

BLACK WOMEN IN ROMANTIC COMEDIES

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

The media is significant in communicating what happens in the world and is a pillar for social change (Happer and Philo 2013; Kumari and Joshi 2015). Per Alzahrani (2016), media has the power to influence how people view the world. The messages conveyed by the media helps individuals to develop a distorted view of reality (Wood 1994). For example, women are underrepresented compared to men in many forms of media, and, when they are included, it is usually in stereotypical roles that focuses on physical appearances (Kunsey 2018; Wood 1994).

While all women tend to be underrepresented in media, Black women often experience even less representation in the mass media (Andrews and McClain 2022; Bourne 1990; Gordon 2008; Mills 2019). Several scholars have described how Black women are often depicted in a white-dominated society (Reynolds-Dobbs et al. 2008; West 1995; Wingfield 2007). The representation that Black women experience in the media coincides with historical stereotypes such as the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire (Glenn and Cunningham 2009; West 1990). In other words, Black women in the media to be seen nurturing, oversexualized, or independent (Chen et al. 2012; Coleman et al. 2020; Glenn and Cunningham 2009; Gordon 2008; Hazell 2008; Jean et al. 2021). These stereotypes in media are important to understand because they determine what images are portrayed, what images are left out, and even how Black women may view themselves (Chen et al. 2012; Johnson 2019).

Media depictions of Black women are also rooted in colorism, another type of discrimination Black women face. Coined by Alice Walker, the term colorism appears to allow Black people with a lighter skin complexion to have more privileges and fewer societal barriers than Black people with a darker skin complexion (Hunter 2002; Matthews and Johnson 2015).

Thus, the Black women we do see in the media tend to be those with lighter skin and straight hair over those with darker skin and textured hair (Hill 2002; McWhorter 2020; Thompson 2009).

The media has reinforced the colorism stereotype by mostly casting light-skinned Black women in movies and in television shows as a way to promote Eurocentric ideals of light skin color, thin body types, and loose hair texture that are less frequent in the majority of African American communities (Brown et al. 2021; Sekayi 2003). These casting decisions shape the way others perceive Black women, thus making the larger society believe that all Black women have light complexions or are living like the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire tropes (Bourne 1990; Coleman et.al 2020; Gordon 2008; Hazell 2008).

Due to the stereotypical portrayals of Black women in media, it is rare to see Black women in lighthearted films such as romantic comedy films. Romantic comedy films have involved mostly white couples with a few exceptions of Black people being included in this movie genre (Roberts 2018; Tyler 2010). Black romantic comedy films are important because it shows that an alternative lifestyle exists for Black people besides the stereotypical race and slavery films. Not only can these films illustrate loving Black relationships and families, but they also challenge stereotypes about Black women, especially since romantic comedies may reach a wider audience than films perceived to be primarily about racial issues (Drake 2019; Edmondson 2007; Erigha 2018).

Many researchers have conducted studies on the impacts of the media on women. Within these discussions, Black women are often left out because the media tends to equate the experiences of white women as representative of all women (Chen et al. 2012; Gordon 2008). This study uses a qualitative content analysis to examine how Black women are portrayed in Black romantic comedies. Specifically, it compares depictions of Black women in romantic

comedies with some of the established stereotypes often applied to Black women (the Jezebel, the Sapphire, the Mammy) to find whether these same stereotypes are present in this genre and what messages this could send about romance and Black women. The study also considers whether colorism is present in these films and if these patterns have changed over time.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Black women in film

Since the creation of the film industry in the early 1900s, people of color have been left out of the Hollywood film industry (Erigha 2019; Kim and Brunn-Bevel 2019), and excluding people of color led to the development of white spaces, the physical spaces dominated by white individuals and ideologies (Thakore 2020). Early movie roles limited Black actors to stereotypical roles such as the butler and slave, helping to prevent Black men and women from expressing their talents in other roles (Thakore 2020). Historically, portrayals of Black women in films centered on stereotypical roles that represent their depictions in America (Jones 1998). These stereotypical roles included the Mammy and Jezebel stereotypes.

The Mammy

Since the 1900s, the Mammy has been considered one of the strongest stereotypical media portrayals of Black women (Chen et.al 2012). Patricia Hill Collins states that the Mammy image stemmed from slavery and enforces the dominant group's goal of maintaining the subordination of Black women (Collins 2000). The Mammy is a dark-skinned, overweight Black woman who is maternal, dominant, and self-sacrificing (Jean et al. 2021; Mapp 1982). These "characteristics" allowed the slave master's home to run smoothly because the Black woman was respectfully feared by both Black and white people (McKoy 2012). Additionally, the mammy spent the majority of her time caring for the master's family before she could ever care for her own family. The willingness to be a loyal servant and caretaker helped hide the mistreatment of enslaved women by portraying them as being content with serving their master (Armstrong 2018).

The domineering caretaking role is portrayed in current depictions of the Mammy stereotype. For example, Tyler Perry's film *Madea's Family Reunion* depicts the nurturing aspects of Madea embracing the Mammy role by taking care of others and providing advice throughout the film (Perry 2006). Madea also exhibits a domineering attitude by being ready to fight anyone who disrespects her. The image of Mammy shapes the role of Black women to be depicted only as caretakers and nothing else (McKoy 2012).

The Jezebel

Although technically any woman can be considered a Jezebel, historically the term has mostly associated with Black women (Brown et al. 2013). The Jezebel image is described as a young Black woman who utilizes her sexuality to get attention (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Typically a fair skinned woman with a shapely body, the Jezebel image also presented a Black woman who is focused on pleasing men (Brown et al. 2013; Reynolds-Dobbs et al 2008). Originating during the slavery era, many White people—especially White men—saw Black women as objects only to be used for their bodies to sexually satisfy others (Anderson et al. 2018). The Jezebel image helped shape the prominent (and lingering) idea that Black women are more promiscuous and highly sexual than other races (Baker 2005; Leath et al. 2021).

Many enslaved women were often forced to sleep with their masters to avoid being beaten or sold; this helped to enforce the belief that Black women were oversexualized (Pilgrim 2002). However, enslavers often presented Black women as sexually aggressive in an effort to cover up the sexual assaults that occurred during slavery era (Brown et al. 2013; Collins 2000). Thus, they presented the idea that Black women could not be raped because they were highly sexual beings, which allowed the perpetrators to escape being held legally accountable

(Armstrong 2018; Brown et al. 2013). Moreover, presenting Black women as oversexualized helped slave owners fulfill sexual desires and maintain power over Black women (Baker 2005; Pilgrim 2002).

