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## Representing Us All? Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Orange Is the New Black

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Representing Us All? Race, Gender, and Sexuality in *Orange Is the New Black*

By

Michael Chavez

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Science

In

Gender and Women's Studies

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May 2015

Representing Us All? Race, Gender, and Sexuality in *Orange Is the New Black*

Michael Chavez

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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Dr. Laura Harrison

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Dr. Barbara Carson

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Jessica Flatequal

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## Abstract

An Abstract for the thesis of Michael Chavez for the Master of Science in Gender and Women's Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota

Title: Representing Us All? Race, Gender, and Sexuality in *Orange Is the New Black*

*Orange Is the New Black* is a Netflix television series that began in 2013. The series focuses on the lives of inmates in a fictional women's prison. Television series about prison have focused primarily on men in prison. This thesis will expand upon previous research on representation of minorities in television using a feminist media analysis to examine the first season of the series. I will explore how race, gender, and sexuality are represented within the series. I examine the representations of four characters during the first season. I chose these four characters because they represented different racial groups, sexualities, and gender expressions. I argue that while the series gives visibility to many minority women, the show continues to use harmful stereotypes that perpetuate negative cultural ideologies about minorities.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In July of 2013, a television show titled *Orange Is the New Black* was released. The television show was written and created by Jenji Kohan, also known for her work on another popular television series, *Weeds*. The show was inspired by the book *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, by Piper Kerman. *Orange Is the New Black* started picking up media attention shortly after its release. *Orange Is the New Black* takes place in a fictional women's prison, Litchfield Penitentiary, located in upstate New York. The series follows the story of Piper Chapman as she adjusts to life in prison and the experiences of other women whom Piper meets and interacts with during her incarceration. The female characters represent a variety of sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, social classes, and gender identities.

In my thesis I argue that despite the representation and visibility that diverse women receive, *Orange Is the New Black* portrays characters in ways that perpetuate stereotypes and dominant ideologies. In this thesis I will examine race, gender, and the sexuality of four characters in *Orange Is the New Black*. I have chosen these four characters because they represent diverse women from different races, gender identities, and sexualities. I will link dominant cultural ideologies to how these women are represented during the first season of the series.

*Orange Is the New Black* is a television series created specifically for the online video streaming website Netflix, which was founded in 1997 and started subscription-based digital distribution in 1999 (Wauters, 2010). Since its creation Netflix has dramatically changed the ways in which individuals are able to view movies and television programs. Traditionally in the United States the three main ways that television

is delivered to customers and households is through public broadcasting, cable television, and direct broadcast satellite (Uri, 2006). Netflix is an online and mail subscription-based television and movie provider. Subscription-based television companies are concerned with providing content that will attract and keep users subscribing (Lotz, 2007). Further, Netflix not only hosts television series and movies from cable and broadcast television, it also creates and distributes its own television series. During 2011 Netflix started developing its own original programming with the series *House of Cards* (Andreeva, 2011). *Orange is the New Black* is another example of its original programming. Netflix television differs from public and cable television because Netflix does not have commercials or sponsors that might pull sponsorship in the series if it is controversial. By early 2014 Netflix subscriptions rose to over 50 million and have expanded to 41 countries around the world (Chatterjee, 2014). Global expansion allows *Orange Is the New Black* to achieve attention from the median and international audiences.

*Orange Is the New Black* season one consists of thirteen episodes. Each episode is between 50 minutes to an hour in length. Unlike broadcast of public television programs, all episodes of the season are released at a single time. *Orange Is the New Black* is a single-camera setup television series on Netflix.com. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, a Netflix spokesperson described the show as a drama and comedy television series (Wilson, 2014).

This project draws upon a feminist media analysis of season one of *Orange Is the New Black* to examine and explore patterns in representation of race, sexuality, and gender. Feminist researchers understand that the patterns located within television series represent dominant ideologies within the culture that created them (Hessie-Biber, 2013).



These patterns in representation are important for two reasons. First, the way that characters are portrayed in *Orange Is the New Black* impacts how those characters are seen by viewers. Second, these representations influence the messages that viewers take away from the series.

In popular media, women are typically viewed through the male gaze, a term coined by Laura Mulvey (1975) in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” The male gaze is a process in which characters are sexualized for heterosexual males viewing the program. In the past, lesbians have been portrayed as sexual objects for heterosexual consumption (Herman, 2003). Television has represented the socially acceptable lesbian as “gentle, sensitive, soft-hearted, soft-spoken, absolutely non-butch, and stereotypically feminine” (Harrington, 2003, p. 216). Unlike previous television shows that have focused on a narrow range of lesbian characters, *Orange Is the New Black* has a wide range of lesbian characters including butch lesbians and women of color (Anderson-Minshall, 2013). Many representations of lesbian characters in the past have appeared in the comedy genre, having their sexuality linked to the comedic aspect and a feminine gender presentation (Lee & Meyer, 2010). These differences from previous television series allow for the characters in *Orange Is the New Black* to have more complex intersectional identities yet still characters are based on stereotypes.

### **Characters**

*Orange Is the New Black* has a large number of diverse characters both in and outside of prison. For this project I focus my examination on four specific characters. I outline my explanation and methodology in more detail in the methods section of this thesis. The four characters I have selected are Piper Chapman, Sophia Burset, Dayanara

Diaz (Daya), and Carrie Black (Big Boo). In this section I will briefly describe each of the characters' lives and the people they interact with on a regular basis.

Piper Chapman faces an eighteen month incarceration after being arrested for transporting a suitcase full of drug money, 10 years prior to the portrayed "present day." Piper is a self-proclaimed White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) from an upper middle-class family. Her mother, Carol Chapman, appears during the season as does her younger brother, Cal, known as the "black sheep" of the family. At the beginning of *Orange Is the New Black* Piper is engaged to Larry Bloom. Piper met Larry through her best friend Polly and her husband Pete. The series also includes Alex Vause, whom Piper met 10 years prior to what the series presents as "present day" while looking for a job as a waitress after finishing college. The two quickly became girlfriends and shortly after their relationship started Alex convinced Piper to work with her in a major drug cartel.

Transgender actress Laverne Cox plays the character Sophia Bursett, a transwoman serving time at Litchfield Penitentiary. *Orange Is the New Black* is credited as being the first women-in-prison narrative to include a transwomen of color actress (Anderson-Minshall, 2013). Before Sophia transitioned she was known as Marcus and held a job as a firefighter. While she was a firefighter Sophia stole credit card information to help pay for her transition, which is how she ended up in prison. Sophia is visited by her wife Crystal on a regular basis; she also has a son named Michael that does not visit. Michael has a difficult time with Sophia's transition. It is Michael who turned Sophia in to authorities for her criminal activity. Sophia has been incarcerated for two years prior to the beginning of the series and during her sentence has worked as hairdresser in the prison.

Dayanara Diaz (Daya), a Latina woman, arrives in Litchfield the same day as Piper Chapman. Daya is incarcerated alongside her mother Aleida Diaz. Before incarceration Daya lived with her younger siblings and her mother's boyfriend Cesar. Daya and her mother are incarcerated for drug related offenses although the exact crimes are never stated. During incarceration Daya starts a relationship with John Bennett, who is a correctional officer at the prison. Their relationship results in her getting pregnant. Daya and John try to cover up her pregnancy by requesting furlough for Daya. When she fails to get it, Daya and other inmates create a plan for her to start a fake relationship with another guard, George Mendez. Mendez is known derogatorily by the inmates as "Pornstache" due to his 1970's-era moustache and sleazy behavior toward the incarceration women. During the first season Mendez can be seen engaging in sexual intercourse with inmates and smuggling drugs into the prison. The plan is for the two of them to be caught having sexual intercourse, which would allow Daya to explain her pregnancy to the prison staff without having to name Bennett as the father.

