

**Awkward Black girls and postfeminist possibilities: representing millennial Black women on television in *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure***

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Taking the television depiction of ‘millennial’ Black women as its focus, this article examines how such on-screen identities are crafted via issues of race, gender, sexuality and feminism. It responds to claims that ‘Awkward black girls are finally having their moment on TV’ (Modhin, 2017: n.p.), in addition to calls for studies of ‘the colour’ (Walser, 2015) of postfeminism, which ‘expand the notion beyond a focus upon young, white, middle-class, heterosexual western women’ (Gill, 2017: 609–610). This work explores how Black feminist and postfeminist media sentiments push against each other in ways that may indicate a form of Black postfeminist television.

This article considers the extent to which UK E4 sitcom *Chewing Gum* (2015–present) and US HBO (Home Box Office) comedy-drama *Insecure* (2016–present), speak to the rise of television which has prompted questions including: ‘Are we seeing Black feminism on prime time TV?’ (Hallman, 2015). More specifically, this work is guided by the following question: How are ‘millennial’ Black women represented in *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure*, and in what ways is feminist media discourse implicated in this? As such, this article is part of an expanding body of media and online studies located within Black feminist parameters (Gabriel, 2016; Opoku-Mensah, 2010;

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Williams and Gonlin, 2017), yet in ways which explore tensions and potential overlaps between the notions of postfeminist and Black feminist media texts.

The discussion that follows is led by an overview of key elements of postfeminism and Black feminism, as well as an outline of the article's methodological foundations. This sets up the subsequent analysis of representations in *Chewing Gum*, *Insecure*, as well as the related online web-series *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl* (2011–2013). Drawing on my broader research about the media experiences of Black women in Britain (Author, 2017), there is reference to interview excerpts which are attributed to participants' self-selected pseudonyms.

### **Black Feminism, Postfeminism and Media**

Black feminism and postfeminism are commonly treated as being irreconcilably different; with Black feminism explicitly addressing the interdependency of racism, sexism, classism and other systems of oppression (Bobo, 1995; Crenshaw, 2017), and postfeminism often being associated with a superficial level of engagement with such issues (Butler, 2013). Moreover, postfeminism is commonly linked with the idea that women have achieved equality, which contrasts with Black feminism's emphasis on intersecting inequalities.

A hallmark of postfeminism is its connection to neoliberalism (Gill, 2016; Negra, 2007), which upholds individualistic notions of agency, choice and socio-

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economic self-empowerment, in contrast with Black feminist critiques of capitalism and the pervasiveness of oppression (Bobo, 2001; Davies, 1981). Theorising postfeminism in this contemporary context necessitates in-depth discussion of related contradictions, including postfeminism's (dis)connection to, and from, intersectional feminist politics. Although friction is involved in the co-existence of postfeminist and Black feminist sentiments in media and popular culture, there are also times when such feminist ideologies may overlap, or at least, appear to do so.

Since its inception, postfeminism remains an analytical category that is highly relevant to media studies (Gill, 2016). However, it has evolved in ways that require scrutiny, including as part of consideration of how postfeminist sensibilities may manifest in television depictions of Black women. The shows that are scrutinised in this article offer 'a detailed examination of representational discourse through the constant presence of black characters' (Andrews, 2017: 111), and through inspection of how gender and feminist discourse is entangled with this.

## **Methodology**

This article is based on a critical discursive analysis of aspects of the two series of *Chewing Gum* (12 episodes), and the three seasons of *Insecure* (24 episodes). Given that the web-series *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl* was the online show that *Insecure* developed from, all 25 episodes of this were also studied. In addition, online

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articles and commentary surrounding the shows was sourced by searching terms such as ‘Insecure Black women’ and ‘Chewing Gum Black women’, as a means of reflecting on the cultural significance of these shows in relation to Black women’s media representation. Analysis was informed by extant literature on postfeminism, Black feminism and feminist media texts, as well as prior research regarding the encoding and decoding of media messages (Hall, 1973).