The sexualized image of Black women is still present in more recent movies despite an awareness of how Black people should be better presented in films (Andrews and McClain 2022; Baker 2005). We can see this in the 2003 romantic film *Bringing Down the House*. Although Charlene Morton, a Black woman, acts as a nanny, she is also presented as oversexualized as well. Charlene Morton catches the attention of her boss' business associate Howie Rottman (Glenn 2009). Howie shows his attraction to Charlene through his sexualized comments, telling her that he is amazed at her body. Although this eventually leads to a relationship, Howie's display of attraction relates to the jezebel stereotype because it involved him valuing Charlene mostly for her body.

The Sapphire

The Sapphire image was popularized from the 1950s radio and television show *Amos 'n Andy* that portrayed the character Sapphire Stephens as hostile and nagging (Bennett 2016). The Sapphire is also described as having a loud, overly aggressive, and complaining attitude towards anyone who insults or disrespects her (Pilgrim 2008; Reynolds-Dobbs et al. 2008; Thomas et al. 2004). In addition to these descriptions, this stereotype also portrays Black women as emasculating and controlling Black men through their verbal assaults (Armstrong 2018; Baker 2005; Jerald et al. 2017; Reynolds-Dobbs et al. 2008; Thomas et al. 2004; Walley-Jean 2009; West 1995). This overly aggressive perception of Black women led Black men to reject them as partners due to them being too assertive. Additionally, Black women being

employed when Black men were not caused Black women to be blamed for emasculating Black men by “failing to be submissive, dependent, feminine women” (Collins 1990:78).

The Sapphire stereotype has internal implications for how Black women see themselves (Young 2019). This image can cause some Black women to have difficulty with properly expressing their needs, especially their emotional ones (Bennett 2016). The Sapphire stereotype portrays Black women as aggressive and angry, resulting in others labeling them as an Angry Black Woman (West 1995; Young 2019). In an attempt to avoid this stereotype, some Black women try to change their behavior to appear non-threatening (West 1995).

Romantic Comedies

Romantic comedies have been a successful genre since the twentieth century (Hefner and Wilson 2013) and was also one of the highest grossing genres from 1995-2014 (Hefner 2019). The romantic comedy genre is often described as a happy, optimistic approach to romantic relationships between men and women. Romantic comedies also involve humor and focus on romantic ideas such as dating and marriage with a happy ending (Hefner 2019; Hellerman 2022).

Despite the positive meanings of romantic comedies, not every racial and ethnic group has been represented in the films that we see. In fact, most films that feature Black people have some type of suffering in the storyline (Hall 2021; Tillet 2020). According to Asmelash (2021), many movies became redundant with the same storyline being told with different actors due to studio demand to reach a broad audience. Additionally, many individuals were no longer content to see the same white faces (Asmelash 2021). Several authors have voiced this concern about a lack of representation in romantic comedies (Bryant 2019; Dionne 2013; Roberts 2018; Tindall 2012; Tyler 2010). Bryant (2019) and Tyler (2010) mention that romantic comedies

typically involve white couples and their stories. Although Black romantic comedies exist, the media often referred to them as Black stories instead of romantic comedies because they were advertised as Black films and not as romantic comedies (Roberts 2018).

Within the romantic comedy genre, negative images have also existed, particularly in regard to race. As an example, when the media showcases a Black woman as a love interest, she tends to spend most of the movie changing who she is so that her love interest will see her as desirable (Tindall 2012). In addition, some romantic films portray Black women in stereotypical and unfavorable roles such as the Jezebel and Sapphire, thereby making them undesirable and unapproachable for a relationship (Dionne 2013). Romantic comedies that do involve Black women focus on perceived character flaws such as bad attitudes and high sex drives, allowing them to be perceived as undesirable, making it difficult for many films to display Black relationships positively (Tindall 2012).

Romantic comedy films have the potential to portray Black people in a positive way. Black romantic comedy films are important because they present Black people in a lighthearted way and it shows viewers that they are capable of experiencing love, too (Barber-Plentie 2016; Hall 2021; Tillet 2020). In addition, because these films fit into the genre of romantic comedy, they may entice white audiences whose views of Black romantic life, or Black life in general, may be shaped by viewing such films.

Colorism

Colorism is another type of discrimination where lighter skinned Black people receive privileges over dark skinned Black people (Brown et al. 2021; Hunter 2002). Although coined by Alice Walker in 1982, the term colorism originated from slavery (Hill 2002; Johnson 2019).

Slavery shaped white supremacist ideology that people of African descent were inferior to whites and that whiteness was defined as being civilized (Hill 2002). White slave owners viewed the bodies of enslaved African women as property to be used however they saw fit (Brown et al. 2021). Slave owners raped enslaved African women, thereby contributing to the birth of lighter-skinned slaves or mulattos (Brown et al. 2021; Dupree-Wilson 2021; Matthews and Johnson 2015). The creation of mulattos led to division within the African community. Lighter-skinned slaves were preferred over darker skinned slaves due to the perception that they were closer in proximity to white people based on the color of their skin. Thus, some White people granted privileges-- such as being able to work in the house instead of outside—to lighter-skinned people over dark skinned people (Brown et al. 2021; Matthews and Johnson 2015).

Furthermore, colorism helped contribute to a divide within the Black community by pitting Black people against each other (Hill 2002; Hunter 2002; Matthews and Johnson 2015). Hill (2002), Dupree-Wilson (2021), and Brown et al. (2021) mention the different tests that were created for lighter-skinned African Americans to distance themselves from darker-skinned African Americans. For example, some Black social clubs developed what was colloquially called the paper bag test to determine if a Black individual would be admitted into their organization. Not surprising, this test—the Black person had to be as light as or lighter than a brown paper bag—created division within the Black community because it allowed light-skinned Black people to view dark-skinned Black people as beneath them.

Colorism has also presented more barriers for Black women than Black men (Brown et al. 2021; Hall 2005; Hill 2002; Hunter 2002). This impacted different areas such as beauty, mate selection, employment, and education (Brown et al. 2021; Hall 2005; Johnson 2019). Light-skinned Black women are likely to have greater social capital and privilege due to their

approximation to whiteness (Brown et al. 2021). Media such as television and film project this ideal through depictions of light skinned Black women as the preferred romantic choice. Hollywood's choice of light-skinned Black people as the dominant choice for films and television has made it rare for dark-skinned women to be in a positive leading role or a play a romantic interest (Norwood 2015).