Carrie Black (Big Boo) is another inmate that Piper Chapman meets while at Litchfield. Season one offers no information about Big Boo's family or the reason for her incarceration. Big Boo is in prison with her ex-girlfriend Mercy, whom she met in prison, but a long time has passed since their relationship ended. The number of years Big Boo has been at Litchfield is also never stated directly. The storyline does mention that she has had a number of "prison wives" and that she has been incarcerated for a number of years. Big Boo can also be seen hanging out or socializing with the other prison lesbians on a regular basis. She suffers from alcohol addiction and is part of the prison's Alcoholics Anonymous program. Big Boo also suffers from anxiety as well as anger

management problems, which is why she is given the job of training and taking care of a therapy dog during season one.

### **Organization of the Chapters**

Chapter two contextualizes my topic within current research and existing scholarship. The literature review consists of three main sections: LGBT representation in television, feminist theories of race and LGBT theory, and sex and sexuality in women's prisons. The LGBT representation in television section will address historical perspectives with regards to representation, visibility, and stereotypes. The second section will examine intersectionality, feminist theories of race, and queer theory. The last section will focus on sex and sexuality within women's prisons and will examine literature concerning sexual coercion, transwomen in prison, and pregnancy and children.

The methodology discussion begins in chapter three and explains how I collected data for this project in *Orange Is the New Black*. The methodology chapter explains the significance of a feminist media analysis and textual analysis for my data. Further it highlights the contributions and limitations of my project. I also include an explanation of the importance of reflexivity and how the project is affected by my positionality.

In Chapter four, I outline the ways in which race, gender, and sexual orientations are represented during season one of *Orange Is the New Black*. I will use categories to organize my findings and analyze the results with current literature to reinforce my argument. In addition, I examine the importance of social class in my analysis. I also further examine character identities using an intersectional framework to better understand how multiple identity categories interact with each other.

Lastly, in chapter five I examine the need for future research and possible areas that could use an examination. My research was limited to specific categories; in order to have a more accurate examination, a detailed analysis consisting of multiple seasons is required. Characters can change as well as new characters can be added who will change the dynamics of the representation the characters have.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

*Orange Is the New Black* has sparked a dialogue about women in prison centered on experiences and flashbacks depicting their lives. The television series depicts issues around sexuality, race, ethnicity, white privilege, class privilege, homophobia, transphobia, and violence. The television show centers on the life and experiences of one woman, Piper Chapman, her family, and those women she becomes close to while incarcerated. The current literature helps to explain some of the issues that *Orange Is the New Black* highlights and why these issues are important. The literature will include three bodies of knowledge: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) representation in television, feminist theories of privilege and LGBT studies, and sex and sexuality in women's prison. I chose these three bodies of scholarship because an examination of each is important for an analysis of the problems the characters faced in their lives, as well as how gender and sexuality are represented within *Orange Is the New Black*.

### **LGBT Representation in Television**

In this section I will first outline how the history of LGBT representation has changed over time and where representation and LGBT individuals are within television currently. LGBT representation has changed a great deal over the past few decades. An understanding of how representation has changed over time is important for placing *Orange Is the New Black* into historical context. Further, the changes in representation over time explain how a television series such as *Orange Is the New Black* is able to have a diverse cast of LGBT characters. Second, I will detail literature on visibility and stereotypes through which LGBT characters have often been portrayed within television. I will draw upon these stereotypes in my analysis section of this thesis.

### *Historical perspective*

Before 1990 there were very few representations of LGBT characters on television (Wyatt, 2008). This is an example of “symbolic annihilation.” The term “symbolic annihilation” was first coined by George Gerbner (1972) to explain the lack of representation of minority groups within the media (p.44). Tuchman (1978) further expanded the term to describe the process by which mass media omits, trivializes, or condemns minority groups. More recently, Merskin (1998) defined symbolic annihilation “as the way cultural production and media representations ignore, exclude, marginalize, or trivialize a particular group” (p. 335). This lack of visibility reinforces the dominant culture and contributes to heterosexism within television. Pierre Bourdieu (2001) argues that symbolic annihilation is a form of symbolic violence and through “invisibilisation” comes a refusal of legitimate, public existence, especially by legal institutions (p. 119).

Representation of LGBT characters alone is not enough; the type of representation also matters. Often when minority groups do attain visibility in the media it reflects on the stereotypes and biases of those creating the media (Gallagher, 2001). Early depictions of LGBT individuals were negative and often based on prevailing stereotypes (Capsuto, 2000). LGBT individuals were also commonly portrayed as criminals or victims of crimes (Netzley, 2010). This helps explain the important role *Orange Is the New Black* plays for television programming by focusing on characters from a diverse group of LGBT individuals and minorities, but characters are still reliant on stereotypes.

Additionally, it is not just fair representation that is lacking but also content for and about LGBT individuals on television that is limited. Stronger positive content is

meaningful for young LGBT individuals who may be looking for role models within current television (Brown, 2002). It is also important that television continue to develop these representations so that minorities can have more accurate media representation. Although mainstream media representations are dominated by heterosexuality, one of the turning points for gay and lesbian representation on television occurred in 1997 following the show *Ellen*, which was the first television show that had a lesbian leading character (Fisher, Hill, Grube, & Gruber, 2007). *Ellen*'s "coming out" was significant because it contributed to the visibility of lesbians on television and helped shape the visibility they have today.

In the early 2000s shows such as *Queer As Folk*, *Will and Grace*, and *The L Word* had a few LGB characters, with *Queer As Folk* and *The L Word* primarily focusing on the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual characters (Peters, 2009; Lee & Meyer, 2010). These shows have had significant amount of scholarship written about them. *Queer As Folk* has been critiqued as over-representing characters who are largely white, male, and upper middle class (Peters, 2009; Farrell, 2006; Gamson, 2000). Similarly, *The L Word* has been critiqued for representing lesbians as hypersexualized, and for the catering to male heterosexual gaze (Wolfe & Roripaugh, 2006). Within the male heterosexual gaze, women's sexuality is portrayed for the enjoyment and pleasure of heterosexual male viewers (Mulvey, 1975). Even the relationships that lesbian and bisexual women are a part of during *The L Word* have received criticism. The women characters in *The L Word* are depicted as having relationships, both sexual as well as friendships, with only other lesbians or bisexual women, causing them to appear isolated from society (Lee & Meyer, 2010). These types of criticism are not limited to just *Queer As Folk* and *The L Word*.



Another television show, *Will & Grace* from the early 2000s, which had gay characters amongst its cast, has also received its share of critique. Battles and Hilton-Marrow (2002) critique the show for comparing gayness with a lack of masculinity, portraying lesbian and gay identities as a problem for straight characters, and for focusing too much on interpersonal relationships, which fails to acknowledge the consequences of being gay or lesbian within a heterosexist culture. There are two gay characters in *Will & Grace*, Jack and Will. Will spends so much time with his best friend and roommate Grace that it creates the illusion that he may be straight, while Jack appears very flamboyant (Battles & Hilton-Marrow, 2002).

Having the illusion that the gay character may be straight as well as having a flamboyant gay character were both points of concern by scholars of previous shows such as *Ellen* (Dow, 2001). Further, Dow (2001) critiques the television series *Ellen* for centering on “out” gay characters. The series rarely, if ever, shows instances of discrimination or hate. It conveniently leaves out the experiences of discrimination and hate, giving a false impression that these types of activities don’t happen or are somehow unimportant to LGBT individuals’ lives.

A contemporary television series is *Modern Family*, which began in 2009 and continues to present. After the first season many viewers critiqued the television series because Cam and Mitchell, the gay couple raising a family in the series, were never shown kissing, viewers even started a Facebook page in response (Williams, 2010). The critique started during the first season when Cam and Mitchell did not kiss during an episode, but instead hugged each other while heterosexual couples in the same scene

were depicted kissing (Kane, 2010). In response to this critique writers for the series created a scene where Cam and Mitchell had a first aired kiss (Guider, 2010).

