
Race And Gender: Analysis Of The Article Race, Gender, And Refraction In Scandal

Gomez, S. L., & McFarlane, M. D. (2017). "It's (not) handled": Race, gender, and refraction in scandal. *Feminist Media Studies*, 17(3), 362-376. doi:10.1080/14680777.2016.1218352

This article was written by Stephanie L. Gomez, an Associate Instructor in the Department of Communication at the University of Utah, and Megan D. McFarlane, an Assistant Professor of Communication at Marymount University. The subject that the article addresses is how race, gender and the refraction of such is presented on ABC's Scandal. Gomez and McFarlane argue that the use of refraction on the character of Olivia Pope tends to depoliticize race and gender despite Pope simultaneously embodies and critiques specific tropes of her race and gender.

In order to support their argument, Gomez and McFarlane conducted a case study using the first three seasons of Scandal as its source of data. Gomez and McFarlane also define the theories of post-race and post-feminism as they key points in larger post-identity politics. Gomez and McFarlane note that while on the surface post-feminism largely focuses on the individual choices of women, it assumes that it is an even playing field. In terms of post-race, Gomez and McFarlane state that colour-blindness and ignoring racial identity are two factors that form the basis of it. They also point out that post-feminism and post-race both downplay internal and external oppression and discrimination. Using Olivia Pope as their model, Gomez and McFarlane note that there are two options of refraction with Scandal: a reproduction of post-race and post-feminism, and an immediate critique of them. Within the first three seasons, the show often tried to avoid the problematic ideologies of racism, anti-feminism, and post-feminism. Within the show, Olivia Pope embodied three key tropes of media representation of Black women in television: the slave mistress, the help, and the Jezebel despite having a large amount of power and having that power being in an environment primarily dominated by White men. Olivia represents the slave mistress trope through her relationship with President Fitz, a White man. There is an unequal power dynamic between the two characters with Fitz's White, masculine privilege also playing into complicating the relationship. Olivia has no power within the relationship as Fitz decides when and how he wants to see her, usually at the most impromptu times. Olivia even refers to being a slave mistress in a scene with Fitz, making reference to slave master Thomas Jefferson and slave Sally Hemings. As the help, Olivia demonstrates and complicates the trope as she is a prominent Washington, DC 'fixer' with most of her clients being composed of wealthy, White people. Like how Black domestic workers worked behind the scenes to fix their masters issues. Through refraction, Olivia complicates the trope as she runs her own successful business, giving her the capital and agency that goes with owning a business. Finally, as the Jezebel, the relationship between Fitz and Olivia is purely sexual. They even continue to have sex after dissolving their relationship. When Fitz's wife Mellie is discussing the affair, she positions Olivia as the Jezebel who deliberately slept with Fitz to destroy his marriage. Despite being deemed a Jezebel a few times during the first three seasons, Olivia maintains a sense of agency through her constant rejection of the trope.

Gomez and McFarlane conclude the article by stating that by Scandal using refraction, it was able to showcase Olivia as the slave mistress, the help and the Jezebel. Gomez and McFarlane also ponder if these portrayals would be made present if the Olivia Pope character wasn't working in the White House. Finally, it is stated that post-race and post-feminist representations must be included in some capacity to allow refraction to be successful.

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