIV-positive. Millstone, on the other hand, is blackmailed to work with Emily Sinclair, Keating's opposing attorney. In the middle of the season, Sinclair is suddenly murdered, and Keating assists in covering up the crime scene. Keating's involvement in the crime scene also leads to her being shot in the stomach. The second half of the season focuses primarily on Gibbins and his personal investigation of his deceased mother, who died ten years ago. Through Keating's flashbacks, audience members find out that Keating was involved with Gibbins's mother's suicide. It is also revealed during the season finale that Frank Delfino, one of Keating's trusted employees, was responsible for a car accident several years prior in

which Keating lost her unborn child. Amid this revelation, Keating fires Delfino from her law firm. As for Keating's students, Pratt and Millstone ends up spending the night together while Gibbins finally meets his biological father and witnesses his father's shooting by an unidentified assailant (Nowalk).

Methodological Steps

Foss lays out four steps necessary to analyze an artifact through ideological criticism, and these steps are as follows: "(1) identifying the presented elements of the artifact; (2) identifying the suggested elements linked to the presented elements; (3) formulating an ideology, and (4) identifying the functions served by the ideology" (214). To analyze *Murder*, I used the steps from this process to identify relevant ideologies and discuss the findings later in Chapter IV.

Using these steps as a foundation, I began by making a list of basic questions to guide my screening of *Murder*. These guiding questions specifically targeted aspects of Keating's racial and sexual identities, as well as how these components are portrayed throughout seasons one and two. Some of the example questions include: "When and how do other characters comment on Keating's identity as a black woman?"; "In what ways does Keating exhibit her queerness?"; "What are some of the unspoken issues relating to race and gender that are not discussed throughout the series?"; and "How does Keating choose to perform or not perform her race and sexuality as a lawyer and professor?" The full list of my pre-analysis questions is available in Appendix A.

With these guiding questions in mind, I started watching seasons one and two, and noted relevant observations, which included physical presentation of the character, important points of dialogue along with their rhetorical situations, and nonverbal communication, all within the overarching plot as well as the subplots. Since the subject of my study is Annalise Keating, most

of my notes focused on scenes involving this character. However, whenever necessary, I also documented the way Keating is mentioned or discussed in dialogues among other characters. I then synthesized these observations.

I continued examining seasons three and four for additional considerations of the character. Though these two most recent seasons were not the focus of my analysis, it was of crucial importance that I examined later seasons because they revealed parts of Keating's history, as well as her personal and professional role since the beginning of the series. Once I ended the process of collecting information and synthesizing my overall observations, I began writing my analysis, which is detailed in Chapter IV.

Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of descriptions as well as justifications for my method, my chosen artifact, and the methodological steps I followed to conduct my study. Using the method of ideological criticism, I analyzed Keating's portrayal on *Murder* primarily in seasons one and two in order to fulfill my purpose of deconstructing the complex nature of Keating's intersectional identity as a queer, black woman. Chapter IV presents my key findings.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

Due to the immense critical and commercial success of *How to Get Away with Murder* (abbreviated as *Murder*), the show has profound potential to shift public opinion on highly complex topics and inspire social change. Particularly, since Annalise Keating is uniquely situated within the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, this character has truly been a stand-out among the plethora of contemporary television characters. However, despite Keating's popularity in mainstream media, this character is complicated and also controversial in many ways. In this chapter, I aim to provide some contextual information about Annalise Keating, discuss some findings about the character's racial and sexual constructions, as well as scrutinize her intersectional portrayal as a black queer woman.

Overview of Annalise Keating and *Murder*'s Plotlines

Murder's seasons one and two have 15 episodes each. Since Keating is the protagonist of the show, she appears in all episodes throughout these two seasons and plays a significant role in the overarching plots and most of the subplots for each episode. As mentioned in Chapter III, the overarching plots for season one involve the death of Sam Keating, Annalise Keating's husband, and the murder of Lila Stangard, Sam Keating's mistress. As for season two, the overarching plots focus first on Catherine and Caleb Hapstall, Keating's clients who are key suspects for the murder of their parents, and second Wes Gibbins's mother, who became acquainted with Keating ten years ago, right before her suicide. In order to fully understand the analysis of the character Annalise Keating, the following sections detail important contextual information concerning all of Keating's key relationships, as well as her professional career as a professor and lawyer.

Keating's Key Characters and Relationships

In the context of romantic and sexual relationships, Keating is involved with three characters: Sam Keating, Nate Lahey, and Eve Rothlo. Both Sam Keating and Eve Rothlo are white, whereas Nate Lahey is African American. First, Sam Keating is Annalise Keating's husband for more than 20 years. Keating has an unhappy marriage with her husband since she suffers multiple miscarriages, her husband's affairs, as well as his abusive behavior. Keating's husband is murdered in season one by Keating's students in her private home. During her marriage and before the death of her husband, Keating meets Nate Lahey, a police officer, and the two begin a sexual relationship. Keating's relationship with Lahey is complicated since they separate and reunite often throughout the show. Lastly, Eve Rothlo was Keating's lover back when they both attended the same law school. Rothlo re-enters Keating's life in season two where the couple shares many intimate moments, but they ultimately part ways in season three.

In terms of her work, Keating relies on two trusted associates, Bonnie Winterbottom and Frank Delfino, and a group of student interns she hires every few years. Keating met Winterbottom as a struggling waitress with an abusive past, and Keating first talked to Delfino when he was in prison. Keating rescued them both out of their plights, which results in their extreme loyalty to Keating. At the present time of the show, Keating's group of students, also known as the Keating Five, consists of Connor Walsh, Michaela Pratt, Asher Millstone, Laurel Castillo, and Wes Gibbins. These five students are quite diverse: Walsh is a white gay man from a middle-class family; Pratt is a black woman who financially supports herself; Millstone is a privileged, white man with an affluent family; Castillo is Hispanic and also has a wealthy family; and Gibbins is a black man who comes from a lower-income household.

Keating's Professional Portrayal

Keating holds two professional positions, one as a law professor and the other as a lawyer. As a law professor, Keating teaches at Middleton College, a prestigious institution in the world of *Murder*. It is unknown how many classes she teaches at the college but the only course that appears onscreen is a criminal justice class, titled "How to Get Away with Murder." This class is also where she first meets the Keating Five. Aside from the classroom depiction, there is no further information on her colleagues or the institution itself. It is worth noting that Keating's husband also teaches at Middleton but in a different department.

Aside from the higher education environment, much of Keating's professional portrayal focuses on her role as a lawyer. Therefore, a large number of Keating's scenes are devoted to depicting different court cases. Specifically, throughout seasons one and two, the show includes a total of 21 court cases. Keating serves in a variety of capacities in these cases with only one exception. More specifically, out of these 21 court cases: one belongs to Bonnie Winterbottom as she defends the client when Keating takes time off work; three cases involve Nate Lahey and Catherine Hapstall, where Keating serves as a witness for all three cases; and Keating serves as the lawyer for her clients in the remaining 17 cases. It is important to note that the number 21 I generated from screening the show does not include the case of Jill Hartford, since Keating successfully settles for this client outside of court. Therefore, I did not include this case in my calculation since there were no scenes involving the courtroom in this episode. Each of the court cases in the subplots occupy part of or one full episode, whereas the cases in the overarching plots last for half or the entire seasons.

All of the 21 cases take place in the same courthouse in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There is one designated judge for each of these cases, and there is never the same judge for more

than one case. The only exception to this is the fact that there were two judges for the overarching case of Lila Stangard. Particularly, there is one white male judge on the first court day but the judge for the rest of the court proceedings is then changed to an Asian woman. There are no explanation for this shift, which means that this change might have simply been a discrepancy from the production side. Similarly, all of the opposing lawyers are different for each of these court cases, except for Emily Sinclair, who serves as both the prosecutor for one of Lahey's cases and Keating's opposing attorney for the case of Catherine and Caleb Hapstall.

