

**REPRESENTING THE INVISIBLE?  
AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF INCARCERATED WOMEN IN  
NETFLIX'S ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK**

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*Representation of the world,  
like the world itself,  
is the work of men;  
they describe it from their own point of view,  
which they confuse with absolute truth.*

- de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 161

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## ABSTRACT

Criminalized women are becoming more prominent in the prison show genre, outlining the need to examine the possible troublesome portrayals of this often invisible population. This thesis uses intersectionality to conduct a qualitative content analysis to explore themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality in relation to woman characters within the popular series *Orange is the New Black* (*OITNB*). It is found that *OITNB* is a departure from most mass media depictions of criminalized women in the sense that it reflects many of the racial demographic realities of woman penal institutions, while often representing minorities in complex, rather than reductionist manners. *OITNB* addresses issues associated with class structure and inequalities to shed light upon the reality of socioeconomic injustices of the incarcerated to its viewers. *OITNB* also raises questions on hegemonic gendered presentations through displaying atypical gender identities and roles, especially with respect to beautification, motherhood and friendships. Finally, *OITNB* offers an original approach in representing the sexuality of the women by depicting various sexual identities. Through analyzing these characters and themes, this thesis concludes that, although problematic portrayals of incarcerated women are present in the show, *OITNB* displays a departure from past displays of the incarcerated in Anglophone media, showing that film and television are able to portray this population in a humanized, yet entertaining manner.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The rise of mass communication and the rapid growth of technology throughout the past decades have led to the mass consumption of media in Western societies (Cheliotis, 2010). To appeal to large audiences, the media tend to focus on topics that the public is inclined to watch and positively experience. Criminalized conflicts and penal practices have always held a prominent place in media representations (Surette, 2015). The public's understanding and perception of penal policy, proceedings and law enforcement officials are largely understood by their portrayal in the media (Dowler, 2003). As the availability of media outlets increase, the content they disseminate becomes fundamental to the viewers' social and cultural understanding of criminalized harms and the penal system (Dowler, 2003). To explain further, criminalized conflicts and the penal system are represented within all forms of the media, such as news, entertainment, infotainment, and online, leading to the blurring of the lines between fact and fiction (Cavender, Bond-Maupin & Jurik, 1999; Barak, 2012). As such, modern day representations of criminalized conflicts and the criminalized through the main sources of entertainment media, such as prime-time television and Hollywood films, offer images that are full of distortions, inaccuracies and illusions (Yousman, 2009). Brown (2009) argues that these ways of engaging with penalty foster social distance between viewers and the criminalized, which create an acceptability of the necessity of the penal system. Penal spectatorship is a "dominant subjectivity practice" that denies or prohibits building empathy with the incarcerated, who are "state targets in a far more dramatic physical and material way" (Brown, 2009, p.27).

While criminological inquiries on the nature and role of media representations of criminalized harms are extensive, media portrayals of incarcerated women are often neglected (Cecil, 2015). This remains the case despite incarcerated women becoming more apparent in the

prison show genre in the recent years. Criminalized conflicts committed by women are often sexualized and sensationalized in media representations (Cecil, 2007). These portrayals are worrisome as Faith (1993) describes that the gap between knowledge and ignorance is increased when women are wrongfully represented. Some researchers (Cecil, 2015; Bouclin, 2009; Cavender et al., 1999; Cheatwood, 1985; Krajicek, 1998) have examined the portrayal of the criminalized through various types of media. Despite this, media forms that focus on women involved in the penal system have received far less theoretical and critical attention, revealing a growing gap in the literature that needs to be addressed (Cecil, 2007). Therefore, a critical analysis of media representations of criminalized women, who are an already marginalized population, is more important and timely than ever.

This scholarly neglect of representations of incarcerated women mirrors a tendency in criminology to focus on men when examining criminalized conflicts and the penal experience (DeKeseredy, 2009). Feminist criminology has challenged the overall masculine orientation of traditional criminology by arguing that women have different needs and experiences of prison, particularly with regards to histories of victimization, as well as a lack of control and power in their own lives (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013). Contemporary research within this field highlights the neglect of women in the theorizing of criminalized harms, in addition to how sexism is reflected in criminological theory, penal policy and practice (Griffin, 2010).

Overall, many mainstream criminological theories were developed by men, through men's viewpoint and therefore do not reflect a woman's experience (Griffin, 2010). As Naffine (1996) explains, criminology has largely ignored women and was strictly dedicated to men's criminality, thus the theories are male-focused and cannot be deemed generalizable to women. Many feminist criminologist scholars including, Kathleen Daly, Lisa Maher, Meda Chesney-Lind, Kathleen



Ferraro, Lauren Snider and Regina Austin, review the need to study issues related to women within criminology including the patriarchal construction of sexuality and gender within criminal law, criminalized conflicts and state responses to harm. This marks the beginning of a feminist perspective within criminology and the gendered focus on further research pertaining to criminalized harms and the penal system.

The issues above sharpen the focus of this thesis, which is to analyze the media's representations of criminalized women. Specifically, the goal of this research is to address the following research question: *How are criminalized women portrayed within entertainment media?* To work towards answering this question, this research utilizes an intersectional theoretical framework to identify different themes related to the race, class, gender, and sexuality of woman characters within the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black (OITNB)*. The reasoning accompanying this choice is that at this time it is the longest running North American entertainment media series that portrays the experiences of incarcerated women. *OITNB* is disseminated in a context where the women in prison genre often sexualizes incarcerated women, and focuses on lesbianism and sexual relations (Cecil, 2015; Bouclin, 2009). Its extreme popularity also warrants scrutiny to examine whether it produces problematic portrayals of criminalized women. Based on the book by the same title written by Piper Kerman, a former prisoner, it has been said that *OITNB* offers a more flattering and realistic depiction of what life is like for incarcerated women (Pecevich, 2013). Benefiting from such claims of authenticity, it is important to examine the types of representations of criminalized women and incarceration this series puts forth and how these challenge or reproduce hegemonic understandings in a patriarchal, gendered, heteronormative, racist and classist world.

It must be noted that the intention of this thesis is not to examine the direct effects that the mass media has on the audiences' possible attitudes and beliefs toward criminalized women portrayed by media. According to Doyle (2006), much of the public's and academics' focus already centres on the various hypothesized negative influences or effects of crime in the media. Thus, the focus of this thesis is to solely review the nature and extent of these representations to come to a conclusion on the fashion in which incarcerated women are portrayed in *OITNB*. The media is capable of putting forth cultural artifacts that foster solidarity or encourage punitiveness and apathy towards the criminalized (Cheliotis, 2010), therefore, through focusing on incarcerated woman characters, the purpose of this thesis is to offer a description of these representations through *OITNB* and how it constructs incarcerated women.

With the increase of the media's role of using criminalized harms as entertainment, the importance of the interplay between the mass media and the penal system may be greater today than ever before (Surette, 2015). The growth of mass media reflects the idea that its affect is also growing and therefore may inform social and cultural understandings of criminalized harms, women in conflict with the law, and punishment. Although women comprise a very small portion of the total criminalized population, they have become the fastest growing incarcerated population both internationally and in Canada (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014; Public Safety Canada, 2012; The Sentencing Project, 2012). For example, over the last decade, the number of criminalized women, both incarcerated and in the community, increased by 30 percent in Canada (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014). Further, since 2004-2005, the number of women in custody has increased by 66.8 percent (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014). In addition, this trend is particularly pronounced for racialized and visual minority women who are often over-represented within the penal system (The Sentencing Project, 2012). Although there

are wide-ranging drivers of this specific criminalized population growth, such as harsher penal policies, the continued war of drugs and perpetuation of broader inequalities (sexism, racism, classism), a portion of the increase has been attributed to the mass media's portrayals of criminalized conflicts, and penal institutions in contemporary times, which tend to promote an expanded use of incarceration (Eschholz, Mallard, & Flynn, 2003)

This thesis begins with a literature review on the topic of the media, criminalized harms, the criminalized and the penal system. Chapter 2, the literature review, outlines existing research on cultural representations of the criminalized in the mass media with a focus of incarcerated women. In doing so, the scope of the problem is outlined and allows for gaps in the addressed literature to be identified. Chapter 3 outlines feminist theory, socialist feminism and consequently intersectionality, which is used as the theoretical perspective to make sense of representations of criminalized women. Chapter 4 explains the data collection and the content analysis approach used to analyze *OITNB*. Chapter 5 presents the findings and discusses their substantive and theoretical implications. Finally, Chapter 6 reflects upon the significance of my conclusions and proposes suggestions for further research within the field in light of the limitations of this study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Media representations and cultural artifacts are social constructions that symbolize reality, providing broadly shared, common knowledge in society that exists independent of occupation, education and social status (Surette, 2015). Currently, a great majority of individuals in the Western world are an audience member of some form of the media, with television being an especially popular medium. For example, in 2011 approximately 90 percent of Canadian households subscribed to a television distribution service, and Canadians aged two and older viewed television for approximately 28 hours a week (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, 2012). Departing from traditional television, Netflix claims that “over the following decades, Internet TV will replace linear, and [they] hope to keep leading by offering an amazing entertainment experience” (Netflix, 2016). In addition, a survey completed by *Defy Media*, found that although teens and young adults still tune in to television, they watch considerably more videos on YouTube, Netflix and other Internet sources (Spangler, 2016). Due to the increased development of the communications world, the criminal justice system holds a higher visibility through the mass media than ever before (Cheliotis, 2010). With this in mind, the purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the previous research conducted on the portrayal of criminal justice within the media, with an emphasis on criminalized women. There are significant gaps in knowledge about media representations of criminalized women, which then highlights the necessity of this research project.

In terms of past literature of media representations of crime and criminal justice, I will broadly introduce popular aspects of the crime and justice media genre, followed by a description of the modern-day media domains. The ways in which the criminal justice system is portrayed

through different forms of media is examined. To achieve this, I reviewed research conducted on depictions of the criminal justice system, with an emphasis on incarcerated men as this is the population typically focused upon, through the news media (Surette, 2015; Sacco, 1995), infotainment media (Murley, 2008, Surette, 2015; Cavender, et al., 1999), and entertainment media (Alber, 2011; Mayne, 2000; Rafter, 2006; Wlodarz, 2005; Surette, 1998b; Chermak, 1998; Cheliotis, 2010; Winterdyk, 2000; Surette, 2015). From there, literature pertaining to how criminalized and incarcerated women are depicted in various media sources is examined (Bouclin, 2009; Cavender, et al., 1999; Cheatwood, 1985; Krajicek, 1998). Following this, I explore what previous studies on *Orange is the New Black (OITNB)* have addressed and explain how my master's thesis addresses gaps in knowledge related to this series specifically, as well as representations of criminalized and incarcerated women more generally.

### **Institutional Processes of Cultural Meaning Making**

Prior to reviewing past literature, I will provide an informed basis of the epistemological and theoretical foundation guiding this thesis. The theories of social constructionism and cultural criminology are explained, as they helped contextualize the direction of the current thesis. Through outlining the development of criminological research and examination of crime, media, and popular culture, Doyle (2006) highlights the various issues that have emerged through media analyses conducted by criminologists. Doyle (2006) has criticized media effects research based on its over-simplification of human behaviour, methodological insufficiencies and the rejection of agency of social subjects, thus states research conducted on crime and popular culture remains in need of a different direction. Overall, Doyle (2006) ultimately calls for scholars to shift away from trying to map the effects of the media on audiences and instead focus on matters of content and its production. Following this, recent criminological studies of the media have studied a broader set

of social and cultural questions, examining the ways in which representations and narratives about crime, criminality and incarceration shape social understandings and cultural artifacts (Brown, 2011). Thus, this reorientation of criminological inquiry of crime and the media situates itself away from effects research and towards a broader social and cultural analysis of representations. With this new direction, cultural criminology has committed to the analysis of cultural meaning and focused to individuals' situated sense-making and construction of shared cultural artifacts (Hayward, 2010).

### **Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism is concerned with documenting and analyzing the meanings that political, media, cultural, and other institutions create, which (re)produce public order and social control (Barak, 2004). Within criminology, the social constructionist approach investigates how the facts of crime and crime control are produced, and is concerned with the overlooked perspective that theorizes the social meaning of crime and criminal behaviour (Rafter, 2006). As a result, socially constructed attitudes concerning various aspects of criminality will reflect not only a specific subjective point of view, but “include a set of embedded social biases situated within a variety of existing social structures and prejudices that will likely inform that perspective and become foundational to the social knowledge this process ‘reveals’” (Polizzi, 2015, p. 4).

Hayward (2010) explains that scholars need to extend their analysis of depictions of crime to understand the vigorous force and power of visual culture. Hayward (2010) extends this notion to state that we cannot only aim to analyze the connection between media representations and succeeding human behaviours, but we also need to consider “the process of construction and the subsequent processes of production, framing, and interpretations” (p. 14). Similarly, Young (2010) explains that within spectatorship, “looking is never ‘just looking’” (p. 91) as the spectator

is affected by an image, both through itself and the wider world to create sense and meaning. Therefore, analyzing images is not an easy task and it is necessary to steer away from an object-centred approach (Carrabine, 2012). To do so, Young (2010) explains that ‘criminological aesthetics’ is an appropriate model where there is an analysis of both “the images themselves and the relation between the spectator and the image” (p. 83). This implies that the image and the cultural world cannot be distinguished from each other, thus creating cultural artifacts that produce meaning through the spectator’s encounter with them. Thus, this type of analysis emphasizes the interpretation of the generation of meaning, processes of significance, and affect in relation to criminological thought production (Young, 2010).

To expand further, Young (2010) is concerned with the emotional experiences involved in ‘looking’ as she develops principles of visual interpretation that builds upon the affective dimensions of spectatorship. It is through this approach that she examines images of crime and justice as constituting and representing the social world through the powers of affect. Affect can be viewed as how the body connects both with itself and the cultural world, and that connection can range from hesitation to being deeply moved. To ensure that the cultural artifacts are not thought of something capable of impacting individuals (such as the media effects model) it is necessary to ensure the artifact is conceptualized as a point of attachment (Young, 2014). Through spectatorship, the body of the spectator registers sensations relating to what they are seeing without experiencing what is being depicted, thus creating sense or meaning (Young, 2010). Similar to Young, Linfield (2010) stresses the importance of acknowledging the incorporation of “emotion into the experience of looking” as a way for viewers to “allow the suffering of the world to enter into them instead of despising it as abjection” (pp. 30-31). These categories recognize cultural

artifacts as meaningful and also attempt to position them “at the heart of criminological inquiry” (Ferrell et al., 2008, p. 158).

One distinct feature of a social constructionist approach has been introduced under the cultural criminology. This approach may be viewed as an integration of elements from subcultural theory, symbolic interactionism, media theory and critical theory (Ferrell 1999; Ferrell & Websdale 1999). The focus of study is often rooted in the mass media’s construction of crime, but the field also focuses on popular cultural accounts, the association between the criminal justice system and the media and entertainment industries, and the experiences of members of subcultures (Lindgren, 2005). More relevant to the current thesis, studies in social construction have involved the analysis of the representations of class, race, and/or gender (Barak, 2004). Jewkes (2004) states that the media set the news agenda by choosing to public or broadcast certain stories and events over others. To expand, Jewkes (2004) states “...despite often being described as a ‘window on the world’ or a mirror reflecting ‘real life’, the media might be more accurately thought of as a prism, subtly bending and distorting the view of the world it projects” (p. 45). Thus, the media hold the ability to frame stories with a particular tone or narrative style, leading to the meaning attached to them as cultural artifacts.

### **Cultural Criminology**

Although the term ‘culture’ is not easily defined, Edgar and Sedgwick (2008) outline the two most important or general elements of culture as “the ability of human beings to construct and to build, and the ability to use language” (p. 82). This is related to the idea that human beings live in a world that is created by social interactions, while being able to embrace all forms of a ‘sign system’ and find meaning. Criminology has taken a cultural turn through an increase of attention to the image via cultural, popular, and visual criminology (Carrabine, 2012; Hayward, 2010; Young, 2010,



2014). Overall, cultural criminology stresses the significance of meaning and representation in the construction of crime (Ferrell, 1999). Jewkes (2004) believes that cultural criminology has had a significant impact on the ways in which connections between crime, the media and culture are made.

In modern times, the concept of cultural criminology refers to the increasing systematic attention that many criminologists now give to popular culture constructions, especially mass media constructions, of crime and crime control (Ferrell, 1999). Scholars, such as Chermak (1998) and Sanders and Lyon (1995) have recognized that the mass media often relies on criminal justice sources for imagery and information on crime. Through this, cultural criminologists emphasize that the media often present the construction of crime and crime control as social concerns and political controversies, while also displaying them as entertainment. Overall, cultural criminology explores the complex construction and appropriation of meaning that occurs within and between media and political formations, illicit subcultures, and audiences around matters of crime and crime control (Ferrell, 1999, p. 441). In so doing, modern-day scholars agree that mass media serve multiple functions, including the construction and conveyance of social meanings through cultural artifacts (Coleman, 2005). Consequently, crime and crime control can only be understood as an ongoing construction of intertextual image-driven, 'media loops' (Manning, 1998). As such, the next section will examine these cultural artifacts in the fashion in which the media represents crime, the criminalized, and prisons through various domains.

### **Media Representations of Crime, the Criminalized and Prisons**

Currently, individuals are able to consult a wide variety of media in their search for knowledge and entertainment. As each source has a different way of transmitting information, they also send different messages about the penal system (Cecil, 2015). Media sources, such as television series,

news broadcasts, infotainment programs, commentaries, films, reality shows, internet blogs, radio broadcasts, daily tabloids and magazine articles, are just some of the categories of factual and fictional information that are accessible to individuals from their homes (Cheliotis, 2010). From entertainment (e.g. *Law & Order*) to reality (e.g. *Cops*) media, popular culture plays a dominant role in presenting images of the criminal justice system.

Various components of the criminal justice system, for example, policing, courts and prisons, are portrayed both positively and negatively through the media. To highlight this research area's importance, Cecil (2010) outlines the issues of images of jail through her content analysis of televised documentaries and reality-based programs. Through this she states that while the media offers viewers a peek into these closed institutions, distortions exist when jails are depicted on television. She continues to stress that the need to entertain outshines the need to inform, and therefore these cultural artifacts only provide a partial look into prisons. These ideas, coupled with the aforementioned ideas of cultural criminology, stress the importance of examining cultural artifacts pertaining to the crime and justice genre, as they convey dominant cultural knowledge of how prisons and the incarcerated in contemporary times. The mass media is thus a dominant outlet of cultural representations and artifacts, which channel as a vehicle of social meaning and social construction.

Surette (1998) offers a review of the American entertainment and news media, and how they depict crime, the criminalized and prisons. He explains that crime has been a fundamental theme in American media, beginning with early novels such as *Solomon's Vineyard* (1941) and *The Big Sleep* (1939), and films such as *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), *Scar Face* (1932) and *The Big House* (1930). In general, the media tend to represent the most dangerous aspects of prison life, misleading the public to believe that positive changes within prison environments, such as

individual transformation, are unachievable (Cheatwood, 1998). Furthermore, the image of the criminal justice system that is typically displayed through the media reinforces the idea that prisons are often out of control with violence and that all institutions, regardless of security level, house the worst and most dangerous criminalized individuals (Bennett, 2006). These negative depictions provide a portrayal that supports retributive justice, while depicting a negative perspective of the criminalized (Eschholz et al., 2003).

Crime is a favoured subject for the mass media to cover, predominantly focusing on certain themes and images intended to trigger popularity (Levenson, 2001; Meiners, 2007). The media regularly ignores the more frequently occurring types of criminalized harms, such as single instances of motor vehicle theft or break and enter, despite the fact that the viewer is more likely to witness or experience them (Cheliotis, 2010). Thus, the cultural artifacts produced through the media offer particular images and interpretations of the penal system, which focus on the most severe form of punishment available (e.g. capital punishment, life sentences, etc.), even though the majority of the criminalized are not incarcerated (Marsh, 2013). Generally speaking, many representations display the prisoner's fight for survival and the process of dehumanization that is a by-product of incarceration (Mason, 2003). Prisons are often portrayed as being filled with tough rules and regulations that are continuously implemented throughout the incarcerated individual's daily life. Surette (1998) explains that media outlets that are concerned with the penal process present a compressed and sensational version of the realities of the penal system. The media tend to excessively focus on aspects of the penal system that will be regarded as entertaining to its viewers, such as police chases, high-profile cases and the ideal victim, while excluding many other important and noteworthy issues, such as safety and treatment within prisons, along with problems

within the penal system (Greer, 2007). Moreover, the criminalized are often portrayed as corrupt beasts beyond redemption or those who continuously do not contribute to society (Jewkes, 2007).

Evidently, regardless of the type of portrayal, representations of crime occur through various domains of media. Barak (2012) explains that there are fundamentally three domains of mass communication: (1) entertainment; (2) news; and (3) online. He continues to explain that each domain may be broken down into sub-domains, such as books, films, radio, television, and the Internet. Within these sub-domains, different styles of discourse and crime construction exist. Ultimately, all forms may include various styles of crime in addition to crime control activities (Barak, 2012). With respect to these domains, Jewkes (2004) explains that the “‘spectacle’ of news reporting has arguably blurred the lines between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ and made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’” (p.55). She continues that this is now the “age of ‘fake TV’”, which leads toward another domain, infotainment, which is the cross between entertainment and information/news. Overall, scholars of crime and justice media have examined various forms of traditional media (Chermak, 1998, Surette, 2015, Alber, 2011), and have increasingly become interested in new media or online domains, such as Netflix (Vannini, 2015, Russo & Steenburg, 2016). This literature review will now examine the entertainment, news and infotainment domains of mass communication to provide an examination of how crime, the criminalized and prisons have been represented within each. This will be followed by an analysis of how the online domains, specifically Netflix, differ from traditional communication domains. This information, coupled with the previous explanations of social constructionism and cultural criminology, will highlight how the media, and for this thesis specifically Netflix, put forth cultural artifacts that represent the incarceration experience.

## **The News Media**

Through the news media, the viewer is informed about real events and real people. News content is marketed as “true, current and objective information about significant world events” (Surette, 2015, p. 16). Newsworthy items, which are frequently dramatic, violent, visual and timely, are predominantly focused on (Chermak, 1998; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1991; Graber, 1980; Humphries, 2009; Sheley and Ashkins, 1981; Mahan & Lawrence, 1996). Not only does the news media offer a record of criminalized events that deviate in many ways from the ones provided by official crime statistics, they often do not reflect the reality experienced by those directly impacted (Sacco, 1995). This suggests that contemporary news provides a “filtered, molded snippets of the abnormal criminalized events of the world” and is used as an “escape from the normal via a social construction of the unusual” (Surette, 2015, p. 16). The news media coverage tends to focus on individual incidents, without any type of contextual information of how it relates to social structures and trends (Potter, 2001). In addition, the crime problems displayed through the news often promote particular punitive changes such as increased police presence or longer prison sentences. Due to the fact that the news media is distorted, viewers may be given partial information, resulting in inaccurate presentation of on the ground realities.

Overall, the news media principally focuses on violent crimes directed against people, which has been declining in volume and severity, and occur less frequently than other harms such as drug-related offences (Statistics Canada, 2015a). For instance, Miljan (2001) examined television news reporting on murders in 2000 and displayed that while 44 percent of CBC news coverage and 48 percent of CTV news coverage focused on murders committed by strangers, only 17 percent of murders in Canada were committed by strangers in 2000 (Statistics Canada, 2001). Similarly, while 24 percent of the CBC reports and 22 percent of the CTV reports referred to

murders in which a gun had been used (Miljan 2001), firearm-related violent crime only accounted for 3.3 percent of all victims of violent crime in 1999 (Statistics Canada, 2000). Thus, the media tend to give preference to crimes that are extreme or involve vulnerable victims, rather than focusing on non-violent crimes such as property offenses (Surette, 1998a). In the United States, such distortion of reality manifests in things like media over-representation of white people as victims of crimes committed by people of colour (The Sentencing Project, 2014). This translates to a double blow delivered by media portrayals, which exaggerate Black crime, while downplaying Black victimization (The Sentencing Project, 2014).

### **Infotainment**

Also claiming to portray reality, infotainment or reality-based television is defined as the marketing of edited and highly formatted information about the world through entertaining means (Surette, 2015). In other words, the purpose of infotainment media is to highlight true events in an amusing manner through combining information and entertainment. Infotainment media is marketed as a vehicle to expose viewers to real facts of the world, but these facts are a highly exaggerated interpretation of a narrow and edited portion of the world (Surette, 2015). Overall, this genre provides entertainment through sensationalizing real stories about crime and justice, typically through realistic police narratives, interviews or actual video footage (Surette, 2015). In contemporary day mass media, reality-based crime shows have become more popular because they shift news to entertainment, while still being viewed as credible and realistic (Surette, 2015). Infotainment programs allow the viewers to have a glimpse into the lives of others and be subjected to unfamiliar experiences. As a result, the previously unrecognizable lives of the criminalized and penal system agents allow aspects of involvement in the criminal justice system, such as arrests or imprisonment, to be experienced, albeit at a distance by a law-abiding individual (Brown, 2009).