Colorism in films helps to exclude the presence of dark-skinned Black women by giving roles to lighter-skinned Black women (Obaizamomwan-Hamilton et al. 2021). Light skinned Black people tend to have more opportunities for movie roles because their skin complexion is closer to the ideal beauty standard of white skin (Obaizamomwan-Hamilton 2021; Onyejiaka 2017; Singathi 2020). For example, in the 2018 movie *The Hate You Give*, the main character was a light skinned Black girl (Dowie-Chin et al. 2020). However, in the book the movie is based on, the main character was a dark-skinned Black girl. Similarly, in 2016 Afro-Latinx actress Zoe Saldana portrayed Nina Simone in *Nina*, an autobiographic movie (Medvedeva et al. 2017; Onyejiaka 2017). Zoe Saldana, who is of Dominican and Puerto Rican descent, was heavily criticized for darkening her skin and wearing a prosthetic nose to better portray a dark-skinned Nina Simone. Utilizing a narrow selection of Black female actresses—especially when those actresses do not accurately represent the people they are portraying—contributes to colorism because it shows a preference for light skinned Black women, perpetuating this cycle (Medvedeva et al. 2017; Onyejiaka 2017; Valdez 2021).

Black Relationships Reality vs. Media

How do films portray Black romantic relationships, including marriage and dating? Black love in romantic comedies has not been as popular as it is in romantic comedies that depict love

between white couples (Tindall 2012). Black romantic films were important because they allowed Black love stories to be represented, and these films allowed Black viewers to determine if the films were accurate representations of relationships or not. Of the few Black romantic comedies that exist, portrayals of Black love slowly began to grow over time (Boyd-Perry 2016). Yet, questions remained about how these portrayals matched the lived realities of many Black people in relationships. Below I review research on Black families, which can provide needed context for better understanding how portrayals of Black relationships in film align or diverge from reality.

Marriage

Marriage provides people many benefits, including being healthier, happier, and living longer (Dixon 2008). Researchers have been interested in factors related to marriage quality for a long time; however, not enough attention has been given to the benefits Black marriages (McCabe 2006; Phillips et al. 2012). When Black people do marry, it is often later in life and results in more divorce (Broman 2005; Dixon 2008; Williams 2019). Individual, interpersonal, and socioeconomic factors also contribute to the impact of marriage in the Black community. Individual resources include attributes and characteristics that an individual brings to a relationship such as education, physical health, and emotional health (Dixon 2008; Goodwin 2003; Marks 2008). These attributes of individual resources determine how equipped an individual is to handle marriage. For example, educated and healthy individuals are likely to have greater communication skills and be able to handle more marital tasks (Goodwin 2003). Interpersonal resources involve positive emotions and attitudes that arise within marriage (Goodwin 2003; Marks et al. 2008). Interpersonal resources impact Black marriage as it helps

determine the quality of marriage. For example, Dixon (2008) and Goodwin (2003) mention that spouses being able to trust each other predicts how well the marriage functions.

The 1960s showed a high rate of marriage in the Black community. However, beginning in recent decades, the rate of Black marriage began to decline. The unequal sex ratio between Black men and women was a central factor in the decline of marriage (Dixon 2008; Holland 2009; Pinderhughes 2002). Black women tend to outnumber Black men, which impacts marriage rates. Dixon (2008) writes that the 2003 U. S. Census counted more Black females than Black males. Several factors contribute to the unequal sex ratio between Black women and men. The small number of available Black men for marriage results from high incarceration and mortality rates, which offers a limited number of choices for Black women (Dixon 2008; Holland 2009; Pinderhughes 2002). The unequal sex ratio also impacts men's desire to marry as well. Pinderhughes (2002) argues the overabundance of Black women contributes to infidelity; in other words, it is easier for men to cheat if there are so many more women available, and more women for Black men to choose from makes it easier for men to avoid the commitment that comes with marriage.

Although marriage rates have declined for all races in the United States, the decline in marriage rates is higher for people in the Black community. Along with the unequal sex ratio, attitudes and perceptions about marriage help weaken marital stability. Historically, Black men were seen as the breadwinner due to earning more degrees than Black women did (Pinderhughes 2002). This educational gap has reversed as Black women began earning more degrees and earning more professional job roles compared to Black men (Banks 2011; Holland 2009). This change in earning power has allowed Black women to delay marriage, as marrying for financial need was not a necessity anymore. On the other hand, Black men's view of marriage declined.

Black men were reluctant to marry due to having to sacrifice the single lifestyle by being with just one woman (Banks 2011; Dixon 2008; Marks et al. 2008).

Additionally, financial instability increased African American males' desire to not marry (Hill 2006). African American males are less likely to marry if they are not financially stable (Hill 2006; Pinderhughes 2002). The ability to not provide may make males feel inferior and cause disputes over gender roles, contributing to dissolving marriages (Hill 2006). Despite the marriage rates of Black people declining, there are some benefits to being married. Phillips et al. (2012) looked at reasons for marital longevity among African American couples. They found that African American marital longevity resulted from "being happily married, attending church, and praying often and believing in their faith" (Phillips et al. 2012:946). Also, marital challenges were dealt with by working through disagreements together. Similarly, Marks et al. (2008) looked at the strengths of Black marriages. They found that African American marriages survived challenges by relying on each other and their faith. Also, the authors found that the desire to marry is still possible despite the general trends toward marital decline.

Dating Relationships

Several research studies have pointed out that there are several structural factors that impact dating among Black couples (Simmons et al. 2021). While Black people desire to form committed relationships, factors such as the gender ratio imbalance and interracial dating determine the success of dating in Black communities (Childs 2005; Hall 2014; Henry 2013; Tyson 2011). Similar to marriage relationships, the imbalanced dating ratio produces lower chances for Black women to find a suitable partner. High incarceration rates are likely to decrease the availability of Black men, and, once they are released, there is a smaller chance of

these men being a suitable partner (Hall 2014; Simmons 2021). This shortage of Black male partners can lead some women to settle for what they believe are less desirable partners or to stay single (Simmons 2021). Additionally, this shortage has led to competition among other Black women and between white women who date Black men (Barnes 2009; Childs 2005; Hall 2014; Henry 2013). According to Hall et al. (2014), the shortage of Black men on college campuses has led many Black women to compete amongst each other for the limited number of available Black men. The pressure to gain a Black male's attention has led some young Black women to "try harder to be seen" by dressing up every day and going to great lengths to limit the competition (8). On the other hand, this competition worked in favor of Black men because they were able to be with multiple women without having to work towards building a relationship.