Considering this critical contextual information, the following sections will further elaborate on of the findings of Keating's portrayal as a black queer woman. More specifically, I will first discuss her racial and sexuality portrayal separately, and then transition into analyzing her intersectional portrayal that combines these aforementioned identity facets.

Keating's Portrayal as a Black Woman

Keating's racial portrayal is deeply problematic since she simultaneously breaks down prevalent stereotypes of black women on screen and aligns herself with dominant ideologies. To elaborate on this claim, the following sections present an in-depth analysis on Keating's experience as a black woman including: her reputation for professional excellence; her reliance on white institutions and white individuals; her adherence to whiteness; and finally her experience with discrimination both at the workplace and in the home.

Exhibiting a Reputation for Skill and Hard Work

Despite the prevalent stereotype of black women characters on television as unmotivated, unskilled professionals with poor work ethics (Tukachinsky et al. 32), Keating is a successful professor and attorney whose work is both supportive and exemplary to her students' growth. In academia, Keating is portrayed as a committed professor, who focuses on her students'

professional exposure and learning curve. From the first day of class, Keating clearly announces to her students that “unlike many of my colleagues, I will not be teaching you how to study the law, or theorize about it, but rather how to practice it in a courtroom, like a real lawyer” (“Pilot”). Consistent with her experiential approach, in both seasons one and two, Keating brings the cases she works on to class so that the students can brainstorm on the best course of action to defend the real-life clients. Students’ attendance to Keating's court proceedings are sometimes mandatory as well, such as in the case of client Gina Sadowski when all of her students are present (“Pilot”). Aside from attending hearings and trials, the Keating Five is privileged to even more professional exposure. For instance, they meet and prepare Keating’s clients for trial, as well as take part in the research and investigation process that directly affects the trial outcomes. Considering the hands-on experience in which her students engage, Keating’s pedagogy proves to be ideal in helping her students gain a better understanding of the legal profession they are pursuing.

Keating’s practical teaching approach stems from her outstanding works as a lawyer, who successfully defends most of her clients despite the varying difficulty levels of each case she receives. As mentioned in the overview, Keating is in charge of 17 court cases in total, including the cases in the overarching season plots and the subplots of each episode. In all, she wins the majority of her cases and loses only in three instances. In two of these three cases, Keating’s clients, Father Crawford and Jason Murray, both change their mind in the middle of trial, dismiss Keating’s assistance, and accept the original charges because they feel guilty for the crime they committed (“She Hates Us,” “The Night Lila Died”). As for the last case out of the three, Walsh, one of Keating’s interns, decides to leak unfavorable footage of Keating’s client to the opposing side, which ultimately leads to Keating’s loss (“Skanks Get Shanked”). It is evident from these

elaborations that Keating does not lose as the result of incompetence. In fact, her record for winning the majority of her cases shows that Keating is a desirable and highly-skilled attorney who almost never disappoints. This portrayal directly combats the common stereotypical representation of unaccomplished black women on screen since Keating is clearly a capable lawyer.

Relying on White Institutions and White Individuals

Evident from the previous details of her professions, Keating works within predominantly white institutions, which are the higher education environment and the legal system. Both of these establishments are historically white, which therefore disadvantage minorities such as black individuals. In Keating's case, as a professor, she works for a prestigious university with a white male as its president ("Smile, or Go to Jail"). In the case of Lila Stangard's murder, the president of the college pressures Keating to represent Stangard's boyfriend, Griffin O'Reilly, since this student's family has "donated more than $8 million dollars to the university last year alone" and, if this student were convicted of murder, the institution's sports programs' reputation would be damaged since O'Reilly is the school's star quarterback ("Smile, or Go to Jail"). The president underscores his coercive request by saying, "You and Sam have been great assets to us here, and I think it's fair to say that you've received a generous compensation package here and unprecedented freedom in conducting your classes with virtually no oversight … But we haven't asked for much" ("Smile, or Go to Jail"). The president's remark is problematic since he implies that Keating somehow owes the institution simply because she is paid well and has a great deal of agency in her teaching. Though Keating eventually denies the president's request anyway, this kind of behavior demonstrates just how challenging it is for black professionals to strive in the environment of higher education.

Aside from her career in academia, Keating's work in the legal system also largely depends on whiteness, which is clearly demonstrated through her clients and the judges assigned to Keating's cases. First, in order to sustain her private law firm, Keating serves numerous wealthy clients, who are predominantly white. Some of Keating's notably rich clients include: Max St. Vincent, a millionaire who is accused of murdering his wife ("It's All Her Fault"); Paul Lombardo, the president and owner of a major distribution company who is charged with drug possession ("She's a Murderer"); Zoey Mitchell, a privileged teenage girl who murders a friend attending the same private school ("Skanks Get Shanked"); Marren Trudeau, founder and C.E.O. of her own brokerage firm who is accused of insider trading ("Let's Get to Scooping"); and Gretchen Thomas, a successful real estate agent who is suspected of killing her nanny ("He Has a Wife"). Considering that the aforementioned wealthy clients, along with some others, are all white, it is evident that Keating's legal work income derives directly from these white, privileged individuals.

In addition to her clients, the judges who oversee Keating's cases also exhibit whiteness despite of the appearance of diversity because they uphold the institutional whiteness of the law. Throughout seasons one and two, Keating works with several black and Asian female judges. Though the court, and the justice system at large, is portrayed to be quite racially diverse, the system still favors whiteness regardless. An example to illustrate this notion involves the case of Catherine and Caleb Hapstall, who are Asian American and African American respectively and both accused of killing their white, rich, adoptive parents—Grant and Ursula Hapstall—for inheritance money. The only testimony against the siblings belongs to their adoptive aunt, who is racist as shown through a footage where she says the following to the police after the parents' bodies are discovered: "I told Grant: 'Do not bring those mongrels into your home!' And they

did. They killed him and Ursula. No, you can't trust people like that, those orientals, those mulattos … Those two murdered my brother and his wife!" ("Meet Bonnie"). Despite the aunt being clearly racist and prejudiced against the Hapstall siblings, the judge, who is an African American woman, still decides to accept the aunt's testimony even after Keating fights to have the testimony eliminated ("Meet Bonnie"). Faced with the judge's decision, Catherine Hapstall stands up angrily in court and pleads to the judge:

> HAPSTALL. She was a racist! That's proof that she wanted us to go down for this. And you're black. Out of anyone, you should get it.
>
> JUDGE. Unfortunately, I do get it, Miss Hapstall. But the law is the law. It's my job to uphold it, no matter my personal feelings. ("Meet Bonnie")

Though clients should not speak for themselves in court without proper consultation with their lawyers, Keating tells Catherine Hapstall afterwards that the emotional reaction was appropriate and points out that "someone needed to say it," given the absurd circumstance ("Meet Bonnie"). Rather than the law, the judge chooses to uphold the institution that frequently favors white, privileged individuals, such as the aunt, and mistreats marginalized people. While this incident was the most explicit case, similar examples arise in other cases throughout the two seasons of the show. Overall, despite having minority-status judges, the justice system remains white and discriminatory.

Aside from white institutions, Keating also depends on three specific characters for emotional and professional support, all of whom are white. One of these three white characters is Keating's husband, who mirrors the image of a white savior, a stereotypical portrayal in films where white characters rescue characters of color from difficult or dangerous situations (Hughey 1). Keating relies on her husband for emotional support as he was originally her therapist, who

helped Keating deal with a number of issues, such as the sexual violation she experienced as a child (“Mama's Here Now”). When confronting her mother about her family’s inaction to alleviate any trauma resulting from the assault, Keating admitted that though her husband “might have been a cheater and a lowlife … but Sam knew exactly what happened to me the minute I stepped into his office” (“Mama's Here Now”). Keating continues by disclosing to her mother some of her husband’s counseling advice from their therapy sessions, which confirms her husband’s crucial emotional support. Additionally, Keating owes her husband for the start of her career both in academia and in the legal system. In a flashback conversation between Keating and her husband, it becomes clear that her husband had already been working at Middleton College before Keating secured her assistant professor position at the same institution (“It’s About Frank”). Therefore, her husband’s relationship with the college gave Keating an advantage that led to her employment in the first place. Keating’s husband also provides her with an office for her private law firm within the couple’s house, which originally belonged solely to her husband and his family (“Best Christmas Ever”). In all, Keating’s husband enabled her to recover from sexual assault as a child and to thrive as an academic and attorney.