As noted earlier, representation has increased since the 1990's, but has done so at a slow pace and not all LGBT characters have been afforded the same amount of representation. By the 2000's, LGB individuals were represented in a variety of shows, but transgender individuals had virtually no representation within television. Members of this minority group would have to wait until 2006 before the group would receive even one character in a television series (Morrison, 2010).

Morrison (2010) conducted a study of the first transgender character that appeared from November of 2006 to April 2007 on the television soap opera series *All My Children*; her name was Zoe and the series introduced her after she had begun her transition. This study primarily examined the attitudes viewers had toward the character Zoe and how the sexuality of the viewers impacted, or influenced those attitudes. Attitudes toward the character were mixed; LGB viewers were more likely to dislike the character but more likely than non-LGB views to be supportive of transgender issues (Morrison, 2010). The LGB viewers felt that the show wouldn't allow the out lesbian of the series to have a relationship with a woman; instead she dated Zoe, who was played by a cisgender male actor portraying a transwoman (Morrison, 2010). The mixed attitudes illustrate a tension between LGB and transgender individuals. This distinction is important because while *Orange Is the New Black* has a transgender woman character, she is often portrayed differently than other queer characters in the series, as I will discuss further in chapter four.

Further, during the 2005-2006 television season less than two percent of characters on broadcast television networks were estimated to be lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 2006). Representation had increased significantly from the 1990s to 2005-2006 but there was still very little representation of LGBT characters. Netzley (2010) conducted a content analysis of 98 television episodes from commercial broadcast and cable television stations from 2005-2006 and found that gay characters made up 7.5 percent of characters studied.

Furthermore, according to the 2014 report by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, merely 32, or 3.9 percent, of primetime broadcast characters are LGB, with transgender characters having no recurring roles on primetime broadcast television (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 2014). The inclusion of cable television shows impacted the data significantly and added a number of more LGB characters. Cable television had an additional 63 LGB characters and one transgender character (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 2014). This is likely due to the fact that LGBT characters have been considered too controversial for public broadcasting. This data illustrates that a number of LGBT characters continue to come from cable television compared to broadcast television.

Unfortunately, this means that viewers who would like to view television content that focuses on LGBT characters would have to subscribe to a fee-based carrier. Although financial barriers exist, the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA, 2010) report found that greater numbers of consumers are viewing internet based television on their TV's from places like Hulu or Netflix. This is a significant finding due to the fact that *Orange Is the New Black* is available for internet viewing through Netflix.

### *Visibility and stereotypes*

Clark (1969) created a process for understanding how media representations occur for minority groups in four stages: non-representation, ridicule, regulation, and respect. The first stage, non-representation, means no visibility. Similarly, Berry (1980) created a framework to measure minority representation of blacks on television, identifying three periods: the stereotypic age, the new awareness, and stabilization. *Orange Is the New Black* contains characters that are both black and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. Consequently, LGBT individuals as well as racial and ethnic minorities are negatively affected from not having better visibility on television (Raley & Lucas, 2006). Visibility is not the only aspect that matters, the ways in which the character is being portrayed on television are also important.

In addition, stereotypes have become a way in which LGBT characters as well as characters of a racial minority are visually represented.

Blum (2004) defines a stereotype as:

[A] false or misleading generalizations about groups held in a manner that renders them largely, though not entirely, immune to counterevidence. In doing so, stereotypes powerfully shape the stereotype's perception of stereotyped groups, seeing the stereotypic characteristics when they are not present, failing to see the contrary of those characterizes when they are, and generally homogenizing the group. (Blum, 2004, p. 251)

There are many common stereotypes towards gay characters. They have often been portrayed as a "sissy" and lesbian characters as "masculine" (Summers, 2005). The

term “masculine” often refers to behaviors, actions, qualities, and social characteristics typically assigned to heterosexual men (Green, 2005).

Further, LGBT characters are often represented as isolated and distant from other LGBT individuals, and when characters do have a partner they are still portrayed as non-sexual (Raley & Lucas, 2006). The non-sexual stereotype has persisted over many years. This can be illustrated by Hantzis and Lehr’s (1994) exploration of Marilyn, a lesbian character on the show *Heartbeat*. Even when Marilyn has a partner, she is never sexual with her despite the fact that many of the other main characters within the show are presented in sexual themes. Similarly, Gross and Woods (1999) examined the only gay male character on the popular 1990’s television series *Melrose Place* and concluded that he was the only cast member to never be shown in a sexual relationship during the entire course of the show.

Additionally, bisexual characters have often been represented differently than gay and lesbian representations. Women are more likely to be represented as bisexual than men, they are also more likely to be non-white, and their sexuality tends to not follow the same “coming-out” narratives that gay and lesbian characters have (Meyer, 2010). These stereotypes of LGB representation are important because *Orange Is the New Black* has numerous LGB characters.

In contrast to LGB characters, transwomen have typically been represented using three tropes. The first two are the deceptive and pathetic tropes (Serano, 2007). The deceptive trope portrays transwomen as merely “passing” as women, hiding their secret from those around them. Transwomen that are portrayed through the deceptive stereotype are able to pass so well that people around them never suspect they are transgender. The

pathetic trope portrays transwomen as weak and or vulnerable. The pathetic trope tends to focus on how the transwomen are unable to “pass” as a woman and are never portrayed as sexually active. Lastly, the artificial stereotype portrays transwomen as an artificial or fake woman, unreal due to the fact that she has used medical surgery or hormones to appear more like a woman (McKinnon, 2014). These three tropes may emerge in *Orange Is the New Black* during flashbacks, experiences, and scenes related to Sophia, the transwomen character in the series.

Furthermore, LGBT characters are often portrayed through the genre of comedy. Silverman (2013) argues that comedy can be used to move away from the perception of otherness, specifically in shows such as *Will & Grace* and *Queer As Folk*. While comedy may be helpful to move away from some negative perceptions, this is not always positive. Comedy can also be used to recreate and perpetuate stereotypes that marginalize people. The television series *Will & Grace* gives the gay character Will visibility but falls into the stereotype of portraying Will as non-sexual and his roommate as very flamboyant (Silverman, 2013).

In addition, Peters (2011) asserts that *Queer As Folk*, a comedy about queer individuals, gives people a false perception of queer culture. The series largely centers on the white gay male, younger than thirty, and makes LGBT individuals of color virtually invisible. *Queer As Folk* also focuses largely on middle and upper class lesbian, gay, and bisexuals with most characters having little problems associated with money and always making the best of bad situations. This is similar to the ways in which characters in *Orange Is the New Black* potentially give viewers a false sense of life being incarcerated.

A feminist understanding of intersectionality and privilege will allow for additional insight into these areas.

### **LGBT Theories, Race, Intersectionality, and Privilege**

Within this section I outline theories of gender and how gender classification changes depending upon the culture as well as the beliefs the person describing gender has about the topic. I examine the differences between gender, sex, and sexual orientation. I will be using these during my analysis later in this thesis. Additionally, I explain intersectionality and privilege and the impact each has on individuals and why it is important when considering characters in *Orange Is the New Black*. All of these identity categories are relevant since *Orange Is the New Black* has characters that have a wide difference in identity categories.

#### ***LGBT theories***

A clear understanding of gender and sex is required for this thesis. Denmark et al. (2005) defines gender as “a social construction that refers to how differences between girls and boys and women and men are created and explained by society” (p. 5). Gender is thus created and maintained by the society individuals live in. Helgeson (2005) defined sex as “the biological categories of male and female, categories distinguished by genes, chromosomes, and hormones” (p. 3). Sex is a category usually ascribed to an individual at birth. Further, gender can be examined through gender roles, which are society’s expectations, based on the perception of male or female, and include personality, duties, mannerisms, as well as cultural expectations (Nagoshi, Brzuzy, & Terrell, 2012). These expectations are the way society measures and individuals portrayal of gender.