The previous paragraphs outlined the realities of Black romantic life—specifically the demographic patterns and individual-level outcomes for Black people desiring romantic relationships. How do romantic comedy films compare to these realities? Research suggests romantic comedies display mixed messages about Black dating and marriage. According to Boylorn (2008), Murphy (2021), and Erigha (2018), Black relationships in romantic comedies have portrayed Black women as independent or undesirable while also portraying Black relationships as being positive. This upholds stereotypes of several factors contributing to the decline of relationships and challenges stereotypes by showing that Black people do desire relationships.

Literature Gaps and Research Questions

This study is designed to analyze the portrayal of Black women in romantic comedies, with specific attention given to common racialized and gendered stereotypes as well as an

examination of whether colorism appears within the films. Based on the literature reviewed, Black women's portrayal in films are, in general, stereotypical roles, and these roles impact how Black women are viewed by society. However, there is not much research on Black women's portrayal in specific genres of film such as romance or romantic comedies, which focus on intimate partnerships and could help shape understandings of romantic relationships. With this study, I plan to fill gaps in the literature to better understand how race and gender expectations are depicted in film and explore the following questions:

RQ1: What is the portrayal of Black women in romantic comedy films?

RQ2: What stereotypical portrayals, if any, exist in these films?

RQ3: Is colorism present in these films?

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My analysis uses two theoretical frameworks. Using Social Cognitive Theory and Black Feminist Thought, I can analyze how the portrayals of Black women in romantic comedies, including the presence of stereotypes and issues like colorism.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory provides an important framework for understanding the portrayal of Black women in romantic comedy films over time. Coined by Albert Bandura, Social Cognitive Theory posits that individuals “commit to memory behaviors they have observed to later used as models on which to base their own behavior” (Green 2013; Johnson and Holmes 2009). The theory also focuses on the idea that individuals are more likely to adapt behaviors from others they like or who look like them (Johnson and Holmes 2009). Since many individuals engage in viewing media such as movies and tv shows, Social Cognitive Theory also has the capability to explain how media can influence an individual’s behaviors and thoughts as well. For instance, romantic comedies allow viewers to learn about relationships in these films and determine if the behaviors should be applied to their own lives (Green 2013; Moore 2021). Social Cognitive Theory also has the ability to influence negative behaviors as well (Frampton and Linvill 2017). Lewis (2019) explains that the display of stereotypical images of Black people have the potential to influence the behaviors of individuals based on what is seen. As a result, to understand the portrayals of Black women in romance films and how these portrayals may shape the way viewers perceive realities of Black women, Social Cognitive Theory is an appropriate theoretical framework.

Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought is another useful framework for examining representations of Black women by the media (Griffin 2014). Coined by Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought involves Black women learning to exist in a society where their experiences are different from Black men and white women (Collins 2000; Johnson 2015). Black Feminist Thought resulted from the marginal status Black women experienced. The marginality or the "outsider within" status allows Black women to be invited to white spaces even though their voices are often ignored (Howard-Hamilton 2003:21). There are three key components to Black Feminist Thought: (1) Black women create self-definitions that enable positive images; (2) confronting the domination of multiple oppressions (race, class, and gender); and (3) redefining their culture to effectively tackle daily oppression (Collins 1986; Taylor 1998). This theoretical framework aids in my analysis by considering whether Black women have confronted stereotypical images and redefined depictions of Black women in the media.

IV. METHODS

The purpose of this research project is to conduct a qualitative content analysis of romantic comedy films with Black people as leading characters to examine how Black women have been portrayed over time. Ethnographic content analysis is a method used to understand the communication of meaning and theoretical relationships (Altheide 1987). Using a content analysis is beneficial because it can provide insight into cultural and historical phenomena within a certain context (Renz et al. 2018). Analyzing Black romantic comedies would allow me to understand how movies document images of African American women within these films.

I conducted a qualitative content analysis of 12 Black romantic comedy movies released between 1992-2019. I chose these dates because many Black romantic comedies were produced during this time, and the genre as a whole was popular among audiences. I analyzed the following movies: *The Best Man* (1999), *The Wood* (1999), *Love and Basketball* (2000), *The Brothers* (2001), *Brown Sugar* (2002), *Deliver Us from Eva* (2003), *Just Wright* (2010), *Jumping the Broom* (2011), *Think Like a Man* (2012), *Baggage Claim* (2013), *Think Like a Man Too* (2014), and *What Men Want* (2019).

To select these films, I performed a Google search of “Black romance films” from each decade, and I selected these films because different movie sites listed these movies as romantic comedies. These movies also included a Black woman lead or a Black woman romantic interest. For this study, I did not include romantic comedies that included white couples. I chose to exclude white couples and white women leads because a Google search of “romantic comedy movies” showed the majority of the romantic comedy films were white actors. I also chose to focus on Black romantic comedy films because I want to analyze the media’s portrayal of Black

women in film.

TABLE 1. Black Romantic Comedy Films

YEAR	TITLE	LEAD FEMALE DESCRIPTION	LEAD MALE DESCRIPTION	DIRECTOR RACE
1999	<i>The Best Man</i>	Robyn, 20s, Black, Light skinned Jordan, 20s, Black, Dark skinned Candace, 20s, Black, Medium-skinned Shelby, 20s, Black, Light skinned Mia, 20s, Black, Dark skinned	Lance, 20s, Black, Dark skinned Harper, 20s, Black, Dark skinned Quentin, 20s, Black, Light skinned Julian, 20s, Black, Dark skinned	Black
1999	<i>The Wood</i>	Alicia, 30s, Black, Light skinned Tanya, 30s, Black, Medium-skinned	Mike, 30s, Black, Dark skinned Slim, 30s, Black, Dark skinned Roland, 30s, Black, Dark skinned	Black
2000	<i>Love and Basketball</i>	Monica, 20s, Black, Light skinned	Quincy, 20s, Black, Dark skinned	Black
2001	<i>The Brothers</i>	Denise, 20s, Black, Dark skinned	Jackson, 20s, Black, Dark skinned	Black