As Gill (2007) notes, one of the shortcomings of textual analysis is its limited potential to yield insight concerning how audiences interpret different texts. Further still, Analysis of on-screen images of Black women and ‘their negotiated reception’ (Bobo, 1995: 5) of such media, can enrich our understanding of contemporary depictions of Black women and mediated constructions of feminism. My research about the media experiences of Black women in Britain (Author, 2017) involved conducting and interpretively analysing 23 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with individuals aged 19–47 years-old. Amongst topics that arose were interview participants’ perceptions of *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure*. Thus, combining these with close examination of the media depictions under review, contributes to a robust analysis of the [trans]forming representation of Black women on television, and their feminist characteristics.

The word ‘millennial’ is incorporated into this article to emphasise nuances of on-screen depictions of Black women, who reached young adulthood at a point in time

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entangled with the early twenty-first century ascension of digital media. To put it briefly, the age of the Black women at the centre of *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure*, as well as the interview participants referenced, means that they have grown up amidst a media landscape punctuated by online content; which distinctly influences current mediated feminist constructions and on-screen images of Black women.

### **The [Trans]forming Representation of Black Women on Television**

The gender and racial politics of television has been the focus of rigorous research, including studies of ‘colourblind’ casting and ‘crossover’ audiences (Warner, 2015; 2016). Continued ‘analysis of the representation of gendered identities’ (Thompson, 2015: 21) requires reflection on producers, actors and spectators (Williams and Gonlin, 2017) who remain often under-represented; including young Black women. After all, mediated gender constructs are ‘always already classed, racialised’ (Gill, 2017: 606) and take shape via a matrix of intersecting oppressive structures and relations (Crenshaw, 2017).

Television images ‘are rooted in cinematic representations which in turn, can be traced back through the history of black-white relations’ (Ross, 1992: 10). Although television has evolved over the last several decades, since the release of early filmic images, stereotypical portrayals of Black women have unrelentingly proliferated. The vehicles through which these are transmitted may have changed with the advent of television and social media, yet many discriminatory ideas have stayed the same. This

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includes Black women being objectified and framed in hypersexualised, ‘sassy’ and ‘aggressive’ ways (Boylorn, 2008; Cooper, 2018; Freydborg, 1995), particularly when they are dark-skinned.

Referring to the representation of Black women on television as ‘[trans]forming’, captures the ongoing process by which they are gaining representation, both in terms of the frequency and complexity with which they are portrayed in leading roles. In contrast to the leading character of Tracey in *Chewing Gum*, who comes from a working-class background and lives with her mother and sister in public housing in England, the leading character of Issa in *Insecure* lives a more middle-class and financially independent life. That both shows represent ‘millennial’ Black women with different classed experiences, is indicative of how the range of television representations of Black women has broadened.

My decision to focus on *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure* in this article is based on their high-profile and continued cultural commentary that makes comparisons between the two shows (Mohdin, 2017). That said, when referring to these television texts as examples of the representation of ‘millennial’ Black women, such claims are made with an awareness of how these shows are rooted in a US and UK context; which cannot encompass the breadth of experiences of Black women across the globe.

### *Chewing Gum and Insecure*

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The work of Michaela Coel – who created and stars in the critically-acclaimed show *Chewing Gum*, and Issa Rae – who created and stars in Emmy Award-nominated *Insecure*, undeniably foregrounds Black women. The sense of control that both have maintained in relation to their on-screen creations has also ensured the significant role of other Black cast and staff members. The fact that it was by writing roles for themselves that such Black women’s work gained traction, reflects how the television industry rarely provides opportunities for Black women to play leading roles, without their significant involvement in the direction and production process.