Gender can also be described of as something an individual does or accomplishes.

West and Zimmerman (1987) conceptualized gender as “a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction” (p. 125). Similarly, Judith Butler (1990) described gender as a performance: “Gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing” (p.25). Both authors are describing gender as a fluid non-fixed state that an individual accomplishes based on actions and performance. Gender can also change depending on the culture ideologies specific in the portrayal of masculinity and femininity (Rosenblum & Travis, 2003). In order for gender to be successfully acted out or preformed, the actor must have a convincing gender expression. Matlin (2008) holds that gender expression is a presentation of gender by the individual through makers or a symbol, such as clothing, hair styles, jewelry, attitudes, or behaviors appropriate for ones gender. Butler (1990) reinforces this definition by stating that gender requires a constant action and a performance to create, and this can change depending on the culture and location of the individual.

Gender identity is described as the individual’s internal sense of being male or female or an identity outside or between these categories (Nagoshi, Terrell, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2014). For example, an individual can be born a male but have a strong internal sense that they are female. Gender can also be described as a spectrum and individuals can fall somewhere between the masculine and feminine endpoints or somewhere outside of the spectrum completely. Transgender is a broad term that is used to refer to individuals who are gender non-conforming or those whose gender identity/expression differs from their biological sex assigned to them at birth (Forshee, 2006).



The definition of sexual orientation is based upon two categories: the patterns of sexual attraction to an individual, and the gender of the person having the attractions (Weinrich, 2014). Sexual orientation can be observed and measured based upon the sexual behavior that individuals engage in. Sexual behavior can be described as flirting, kissing, intimate touching, sexual intercourse implied, sexual intercourse depicted, or other sexual activities (Fisher et al., 2007). Researchers have primarily described sexual orientation in two ways, as comprising of categories such as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual, or as a continuum where individuals are placed illustrating the fluidity of sexuality (Epstein, McKinney, Fox & Garcia, 2012). Of course, sex, gender, and sexual orientation are not the only identity categories that are important to understand when examining representations in *Orange Is the New Black*. An in depth analysis requires examining race and how all of these identity categories influence each other.

### ***Race, intersectionality and privilege***

*Orange is the New Black* focusses on women of varying racial groups. Race can be conceptualized as a socially constructed identity that changes over time and location, where racial categories are determined by social, economic, and political forces (Omi & Winant, 1986). Historically, race has often been explained as a biological concept that characterizes individuals based upon a shared attribute such as skin color (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Focusing on race as a biological factor ignores how race changes over time and location.

In addition, race can be connected with the space people interact within. Knowles (2003) outlines four ways in which racial and spatial processes intersect. One such intersection is contested spaces, which are fluid and change over time. These spaces are

created and changed through interaction between groups and individuals, and relate to differences and inequality (Knowles, 2003). An analysis of race and its relation to space is significant for understanding the interactions and ways that race impacts character representation in *Orange Is the New Black* because race is represented as a significant factor in each character's prison experience. The race of the character in *Orange Is the New Black* helps to shape where the inmate will be housed, what bathroom she will use, and where she is allowed sit in the cafeteria. A discussion of race is only part of the full discussion of the identities that an individual may experience. In order to fully grasp the complex life experiences and stories of these women in *Orange Is the New Black* an understanding of intersectionality is necessary.

Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality to describe the different interlocking systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination that individuals may struggle against. The systems cannot be separated and all contribute to the overall oppression an individual faces within society. Women in *Orange Is the New Black* often face multiple systems of oppression. An incarcerated woman may face oppression as a result of being an inmate in prison and oppression due to her gender. In addition to incarceration and gender oppression, some women may also suffer from oppression or discrimination due to their race and sexuality. *Orange Is the New Black* includes both oppression and privilege through the representation of women inmates in the series.

Further, Collins (2000) explains that women can experience oppression due in part to their identity but also acknowledges that the same women can have privilege. A black female incarcerated inmate may experience oppression from both gender and race, while a white female incarcerated inmate may face oppression from gender but have

privilege due to the fact that she is white. McIntosh (1989) describes white privilege as a system of unearned advantages for being white that typically remain invisible. In the first season of *Orange Is the New Black* white privilege is best illustrated in the character Piper, as I will discuss further in chapter four of this thesis.

Privilege is not just limited to race privilege; it can include socioeconomic class, religious identity, nationality, ableism, gender, sexuality, and age as well as many other categories not mentioned. Privilege often leads to oppression because it operates intentionally or unintentionally on individuals and institutions (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007). In working this way individuals may experience privilege in their daily lives without ever asking for the benefits they receive or even noticing how these benefits are not given to others. In order to create change in how privilege benefits some individual's people must be willing to acknowledge their privileges and not unquestionably accept the benefits (Carbado, 2005). This can be exceedingly difficult because to acknowledge privilege is to work against the system that created privilege in the first place since it is supposed to be invisible and unnoticed.

All of these identity categories are helpful to understanding the life experiences of women in *Orange Is the New Black*. Social Identity Theory contends that a person does not have one true self, but has multiple selves corresponding to different group memberships (Turner & Oakes, 1986). A person's social identity is the individual's self-concept, which comes about from their membership within social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). The individual will think of themselves differently depending on the group that they are involved with. Any social group the individual might belong to can depend on race, gender, or sexual orientation. Further, identity groups can be more or less

significant and change depending on time, location, and culture (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003). Understanding how an individual's identity categories interact is why an understanding of intersectionality becomes important.

Intersectionality helps to explain how gender, sexual orientation, and race are part of an individual's identity and how each simultaneously contributes to the oppression an individual may experience. While gender, sexual orientation, and race are distinct categories in scholarship, a thorough analysis must examine the ways in which these categories interact or overlap. Further, privilege becomes a significant factor in conceptualizing the ways in which some identity categories are privileged over others and in different situations.

### **Sex and Sexuality in Women's Prison**

Women often end up in prison due to problematic behavior based on matters of survival from physical or psychological abuse, struggles against poverty, or substance abuse (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004). Prison is an environment of control and regulation; many of these rules have been taken from male prisons and used in female prisons without regard for the differences and needs between the two populations (Rosenblum, 2000). Due to these differences, prisons need policies and practices that are gender responsive. Gender responsive refers to "policies and interventions that take into account girls' and women's special needs by virtue of their gender" (Wormer, 2010, p. 16).

This body of knowledge is divided into two areas of scholarship because each one is important for understanding issues that arise throughout *Orange Is the New Black*. The first section details the policies around transwomen in prison and the experiences they

have. This scholarship is vital to understanding the presentation of a transwomen character in *Orange Is the New Black*. The second section contains scholarship on sexual activity in prison and focuses on differences between sex with staff members and sex with other inmates. Many characters in *Orange Is the New Black* are engaged in sexual activity while incarcerated, with one character even becoming pregnant while in prison.

### ***Transwomen in prison***

Federal prisons and correctional facilities in the United States are segregated by two sexes, male or female. As noted earlier, transgender is a broad term that is used to refer to individuals who are gender non-conforming or those whose gender identity/expression differs from their biological sex assigned to them at birth (Forshee, 2006). Correctional facilities are highly gendered institutions and most policies dictate that transgender inmates should be housed according to their genitalia (Rosenblum, 2000; Tarzwell, 2006; Brown & McDuffie, 2009). By extension, incarcerated transgender individuals are rarely placed in a facility based on their gender identity (Spade, 2011; Spade, 2008).