Reality programs focusing on crime tend to blur the line between news and entertainment, while sometimes obscuring the line between fact and fiction (Cavender et al., 1999). This occurs when the infotainment program claims to present the unaltered truth to its viewers. Infotainment media portray non-fictional situations in which the narrative reviews an actual crime and details the actions of real people (Murley, 2008). Within this media content type, the crime-control model dominates because it is associated with real events, re-enactments and documentary-like formatting, thus portraying it as real (Surette, 2015). For example, Doyle (2003) analyzes the infotainment series *Cops* and explains how there are decisions made throughout the production process to decide what to air and what to edit out, the outlet form and the narrative strategies that provoke identification with the police. Doyle (2003) suggests that *Cops* is an infotainment series in which claims to be ‘reality based’, yet the producers “turn reality into entertaining narratives for television” (p. 35).

### **Entertainment Media**

Entertainment media can be classified as any mass mediated form of entertainment to its viewers (Bates & Ferri, 2010). In general, entertainment media outlets are viewed as a distraction, which is used as a getaway from the seemingly unpleasant or dull aspects of daily life. Entertainment media are widely popular because it provides pleasurable means to escape reality, as it delivers idealistic views of reality that normally cannot be experienced in everyday life. The aforementioned content type is typically displayed through film and television, and describes experiences and events that typically have not occurred in the real world (Surette, 2015). Examples of entertaining crime media range from current examples such as *American Crime Story* and *Legend* to older versions such as *Law & Order* and *Brubaker*. Although most crime and justice content through entertainment media in the form of film and television programming are

recognized by the public as unrealistic and heavily scripted, at times, media content is marketed as providing a representation of reality, especially in areas where alternate sources of information are less available (Surette, 2015). As stated previously, although Netflix is defined through a new type of media, the representations of crime, the criminalized and prisons through traditional forms of entertainment media (i.e. film and television) are still relevant to the analysis as they hold some of the same type of content marketed as entertaining.

### ***Film***

Several criminological researchers explore prison films (Alber, 2011; Rafter, 2006; Wlodarz, 2005; Surette, 1998b; Mason, 2003; Cheatwood, 1998; O'Sullivan, 2001; Wilson & O'Sullivan 2004). Like television, film produces entertainment media that tells a story through a similar structure (Anderson, 2011). Surette (1998) explains how representations of crime on film became increasingly more violent in the post-World War II era, as the film industry became less interested in self-censorship. Similar to the popularity of television programs, Bailey and Hale (1998) note that crime-related films were in high demand from the 1940s through the end of the century. Notable examples of crime films include *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Hole* (1960).

Alber (2001) examines prisons in film and explains that there are two distinct prison metaphors within the genre, which are able to use positive or negative metaphors of imprisonment. Accordingly, Alber (2001) explains that the prison films put forth cultural artifacts that either examine the criminalized within an institution or will describe an area in the outside world as acting like a prison. When a prison metaphor describes a prison in terms of another domain of human experience, it will play a role in interpreting the prison experience through narratives. In contrast, when a prison metaphor illustrates the image of prison in areas outside of the institution,



it will generally focus on restraint of human action. Regardless of the metaphor used, Wlodarz (2005) states that the prison film genre promises an unfiltered, raw, and realistic presentation of criminalization, systems of authority and the socially marginalized. Mason (2003) notes that the most popular occurrences and themes include escapes, as well as battles with authority and violence. Other subjects and themes include resistance to authority, masculine control, and the promotion of idealized characterizations of heroic men at the centre of exceptional events such as riots, escapes and the release of dangerous criminalized individuals (Chermak 1998; Levenson 2001; Wlodarz, 2005).

### ***Television***

Crime and violence is the most popular genre of content found on television, especially in entertainment media (Surette, 2015). Within the crime and justice genre, the depiction of the life of the incarcerated on television has been popular since the early 1990s (Cecil, 2015). As a highly utilized form of communication, television is, and continues to be, a significant form of knowledge of the criminal justice system to the public. To demonstrate, Surette (1998) estimates that roughly 25 percent of primetime entertainment television programs featured crime themes as their main focus between the 1960s and 1990s. From the 1950s to present day, crime television dramas continue to grow and increase in popularity, along with the medium of television itself (Snauffer, 2006). For instance, some of the past highest rated crime shows include *Hawaii Five-O*, *The Sopranos* and *Sons of Anarchy*, while some of the more current highest rated shows of this kind include *Arrow*, *Breaking Bad* and *Criminal Minds*. Therefore, with the upward trend of crime and justice popularity the proportion of television series focusing on these themes is likely to continue in the future.

Typically, televised prison dramas use the basic formula used by the crime genre more generally, which rely on violence, drama, mystery and punishment (Cecil, 2015). As negative imagery and emotional manipulation attract viewers, violence, conspiracy, and mystery are often a main focus (Freeman, 2000; Javis, 2006). To illustrate, a disproportionate amount of media coverage of the penal system and punishment focuses on prisons (Levenson, 2001). Despite this, only a scarce number of people are aware of the basic information related to incarceration, such as the number of criminalized individuals or prisons, let alone the realities and routines of the incarcerated (Levenson, 2001). Thus, public knowledge of prison life is often based on symbolism derived from skewed fictional images of the penal system facilitated by television and film (Levenson, 2001).

Media representations tend to focus on a retributive and punitive representation to reinforce the idea that the penal system is necessary, sentences are proportionate and further growth of the system is necessary (Cheliotis, 2010). Further, Cheliotis (2010, p. 178) states that:

The media play upon public fears by overstating the danger of criminal victimization, targeting weak and marginalized swathes of the population, criticizing the authorities for laxity, calling for more and harsher punitive measures, and blocking or neutralizing the imagery of human suffering thereby caused.

He continues to explain that media networks are most concerned with their financial interests and this provides the public with content that produces the most viewers. Popular content is often what is marketable, stereotypical and entertaining, rather than realistic.

Overall, prisons have always held a disproportionate number of marginalized groups, yet media displays rarely account for this (Cecil, 2015). Historically, prison films maintained a mostly white prison population (Cecil, 2015). In the 1960s, prison films began to offer a more racially diverse penal population, but Black voices were still were not prominent (Cecil, 2015). In comparison, in the late 1990s, *Oz*, which is an *HBO* series, was the first televised media display of

prison that included a racially and ethnically diverse cast (Cecil, 2015). Even though Black individuals continue to be five to six times more likely to be incarcerated than whites in the United States, media portrayals reflecting this reality remain scarce in the twentieth century (Carson, 2014). Thus, minority voices are often muted in media displays of the penal system, which tend to be focused on glamorization of the gangster lifestyle, which creates a false picture of race and incarceration (Cecil, 2015).

### **New Media and Netflix**

New and online media (mass communication using digital technologies) has increased in popularity and pose a challenge to the other media domains (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). While the research and analyses on media and crime within news and entertainment are underdeveloped, the newest and fastest growing domain, online mediatizing, lacks even more research in the criminological world (Barak, 2012). Even though series such as *OITNB* continue to be classified as a television series, such as by the Emmys, Netflix differs from the traditional television domain. From being identified as a DVD rental company, to instant viewing in 2007, and finally original programming in 2012, Netflix has revolutionized how individuals are entertained. Technically speaking, if media types are defined in part by the mode of distribution, Netflix should not be classified as television. Media scholar Raymond Williams (1975) first used the term “flow” in relation to television to describe it as a tactic to refrain a program’s audience from changing the channel. Williams (1975) claimed that the “flow” provided by broadcasting systems could be classified as “the defining characteristic of broadcasting” (p. 86). Netflix changed this traditional notion of liveness when the potential of interrupting its viewers diminished. Thus, the program-centred flow of Williams (1975) transformed into a viewer-centred flow, as it draws in audiences through offering control to its subscribers (Cook, 2014).

Another unique aspect is that Netflix provides its own original programming, which are released all at once, therefore allowing viewers to watch multiple episodes in rapid succession. This is related to the cultural phenomenon “binge-watching”, which has increased through contemporary streaming services, and as Matrix (2014) suggests, is becoming synonymous to Netflix (p. 120). When all episodes of a season are released at once, the producers are not reliant on the pilot system, compared to series that take longer to ‘grow’ on audiences and run the risk of being cancelled due to initially low viewing figures. In addition, this type of release allows for unique storytelling, through relationship development, rather than cliff-hanger endings that keeps audiences coming back for more the following week. Jenji Kohan, *OITNB*’s creator, explains that binge-watching influenced the production of the series as, “We could string out the moments” and “let a character fall away for a few hours because if you’re bingeing, then you’ll see them again in a few hours” (Ma, 2016, p.1).

To continue, Netflix’s production also differs as they do not need to cut to commercials or sell advertising space next to a controversial show. This allows Netflix to provide quality exclusive content that cannot be found anywhere else. Their flexibility allows producers to no longer comply with the networks’ requirements, rules, content boundaries, as Netflix *chooses* what series they want to produce and renew. As Netflix is a subscription-based platform, their revenue stream from subscriptions allows them a huge cushion to support innovative programming, as they had more than 83 million subscribers internationally in 2016 (Weber, 2016). Thus, it is evident that as a platform Netflix is different, which means that its programming will also provide different content, representations and subsequently, social understandings.

### **Media's (Mis)representations of Incarcerated Women**

As is made evident in the previous section, multiple domains of the media put forth images that create social and cultural understandings of specific phenomena. These media domains are embedded in everyday life, which allow individuals to have instant access to various types of crime-related imagery. More specific to this thesis, the media hold the ability to construct and reproduce gender (O'Brien, 2009), including through portrayals of incarcerated women. The following section provides an overview of the current literature concerning incarcerated women's depictions in various media sources. This background provides context of the current state of knowledge on how incarcerated women are presented in the mass media through various themes, both in past representations and *OITNB* specifically.

#### **An Invisible Population**

One major concern is the fact that many films (e.g. *The Shawshank Redemption*) and television shows (e.g. *Oz*) have been created to represent the penal experience, yet most fictional accounts focus on incarcerated men (Britton, 2003). Some individuals may believe that the criminalized are only identified by virtue of their law-breaking, regardless of gender, and all prisons are the same no matter who are housed (Cecil, 2015). Despite this, there are some major differences between criminalized males and women, in addition to the history and function of the penal system as it relates to them. Not only are incarcerated women largely invisible in popular culture and the general media, but the few portrayals that focus on their lives tend to distort, trivialize and sensationalize the realities of the lives of the incarcerated, through focusing on sexualized images (e.g. *The Big Bird Cage*) (Krajicek, 1998). Overall, Hollywood media continue to predominantly represent incarcerated males, even though women, specifically women of colour, are the fastest growing prison population (Sudbury, 2005). By centering gender in the analysis of media

representations of crime and justice, researchers have examined the portrayal of the criminalized and incarcerated women through various types of media (Cecil, 2015; Bouclin, 2009; Cavender et al., 1999; Cheatwood, 1985; Krajicek, 1998). Examining the representations of incarcerated women is important as they are often displayed differently from males in all aspects (Cecil, 2015).

To put in perspective, as of April 13, 2014, there were a total of 1,098 federally sentenced women in Canada, which is a 14 percent increase from 2003-04 to 2012-13 (Correctional Service of Canada, 2014). To compare, in the United States, the number of criminalized women increased by 646 percent between 1980 and 2010, rising from 15,118 to 112,797, and when including women in local institutions, this population soared to more than 205,000 women during this period (Guerino, Harrison & Sabol, 2011). In 2010, Black women were incarcerated at nearly 3 times the rate of white women in the United States (133 vs. 47 per 100,000) (Guerino et al., 2011), while Hispanic women were incarcerated at 1.6 times the rate of white women (77 vs. 4.7 per 100,000) (Guerino et al., 2011). Yet, incarcerated women remain relatively invisible when contrasted to their male counterparts in media portrayals.

### **Reinforcing Gender Roles**

In the few instances where incarcerated women are the focus of crime and justice media, a prominent theme documented in research is the presence of gendered images, which are also found in media depictions of women across social institutions (Milestone & Meyer, 2012; Connell, 1987). Prior to this discussion, it is necessary to provide context of the key concepts of 'doing gender', gender performativity and gender hegemony. West and Zimmerman (1987) developed the term 'doing gender' to explain the reproduction of gender through social interaction, rather than as a biological trait. West and Zimmerman (1987) state that gender is performed, and 'doing gender' involves "a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical

activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (p.13). Thus, gender is viewed as an action of an individual in contact with another, rather than as an individual characteristic itself. ‘Doing gender’ is apparent in all social interactions and activities, making one’s actions responsible in terms of their appropriateness to his or her socially constructed gender category.

To further this idea, Pyke and Johnson (2003) state that through social practice, the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity organize material relations of social life, thus referring back to cultural artifacts. Consequently, these create a legitimate rationale for the belief and behaviour by individuals, while also coordinating, evaluating, and regulating social practices (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). Similarly, Butler’s (1990) work on gender performativity suggests that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 25). These performances are not necessarily knowingly chosen by the individual, but rather are exercises in conformity with the norms, rules, and understandings of one’s culture(s), as gender is always a ‘doing’. Overall, these scholars are reinforcing the notion that gender is not self-identification, but rather is a construction formed by, while simultaneously forming, social actions.

Related to these gender notions, hegemony refers to the cultural dominance in society, where gendered relations exist through subordinated and dominated roles (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As such, hegemonic masculinity proposes to explain how and why men maintain dominant social roles over women, and other gender identities, which are perceived as ‘feminine’. Advocates support the usefulness of hegemonic masculinity in understanding gender relations and its benefit to multiple fields of study such as education, criminology, representations of masculinity in the mass communications media, the health of men and women, and functional

structure of organizations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Typically speaking, the media presents men with physical strength, who use of violence when faced with conflict, occupy positions of authority, and express an erotic desire of women (Schippers, 2007).

On the other hand, hegemonic or emphasized femininity is a concept that was developed “to acknowledge the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal gender order” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848). Schippers (2007) critically views the notion of hegemonic femininity, noting that “masculinity and femininity are hegemonic precisely in the ideological work they do to legitimate and organize what men actually do to dominate women individually or as a group” (p. 93). Therefore, hegemonic femininity consists of “the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Schippers, 2007, p. 94). In this sense, femininity is displayed as in agreement with gender inequality, and is concerned with accommodating the interests and desires of men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Despite this, femininity is able to be hegemonic, as women are criticized for failing to meet the ideal femininity. If a woman possesses any masculine characteristics, it is culturally defined as contaminating gendered social relations. The media tends to construct women as physically vulnerable especially if they venture into public, unable to use violence effectively, and being compliant (Cavender et al., 1999; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Schippers, 2007). Even though these constructions focus on women as ideal victims, at times women are blamed or deemed responsible for their victimization, which reduces or mitigates the perpetrator’s responsibility (Humphries, 2009; Anastasio & Costa, 2004). This causes violence against women to become devalued, while the woman victim is depersonalized, objectified, and dehumanized (Anastasio &



Costa, 2004). As the media play a significant role in enforcing and normalizing gender roles and hegemony, it can produce hegemonic understanding of gender inequalities, especially hegemonic masculinities and femininities. According to Wykes and Gunter (2004) the media socially constructs femininity and encourages women to achieve an expected stereotype in terms of being heterosexual, feminine and slim, which thus reflects and reinforces systems of meaning and understanding about women and gender roles (Milestone & Meyer, 2012).

On the issue of gender roles, many stereotypes exist about appropriate behaviour for women and originate from ideas about their ‘proper’ place in society (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Women who behave in this manner conform to gender-role expectations and, consequently, are looked upon favourably, but women who fail to do so are considered abnormal and, as a result, are viewed much more negatively (Brennan, 2002; Cavender et al., 1999). Faith (1993), who conducted research on the masculinization of women who come into conflict with the law within film, shows how this form of representation reasserts the common gender roles within society. She explains, “By attributing to criminal women evils more realistically associated with the worst of male behaviours, filmmakers confirm society’s satisfied conviction that normal women and criminal women are very different from one another” (Faith, 1993, p. 189). Some authors (Birch, 1994; Faith 1993) argue that gender role expectations lead viewers to be horrified and disturbed when woman characters are not portrayed as caring and nurturing.

As such, when a women is displayed as being involved with the penal system, she has not only broken the law, but has also “transgressed the norms and expectations associated with appropriate feminine behaviour” (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002, p. 50). Similarly, McCorkel (2003) explains how these women are not only criminalized, but also deviant in a way that goes against their role as “monogamous and heterosexual, diligent caretakers of children and the elderly,

responsible, clean, and self-restrained” (p. 70). To reiterate, criminalized women can be “stigmatized twice – as a criminal and as breaking the societal conventions of woman submission” (Collins, 2016, p. 297). Collins (2016) found that within Canadian news, criminalized women were often portrayed as evil, cunning, and methodical or as sexualized objects. In addition, when describing crime committed by women, the news typically “uses language describing crime as being rampant and out-of-control” (p. 305). Consequently, many people are manipulated to solely recognize incarcerated women through high profile cases like that of Karla Homolka (Kilty & Frigon, 2016), which shape what a typical incarcerated woman looks like in reality (Barker, 2009).

Scholars have generally found that the media group criminalized women into one of the two categories of ‘bad’ women and ‘mad/sad’ women (Chesney-Lind, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Naylor, 2001). ‘Bad’ women are those who wilfully defy traditional gender roles and expectations through intentional actions, whereas ‘sad’ women are portrayed as not being fully responsible for their actions, as the media focus on medical conditions causing deviant behaviour, feminine attributes and sexually and religiously pureness (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Similarly, Cecil (2007) found that the portrayal of incarcerated women in the media focus on innocent women who “enter brutal prisons where they are sexually violated and physically attacked, but in the end they are able to fight against the corrupt administration and the vicious prisoners to escape – presumably to live happily ever after in the free world” (p. 320). In contrast, violent women portrayed through the media may reflect a notion that they have stepped outside the boundaries of appropriate woman behaviour and therefore must have “gotten what they deserve” (Cecil, 2007, p. 321).

Despite the fact that the media typically assign traditional gender roles, such as a homemaker, to women (Tuchman, Daniels & Benét, 1978), the crime genre generally tends to underrepresent the actual number of incarcerated mothers, possibly suggesting that the issue is

unimportant (Cecil, 2007). Incarcerated mothers should be displayed throughout the media because this may help humanize incarcerated women and provide the ability for some viewers to relate to the imprisoned (Cecil, 2007). Consequently, it is evident that the media representations of incarcerated women focus on atypical women and superficial aspects incarcerated life, while ignoring the realities faced by most incarcerated women. Thus, these gender role inaccuracies provided by the media may actually reproduce gender roles in society, as women in prison films illustrate that “jail is not a genuine home, and thus ‘real’ women do not belong there” (Morey, 2010, p. 81). This is similar to the notion that women are often known as the ‘innocent’ and ‘caring’ gender, and thus should not be committing criminalized harms.

While incarcerated women tend to be demonized, Morey (2010) notes that woman prisons are often depicted as places of positive socialization for women. Women entering the prison are typically portrayed as masculine, while the institution is working towards the primary goals of socializing and preparing the women for domestic and family life. Morey (2010) also explains that the ‘male’ crimes women commit in the media are “naturalized as the product of a broken agreement with male caretakers – thus women kill men who abuse them, or are led into temptation and abandoned by the men whom society tells them to trust, such as husbands and fathers” (p. 81). Therefore, incarceration in the media is displayed as correctly disciplining the women who have stepped outside their usual domestic role, and is portrayed as an adequate replacement for the household and familial aspect of a woman’s life.

### **Sexualization and Objectification of Incarcerated Women**

With respect to prison films that focus on women behind bars, Suzanne Bouclin (2009) classifies two types. The first arose in the 1930s and is essentially categorized as romantic melodramas. The second appeared in the 1960s, which aimed to attract young heterosexual male audiences and

therefore attempts to exploit the women in the film. Examples of prison films produced in the 1930s are *Big House* (1930) and *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* (1932) and one produced in the 1960s is *House of Women* (1962). Despite this, the two classifications overlap and both attempt to provide cultural artifacts ripe with messages about prisons, while simultaneously providing male pleasure at the expense of incarcerated women (Bouclin, 2009). In recent times, women in prison films do not follow a specific style outlined above, but rather use a mixture, as well as new elements to create their story. For example, since their beginning, many crime dramas focused on the specific imagery, such as incarcerated women being brutalized by guards, sometimes sexually or being displayed as highly masculine (Cecil, 2015).

Historically, the most common images of criminalized women were rooted in stories of femininity and sexuality, along with violence (Cecil, 2015), whereas media portrayals of incarceration males centre mostly on the latter (Britton, 2003). Homosexual activity is one of the prime portrayals within the sexual encounters that are touched upon, and in most cases, there are sexual undertones and/or the sexualization of incarcerated women (Cecil, 2015). After World War Two, incarcerated women in popular culture became “synonymous with lesbianism” and early representations of homosexuality of the incarcerated often represented a racialized sexuality, one that placed Black women in the aggressive male role and white women in the passive woman role (Freedman, 1996, p. 141). However, by the mid-twentieth century, the prison lesbian expanded somewhat to include white women as well (Freedman, 1996).

Stereotypical lesbian relationships within the prison are found both in film and television, and describe lesbians who are incarcerated as aggressive, masculine predators who prey on heterosexual women (Truss & Inderbitzin, 2005). Herman (2003) explains that a significant proportion of scholarship on lesbian images in popular culture explores the women in prison genre,

but mostly through films. Women in prison narratives are often fearful that lesbianism is contagious in that incarcerated lesbians will somehow ‘spread’ their sexuality to the other heterosexual women. This suggests that the prison lesbian threatens the heterosexuality of the other incarcerated women with whom they interact. In general, Marne (2000) argues that the women in prison film genre focuses on a relatively innocent, heterosexual woman protagonist who is incarcerated and subsequently abused by predatory women she encounters there. Similarly, classic women’s prison films portray violent lesbians as competing for contact with an innocent young criminalized woman (Freedman, 1996). Lesbianism is usually ignored or pathologized with homosexual characters often facing unattractive futures or suffering violence, as such activity is viewed as sexual deviance and is portrayed as closely linked to criminalized deviance (Hart, 1994; Mayne, 2000).

Pertaining to the reality of sexual behaviour of women’s prisons, Pardue and colleagues (2011) categorize at least five different sexual conduct behaviours: (1) suppressed sexuality; (2) autoeroticism; (3) true homosexuality; (4) situational homosexuality; and (5) sexual violence. These categories are categorized by level and type of sexual involvement, as well as corresponding degree of potential violence. Suppressed sexuality relates to the absence of any forms of physical sexual behaviour, while autoerotism is categorized by self-masturbation or stimulation. Situational homosexuality pertains to individuals who engage in consensual sexual acts while incarcerated where who did not identify as homosexual prior to their imprisonment, while true homosexuality refers to individuals who identified as homosexual prior to incarceration. Finally, sexual violence relates to manipulation, compliance, and coercion, which can be expressed through prisoner-on-staff member, prisoner-on-prisoner, and staff member-on-prisoner relationships (Pardue et al., 2011). Similarly, other researchers (Owen, 1998; Alarid, 2000), explain that incarcerated women

are involved in exploitative relationships with an underlying economic and/or emotional motive, and that sexual pressuring and sexual harassment are more prevalent than sexual assault in women's prisons.

This research is also in line with Gibson and Hensley's (2013) models of prison sex: the importation model, the deprivation model, and the social constructionist model. Through the importation model, the criminalized import social values from outside of prison, but the deprivation model suggests that women are deprived of their normal heterosexual sexual activity and relationships. Similarly, the social constructionist model explains that sexuality is constructed by social situations and values. To further these ideas within the media, Ciasullo (2008) explains how the distinction between the 'true' lesbian and the 'pseudo' lesbian is one of the hallmarks of women in prison narratives. She refers to Havelock Ellis' (1910) categories of the 'true' lesbian, who is identified by her masculinity, and the 'pseudo' lesbian, who is typically a submissive feminine woman whose homosexual identity was not her sexual orientation prior to incarceration. The author explains how almost all women in prison narratives include at least one character as a 'true' or 'real' lesbian, who then becomes the prison lesbian. Within these narratives, the 'true' lesbians can be separated from 'pseudo' lesbians, which naturalizes heteronormativity. Without these clear distinctions of 'true' and 'pseudo' lesbians, the sexuality of many protagonists of the narratives would be called into question, a scenario that media productions tend to avoid (Ciasullo, 2008).

### **Blind to Pre- and Post-Incarceration Issues**

Another issue with media productions, notably prison films, is that they are blind to and further fail to problematize the legal, economic, and political strategies that operate to criminalize women (Bouclin, 2009). In, addition, these representations become blind to the real issues incarcerated

women face within prison, such as drug abuse and male-centred programming, histories of sexual and physical abuse, the social problems that contribute to their initial incarceration and frequent conflicts with the law, and challenges of post-release (Cecil, 2007).