Other than her husband, Keating also relies heavily on her two white associates, Bonnie Winterbottom and Frank Delfino. First, Winterbottom is a licensed lawyer who was originally one of Keating’s students (“She Hates Us”). As mentioned in the overview, Keating was Winterbottom’s savior when they met, as Winterbottom was working as a waitress (“I Love Her”). Though Keating initially opened new doors for her associate, Winterbottom proves to be an important individual in both Keating’s work and personal life. For instance, Winterbottom steps in for Keating by successfully defending one of Keating’s clients and maintaining the normal functioning of the firm when Keating takes time off work (“Mama's Here Now”). Aside

from the professional support, Winterbottom also plays a critical role in Keating's personal life. For instance, Winterbottom was a part of Keating's group of student interns when Keating was pregnant ("She Hates Us"). Throughout the pregnancy, Keating relies on Winterbottom for companionship and advice since Winterbottom had prior experience with pregnancy ("She Hates Us"). Additionally, after Keating is hospitalized for a fatal shot in the stomach, Winterbottom becomes Keating's main caretaker and performs numerous duties such as sorting drugs and preparing meals ("What Happened to You, Annalise?"). From these elaborations, despite the start of their relationship, Keating clearly relies on Winterbottom both professionally and personally.

In contrast to Winterbottom, Delfino is not licensed to practice law, but he assists Keating in most of her cases and, therefore, contributes significantly to her victories. Because he is especially loyal to Keating, Delfino fulfills any requests Keating may have using any possible methods, which are illegal in many cases. For instance, in Lila Stangard's murder case where Keating's client is one of the two key suspects, Delfino helps Keating plant fake evidence into the other suspect's car to strengthen the opposing suspect's motive for the murder, which ultimately benefits Keating's client ("Freakin' Whack-a-Mole"). Also, in the murder of her husband, Keating decides to pin the crime on her innocent boyfriend, Nate Lahey, to protect herself and her students since they are all present at the moment of her husband's death. To manipulate evidence against Lahey, Delfino breaks into Lahey's apartment, copies Lahey's fingerprint, and transfers this fingerprint onto Sam Keating's wedding ring, which results in Lahey's arrest ("She's a Murderer"). It is quite clear that Delfino is willing to go any lengths to assist Keating, which undoubtedly plays a major role in Keating's success in the courtroom and in her personal life.

Adhering to Whiteness

As mentioned in the previous section, Keating functions within predominantly white structures as well as interacts most closely with white characters. To navigate these spaces and relationships, Keating distances herself from her black identity and incorporates elements of whiteness into her physical appearance.

Keating's image as a successful, wealthy professional managing a private law firm separates herself from her past as a poor black girl. This detachment is clearest through the unfriendly exchanges between Keating and her mother, Ophelia Harkness. First, Keating's original first name was "Anna Mae," but she later changed her name to "Annalise" so she asked her mother to use the new name ("Mama's Here Now"). Responding to this request, Keating's mother says, "You get rich, you give yourself a rich name—Annalise … I wiped your ass, and I'll call you anything I want" ("Mama's Here Now"). Though Keating does not fully explain the timing of or the reasons for changing her name, she mentions that "Anna Mae belonged to a hand-me-down box" ("Mama's Here Now"). Keating's statement, along with her mother's claim, hints that Keating's old name is synonymous to the struggling life she previously had with her family and implies that "Annalise" is more suitable because this name is associated with her current wealth and success.

Second, Keating's mother accuses her daughter of distancing herself from the life Keating has before she marries a well-off doctor and becomes professionally successful. Particularly, Harkness mocks Keating, "I never been invited up here, have I? To Annalise Keating's fancy-ass rich house" ("Mama's Here Now"). Also, when Harkness decides to take some of Keating's deceased husband's old clothes, Keating refuses to let her mother do so since these clothes "are not just some cheap hand-me-downs that you put in the poor box at church"

(“Mama's Here Now”). Harkness responds by stating that Keating is now “too proud for the hand-me-downs” and also reminds Keating that her daughter and the entire family used to rely on this assistance when they were poor (“Mama's Here Now”). Though all of these exchanges directly reference Keating’s socioeconomic standing, Harkness’s resentment is also racially charged as her daughter has become so privileged that she no longer identifies with the black family and community in which she was raised.

Other than the apparent wealth Keating currently possesses, her appearance adheres to whiteness, particularly through her wigs, which she wears at all times except when she is at her own home not working. Her wigs change several times over the course of the entire show but, generally, they are all dark brown, straight or slightly-curled. This style consistency in the show is different from featured flashbacks from ten years earlier when Keating is shown donning African braids even in professional settings, including when working at the courthouse or meeting with clients. Though there were no explanations for her shift in appearance, Keating’s inclination towards whiteness might have influenced her decision to alter her appearance. Additionally, it is important to note that black women's naturally kinky hair, braids, or cornrows are considered unprofessional in certain spaces within the legal profession (Pratt 1782-83). Therefore, Keating’s current hairstyle consisting of a straight or slightly-curled wig adheres to the dominant white beauty standards that govern the legal profession.

Aside from maintaining a look that would fulfill her workplace’s discriminating beauty standards, Keating also relies on her wigs to appear more desirable in personal settings. During the scenes where Keating engages in sex with her lovers, including Sam Keating, Nate Lahey, and Eve Rothlo, one would expect Keating to express herself authentically or just make herself more comfortable by removing her wig, especially considering the fact that many of these scenes

take place right in her own home. However, Keating keeps her wigs on even during these intimate scenes to maintain a certain level of attractiveness. This practice not only demonstrates how Keating internalizes these white beauty standards, but also explains why she refuses to display her naturally kinky hair in public. For instance, after Keating and Rothlo confessed their feelings for each other, Keating engages in sex with her lover right in Keating's bedroom without taking off her wig ("She's Dying"). The next morning when Rothlo leaves Keating's house, Keating steps outside of her front door to say goodbye while donning a black head-wrap that covers her kinky hair entirely ("She's Dying"). It is evident from these details that with such deep internalization of whiteness, Keating is unable to feel, or appear attractive without incorporating this dominant ideology into her appearance. Moreover, Keating also keeps her wigs on whenever she meets or has sex with Lahey, who is African American. Therefore, despite her partners' race, Keating still feels the need to adhere to white beauty standards to appear presentable or desirable.

Experiencing Discrimination as a Black Woman

Though Keating's black womanhood is rarely a topic of direct discussion, a particular flashback from Keating's early days in her legal career describes how she faced discrimination in her job. At the time of the flashback, Keating was representing Charles Mahoney, a white man who came from a family that owned a billion-dollar company. He was charged with murdering his fiancé. At this point in time, Keating was still pregnant with her son. After a particular day at trial when Keating failed to present a key witness, whose testimony would benefit her clients, Wallace Mahoney, the defendant's father, said the following to Keating:

> My corporate attorneys told me not to hire you, but every judge and lawyer friend I know told me that we would need a woman if we had any chance at winning. And with a jury

> made up of mostly minorities, a woman of color would be best. So I found you. Turns out, there aren't a lot of women like you out there, which is why I went against my instincts and chose to ignore [your pregnancy]. Maybe it even made you more sympathetic to the jury, I thought. But now...don't give your people a bad name. ("It's a Trap")

The quote demonstrates outright discrimination towards Keating as a black woman. Mahoney admitted that he hired Keating not because of her capabilities, but only because of her race and gender. As an inexperienced, black female lawyer at the time of the flashback, Keating was susceptible to such criticism the moment she performed poorly. Moreover, considering her clients' powerful status, Keating did not even have the freedom to fight back or drop the client as she would have later in her career. In fact, when Keating finally decided to go to the police and expose her client and his family, the Mahoneys ordered a car accident to happen, which left Keating's child stillborn ("Anna Mae"). The consequences Keating faced were extreme, but they certainly reaffirmed the power dynamics in this case and also demonstrated Keating's inability to resist powerful institutions as a minority-status lawyer.