In 2010, only seven state departments of corrections had policies regarding transgender prisoners. Those states are: Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania (Vitulli, 2010). Due to the prison system classifying prisoners based on binary sex, it is difficult to get statistics on transgender incarceration rates or treatments. However, Brown and McDuffie (2009) estimated that in 2007 there were at least 750 transgender prisoners in U.S. prisons, the majority being transgender women housed within men's prisons. It has been shown, however, that transgender women who are housed in men's prisons are more vulnerable to harassment and violence

from other inmates as well as prison staff (Jenness, 2009). In order to protect transgender inmates some prisons will place transgender women in special housing, such as administrative segregation (Tarzwell, 2006). Dolovich (2011) explains how segregation can be beneficial to individuals, by using it strategically to house entire communities. An example of prisoner segregation that was used in a strategic way to house prisoners in the country jail is the L.A. County K6G Unit. Here the jail establishes communities such as transwomen, people at risk or in need of security, or the LGBT community.

In 2009, the Washington D.C. department of corrections created new policies for the treatment of transgender inmates, including rules and regulations regarding strip searches. These new policies allowed for the creation of a committee made up of a doctor, mental health practitioner, correctional supervisor and an approved volunteer to help determine the placement of transgender prisoners (Najafi, 2009). These new policies allow transgendered individuals' health to be considered by people other than prison officials. These policies also lessen the humiliation for transgender individuals by not forcing them to be strip searched in front of other prisoners. The L.A. County K6G Unit is made up of individuals that self-identify as a member of the LGBT community during intake questionnaires (Dolovich, 2011).

While segregation might seem like a reasonable way to protect transwomen it can make them more vulnerable to victimization by prison staff, and is often more restrictive than general population (Tarzwell, 2006; Arkles, 2009). Housing placement is of great concern for transwomen placed within a men's prison as part of their safety and security. In 2009, a study collected 315 interviews from transgender female inmates housed in men's prisons within California (Jenness, 2009). The study found that transgender

women inmates reported that the prevalence of sexual assault by other inmates was 58.5 percent during their entire incarceration history, while 23.8 percent experienced sexual assault in their current housing unit. The prevalence of sexual assault by prison staff was 13.6 percent during their entire incarceration history and 0.6 percent in their current housing unit. Further, 15.2 percent reported sexual assault by law enforcement officers outside of prison. In an earlier study on a random sample of male prisoners in California, the prevalence of sexual assault was reported to be 4.4 percent (Jenness, Maxson, Matsuda, and Sumner, 2007). These studies highlight the danger of sexual violence that transgender women experience when they are incarcerated at a men's prison.

A case, *Farmer v. Brennan*, that went before the Supreme Court of the U.S. in 1994 illustrates the experiences of violence and dangers that transwomen face during incarceration at a men's facility. Dee Farmer was a transwomen that was placed in a federal men's prison because she had not yet undergone genital surgery. Farmer was placed in a men's prison despite several years of being on hormones and having breast implants. During her incarceration she worried for her safety, experiencing violence as well as taunting from other prisoners and staff. Farmer's gender expression and placement in a men's prison caused her to be singled out for violence by other inmates within the prison. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in her favor and found that prison officials must protect inmate's rights under the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution which guarantees freedom from cruel and unusual punishment.

In addition to housing safety, transgender women may also be at risk of having their medical treatment withheld during incarceration. The U.S. Bureau of Prisons policy regarding hormones is to provide hormones at the level that was maintained prior to

incarceration, but in practice there has been wide variability observed with regards to inmate's access to hormone treatments (Brown & McDuffie, 2009). Tarzwell (2006) identifies three ways transwomen may experience disruptions in their hormone treatments: prison transfers, providers not willing to continue hormone treatment, and not having a prescription that documents previous hormone use. Having to provide documentation of their hormone treatments before incarceration means that transgender individuals who have undergone hormone therapy in secret may not be able to receive adequate care.

### ***Sexual Coercion***

Although sexual coercion in prison has been studied by social scientists more attention has been given to male prisons and male victims (Hensley, Stuckman-Johnson, & Eigenberg, 2000). Women in prison have been largely left out of research on sexual coercion until quite recently. The first study to examine sexual coercion women in correctional settings experienced found that three of the 42 women surveyed reported to have been coerced into sexual activities, either by other female inmates or male correctional staff members (Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, Rucker, Bumby, & Donaldson, 1996). In *Orange Is the New Black* women inmates experience sexual coercion from both guards and other inmates. Baro (1997) studied sexual abuse perpetrated by prison staff members in a women's prison facility in Hawaii with a population of about 50 women. The study interviewed female inmates and examined prison records to understand how these women were vulnerable to sexual coercion. She found that between 1982 and 1994 the prison had 38 officially acknowledged cases of custodial sexual abuse.



Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2002) conducted a study in order to increase sample size and analyze sexual coercion women inmates experience; researchers surveyed 263 inmates from three facilities in the Midwest. The study reported findings of sexual coercion were between six percent and 19 percent, and 45 percent of those reported incidents involved staff members (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2002). Hensley, Castle, and Tewksbury (2003) conducted a survey of 243 women that focused on sexual coercion between inmates and found that 4.5 percent of women reported incidents of sexual coercion by other inmates and two percent admitted to perpetrating sexual coercions against other inmates. Tewksbury and Conner (2014) insist that beyond sexual coercion, concerns about sexually transmitted infections as well as other health problems when violence is used is an issue.

In *Orange is the New Black* many scenes depict the issue of guards and sexual coercion, but the scenes involving inmate-inmate sexuality is portrayed as consensual. Consensual sexual activity among inmates has often been ignored, or when studied it has mostly examined same-sex sexuality amongst prisoners as a social problem or consequence of institutionalization, causing these inmates to resort to these types of sexual acts (Saum, Surratt, Inciardi, & Bennett, 1995). Sexual activity amongst prisoners even when it is consensual is still against the rules and regulations.

While *Orange Is the New Black* centers mostly on consensual sex between inmates, it does portray some sexual relationships between inmates and prison staff. *Orange Is the New Black* shows several guards engaged in sexual acts with the female inmates. The show raises awareness of the question of consent and power in prison. The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) passed in 2003 was to protect inmates from rape in

federal, state, and local institutions and to provide information and resources to protect individuals from prison rape. The PREA mandates that prisoners cannot give consent to guards for sexual activity due to the power relations between them. The PREA regulations were aimed at identifying and preventing rape against prisoners, both male and female, as well as holding individuals accountable for their actions. Reid (2013) explains that on the surface this law is good but under the surface it does little to help women who experience rape and sexual assault, because blame is placed on individuals rather than addressing institutional or policy problems.

In closing, *Orange Is the New Black* is more than just a television series about women. The series represents women who are part of race, sexual orientation, and gender minorities. Further, these representations are about women in prison, another minority group among the general population. Women face particular dangers while being incarcerated including violence and sexual coercion. The situation that faces transwoman in prison is particularly dangerous. This is compounded by issues arising from where they are sentenced to serve time to issues with whether they will receive adequate healthcare. All of these issues and concerns will be important in my analysis of the television series.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

The Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black* has sparked conversations pertaining to the experiences and stories of women in prison. As previously mentioned in my introduction the show has several lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women as well as many characters from different races and ethnic groups. For this project, I examined four representations of women using a feminist textual analysis of the first season of *Orange Is the New Black*. I specifically investigated the representation of four characters' race, gender, and sexuality. The characters I chose were Piper Chapman, Sophia Burset, Dayanara Diaz (Daya), and Carrie Black (Big Boo). I chose these characters specifically because they represent a diverse group of individuals based upon race, gender, and sexuality. This research is important in understanding the representation that women with different identity categories receive on television.