Researchers have examined the challenges women face related to housing, employment, difficult family dynamics, stigmatization, dual diagnoses, and anxieties that impede reintegrating into the community (e.g. Maidment, 2006; Shantz, Kilty, & Frigon, 2009). Women face new struggles in their communities that are heightened by a lack of planning for post-release strategies. Incarcerated women experience numerous daily challenges that are extremely difficult as incarceration leaves a lasting effect on the women's minds and bodies, also leading to institutionalization. Faith (1993) emphasizes that for many women the relief of being released is often replaced with anxiety for the same situation. In addition, criminalized women are often one of the most disadvantaged in terms of marketable job skills and levels of education (Maidment, 2006). Often enough, women are subjected to further social control post-release, in the form of police presence and surveillance (Maidment, 2006). In accordance, relationships play a major role in women's success post-release, which include immediate family members, intimate partners, and professional staff, who are often not present (Maidment, 2006). Although release is a post-incarceration matter and therefore may be viewed as unimportant to the portrayal of incarcerated women, it remains equally important to the representations of criminalized women as it presents a challenge of social integration and possibility of reincarceration.

Overall, media depictions of criminalized women typically put forth images that are often inaccurate and distorted. Thus, the media deliver representations of criminalized women centring on their crime, violent acts, femininity, and sexuality, while excluding important issues that revolve around social structures that work to criminalize and incarcerate women, and issues

pertaining to pre- and post-incarceration. Belknap (2001) believes it is useful to examine the images of women and crime in the popular media because it may shape the public's understanding of how women are "viewed and treated by the crime-processing system" (p. 21). Although the influence that the media has on its viewers is not directly examined in this thesis, it is still noteworthy to expand upon to provide context on how these misrepresentations may hold the ability to put forth misinformed cultural artifacts, which will be expanded upon further in the next section.

### **Representations of Crime, the Criminalized and Prisons in *OITNB***

As stated previously, there is limited research on the portrayal of incarcerated women within the media. *Orange is the New Black (OITNB)* is a relatively new online series that focuses on the experiences of incarcerated women, and has been the focus of some research and investigation. Therefore, I will now highlight the current literature that focuses on *OITNB* to display the patterns of examinations and differences highlighted in this thesis. Within the academic world, there has been various peer-reviewed journal articles (Caputi, 2016; DeCarvalho & Cox, 2016; Belcher, 2016; Terry, 2016; Smith, 2015; Pramaggiore, 2016; Silverman & Ryalls, 2016; Householder & Trier-Bieniek, 2016) and master's theses that examine this series (Louis, 2015, Weatherford Millette, 2015; Stearns, 2014; Chavez, 2015). Each of these scholars take a different approach to examining *OITNB*, while most often utilizing a qualitative content analysis as a methodological approach.

Firstly, Cecil (2015) includes *OITNB* in her book examining the lives of incarcerated women portrayed in popular culture, and states that the series presents a fresh take on criminalized women, but does not completely diverge from its infamous predecessors. She concludes that *OITNB* breaks the typical mould of fictional representations of incarcerated women by addressing



the complexity of the women through their lives, offenses and social structure within the institution. Caputi (2016) critically examines social justice issues within such as mental health, sexuality, class and race, but only examines season one. Through this she concludes that *OITNB* reinforces many of the stereotypes and myths upon which the prison industrial complex rests on through centring the series on Piper, a white, middle-class woman.

Further, DeCarvalho and Cox (2016) examine whether Netflix is using *OITNB* to promote policy reform or if Netflix is using the need for policy reform to promote itself. Through utilizing a feminist textual analysis approach, the authors analyze the construction of intersectional identities within Netflix's two promotional campaigns and suggest that while Netflix successfully "maximized its target audience" from a commercial point of view, it simultaneously "provides a platform for incarcerated women to be more than just numbers in a system" (p.515). Belcher (2016) argues that approaching diversity through a multiculturalist approach indicates the series' inability and unwillingness to critique neoliberalism. The author analyzes seasons 1-3 of *OITNB* and concludes that the series puts forth a message that the incarcerated deserve to be incarcerated and white women are best positioned to help them (Belcher, 2016, p. 500). Terry (2016) reviews issues incarcerated women face in the real world in comparison to *OITNB*, while also discussing the need of positive relationships both inside and outside prison. The author addresses policy implications to help solve these issues, such as more open visitation, support of welfare agencies, and overall gender-specific programming needs. Smith (2015) completed a content analysis in which she discusses the significant political differences between the various representations of individuals and groups found in the memoir versus the Netflix series. Overall, the author identifies that the series promotes "privileged white narcissism" coupled with a "male heterosexual

structure”, which differs from Kerman’s memoir which handles “the sensationalism of its material with great insight and care” (Smith, 2015, p.276).

Pramaggiore (2016) examined the portrayal of labour in *OITNB* while focusing on gender and race. The author examines *OITNB* and the representation of prison labour in a wider context of neoliberalism and concludes that the series fails to present an effective critique of prison labour “by focusing on individual needs and affective ties over group solidarity against structural conditions” (p.558). Silverman and Ryalls (2016) primarily use Goffman’s work on stigma to analyze the representations of elderly women on *OITNB*. The authors state that the depiction of elderly women in *OITNB* is a notable trait of the series and it does offer opportunities to critique the prison industrial complex, but “the portrayal of older women is troublingly reliant on pedestrian notions of femininity” (Silverman and Ryalls, 2016, p.529). They conclude that the series reinforces common stereotypes of gender and suggests women become more manipulative as they age. Finally, Householder and Trier-Bieniek (2016) are the editors of and authors within *Feminist Perspectives on Orange Is the New Black: Thirteen Critical Essays*, which bring together a collection of essays on Netflix’s most popular original series. These essays focus on the series’ diverse cast of characters, concentrating on its production of gender, politics, and intersectional identities. The book offers a critique of the series, through exploring the relationship of race, class, gender, and sexuality as both a site of opposition of and reality of oppressive stereotypes, displaying how the series concurrently reinforces and contests hegemonic discourse through its diverse characters and captivating storylines.

The four master’s theses noted above that focus on *OITNB* are rooted in the disciplines of English, Modern, Classical Languages and Women’s Studies rather than Criminology. Louis’ (2015) research specifically focuses on the penal system to show how *OITNB* engages with the

prison as a normalizing institution. Weatherford Millette (2015) examines the representation of Latinas in *OITNB*. Stearns (2014) examines the mediated reality of incarcerated women, compares past and present representations of criminalized women in the mass media, and assesses connections the series makes with the prison industrial complex. In her conclusion Stearns (2014) notes that future research is needed to examine the racial and sexual identities represented within *OITNB*, which is something this thesis addresses. Chavez (2015) examines the race, gender and sexuality of four chosen characters within the first season of *OITNB*. As I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, my thesis adopts a similar character-driven approach, that examines all of the seasons of the series that were available at the time of data collection and analysis (i.e. seasons 1-3), while adopting a different theoretical framework that shaped my data analysis (i.e. intersectionality). In so doing, this study addresses important gaps to knowledge noted in this chapter pertaining to depictions of incarceration generally, and of criminalized and incarcerated women specifically in entertainment media.

It is not a surprise that *OITNB* has become increasingly suitable for academic analysis. Although many of the scholars above touch upon similar issues and themes to this current research, differences still remain. From its beginning, *OITNB* has sparked considerable debate in the academic sphere due to its depictions of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, privilege, motherhood, prison, and the criminal justice system (Householder and Trier-Bieniek, 2016). Householder and Trier-Bieniek's (2016) edited book provides much of the same analysis structure as the present thesis as the authors touch upon similar themes, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, but do so in a much more condensed manner. Much of the other previous research explained above focuses on different aspects than the present thesis, such as elderly women, prison labour and policy implications. Thus, the present research remains original as it critically examines

season 1-3 through the development of 14 main characters, while analyzing the themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality overall.

### **Addressing Gaps in Knowledge through an Intersectional Analysis of *OITNB***

As the number of criminalized women in the penal system grows (see Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014; Public Safety Canada, 2012; The Sentencing Project, 2012), more attention to the fashion in which they are represented in the media should also increase, largely because of its capability to create cultural artifacts of such experiences. Media portrayals aiming to entertain viewers through the penal experience are not abundant and they are even scarcer for criminalized women dramas (Cecil, 2015). Cecil (2007) believes that the style in which the media represent incarcerated woman significantly influences the public's perception of woman criminality and can be considered a major social problem. Thus, an examination of media portrayals that have been praised by critics as emancipatory such as *OITNB* (see Chapter 4), are required to further understand whether models exist for more accurately reflecting the realities faced by criminalized and incarcerated women that may, in turn, foster favourable views amongst viewers that may lead to more appropriate ways of responding to the social harms they experience and perpetrate.

There have been scholars who have questioned the media displays of criminalized women (e.g. Kilty & Frigon, 2016) in news media (e.g. Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Chermak, 1998; Entman, 1994) or focus on women as crime victims (e.g. Bond-Maupin, 1998; Cavender, et al., 1999; Grabe, 1999; Grabe, et al., 2006; Madriz, 1997, Naylor, 2001), and research on the entertainment media, and especially *OITNB* is growing. Although criminalized women are not usually the main character in entertainment media this does not mean their presence in film and the manner in which their stories of living behind bars are told should be ignored (Cecil, 2007).

Stemming from Young (2010), these images represent the social world through the powers of affect and therefore the spectator/audience creates meaning based on what they are seeing. This in turn holds a potential of putting forth cultural artifacts that may (dis)empower individuals and social groups, which depends, in part, on whether their portrayals of race, class and gender conform to or challenge popular stereotypes and norms (Kellner, 2011). In mobilizing an intersectional approach that I discuss in detail in the next chapter, this thesis contributes to a body of work that seeks to understand how the media may either contribute to or challenge inequalities that exist in Western societies, like Canada, today. By examining the representation of incarcerated women and thus cultural understandings they may shape, it is necessary to examine how race, class, gender, and sexuality is portrayed and how such depictions may further promote various forms of oppressions or reproduce certain forms of racism, sexism, and biases against members of subordinate classes (Kellner, 2011). Overall, it is also significant to assess the ways in which the portrayal of incarcerated women reflect broader aspects of race, class, gender, and sexuality, as this is not a commonly researched topic within criminology and communications, especially representations found in online media domains (Barak, 2012). To this end, this research project contributes to the limited knowledge of representations of criminalized and incarcerated women through conducting an intersectional analysis of *OITNB*.

### CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical framework and epistemological position that informs the research and analysis of media representations of criminalized and incarcerated women in *Orange is the New Black (OITNB)* examined in this study. As intersectionality arose from feminist scholarship, specifically socialist feminism, this is reviewed first. Extending the notions of socialist feminism, intersectionality, also referred to as multiracial feminism, will be discussed to illustrate how race, class, gender, and sexuality overlap within media portrayals of women in conflict with the law in *OITNB*.

#### Feminism

Feminist criminology has challenged the overall masculine nature of traditional criminology by arguing that women have different needs and experiences than men prior to entering the penal system, particularly in regards to their experiences of violence, as well as a lack of control and power in their own lives (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013). In general, feminist theorists strive for social, political and economic equality of sexes (Williams & McShane, 2014). In addition, the objective in feminist research is to analyze the issues of the domination and oppression for women with the goal to change and/or eliminate their sources (Wallace, 2010). Feminism, therefore, recognizes and stresses the importance of gender and sex, arguing that women should be provided equal opportunities within society (Foss & Foss, 1989).

One of the main purposes of feminism is to improve the social relations between men and women by making them equitable (Williams & McShane, 2014). In general, feminist researchers have emphasized the ways in which certain stereotypes of women and men perpetuate the sexual inequalities of the former (Friedan, 1963; Tuchman, et al, 1978). Adrienne Rich (1976) encourages asking the question, “What is life like for women?” This question leads us to considering the

world from the standpoint of women to transforming the typical dimensions of social reality that focus on men (Andersen, 2005). This allows the analytic focus to be on a woman's point of view, while being conscious of and critical towards the domination of women by men.

Feminist theory can use the conflict approach to principally focus on relations between males and women, and the social construction of gender to address the inequalities women experience (Archer, 2004). In addition, feminism is a "set of theories about women's oppression and a set of strategies for social change" (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1998, p. 502). To highlight these differences, Daly and Chesney-Lind (1998) identify five elements that separate feminist perspectives from other perspectives:

- Gender is not a natural fact, but a complex social, historical and cultural product; it is related to but not simply derived from, biological sex difference and reproductive capacities
- Gender and gender relations order social life and social institutions in fundamental ways
- Gender relations and constructs of masculinity and femininity are not symmetrical but are based on an organizing principle of men's superiority and social political-economic dominance over women
- Systems of knowledge reflect men's views of the natural and social world; the production of knowledge is gendered
- Women should be at the center of intellectual inquiry, not peripheral, invisible or appendages of men (p. 504).

Although these elements are open to interpretation, they should be considered by feminist criminologists to distinguish a feminist-based approach to criminology apart from the majority of traditional criminological inquiry, whereby men study other men and their place in society. Thus, these elements will help problematize hegemonic constructions of gender, and generate findings and analysis through a study with the explicit goal of empowering women to advocate change in gender relations generally and dominant representations of women specifically (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1998).

In general, feminist research often addresses social justice issues and gender domination within societies. Similarly, the goal in feminist research is to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relations to allow a researcher to avoid objectification and to conduct research that is transformative (Creswell, 2007). Lather (1991) explains that feminist researchers view gender as a basic organizing principle that shapes the condition of the lives of women. Similarly, Keller (1985) states that a feminist perspective allows for particular questions, usually based on gender, to be brought into focus. Within academia, research questions through a feminist perspective relate to the centrality of gender in the shaping of an individual's consciousness. Lather (1991) suggests that the aim of feminist research is to "correct both the invisibility and distortion of woman experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal position" (p. 71). Although the tenants displayed above establish that feminists are concerned with gender, there are still unique branches within this theoretical standpoint.

Within feminism, there are five most commonly identified feminist perspectives, known as liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist and postmodern feminisms (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Burgess-Proctor (2006) explains the differences between these types of feminism as follows. Liberal feminism states that men's social roles are given more social status and power than women's roles and emphasize political, social, legal and economic equality. Radical feminism explains that women experience discrimination due to social relations and social interactions that are shaped by male power and privilege, while focusing on manifestations of patriarchy in everyday life, including in criminalized harms against or perpetrated by women. Marxist feminism states that the capitalist mode of production shapes class and gender relations that ultimately disadvantage women because women occupy the working class instead of the ruling class. Postmodern feminism departs from the other feminisms as it rejects fixed categories and universal concepts in favour of



multiple truths. Finally, socialist feminism, which is adopted in this study and extended through intersectionality, is relevant as it combines radical and Marxist perspectives to explain that women's oppression results from connected gender- and class-based inequalities (Burgess-Proctor, 2006).

### **Socialist Feminism**

Within criminology, socialist feminists examine causes of crime and the exercise of penal power within the context of interacting gender- and class-based systems of power (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Socialist feminists focus on both patriarchy and capitalism as constructions of male domination, while emphasizing the fact that structural, material and historical processes must be studied in their complexity (Holvino, 2008). In addition, socialist feminists call for an analysis of the traditions in which gender relations are formed by class and vice versa. Socialist feminism is centered on the issues of women's oppression and gender differences that place women at a disadvantage, but also that these patterns are produced within different cultural and racial groups of women (Holvino, 2008). In addition, it focuses on class as an important dimension of differences and unequal relations of power among women. Therefore, women of different races, ethnicities and classes work together in cooperation to end woman inequality (Holvino, 2008).

Socialist feminists, such as Iris Young and Alison Jagger, view oppression as a consequence of the political, social, and economic structures within society (Wallace, 2010). Socialist feminists explore the surrounding gender assumptions in society's social expectations and the intersection of those expectations with rules and practices found in organizations, institutions, and society. Socialist feminism is "structurally identical with that of traditional Marxism and so consequently is the structure of its epistemology" (Jagger, 1999, p. 50). This means its epistemology, theory and knowledge of women's oppression is similar to Marxist

feminism, which investigates woman oppression through systems of capitalism and private property (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). For example, socialist feminists will agree that economic class is a crucial consideration in women's oppression (Steeves & Smith, 1987). Despite this, socialist feminists differ from Marxist feminists in that they believe a primary condition for the acceptability of a feminist theory should represent the world from the standpoint of women. This provides a basis for a view of reality that is impartial and more comprehensive than that of the (male) ruling class (Jagger, 1999). This reliable worldview is not available when the existing social order, based on the oppression of various social groups, remains present. Therefore, although a distorted reality is provided, a less partial and more comprehensive view of that distorted reality is available from those who are oppressed. In summary, socialist feminism will examine the multiple dimensions and interconnectedness of oppressions that a woman may face in her daily life.

Previous feminist research has shown how mainstream media can be accused of being unfavourable to woman characters (Cantor, 1988; Wood, 1994). In addition, the media often provides negative portrayals when depicting women who embody non-conventional roles, such as being incarcerated, because it deviates from gendered expectations (Cheatwood, 1985). Therefore, by incorporating socialist feminism, dimensions other than sex will be added to the analysis of the portrayals of incarcerated woman within entertainment media. To this end, the simultaneous elements of race, class, gender, and sexuality will be further stressed through the theoretical and epistemological perspective of intersectionality, as it offers a more holistic approach in analyzing entertainment media.

### **Intersectionality**

As socialist feminism stresses gender and sexuality, while taking into account race and class, intersectionality will be used in this thesis to further interrogate the connection of oppressions between marginalized groups (McCall, 2005). Intersectionality is viewed as a system or perspective used to research the relationships among multiple systems of oppression, dimensions of discrimination, the organization of social relationships, and subject formations (McCall, 2005). It highlights that the main sources of oppression within society, such as racism, sexism, homophobia and religion, do not act independently of each other (Knudsen, 2006). Rather, as intersectionality illustrates, the forms of oppression interrelate and therefore create a new system of oppression that reflects this intersection of multiple forms of discrimination (Knudsen, 2006). This intersectional model, which is informed by multiracial feminism, has succeeded in examining gender through the lens of difference, while at the same time acknowledging the instrumental role of power in shaping gender relations (Burgess-Proctor, 2006).

Intersectionality and intersectional epistemology were first introduced and applied by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) to reinforce and strengthen the central tenants of a socialist feminist perspective. Intersectionality has its roots in numerous intellectual traditions, such as socialist feminism, race and ethnic studies, and postcolonial feminisms (Pelak, 2011). It examines a wide variety of lived experiences and social realities, not only on the individual level, but also through various aspects of society. Intersectionality successfully focuses on issues of power and domination, while concentrating on the important features that have been neglected in previous approaches to studying gender. In addition, similar to intersectionality, multiracial feminism will be used to further this analysis and will be used interchangeably.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) was one of the first researchers to use the term intersectionality to draw attention to the marginalization of Black women's experiences within a 'single-axis' framework of anti-discrimination laws, feminist theories and anti-racist politics. Her first article explaining intersectionality was based on the experience of Black women in the United States. Through this work she argues that an intersectional analysis should be used in both feminist and antiracist theories, which are unable to sufficiently address the experiences of Black women suffering from both sexual and racial discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). She believes that feminist theory is exclusive and typically ignores the intersection of race and sex within the oppression of women. Crenshaw (1989) illustrates this idea through an analogy of traffic:

Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (p. 149)

Through this analogy, Crenshaw (1989) encourages the examination of how different systems of oppression intersect and effect groups of women in different ways. Therefore, intersectionality is a necessary tool in understanding the multiple forms of oppression and discrimination.

Intersectionality gained attention in the 1990s when sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) reintroduced it as part of his discussion on Black feminism. She defines intersectionality as "particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation" (p. 18). Similar to her predecessor Crenshaw (1989), Collins (1990) argues that "Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity" (p. 42). In sum, she argues that oppression cannot be condensed into one fundamental category, but rather that various oppressions work together in creating inequalities. For example, she states that

Black women's lives are formed by gender and race, and therefore theories focusing on race or gender alone do not sufficiently address the simultaneity of race and gender in social lives (Collins, 1990). This framework is interested in the fact that there are no gender relations, but only gender relations as constructed by and between classes, races and cultures (Harding, 1991). Collins (1990) is thus interested in the opportunities and shortcomings associated with the combination of gender, race and class, which allows for an examination of differences among women or males exclusively, rather than between males and women.

Collins (1990) refers to the possible intersections of social inequality as the "matrix of domination" and describes how people are socially positioned based on their differences from one another (p.3). This refers to how the differences among people, such as their race, class, age and gender, serve as additional oppressive processes. This idea focuses on two designs. The first explains how any social structure has a particular association of intersecting systems of oppression. The second asserts that intersecting systems of oppression are specifically organized through four interrelated domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal (Collins, 1990). Specifically, Collins (1990) explains intersectionality as an "analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization" (p. 299). These features help shape women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by women. Collins (1990) is especially interested in the way intersectionality can reveal various types of lived experiences and social realities. Therefore, she believes that thinking about social phenomena through intersectionality can make new forms of inequalities and notions of power visible.

To extend this notion, Collins (1998) suggests that intersectionality "provides an interpretive framework for thinking through how intersections of race and class, or race and

gender, or sexuality and class, for example, shape any group's experience across specific social contexts” (p.208). Within this, Collins (1998) notes the importance of developing an appropriate and specific analysis of each group with a view to speculate the hierarchies of intersectionality, such that some types of oppression are not believed to be equivalent. More recently, Collins (2015) examines intersectionality as a knowledge project, whose purpose of existence lies in its “attentiveness to power relations and social inequalities” (p. 1). In this, she finds herself concerned with three interdependent elements and attempts to define intersectionality through providing navigational and conceptual tools to provide context. These elements are concerned with the fact that intersectionality is positioned within the power relations that it studies, while being used as an analytical strategy to outline new directions of social phenomena. In addition, intersectionality can also be viewed as a critical process that informs social justice projects. Collins (2015) states that academic work using intersectionality most often focuses on identities rather than on social inequities and social justice, which stems from critique of feminist scholarship through its failure to acknowledge multiple social contexts to appear as universal, but in truth only reflect the thought of the academics in their explicit social context. She concludes that intersectionality “faces the fundamental challenge of sustaining its critical edge” (Collins, 2015, p. 17) as the definitional dilemma of intersectionality is based on its creativity of the area of inquiry, while determining a common language that will be useful to its users.

To further the concept of intersectionality, Baca Zinn and Thorton Dill (1996) question how society can move away from the “false universalism embedded in the concept of ‘woman’ toward an examination of gender in the context of other locations of inequality” (p. 322). They identify five basic assertions common to intersectional approaches. These approaches include: (a) conceptualization of gender and race as structures and not simply individual traits; (b) the rejection

of a prior assumption that women constitute a unified category; (c) the existence of interlocking systems of inequality and oppression; (d) the recognition of the interplay of social structure and human agency; and (e) local analyses to understand interlocking inequalities (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). Therefore, they stress the combination of multiple phenomena that influence the degree of oppression an individual may face, what Collins' (1990) discusses as the matrix of domination.

As stated previously, intersectionality and multiracial feminism can be used interchangeably, but multiracial feminism further stresses that “race [acts] as a power system that interacts with other structured inequalities to shape genders” (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996, p. 324). Nevertheless, both theories focus on the interconnectedness of the multiple inequalities an individual may be faced with. Using an intersectional framework demonstrates that intersection creates both opportunity and oppression. Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (1996) explain:

At the same time that structures of race, class, and gender create disadvantages for women of color, they provide unacknowledged benefits for those who are at the top of these hierarchies—whites, members of upper classes, and males. Therefore, multiracial feminism applies not only to racial ethnic women, but also to women and men of all races, classes, and genders. (p. 327)

In society, men and women are characterized by their race, class, sexuality, age, physical ability and other sources of inequality, which together determine their social standing and the discrimination or oppression they may or may not be faced with (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996).

For these scholars, the elements of this interlocking system occur simultaneously. These aspects of intersectionality create a particular status for the individual in the social world. Consequently, social relations are examined in multiple and interactional terms rather than as additives (Daly, 1993). At times, race, class or gender may seem more influential over the other, but they are always equally relevant to an individual's identity. One central notion of this theory

is that power is relational as an individual can simultaneously experience both power and oppression in varying contexts, at different times, which means no individual or group can be entirely privileged or oppressed (Collins, 1990). In addition, social categories are no longer bounded or permanent, as an individual can self-identify using a combination of constructions.

Barak (2012) observed how race, class and gender usually are only individually applied to the study of crime, including its representations, rather than in concert. In addition, Burgess-Proctor (2006) outlines explanations of why contemporary criminologists should adopt an intersectional perspective. According to Barak (2012), an integrated theoretical perspective “incorporates an appreciation of differences in the patterns of crime attributed to socialization, opportunities, and bias in the context that everyone’s life is framed by inequalities of race, class, and gender” (p. 251). Similarly, multiracial feminism emphasizes this intersecting system of race, class and gender as a structuring force, which influences individuals’ actions, the available opportunities and the manner his or her behaviour is socially defined (Lynch, 1996). In addition, multiracial feminism and intersectionality allow feminist criminology to adopt a perspective that will permit theory to be translated into action. Social justice issues can be examined through a cohesive perspective that will provide insight in social and political circumstances, while challenging the power relations and intersecting systems of race, class and gender.