Other than the aforementioned incident, Keating's identity as a black woman is also a target for discrimination by her own husband. Keating and her husband understandably have many heated arguments about Lila Stangard, the husband's most recent mistress. In these confrontations, he makes no abusive remarks about Keating's identity as a black woman. However, in the most intense argument between Keating and her husband right before his death, Keating declares to her husband that she is merely "a black woman on your arms so you can hide, so that people only see the good guy" ("Kill Me, Kill Me, Kill Me"). Responding to this assumption, Sam Keating says the following about his wife: "You're nothing but a piece of ass.

That's what I saw when I first talked to you in the office that day. Cause I knew you'd put out. That's all you're really good for: dirty, rough sex that I'm too ashamed to tell anyone about. That's how foul you are, you disgusting slut" ("Kill Me, Kill Me, Kill Me"). The insult fetishizes Keating as nothing but a sex object to her husband as the result of her identity as a black woman.

Despite the evident discrimination Keating faces in her professional and personal life, the two aforementioned cases are the only times throughout the first two seasons where her identity as a black woman is mentioned explicitly. No other characters comment on this specific aspect of Keating's identity in conversations among themselves, nor directly to Keating. It is possible to attribute this lack of discussion to Keating's strong associations and alignment with whiteness, which situates her in a uniquely privileged position that minimizes her struggles as a minority-status individual. Therefore, no characters seem to even acknowledge Keating's marginalized racial identity, which results in the absolute absence of any derogatory remarks in her present.

Keating's Portrayal as a Queer Woman

Aside from her identity as a black woman, Keating also belongs to a sexual minority because of her queer sexual tendencies. Despite refusing to label her sexuality, Keating conveys queerness by maintaining romantic and sexual relationships with both male and female characters. Many current television shows develop plots for queer characters based on their personality traits and personal circumstances, rather than making sexuality the focal point to these characters (Kessler 144). Consistent to this trend, Keating's queer sexuality is never part of any major plotlines throughout the first two seasons of the show. Nonetheless, Keating's sexual performance remains noteworthy since her representation carries complicated underlying ideologies. The sections below aim to explore how Keating chooses to conceal her queer sexuality and passes as heterosexual.

Closeting a Queer Identity

Keating's queer sexuality is not evident until season two when Eve Rothlo, Keating's past lover when the two attended Harvard Law School, re-enters Keating's life. Rothlo is a successful attorney based in New York but she reunites with Keating in Philadelphia several times throughout season two upon Keating's request for assistance with a particularly difficult court case. Though the two appear to other characters on the show as merely old classmates, Rothlo confirms Keating's queer identity to viewers in a heated confrontation in the first episode of season two, as Rothlo accuses Keating of breaking off their romantic relationship because Keating chose to date, and eventually marry, her therapist Sam Keating ("It's Time to Move On"). Rothlo remains the only same-sex romantic and sexual partner Keating has on *Murder* as the two display much affection towards each other and occasionally engage in sex throughout season two. Keating is not romantically or sexually linked with any other queer characters when Rothlo leaves for San Francisco in season three to pursue a new relationship with another woman ("Don't Tell Annalise").

Though Keating's queer identity is "out" to the viewers since the first episode of season two, Keating is a closeted queer individual in the world of *Murder*. Therefore, Keating's prior relationship to Rothlo and her overall queer sexual orientation remain unknown to the majority of other characters in the show. Because of this particular choice, all of Keating's serious conversations involving her queer identity and all of her acts of queer affection with Rothlo take place in very private settings such as Rothlo's apartment in New York ("It's Time to Move On"), Keating's house ("She's Dying"), Rothlo's car ("I Want You to Die"), or a hotel room ("Something Bad Happened"). These private conversations occur both in flashbacks dated back as far as ten years ago and in scenes from the present, which suggest that Keating has been a

closeted queer individual for quite some time and remains committed to keeping her sexuality a secret.

With such a careful coverage, only few other characters are aware of Keating's queer identity, which includes Nate Lahey, Bonnie Winterbottom, and possibly Sam Keating. In the case of Lahey, he learns about Keating's sexual orientation after accidentally coming across Rothlo and Keating engaging in a deep kiss ("She's Dying"). As for Winterbottom, though it is not clear if she has always known about Keating's queer identity, the two share a kiss in season three when Keating is intoxicated ("Who's Dead?"). Other than Lahey and Winterbottom, it is difficult to determine whether Keating's husband knew about her queer identity since there are no direct discussions about this topic with him. However, in a flashback conversation between Rothlo and Keating, Rothlo stated that Keating's confusion about her own queer identity was the cause for Keating's seeking therapy, which led Keating to meeting her husband since he was originally Keating's therapist ("Something Bad Happened"). Considering this statement, Keating might have discussed her queer relationship with Rothlo during the therapy sessions, which would suggest Sam Keating had knowledge of his wife's queer history.

From discussing the circumstances of how other characters came to know about Keating's queer identity, it is clear that Keating intends to keep this part of her life private. As mentioned, only three characters, other than Rothlo, knew about Keating's identity as a queer woman. Especially in the case of Lahey and Winterbottom, the revelation might even be accidental. These coincidental circumstances further confirm that Keating is quite intentional in concealing her queer identity. This portrayal is in direct opposition to Connor Walsh and Oliver Hampton, the other prominent queer characters on *Murder*. These two self-identified gay characters share the most sustainable romantic relationship on the show as the pair has lasted

since season one through the current season four. Over the course of their relationship, the two characters have discussed various queer-themed issues, such as dealing with HIV, queer marriage, and queer dating mobile applications (Nowalk). Therefore, despite Keating's potential for enriching queer dynamics on the show, her closeted queer identity limits conversation and visibility on other queer categories such as bisexuality or lesbianism.

Keating's decision to keep her sexual orientation private might result from her own negative perspective on queerness. In a flashback featuring a heated argument between Rothlo and Keating over the reason for their break-up, Keating screamed at Rothlo, "I left you because I'm not gay" ("Something Bad Happened"). When Rothlo responded that she firmly identified herself as "gay" and implied that Keating was scared to admit the same, Keating continued to deny Rothlo's argument and simply ended the conversation with "you lived your life; I lived mine; straight or gay, whatever you want to call it" ("Something Bad Happened"). Even when Keating and Rothlo start seeing each other again in season two, Keating never privately or publicly identifies herself using any specific descriptors such as "lesbian," "bisexual," or "gay." The lack of identification despite her continued engagement with Rothlo throughout season two might hint that the negative outlook Keating has on queerness is not only prevalent in the past, but also in her present. Considering this perspective, Keating certainly would not want to associate herself with an identity she resents, which ultimately leads her to stay closeted and appear heterosexual.

Passing as Heterosexual

As a closeted individual, Keating constructs a coherent appearance that would help her pass as heterosexual. Keating's facade of heterosexuality is most evident through the public's knowledge of her personal relationships. Keating is married to her husband for 20 years ("Kill

Me, Kill Me, Kill Me"). During their marriage, the couple works for the same higher education institution and frequently appears hand-in-hand at different campus events, such as the Dean's Cocktail Party ("Pilot"). Consequently, Keating's marriage is widely known not just among family and friends, but also members of the public such as the students, college faculty, and staff members at Middleton. After her husband's death, Keating also publicizes her extramarital affair with Lahey at court since this is a critical piece of information in the murder of her husband ("She's a Murderer"). As the result, Keating is once again publicly linked with another male partner. All in all, because of the public's knowledge of her male partners, Keating can easily pass as heterosexual.