2002	<i>Brown Sugar</i>	Sidney, 20s, Black, Light skinned	Dre, 20s, Black, Dark skinned	Black
2003	<i>Deliver Us from Eva</i>	Eva, 30s, Black, Dark skinned	Ray, 30s, Black, Light skinned	Black
2010	<i>Just Wright</i>	Leslie, 30s, Black, Medium-skinned	Scott, 30s, Black, Light skinned	Black
2011	<i>Jumping the Broom</i>	Sabrina, 30s, Black, Light skinned	Jason, 30s, Black, Light skinned	Black
2012	<i>Think Like a Man</i>	Candace, 30s, Black, Medium- skinned Lauren, 30s, Black, Medium-skinned Mya, 30s, Black, Medium-skinned Kristen, 30s, Black, Dark skinned	Michael, 30s, Black, Light skinned Dominic, 30s, Black, Light skinned Zeke, 30s, Black, Dark skinned Jeremy, 30s, Hispanic, Light skinned	Black
2013	<i>Baggage Claim</i>	Montana, 30s, Black, Light skinned Gail, 30s, Black, Medium-skinned	Will, 30s, Black, Dark skinned	Black
2014	<i>Think Like a Man Too</i>	Candace, 30s, Black, Medium- skinned Lauren, 30s, Black, Medium-skinned Mya, 30s, Black,	Michael, 30s, Black, Light skinned Dominic, 30s, Black, Light Skinned	Black

		Medium-skinned Kristen, 30s, Black, Dark skinned	Zeke, 30s, Black, Dark skinned Jeremy, 30s, Hispanic, Light skinned	
2019	<i>What Men Want</i>	Ali, 30s, Black, Medium-skinned	Will, 30s, Black, Dark skinned	White

I viewed each film several times, and I coded for general depictions of romance displayed in the movies such as the different types of love (love at first sight, sentimental love, platonic love etc.) and how the movies present Black romance. I also coded for whether stereotypical images existed in romance films (the Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire) and whether or not colorism appears within the casting and the roles played by women with different skin colors. Other themes I coded for were sexuality and affection. These themes were generated during the course of my analysis after reviewing the selected movies. For affection, I looked for instances of characters showing their love towards individuals they were interested in romantically. The next theme I coded for was sexuality. For sexuality, I looked at how the characters displayed their attraction to each other through the physical connections they had. The characteristics of sexuality involved kissing and sleeping with other people. The signs of affection included physical touch such as hugging or kissing. Beyond these themes, I was open to looking for other themes that might appear while I did my analysis.

After analyzing themes for each decade of films selected, I focused on how Black women in romantic films have changed over time. I gained access to my sample by utilizing different

movie subscriptions such as HBO Max and Hulu. I took detailed notes while watching the movies in a Word document and used these notes to find any themes that may occur while watching these movies.

V. FINDINGS

My research addressed the portrayals of Black women in film, whether some of the same stereotypes that have been applied to Black women in other media are present in these films, and if colorism appears to impact the women's romantic pursuits. My major themes include Comparison to the literature, Colorism, and Desire for companionship but always facing obstacles.

Themes

My content analysis identified some common themes across the films. The first sections will focus on the themes identified across the films this will be followed by a discussion section that compared my findings to the larger literature on Black women in the media, as well as the research into Black families and romance. The first theme was Upholding the Jezebel, Sapphire and Mammy Stereotypes. The second theme was Colorism's Effect on Relationships. My third theme focuses on the common plot in these romantic comedies of The Desire for Companionship, but Always Facing Obstacles.

Upholding the Jezebel, Sapphire, and Mammy Stereotypes

According to the literature, portrayals of Black women in films centered on stereotypical roles that represent their depictions in America such as the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes (Jones 1998). Despite its origins in the slavery era, the Jezebel stereotype still exists with the way Black women are depicted in media (Anderson et al. 2018). The Sapphire stereotype portrays Black women as hostile and sassy due to her ability to overpower men with her verbal insults.

This stereotype also allows Black women to be presented as aggressive.

Examples of the Jezebel

In the films analyzed, the Jezebel stereotype was common, however, there were some examples of times when this stereotype was subverted. An example of this occurs in the film *The Best Man*. The film goes through a weekend of wedding events for two of the characters: Lance and Mia. After the rehearsal dinner, the men and women split up for their bachelor and bachelorette parties. Lance ends up having several strippers at his bachelor party with very limited clothing. This scene also involves the strippers being introduced to the men at the bachelor party. The stripper promoter introduces one of the strippers by stating: "We're 'bout to bring you somethin' luscious and sugary. So allow me to introduce the flavor we call... Candy" which results in the men cheering and clapping after all the strippers are done with their performances. This scene contributes to the Jezebel stereotype by emphasizing the body parts of Black Women and their ability to please men (Lewis 2019).

One stripper in particular, Candace or Candy, catches the eye of Julian at the bachelor party. Julian is the boyfriend of Shelby and friends with Lance and Mia who are getting married. After the party is over, Julian catches Candace as she is about to leave to get her number. He admits that he felt a connection which is proven when he quotes a saying from Audre Lorde that Candace recognizes. While Candace's job as a stripper marks her as a Jezebel who uses her body to make a living, the film suggests she is still an intelligent, thoughtful woman because she recognizes and responds positively to the works of Audre Lorde. Thus, the connection between Candace and Julian goes beyond Candace's body to her mind and intelligence, subverting the jezebel stereotype.

Later, in the wedding scene, as everyone is entering the church, Shelby approaches Julian and appears to have a controlling attitude by saying she forgives him for hanging out with his friends and understands that it ate Julian up inside that he could not be with her. Shelby continues on with her speech by saying: “It just made sense that you should suffer and think about the jeopardy you put the relationship through rather than let you have your own way.” This remains when she meets Candace. This scene contributed to Shelby’s domineering attitude because she was portrayed as knowing what was best for the relationship and deciding Julian’s every move. In response to her perceived attitude and controlling nature, Julian breaks up with her and ends up in a relationship with Candace. In contrast to Shelby, Candace is able to get the guy despite being a stripper and Shelby still has a controlling nature that prevents her from being happy. This subverts the traditional, more tragic jezebel stereotype as Candace is able to remain a sexual being who is still rewarded with a happy ending.

In the film *Baggage Claim*, Montana is the main character who is trying to find love in thirty days just in time for her sister’s wedding. The film presents one of Montana’s friends, Gail, as hypersexualized when Montana mentions: “If you’re not a lady or a woman, then you’re like my best friend Gail,” who uses her body to attract men. This is apparent in the next scene where Gail is leaning over a male passenger offering him some snacks in a sexually suggestive way and exposing her cleavage area.