Furthermore, some scholars (Hancock, 2007; Jordan-Zachery, 2007; Bedolla, 2007) have investigated how the concept of intersectionality may be used within academic research. In general, Hancock (2007) argues that intersectionality must be viewed as a general approach or conceptual framework to understand and articulate the multiple oppressions that all marginalized groups face. Intersectionality motivates researchers to extend beyond single identities because they are ineffective in explaining the nuances of human lives, while encouraging the production of more



fruitful information to better understand the origins, root causes and characteristics of social issues. Thus, human lives cannot be reflected through a single category, as you cannot examine the collective impact of gender, race, sexuality, age and class as the sum of their independent effects (Hancock, 2007). Rather, intersectionality theorizes social categories as interrelating with and co-existing with one another to generate unique social positions that vary according to time and place. Overall, intersectionality is concerned with theories of knowledge and power, and more specifically, with the relationship between power and knowledge production. Collins (1990) argues that this type of analysis emerges “when abstract thought is joined with concrete action” (p. 29), which aims to reduce marginalization and subordination. By including the perspectives of individuals who are normally marginalized and excluded in the production of knowledge, the agents of power typically activated through the production of knowledge becomes disrupted (Dhamoon, 2011).

#### **Application of Intersectionality to Media Representations in *OITNB***

In terms of the analysis, the discussion related to the intersection of multiple oppressions, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, have become more popular within the social sciences (Hardy-Fanta, 2007; Parry & Karam, 2007). As the literature demonstrates, there is a lack of an intersectional analysis within criminology, especially within media analysis of crime and justice depictions (Potter, 2013; Brown, 2015). An intersectional approach is different as it conceptualizes social identity and categories of difference. The majority of theories used in media analyses are concerned with how the description, interpretation, explanation, and evaluation of power of the media are used to assimilate individuals in society (Fourie, 2007). Within media studies, more popular examples of theoretical perspectives include, but are not limited to, positivist (empirical, scientific method), critical (ideology, power and inequity), and poststructuralist/post-modern

approach (role of the recipient in the production of meaning) (Fourie, 2007), which typically lead to examining the functions of the media and the effects it has on society.

As discussed previously, this thesis will take a different theoretical approach from typical media and criminal justice perspectives, as it will not examine the effect the series has on its viewers. Through the discussion of Doyle (2006), cultural criminology and social constructionism in Chapter 2, it is evident that this thesis is more concerned with utilizing intersectionality to demonstrate how *OITNB* represents its diverse cast and how this may shape social and cultural understandings of such population. Referring back to Doyle (2006), the relationship between race, class, gender, and sexuality are complex and recursive and therefore do not simply cause public beliefs and attitudes. Thus, this thesis focuses on *OITNB*'s representations through the representation of the incarcerated women's race, class, gender, and sexuality to examine the ways in which its representations and narratives about crime, criminality and incarceration shape social understandings and cultural artifacts

Through the discussion above, it is evident how the principles of socialist feminism extended through intersectionality are relevant to analyzing media representation of criminalized and incarcerated women. The key feature of intersectionality, which examines the connection of multiple oppressions, allows for a perspective that will consider race, class, gender, and sexuality in the analysis. As socialist feminism has been critiqued for failing to take into account issues of race and racism as a core part of its analysis of gender oppression, intersectionality covers a wider spectrum of the dimensions of oppression. Therefore, this thesis will also examine the representations within the series, *OITNB*, through a perspective that analyzes social structure, usually in the form of patriarchal relations and gendered socio-cultural lifestyle, which fundamentally discriminates against women.

Given that *OITNB* is shown to incorporate multi-dimensional layers within its characters (Householder & Trier-Bieniek, 2016), intersectionality is an appropriate approach for analysis. For example, *OITNB* features the first transgender actor (Laverne Cox) to play a transgender character, includes a racially diverse cast, and portrays sexuality and gender as complicated issues. Despite this, the series has also been critiqued for putting forth a stereotypical depiction of women in the media, especially women of colour and women who do not identify as heterosexual (Fryett, 2016). Thus, this study utilizes an intersectional approach to display how modern media, in particular *OITNB*, reflects the intersectional layers of oppression. Prior to engaging in this analysis, the next chapter highlights the details of the methodology used throughout the course of this study.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to analyze the way in which incarcerated women are portrayed within entertainment media using an intersectional lens. To this end, I utilize a qualitative methodological approach to allow for an in-depth examination of *Orange is the New Black (OITNB)*, which was selected as the focus of this study. The purpose of this chapter is to revisit my research object, as well as provide a detailed overview of the collected data and the subsequent analysis via descriptive qualitative content analysis for this project.

### Research Object

It has been argued that the Netflix series, *OITNB*, provides a shockingly realistic and ‘revolutionary’ portrayal of the experiences of incarcerated women (Pecevich, 2013). To interrogate these assertions, this research is guided by the following question: *How are incarcerated women portrayed within entertainment media?* More precisely, I seek to answer: *How are incarcerated women represented in the series Orange is the New Black?* Guided by intersectionality, the aim of this assessment is to examine if and how race, class, gender, and sexuality are portrayed in *OITNB*. In doing so, I will be able to determine how the series challenges or reinforces hegemonic characterization of incarcerated women.

### Data Collection

The overall research design of this thesis is a descriptive qualitative content analysis. This technique is typically used to respond to ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about phenomena (Meyer, 2001). The most common types of information that are collected are documents and records, interviews, observation and physical artifacts (Creswell, 2007). The collected data will assist in making focused and detailed observations through the analysis (Tobin, 2010). The strategy to ensure trustworthiness of qualitative content analysis starts by choosing the best data collection

method to answer the research questions of interest (Elo et al., 2014). Within the research area of this thesis, the media's representation of incarcerated women, there are limited sources of material to choose, especially within the entertainment domain. Therefore, to examine the style in which incarcerated women are portrayed within entertainment media, one modern display of incarcerated women within entertainment media was chosen (*Orange is the New Black*). In addition, *OITNB* was selected because of its widespread popularity and claimed truthfulness (Pecevich, 2013; Cecil, 2015). As I intend to add to the limited academic literature pertaining to criminalized women's portrayal within the entertainment media, focusing on *OITNB* will allow for an underdeveloped area of inquiry to be examined within the criminological research field.

*OITNB* is a contemporary example of the representation of incarcerated women within entertainment media and seasons 1-3 constitute the sample. In sum, I watched 36 hour-long episodes and three 90-minute episodes. These episodes were accessed through my Netflix subscription. In addition to viewing *OITNB* episodes, I also downloaded the transcripts for each episode, which guided the observation. These documents were accessed via Springfield! Springfield! (2015), which is a database containing thousands of television show episode and movie scripts. This allowed for a deeper and more precise understanding of the dialogue occurring throughout the series. My observations also focussed on 14 main criminalized women characters. As noted in the Chapter 3, the intersectional approach deployed in this study highlights the importance of how incarcerated women, particular these 14 main criminalized women characters, are represented through the themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality. This selection of the material for analysis, which I elaborate upon below, is appropriate for this study as I am interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of *OITNB*'s portrayal of incarcerated women.

### ***Orange is the New Black***

*Orange is the New Black (OITNB)* is an American prison comedy-drama series released by Netflix, an on-demand Internet streaming website that provides access for subscribers to television shows and movies (Netflix Media Centre, 2016). *OITNB* is based on the experiences faced by incarcerated women and is loosely based on Piper Kerman's (2011) memoir *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*. The book narrates Kerman's yearlong period at the minimum-security correctional facility in Danbury, Connecticut, as a result of a conviction for her involvement in a drug smuggling and money-laundering scheme from 10 years earlier. The Netflix series centres on the character Piper Chapman, who is incarcerated in her thirties, sentenced to 15 months after being convicted of a decade-old crime of transporting money for her drug-dealing girlfriend (Orange is the New Black Wikia, 2016). Since the offence Piper had led a simple and law-abiding life with her boyfriend and family in New York. Upon her incarceration, Piper is reunited with her ex-girlfriend, Alex Vause, which causes issues in Litchfield.

The original series aired on Netflix on July 11, 2013 in all regions where Netflix is available, including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland, Latin America, Brazil and the Nordics Countries (Goldberg, 2013). It was then aired on broadcast television in New Zealand and Australia later that year (Goldberg, 2013). During the course of my master's degree, there were three seasons of *OITNB* available, with a fourth season released in June 2016 (Abrams, 2016). In addition, *OITNB* was renewed in February 2016 for three more seasons, which is said to be the longest commitment for any television series in recent memory (Harnick, 2016). As an indication of its popularity, *OITNB* generated more viewers and hours viewed in its first week than the other Netflix original series, including *House of Cards* and *Arrested Development* (Kafka, 2013). At the time of season one's release, Netflix, which does not display its viewer figures,

revealed that *OITNB* was its most popular original series (Nicholson, 2014). In addition, the series and some of the cast members have been nominated and received various awards within the entertainment industry including the Golden Globes, Primetime Emmys, Screen Actors Guild Awards, Grammy's, Online Film and Television Association and People's Choice awards (Hernandez, 2014). These tributes demonstrate that not only is *OITNB* popular, it is also critically acclaimed.

After only one season, Maureen Ryan (2013), a TV critic at *The Huffington Post*, stated that “*Orange* is one of the best new programs of the year, and the six episodes I've seen have left me hungry to see more”. Following the release of the second season, Tirdad Derakshani (2015), an entertainment reporter at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* said, “After 26 episodes, it's as funny, moving, compelling, and fresh as ever” (p.1). Most importantly, just recently following season three of *OITNB*, Liz Shannon Miller (2015), an *Indiewire* TV Editor stated:

‘Orange’ is a show about women -- a show that is so powerful because it shouts against the idea that a single ‘strong woman character’ equals diversity. There are women who prefer to be invisible, and women who demand to be seen, and women who just want to get through the day. Sometimes, they make mistakes that land them in prison. But ‘Orange’ finds the beauty in them, even in their most stripped down and ugly moments. Because ‘Orange’ makes sure that they are seen. (p. 1)

Overall, *OITNB* receives predominantly positive reviews, Lawson (2015) states that it suppresses an element of surprise from prison, as it inhabits the “melting pot of modern America, depicted through not only dark comedic edge, but also with a deep empathy, at once weary and hopeful” (p.1). Therefore, it is clear that *OITNB* has made positive impressions as reflected in both media headlines and public attention.

As stated previously, there has been some scholarly research conducted on *OITNB*, which is not as surprise as it is a network series where there is a potential for different kinds of stories, ones that may hold the ability to challenge the normative and political content of more traditional

media forms. The scholars described in Chapter 2 (Cecil, 2015; Caputi, 2016; DeCarvalho & Cox, 2016; Belcher, 2016; Terry, 2016; Smith, 2015; Pramaggiore, 2016; Silverman & Ryalls, 2016; Householder & Trier-Bieniek, 2016) and master theses centring on this series (Louis, 2015, Weatherford Millette, 2015; Stearns, 2014; Chavez, 2015) use *OITNB* as their focus, yet distinctions, such as the theoretical framework, methodology, analysis, and research questions, exist between them. The present thesis examines the series through an intersectional analysis that considers how race, class, gender, and sexuality are used to portray the main criminalized women characters. Also, this thesis analyzes the first three seasons, which a minimal number of the previously named studies did.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is complex and involves moving back and forth between data and abstract concepts (Merriam, 2009). As stated previously, this thesis utilizes a qualitative content analysis method to draw conclusions from *OITNB*. Qualitative content analysis examines the relationship between the text and the meanings provided to the audience (Macnamara, 2005; Bryman, Bell & Teevan, 2012). In other words, qualitative content analysis focuses on revealing the deeper meaning in the material that is being analyzed. It is a fundamental method based on gathering data from the observers' judgment by recording or transcribing the textual, visual, or audible messages within communication (Krippendoff, 2004).

Most often the analysis is based on information and text expressed in words, descriptions, opinions, feelings and visual cues. The sources of text may be in verbal, print, or electronic form and can be attained from narrative responses, interviews, focus groups, observations, or print media such as articles, books, or manuals (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). Qualitative content analysis uses an inductive approach and is unobtrusive, while enabling the researcher to examine



messages “in view of the meanings, symbolic qualities and expressive contents” (Krippendoff, 2004, p. 45). It examines the content, information or symbols contained in text, language and visually based data to examine culture and accredited meaning given to it within social reality (Kraska & Neumen, 2008). Therefore, content analysis enables the discovery and analysis of manifest and latent content that is objectively present or that cannot be measured directly (Neuendorf, 2002).

Manifest content refers to elements that are substantially present and countable, while latent concepts consist of variables that cannot be directly measured (Neuendorf, 2002). Therefore, manifest content is on the surface, is explicit and is clearly indicated, such as words and their denotations, while latent content is implicit and is often implied, but not present in text (Neuendorf, 2002). In terms of the media, the manifest content is what is being said, while latent content will include other cues, such as the vocal tone, visual signals and body language (Sparks, 2013). When using content analysis to examine the media, these two elements are often combined. For example, the researcher is typically focused on the text itself, as well as the contextual factors, such as the environment and situations of the scenes and the channel of the communication (Macnamara, 2003). In terms of this study’s subject matter, Cecil (2015) explains that to truly uncover the messages that popular culture sends of the penal system, it is necessary to identify the underlying messages and determine how the issue of imprisonment is framed through visual cues.

More specific to the present thesis, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) explain that qualitative content analysis can be used to study mass-mediated representations. While studying the media, content analysis can refer to a research technique that is based on measuring a phenomenon in a representative sampling of a mass-mediated popular art form (Berger, 1998). This means the researcher is attempting to examine a particular issue through the fashion that it is written and

produced in. When conducting a media content analysis, the researcher intends to reveal the properties that are not otherwise observable. In general, the focus is on the text such as words, sentences and phrases, but when analyzing the text, the research goes beyond the factual surface to concentrate on the meaningfulness of the text (Anderson, 2012). Further, the meaningfulness involves the relationship between the text and a ‘meaning maker’, otherwise known as the researcher, and is therefore not limited to the text itself.

As technology increases and constantly evolves, qualitative media content analysis has become a more popular method of investigation (Altheid & Schneidern, 2013). Frequently, a researcher will focus attention on an issue such as basic values and attitudes, gender roles and political or social problems that become apparent within the media content. In addition, qualitative media content analysis can investigate words and phrases within the text, audience’s response to the phenomena, and examine general themes within the context (Devereux, 2014). Regardless of the focus, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe the four steps for media analyses, explaining that the researcher must first regard the media outlet as a whole, create research questions, conduct structured microanalyses on individual scenes and finally search for patterns. This allows a researcher to examine samples from the media observed all together, which is used to examine latent and manifest content to relate it to other similar samples.

Qualitative content analysis involves “subjective interpretations of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Throughout qualitative content analysis, the researcher begins with a relevant area, which he or she begins to investigate from their theoretical standpoint. In most cases, the data analysis reflects the theoretical perspective of the researcher, which will help in coding the data (Merriam, 2009). Particularly, while conducting a content analysis, the researcher is

searching for insights in which situations, settings, styles, images and meanings are significant to the displays throughout the collected data (Merriam, 2009). A researcher will then choose a specific approach in regards to his or her theoretical and substantive interests and the area and problem under study (Weber, 1990). Prior to beginning the analysis, the research question is chosen to ensure efficiency and empirical grounding (Krippendoff, 2004). This demonstrates that a researcher will begin with his or her research question to ensure that they interpret text for a specific guided purpose and through an appropriate chosen theoretical perspective (Krippendoff, 2004). To answer a research question through a stated theoretical framework, the researcher will typically form a coding technique to use throughout the analysis. As stated previously, the present thesis is theoretically informed by intersectionality, which is the perspective that the data is analyzed through. Therefore, the qualitative coding technique used within this thesis is reflective of that theoretical approach.

### **Qualitative Coding**

The data analysis process began with category construction, which involves developing codes. To reiterate, qualitative coding was used to explore the collected data for themes, ideas and categories, characterized with a code label (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This allows for certain categories to be easily retrievable for further analysis. Within qualitative content analysis, codes are more subjective, broad and lead to the subsequent step of interpreting patterns that are found within the sample. In the context of this thesis, coding involved creating content categories in order to analyze the collected data, such as the words and themes within *OITNB* (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). Coding within content analysis is interpretive and begins with an engaging problem. In general, a code is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, essence-capturing and/or suggestive attribute for a portion of language, text or visual data (Saldana, 2009). Categories and a coding

scheme can be formed from three sources: (a) the data; (b) previous related studies; and (c) theories (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Although researchers begin with a pre-existing coding system, it may be modified and additions can be made throughout the research. The coding begins with a preliminary and tentative set of codes that have been based from previous literature, but other themes may become present throughout the collection (Anderson, 2012). The initial codes are guided from the conceptual and theoretical framework, research questions, and problem areas (Anderson, 2012).

As this thesis was conducted through an intersectional lens, the coding themes were based on the aspects of race, class, gender, and sexuality (See Appendix A). Each character has a designated coding template to record the themes that were evident throughout the series, along with the details of the portrayal (e.g. episode number and scene number) and relevant text. Through this, there are three columns: The first is titled *Notes* to describe what is occurring in the recorded scene; the second is called *Script* to display the manifest content and actual words spoken during the scene; and finally the last column is termed *Visual Cues* to explain relevant latent messages such as tone of voice, visual cues, and environment of the scene.

Prior to coding, the series was viewed without taking any notes with the aim of grasping an overall understanding of the series. The second viewing of the series involved the first round of coding, which focused on manifest content and documenting the dialogue and script of the television episodes pertaining to the guided themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Within the third viewing, the second round of coding involved the latent content or visual elements of the series, which was recorded on the same template to correspond with the dialogue. Therefore, the 39 episodes were viewed three times to ensure the reliability of the recorded manifest and latent content. I examined both manifest and latent content to ensure that not only the words, but also the

context surrounding the script are examined. Due to the fact that the series is viewed on Netflix, I was able to pause, rewind, and continue playing each episode without disrupting note taking or the coding process

Subsequently, during the third round of coding I reviewed the Content Analysis Coding Template and produced a character development worksheet for the 14 recurring and main characters. The aim of this was to describe how each individual character was portrayed across the seasons. This allowed for an in-depth focus on each main criminalized woman character to better understand how she evolved over the 39 episodes in terms of actions, mentality, and physical appearance in relation to race, class, gender, and sexuality. Finally, the content analysis helped me identify themes or patterns that emerged from coding rounds one to three. This analysis focused on the main characters and their portrayal within *OITNB* based on their representations of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In the next chapter, I present how these themes were addressed in the series and contrast those to the previously reviewed literature.

### **Applicability**

In general, content analysis is an appropriate methodology because the coding scheme may be refined or corrected throughout the research if there are possible errors detected (Tallerico, 1991). In addition, content analysis is often a preferred methodology as it produces results that are consistent, valid and therefore replicable (Lissack, 1998; Woodrum, 1984). Consequently, content analysis was selected for this research as it allows the messages and themes within *OITNB* to be analyzed effectively. The major goal of this thesis was to identify important themes or categories within the collected data to provide an in-depth description of the social reality created by those themes or categories (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative content analysis relies heavily on researcher 'readings' and interpretation of the chosen collected data (Macnamara, 2003). Jasper

(2005) explains how it is important that decisions within research are not stripped of the personal contributions of researchers. Reflexivity reminds the researcher to engage with the moment, while being conscious of their cultural, linguistic, political, and ideological origins (Patton, 2002). Reflexivity is “an invaluable tool to promote understanding of the phenomenon under study and the researcher's role” (Jootun, McGhee & Marland, 2009, p. 46). Through the process of this research project, I was conscious of the reflexive considerations of how subjectivity may have shaped, framed or influenced the research design, coding and development of interpretive findings. For example, I am aware of my privileges in terms of my identity as white, middle class, heterosexual, and educated woman that help shape who I am. To attempt to limit my subjectivity and reflexivity through my analysis, I outlined my epistemological position in Chapter 2 and carefully focused on the process of collecting and analyzing data through multiple rounds of coding. These rounds of coding were guided by specific themes of intersectionality, which reflects the particular data I was investigating.

In terms of methodological rigour, qualitative research relies on various methods to ensure quality. Guba and Lincoln (1982) offered an alternative to reliability and validity through the substitution of trustworthiness. This concept included four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings and the value and believability of the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In the present thesis this was ensured through thorough data collection of all seasons of *OITNB* at the time. The process of analysis included four rounds of rigorous coding; the first recorded the dialogue and script, while the second documented the visual elements. Following these two rounds of coding, the third produced a character development description of the main characters, while the last created the analysis of the first three rounds of coding. One limitation to this aspect is the fact that I did not

analyze the memoir in which the series is based off of, thus limiting data triangulation. Another study limitation is that I only examined the first three seasons of *OITNB*, as season four had not been released at the time of the data collection.

Transferability was achieved through demonstrating that the findings have applicability in other contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Through this thesis, I hope that the reader is able to apply this methodology in similar contexts or situations, such as other portrayals of crime, the criminalized and prisons through popular culture. Dependability refers to sense that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). This is achieved through reporting each process of the study in detail to enable another researcher to repeat the analysis and achieve similar results. Finally, confirmability is the degree of neutrality and accuracy of the data within the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Within the present study, this refers to how the findings are supported by the data and is achieved through providing rich and specific examples in terms of characters and episodes to explain and support the analysis.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings of this research study, which were generated through a content analysis of seasons 1-3 of *Orange is the New Black* (*OITNB*) using a feminist and intersectional theoretical lens. Having coded and derived notable themes from 39 episodes, it became evident that *OITNB* often challenges stereotypical portrayals of criminalized women within the entertainment media, while at times reinforcing them. Below, I highlight and unpack the intersectional themes that describe how *OITNB* represents criminalized woman characters. First, I provide a description of the 14 main characters, chosen based on their central roles in the series, and sketch their development throughout the three seasons (see Appendix B for a photograph of each character to correspond with each character development). Following this, the themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality in *OITNB* are explored in relation to the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Subsequently, I revisit the research question and discuss key findings concerning the portrayal of incarcerated women in *OITNB*. All of the descriptions provided below are representations the series presents to its viewers, so it is important to note that socially-constructed terms such as gender, gender roles, feminine, masculine, race, crime, and terms associated with sexual orientation will be used for descriptive purposes only and by no means does this thesis aim to further reinforce these dominant terms.

Overall, this analysis displays how the characters develop through the first three seasons, but it is important to also explain *OITNB*'s development overall. Season one focuses on the main character, Piper Chapman, and her struggles. Season two revolves around the threat of a previously incarcerated woman, Yvonne Parker (Vee), returning to and taking over Litchfield Penitentiary (Litchfield). Season three is more expansive in that its episodes focus on multiple diverse characters, their past experiences that led to their incarnation (shown through flashbacks), and



present-day relationships. As will be shown, *OITNB* provides a representation of incarceration women that, although reinforcing some elements, is a departure from the women in prison genre, through its depiction of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

### **Main Character Development**

*OITNB*'s challenge against the dominant ideologies surrounding depictions of criminalized women is first illustrated through the development of the main characters. As stated previously in Chapter 4, *OITNB* is a series centred on the women incarcerated in Litchfield prison. This analysis focuses on the numerous characters and events occurring in the first three seasons. Apart from the main characters, there are other minor recurring characters that are mentioned throughout the analysis. These characters are recurring as they frequently appear from time to time throughout the series, compared to the main cast who are involved in the majority of the episodes throughout the series. These recurring characters include Claudette Pelage, Cindy Hayes, Tricia Miller, Erica Jones, Yvonne Parker (Vee), Sister Jane Ingalls, Maritza Ramos, Stella Carlin, Blanca Flores, and Maria Ruiz (see Appendix C for a photograph of these characters). These characters, although not included in the main cast, contribute to the overall story of *OITNB* and the main characters' storylines. The following character development describes the 14 main characters that were selected for this analysis on the basis of their centrality to the plotlines of the series, which will help answer the broader research question guiding this study inquiring how incarcerated women are displayed in entertainment media and specifically *OITNB*.

#### **Piper Chapman**

Piper Chapman is the main character in *OITNB*. In terms of physical appearance, Piper is young, white, and has blonde hair and blue eyes. Piper's character coincides with the "ideal woman" in the media, who often is thin, beautiful, and has blue eyes and blonde hair (Ajzenstadt & Steinberg,

1997). Her nicknames, based on her appearance and background, are “Blondie”, “Taylor Swift”, “Lindsay Lohan”, “Dandelion”, and “College” (1.4).

In the beginning of the series Piper appears to be a naive character that does not want to be involved with other women or drama. As the series continues, a different side of Piper emerges as she proves to be harsh, spoiled, selfish and devious as she pursues her own endeavours as is evident when she plots to have Alex re-incarcerated (2.13) and prevents Stella’s release (3.13). Her development throughout the series is regressive in that she makes more enemies, treats others badly and becomes even more self-absorbed and narcissistic as she manipulates others through her new used-panty business, as will be discussed in the race section of this analysis (3.11). She is often in this position because of her privilege and related unearned power, evident through her connections and network of friends and family who help her, visit her, and send her money from the outside. Despite this, at numerous times she is shown that her privilege on the outside is irrelevant to Litchfield’s incarcerated such as when she expresses that she has been “starved out, felt up, teased, stalked and threatened” by the other women (1.4). Despite this, Piper remains oblivious to real class struggle when she expresses her concern of not having a place to live or a job when she is released, but it is obvious that unlike many of the other women, her family and friends will support her, along with her educational pursuits. Thus, she is often unresponsive to other women’s struggling dilemmas shaped by poverty and racism, which demonstrates she does not understand class and racial struggles. This is evident through her and Daya’s (see p.74) conversation about Piper growing up in a wealthy white family, and Piper explains, “Money does buy happiness, up to \$75,000 a year”, to which Daya responds, “75 grand is a lot” and Piper quickly states “Yeah, no. I guess, I guess it is” (3.7). At times it is shown that Piper is unaware of her

privileged upbringing, especially when she makes remarks such as, “I guess white privilege wins again” (2.8).