Additionally, throughout seasons one and two, Keating dresses consistently in a feminine manner. Whenever she is working at her office, lecturing at her college, meeting with clients, and attending court trials, Keating almost always wears a tight-fitting dress with a handbag and a pair of high heels. There are days where Keating would choose a combination of blouse and skirt, or blouse and pants. However, body-conscious dresses are clearly the majority of her work attire. Though one's choice of dress might not directly correlate with sexual orientation, it is essential to consider Keating's feminine attire in this case since her dresses fit coherently with Keating's public image as a straight woman.

Keating's Intersectional Portrayal as a Black Queer Woman

As mentioned in Chapter II, intersectionality assumes that all facets of one's identity are interconnected, which allows scholars to interpret human experiences holistically (Hardy-Fanta 178). Consistent to this belief, when examining Keating's overall portrayal as a black queer woman, I am able to generate unique findings that are not evident from analyzing Keating's racial and sexual performances separately. To further elaborate on these findings, the following

sections discuss how Keating and other queers of color experience their sexuality as compared to white queers on *Murder*, as well as how Keating manipulate other characters' marginalized identities despite being part of the show's diversity cohort herself.

Racializing Queer Identities and Experiences

On *Murder*, there are noticeable differences between the portrayal of white queers and queers of color. In the following paragraphs, I will compare the experiences of the queer characters on the show and highlight the critical differences among these portrayals.

Accepting Queer Identity. White queer characters on the show, which include Eve Rothlo, Connor Walsh, and Jill Hartford, are open about their sexual identity. First, as mentioned in previous sections, Rothlo clearly identifies herself as "gay" and even contrasts her openness to Keating's negative outlook on queerness ("Something Bad Happened"). As for Walsh, his gay identity is "out" to the viewers from the first episode of season one. After this point, the fact that Walsh is gay comes up in various conversations as different characters, such as the members of the Keating Five, learn about Walsh's queer identity at different times. Hartford is a transgender professor, who is both a long-time client and a family friend to the Keating couple ("Two Birds, One Millstone"). Therefore, her transgender identity is known among family and friends. Additionally, when investigating the death of Hartford's husband, a detective asks Hartford about a driver's license of an adult male, to which Hartford simply replies, "Well, that's me … was me" in a very casual, straight-forward manner ("Two Birds, One Millstone"). The identification card belongs to Hartford before her physical transformation. Hartford's reaction in this case demonstrates that she is comfortable admitting her transgender identity. From these observations, it is quite clear that these white characters are all accepting of their queer identity and, to a certain degree, publicly acknowledge their queerness.

On the other hand, Annalise Keating and Aiden Walker, both African American queer individuals on *Murder*, actively reject their queer sexuality. As mentioned in previous sections, Keating is a closeted queer who denies her sexual identity. This is quite similar to the case of Aiden Walker, Pratt's fiancé in season one before the couple ultimately terminated their engagement. Pratt is unaware of Walker's sexual history until she finds out that Walsh and Walker used to attend the same boarding school, where the two young men shared a sustained sexual relationship ("Smile, or Go to Jail"). Despite this revelation, Walker insists to Pratt that he is "not some guy on the down low" and that he is simply "not gay" ("Smile, or Go to Jail"). Considering Walker's response, he clearly views queer sexuality negatively and actively resists queer labels despite exhibiting queer sexual tendencies.

Different from both Keating and Walker, Hampton is the only queer character of color out of the three to publicly acknowledge his queer identity. Nevertheless, Hampton is incredibly insecure about himself and frequently compares himself to his partner, Walsh. For instance, during a fight when the couple is going through a temporary break-up, Hampton says to Walsh, "You go through life looking like you do, meeting guys all the time, but me…" ("Best Christmas Ever"). Hampton stops mid-sentence since he is overcome with emotions. In this context, Hampton is implying that it is not difficult for an attractive gay man like Walsh to seek new partners. In contrast, Hampton has so little confidence in his appearance that he finds it challenging to romantically connect with other individuals. Additionally, in a conversation with Hampton, Walsh mentions a rape case he is currently working on, which involves defending an unattractive, shy, female nurse who is accused of raping a physically attractive male patient. After Walsh describes the difference between these two individuals' attractiveness levels, Hampton replies, "Some people might say the same thing about us" ("Mama's Here Now").

Although Hampton responds in a casual, almost humorous manner, his insecurity is visible since he is implying that his physical appearance is much less desirable compared to Walsh. Overall, though Hampton is open about his queer identity, his portrayal as an insecure gay man is vastly different from that of the aforementioned white queer characters.

Living as Queer Individuals. Aside from these characters' attitudes and performances of their queer identities, white queer characters on the show meet with significantly fewer challenges and even manage to find a "happy ending." First, Rothlo's queer sexuality does not seem to hinder her career prospects as she is a successful and well-known death row attorney ("It's Time to Move on"). Aside from her stellar professional record, Rothlo also ends up in a romantic relationship, despite failing to rekindle her relationship with Keating ("Don't Tell Annalise"). Based on this portrayal, Rothlo's queer identity poses virtually no setbacks to either her professional or personal life. Second, Walsh's unethical practice of utilizing sexual intercourse to advance in his career is not only accepted, but also encouraged. For instance, Walsh first approaches Hampton in a club because Hampton works in I.T. for a company involved in one of Keating's cases ("Pilot"). Walsh exchanges sex with Hampton for crucial information that Keating needs to win the court case ("Pilot"). In another case, Walsh also uses sex to manipulate an individual into making a number of confessions, which Walsh secretly records to benefit Keating's client in court ("Let's Get to Scooping"). In both of these cases, not only does Walsh receive no criticism for his unethical practice, but Keating even rewards Walsh with the class trophy since he helps her win both of these cases.

As for Hartford, she manages to find a "happy ending" for herself after her husband's death. Hartford's case is definitely one of the easiest since Hartford does not even go to court for the death of her husband ("Two Birds, One Millstone"). As a long-time family friend and client

of Keating, Hartford calls Keating right after she kills her husband, an act that Hartford claims to be one of self-defense ("Two Birds, One Millstone"). Through multiple private conversations between Keating and her client, it becomes clear that Hartford is intentional in killing her husband as he has been physically and verbally abusing her for years. Keating goes out of her way to settle the case outside of the courtroom, and Hartford serves no time in jail nor suffers any consequences for killing her husband. The kind of treatment Hartford receives is quite distinctive since all of Keating's other clients, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have to appear in court multiple times. These scenes show that Hartford, in spite of her marginalized queer identity, is privileged with unbelievably favorable treatments from both Keating and the justice system at large.

In contrast, black queer characters on the show suffer numerous difficulties, often resulting directly from their sexuality. In Keating's case, she discontinued her romantic relationship with Rothlo after law school because Keating refused to accept her queer sexuality ("Something Bad Happened"). When seeking therapy as the result of her break-up with Rothlo, Keating met and married her therapist, Sam Keating. Throughout her marriage, she suffered multiple miscarriages, physical and verbal abuse, and her husband's affairs. Even after Rothlo re-enters Keating's life, Keating refuses to pursue happiness despite Rothlo repeatedly suggesting that the two should officially rekindle their romance. Though they occasionally share some intimate moments in season two, Keating turns down the opportunity to fully reunite with Rothlo, which is partially because of Keating's fear of publicly admitting her queer identity. If Keating had chosen to live true to to her queer identity, Keating could have lived happily with Rothlo, avoided the damaging relationship with her husband, and experienced an overall happy personal life.