Later on in the film, Montana is feeling depressed because she is unable to find the right guy. Her best friend Gail’s attempt at consoling her involves mentioning that Montana can still sleep with guys while she continues to look for the right one. This relates to the Jezebel stereotype because Gail is focused on using her body to attract men. Throughout the film, Gail flirts with several men and is not concerned with settling down in a real relationship. Gail’s

response to relationships and dating is depicted as hooking up with men as opposed to finding a relationship. For example, further in the film while talking to Montana, Gail flirts with one of the members at the gym by unzipping her jacket halfway to catch his attention. Also, Gail flirts with the masseuse by looking at him lustfully. Although Gail does not use her body to get things from men, she is portrayed as oversexed, seductive, and alluring.

Examples of the Sapphire

More recent examples of the Sapphire stereotype reimagine these characters as dominating and careerist. This new depiction is consistent with the existing Sapphire stereotype by portraying black women's characteristics as aggressive towards those that disrespects her and emasculating men less successful than her with harsh words. Their fatal flaws are that they are too strong and drive men away. In the film *The Best Man*, one of the characters, Shelby, is introduced as a character that no one really likes. Her behavior is portrayed as controlling and nagging as she belittles her boyfriend in public and makes him do whatever she requires. This earns her the dislike of the other members of the friend group and invalidates her ability to be a good romantic partner.

Additionally, one of the other characters in the film is also portrayed as a sapphire. Jordan, just like Shelby, is a part of the friend group of six friends that met in college. Jordan is also a career oriented and independent woman. She, just like the other five, is in town for Lance's wedding. The male characters briefly discuss Jordan's characteristics when it comes to relationships. During their poker game, the men complain about Jordan's independence being a cause for her not finding a man because she acts too domineering. This complaint results from a brief conversation that occurs during the poker game: Lance: I'm Glad Robyn's not like Jordan.

Harper: Why you say that?

Lance: “Cause Jordan’s too damn sassy and independent man. And she might make more cheese than you one day.”

Harper: Yeah? And?

Lance: I love Jordan, you know that. But let’s face it. A woman like that don’t need a man.

This conversation between two of the men at the poker game relates to the sapphire stereotype because it shows that Black women who are “sassy” and “independent” are likely to not find a relationship due to their controlling nature. However, in this example, being a sapphire is not only about attitude or behavior. Black women who are too independent, in this case having a successful career and out earning many potential Black male partners, are considered ineligible for romantic partnership.

In the film *Deliver us from Eva*, the main character, Eva, is portrayed as having the domineering characteristic of the Sapphire stereotype. The main character Eva is the oldest of three sisters that she took care of after their parents passed away. Eva took on the role of a parental figure who can be controlling and domineering sometimes, for example, by giving unsolicited advice to her sisters and brother-in-laws.

When Eva is displeased about their life choices, she provides lengthy lectures that end up hurting the recipient’s feelings. Her character has been known to be verbally abusive to the men she has encountered. In one scene, Eva demands that her and her sisters use the living room for their book club resulting in a dispute between Eva and her brothers-in-law, which Eva easily wins through her sharp language. In another scene, Eva was tough on the restaurant manager after completing her inspection. The manger called Eva uncompromising and having a cold heart due to her aggressive nature and the way she responds to things.

This film describes the sapphire stereotype because Eva's demeanor when interacting with others is portrayed as hostile and nagging. Which makes others want to avoid being around her. While her sisters enjoy being around her, it is typically men that want to avoid her presence. For instance, Eva is a health inspector who goes around to different restaurants making sure there is not anything unsanitary about the restaurants. Eva explains the reasons the restaurant owner failed the inspection which leads the owner to ask Eva to overlook the issues. After her refusal, the owner claims she does not have a heart and claims she is uncompromising. Despite her reasonings for failing the restaurant being justified, she is still portrayed as being in the wrong because she used a harsh and chiding tone with the male business owner.

Other successful women were also placed in the Sapphire role. In the film *Think Like a Man*, the character Lauren is described as controlling by those around her such as her friend Candace. Lauren meets with her best friend Candace for lunch and discusses the issues with finding a man. Lauren believes there is nothing wrong with being successful and independent. Despite not having anger, Lauren's independent nature allows her to emasculate men for being less successful than her. At dinner with Candace, Lauren considers breaking up with Dominic because he is less successful than her and complains about his lifestyle. Lauren believes that Dominic should be further ahead in life instead of just working as a waiter trying to pursue his dreams. which does not match to her expectation of men. This relates to the Sapphire stereotype because Lauren is shown as emasculating men based on the kind of career they have. Although Lauren believes Dominic should be further in his career, she is quick to critique his career aspirations and judge him for not making enough money.

Examples of the Mammy

There were very few examples of the Mammy stereotype in these contemporary romantic comedies. This may be because most of the focus of these films is on the younger, more conventionally attractive couples in the film. There was one example of The Mammy, but, again, her portrayal is more complex than her original introduction in the film. The Mammy image portrayed Black women as being happy to provide domestic service to others. She is also motherly, loyal and self-sacrificing to the people she takes care of (Reynolds-Dobbs et al. 2008; West 1995). In *Love and Basketball*, Camille Wright, the mother of Monica Wright, one of the main characters, is presented as the mammy stereotype. Throughout the film, Camille Wright is depicted as the perfect housewife that cooks, cleans and takes care of her family without any complaints. Later in the movie, Camille Wright mentions that any dreams she had were put on hold in order to take care of her family. Despite not being dark skinned and overweight, Camille Wright represents the mammy stereotype thorough her characteristics. She was loyal to her family, willing to put their needs before her own. However, Camille also represents a subversion of this stereotype because she acknowledges regrets about putting others' dreams ahead of her own. Such reflection and candor were rare among earlier examples of The Mammy role and suggests that more recent filmmakers may be willing to gently critique the concept of the Black woman who must always sacrifice for others to her own detriment.

Colorism

According to the literature, colorism is a type of discrimination that privileges lighter skinned Black people over darker skinned Black people (Brown et al. 2021; Hunter 2002). The media helps to contribute to colorism by portraying light skin Black women as the preferred

choice when it comes to casting Black women on television and in film (Norwood 2015).