#### Process

I selected *Orange Is the New Black* for several reasons. First, while not a network television program, the series has received significant attention from viewers and media. The series is available online for streaming, which has contributed to the large number of viewers in the United States and abroad. In July of 2014 Netflix had over 50 million subscribers, all of whom had access to *Orange Is the New Black* (Faughnder, 2014). The second reason for choosing this series is that it has enough episodes to allow for significant analysis. The first season contains 13 episodes, each between 50 minutes to an hour in length. The entire first season was released on July 11, 2013, the second season was released June 6, 2014, and the series has been renewed for a third season. For the purpose of this study I will only be discussing the first season of *Orange Is the New*

*Black*. Focusing my research on the first season will allow me to finish my study in the time allotted.

I used a feminist media analysis to examine representations in *Orange Is the New Black* season one. A feminist media analysis uses texts to examine gender and the ideologies within the culture that created those texts (Hesse-Bieber, 2013). I gathered and analyzed my data from *Orange Is the New Black* season one using a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While there are other ways to collect data on television, I found a thematic analysis to be the most beneficial for my research because it allowed me to identify and select specific categories before starting my research gathering. This allowed me to further narrow my focus. I also did not want to use a quantitative data process for gathering information. Quantitative data would have only been able to examine the number of times women were represented depending on race, gender, and sexual orientation. I wished to get a deeper understanding of the representation women had in season one of *Orange Is the New Black*.

Before I began coding, I watched the entire first season of *Orange Is the New Black* without taking any notes to better familiarize myself with the show. Coding can be thought of as a two-step process, the first step is placing codes from the text based upon themes, the second is a more in depth coding to look for patterns or trends (Hesse-Biber, 2013). During this time I selected three themes I was going to explore in my research: race, gender, and sexuality. When I started the coding process, I would watch one episode at a time, collecting notes as I went through the 13 episodes of season one. I used a notebook, and divided the page into three sections to record all of my data. The sections

were labeled race, gender, and sexuality; I define these terms in my literature review section of this thesis. During the coding process I recorded visual scenes, while at other times I took notes and quotes on what characters said in the scene. An example is a scene where Piper explains her WASP identity to Alex; I would record the instance in the race column and write a quote. In order to make sure that I took accurate and relevant notes, I would have to frequently pause or rewind the episode to get all the information written down. Sometimes my notes were of the characters dialogue, the interactions with other characters, or visual cues within the scene. Recording my coding this way was beneficial to my research because I can refer back to the notes and examine what occurred in each episode. Having the information separated by individual episodes allows me to know the exact place in which the notes were gathered in case I needed to watch a particular scene again.

When gathering notes specifically about race I would make an indication of how race played a role in the scene. I examined how other characters in the series referred to individuals by race. I also looked at how the person self-identified, if the individual ever made reference to her race, as well taking making notes about the group that a character located herself within. I would make note of the way race impacted the interactions with both guards and other inmates as well as how race impacted the location and setting the inmate was a part of.

In collecting notes about gender I not only examined instances of where the characters I chose talked about their gender identity, but also how inmates expressed that gender. I took notes specifically on actions and behaviors during the series, such as how characters dressed or presented their gender. For sexual orientation I collected notes not

only on the way that characters describe their sexual orientation, if they ever did, but also on their sexual behaviors with other individuals in the series. I would take notes specifically on the types of activities and with whom they interacted with. In analyzing these identities, I found that having an intersectional analysis more accurately described the ways in which multiple identity categories interact in the representation of these characters.

### **Reflexivity**

In regards to my own reflexivity, I am aware of my positionality during the research process. I personally identify as gay and gender queer. My own struggles and research into sexual orientation and gender identity have been a process that has lasted over a decade. I am personally invested in these two identity categories, which leads to a “strong objectivity” because I am aware of the social and personal factors that may influence my interpretations and understand my position as a queer researcher (Hesse-Biber, 2013, p. 19). My queer identity allows me to have stronger feelings of connection with the subject material and how LGBT characters are portrayed in popular television. As a member of these communities, I am personally invested in the representations of queer individuals.

Further, with insight to my analysis of race and class in this project, I am aware of the racial background and class privilege that I have. I am from a working-class background and have a personal connection to those issues. As a college-educated person, I may interpret the show in different ways than people with a limited educational background. As a person of color, specifically Latino, I can understand some of the oppression the Latina women experience based on race. I can relate to the racial

experiences that Daya has during the show. Specifically, Daya is criticized by other inmates for her lack of understanding and ability to speak Spanish. While I have insider information about being Latino I cannot relate to or understand racial oppression that is experienced by other racial and ethnic minorities.

Lastly, as someone who has had a person close to me that has been incarcerated inside of a women's correctional facility, I acknowledge that this topic brings up personal feelings. While it has been many years since her incarceration, the feelings and experiences I had during that time have impacted the way I view the television series and the experiences portrayed. All of these identities discussed influence the ways in which I watch the television show and why I feel this research is important.

### **Contributions and Potential Limitations**

Due to the fact that *Orange Is the New Black* is a relatively new television show, there is a limited scholarship on this series. This means that my research on representations of race, gender, and sexual orientation may be some of the first academic research completed for *Orange Is the New Black*. Another contributing factor is that *Orange Is the New Black* has many diverse characters within the series, which allows for analysis that can examine multiple identity categories in a single character. The show also focuses on women's incarceration in federal prison. As mentioned in the literature review, prison and research about prison has typically focused on the male perspectives. Television series about prison have also centered on men's prisons. Further, this study contributes to research on television series designed to be viewed online rather than on broadcast or public television.

Similarly, there are limitations in this research. The characters in *Orange Is the New Black* are representations and cannot be related directly to the lived experiences of real life individuals. This means that the experiences and stories are fictional and not generalizable to real people outside of the text. In addition, because characters are representations, it is not possible to explain the agency that these characters have within the prison system or within the portrayal of their lives in the show. All of the actors have scripts that they must follow for the show, so their actions and interactions are dictated by the writers and those responsible for the creation of the television series. Another significant factor is that characters are interpreted differently depending on the viewer. As a viewer myself, I have to be aware of this fact and how it influences what information I might report about the television series. I further acknowledge that the characters representation may change between seasons. Lastly, my analysis of representation is limited to only four characters from the television series; more research may need to be done in the future to broaden the scope of representation to the entire series.



## Chapter 4: Analysis

All representations analyzed in this thesis are influenced by the characters' race, gender, and sexuality. In this section I will be examining these identity categories and analyzing how each character is represented during season one of *Orange Is the New Black*. Further, in the last section of this analysis I will bring together and explain how intersectional these social identities are and what impact they have on the representation of the character. A person's social identity is the individual's self-concept, which comes about from their membership within social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). Social groups can be divided into members of a race, gender, class, as well and sexual orientation. In addition, an identity group can be more or less significant and can change over time, place, and across cultures (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003). I specifically use race, gender, and sexuality because these identity categories are particularly important and represented in the four characters I examine from *Orange Is the New Black*.

### Race

As I mentioned earlier, race is socially constructed, but during the first season of *Orange Is the New Black* race is presented as a biological process largely based upon skin color. Piper, the shows main protagonist, both identifies and is seen as white; she makes several references to her White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) background throughout the season. These references to her WASP background are often done between her fiancé Larry and her ex-girlfriend Alex. While McIntosh's (1989) theory of white privilege explains that whiteness is invisible, we see Piper's race because of other inmate's response to her white privilege. During *Orange Is the New Black* season one Piper's whiteness is portrayed in ways that make it more visible than usual. Piper's white

privilege does not go unnoticed by other inmates, especially inmates of color. From some of the first interactions Piper has in the prison she is made aware of her race and the impact it has on her incarceration.