Similar to Keating, both Walker and Hampton suffer from issues stemming both directly and indirectly from their sexuality. Walker ends his engagement with Pratt since Pratt continually questions and suspects Walker of having illicit relationships with other men ("Best Christmas Ever"). Particularly, ever since finding out about Walker's past, Pratt becomes suspicious of everything Walker does, and she even rudely asks, "Are you two screwing?" when she sees Walker simply chatting with a male colleague at a party ("Best Christmas Ever"). Because of Pratt's incessant questioning and exasperating behavior, Walker has to end their relationship despite remaining faithful to Pratt. In Walker's case, his sexuality, particularly his queer sexual history, has completely destroyed his personal life. On the other hand, Hampton is HIV-positive despite having significantly fewer sexual partners compared to Walsh. Hampton contacts HIV after having unprotected sex with a stranger while intoxicated, which results from a fight he has with Walsh since Walsh cheats on his partner with another man ("She's Dying"). Considering this context, though Hampton is fully responsible for his poor choices, he would not have engaged in this risky sexual behavior in the first place if his partner were to remain faithful. Therefore, Hampton's infection results partially from his white partner's promiscuity, a trait that is not at all criticized as mentioned earlier in this section.

Contriving Disposable Diversity

Murder illustrates diversity through its characters and their lived experiences in the overarching plots as well as the subplots. However, though diversity is very visible on the surface level, critical dialogues surrounding this topic are largely absent and the diverse characters on the show are highly disposable. This trend of depiction is evident through

Keating's actions and her overall portrayal, which will be discussed in-depth in the following paragraphs.

Strategizing Communication on Diversity. Throughout the first two seasons, Keating sometimes addresses diversity issues, specifically racial or sexual discrimination, but these mentions are highly strategized. In most cases, Keating has a very specific agenda in mind and utilizes marginalized identities to reach her goals. For instance, when assisting her client Jill Hartford, Keating privately settles with the opposing prosecutor and investigator by framing the investigation as a "hate crime" since Hartford is "abused by her husband, and further prosecuted by an insensitive, transphobic detective, and now a like-minded D.A.'s office" ("Two Birds, One Millstone"). This appeal proves to be ineffective since the prosecutor immediately fights back with a convincing counter-argument ("Two Birds, One Millstone"). In the next attempt to save her client, Keating presents some confidential information that the prosecutor can manipulate later on to advance in his career, which successfully persuades the prosecutor to drop Hartford's case ("Two Birds, One Millstone"). It is quite clear in this instance that Keating's references to sexual discrimination are part of a disposable strategy, which Keating immediately scraps when it does not work in her favor.

In a different example, Keating utilizes racial discrimination as part of her argumentative strategy at court when she is trying to negotiate a plea deal for her client Jason Murray, who is charged with murder. Specifically, Keating pleads to the judge, "Show our colleagues that we need to stop blaming the defendants and start blaming ourselves for a system that tears apart families by incarcerating every man of color that steps foot in the courtroom … I mean, let's end the cycle" ("She Hates Us"). Evident from these examples, as well as similar cases across the two seasons, Keating utilizes notions of marginalization and discrimination as a rhetorical

strategy to defend her clients. She does not further develop her arguments as the issues merit only a brief mention like the ones highlighted here. Therefore, these mentions do not facilitate any discussions or spread awareness on these diversity matters, but exist purely for Keating to achieve her agenda.

In just one instance throughout *Murder*, Keating displays genuine interest in diversity issues through the case of David Allen, an innocent black man who was wrongfully convicted of murdering his girlfriend. Keating was just a law student when she first learned about Allen's case and her petition to gather new facts on the case is accepted 21 years afterwards, which is the present time within the show. When defending Allen in court, Keating displays genuine passion for the case through the powerful condemnation of Senator Art Trucco, a powerful, white business owner who might have been responsible for the unjustified conviction. At the time of the murder, Trucco was developing a massive real estate project that would displace countless black, low-income families already living in the targeted area ("Freakin' Whack-a-Mole"). Therefore, Allen's girlfriend at the time filed for an injunction to stop Trucco's project ("Freakin' Whack-a-Mole"). A few days after the death of Allen's girlfriend, the project moved forward without any hindrance and Allen was conveniently convicted of the murder ("Freakin' Whack-a-Mole"). In front of the Supreme Court, Keating criticizes Trucco:

> I'm sorry, Senator, if you do not have the time to answer for who bore the real cost of your development. Not just Trisha Stanley and her boyfriend, David Allen, who served 21 years in prison, but the thousands who were displaced in the name of lining your pockets, the majority of whom are poor, powerless, and didn't bear the color of skin desirable to your business interests. You tore a community apart. You tore families apart. You destroyed lives, Senator. ("Freakin' Whack-a-Mole")

The impact the case had on Keating as a law student, as well as her compelling words on Trucco's actions, make her mentions of racial discrimination seem much more authentic and not just an argumentative strategy. After hearing that the judges decided to release Allen, Keating sheds some tears, something she rarely does after closing her cases. The emotional reaction Keating displays, once again, reinforces the personal significance of this case, as well as reemphasizes the authenticity of Keating's racial appeals in this instance. However, it is important to keep in mind that Allen's case is the only time where Keating displays such genuine passion. For other cases, Keating merely utilizes diversity as a rhetorical device whenever convenient or ignores the issue altogether, with Allen's case as an exception.

Constructing a Facade of Diversity. As a marginalized individual, Keating seems to be among the show's coalition of diverse characters, including her students, the judges, and opposing attorneys with whom she interacts. However, though minority-status characters appear in most scenes of the entire show, diversity is only a facade since these characters surrounding Keating are all highly disposable. First, as mentioned in the overview, the Keating Five includes students from diverse racial, sexual, and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, these students and their labor are replaceable since Keating changes her group of interns periodically. None of Keating's previous interns maintain any relationship with her, except for Winterbottom, who was originally one of Keating's students and went on to work for Keating's firm full-time. This implies that the current group of the Keating Five is as expendable as any previous groups and will eventually exit Keating's life at some point. Additionally, because of the complications that Keating and the group experience in seasons one and two examined here, Keating dismisses all of her interns in the first episode of season four, which demonstrates just how disposable the Keating Five is to her personal life and work ("I'm Going Away"). Keating prioritizes her own

interests and dismisses her interns without any prior notice, putting these students in a financial and professional crisis. It is clear from these elaborations that despite developing close relationships with Keating, this diverse group of students remains highly disposable, which constructs the show's seeming diversity as largely a facade.

Second, Nate Lahey, Keating's on-again, off-again boyfriend, is another disposable minority-status character who contributes to the overall facade of diversity. Lahey lacks agency almost entirely since Keating controls and manipulates many critical events in Lahey's life throughout the first two seasons of the show. For instance, when Lahey is still working as a police officer, Keating forces Lahey to testify in court since she knows his statements would benefit her client ("Pilot"). However, since Lahey's forced testimony involves admitting that the police department sometimes alters video footage for the prosecutor to gain a particular conviction, Lahey is then put under probation and eventually fired from his job ("Pilot"). Keating also frames Lahey for the death of Sam Keating despite Lahey having no involvement in this murder ("Freakin' Whack-a-Mole"). The framing results in Lahey's arrest, but helps Keating and her students get away with the murder ("Freakin' Whack-a-Mole"). Because of Keating, Lahey spends some time in prison and even gets beaten up by his fellow inmates, though he is completely innocent. Despite these terrible incidents, Keating still manages to manipulate Lahey's emotions and rekindle their sexual relationship a number of times throughout seasons one and two. Upon evaluating these incidents, Keating certainly sees Lahey as disposable goods and uses him for whatever purposes she sees fit, whether it is to satisfy her sexual desires, to benefit her clients, or to take responsibility for crimes with which she is involved.

In addition to the aforementioned major characters, supporting characters—such as the judges, Keating's opposing lawyers, and Keating's students in her lectures—also contribute to

Murder's facade of diversity. At the courthouse, many of the judges and Keating's opposing attorneys are minority-status females, whose race and gender are both underrepresented in the legal system (e.g., "It's Time to Move On," "He Deserved to Die," "She's a Murderer"). Since each judge and opposing lawyer are assigned only one case on the show, these characters have very few or no lines at all, and the audience will never see these characters for a second time once their case is closed. Similarly, the students who appear in Keating's large-lecture class, other than the Keating Five, are also diverse in terms of race and gender (e.g., "Freakin' Whack-a-Mole," "I Want You to Die," "Pilot"). In *Murder*, the purpose these students serve is simply to fill the seats of the lecture hall, although a few them occasionally answer Keating's discussion questions in class. From these observations, the diversity represented in the courtroom and the classroom are certainly very visible on the surface level. However, these judges, attorneys, and students have little influence on the series' overall plot since their dialogues and onscreen presence are extremely limited. Consequently, these diverse characters are highly expendable and interchangeable since they are replaced regularly throughout the course of the show.