Piper grew up in an upper middle-class family in which her parents were often obsessed with her social appearance (1.6). In terms of events preceding her incarceration, Piper meets Alex Vause (see p. 71) shortly after graduating college and became intimately involved with the international drug smuggler (1.1). Soon after their break-up caused by Alex using Piper as her drug smuggler, Piper meets Larry Bloom, to whom she got engaged prior to entering Litchfield. While incarcerated, Piper does not self-identify with a sexual orientation and in the pilot episode states that “No, I am not *still* a lesbian”, when explaining her sexuality to her family, who were unaware she has ever dated a woman (1.1). Throughout the series, Piper expresses heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian traits, as she is seen being engaged to Larry, dating Alex and claiming she loves both of them at the same time, yet she does not self-identity with any label.

Overall, the three seasons of *OITNB* display Piper’s journey through the penal system, beginning with her first rough week where she does not know how to adapt to her new prison lifestyle, to the last episode where she displays her power within the institution’s hierarchal system over the other women, gained through managing her own business and threatening those who attempt to cross her. Season one of *OITNB* focuses on Piper’s transition and adaptation to Litchfield, while season two portrays Piper as becoming more adapted to her incarcerated life as she begins to threaten others, including the Warden. She is granted furlough to visit her dying grandmother and many women believe this is because of her white middle-class privilege (2.8). Finally, in season three Piper displays her most cynical and manipulative self as she creates a used panty-selling company, Felonious Spunk, within Litchfield, which often reflects her corporate greed (3.11). At first, she pays the women wearing her panties with Ramen noodle

seasoning packets, but is forced to pay them money after a fellow criminalized woman, Flaca, threatens to cause a strike (3.11). Nevertheless, as her business becomes more successful, she becomes darker and more cold-blooded, firing Flaca in vengeance for her provocation of the strike (3.11). Piper's personality change somewhat leads to the end of her relationship with Alex, and new love interest, Stella. Piper developed from a timid person to a hardened individual through her experiences of being threatened, beaten, abandoned, betrayed, and subject to solitary confinement as a result of conflicts with fellow prisoners and staff.

### **Alex Vause**

Alex is sentenced to Litchfield as an international drug smuggler, and is Piper's ex-girlfriend. In terms of physical appearance, Alex is a tall woman with dyed black hair and wears thick black glasses. She admits that she is nervous about the period following her incarceration as her only skill is "moving massive amounts of heroin" (1.12). She admits to suffering from depression in which she explains to Nicky that she can't even "get past the swirling darkness in my brain long enough to land on anything" (1.4). She does associate with other women within Litchfield, but typically keeps to herself emotionally. It is evident that Alex relies on Piper as seen through begging Piper to stay with her (1.8; 1.11), but Alex's manipulative personality prevails once again as she tricks Piper to not testify in court so that she could be released from Litchfield (2.1). Alex does not strongly change over the series and she typically does not create trouble or drama with prisoners other than Piper. Although many of the women believe she is from a middle-class family, Alex often makes it known that she has no money as her involvement in the drug-business has finished (1.12).

The series presents her background as one where she was raised by her mother, as her 'rockstar' father was unaware of her existence. Alex grew up in a lower socioeconomic area and

her mom worked four jobs, which other students bullied her for (1.9). Thus, Alex did not have money for trendy clothes or college, which leads her to constantly experiencing the feelings of inadequacy and exclusion (1.4). Through tracking down her father, Alex met his friend who introduced her to the drug smuggling trade (1.9). She met Piper at a bar, instantly took interest in her and gradually brought her into the drug trade. Alex's mother died around the time Piper broke things off, leaving her feeling abandoned once again (1.11).

At the beginning of season one, Piper and Alex barely communicated, but once Piper believed Alex did not cause her incarceration, they reconciled (1.8). Piper and Alex had a love affair until Larry told Piper that Alex did in fact name her, leading to her incarceration (1.11). Alex rarely appears in season two, other than at her trial where she is released due to a plea deal (2.1). Once released, Alex is scared for her own safety because she does not have any protection from her murderous ex-boss who she believes may seek revenge (2.6). In the last episode of season two, Alex is arrested again because Piper had her friend call Alex's probation officer to tell him Alex was breaking her parole conditions (2.13). Season three begins with Alex arriving back at Litchfield, embarrassed for her actions, and she and Piper date again (3.11). Throughout season three Alex becomes very paranoid and displays signs of mental distress towards the fact that her ex-boss, who is very angry with her, now knows where she is at all times. She believes he may have hired a hit-man to kill her in Litchfield and she expresses this worry to Piper who makes light of the situation and explains that it would not be possible (3.13). Season three ends with Alex being cornered and threatened in the garden shed by a new officer, who works for her ex-boss (3.13)

### **Tiffany Doggett**

Tiffany has the greatest degree of character development over the three seasons of *OITNB*. In season one she was Piper's primary antagonist and she eventually attempts to kill her (1.13). In

this season, Tiffany is worshipped by many in the public as a defender of the unborn and receives a lot of ‘fan mail’ to show their support. The reasoning behind this becomes evident through a flashback where it is shown that Tiffany shot one of the nurses in an abortion clinic as a result of a snarky comment, which leads to many pro-life activists supporting Tiffany as a ‘hero’ because it appears that she was defending the unborn life (1.12). As a result of their moral and financial support, Tiffany had a high-profile Christian lawyer to defend her in court and she quickly became a religious extremist.

Tiffany was often hated by the other women and was frequently used as a character filler to make Litchfield seem horrible and dangerous, as evident through her homophobia (1.9), transphobic attitudes to Sophia (1.5) and violent stunts against Piper (1.13). In season two Tiffany loses most of her religious passion and drive, and she becomes less violent. Tiffany becomes the new driver at Litchfield during season three and quickly becomes good friends with the new correctional officer Coates (3.9). They develop an unprofessional relationship, which Coates quickly takes advantage of and abuses her through rape (3.9). This imitates her past where at ten-years old her mother told her that she was becoming a woman and now men would expect sex from her, which just feels like a “bee-sting” (3.10). Her flashbacks show how men fully take advantage of her, but she thinks it is acceptable and part of being a woman. As a result of this influence, it is clear that Tiffany has a low self-worth, and believes that sex is to be enjoyed and controlled by men. As Tiffany enters adulthood, she is shown as a sexually irresponsible methamphetamine user (1.12). Despite these instances, the third season shows Tiffany developing into a woman who is frantically attempting to survive in the world based on the horrifying rules her mom initially explained to her. Tiffany is transformed into a more laidback individual who is

attempting to mature beyond what she was taught as a child and to take a new outlook on life, free of abuse and self-neglect.

### **Dayanara Diaz**

Dayanara (Daya) is serving a sentence for a drug-related charge in the same institution as her mother, Aleida. Throughout the series it is clear that Daya is quiet and shy as she does not interact extrovertly with other women, while also remaining the protector of her family and herself. Her mother's boyfriend's drug dealing business operated out of their apartment where Daya lived with her younger siblings (1.5). Daya took more responsibility of her siblings than her mother did and once Aleida was arrested for taking responsibility for the drug-dealing business, they would go visit despite the little attention their mother paid to them (1.5). Through flashbacks she is shown to compassionately care for her siblings through making their meals, along with taking an interest in their activities and wellbeing (1.5).

Within season one, Daya and an officer in Litchfield, Bennett, engage in a romance, which they must keep secret (1.6). Daya is impregnated by Bennett and decides to keep the baby, which creates concern as Bennett can be charged with rape (1.8). As a cover, Daya seduces officer Mendez into sex so that it looks like it is his baby and he gets charged with rape (1.12). In season two, Daya names Officer Mendez as her baby's father and he is arrested for this, yet remains excited that he will be a father (2.10). In season three, Officer Bennett and Daya are both excited for the birth of their baby, but after a few short days and an engagement later, Officer Bennett disappears (3.4). At the end of the season Daya still has around 35 months remaining of her incarceration. By this time, she and her mother's relationship has improved as they hug and share a moment of reconciliation, when they realize they both need each other and Daya even thanks her

for making her keep her baby against her wishes (3.13). Daya initially has an idealistic view on love and relationships, but then claims to not believe in love after Bennett abandons her.

### **Galina Rezniov**

Galina, most often referred to as Red, is known as a powerful woman within the institution who rules the kitchen with an iron-fist. In terms of physical appearance, Red has short red hair and is known to be cold, fierce and the leader of the white women. In season one Red runs a smuggling business out of her kitchen, but refuses to import drugs of any kind. Even though she is typically serious, there are times that Red is shown as sentimental, as she often uses her smuggling business to bring in products to help some of the women overcome drug addiction. This allows her to be known as a motherly figure to the younger women, as she always wants what is best for them, which she expresses through tough-love, such as starving Piper (1.2) and shunning Tricia for using drugs (1.9). In season two, Red fights over smuggling tunnels with Vee, a past enemy who returned to Litchfield after many years. This results in Vee attacking her with a lock hidden in a sock and Red being hospitalized. It is in season three that she realizes that she does not have much time remaining in Litchfield and is now more concerned with what she will do post-release. After realizing that her restaurant on the outside is doing horribly, Red decides that she does not want to be with her husband any longer, due to his lies about the restaurant's success, highlighting her self-determination (3.2).

### **Nicole Nichols**

Nicole (Nicky) is an incarcerated woman in Litchfield, but is taken to the maximum-security institution in the third season. Throughout her childhood, a nanny raised Nicky as her wealthy mother lived separately with her boyfriend (1.6). This resulted in a very negative relationship between Nicky and her mother, which continued into adulthood as their only exchanges were over



Nicky asking for financial assistance (3.3). Nicky had to undergo an open-heart surgery as a young adult, which was caused by her heroin use (1.6). Nicky is very hostile towards her mother, as she neglected her throughout her childhood and believes this set her on a “path of self-destruction” (3.3). Despite this behaviour, throughout the series Nicky is shown to be sarcastic, humorous, and curious, as she befriends both Piper and Alex to gather information about what occurred between the two of them before their incarceration. She proudly identifies as a lesbian and keeps track of every woman she has a sexual encounter with.

When first entering Litchfield, Red (see p.75) helps Nicky recover from her heroin relapse and Nicky then refers to her as mom (1.6). At the beginning of season one, Nicky was having ongoing sexual relations with Lorna (see p.77), who then ended things (1.4). Season two focuses on Nicky and Big Boo’s sex competition, in which they wanted to see who could acquire the highest number of sexual partners (2.4). When Nicky is sent to maximum-security in season three, Lorna tells her that Red will be very upset, but it is clear that Nicky has a low self-worth as she states that Red is not her mother because she would never wish that upon anyone (3.3). It is clear that the lack of attention and affection in Nicky’s upbringing had an immense effect on the woman she currently is.

### **Brook Soso**

Brook Soso arrives at Litchfield during season two. In terms of physical appearance, Soso’s background is Japanese and Scottish, but the white women of Litchfield support her. Overall, she is passionate for what she believes in and is portrayed as honest and ethical, as she was incarcerated due to political protest (2.3). In addition, at one point she is so disgusted about their treatment in Litchfield that she protests through a hunger strike and also refuses to shower (2.7; 2.8). She is often sexualized within Litchfield as she engages in sex and describes her sexual past (2.4). Soso

is portrayed more as a sexual object as Nicky, who is often her sexual partner, says that she talks too much so she needs to regularly cover her mouth (2.4).

During her childhood, Soso was raised in a strict household with her mother who stressed that she must be the best at everything, such as playing the piano (3.13). When she first enters Litchfield she becomes acquainted with Piper, even though Piper shows no interest. Piper attempts to have her become Big Boo's (see p. 71) pseudo wife in return for her blanket, but Soso realizes this, shuns Piper and ends up having sexual relations with Nicky (2.4). In season three Soso realizes she does not have many friends in Litchfield and becomes depressed. She attempts to commit suicide, but Poussey, Taystee and Suzanne help her and ultimately save her life, while also saving her from being sent to the Psychiatric Housing Unit (3.13). She then becomes friends with them as seen in the season three finale.

### **Lorna Muccio**

Lorna Muccio (Morello) is portrayed as a hyperfeminine, often-racist woman, who is in the process of planning her fake wedding for all of season one. She is described as "pretty and nonthreatening, she likes her lipstick, and she listens" (1.6; 2.4). At times she engages in sexual relations with Nicky, but breaks things off because she feels guilty about betraying her fake fiancé Christopher (1.4). Most of the other women enjoy her presence because she is easy-going, positive and optimistic, as she is often seen welcoming newcomers (1.1), keeping the conversation going while driving the Litchfield van (2.7), and providing beauty advice in a newsletter (2.13). She frequently expresses her femininity when she engages in behaviours such as doing her daily makeup and hairdos, and is resourceful as she manages to make beauty products from materials she can acquire, such as tampons as hair curlers and instant coffee as eyeshadow (1.4). It is also clear that she suffers from a mental illness due to her rages, outbursts, illogical decision-making and delusions,

especially when it is revealed that Christopher is not really her fiancé, but a man she went on one date with, who then placed a restraining order against her when she began stalking him (2.4). She often makes racial comments, although the source of her ignorance is never specified.

### **Suzanne Warren**

Other women often disrespectfully refer to Suzanne as “Crazy Eyes”, because her eyes are big and bulgy. Suzanne is easily emotionally attached to other people, as evident through calling Piper her wife after one day (1.3), and can become quickly upset or frustrated, even with herself, as seen through her hitting herself on the head and calling herself stupid (2.3; 2.10). This demonstrates that she may be emotionally unstable and may suffer from mental health issues, yet she remains compassionate and friendly as she goes out of her way to help those in need, such as helping Piper when Alex seemed to be bothering her (1.3). She clearly has anxiety, but admits she is able to control this through cleaning the bathrooms at night (1.12). She grew up with a white family, but through flashbacks it is clear she was still treated differently by others, possibly due to her race. Before entering Litchfield, Suzanne was adopted by a childless white couple, who eventually were able to have a child themselves when she was five. Throughout her childhood, Suzanne did not abide to society’s socialization standards of girls her age, as evident through flashbacks of her as a child at a sleepover and talking about dragons when all the other girls told stories of princesses, causing many people not to accept her (2.3). Her mother was always protective of her and wanted Suzanne to be successful in anything she did. The negative effect of this is not evident until a flashback of Suzanne’s high school graduation where she was pushed by her mother to perform a song she created. She was unable to sing because of stage-fright and she started hitting herself in the head while calling herself “stupid” (2.3). These feelings are carried into adulthood, exemplified when she ran off stage during the Christmas play and ends up hitting Piper and screaming,

“No, Mommy! Oh! I don’t want to! You’re always pushing me to do these things! Pushing me! No more, Mommy! No more” (2.3).

In season one, Suzanne, who is a lesbian, becomes obsessed with Piper and wants her to be her wife. Officer Healy tells Piper that Suzanne has had a violent past and has had many pseudo wives before Piper (1.3). Suzanne calls Piper “Dandelion” and believes that they are in a relationship until Piper puts an end to it (1.3). After this, Suzanne admits to Piper that she dislikes everyone calling her “Crazy Eyes” (1.11). Throughout season three, Suzanne writes a science fiction erotica series that many of the women love to read, which helps her reach a level of acceptance that she never had in the previous seasons. When another woman takes interest in Suzanne, Suzanne admits that she has no experience with sex and does not understand it (3.10). In the last episode, they are seen flirting with each other and holding hands.

### **Poussey Washington**

Poussey is sentenced to Litchfield for dealing marijuana and is often one of Litchfield’s most likable women. Overall, Poussey is depicted as humorous, honest and thoughtful. She helps Taystee (see p.82) with her parole, even though she will be very lonely without her and saves Soso’s life (see p. 67), even though they are not friends. She always stands up for what she believes in and is not afraid to protect herself, as seen through destroying Vee’s entire batch of tobacco by pouring bleach on it (2.12). Her lesbian sexuality is often displayed through flashbacks where she remembers the girl that she once loved, but was not allowed to be with, due to the girl’s father’s views on race and sexuality (2.6).

Through flashbacks, it is revealed that Poussey is the daughter of a military worker, which caused her to move around often. Poussey is shown as having a close relationship with her mother, who died when Poussey was incarcerated and she was unable to go to the funeral (1.12). She is

kind-hearted and is often used for comic relief, especially when she and Taystee (see p. 82) are mocking white people (1.6). In season two, Poussey inexplicitly confesses her love for Taystee, who does not reciprocate the feelings (2.3). In season three, Poussey shows symptoms of depression and turns to alcohol that she makes in Litchfield (3.5). Poussey attempts to suppress her feelings of depression and alcoholism, and at times she seeks help from Taystee through expressing that she is lonely without a girlfriend and Taystee tries to assure her that she will always be there for Poussey as a friend (3.6). When Poussey finds Soso in the library after she attempts to overdose, Poussey becomes very close with her and they are seen holding hands, but it is unclear if their relationship is platonic or romantic (3.13).

### **Carrie Black**

Carrie, otherwise known as “Big Boo”, is known as one of the more intimidating women in Litchfield for her size and competitive nature, shown when she gets upsets with her former ‘wife’ Mercy for giving away a shirt she gave her and threatens to cause an extension on her incarceration (1.4). Big Boo is confident in her homosexuality as she often has ‘wives’ and is often shown making sexual passes at other women in Litchfield. In season one she is responsible for stealing a screwdriver from Piper’s cell to stimulate herself (1.4). Through flashbacks, Big Boo is shown to struggle with her gender and how she did not express her femininity up to her family and society’s standards. Prior to Litchfield, Big Boo had a negative relationship with her mother, due to her masculine looks and related disapproval (3.4). It is clear that she is defensive about her appearance and as a child she was told to put on woman’s clothes to impress her mother (3.4). In season two, Big Boo and Nicky (see p. 75) have a competition to see who can have sex with the most women, but eventually they call it a draw (2.5). Big Boo does not have a tremendous impact on the events within Litchfield, and has little loyalty to other women, as she sometimes uses them for her own

greed such as trying to impress the powerful Vee, but betraying Red in the process (2.9). In this, she discloses Red's greenhouse smuggling operation to Vee, who then attacks Red nearly to death (2.12). Although many of Red's friends shun Big Boo for this, Red eventually forgives her (3.12). In season three she becomes a caring friend to Tiffany and genuinely consoles her through talking about Tiffany's past abortions and associated feelings of regret (3.1). In the process, she also discovers that Officer Coates assaulted Tiffany, who opens up and admits that he raped her and that it is unacceptable (3.11).

### **Sophia Burset**

Sophia is transgendered, for which she often gets ridiculed and mocked for by the officers and other women through derogatory comments and mistreatment (1.3; 1.4; 3.12). Before Litchfield, Sophia was a firefighter, a husband, and a father (1.3). Sophia committed credit card fraud to fund her gender reassignment surgery, which led to her incarceration. Her wife, Crystal, supports her transition, but her son, Michael, has issues accepting the situation. Overall, Sophia is portrayed as very friendly, helpful, and enjoys doing her own and others' hair and makeup as one of Litchfield's hairdressers. She is often portrayed as doing 'feminine' actions such as plucking her eyebrows, doing her makeup and pampering herself (1.3). Therefore, her gender is often displayed to show why she transitioned as she always felt that she was a woman, which she attempts to show and explain to others, who often do not understand. Quite frequently in season one she has to fight for her proper hormone dosages, without which her body will become more masculine again. Although she does not always feel welcome in Litchfield, she does feel like a woman among the other women, widened by her teaching other women about the woman reproductive system (2.4). Although Sophia is often subject to transmisogyny from the other women and the staff (1.3; 1.4; 3.12), she is not afraid to talk about her transition and often makes one-liners about it, such as,

“It’s okay, honey, you can look — I paid a lot of money for it” (1.3). In season three Sophia is a victim of bullying, both physical and psychological, and is attacked by numerous women stemming from a disagreement with Gloria over their sons’ influence on each other and the women’s parenting styles (3.11).

### **Gloria Mendoza**

Gloria is known as the head of the Hispanic women and takes over the kitchen after Red is demoted for smuggling in contraband. It is revealed that before Litchfield, Gloria suffered domestic violence and forgave her boyfriend until he abused her son. She was planning on leaving her boyfriend with the money she saved from running a food stamp scam from her convenience store, but was arrested for this before leaving (2.5). In season one she is often seen playing dominos, while looking out for her pseudo family in prison through giving advice or performing Santeria spells (2.5), a Spanish worship of the Saints. Through time it is evident that she becomes more worried about her eldest son as her mother told her he has been acting out at home and school (3.4). She attempts to force him to come visit her and do homework, but it is hard as they live far away and at that time Gloria is head chef with many duties. Her gender role as a mother becomes prominent because she feels like she needs to be there for him to grow up adequately (3.8). Overall, it is evident that Gloria is protective of those close to her, including her family and her pseudo family as she is viewed as a pseudo mother to many of the Latina girls. This is evident when she was upset with Flaca for quitting her job in the kitchen, but she still treats her like a daughter by defending her in front of Piper (3.12).

### **Tasha Jefferson**

Tasha, otherwise known as Taystee, is often viewed as a friend to all of the women, motherly figure to Suzanne in season three, as well as a source of comic relief, often mocking white women

with Poussey. Taystee's childhood was replete with orphanage stays and attempts to be adopted (2.1), which she eventually was by Vee (2.2). Taystee is intelligent and able to remember a vast amount of information, as evident through her job in the library, as well as through her business and math skills, which helped her become involved with Vee's drug dealing business when she was 16 (2.2). She admits that she has always been in some form of institution her whole life, whether it is a group home, orphanage, juvenile penal institution or Litchfield. In season one Taystee works in the library where she proves to be very knowledgeable and demonstrates a love for learning. In this season she is released from Litchfield, but is unable to adjust to the real world and the strict rules of her probation that accompanies it (1.12). She subsequently purposely violates her probation and is sent back to Litchfield. Both her race and class become prominent in this case, as she was a poor and racialized woman attempting to survive in an inequitable world (1.12). She had no friends or family to help her, and she felt that being incarcerated was easier and more enjoyable. Overall, Taystee keeps with the Black women in Litchfield, is known to be funny and ambitious, and becomes more of a motherly figure to other Black women in season three.

### **An Intersectional Analysis of *OITNB***

Above, I have provided a brief description of the central characters in *OITNB*. I now turn towards events within the series where the themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality were prominent within the first three seasons. This analysis will be compared to the findings produced in previous studies examining representations of incarcerated women discussed in Chapter 2 to illustrate how *OITNB* more often challenges, than reinforces, stereotypical representations of criminalized women.



## Race

In 2013, the population of incarcerated women under the jurisdiction of state or federal correctional authorities in the United States was comprised of 49.5 percent white, 22.2 percent Black, 17 percent Hispanic and 11.3 percent of other racialized groups (Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014). Expanding beyond the main characters described above, one watching *OITNB* can observe a total of 31 main and recurring characters, which are those who play major roles and appear quite frequently, if not in every episode. Of these, 48 percent are white, 22.5 percent are Black, 22.5 percent are Hispanic and 6 percent are Asian. In contrast to other mass mediated representations of criminalized women in the American context (Cecil, 2015), *OITNB*'s racial representation is more in keeping with the reality of these institutions. As will be further evidenced below, *OITNB* seems to also capture the racism experienced by women of colour, while occasionally reproducing harmful stereotypes.

Cecil (2007) describes how the media's portrayals of incarcerated woman are racially and ethnically inaccurate, and generally tend to focus on white women. Moreover, the media typically over-represents white people as victims of crimes, which are often committed by people of colour (Ghandnoosh, 2014). In reality, people of colour have a higher prevalence of victimization, especially Black women, via aggravated assault, robbery and abuse, both physical and psychological (Barak, Leighton & Cotton, 2014; Langton, 2015), and *OITNB* attempts to display this by directing attention to the character's experiences of victimization of criminalized women (1.4; 2.5; 2.6). Such experiences include events prior to and during incarceration at Litchfield, such as the neglect of Daya by her mother in the past (3.12), psychological and physical abuse Gloria experienced at the hands of her boyfriend (2.5), racial and sexual discrimination Poussey

encountered while being shunned by her girlfriend's father (2.6), and lower socioeconomic upbringings such as Taystee's living in a cycle of poverty (1.12).

Skin colour lays a role in the women's overall treatment by staff and other women. Black women in particular are subject to unequal treatment as seen through Janae being sent to solitary confinement as punishment for insisting that a woman officer administer her pat-down (1.6). A departure from the stereotypically portrayal (Bouclin, 2009), Janae expresses her resentment for the injustices Black women:

We go to prison 20% longer for the same crimes as white people. They can stop and frisk us whenever they want, and now, when some bitch fucks with our food, I'm the one who gets thrown on the ground? This shit ain't right. And don't forget they took your commissary. Be angry. (2.4)

She also expresses her sense of injustice when she tells Yoga Jones that she does not like being "your token Black friend" (2.10). Cindy also makes the racism evident when she is being written up for being late for work and states that "white Cindy ain't gonna make it, either... This is some racism right here!" (2.7).