While *Chewing Gum* started out on the stage as a play by Michaela Coel, *Insecure* began life as *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl* – a web-series that was yet to attract mainstream attention but which strongly resonated with Black women. The success of *Insecure* is proof of how digital spaces are being engaged with by young Black women in ways that can facilitate their media production efforts, their self-representation, and their potential entry into the television industry. This is not to suggest that the rise of individuals such as Issa Rae is commonplace, but her notable achievements – including being nominated for a Golden Globe Award twice, signal how some Black women are traversing the television industry in ways fuelled by their online content-production, rather than relying on a system of industry networking.

Myriad articles about *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl* position its significance in relation to its role in a blossoming body of television which altered ‘a

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decade of Hollywood barely giving black women a chance to create their own series, particularly darker-skinned women with natural hair and an explicitly black feminist perspective on the world' (Christian, 2018: n.p.). Headlines which reiterate this include: 'Issa Rae: African Americans must "reclaim" their stories' (Hallman, 2015) and 'the rise of the awkward black girl' (Modhin, 2017). Both *Insecure* and *Chewing Gum* focus on the humorous discomfort of everyday interactions that the leading characters are involved in. As will be further outlined, many of these on-screen moments involve implicit and explicit references to issues regarding race, gender and sexuality.

### **Black Women's Awkward [Sex and Love] Lives in *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure***

Storylines in *Chewing Gum* involve focusing on the sexual awakening of the show's main character – twenty-something year-old Tracey, who was raised in an evangelical Christian home and becomes determined to lose her virginity. It is not long into *Chewing Gum* (2015: 1: 1) that the audience is introduced to Tracey's current devout Christian boyfriend, who rebuffs even the most minor of her sexual advances. When speaking about *Chewing Gum* to an interview participant named Ola who is 19 years-old, her remarks signposted the scarcity of television images of young Christian Black women, and the importance to her of Tracey's character:

The trailer [for *Chewing Gum*] looked funny...yeah cause I'm a Christian as

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well and it's kind of based on like...being a Christian and kind of you know...I guess, the struggles [laughs] of being a Christian... so I thought it was something that I could relate to.

Linked online articles about the show include 'In "Chewing Gum," Tracey Is The Quirkiest And Freest Character On TV'. In such a piece, Nsiah-Buadi (2017: n.p.) passionately comments on what Tracey symbolises:

I don't just love her because we're both British-born Africans. Or that, like her, I lived in public housing for part of my childhood, or that we both have dirty laughs. I love her because she, mostly, succeeds in breaking free from what society and her faith have told her she should be and how she should act.

*Chewing Gum* challenges deep-rooted stereotypes that have doggedly tailed the depiction of Black women on-screen, including portrayals of them as being both undesirable and undesiring. It depicts the words, wants and world-view of Tracey, who even addresses the audience directly in a similar vein to a confessional YouTuber, and whose sexual desires are far from being a plot footnote.

The character of Tracey in *Chewing Gum* is a significant one in terms of present-day portrayals of Black 'millennial' women on-screen. This is further evidenced by the

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perspective of Black women such as Okra, who is 33 years-old. Okra's comments stress how the symbolic value of the show includes its foregrounding of dark-skinned Black women, along with how it addresses issues of faith and sexuality:

Michaela Coel...she's Black-skinned and I think that matters at this specific moment in time, in terms of how colourism works against dark-skinned Black women but also what she talks about. I like her artistic vision. I like her lack of...apparent lack of fear. I like that. I like that she has taken those chances at this point because I remember being her age and wanting to take chances and the fear and all the shit that's wrapped up in it and I'm so proud that she's taken those chances and it's working out...that show is ridiculously funny. It's so good and my husband keeps saying 'oh my god that's you that's *you*' [laughs] but yeah, and I like the subject matter...specifically cause she's of African ancestry and she's young and at this time to reject god and shove sex in the elders' face is so brave and required. When I say it's required, I cannot express to you how necessary it is to start thinking critically about religion and the impact that's having on social development, so for someone to talk about that while addressing the shit that we deal with as 'the other' in Britain, especially at that point in life when you're trying to explore your sexuality and you *are* 'the other'...is great.