Conclusion

Overall, there are a number of recurring themes in Keating's racial, sexual, and intersectional portrayal as a black queer woman. First, Keating shatters common stereotypical portrayals of black women by excelling as a law professor and defense attorney. However, within her representation as a black woman is a consistent presence of whiteness. More specifically, Keating relies heavily on white individuals, particularly her husband and her associates, to navigate the dominant social structures that govern her work and personal life. Aside from these relationships, Keating's dress also adheres to white beauty standards since she consistently wears straight or lightly-curled wigs at her workplaces to appear more professional,

as well as in personal settings to look more attractive. As the result from incorporating whiteness, Keating manages to avoid discrimination in most cases, with rare exceptions such as her husband's racist remarks during one of the couple's heated arguments.

Second, Keating is a closeted queer who is very committed to concealing her queer identity. Keating's decision to remain closeted is partially due to her negative outlook on queerness. Therefore, Keating refuses queer labels for herself although she maintains a sexual relationship with her queer partner throughout season two. Because of the adamant suppression of her queer identity, very few characters are aware of Keating's sexuality and most people expect Keating to be heterosexual. Keating fulfills others' expectation and passes as heterosexual by publicizing her relationships with two men, her husband and boyfriend, through her work and court involvements. Moreover, Keating dresses consistently in a very feminine manner, which contributes to the coherent image of Keating as heterosexual.

Lastly, when examining Keating's racial and sexual identities collectively, I observe that Keating shares similar struggles with other queers of color, which are completely distinct from the portrayals of white queer characters. Particularly, queers of color, including Keating, refuse to accept their sexual identities and also experience tremendous difficulties due to their sexuality. However, despite these struggles, Keating exercises problematic methods in navigating her life and work as a marginalized individual. More specifically, Keating merely utilizes notions of marginalization as a rhetorical strategy to assist her clients without making concrete investments into finding solutions to these diversity issues. Additionally, Keating also manipulates other marginalized character to serve her own interests. Her treatment of these characters further clarifies the show's diversity facade since marginalized characters, except for Keating, lack agency and depth despite being frequently featured.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The purpose of my study was to examine the intersectional portrayal of the character Annalise Keating as a queer, black woman, navigating through complex interracial relationships and highly institutionalized environments. To conduct this research, I have utilized the lens of ideological criticism to screen all episodes from the first two seasons of the show *How to Get Away with Murder* (abbreviated as *Murder*). Based on my observations, I have synthesized relevant findings about Keating's race and sexuality portrayal in Chapter IV. In this final chapter, I will elaborate on some major conclusions about this character's portrayal, summarize important implications of my findings, acknowledge some limitations to my study, and give recommendations for future studies. I will end the chapter, as well as this thesis, with some final thoughts about this research.

Major Conclusions

Despite being a queer, black woman, Keating carefully constructs her image to resemble a white, heterosexual woman in order to alleviate, or completely avoid oppression from the major institutions that govern her life and work. To embody whiteness, Keating alters her appearance by consistently wearing straight or lightly-curled wigs to cover her naturally kinky hair. The rigid consistency of Keating's beauty practice turns these hairstyles into part of her identity since Keating rarely appears onscreen throughout the two seasons without her wigs. Since these wigs adhere to white beauty standards, the consistency in Keating's appearance also demonstrates how she internalizes whiteness and incorporates this ideology into her everyday life. Keating also aligns herself with whiteness by maintaining very close relationships with only a few other characters, which include her husband and her associates, all of whom are white. Keating leverages these characters' privileges to fulfill her agency and to alleviate her struggles

as a black woman. For instance, Keating was able to land her first teaching job at a prestigious college because her husband was already a professor at this institution by the time she applied. Considering her tremendous efforts in associating and assimilating herself to whiteness, Keating faces minimal racial discrimination in her current life since, other than her actual skin color, Keating functions like a white, privileged woman.

Skin color is unchangeable, and Keating can only emulate whiteness; conversely, queerness is concealable, which allows Keating to hide her queer sexuality to pass as heterosexual. Keating does this by remaining discreet with her queer partner and rejecting the opportunity to advance their relationship out of fear of publicizing her queer identity. On the other hand, Keating's public profile includes her relationships with two men, her husband and her boyfriend. Keating and her husband teach at the same institution and carry the same last name, whereas Keating's relationship to her boyfriend is fully disclosed at court since this information is relevant to the murder investigation of her husband. Therefore, Keating's relationships with these two men are completely public. Keating also constructs heterosexuality by consistently dressing in a feminine manner, particularly in tight-fitting dresses, which further contributes to her disguise as a heterosexual woman. From examining Keating's gender portrayal, I conclude that Keating clearly suppresses her queer sexuality to avoid societal pressures as well as any possible hindrances to her professional development.

Finally, as one of the queer characters of color on *Murder*, Keating's experiences and actions are unique as she simultaneously shares the same struggles as other marginalized characters, but also oppresses those characters to follow her own agenda. Throughout the first two seasons of the show, Keating continually rejects her queerness and views her sexuality negatively. Failing to come to terms with her identity, Keating abandons her queer partner and

chooses to cover the secret by marrying her husband, who cheats on her and abuses her throughout their marriage. Though these difficult choices correlate to the struggles that other marginalized characters face, Keating manipulates these other characters to serve her agency instead of empathizing with or empowering them. Particularly, Keating's manipulation involves utilizing diverse characters for her personal and professional gains, and then disposing of these individuals whenever necessary. For instance, Keating benefits significantly from her diverse group of interns in all of her court cases since they assist her in investigating, brainstorming defenses, preparing clients for trial, and many other important tasks. However, when complications arise from Keating's collaborations with the students, Keating dismisses all of her interns without prior notice, leaving them with little financial and professional security. Therefore, though Keating is navigating the same systems that oppress her and other marginalized characters, Keating is able to maintain much of her agency since she continuously manipulates other marginalized characters to serve her interests.

Implications of Research Findings

My research provides several implications. First, the study suggests that despite the plethora of marginalized characters, *Murder*'s diversity only exists on a superficial level and the show fails to portray or facilitate impactful conversations about diversity. Since *Murder* incorporates some elements of marginalization into most of its major characters, diversity is widely visible and easily accessible throughout the show. However, these marginalized identities do not live up to their potential for facilitating critical dialogues on diversity. This is largely because diversity and marginalized identities are not portrayed as internalized factors that deeply affect one's sense of self. Rather, the show *Murder* only illustrates diversity through the most obvious indicators, such as highlighting particular skin colors or displaying behavioral

differences to portray queerness, for instance. Therefore, *Murder*—through Keating as well as its other characters—lacks the critical representations of what it truly means to be marginalized in multiple contexts, such as in one's professional workplace or within an interracial marriage.

Second, Keating's intersectional portrayal secures, rather than disrupts, the existence of social hierarchies and even encourages other marginalized characters to strive for advancement on these social ladders. Specifically, how Keating negotiates dominant ideologies is profoundly problematic since she chooses to emulate dominant structures instead of advocating or petitioning for social change. Keating's strategy proves to be somewhat effective since she is able to gain professional success, avoid social discrimination, and manipulate others to serve her interests. The success of her method encourages internalizing social hierarchies and privileging adherence rather than offering resistance, which makes her approach somewhat regressive. Moreover, her perpetuation of social hierarchies is especially concerning since she plays the role of an educator and a law practitioner, whose life and work have the ability to cultivate critical views and inspire actions. Consequently, Keating's ways of navigating dominant systems are not simply personal strategies, but also serve to propagate these ideas and ideologies to large groups of people who regard her an exemplary figure.