*OITNB* also displays race and racial inequalities through flashbacks of certain characters. Taystee (see p. 82) and Suzanne (see p. 78) are separated by race early on in their life. Taystee's flashback portrays her as being subjected to a "Black Adoption Fair" (2.1), where Vee eventually takes her in. Suzanne is adopted by an upper-class white couple, who was eventually able to have a child of their own and call her "our miracle" (2.3). Even through her flashbacks, Suzanne is portrayed as comical and ultimately a caricature. These two examples demonstrate how even as helpless children, the two women were categorized by their race and somewhat segregated from others in society, whether through a race-specific adoption fair or being treated differently due to the colour of their skin.

Overall, the Hispanic women, who tend to be overlooked in mass media representations (Entman & Gross, 2008), are included in *OITNB*, but they are emphasized through their appearance rather than intelligence. It is not until season three that Flaca challenges this by noting that none of the brand's underwear models in the catalogue they are looking at are Latina. Flaca responds to this with the critical quote, "If you talking about Latinas, there's like twenty different countries that all look different. See this blond chick? She could be Latina. We just don't know" (3.6). Although this may seem like basic ethnic knowledge, it is a fact that is left unaddressed and often misrepresented by the media (Minelle, 2001).

Although there is an accurately proportionate population of Black, white and Hispanic women, there are only a few Asian characters within Litchfield. The Asian character of Mei Chang is not focused on until season three, while Soso is also half Scottish and therefore is accepted by white women, as evident through Lorna giving her soap and a toothbrush upon arrival and saying, "I don't normally bend the rules like this, but you don't look full Asian" (3.2). Chang keeps to herself, rarely speaks and often ignores other women as she does not respond to their racist comments. When she does speak, it is through broken English with a thick, stereotypical Asian accent (2.7; 3.6). On the other hand, Soso enters Litchfield in season two and is often mocked for her ethnicity by the women, marginalized by staff, and sexualized by Piper, Big Boo and Nicky (2.4).

Despite the ongoing stereotypical remarks made against Asians throughout the series, such as, "Maybe if you were technologically savvy. Or Asian" (3.3), there are some statements made by the Asian characters that attempt to challenge stereotypical comments, but not until the third season. In this season, the two Asian characters finally realize how little their voices are heard and therefore the audience members learn more about them. Soso explains her frustration about not

belonging to a 'tribe' and tells Chang, "Where's my big, Asian prison family?" (3.6). In addition, Chang attempts to empower herself when she responds to two women who are teasing her in the bathroom with, "My eyes squinty but ears work fine" (3.6). Both characters' flashbacks are displayed to show their struggles on the pathway to the penal system. As a young adult, Chang's mother and brother attempt to sell her, but the male buyer was not interested in the "smelly peasant" (3.6). On the other hand, it is seen that Soso was brought up in a wealthy family and was constantly yelled at by her stereotypical Asian mother for neglecting to play the piano properly (3.13). Although the characters attempt to comically discredit some Asian stereotypes, these two Asian women are depicted stereotypically in a negative fashion. Their characters are often underdeveloped and jokes are made at the expense of their Asian heritage.

The white women are typically portrayed as higher in the social system, often more privileged and educated. In particular, racial privilege is dominantly presented through Piper's character. In the first episode of the series, Piper is given a toothbrush by a fellow white woman and is instructed to sit with the "nice white lady" in the cafeteria (1.1). Piper's white privilege and advantages due to her race are also evident through other women's responses to her opportunities. For example, one of the most obvious instances of Piper's white privilege is the fact that she receives furlough in season two, which means she receives temporary leave from Litchfield for a serious matter (2.7). Piper is granted furlough to visit her dying grandmother, yet Poussey and Sophia both note that their furlough requests were previously denied when their mother and father were deathly ill and passed away. Reflecting on this, Poussey states, "Chapman ain't got no strife in her life, but bitch gets the red carpet laid out for her" (2.8). Piper attempts to defend herself stating "I guess white privilege wins again. And as a speaker for the entire white race, I would like to say I am sorry that you guys got the raw deal, but I love my fucking grandmother" (2.8), which

reveals her inability to grapple with the existence of systemic racism in the prison system and American society more broadly (see Davis, 2003). Overall, Piper makes light of her white privilege as she tells the women of colour that they got “the raw deal” (2.8), which is unsympathetic, but also shows she does not understand that white privilege exists outside this situation.

This does not imply that Piper does not realize she is privileged, because the previous quote clearly states she does, but rather that she does not understand the further discrimination that women of colour are subjected to both before, during, and after incarceration. Moreover, Piper reproduces her white and class privilege through her own actions (i.e. panty-selling business, exploiting Suzanne as protection), which further demonstrates her discriminatory conduct. To compare, Piper has the ability to make money from Felonious Spunk while incarcerated due to her support outside, capitalistic tactics, and education; yet Taystee could not successfully reintegrate post-incarceration due to her lack of resources and support, relationships and education. This outlines Piper’s intersection of her race and class privilege as she has the resources, education, and white privilege to run such business in a capitalistic manner. Despite this, *OITNB* represents this through comic relief, allowing the viewers to dislike Piper rather than hate the subordination of poor racialized women through the capitalist system. If Piper was fully cognizant of her white privilege it would perhaps oblige her to take concrete actions to combat white privilege, such as staging a campaign to ensure equitable access to furloughs for all prisoners at Litchfield, irrespective of race, in a fashion similar to her standing up for GED program and track access (1.7).

Piper is shown to be unaware of how her white privilege has positively influenced her life. Piper admits to her mother during a visit that she is no different from any of the other incarcerated women as she explains, “I made bad choices, I committed a crime, and being in here is no one’s fault but my own” (1.6). Rather, she is completely ignorant to the idea that making bad choices is

not the sole reason for being incarcerated, neglecting that many women are subject to greater intersectional oppressions that lead to the penal system through different paths. Although at some points it may look like Piper will come to a realization that she is “not different from the other women” and thus may realize the inequalities that exist, she would have to examine her own power and possibly surrender some of it. Nevertheless, Piper, and her narcissistic self, strives for more power both within and outside Litchfield and lacks willingness to critically examine the issues of the other women. Many of the women of colour are shown to be subject to physical and mental abuse, poverty and drug abuse, all of which Piper appears to be blissfully unaware of. Piper has never experience the homophobic attitudes Poussey was subjected to from her girlfriend’s father nor can she understand the institutional upbringing of Taystee. As such, *OITNB* utilizes Piper’s ignorance of racial inequalities to educate its viewers that colourblindness is actually a form of racism (see Alexander, 2010).

Although *OITNB* often departs from mainstream depictions of criminalized women in terms of race (Cecil, 2015), at times it engages with race in a very trivial and stereotypical fashion. To explain further, diversity cannot be defined by simply including women of various ethnicities in its representation. As such, the series is guilty of portraying racial separation at times. Within Litchfield, the series displays many race-based social groups, otherwise known as ‘tribes’. Although there is a clear divide between whites, Blacks and Hispanics in the series, it is different from past representations in the way that the groups are socially based, rather than stemming from conflict between groups (Cecil, 2015). For example, in the media, racial gangs typically separate the incarcerated, but in *OITNB* the cliques or ‘tribes’ are strictly based on biological race, not gangs or racial conflicts. There are continuous reminders to ‘defend your own’ and band together with those that look like you based on race. This becomes evident in the first episode of season one,

where Piper is given necessities, such as a toothbrush, by another white woman Lorna, who states that “we look out for our own... Oh, don’t get all P.C. on me. It’s tribal, not racist” (1.1). When the same situation occurs with a new incarcerated white woman, Vee, a Black woman, asks Lorna if she has another free toothbrush and soap and Lorna responds, “One of the black girls didn’t come round when you got in? That’s a shame.” (3.2). The racial separation continues in the cafeteria, where each racialized group only sits with each other and in the dormitories and bathrooms, where each section is segregated by one race. When Piper is awaiting her initial room assignment, Nicky explains that she will send her to “‘The Suburbs’ with the other white people” (1.3).

The race-based groups are even further defined through the Women’s Advisory Council (WAC) election, which is an elected group who act as the incarcerated women’s representatives in occasional meetings with correctional officer Healy. To begin, the election for the WAC is not based on Litchfield as a whole, but rather every race elects one representative. Nicky explains this concept to Piper, “You can only vote within your race or your group. Look, just pretend it’s the 1950s. It makes it easier to understand” (1.6). During this election there are racist comments that seem to be entertaining in that everyone laughs and giggles, rather than reflective of the discriminatory or critical remarks that are occurring. At the white women’s table, Lorna explains what she knows about Hispanics: “They live like 20 people to one apartment, they have more kids than even the Irish... they’re dirty, they’re greasy, and they’re taking our jobs” (1.6). At one of the Hispanic tables, a debate settles with observations that Black people are, “smelly, stupid, and lazy, but they ain’t got different bones” (1.6). Black women Taystee and Poussey engage in a conversation mocking ‘white people politics’ and discuss stereotypical wealthy ‘white’ activities such as sushi, yoga, wine tasting, being vegan, setting-up hedge funds, viewing documentaries and “having really quiet sex at 9:00pm” (1.6). These conversations further reinforce racial ignorance

and separation, while framing it in a comical manner, albeit in a way that highlights that racism is still very much present in American society.

After the election, the representatives meet with Healy to discuss the women's concerns, requests and possible implementation plans. Taystee and Gloria, both women of colour, only ask for a book, an extra pillow and new hot sauce (1.7). On the other hand, Piper, a white woman, is shown to fight for higher valued or more influential requests and issues such as the preventative healthcare, legal counselling, an updated GED program, and reopening the recently closed track (1.7). This portrayal highlights the fact that Piper is shown to be more educated, while Taystee and Gloria are not concerned about the same issues that Piper deems important. This is evident in how Taystee mocks Piper's teaching ambitions, knowing that Officer Healy cannot fulfill those requests, which he quickly admits to. In addition, Officer Healy proposes that the WAC ladies can either receive doughnuts and coffee instead of bringing forward requests, and everyone except Piper agrees. Taystee explains to Piper that she "...ain't looking to make waves" (1.7) and that the whole WAC idea is actually just a scheme of Officer Healy's to have the women stop coming to him to make requests (1.7). Despite this, it also leads to the sense that Piper is oblivious to the prison industrial complex and the inequalities associated with it, while the women of colour, who are shown to undergo many injustices throughout their lives, are sensitive to the fact that substantive change within the prison is next to impossible (Davis, 2003). Piper's ignorance to the inability to make change within the institution is reflected further when she states, "So this whole WAC thing is basically bullshit", and she is told to "just take the doughnuts girl" (1.7)

In addition, *OITNB* reproduce stereotypes of racial groups at times, such as Black women having fantasies about fried chicken (1.6), as well as being called monkeys (1.4) and "Crazy Eyes" (1.11). To continue, the women of colour are portrayed through a stereotypical and demeaning



fashion at times. The Black women are often referred to by their skin colour and often are pictured as crazy and violent. In particular, Taystee, Cindy, Janae, and Suzanne are involved in a lot of violence instructed by their leader Vee (2.3). They can be viewed as bullies and one of the first violent acts is against the Hispanic women who want to use their showers (2.5). Vee instructs the other Black women that they need to teach the Hispanic girls how to properly behave or they will run Litchfield. She states, "I am telling you, unless we do something now, this is gonna become the way it is... I'm just saying those girls need to learn some manners" (2.5). Vee is a strong example of how the Black women at times are portrayed as violent and deceitful. Another example from season two occurs when Vee heartlessly poses as a pseudo mother, both through flashbacks and in Litchfield, selfishly using her adopted and pseudo children as pawns in her drug dealing business (2.3; 2.12). For example, she put a hit out on her adoptive son RJ because he was using her drug supplier to sell drugs in her territory (2.3) and manipulates Suzanne to believe that she was the one who beat up Red (2.13). In addition to this, in season one Suzanne attempts to force Piper to become her prison-wife, which is in line with Mogul and colleagues' (2011) findings that explain that Black women are portrayed as "sexually degenerate seductresses, whose depravity is whose depravity is further twisted in the context of sex-segregated prisons against members of their own sex" (p.104). In sum, the Black women are at times portrayed as predators and villains who often create more trouble than other racialized groups in *OITNB*.

Although not to the same extent, the Hispanic women are often subject to stereotypical portrayals as well. The Hispanic women are portrayed negatively in comparison to white women, as seen through their manipulative and deceitful behaviours. They are often seen as being disrespectful, gossipy, thick-accented, and hypersexual. At times they are constructed as evil, untrustworthy, and passive aggressive. For example, they are typically surrounded by negative

drama and problems, at times within their own group, including when the women shunning Flaca for taking a new job without them (2.5) and with other groups such as when they are fighting with the Black women over bathroom use (2.5). Daya (see p. 74) reveals a stereotypic portrayal as a pregnant Hispanic woman (1.8), who also uses sex as a weapon for her own benefit when trying to seduce Office Mendez into having unprotected sex so that she can claim him as her baby's father (2.10). Other Hispanic women are seen blackmailing correctional officer Bennett for electronics from the outside in exchange for not telling anyone about Daya's pregnancy (3.6). In season one, a Hispanic woman is portrayed as and called 'crazy', as she is shown to talk to herself and Diablo (the devil in Spanish) while locking herself inside the only functioning bathroom stall. Finally, Gloria and Aleida, who are at the head of the Hispanic 'tribe', are viewed as violent when they spread mean-spirited transphobic rumours about Sophia causing some women to brutally assault her (3.11).

As expressed above, although there are racist comments and actions reinforced by *OITNB*, also raises awareness of the stereotypes and discrimination Black, Hispanic and Asian women face. However, departing from the typical behaviour of the media to rarely capture the disproportionate number of criminalized minorities (Cecil, 2015), *OITNB* displays various racial characters and reflects on their experiences of inequality through their backstories prior to incarceration. *OITNB* allows for a discussion to be created for audiences to realize how these stereotypes occur in their own lives. In addition, Piper's ignorance of racial issues throughout the series displays how colourblindness exists within American society, in addition to a general lack of awareness of the racial struggles and inequalities minorities face (also see Alexander, 2010). This is a major departure from typical media displays of minorities, which tend to downplay victimization experiences by racialized groups, both interpersonal and structural (Barak, Leighton

& Cotton, 2014). Overall, the large cast of *OITNB* is very racially diverse and the series does not fail to treat each one of the characters' backstories and narratives with complexity as the seasons develop. Despite this, when the analysis of race intersects with gender and sexuality, problematic representations arise, which will be explained through the subsequent themes.

### **Class**

Overall, *OITNB* addresses the issue of class status and socioeconomic injustices that are typically affiliated with the reality of incarcerated women (Barak, Leighton & Cotton, 2014). Thus, they are able to depart from typical media representations of incarcerated women, which do not display the complex issues of women's criminalization through the broader class injustices (Bouclin, 2009), by depicting various experiences of poverty both prior to and after their incarceration. The portrayal in *OITNB* attempts to discredit the assumption that incarcerated women are less human or worthy of basic human care and rights (Clowers, 2001). Other than Piper and a few fortunate women, the majority of the women come from broken families in which they received little affection or attention. In addition, many of the characters, regardless of race, were subject to a lower-class upbringing and adulthood. Overall, the women come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds prior to their incarceration, which is evident through flashbacks, current discussions, and visual cues. Generally speaking, the socioeconomic class of the incarcerated women is connected to gender and racial issues, creating an implied intersectional discrimination that shapes their unequal situations. This is perhaps most evident through the excitement generated by the two opportunities to make more money while incarcerated. The first is through new job opportunities at Litchfield, which earns a wage of one dollar per hour sewing underwear, and the second is being part of Piper's exploitative used-panty business, both which emerged in season three (3.5).

The Black and Hispanic women are portrayed as mostly having experienced poverty prior to Litchfield. Their flashbacks depict their economic situations that often put them in an unfavourable situation that created disadvantages for them that ultimately led to their incarceration. Many background stories revolve around their troubled pasts such as being an immigrant or being in a situation that does not allow one to complete high school. For example, Daya came from a broken home in which she and her siblings were psychologically and physically neglected (1.5; 3.12). Her mother often left them with no food to go on dates and eat oysters with her boyfriend, who ran his drug business in their tiny apartment (1.5). Ms. Claudette was purchased by a maid service and within this place of employment was physically abused and eventually witnessed other young girls' abuse (1.4). Gloria was incarcerated due to food stamp fraud because it was necessary for her survival (2.5). Sophia was labelled a criminal because she committed credit card fraud to provide for her family and receive her gender reassignment surgery (1.3). Through Cindy's flashbacks it is evident that she stole an iPad for her 'sister's' birthday, who actually is her own daughter, but needed to be raised by her grandmother because Cindy was unable to support her (2.7).

Flaca's flashback as a high-school student displays her mother sewing in the kitchen, while illegally selling her products as brand name items (3.4). They live in a small apartment and it is evident her mother is making knock-off clothing to get them by. Flaca, who wanted more money, begins to sell fake drugs to other students at school (3.4). Flaca's poor financial status becomes further evident when she asks Piper to be part of her used-panty business again because her mother is sick and they need money for treatment. The majority of women of colour in *OITNB* come from difficult socioeconomic situations, but a couple of the women of colour do not. For example, Suzanne (see p. 78) explains that she has previously been sent to the Psychiatric Housing Unit but

came back, which few women do, as her upper-class adoptive parents have an ‘arrangement’ with Litchfield’s management. This further reinstates white privilege, as Suzanne was adopted by a wealthy white family who live in a New York Upper East Side penthouse (1.11; 2.3). Although this may lead to the idea that Suzanne has a more privileged background than most of the women of colour in Litchfield, she clearly feels different compared to her adoptive family, which is evident through the negative bullying she was subject to throughout her childhood (2.3).

Conversely, the white women are typically portrayed as a more privileged group prior to being incarcerated. The most obvious example of this is Piper, who is an upper-middle class, privileged and educated woman, which is the reason why some of the other women call her “College”. When first entering Litchfield, she is warned by Officer Healy to keep safe because “they might peg you for rich and try to hit you up for a commissary” (1.1). Healy initially favours Piper, most likely due to her class, race and apparent heterosexuality, as he states that they understand each other and could make some changes within Litchfield (1.6). On the outside, it is clear that Piper has financial support, such as when her fiancé threatens Litchfield to release Piper from solitary confinement or he will publish a story in the *New York Times* (1.9), and when Piper runs a panty-selling business from inside Litchfield with the help of her brother (3.6). Piper’s white privilege intersects with her class privilege namely through this business. As this business becomes more successful in the eyes of Piper, she begins to mistreat her employees by failing to pay them an adequate share of the profits for their labour. Her own corporate greed makes her closed-minded to the fact that the other women need money to survive as well. As stated, Piper has financial support from her family, her own start-up company and post-secondary education. Her own temporary lack of a steady income or job does not automatically guarantee that she will understand and empathize with the other women, who experience multiple identity-based

oppressions both prior to and in Litchfield. She has never had to worry about money as flashbacks provide context of her wealth through her apartment, high-end clothes, pricey grocery-market store shopping, and the like. Thus, she may not fully understand what it is like to be in poverty or fight for work equality. In addition, Piper has to correct the other women who claim that she grew up in a mansion, because to her “it was hardly a mansion” and only had one housekeeper (3.4). Further, when sewing, Piper and Stella sarcastically joke about how hard Piper’s life is and being able to afford one-hundred dollar undergarments outside of Litchfield.

However, not all white woman characters are financially secure. For example, three clearly impoverished white women in Litchfield include Tricia, Alex, and Tiffany. Tricia’s narrative explains how she lived on the streets and would resort to stealing objects for survival, but would keep thorough notes on how much she owed because she believed in repaying her debts. Her flashbacks reveal her panhandling adolescent years, in which she lived on the street and denied anyone’s help (1.10). In addition, people perceive Alex (see p. 71) as a “privileged rich-girl” at times (1.9), but she quickly disproves those comments and explains “those types of girls tortured me my whole life” (1.9). Through her flashbacks it is evident that she is the daughter of a working-class single mother who worked four jobs to afford knock-off running shoes for Alex, for which she was bullied. She explains how she was unable to afford college and may have been attracted to the international drug cartel as a result of that (1.4). Lastly, Tiffany’s (see p. 64) childhood presents lower-class attributes such as her mother forcing her to drink a Mountain Dew as a ploy to receive extra social security benefits for having a hyperactive child (3.1). In addition, a more visual cue of Tiffany’s economic status is her broken and missing brown teeth, which stands in sharp contrast to the white, perfectly straight teeth that are often linked to high-class status (Francis, 2010).

One of the most influential intersectional class-focused aspects of the series is the deep portrayal of Taystee (see p. 82), a woman of colour, and her struggle post-release. Unlike Piper, who will be released with a wealthy support system to fall back on, Taystee is not so fortunate. In season one, it is announced that Taystee will be released, but she displays a degree of anxiety in leaving Litchfield. When she is talking to a few of the women before her release she admits, “Nothing out there gonna be scarier than this shit. Shit, I been in institutions my whole life. I was a ward of the state till I was 16. Then juvie. I got no skills” (1.9). She expresses her concern about how she will survive once released and feels that “no one’s gonna take me seriously” (1.9). Although Taystee is excited to leave Litchfield, she is also scared about how she will survive. After Taystee’s farewell party, it is a quick month before she is admitted back into Litchfield for violating parole. Taystee explains her experience post-release:

When you get out, they be up your ass like the KGB. Curfew every night. Piss in a cup whenever they say, you gotta do three job interviews in a week for jobs you never gonna get ... Minimum wage is some kinda joke. I got part-time workin’ at Pizza Hut, and I still owe the prison \$900 in fees I gotta pay back. I ain’t got no place to stay. I was sleepin’ on the floor in my second cousin apartment like a dog, and she still got six people in two rooms. One of the bitches stole my check. I got lice. Everyone I know is poor, in jail, or gone. (1.12)

She states that no one is concerned with how she is doing, except for her probation officer, which is for work purposes only. She explains that she understands how to live within the institution, but it is a fight to survive outside prison walls. She did not have a place to live, clothes to wear or food to eat. She also barely knew anyone outside of Litchfield and it was impossible to find a decent paying job. She admits that being incarcerated at least provided her with a bed, a job and friends, and thus highlights the process of institutionalization.

These experiences reflect the realities of incarcerated women outlined in Chapter 2 (Maidment, 2006; Shantz, Kilty & Frigon, 2009). At first, Taystee experiences concern when she

is told she will be released, which mirrors Faith's (1993) findings that illustrate how many women replace relief with anxiety once released. Many women often feel under a different form of social control and the inability to secure meaningful employment, both of which Taystee expressed (1.9). In addition, as relationships (e.g. family members, intimate partners, and professional staff) play a major role in women's success post-release, Taystee's experience highlighted that her own family did not want her to stay with them. With a very little support system and lack of meaningful employment, coupled with social control and anxious behaviour, Taystee's negative experience reflects a realistic representation of what post-release is like for incarcerated women. This aspect of the series challenges the typical media portrayal of issues with incarceration, which tends to provide little information regarding the challenges women face upon release (Cecil, 2007). *OITNB* is unique in that it attempts to illustrate the problems faced post-release, caused by the intersectional oppression that occurs.

Past research states that the portrayal of incarcerated women tends to not problematize the legal, economic, and political strategies that operate to criminalize women (Bouclin, 2009). Overall, *OITNB* departs from this as poverty – a condition arising from such strategies – is a theme regularly presented within the series, especially when presenting the flashback stories, as many of the women are shown to have lower socio-economic backgrounds. As stated previously the backgrounds of the women, including their socioeconomic status, is shown to ultimately shape actions that led to their incarceration, typically out of necessity. Mainstream media portrayals of criminalized women typically do not present the relationship between lower socioeconomic status and incarceration, but *OITNB* is noteworthy in it attempts to provide an illustration of how a lack of finances is a pathway to incarceration.



## Gender

Gender is classified as a cultural and social construction and is an important theme that becomes central in many scenes throughout *OITNB*. The series represents a departure from past mass mediated representations of incarcerated woman (Ajzenstadt & Steinberg, 1997; Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013; Faith, 1993) by raising questions about gendered presentations, identities and roles, including with respect to beautification, mothering and developing friendships. Instead of masculinizing, monsterizing and otherwise positioning incarcerated women as different from others as is the case in many other entertainment programs and films (Faith, 1993), *OITNB* puts forth images of the incarcerated women that reflect a humanized depiction of them that offer a frame through which viewers may come to see them as acting naturally in response to difficult life circumstances.

One way the series cultivates this by showing how the women carry emotions and capabilities similar to women outside Litchfield. *OITNB* does not always focus on the actual crimes that lead to each character's incarceration, but rather on the women as people and their material lives. The series also communicates that criminalized women are not fundamentally different from other women. For example, in season one a woman officer tells Piper, "I just want you to know that as far as I'm concerned you and me are the same. The only difference between us is when I made bad decisions in life, I didn't get caught" (1.7). A similar message that *OITNB* reinforces is that the women portrayed in the series are humans as well and deserve to be treated like one, regardless of their circumstances. This is underscored in character flashbacks where *OITNB* highlights the circumstances of criminalized women that led to their incarceration. For example, season three really humanizes Tiffany as her flashback reveals her as a sexual abuse victim on

multiple occasions (3.10), which leads into her current circumstance of being sexual assaulted by Officer Coates and not problematizing it initially (3.9).