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Colourism – which involves the social privileging of light-skinned Black and brown people, particularly women, continues to plague the television representation of Black women. The work of Pafford and Matusitz (2017) confirms that colourism is an issue that affects the representation of different women of colour on television, including the depiction of a dark-skinned woman of Indian descent in ABC’s (The American Broadcasting Channel) show *Quantico* (2015–present). However, detailed discussions of colourism continue to be overlooked as part of surface-level praise of the [trans]forming television depiction of Black women. Assessments of the extent to which ‘millennial’ Black women are made visible on television, must be nuanced in their acknowledgment of which Black women are (not) represented.

One of the components of *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure* which contributes to how they have changed the representation of ‘millennial’ Black women on TV, is that the leading characters are darker-skinned Black women; whose on-screen visibility is ordinarily the worst affected by the intersections of sexism and racism amidst the media industry and beyond (Dash, 2016). More than this, the leading characters in both shows are not portrayed as simply being the fetishised object of another’s lust, nor as being desexualised themselves. Instead, potentially Black feminist aspects of *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure* relate to how they steer clear of conjuring up hypersexualised stereotypes

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or the matronly and subservient longstanding ‘Mammy’ trope, which stems from the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

Another point of view is offered by an interview participant named Lisa, who is 19 years-old. Despite not being a fan of *Chewing Gum*, Lisa still had a strong appreciation of how it is altering the television representation of young Black women:

Michaela Coel’s *Chewing Gum*...I personally don’t really like the style of humour as it’s always very crude, but at the same time...because her character can be like that...*can* be very crude and have those slapstick moments...it’s important. You just don’t...I’ve never seen a Black woman lead be *allowed* to be just so...crude in the same way that white guys are allowed to pretty much on the regular, so it was really great to see those sorts of characters.

Of course, it would be an overgeneralisation to suggest that all young Black women relate to the images available to them in *Chewing Gum*. However, the words of interview participants quoted in this article, suggest such that such TV is a resource through which some Black women may reflect on their own lives and the challenges that they face. Lisa’s comments highlight the potentially Black feminist characteristics of images of ‘millennial’ Black women in *Chewing Gum*, include their disruption of expectations of how Black women are ‘allowed’ to be portrayed on television. This is

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echoed by Newman-Bremang's (2017) Elle magazine interview with Michaela Coel, during which Coel said:

I wasn't really trying to make an awkward person, I was trying to make someone who was unfiltered by the norms and expectations popular culture puts on people, especially black women.

*Chewing Gum* is far from being shy in its approach to exploring issues of female sexual pleasure, including when featuring the lead character of Tracey in a comical storyline concerning sex toys. Similarly, *Insecure* addresses the concerns of the character of Issa, who we learn is dissatisfied in her relationship with her boyfriend – Lawrence. In the season two trailer for *Insecure* Issa exclaims: 'Girl, I always wanted to have a "ho" phase' (*Insecure*, 2017: 2: 3). In the season one trailer (*Insecure*, 2016: 1: 4), Issa is seen stood in front of a mirror in a public bathroom. She clutches what appears to be a champagne flute when speaking to the reflection of a topless athletic Black man, who the show's audience come to know as Daniel:

Issa: What are you doing here?

Daniel: I don't know. It's your fantasy. I've always been your 'what if guy'.

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Scenes in *Insecure*, such as this bathroom one, place Issa's pursuit of pleasure at the forefront of the show. *Insecure*'s unashamed emphasis on Black women's lives and relationships, including their sexual ones, is partly why it has been held up as revolutionising how 'millennial' Black women are depicted on primetime television.