Lastly, my research findings reinforce the importance of intersectionality studies on television portrayals. As mentioned in Chapter II, intersectionality studies of television depictions are rare since previous research primarily examined identity factors, such as race, gender, and class, as separate entities (Meyer, "The 'Other' Woman" 903). However, some of the findings of my study would not have been possible without the intersectional framework. Intersectionality allowed me to concentrate on the interconnections between the different identity facets, which include race and sexuality in this case. For instance, one of the major arguments I

put forth was that Keating, along with other queer characters of color on the show, rejects her queer identity and suffers multiple consequences as the result of her sexuality. Without examining both race and sexuality as intersecting identity factors, my understanding of Keating would be profoundly incomplete.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, due to the time constraints of this undergraduate thesis, I could only conduct an in-depth analysis of the first two seasons of *Murder*. The show has already completed its third season and plans to air the last episode of season four in April 2018. Though I did incorporate information from seasons three and four for flashbacks from Keating's past and specific plot points that developed from previous seasons, the time restrictions did not allow for further analysis of any new developments after season two. If I were to conduct the same study for a longer period of time, I would choose to examine the two remaining seasons more thoroughly to better synthesize a comprehensive understanding of the character Annalise Keating.

Another limitation to my analysis is that I focus primarily on Keating's race and sexuality but not any other traits. Keating is a deeply complicated character in terms of her profession, ethical judgment family upbringing, and relationships with other characters. Though each of these aforementioned facets are briefly discussed in my analysis, closer readings of them would allow for more insights into Keating's portrayal. For instance, Keating's moral ambiguity is a major recurring theme. She is so motivated to win her cases and protect her loved ones that she is willing to manipulate others, such as her associates and students, into committing illegal or unethical acts to serve her interests. I personally chose not to explore these themes because they are not directly relevant to my study's purpose of examining the intersectional portrayal of her

race and sexuality. However, since these omitted details contribute to a fuller picture of Annalise Keating as an individual, my research is limited to analyzing only some facets of her portrayal.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the aforementioned discussions from this chapter, I propose several recommendations for future studies on this topic. First, if other scholars were to choose Annalise Keating as their research subject, I would suggest examining this character throughout all four seasons of the show. Since later plotlines unfold additional significant events, such as Wes Gibbins' death and Keating's involvement with her new therapist, Keating demonstrates tremendous changes in her perspectives, her relationships with others, as well as her personal and professional objectives. Therefore, in order to gain a more comprehensive analysis of Keating, it is critically important to generate observations from all available seasons.

Second, future researchers should also consider examining other characters on the show. Many characters on *Murder* are unique, which would undoubtedly open doors to different research opportunities. For instance, Oliver Hampton is another interesting character to explore for multiple reasons. Hampton is gay man infected with HIV, which is a rare portrayal on current television since HIV itself is not as prevalent of a disease in the current decade. Also, Hampton is racially mixed and engages in an interracial romantic relationship with a white gay man, which is another uncommon facet about his portrayal that is worth exploring. In addition to Hampton, other characters on *Murder* also exhibit noteworthy traits that correlate to other unrepresented issues, such as interracial adoption. Therefore, aside from Keating, other characters on *Murder* also possess major potential for extending current scholarship on television portrayals.

The third recommendation would be for scholars to examine the audience's response to Keating and also to the show at large. My perspective about *Murder* and its characters changed

significantly as I shifted from the role of a regular viewer to that of a scholar examining the show. Undoubtedly, conducting close readings on the show's materials allowed me to comprehend and decipher many hidden messages, some of which may have hindered my affection for *Murder*. However, without such close readings, it is difficult for an ordinary viewer to detect these underlying themes, such as whiteness and heteronormativity. Therefore, future studies on the audience's responses would be fruitful in understanding how much of these covert messages are visible to viewers, and how these themes affect the audience's perceptions or cultivate certain views. The answers to these research questions are important to the media studies field since these findings will further contribute to scholars' understanding of media effects as well as mainstream television consumption.

The final recommendation that I have for future research is to implement the intersectionality framework when examining other popular television shows, especially ones with apparent diverse cast members such as *Grey's Anatomy*, *Orange is the New Black*, *New Girl*, *Quantico*, and many more. As mentioned in one of my major conclusions, *Murder*'s diversity is merely external since the show and its characters do not explore many diversity issues in-depth or portray many critical dialogues surrounding this topic. This important finding was only possible by utilizing the intersectional framework to observe the multiple identity facets in relations to one another, which ultimately affect a character's construction and lived experience. Therefore, employing the intersectional approach is key to fostering a more comprehensive understanding of television characters and their portrayal of diversity.

Final Thoughts

Recent television series in the United States have included more and more diversity on screen. Though the growing quantity of these representations is critically important for

enhancing visibility, the quality of these diverse characters in popular television shows is still questionable since many portrayals of marginalized individuals remain heavily stereotyped. I first narrowed down my research subject to Annalise Keating because she is one of the few minority-status characters on mainstream television to receive immense praise from both critics and the public. Also, as a television viewer who has been disappointed by the lack of diversity on mainstream media, I was excited to watch Keating on *Murder* every Thursday because she weaves in multiple layers of marginalization while maintaining a powerful status through her impressive capabilities. However, through this study, I realized that the character, as well as the structures she is navigating, are much more complex than they first appear. My research has shown that while Keating breaks down many common stereotypes for a black queer woman, her portrayal remains problematic because of the subtle adherence to dominant institutions as well as her manipulation of other marginalized characters.

Considering these findings, my original opinion of *Murder* as a viewer has definitely changed but I am appreciative of the new perspective I have adopted after conducting this research. Particularly, one of the most important lessons I drew from this study is that I should think critically about the mediated representations I sometimes passively consume from mainstream media. The findings of my study reaffirms the necessity of this mindful practice since close readings of different portrayals and messages allow for clearer understanding of the underlying ideologies that manifest within the artifact. On the other hand, as a communication scholar, it was such a joy to be able to combine my personal and academic interests for this thesis. Because of my focus on media studies, I have read many journals and published research papers within this field throughout my undergraduate years. However, I never imagined back then that I would have the unique opportunity to conduct my own research on one of my favorite

television shows. Therefore, I am thankful for this experience of simultaneously engaging different interests in my research as it has motivated a novice scholar like myself to explore academic avenues that are impactful to my personal life.

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APPENDIX A: PRE-ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

Questions on Keating's identity as a black woman:

1. How did other characters (her students, associates, husband, lover) perceive Keating?
2. How did Keating portray her professionalism at both of her workplace, specifically through her dress, hair, dialogue styles with others?
3. Did Keating's identity as a black woman amplify her success and/or hinder her authority? If so, how?

Questions on Keating's queer identity:

1. How did Keating define her own sexuality?
2. In what setting did Keating "come out" on screen? Who knew about Keating's queer identity?
3. In what ways did Keating exhibit her queerness?
4. What and how did different factors hinder Keating's queer relationship?
5. What were some themes that Keating did not discuss in regard to her queer identity? How were these omissions handled by her character and/or the television show as a whole?

Intersectional portrayal of race and sexuality:

1. How did other characters comment on Keating's identity as a queer woman of color?
2. Were those comments positive or negative? How so?
3. Did Keating's performance change depending on the setting? If so, how?
4. How was Keating's queerness incorporated into the plot?
    a. How did the series portray Keating's marriage with a white male professor? How did this character interact with Keating?

   b. How did the series portray Keating's extramarital affair with a black male police officer? How did this character interact with Keating?
   c. How did the series portray Keating's romantic relationship with a white female defense attorney? How did this character interact with Keating?

5. In what ways does Keating convey queerness and race?
6. Are there ways in which Keating's queerness and race influence her non-romantic relationships with other characters? If so, how?
7. What are some of the unspoken issues relating to race and gender that were not discussed throughout the series?
8. How does Keating choose to perform or not perform her race and sexuality as a lawyer and professor?