Another way that *OITNB* challenges traditional gender expectations is by focusing on women of various body types and physical features. *OITNB* presents women who depart from the stereotypical depiction of a young, feminine and thin-bodied woman as the series portrays women through different body types. The series includes women who are young and old, petite and curvy, and those who do and do not fit the traditional media definition of attractive or beautiful. Each woman within the series is offered a focus, rather than neglecting those who do not fit the mainstream media woman depiction. For example, when Daya (see p. 74) takes interest in Officer Bennett, her mother tells her she is wasting her time with him, “Not that you’re not pretty. I don’t mean it like that. It’s just, if you gonna [have sex with] a guard, [have sex with] a fat one. That way they’re more appreciative” (1.4). From the beginning, Daya believes she is not good enough for Bennett, but despite this Bennett pursues a relationship with her rather than someone like Flaca, who Gloria jokes, is very attractive. In addition, many characters are often subjected to jokes about their weight, such as Taystee and Big Boo, but both women embrace their body and dismiss ridicule.

In general, various characters hold different gender roles and gendered presentations, including many women who are clearly not afraid of anything or anyone. Although through flashbacks there are some cases of male presence and influence, the series rarely displays the woman character’s happiness, self-value or survival based on a male figure. This is in contradiction to typical media displays, which emphasize women’s relationship to men (Cecil, 2007). Although *OITNB* is set in a woman prison, it is clear that all of the women express their gender differently. At times *OITNB* does reproduce typical gendered notions of femininity, usually through visual

cues such as make-up, nails and hairdressing. This art of beauty is very important to a majority of the women in Litchfield to the point where they will possess contraband to have their beauty products. Lorna (see p. 77) is a prime example of a hyper-feminine character as she is often seen putting on make-up made from instant coffee and making curlers using her tampons (2.4). As a child Lorna especially loved exerting her femininity, as seen through a flashback of her first communion where she told her parents that the focus of her communion is her pretty white dress as she spins around thanking Jesus (3.13). At first, Lorna is fixated on attempting to plan her fake perfect wedding as a flawless bride, but as the series unfolds she ends up proposing to her pen-pal boyfriend and has a less-than-glamorous wedding inside Litchfield (3.13). Thus, these findings are partially in line with past research, which explains that some images of gender roles, such as hyper-femininity, dominate (Cavender et al., 1999). This also reinforces the aspect of ‘doing gender’ in a sense that she is arranging her appearance, dress, and mannerisms as part of the “normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for [her] sex category” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127).

In terms of gender identity, Sophia’s (see p. 72) character is transgressive and demonstrates an historic advancement in terms of media representations of transgendered people. Sophia presents as a transgendered character “just living her life,” which goes “beyond the ‘transition narrative’” (GLAAD, 2015, p. 27). There is a lack of transgendered women in popular media representations (GLAAD, 2015), which leads to *OITNB* being ground-breaking in this aspect. In season one, Sophia’s storyline is centred on her gender identity in regards to requesting an increase in her hormone dosage (1.3), as well as her complex relationship with her wife and son (1.3). Sophia’s role reinforces the fact that one’s gender identity, like sexuality, is personal, despite the fact that society usually categorizes an individual’s sex and gendered behaviours together.

Reflecting the transphobia that exists in American society, Sophia must adapt to life while incarcerated and the mockery that comes with her gender identity and transition. Many women and officers call her a “thing”, “it”, “lady-man” or “monster”, but Sophia always remains respectful and friendly (1.3; 3.1). Overall, Sophia’s character represents a complex intersectional identity, as her race, gender, and sexuality all have an impact in her treatment both outside and inside Litchfield. For example, in season one Sophia (see p. 81) attempts to run for the WAC representative, in which she can only run against other Black women, but is shut down as women question her as a “fake women” who has a “plastic pussy” (1.6).

As Sophia’s flashbacks allow the viewers to recognize the struggles she encountered in regards to her gender identity, many of the flashbacks of the women show their past as a survivor of some sort of abuse. Rather than emphasizing the main incarcerated woman character as entering prison and experiencing abuse by the other vicious prisoners (Bond-Maupin, 1998; Cecil, 2007; Escholz, Mallard & Flynn, 2004; Humphries, 2009; Sumser, 1996), *OITNB* communicates that many of the women experienced some form of abuse prior to their incarceration, such as being sold to a maid service (Ms. Claudette), being sold to another person (Chang), domestic violence (Gloria, Tiffany), neglect (Daya) or parental stress (Soso, Suzanne). Despite this, *OITNB* still advances the notion that the women are strong and independent, often not relying on a male or male presence to survive – it does not portray its characters as a “damsel in distress”, a typical gendered notion of femininity.

The series displays the fact that the women are able to react to their abusive past to try to prevent their horrible experiences from limiting who they are in the present. Through this, *OITNB* attempts to depart from the typical media portrayals that downplay incarcerated women’s history of sexual and physical abuse (Cecil, 2007). Despite this, hegemonic attitudes and ‘doing gender’

are also reinforced on the women through demonstrating male domination at times. Although they are correctional officers and thus already hold authority over the women, at times they are viewed as violent, deceitful, and powerful. The women are viewed as physically vulnerable, unable to use violence effectively and compliant, which reflects Schippers' (2007) definition. One of the most obvious examples relates to the relationship between Officer Bennett and Dayanara, which quickly falls apart when Officer Bennett impregnates and then abandons her. Other examples include women being sent to the solitary confinement for no reason, being socially abandoned, and Officer Coates raping Tiffany to continuously exert his power over her. Overall, hegemonic masculinity is overpowering as the women are ridiculed, harassed and sexually assaulted by the officers, a form of masculinity that is linked to institutional power. Although these are serious issues, which Pardue and scholars (2011) have documented, the entertainment factor of the series depicts the women at times in a depersonalized, objectifying, and dehumanizing manner

In terms of the gender role of motherhood, *OITNB* attempts to depart from past media representations by displaying incidences of incarcerated mothers. Although these representations do not always paint the women in a positive light, the fact that there are including the subject is imperative. For example, typical media representations tend to underrepresent the actual number of incarcerated mothers (Cecil, 2007). Departing from this, *OITNB* displays various notions of mothering behind bars. In season one, Maria Ruiz gives birth to her daughter while in Litchfield and returns to the facility depressed and anxiously separated from her newborn. Over the first three seasons her boyfriend visits her with her newborn, but she becomes stressed in season three when he states he will not bring their daughter to Litchfield anymore because he does not want her to learn her mother is incarcerated. Another pregnant woman is Daya, who is impregnated by Officer Bennett. Once Daya decides to keep the baby, Bennett proposes to her, but then disappears

(3.2). From here, Daya contemplates and must make a decision on whether she will keep the baby or put it up for adoption. This is another heartbreaking moment of the series that has the potential to elicit sympathy with mothers and women alike, which is not a typical representation in this genre.

*OITNB* mobilizes the emotional issue of motherhood behind bars in a way that shows how incarcerated women had a life before and outside of their incarceration. The first episode of season three is titled 'Mother's Day' in which Litchfield hosts a celebration for Mother's Day and everyone's children are invited for a full-day event. This episode includes various stories in which the incarcerated women remember their mothers through flashbacks, while also focusing on the present through examples of children visiting their incarcerated mothers. The episode displays the different types of women within Litchfield; those who do and do not have mothers, those who are mothers and the ones who do not have any children. For example, the viewers learn that Poussey lost her mother while incarcerated and holds on to her childhood memories as support. On the other hand, Taystee's adoptive mother Vee mother used and manipulated her, while Cindy transfers her motherly responsibility to her mother and now passes off her daughter as her sister. However, the episode also presents the emotional bonds of motherhood through Maria's being able to spend time with her newborn, Sophia being able to give her son advice, and Aleida and Daya receiving visits from their family. The message presented here is that there are many different examples of family dynamics and motherly figures, which is also the case outside of the prison context. Although not always portrayed as fit mothers, *OITNB* chooses to attempt to humanize incarcerated women by providing a common experience through which some viewers can potentially relate to them (Cecil, 2007).

As stated in Chapter 2, the women in prison genre can be said to depict women's prisons as agents of socialization (Morey, 2010). *OITNB* does not suggest that incarceration is aimed at socializing women in a manner to prepare them for their domestic role after incarceration. Instead, the series focuses on the friendships and relationships made within Litchfield as a source of adaptation and socialization that occurs within it. This is similar to Sykes' theory on adaptation to prison through socialization, which offers roles, relationships and activities to the incarcerated (Sykes, 1958). In addition, Jones (1993) found this aspect to be true as adaptive measures taken by incarceration women are reflected in the formation of pseudo families, couples and partners. This is reflected in Litchfield through the many family-type dynamics, which, as previously discussed, are based on race, as well as biological and pseudo familial bonds, and friendships between the criminalized women.

Inside Litchfield, Red (see p. 75) is very influential and rules her area very strictly. She is extremely intolerant of drug use by others, which illustrates her strict pseudo motherly role in the prison. Many, such as Nicky, Lorna and Tricia, refer to Red as their mother, but after an incident in season two, in which she mistakenly injured one of her pseudo daughters, all of them disown her (1.13; 2.1). Despite this, many of the women begin to forgive Red in season three and she begins taking on some of her motherly duties again such as cooking for and providing gifts to her family. In addition, Daya's (see p. 65) biological mother, Aleida, embodies the qualities of a traditional motherly figure. When Daya first enters Litchfield and is known as Aleida's biological daughter, one of Aleida's pseudo daughters makes a point to note that Aleida is *her* mother, but is actually her pseudo daughter. At first Daya and her mother do not have a good relationship, but as the series continues, their relationship grows as evident through humble interactions and meaningful conversations. With their growing relationship, Latina pseudo mother Gloria often

helps Daya with her pregnancy, which causes some hostility to be directed towards her from Aleida. Another familial tie is in season two when Taystee's (see p.74) adoptive mother Vee enters Litchfield and is shown to be the new pseudo mother of many of the Black women. In season three, Vee is gone and Suzanne, who relied on Vee's motherly figure, turns to Taystee as a replacement pseudo mother. Overall, most of the non-biological familial relationships within *OITNB* are portrayed as more positive and supportive than the women's biological families outside of Litchfield.

Moving beyond familial bonds, *OITNB* focuses on friendships to make evident the fact that just because the women are incarcerated does not mean that they are different from other people, as their actions display how they take care of and protect each other, while building and maintaining kind and thoughtful friendships. Some examples of these friendships include Taystee and Poussey, Big Boo and Nicky, Flaca and Maritza, and Sophia and Sister Ingalls. These friendships are viewed as particularly interesting in the way that they take care of each other, have fun together despite their situation and ultimately teach how to build and maintain friendships. From 'friendly' competitions (Nicky and Big Boo), to planning their future bridal party (Flaca and Maritza), to help mending their family relationships (Sophia and Sister Ingalls), these friendships work to humanize incarcerated women, and illustrate that they are capable of companionship and friendship. Overall, most of the women are extremely friendly to each other within their group and they usually do not go out of their way to be kind to another outside their 'tribe', but during certain circumstances, such as when Tricia died, they do (1.11). In this example, while the white women are holding a memorial for Tricia, some of the women of color bring gifts and offer their condolences (1.11).



Through these strong relationships it is clear that *OITNB* uses socialization in a more positive fashion to demonstrate the value of relationships that are formed within prison. These tight-knit relationships stand outside traditional conceptualizations of women as ‘bad’ or ‘mad/sad’ (Chesney-Lind, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Naylor, 2001), depicting them as humans capable of love and nurturing. Through the media, prisons are often seen as correctly disciplining women who step outside their usual domestic role (Morey, 2010). Departing from this, *OITNB* presents Litchfield not as replacing or improving the gendered familial aspect of a women’s life, but rather displays the familial bonds within the prison environment as a temporary adaptation of domesticity. By portraying characters as sympathetic, caring and nurturing, the series fosters the notion that criminalized women are people worthy of compassion rather than punishment, and use these familial relationships as a source of support. *OITNB* does not portray all of the women in the typical gendered fashion (see Chesney-Lind, 2013; Faith, 1993; Jewkes, 2011), but rather through a variety of representations, some of which challenge societal gendered norms, it differs from past media representations that typically portray incarcerated women in a masculine fashion or as monsters (Morey, 2010). Despite this, the portrayal of masculine predators will be further explored in the subsequent section.

### **Sexuality**

The theme of sexuality refers to both the sexual activity that occurs within Litchfield and also sexual identity of each character. *OITNB* displays a variety of different sexual acts, which is in line with literature that states that masturbation, consensual sex, and coerced sex is part of the landscape of women’s prisons (Pardue et al., 2011). In terms of sexual activity, many scenes within season one to three are filled with lesbian sexual experiences that occur in various locations within Litchfield, such as the shower, chapel and in unoccupied rooms. In addition, there are many sexual encounters

of some of the characters within their personal flashbacks. Departing from Freedman's (1996) findings that state that lesbian activity is viewed as sexual deviance, there is no deviance-associated homosexuality in *OITNB* other than Tiffany and Officer Healy believing that the act and those associated with it are evil (1.3; 1.9). The sexual activity that occurs is typically associated with love or individual pleasure, but the storylines do not necessarily rely on them to exist. In terms of women in prison films, Bouclin (2009) classifies two types; one that arose in the 1930s, which essentially categorized sexual actions as being integral to the romantic melodramas, and the other appearing in the 1960s, which aimed to attract young heterosexual male audiences and therefore attempts to exploit the women in the films. *OITNB* incorporates aspects from both of these elements as it uses sexual activity to reinforce other storylines, but also as a form of entertainment.

There are many sex scenes that involve various characters throughout the series, many of which are in line with Pardue and colleagues (2011)'s classifications. Many of these scenes include Nicky, who is viewed to be sex-obsessed. For example, Nicky and an unidentified woman have sex in a bathroom stall while Big Boo (see p. 80) attempts to instruct Nicky on her technique (2.3). Nicky and Lorna (see p. 77) are sex partners in season one and many of their scenes are in the shower and in the chapel (1.4). Nicky engages in sex with other women once Lorna is no longer interested as she gives Alex her 'Christmas present' as they engage in sex in her open cell. In addition, in season two she engages in sex with Soso in the chapel (2.4) and another unidentified woman in the bathroom (2.3). Big Boo, who always talks about engaging in sex within Litchfield, is never shown as engaging in sex except for in flashbacks, where she is having sex with her current girlfriend (3.4). Despite this, Big Boo is also often implicitly shown as self-stimulating with a screwdriver (1.4) and it is implied she also used her dog for sexual pleasure at one point (2.2). This

falls into Pardue and colleagues' (2011) category of autoeroticism, which explains that some criminalized women engage in self-stimulation while incarcerated.

What is perhaps most interesting about the characters that engage in sexual activity is the fact that they are primarily white women. Conversely, early representations of homosexuality in women's prison often represented a racialized sexuality, one that placed a Black woman in the aggressive masculine role and a white woman in the passive feminine role (Freedman, 1996). No woman of colour is shown engaging in lesbian sex other than a flashback of Poussey (see p. 79) and her white German girlfriend engaging in sexual activity after passionately expressing their love for each other (2.6). As for the women of colour in *OITNB*, Suzanne's sexual interest is rejected by Piper and dismissed until season three when she becomes interested in another white woman, who also takes interest in her. Despite this, Suzanne admits to Lorna that she does not really understand sex because she is a virgin (3.10). Poussey's sexuality, despite her flashback, is often downplayed and rejected by Taystee (2.4), while no Hispanic women are shown engaging in sex with other women or to identify as homosexual. This aspect also reinforces the notions of gender performativity as only thin and attractive characters whose performances reiterate white, heterosexist, patriarchal-controlled women's bodies are displayed, thus maintaining certain societal expectations pertaining to sex, gender, and sexuality.

In all, many of the sex scenes seem to be included arbitrarily, such as random unidentified women having sex in the showers and shown in the backgrounds or between main scenes. The sex scenes typically include lesbian sex, with the acceptance of a minimal amount of heterosexual sexual encounters such as Piper and Larry (1.1; 2.9), Daya and Officers Bennett and Mendez (1.6; 2.6), and Lorna and her new fiancé (3.13). Cecil's (2006; 2015) research states that within media displays of incarcerated women, sexual encounters are often the main focus with lesbian activity

being one of the prime portrayals. To a certain extent, *OITNB* reinforces this, but it also departs from this narrative in that the series does not root itself in sex, rely on or solely revolve around sexual encounters, nor do its storylines always include sex.

Britton (2003) found that the media's depiction of women's incarceration is usually hypersexualized, and Cecil (2015) agrees that entertainment media's portrayal of incarcerated women tend to have sexual undertones. As this derived from the history of prison films and continued into the television industry (Bouclin, 2009), *OITNB* is not completely different. Although the series does not rely on sexual encounters to hold a storyline, there are numerous examples of sexualization and sexual activity. Despite this, *OITNB* departs from the classic lesbian images typically found in the women in prison genre and creates a discussion on sexual identity. Sexual identity within this context refers to how the woman thinks of herself in terms of how she is attracted to another either romantically or sexually, which may lead to the sexual orientation that a woman chooses to identify or not identify with. In addition, it presents an argument that while incarcerated, not all women are interested in developing relationships with the motive of physical pleasure, but a majority of the women are looking for the emotional support of another individual, via familial and friendship bonds.

Piper's sexual encounters are prominent while she is incarcerated and prior to her incarceration through flashbacks. In season one, on her first day in Litchfield, Piper emerges from the shower and is told that she has perky "TV titties" (1.1). Through the first three seasons Piper is seen engaging in sex with Alex (see p.71) and Larry (1.9; 1.10; 2.9; 3.1; 3.2). Various flashbacks also display Piper engaging in sexual acts with both Alex in their past relationship (1.1; 2.10) and Larry in their current one in season one (1.1). Despite this, sex scenes with Alex are much more prevalent than sex scenes with Larry. This is reflected when the issue of Piper's sexual orientation

is raised throughout the series. As the main character, there is an enormous focus placed on the discussion of Piper's sexual identity in the series. It is clear that Piper's sexuality is complex and it is evident that she considers her sexuality to be fluid. Through both context and visual cues, Piper does not label herself as heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual. Rather, Piper is seen in various situations such as being devoted to her fiancé Larry (1.1), having an affair with her ex-girlfriend Alex (1.10) and being in a relationship with Alex (3.4), becoming attracted to Stella (3.9), all while still missing her ex-fiancé Larry. Piper describes her sexual identity and preferences through phrases such as "phases" and "at times" to demonstrate how she does not have a specific indicator (1.1). Piper explains to her friends that "you don't just turn gay, you fall somewhere on a spectrum, like a Kinsey scale" (1.5). In the process, *OITNB* disrupts the hegemonic boundaries of sexuality and identity.

To further illustrate this, it should be noted that throughout the series Piper's sexuality remains fluid. One of the most noteworthy aspects of Piper's sexuality is when her brother and Larry are discussing Piper's affair with Alex. Larry asks, "So is she gay now?" and Piper's brother responds, "I'm going to go ahead and guess that one of the issues here is your need to say that a person is exactly anything" (1.2). Here is where *OITNB* differs in the typical sexual identity presented through the media (Marne, 2000). The series is attempting to disregard the idea that people have to be labelled and be described by a term based on a single category. Piper constantly battles questions about her sexuality from her family, friends and other incarcerated woman. Piper's family questioned if she is "still a lesbian?" (1.1), Nicky called her out for her affair with Alex (1.11), while Alex herself has claimed that Piper is just a "confused heterosexual girl" (1.13). Rather than identifying herself in regards to a socially approved label, Piper is shown to be who she really wants to be in terms of sexual identity by ignoring hegemonic classifications

and categories society has put forth. *OITNB* supports sexual fluidity and aims to break the myths that surround sexual identity, specifically bisexuality. Despite Piper's positive attitude towards her sexuality, her intersectional identity often privileges her in terms of race and class, but her sexuality leads to difficulties with Officer Healy, whose homophobic attitude causes problems between them as he sends her to solitary confinement for dancing with Alex (1.9).

Focusing on Litchfield as a whole, some of the other criminalized women identify as a lesbian. For instance, Big Boo (see p. 80) describes herself as a lesbian and has had several pseudo 'wives' during her incarceration. Through flashbacks it is evident that Big Boo identified as a lesbian before she was incarcerated, as she is seen with girlfriends and engaging in sexual activity with other women. Similarly, Nicky (see p. 75) openly identifies as a lesbian and also has many sexual encounters throughout the series. Piper's ex-girlfriend Alex also identifies as a lesbian through her ongoing relationship with Piper and through flashbacks of her ex-girlfriends. In season three Piper also becomes involved with the newly incarcerated Stella.

On the other hand, some of the women are portrayed as heterosexual, but engaging in lesbian sexual activity while incarcerated. In season one, Nicky and Lorna engage in multiple sexual encounters, but it is Lorna's realization of her sexual identity and her heterosexual relationship that ends this (1.4). Lorna tells Nicky that they cannot have sex anymore because she has a fiancé, which shows she defines herself as heterosexual and changes her actions to coincide with that identity. In season two, Flaca offers to kiss Maritza on Valentine's Day because they both feel lonely and have never kissed another woman (2.6). They both have or had a boyfriend prior to their incarceration, but in that moment they decide to try kissing out of the deprivation of intimate relationships. After this they pull away, giggle and feel that this is not who they are. These incidents highlight the fluidity and diversity of sexuality within the series. This variety

demonstrates that some women define themselves as part of the LGBTQ community, while others strictly define themselves as heterosexual. Of those characters that identify as heterosexual, some still engage in sexual encounters with other women and some do not (1.4; 2.6). This aspect reinforces the Pardue, Arrigo and Murphy (2011)'s categories of sexual behaviour, explained in Chapter 2 and displays that some women engage in lesbian activity only while incarcerated.

In terms of the literature on sexual identity within the women in prison genre, *OITNB* departs from various themes, but also reinforces some. To begin, within the series there is not one main 'prison lesbian' as Ciasullo (2008) states is typical. Despite this, Ciasullo (2008) categorizes incarcerated woman characters who partake in homosexual acts as 'true' or 'pseudo' lesbians, which are elements that *OITNB* communicates at times. 'True' lesbians are known as those such as Big Boo, Alex and Nicky, who clearly identify as a lesbian despite their situation or incarceration, which also reinforces the category of true homosexuality (Pardue, Arrigo & Murphy, 2011). On the other hand, Lorna states she is heterosexual, but engages in lesbian acts at times while incarcerated and thus would be categorized as a 'pseudo' lesbian, thus reinforcing situational homosexuality (Pardue, Arrigo & Murphy, 2011). Piper is an outlier to this case as her sexual identity is never concretely identified, yet at times Piper can seem like a 'true' lesbian without actually identifying as one, thus would not identify under true or situational homosexuality. Despite this, the fluidity of Piper's sexuality could be explained as sexual activity rather than identity.

Through the lesbian characters of Nicky, Big Boo, Poussey and Suzanne, *OITNB* departs from the notions of traditional media representations of lesbian bodies, which are white, thin and attractive, such as Alex and Piper. Despite this, these progressive representations are quickly disregarded when critically examining the lesbian actions of those diverse lesbian characters. Other

than Piper and Alex, who follow the hegemonic feminine classification, much of the series' representations of lesbians are problematic. In terms of the Black women, Poussey and Suzanne are two lesbians who are often rejected in regards to their sexuality, thus are subjected to over-sexualization and disapproval. Although Poussey was not rejected by her lover in the past, she was rejected by her lover's father and therefore abandoned by her (2.7). This is then reproduced in present day where she is often rejected by Taystee as she attempts to cross the friendship-lover boundary line (2.3). After this rejection, Poussey is actually abandoned by Taystee due to Vee's influence over her (2.3). This theme is also evident through Suzanne, who is bluntly rejected by Piper in season one, who retaliates by peeing in Piper's bunk at night (1.3). Thus, the Black lesbian characters are often viewed as unaware of their 'boundaries', as they push to take interest in uninterested heterosexual women. In addition, Big Boo, a white women who does not fall under the hegemonic feminine classification, is stereotyped in the sense that her character reflects the concept of butch through her masculine haircut, deep voice, and actions reflected through her flashback such as yelling at people who gave her a 'wrong' look on the street, as well as how she dresses and presents herself (also see Halberstram, 1998).

As explained in Chapter 2, at times the media sensationalizes incarcerated women who have failed to conform to their gender roles. Predominantly, the characters that identify as a lesbian in *OITNB* are not viewed as aggressive and masculine predators that prey on heterosexual women (Truss & Inderbitzin, 2005), but Pardue and colleagues' (2011) classification of sexual violence in women's prisons is evident at times through hegemonic representational practices. In terms of sexual violence, Nicky and Big Boo are portrayed as lesbians who are as hypersexual, deviant, and predatory, which is also in line with the stereotype of lesbian promiscuity (Ciasullo, 2008). In season two Big Boo and Nicky have a sexual competition to see who can have the most sexual



partners and then rank them on a scale to total their scores (2.4). Together, they are predatory in the sense that they compete to have the most sexual encounters, where a higher score is given for women they classify as “hard-to-get”. This is partially in line with Ciasullo (2008) who states that other women feel threatened by women who identify as homosexual.