In episode one, "I Wasn't Ready" Piper is given a toothbrush, by a fellow white inmate named Morello, and told that "we take care of our own" and that it is "tribal, not racial." Morello is an inmate driver that took Piper to the prison when she first turns herself over for incarceration. Morello's statement sets the stage for how the prison population is segregated by race at Litchfield and the impact race has for inmates. In the same episode, Piper enters the cafeteria and is looking for a place to sit when she is instructed by another inmate to sit with "the nice white lady." In being directed to sit with the other white inmates race becomes a deciding factor in the space that these inmates inhabit. Race even plays a significant factor in which wing inmates are housed.

In episode three, "Lesbian Request Denied," Piper receives her new bunk assignment. Piper's fellow inmates are a little surprised when she is assigned to the housing bunk that is referred to as "the ghettos," which largely houses black inmates. The other inmates are surprised because typically the prisoners are put into housing depending on their race. Healy, the prison counselor, would have had to approve of Piper being sent to live in "the ghetto" housing unit. He doesn't seem uncomfortable placing her in a predominantly black housing unit, but he was strongly against housing her with a lesbian. In this instance, the counselor's fear of lesbian sexuality trumps his desire to conform to standard of racial segregation. While race impacts the space and location an inmate in the series occupies, it does not mean all inmates agree along racial lines, and the white

inmates are subdivided into multiple groups. The groups are based on sexuality, social class, and prison occupation.

Carrie Black is also called “Big Boo” by other inmates. No information about how she ended up at Litchfield or her life before is provided in season one. Big Boo is white and similar to other inmates her race impacts the place she lives and the space she occupies. Her race allows her to hang out with other white inmates both in the cafeteria and in her housing assignment. Big Boo can be seen interacting with two of the white subgroups. She frequently spends her time with the group associated with the prison kitchen, despite the fact that she does not work in this area. In season one, the kitchen is a predominantly white space, and white inmates spend much of their time together in the housing unit, activities, or in the cafeteria when not serving food. The second group that Big Boo is associated with is the white lesbian group, which she spends time with frequently in the first season.

Daya arrives on the same day as Piper and is housed in the same cell, until she can be placed into a more permanent housing unit. Upon arriving to Litchfield in episode one, “I Wasn’t Ready,” Daya is presented to the viewer as Latina and paired with another Latina woman, Gloria Mendoza. In the scene Gloria begins a conversation with Daya in Spanish, but when Daya explains that she does not understand Spanish, Gloria scolds her. Further, Daya’s race impacts the space and locations that she has access to during her incarceration. Daya’s race allows her to be placed in the housing unit known as “Spanish Harlem.” Additionally, her race also allows her access to sitting with the other Latina women at meals or playing dominos with them while outside. While her race allows her

to get close and live with other Latina inmates, the fact that Daya does not speak Spanish continues to be a point of alienation for her during season one.

Sophia is a black inmate at Litchfield Penitentiary. Similar to the other inmates, the spaces that Sophia occupies are largely dependent upon her race. She is a resident in the housing unit labeled “the ghetto.” Sophia is often grouped with the other black inmates while in the cafeteria and housing units. However, while most inmates are often segregated by race, Sophia is able to transcend some racial boundaries with her work. Sophia works inside of the prison’s beauty salon. The ability to transcend her racial group only pertains to her working with white inmates as most of the Latina inmates never are shown in the salon. Allen (2014) explains that often *Orange Is the New Black* portrays Sophia and her storyline in ways that always relate to her transgender identity. This leads to other identities being masked by having her representation largely being centered on her transgender identity.

Knowles (2003) insists that race can be connected to space in a way that relates to difference and inequality. The housing unit for black inmates “the ghetto” and the housing unit for Latina inmates “Spanish Harlem” are both named throughout the series by white inmates. While those two housing units have racially descriptive names associated with them, the housing units where white inmates live go unnamed. It is significant that the white housing unit has no name because having no identifying name allows it is seen as just a housing unit, whereas the housing units for women of color are not viewed in the same manner, which is why they are given descriptor nicknames. Further, whiteness is portrayed as a privileged identity because white inmates are the ones who name the housing units of people of color.

Furthermore, the series largely focuses on Piper, a white woman, who is incarcerated at Litchfield. Piper's entry into the prison system sheds light on the problems facing the other inmates, who are mostly inmates of color. This is problematic because *Orange Is the New Black* frames the narratives of women of color through the lens of a white inmate (Bogado, 2013). Piper's whiteness often makes her an outsider to most of the women in prison, yet during the series she is the person that brings issues the inmates experience to light. In film and television the white savior is a white character who comes in and saves a lower or working-class, often isolated person of color experiencing some problem (Hughey, 2014). Piper's white privilege allows her to tell the stories of women of color inmates without giving them a voice. In doing so she is portrayed as the white savior coming into prison and helping fix their problems for them. Piper is instrumental in telling the stories of the women she meets through her fiancé Larry on the outside. Piper's stories also help in the identification of some questionable actions with money at the prison involving staff cutting back programs for inmates and switching to generic medications. In representing Piper as a white savior the women of color in the series are portrayed as not having the ability to help themselves and must rely on Piper's whiteness to be the spokeswoman for their problems.

## **Gender**

Gender identity is an individual's internal sense of being masculine or feminine or an identity outside or between these categories (Nagoshi et al., 2014). All of the characters I chose to analyze have a female gender category, even though many never directly state their gender identity. In order to determine gender identity, I used evidence from the series about how the characters expressed their gender. Gender expression is a

presentation of gender by the individual through markers or a symbol, such as clothing, hair styles, jewelry, attitudes, or behaviors appropriate for one's gender (Matlin, 2008). Gender expression is an important indicator of gender identity in the series because often characters do not explain their inner sense of gender or how they conceptualized their gender identity.

Piper Chapman never directly states that she identifies as a woman during the first season, but she does exhibit many behaviors related to her gender expression. Piper can be seen spending time in the salon getting her hair done, which she always keeps long. Piper also buys items from commissary such as makeup and has items like pink nail polish. Several times throughout the series Piper also reveals that she knows how to make soap and other assorted items, which she used to do before she was sent to prison. In episode two, "Tit Punch," Piper uses her knowledge about soaps and lotions to make a cream for Red, the women in charge of the kitchen whom Piper has offended, to help her with back pain. During flashbacks early in Piper's life before and while she met Alex, she is often wearing dresses or female clothing and attire.

Piper's gender identity and expression are feminine. These identities privilege her in the relationships she has with other characters especially correctional staff. At the beginning of the series, her normative gender expression causes her counselor Mr. Healy to often take her side. Mr. Healy is a white middle aged man at the prison who is a counselor who works with women inmates. In episode three, "Lesbian Request Denied," Mr. Healy describes Piper as a "nice girl." In the first episode, "I Wasn't Ready," Piper is instructed by other inmates that Caputo, a white middle aged man who is an assistant to the warden, doesn't like to see women cry and if she cries in his office he will let her use

the phone to make a call. Piper takes advantage of this and cries in his office and he lets her use his office phone to call Larry. Continuously portraying Piper as someone in need of help in these situations makes Pipers' character seem weak or in need of protection from masculine authority figures around her.

Daya Diaz never directly states her gender identity. Daya does exhibit behavior and a gender expression that would indicate she is feminine. During the series Daya always keeps her hair long and highlighted. Daya also threads her mother's eyebrows for her on occasion when she needs it done. In episode six, "WAC Pack," Daya explains her love of the Japanese art style anime, drawing feminine characters since childhood, and enjoying them more than Disney princesses. Before prison Daya could be seen wearing feminine cloths as well. Daya is constantly portrayed as a mother figure or care provider to her siblings during the series. I found that her portrayal would indicate that she would identify as a female if asked, and she has a very feminine gender expression. In many flashbacks Daya can be seen taking care of her younger siblings, while either her mother is hanging out with her boyfriend Cesar, or when her mother becomes incarcerated. Cesar is first introduced in the series as Aleida's, Daya's mother, boyfriend, but eventually Daya and he have a relationship after Aleida is sent to prison. Daya will take orders from Cesar to make him food and get him groceries from the store and allow him to use her house as a way for him to package drugs so that she can provide for her family.