The stereotype of colorism was displayed in 6 of 12 films viewed. In relation to the literature, colorism was shown as light skin Black women being the preferred choice. Five of the films (*Best Man*, *The Wood*, *Love and Basketball*, *Brown Sugar*, *Jumping the Broom* and *Baggage Claim*) depicted relationships among Black people as the woman having a lighter complexion and the man having a darker complexion. The films showed that while Black women were receiving representation, not all Black women were represented in these films. In two films (*The Best Man* and *Just Wright*), there was a comparison between how lighter skin Black women were viewed versus how darker skin Black women were viewed. In *Just Wright*, Leslie Wright's cousin Morgan was presented as a light skinned beautiful woman who gets any guy she wants. While on the other hand, Leslie has a darker complexion and has trouble finding a date throughout the movie because she is not considered what Black men typically desire. In *The Best Man*, the men's discussion of Shelby and Jordan, two Black female characters, differs when discussing relationships. Shelby is a light skinned Black woman who has a controlling nature when it comes to dealing with her boyfriend, Julian. Jordan, a dark-skinned female character was discussed as someone who would probably never get a man because of her independent nature. While the men point out how controlling Shelby is to her boyfriend Julian, there is never any discussion about whether she can keep a man unlike with Jordan. Jordan being darker skinned allows her inability to find a relationship to be critiqued as opposed to Shelby a light skin Black woman whose only issue is her controlling nature. While there were few instances of colorism displayed in these films, these instances highlight the barrier Black women face in relationships because they are depicted in an unfavorable light that gives higher value to light skinned romantic partners than those with darker skin, even if those with lighter skin are also presented

as being less professional successful and with fewer social graces.

Over time, Black women's depiction changed when they were in romantic comedies. Black women in 6 out of 12 films shifted from light skin depictions of Black women to more depictions of darker skin Black women. The lead women characters in these films had darker complexions and proved they were able to find love. These films changed the representation of Black women in romantic comedies by allowing Black women of all shades to eventually be represented in the media.

Desire for companionship but always facing obstacles

According to Hefner (2019) and Hellerman (2022), romantic comedies have the ability to focus on dating and marriage with the goal of having a happy ending. Examples of a happy ending often involved displays of affection that showed love from both the male and women characters. These films allowed displays of love to be portrayed from the perspective of Black people.

The Desire for a Relationship

In these films, a major plot is that the women were depicted as desiring a relationship with the right man. In some of the films, this was presented as a problem because some of the women were expected to change who they are to get the right man. In *Love and Basketball* and *Just Wright*, Monica (*Love and Basketball*) and Leslie (*Just Wright*) are presented as tomboyish women who go against the typical ideal of what a woman should look like to get a man. Their attire is usually sporty because they are both sports fans. Although they do not find anything wrong with their attire, others around them view it as a problem. Monica's mom desires for her

to grow out of the tomboy phase and present herself as more ladylike. Similarly, Leslie's mom asks, "how will she get a man dressed like that?" when she sees Leslie's attire for a basketball game. Despite eventually finding love by being themselves, appearing more feminine was a belief that was instilled by those around the main characters, suggesting that these Black women must assert their femininity, even if it means changing themselves and their preferences, to be romantically successful.

The desire for a relationship and the challenges this presents allows these Black women to confide in those closest to them about what to do about their dating dilemmas. In 4 of the 12 films, Black women confided with trusted people on how to handle their relationships. In *The Brothers* and *Just Wright*, parental figures act as guides in reassuring the women to not give up on finding love. In *Just Wright*, Leslie's dad asks about the birthday celebration for Scott McKnight that Leslie and her cousin Morgan went to. Leslie's dad assumes that Leslie got the guy, but she had to inform him that Scott "saw Morgan and forgot I was even there...but hey I'm used to it, I mean hey why wouldn't he, she is beautiful." Leslie's dad reminds her that she is just as beautiful and that the right one will come at the appropriate time after seeing her give up hope. In *The Brothers*, Denise is uncertain if Jackson really loves her. These concerns lead to a sit-down conversation with Jackson's mom and Denise's friends. All the women encourage Denise to tell Jackson how she really feels by being direct with him. Denise's uncertainty is resolved when Jackson's mom tells her to "be fearless with my son, don't be timid with love." Jackson's mom in *The Brothers* uses her years of experience to guide other women in relationship troubles throughout the film.

Another character who receives advice from a parent is Ali. In *What Men Want*, Ali confides in her dad after her actions create problems in her relationship with Will. Her dad

reminds her: “You know there are things we probably need to learn. When to lower our fists. There’s so many beautiful things that we don’t see because our hands are in front of our face.” This scene with Ali and her dad reminds Ali to not give up on love and that there is still time to make things right.

In each of these examples, Black women are expected to go through significant change in order to win a romantic partner. They are asked to change their clothing, mannerisms, and ways of interacting in order to be considered an acceptable partner. These decisions to change do not always come from the main character, and there are often numerous side characters advocating for the women to change. Rarely is the same level of change required from the male characters. This pattern suggests that Black women must be willing to change key parts of themselves in their quest to find a romantic partner.

Self-Acceptance and Love

In the previous section, I discussed how many films included plots where Black women had to change significant parts of themselves in order to “earn” love. However, there were some films that went against this trope. In some instance, Black women in the films I analyzed learned to accept who they are in order to be in a relationship. An example of this occurred in the film *Baggage Claim*, where Montana came to the realization that she does not need a man to live a fulfilling life. In the wedding rehearsal dinner scene, Montana gives a speech about not needing a man to feel happy.

Additionally, while the stereotypes of Black women (Jezebel and Sapphire) were presented as character flaws that prevented the women in the films from receiving the love that they desire, some films showed this lack of romance was not permanent. In *Think like a Man*,

Deliver us from Eva, and *Love and Basketball*, the women were depicted as never finding love due to their aggressive and independent nature. Ultimately, as the movies progressed, these characters proved that, despite the stereotypical box they have been placed in, they were still able to find love. In *Deliver us from Eva*, Ray who is the love interest of Eva in the film, follows Eva to her new job in a different city to confess his love for her on a horse:

Ray: Quit my job, sold my house and bought him.

Eva: You Shouldn't have. I can't be bought.

Ray: Got him a home and stable just outside of town. It's paid up to a year.

Eva: Are you even listening to me?

Ray: Yes. Now you listen to me. You said love is a choice. Well, I love you. And I'm not leaving. I'm gonna show up at your job every day. I'm gonna send you gifts and tell you I'm sorry until you understand that I will not live without you. Or until you call the cops on me, but even that won't stop me.