This is also in line with past literature of the reality of women’s prisons, which explains that at times, homosexual relations have the motive of game playing, economic manipulation and sexual victimization (Pardue et al., 2011; Greer, 2000). Similarly, researchers (Owen, 1998; Alarid, 2000) found that incarcerated women were involved in exploitative relationships with an underlying economic and/or emotional motive, and that sexual pressuring and sexual harassment are prevalent in women’s prisons, which can be viewed in this example. Although these types of homosexual relationships are not typically found within *OITNB*, the actions of Nicky and Big Boo reflect underlying manipulative and exploitative motives for their homosexual sexual activities. These demeaning actions incorporate stereotypical prison lesbian character elements, which continue to desensitize sexual violence as it is portrayed comically rather than as critical. On the contrary, it is important to note that Nicky and Big Boo never actually use physical pressure with their advances, which often accompanies the traditional predatory prison lesbian character (Pardue et al., 2011; Greer, 2000).

The categories and aspects mentioned above are also relevant to the models outlined by Gibson and Hensley (2013), who explain that researchers have formulated three models in attempting to explain the concept of prison sex: the importation model, the deprivation model, and the social constructionist model. The importation model expresses that the criminalized import social values from outside of prison to construct the prison subculture (i.e. ‘true’ lesbians), while the deprivation model suggests that women are deprived of their normal heterosexual sexual

activity and relationships (i.e. Daya and Officer Bennet's sexual activity, Big Boo's masturbation). Similarly, the social constructionist explains that sexuality is constructed by social situations and values (i.e. 'pseudo' lesbians) (Stein, 1992). Coupled together, and to highlight the above examples, Hensley (2002) explains that the incarcerated turn to alternative methods of achieving sexual gratification [such as] masturbation, consensual same-sex activity, and coerced same-sex activity" (p. 2). This is in line with a majority of *OITNB*'s representations of the motives behind homosexual relationships, with the exception of Big Boo and Nicky as explained previously, as some women use them as emotional support, while others are involved solely due to situational deprivation.

Overall, in terms of sexuality, the women in prison genre focuses on a relatively innocent, heterosexual woman protagonist (Marne, 2000). *OITNB* departs from this as Piper, the main character, presents a fluid sexuality and sexual identity. *OITNB* presents a storyline that conveys the notion that many different sexual identities exist in the world and all should be accepted and respected. The series does so by normalizing the vast descriptions of sexuality through various orientations and transgender women. *OITNB* brought a diverse depiction of sexuality to television and made that representation mainstream. Rather than being classified as a 'lesbian show', it is a series centred on incarcerated women who challenge stereotypes and accept their sexuality. Despite this, there are problematic elements in terms of sexuality presented above. These stem from reinforcing hegemonic ideologies in terms of gender performances as it includes many stereotypical depictions of women of colour, butch lesbians, manipulative lesbians and society-approved white lesbians.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the main themes emerging from my intersectional analysis of *OITNB* seasons 1-3. To provide context I first provided a description of the 14 main characters of the series to illustrate how each were developed throughout the first 39 episodes. Thereafter I explored the themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality to assess how *OITNB* challenges and departs from the typical media representations of incarcerated women, the research object guiding this study. To this end, the findings of this thesis were compared to previous findings concerning mass media representations of incarcerated women, maintaining an intersectional lens. Having done so, it is my contention that *OITNB* often challenges hegemonic or dominant ideologies of associated with incarcerated women, while also at times reinforcing others. With this, *OITNB* may be used as a platform and tool to spark conversation surrounding issues of incarceration and the oppressions that exist, especially for the marginalized.

*OITNB*'s tagline is "every sentence is a story", which demonstrates the complexity of the various storylines that emerged in its first three seasons. As noted in Chapter 2, since the emergence of the women in prison genre there have been explanations and critiques of the representations put forth within such cultural productions. This analysis found that *OITNB* addresses some of these critiques by providing a more humane and nuanced approach to representing criminalized women. Overall, *OITNB* outlines the complex nature of incarceration through illustrating prison life, relationships both inside and outside of Litchfield, and the unjust nature of imprisonment. In addition, the series focuses much less on the idea of crime control and punishment, and instead provides a comprehensive overview of issues incarcerated women deal with. This may help start a discussion on prison issues by providing personal stories through which penalty, can be better understood.

The woman characters of Litchfield are diverse, unique and relatable in many ways that do not fit the typical Hollywood standard (see Bouclin, 2009; Cecil, 2015; Chesney-Lind, 2013; Faith, 1993). Media scholars Gerbner and Gross (1976) state that “Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation” (p.182), thus highlighting the importance of a present, accurate description within the media. As explained previously, scholars have generally found that the media group incarcerated women into one of the two categories of ‘bad’ or ‘mad/sad’ women (Chesney-Lind, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Naylor, 2001). Departing from this trend, *OTINB* depicts criminalized women as neither ‘bad’, ‘sad’, criminal nor deviant. They are instead portrayed as humans living complex lives, which also departs from Rapping’s (2003) research that explains how the criminalized are typically positioned as the enemy that the general public must unite against. *OITNB* attempts to display the inequalities that exist within society by making visible situations that lead to women being incarcerated. Therefore, the series ultimately addresses issues such as motherhood, sexual harassment, education, post-release struggles, and racial and class inequalities. In doing so, space for broader public discussions concerning the need to move away from mass incarceration and towards addressing the complex needs of women behind bars.

The series can be exemplified through its realist ideology of displaying racial stereotypes both within and outside Litchfield. Although the series itself is not creating these stereotypes, at times they are reinforcing them from a white protagonist perspective, as the main character and primary lens is of a white middle-class woman. Different perspectives are eventually shared and stereotypes are highlighted. Women of colour are given a voice, and over time more of an opportunity to reveal the intersections of oppression they experience. The stories of Black, Hispanic, and Asian women are told within Litchfield as well as through a series of flashbacks of

their lives prior to incarceration. Overall, the representation of race has improved (Cecil, 2015) and it is important to remember that the main reason that it is told through a white protagonist is the fact that it is based on Piper Kerman's memoir. In addition, after season one the series' creator, Jenji Kohan, stated:

In a lot of ways Piper was my Trojan Horse. You're not going to go into a network and sell a show on really fascinating tales of black women, and Latina women, and old women and criminals. But if you take this white girl, this sort of fish out of water, and you follow her in, you can then expand your world and tell all of those other stories. But it's a hard sell to just go in and try to sell those stories initially. The girl next door, the cool blonde, is a very easy access point, and it's relatable for a lot of audiences and a lot of networks looking for a certain demographic. It's useful. (Gross, 2013, p.1)

Although this comment may sound problematic in the sense that the stories of minority women should not have to be strategically told through a white woman to be heard, it seems that she used this tactic to offer stories that are not typically represented in the media. This issue is related to feminist scholar Beth Ritchie's (1996) recognition that it is difficult, yet necessary, to have knowledge conveyed through marginalized individuals' voices. As such, as the series progresses, *OITNB* began to deviate from Piper as the central figure to explore and assert the voices of often-marginalized women to tell their stories from their own perspectives.

In season one, the storyline relies on Piper and the events preceding her incarceration, but by season three the story revolves around everyone in Litchfield and Piper is far from the only lead character. The story is no longer only Piper's, but rather that of those around her, which allows viewers to glimpse more diverse stories and characters. When Piper is the main focus, the series cannot fully tell the stories of the other women's experiences of inequality and systemic discrimination, and thus the audience is not able to fully grapple these issues. Yet, as stated above, over the seasons the audience is invited to take a more critical glimpse to the other women's lives as Piper is displaced from the centre of attention, which is evident through flashbacks, opening

credits of a variety of women, and episodic character focus. This tactic makes sense in the long run for Netflix and the producers of *OITNB* as it can also be viewed as a function of the wide viewership of the show. For example, telling the story mainly through an upper-class white protagonist may not maintain or increase a diverse viewership.

Although Piper's physical attributes fit the common representation of Hollywood women (Ajzenstadt & Steinberg, 1997), it is the highly diversified women that surround her that allow for a counter-hegemonic visual display of criminalized women. Piper's ignorance of her privileges, both race- and class-based, allow for the stories of the marginalized to be told and lessons to potentially be learned. Different from most of her fellow incarcerated women, Piper's fate was not depicted as a by-product of her race or class. Although the series may present Piper's incarceration as a consequence of desiring excitement, being infatuated with Alex, and consequently committing a crime, she too is subject to inequality and oppression that led her to depart from the societal norms exemplified upon the public through hegemonic structures. Most obvious, Piper's identity as a woman is the sole oppression she faces through discriminatory correctional officers and incarcerated males making sexual jokes (2.1). Her systemic intersectional oppressions, which are not as profound as the majority of the other women in *OITNB* whose intersections have served as pathways to criminalization, have her sent to solitary confinement for engaging in sexual relations with another woman. Although many of the women believe Piper is completely privileged in every aspect, her intersectional identity privileges her in terms of race and class, but her sexuality and gender leads to her oppression and disadvantages. This is consistent with Collins (1990) description of intersectionality in which she states that individuals concurrently experience both oppression and control, which means no individual or group can be entirely privileged or oppressed.

Through character-focused episodes and overall storylines, the women are given an in-depth display of their past and present circumstances. The series does not depict the disciplining of women who have stepped outside their usual domestic role (Morey, 2010), but rather displays them to have suffered the consequences of their actions, which are largely owed to their socioeconomic circumstances. Specifically, seasons two and three provide the audience insight into the inequalities experienced by criminalized women. Throughout this analysis, it is clear that there is much racism, homophobia and transphobia present within Litchfield, which is reflected in the characters, but these elements of social life are presented in such a way that audiences may question these structures of inequality that are commonly taken for granted and left unquestioned (Alexander, 2010). At times *OITNB* also challenges hegemonic constructions of femininity by incorporating characters who come in various shapes, sizes, classes, races, religions and sexual and gender identities.

Nevertheless, there holds a need for *OITNB* to improve some aspects in their representations specifically in regards to race, sexuality and gender. *OITNB* is not revolutionary, as its first priority is entertainment. For example, Jenji Kohan even goes as far as to admit, “I don’t set about to say, ‘Today we’re going to teach people that this is oppressive and wrong.’ My first job is to entertain and engage people” (Shaw, 2014). By placing entertainment at the forefront of the series, *OITNB* places race in a superficial context as Piper is often viewed as superior and the one who will stand up against the system (i.e. GED program), while the women of colour are viewed as aggressive, violent, and often used as comic relief (i.e. Taystee and Suzanne). The series at times reinforces hegemonic representations specifically in relation to lesbian identification practices, which can be viewed through its homosexual rejection of the Black characters Poussey and Suzanne, the aggressive butch Big Boo, and sex-obsessed manipulative Nicky, while

presenting the feminine white lesbians as attractive and harmless. Overall, Piper as the voice or ‘Trojan Horse’ of *OITNB* does not allow for a holistic understanding of the various types of lived experiences and social realities pertaining to the discrimination and inequality of women of colour.

Thus, as outlined through the analysis, *OITNB* includes dominant portrayals of incarcerated women as it incorporates various problematic elements, but also allows viewers to take a glimpse into intersectional issues and acts as a vehicle to analyze personal privilege. *OITNB* raises critical awareness of many contexts and conditions within the penal system that are not typically focused on in the mainstream media. These include poverty and homelessness both prior to and following incarceration, the distress caused by solitary confinement, homophobic and racist officers and fellow women, and the context of women who are released only to face inadequate community support. Overall, the characters in *OITNB* communicate more than just a message; through an intersectional manner, it illustrates the struggles and inequalities criminalized women face, as not all characters who belong to one oppression are the same.

The subsequent chapter explores the significance of my findings, while proposing suggestions for further research within the field to address the limitations of this study. In doing so, the overall message that *OITNB* challenges dominant media representations of incarcerated women is reflected upon, while discussing the possibility to revisit this work by expanding the inquiry to other empirical cases and questions.



## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### Key Contributions

While mass media representations of criminalized women are not often the focus of scholarship, previous studies of this phenomenon note that this population is typically portrayed as violent, sex-crazed and deserving of punishment (Cecil, 2015). Such depictions are of concern in that the narratives become an important basis for public opinion on issues related to the penal system, whereby violence against women in the form of incarceration becomes increasingly common (Correctional Service of Canada, 2014; Murley, 2008; Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014; Public Safety Canada, 2012; Surette, 2015; The Sentencing Project, 2012). Within the entertainment media, incarcerated women typically do not hold main roles; but despite this, their presence does not go unnoticed as their stories and lives are told (Cecil, 2006).

In this context, some have expressed praise of the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black* (*OITNB*) as putting forth a different and improved representation of incarcerated women (Cecil, 2015; Derakshani, 2013; Lawson, 2015; Householder and Trier-Bieniek 2016). Through a content analysis of 39 episodes of this series, this thesis set out to address whether such praise is warranted or if *OITNB* reinforces dominant ideologies by examining how 14 of the main incarcerated woman characters are depicted. Through the lens of intersectionality, this research was able to identify the intersectional themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality associated with *OITNB*'s main incarcerated woman characters. Through an examination of these portrayals, this thesis demonstrates that *OITNB* does in fact disrupt the pattern of typical and past representations of criminalized women in most occurrences. It is through these intersectional identities that *OITNB* challenges hegemonic ideologies, especially through the progression of the main characters over

the first three seasons, while at times conforming to existing stereotypes that oppress marginalized groups in the media.

In terms of race, *OITNB* is a departure from most mass media depictions of criminalized women in the sense that it more accurately reflects the demographic realities of woman prisons, while representing minorities in complex, rather than reductionist manners. To achieve this, *OITNB* portrays a racial representation that is more in keeping with the reality of American prisons (Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014). There are many moments within the series that allow for the minority women to express their struggles and experiences in terms of hegemonic structures, inequalities and discrimination that occurs. These instances include Taystee's institutional upbringing (1.12), Daya's childhood neglect (3.12) and Gloria's abusive past (2.5). At times the series engages with race in a very superficial and stereotypical fashion, as seen through the overall racial separation (1.2), the stereotypes exemplified through the WAC election (1.6), women of colour used as comical relief, rejection of racialized lesbians, collective racial personalities such as the Hispanic women viewed as manipulative and deceitful (3.6), and one of the two Asian women having a thick accent (2.4; 2.7). Despite this, as the series continues these occurrences diminish as the focal points shift towards more diverse storylines and narratives. In season two and three the main storylines shift from solely surrounding Piper, to allow the other women's experiences of inequality both during and prior to incarceration to come to the forefront.

Overall, *OITNB* displays class structure inequalities that reflect material socioeconomic injustice. This is accomplished through displaying various character experiences of poverty both prior to and after their incarceration. The Black and Hispanic women are portrayed as mostly having experienced poverty prior to Litchfield, such as Ms. Claudette who was purchased by a maid service (1.4). Some white women also display class struggles such as Tricia, who lived on

the streets and would resort to stealing objects for survival (1.10). Notably, *OITNB* captures an aspect that is typically absent from the women in prison genre, post-release adaption and struggles (Bouclin, 2009). This is evident through Taystee, who was released from Litchfield, but could not survive as she struggled with employment, housing, friendship and the necessities of life (1.12). Through highlighting important socioeconomic elements, *OITNB* is able to problematize the legal, economic and political strategies that operate to criminalize women, which as Bouclin (2009) states, previous portrayals fail to do.

Gender identity, roles and activities are typically positively displayed to challenge the assumption that incarcerated women are less human or worthy of basic human rights (Faith, 1993). *OITNB* is able to raise questions about hegemonic gendered presentations through representing atypical gender identities and roles, especially with respect to beautification, mothering and developing friendships. *OITNB* is also able to capture the gender identity of Sophia, a transgendered woman, and the daily struggles she is faced with both prior to and during her incarceration (1.3; 1.6; 3.1). In terms of gender roles, many characters are viewed as ‘doing gender’ and conforming to the gender performativity through applying make-up, making hair curlers, shaving their legs, and plucking their eyebrows (2.4). These acts are more in line with past research, which shows that some expressions of gender roles remain intact (Cavender et al., 1999). More positively, motherhood, which is typically not represented in media portrayals of criminalized women (Cecil, 2007), is highlighted in *OITNB*, thus shedding light on the issues facing incarcerated mothers.

Finally, the sexuality of the women is often presented in a transgressive fashion as the series highlights various sexual identities, which should be accepted and respected. Overall, GLAAD (2015) states that *OITNB* “boasts more LGBT regular and recurring characters than any

other scripted program tracked in [their] report” (p.11). Although there are numerous instances of sexual activities, the series does not base its narrative on this, focusing on more complex issues such as homophobia, sexual fluidity and transsexuality. This is a departure from past representations in which criminalized women are portrayed as hypersexual and sexually aggressive (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013; Jewkes, 2004). *OITNB* illustrates how these social characteristics and interrelated oppressions work together and may put criminalized women at a higher risk of discrimination and ill-treatment in prisons and society. Despite this, examining these overlapping themes displays that *OITNB* has room to improve, specifically in its representations of the lesbian identification practices as it conforms to stereotypical lesbian portrayals of white attractive women (Piper and Alex), rejection of non-heterosexual women of colour (Suzanne and Poussey), and the aggressive and manipulative butch (Big Boo), thus reinforcing gendered hegemony.

The use of intersectionality as the theoretical framework of this thesis utilizes the interrelated aspects of race, class, gender, and sexuality to allow for a more holistic approach to understanding the discrimination that occurs within the media. Through employing an intersectional perspective this research deconstructs the hegemonic representations in media representations of incarcerated women. In addition, an intersectional analysis allows for the identification in which the multiple identities of the woman characters are shown to impact their experience both prior to and through their incarceration. The degree in which each character’s intersectional identity influences their experiences depends on the status each aspect of the characters’ identity. For example, through flashbacks, Sophia’s disadvantaged intersectional identities of class, sexuality and gender highlights how these dynamics ultimately led her to her incarceration. On the other hand, as explained, while Piper’s race and class create certain privileges, her sexuality sets her at a disadvantage, especially with Officer Healy.

As such, the findings outlined in this thesis have implications in regards to how the media portrays criminalized women; *OITNB* attempts to contextualize their conflicts with the law and challenges the notion that they are worthy of imprisonment. As such, *OITNB* displays a departure from historical displays of the incarcerated, which suggests that the media can represent this population in a more humanized, yet entertaining manner. Moreover, *OITNB* represents women who are not regularly present within the media, in ways that challenge stereotypical demonization and degradation. Rather than having the media reinforce the acceptability of the necessity of the penal system as Brown (2009) explains through her idea of penal spectatorship, *OITNB* offers a portrayal that helps build empathy with the incarcerated characters. As women are the fastest growing incarcerated population (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014; Public Safety Canada, 2012; The Sentencing Project, 2012), it is crucial that progressive and ethical media depictions exist to shape the public's perception of prison realities, which could lead to less harmful responses to criminalized harms.

### **Paths for Future Research**

While this thesis contributes to the limited literature on the media's representation of criminalized women, there is much it was unable to address. In terms of media representations as a whole, there appears to be a need to compare different domains of media representations of the incarcerated and how these differ based on the domain, and the boundaries that follow (e.g. Netflix vs. traditional domains). As the theoretical framework of intersectionality was chosen to examine the portrayal of the race, class, gender, and sexuality of criminalized women, other themes were not examined in depth. One particularly noticeable aspect of *OITNB* that arose was the mental health of the incarcerated characters, including Soso, who attempts suicide, Suzanne, who repeatedly hits herself, and Lorna, who falsely believes she has a fiancé. In relation, another element that arises

throughout the series is physical health issues, which is evident in the lack of physical exercise the women are able to participate in. Finally, it would also be useful to examine representations of the women staff through an intersectional framework, as it will yield a more direct comparison of the representations of prisoners to correctional officers. Supplementary research could also be conducted to examine if and how *OITNB*, and the events and environment within it, accurately and/or inaccurately represent the lives of those incarcerated in the real world. To do so, it is necessary to examine the conditions and experiences of those incarcerated in the real world and compare to those of *OITNB*. This would assist in demystifying the realities of the lives of those who are incarcerated, as the media tend to sensationalize the penal system and the criminalized.

It may also be useful to analyze other similar shows for the purpose of comparative analysis. These comparisons may examine different examples of the media's representations of incarcerated women (e.g. *Wentworth*), different media outlets' (e.g. news, infotainment) representations of criminalized women, or the difference in representations of incarcerated males and women (e.g. *Oz*). Each media portrayal could highlight how different environments, cultures and, events produce different representations of the criminalized. It also may be noteworthy to compare the media's portrayal of criminalized women over time to display if and how these portrayals are evolving (*Prisoner* [1979], *Women in Prison* [1987], *Bad Girls* [1999]). This technique would help analyze if the portrayal of criminalized women has developed over time in such a way to increasingly or decreasingly challenge or reproduce hegemonic representations, specifically through its content, tone, atmosphere, and overall message. Stemming from this, further research can analyze what changes have led to the inclusion of a more diverse representation of incarcerated women over time and why we are seeing these changes now.

Although this thesis did partially look at the visual displays of the women, it did not take into account various visual and audio cues such as camera movement, symbolic placement of objects in the frame, type of shot, tone, film speed, tone, pitch, amplitude and angle of lens. As explained, the media hold the ability to portray their subjects in various manners, but the audio and video practices allow the film/television-makers to deepen an association between the audience and the representation at hand (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). This type of research would be better suited for research within a media and communications field to analyze how these audio-visual techniques manipulate the portrayal of the woman characters.

Through examining seasons 1-3 of *OITNB* it is evident that the media is capable of fostering solidarity and providing a more positive representation of the criminalized. Despite its various problems, *OITNB* is capable of presenting issues that have yet to be addressed in other Anglophone media portrayals of incarcerated women examined to date. The incorporation of positive and diverse intersectional representations through the themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality demonstrates a shift of focus and marks an evolution in the genre. Its challenge against dominant ways of representing incarcerated women through displaying complex issues such as racism, poverty and various sexual identities, coupled with its drama and humour, allow for an innovative representation of incarcerated women that has the potential to shatter and discredit past representations of the same population.

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**APPENDIX A: Coding Grid**

SEASON #

Character Name

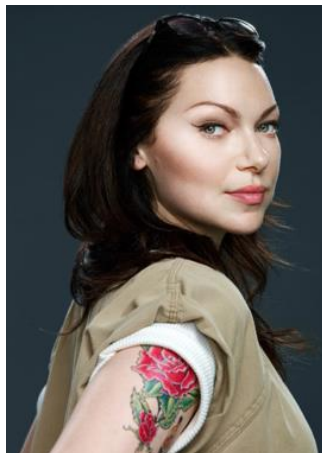
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Season/Episode</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Visual Cues</b>
<b>Race</b>				
<b>Class</b>				
<b>Gender</b>				
<b>Sexuality</b>				

**APPENDIX B: Main Characters**

Piper Chapman



Alex Vause



Tiffany Doggett



Dayanara Diaz



Galina Rezniov



Nicole Nichols



Brook Soso



Lorna Muccio



Suzanne Warren

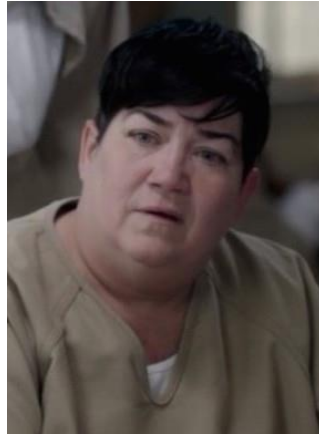




Poussey Washington



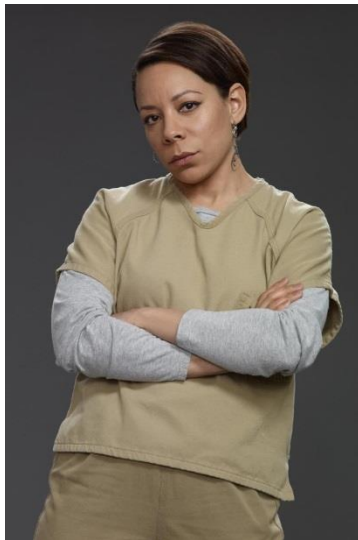
Carrie Black



Sophia Burset



Gloria Mendoza



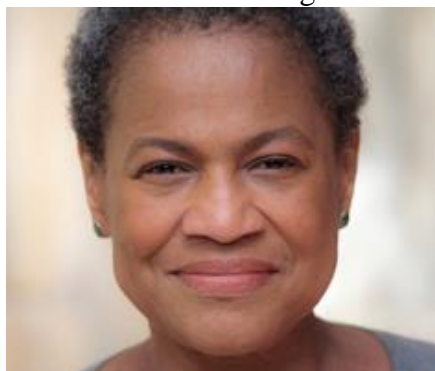
Tasha Jefferson



(Orange is the New Black Wikia, 2016)

**APPENDIX C: Recurring Characters**

Claudette Pelage



Cindy Hayes



Tricia Miller



Erica Jones



Yvonne Parker



Sister Jane Ingalls



Maritza Ramos



Stella Carlin



Blanca Flores



Maria Ruiz



Marisol Gonzales



(Orange is the New Black Wikia, 2016)