While Tracey's sex life in *Chewing Gum* is the root of comedic content throughout the show, the awkward encounters that she finds herself in feature a refreshing meditation on the particularities of the lives of some young Black women. One case in point is a scene which involves Tracey's soon-to-be new boyfriend – Connor. He attempts to make conversation with her by saying that he has seen her working in a local shop where she wears a hat, before his flustered attempt at rewording the following comment (*Chewing Gum*, 2015: 1: 1):

Connor: ...you sort of look like a maid...like a modern liberated slave sort of thing...nah that doesn't...em...when you wear the hat...I like...you're not my maid...I like you...

Tracey raises her eyebrows, widens her eyes and snickers in response to Connor, who edges closer to her, as cheerful music starts to play. This brief exchange in which Tracey finds herself on the receiving end of racially-coded 'flirting', is a light-hearted

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one, which includes the awkwardness of her trying to move past Connor to enter her flat.

Another uncomfortable dating encounter of Tracey's involves a white man continuing to question where she is from, when he is dissatisfied with her initial reply: 'London' (*Chewing Gum*, 2017: 2: 2). Despite reflecting the show's humorous and feel-good tone, the momentary awkwardness of these on-screen conversations touches on some of the complexities of the love and sex lives of Black women; in ways which resist postfeminist universalist notions of women's experiences. One of the key themes that is highlighted in *Chewing Gum* is how the dating lives of Black women may be tinged with both racialised and hypersexualised perceptions of them. Nevertheless, it is the emphasis on Tracey's point of view and the uneasiness of these interactions, which means that the show avoids simply reinforcing exoticised stereotypes, and moves closer to an arguably Black feminist framing.

Contrastingly to Tracey's interracial relationship in series one of *Chewing Gum*, in an episode of *Insecure* (2017: 2: 4), Issa starts to argue with her Black boyfriend in a shop. When doing so, the following line is said:

Issa: We are not about to be the Black couple fighting in Rite Aid.

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Both the scene between Connor and Tracey in *Chewing Gum*, and the one between Issa and her boyfriend Lawrence in *Insecure*, reflect different racialised stereotypes that young Black women may anticipate as part of their dating and sex lives; the fetishisation of their Black womanhood in *Chewing Gum*'s case, and perceptions of Black couples as being loud and argumentative, which is implied in *Insecure*. The slightly different genres of *Chewing Gum* (comedy) and *Insecure* (comedy-drama) impact the shape of the humour on the screen, as do cultural differences regarding Black British and Black American experiences. However, one of the key commonalities that puts these shows in conversation, is their representation of Black women exploring their sexual desires, and on their own terms.

Although neither Tracey or Issa appear to be completely defined by a quest for romance, this is still gestured to quite consistently throughout both shows. As Thompson (2015) attests, although men's pursuit of heterosexual coupledness is increasingly outlined on TV as being an imperative, it is the singlehood of women that is the subject of most scrutiny. Critics including Kai (2016: n.p.) suggest that *Insecure* may even be interpreted by some as 'casting singlehood as the worst-possible outcome'. Moreover, *Insecure* primarily focuses on both heterosexual coupledness and singlehood, in ways which result in any feminist qualities of its being decidedly heteronormative in nature. While the show, to some extent, pushes against the scarce visibility of mediated Black feminist sensibilities, it does little to challenge unevenness between the hyper-

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visibility of heterosexual feminist media discourse, in contrast with lesbian, bisexual, queer and asexual feminist sensibilities on-screen.

The normativity of heterosexual coupledness in *Insecure* can be identified as being more of a postfeminist than Black feminist trait. This is especially the case given the implicitness of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) within much postfeminist discourse, versus the rich contributions of queer and lesbian Black women which has mobilised Black feminist thought (The Combahee River Collective, 1986). While there are similarities between Tracey in *Chewing Gum* and Issa in *Insecure*, as will be discussed, despite both pursuing sexual and romantic relationships in various ways, a stronger emphasis on postfeminist notions of self-transformation is evident in *Insecure*.