Eva is shown to be in love with Ray as well by smiling at him the whole time he is confessing his love to her. Ray is depicted as the right person that allowed Eva was able to find love despite having the stereotypical image of the Sapphire. Another example of addressing barriers occurs in *Think Like a Man* towards the end of the film. Lauren goes to Dominic's new restaurant to reconcile with him. She is finally able to admit that their differences are a good thing and that she needs someone who makes her feel special. This scene shows Lauren's growth because in the beginning of the movie Lauren was portrayed as dominant and criticized men for not having certain qualifications, such as making six figures and judging their job choices. Reconciling with Dominic at the end allowed Lauren to change her standards a little bit in order to avoid losing a good man.

VI. DISCUSSION

Per Alzahrani (2016), media has the power to influence how people view the world. Black women in particular are often underrepresented in the media. When they are represented, it usually involves stereotypical roles. Of the 12 films I analyzed, there was a consistency showing how Black women viewed love and relationships over time. I found that the desire for love was important to women within these films. This desire for love was often hindered by different barriers that could negatively impact the way Black women see love. For instance, the films connected to previous literature in the way relationships were displayed in Black romantic comedies.

According to Tindall (2012), Black relationships were able to be displayed through Black romantic comedies and provide representation for the Black community in regard to love. These films also provided mixed messages about the view of dating and relationships in the Black community because Black women were portrayed as independent and undesirable along with providing positive depictions about relationships. I found that Black women were sometimes portrayed in ways that fit society's viewpoint of Black women through stereotypes. The stereotypes such as the Jezebel and Sapphire were depicted as character flaws making Black women undeserving of love. Shelby's controlling nature in *The Best Man*, as well as Eva's (*Deliver us from Eva*), Lauren's (*Think Like a Man*) and Jordan's (*The best Man*) independent natures made them appear to be undesirable to men as their attitudes would scare men off. In *The Brothers*, Brian refers to Black women as evil and bitter and complains about Black women "bringing drama." His reasons for refusing to be in a relationship with a Black woman are stereotypical leading him to refer to Black women as having: "fake hair, baby fathers, the excess

weight. It's like they're giving out government cheese sandwiches with fake hair and babies.”

This example contributed to the reasons Black women remain single because they were presented as undesirable.

The findings in this study connect to Social Cognitive theory because viewers are able to view these depictions of Black relationships and compare it to their own life. Additionally, Social Cognitive Theory allows Black viewers to see themselves in the media to determine if that is how they should act. These films could inform a blueprint of how Black women may believe they should act in order to achieve a romantic relationship. Some of the ideas that audience members could perceive is that Black women must change themselves to be more feminine and less threatening to men if they wished for a partner.

While this may suggest negative impacts from the depictions of Black women in romantic comedies, there could be positives from these portrayals. Black Feminist Thought helps to validate the experiences of Black women (Stephens and Phillips 2005). This validation allows the stories of Black women to not continue to be suppressed and deemed as worthless (Belkhir 2015). According to Collins (1990), placing Black women's experiences at the center of discussion provides new insights on prevailing concepts, paradigms and epistemologies of this worldview. While the insight on dating has existed in romantic comedies, Black romantic comedies and Black Feminist Thought provided a different perspective because it showed how Black women viewed relationships and interactions with others. In relation to Black Feminist Thought, the films gave Black women the opportunity to explain their stories about love. According to the literature, relationships seemed impossible for Black women. But these films proved that it was possible for Black Women to fall in love.

This study supports Black Feminist Thought because it allows the stories of Black

women to be at the center. Although some of the films depicted negative images, the films allowed Black women to redefine what Black love looks like to them and overcome the obstacles that might hinder them. Redefining Black love for women involved portraying them as the prize and the one to be desired in the end. For instance, in *The Best Man*, Harper confesses his love for Robyn and proposes to her. In *The Brothers*, Jackson admits that Denise was right when she stated "I'm gonna make you love me." Jackson admits where he went wrong and realizes Denise is the one for him. In *Brown Sugar*, Dre admits his feelings for Sidney and goes to the studio to tell her in person. In *Just Wright*, Scott McKnight confesses his love for Leslie after he realizes she's the one for him while answering an interview question on what motivates him. All of these films allowed Black women to change the way they are perceived when it comes to relationships. Instead of being the least desirable or being unable to find a relationship, the films proved that Black women could have a chance at love too.

According to Simmons et al. (2021), the shortage of available Black men prevents many Black women from finding love despite the desire to be in a relationship. Although the reasons for being single did not involve the incarceration rates that was mentioned in the literature for reasons that Black Women have difficulty dating, there were other reasons with the selected films that contributed to singleness. For instance, In *Just Wright*, Leslie's difficulty in finding love was that she was not the typical woman men go for. In *Baggage Claim*, Montana also has difficulty finding the right guy which leads her to give up hope after trying to find a man in thirty days. In relation to marriage, Marks et al. (2008) found that marriage among Black people was still desired despite declining marriage rates. The films relate to the literature review on marriage because the desire to marry remained even with the obstacles the characters faced. For example, in *The Wood*, *Jumping the Broom*, and *Think Like a Man Too*, there was an uncertainty of

whether getting married was the right decision due to nerves (*The Wood*), controlling family members (*Jumping the Broom*), and failed wedding plans (*Think like a Man Too*). The films supported the literature because they proved that Black marriages could survive by relying on each other in hard times.

VII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to analyze how Black women are portrayed in romantic comedies. It's main focus was what stereotypical portrayals, if any, existed in these films. Using a content analysis of Black romantic comedies, this study showed that the portrayals of Black women in romantic comedies consistently involved barriers that Black women learned to overcome in order to find love. The stereotypes identified in the literature (Mammy, Jezebel and Sapphire) along with colorism impact Black women's desire for a relationship. Conquering these barriers allowed the Black women to achieve the companionship they desire.

Some limitations to this research involve not considering the Black male perspective of relationships. Considering the black male perspective could be beneficial in seeing the similarities and differences between black men and women when discussing relationships. Also, using white romantic films could have been implemented to compare them to Black romantic films. Using white romantic films could have been useful to determine if things such as the expectation to change was a racial component or if it impacted all women. This study also has a small sample size, and it cannot determine how the audience is interpreting the material. A future research design could include genders from different races to determine if romantic films impact them at all. Also, a future study could compare Black viewers across different generations to see if romantic comedies have any impact on the way generations view relationships.

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