### **‘I’m now Miss give all the fucks...I think I like who I’m becoming’: Black Postfeminist Television?**

*Insecure* has been spotlighted as having facilitated complex depictions of young Black women which are often lacking from television. Amongst online articles which affirm this are ‘Issa Rae’s ‘Insecure’ Puts the Narrative of Black Women Back in Our Hands (Premiers This Weekend)’ (Tinubu, 2017) and ‘Intersectional Feminism in Prime Time’ (Bratby-Rudd, 2017). Comparisons between *Insecure* and seemingly postfeminist media texts, include those made as part of the article ‘Is Insecure Preying on Black Women’s Insecurities’, in which Kai (2016: n.p.) writes: ‘In lieu of representation on prior HBO

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hits like *Sex and the City* and *Girls*, *Insecure* is a long-awaited breakthrough—albeit one that occasionally feels like *Girls* in sepia’. Distinctly heteronormative undertones of *Insecure* have been subject to criticism, and Kai (2016) queries the extent to which *Insecure* tackles stereotypical ideas about Black women as being lonely and loveless.

Alternatively, *Insecure* may be interpreted as depicting ‘millennial’ Black women in sexually empowering ways, including due to focusing on Issa’s discontent with her current relationship in season one and her quest for a more sexually satisfying life. Nevertheless, as Kai (2016) calls out, the subtext of *Insecure* can also be understood quite differently. *Insecure* follows Issa and the aspirational lives of her friends in Los Angeles. It offers images, that are at times, conducive with the gendered neoliberal logics that can bolster the postfeminist notion that ‘if confidence is the new sexy, then insecurity is undoubtedly the new ugly – at least when it presents in women’ (Gill, 2016: 619).

The trailer for season one of *Insecure* makes use of a range of visual and verbal cues which indicate the socio-cultural capital and relative wealth of the characters at its core, while also alluding to their self-deprecation. In one shot (*Insecure*, 2016: 1: 3), a woman compliments Issa’s close friend Molly on her high-heeled Fendi shoes:

Molly: [smiles] I have a problem.

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Issa's comparatively cheap Converse trainers are a source of humour. This involves her repeating the words of Molly: 'I have a problem'. She does so while drawing attention to her Converse, before the woman who complimented Molly comments on how she loves how Issa doesn't seem to 'care'. Throughout the show Issa refers to wanting to be more confident and in the trailer for season two she says: 'I'm done second guessing myself'. I just want to feel good' (*Insecure* 2017: 2: 3). In a season one trailer scene, Issa says the following to Molly while trying on clothes in a changing room (*Insecure*, 2016: 1: 7):

Issa: I don't need to be Miss no fucks...I'm now Miss give all the fucks...I think I like who I'm becoming.

In *Insecure*, Issa undergoes somewhat of a makeover, which is a common occurrence as part of the evolution of television characters, yet which may be read as drawing on commodity practices as part of a sense of Black 'Girl power' postfeminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). As Gill (2007; 2017) and McRobbie (2009) note, the makeover paradigm can be a hallmark of postfeminist media texts; resulting in the implicit message that if you look 'good' you will feel 'good'. The 'I'm becoming' quality of Issa's statement and which is embedded in the arc of the show, is reflective of a 'work-

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in-progress', self-empowerment and self-actualisation mantra, that can underpin postfeminist media discourse.

In contrast to Issa's normalised aesthetic evolution over the course of *Insecure*, Tracy's attempt to appear like Beyoncé in series one of *Chewing Gum*, generates 'tongue-in-cheek' humour and awkward interactions. This results in Tracy quickly returning to how she looked before. In critiquing the role of an aesthetic makeover in *Insecure*, there is the risk of falling into the trap of mistakenly equating a woman's interest in clothes, style and their appearance, with their anti-feminist credentials and maintenance of patriarchy. My analysis of *Insecure* is not intended to infer this. Instead, it is meant to highlight that qualities of potentially postfeminist contemporary media texts, do not simply disappear when the protagonist is a Black woman. This point paves the way to further explore the notion of Black postfeminist media.

Even if *Insecure* can be construed as demonstrating postfeminist ideals, it is still a television text which unapologetically emphasises Black women's perspectives. This is summarised by words spoken by a character in the trailer for season two, who says (*Insecure*, 2017: 2: 2):

I know that as Black women it can feel like there's a lot of things stacked against us. We feel invisible at work. We feel the pressure to have the perfect relationship.

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Black feminist aims, visions and methods are distinctly different to postfeminist perspectives; the latter of which often upholds individualistic notions of self-work and self-transformation in the pursuit of personal and professional desires. The aforementioned quote can be interpreted as implicitly commenting on the intersecting nature of oppression that is ‘stacked against us [Black women]’. However, on-screen insinuations of intersectionality do not neatly result in *Insecure* being a Black feminist media text, but do limit the extent to which it can solely be regarded as being a postfeminist one.

Issa’s friend Molly whose corporate accomplishments are highlighted in *Insecure*, can be reflected on when arguing the case for identifying the show as contributing to an emergent canon of ‘millennial’ twenty-first century Black postfeminist TV, which promotes the impetus to cultivate ‘the “right” kinds of dispositions for surviving in neoliberal society: confidence, resilience and positive mental attitude’ (Gill, 2017: 606). Issa speaks of Molly’s professional popularity amongst both white and Black people (*Insecure*, 2016: 1: 1), which is accompanied by scenes of Molly knowing how to ‘work’ these different crowds.

Without following *Insecure* into its second season, Molly’s enviable career trajectory may seem as though it represents a postfeminist ‘muting—of vocabularies for talking about both structural inequalities and cultural influence’ (Gill, 2016: 613). At

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first glance, Molly's experience may be deemed as symbolising a meritocratic workplace where she has simply 'leaned in' (Sandberg 2013) to the neoliberal notion that success is solely within her individualistic control. However, by season two of *Insecure*, the potential for her plotlines to perpetuate such postfeminist perspectives is problematised, by how Molly is clearly being paid less than her white peers (*Insecure*, 2017: 2: 2). In this case, the associated issues to do with entwined racism and sexism that are raised, are more demonstrative of Black feminist television representations, than postfeminist ones.

Whether or not *Insecure* can be identified as being part of broader Black feminist media projects is up for debate, as is the question of whether or not it should be expected to. Such a show raises additional questions in need of further scrutiny, including: Can television industry equality be found in the ability of Black women to create and star in shows that are not defined by issues concerning racism and sexism? Are the potentially Black feminist credentials of such shows based on how Black women are represented on-screen in them, or in the production process?

## **Conclusions**

By focusing on *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure*, this article sheds light on the awkward, and sometimes, contradictory, intricacies of how issues of gender, race and feminism map onto the representation of 'millennial' Black women on television. Wood's (2015: 39)

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study of *Girls* illuminates how the HBO comedy ‘served as a space to think through the contradictions and challenges of contemporary femininity and women’s place in television’. Comparably, this article outlines how *Chewing Gum* and *Insecure* depict particularities of the experiences of some ‘millennial’ Black women, and contain within them various postfeminist, Black feminist, and even – Black postfeminist television qualities.

Black feminism and postfeminism are not interchangeable ideologies. Nevertheless, media depictions of Black women are not inherently Black feminist in nature, nor are they removed from the possibility of promoting postfeminist ideals. Although famous Black women such as Beyoncé have been the root of conversations concerning neoliberalism, postfeminism and Black women, Black postfeminist visibilities amidst television remain comparatively under-explored. Unpacking tensions between the potentially postfeminist and Black feminist qualities of shows, indicates the need for continued nuanced analysis of the feminist traits of media texts which feature Black women, as well as further theorising of the notion of there being new ideological formations of Black postfeminist media.

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