Similar to Daya, Big Boo never directly states her gender identity. During season one of *Orange Is the New Black*, Big Boo expresses many traits that could be described as masculine. The clothing that Big Boo wears is the same as everyone else, but her body appearance is more masculine, due to muscles, than other inmates; she also never wears

makeup during the first season. She has shorter hair than most inmates as well as has a number of tattoos on her arms, and can regularly be seen wearing a white prison issue tank top. Big Boo is heavysset with considerably more muscle build around her arms and chest than other inmates. Big Boo appears to “act tough” around others and is not afraid to use violence or threats of violence against those that cross her. Characteristics such as toughness and physical strength aid in giving butch lesbians a female masculine expression (Halberstram, 1998). In episode four, “Imaginary Enemies,” Big Boo becomes offended that her ex would give away one of her old t-shirts and threatens to mess her up before she is set to be released.

Sophia openly discusses her gender identity several times during the first season and explains that she is a transwoman. Serano (2007) describes a transwomen as “any person who was assigned a male sex at birth, but who identifies as and/or lives as a woman” (p. 13). At the start of episode five, “The Chickening,” Sophia is talking with other inmates about her gender reassignment surgery. In addition, during flashbacks in episode three, “Lesbian Request Denied,” the scene depicts Sophia’s life before prison, before her transition, and her adjustment to life during her transition. Sophia’s character not only portrays a transwomen, but portrays a transwomen in a way that counters the deceptive narrative. The deceptive narrative often portrays transwomen as “passing” as well as hiding their transition from those around them (Serano, 2007). Sophia is always honest and open about her transition; she does not try to hide the fact that she was born biologically male and has undergone gender reassignment surgery. The honesty that Sophia has during the first season of *Orange Is the New Black* does not stop judgments placed upon her by others based upon her identity.



Further, Sophia's gender identity and gender reassignment surgery are the reason she is incarcerated within the women's prison. Placement in a federal prison is based upon the genitals of the inmate (Brown & McDuffie, 2009). Due to Sophia having undergone gender reassignment surgery she was placed within a women's correctional facility. For actual incarcerated transwomen this is how placement is determined, the show may be mirroring this process. Even though she is placed in a women's facility she still faces many problems during her incarceration with staff and other inmate.

A significant problem that Sophia encounters during season one deals with her struggle with medical concerns. In episode three, "Lesbian Request Denied," The nurse who is charged with administering inmates' medication tells Sophia that her hormone treatment has been changed unexpectedly. When Sophia addresses her medical concerns with Mr. Healy, he insists that it is not a big concern. This incident forces Sophia to have to swallow a bobble head toy from his desk in order to receive medical attention. Tarzwell (2006) explains that transgender inmates often face problems in receiving adequate medical care, including hormones.

After Sophia receives some treatment by medical staff she is taken off hormones completely. Sophia's barriers to medical care represent a real problem that occurs for transwomen while they are incarcerated. The U.S. Bureau of Prisons policy regarding hormones guarantees the individual access to the level they had before incarceration, but this does not always happen within prisons (Brown & McDuffie, 2009). While Sophia faces problems in receiving hormones she has some privilege compared with actual transwomen who are incarcerated. Tarzwell (2006) explains that for many transwomen

not having a medical prescription that documents their previous hormone treatments can be a barrier to receiving treatment while incarcerated.

In addition, Sophia's gender identity causes arguments and tension between inmates and staff during the course of the first season. In episode three, "Lesbian Request Denied," officer Mendez, after talking with Sophia, refers to her as having a "cyborg pussy." This illustrates what McKinnon (2014) explained as a tendency for transwomen to often be depicted through an artificial narrative. In the same episode Mr. Healy refers to Sophia as a "tranny" and Figueroa, the assistant warden, questions Sophia for wanting to give up on being a man. Sophia also has problems with other inmates who in episode five, "The Chickening," describe Sophia as an "it" and an abomination. Transphobia impacts the way in which transgender person are ostracized from mainstream culture as well as how they are treated within prisons (Erni, 2013). Sophia is represented as experiencing direct and indirect transphobia. Transwomen's femininity is thus viewed as something artificial or something not entirely "real." Sophia is no exception to this narrative and consistently has her status as a "real" woman questioned by other inmates and guards. All of these are examples of how both inmates and staff view Sophia as something other than a woman.

Sophia is also portrayed as being very knowledgeable about beauty techniques such as hair, fashion, and makeup. These representations portray Sophia in ways that cause her to be hyperfeminized. Serano (2007) explains that the hyperfeminization of transwomen in the media tends to focus on narratives about transwomen in relation to makeup and fashion as well as portraying transwomen with negative female characterizes such as being passive, confused, or weak. During flashbacks in episode three, "Lesbian

Request Denied,” Sophia is portrayed as confused about how to dress as a woman and she is being educated by her wife about women’s fashion and clothes during her transition. Further, Sophia can be seen regularly fixing the hair of many women during her time spent at the beauty salon. Sophia also creates makeup from Kool-Aid and Vaseline. Having Sophia portrayed as the all-knowing woman in prison to go to for hair, makeup, and fashion advice only furthers the ways that the media hyperfeminize transwomen.

### **Sexuality**

Sexual orientation has been defined based by two categories, the sexual attraction to an individual, and the sex of the person showing those attractions (Weinrich, 2014). Sexual orientation can also be observed based upon the sexual behavior the person exhibits towards other individuals interactions such as flirting, kissing, intimate touching, sexual intercourse implied, sexual intercourse depicted, or other sexual activities (Fisher et al., 2007). These and other sexual behaviors are exhibited by the characters throughout season one of *Orange Is the New Black*.

*Orange Is the New Black* often portrays sexuality in the context of prison life. Historically, three theories have been used to explain sexual activity between inmates in prison. First, Clemmer (1940) explained the deprivation model, which theorized that inmates engaged in same-sex interactions because they were deprived of heteronormative sexuality. The second model developed by Irwin and Cressey (1962) is the importation model in which inmates import social values from society to prison, helping to create the prison subcultures. Lastly, Stein (1992) used a social constructionist approach that defines sexuality as a cultural entity that has been constructed by social situations and

values. The social constructionist approach takes into account the impact society has on individual's social values and norms. In the social constructionist approach sexuality is not defined as a fixed category, but exists on a continuum and may change during different points in an individual's life, depending on lifestyle factors, experiences, and the social forces of those around them (Alarid, 2000).

The deprivation model is illustrated within the first episode, "I Wasn't Ready," when Piper meets Healy and he describes some of the rules and inner workings of the prison. At the end of their meeting he explains to her that no people will bother her. He asks her to stay away from the lesbians and insists she does not have to engage in lesbian sex during her incarceration. Healy assumes her to be heterosexual and cautions her about lesbians. When Piper responds that she has a fiancé Larry, reaffirms Healy's assumption that Piper is heterosexual. Further, in episode three, "Lesbian Request Denied," Healy explains that some women are attracted to the "studs," who are the masculine lesbians. This is an example of the deprivation model because Healy assumes that these women are attracted to these women with a masculine presentation because they cannot be with a man due to incarceration.

The importation model is illustrated by the lesbian and bisexual women that bring their identity with them to prison. Piper and her ex-girlfriend Alex can both be used as examples to explain how the importation model works. In this model, Alex and Piper brought in their values and views of sexuality that allowed them to join in the lesbian subculture in prison. Daya also illustrates the importation model because her sexual behavior before prison matches her behavior during prison. Before prison she was only

involved with men and while incarcerated she continues this pattern with the prison guard Bennett.

Finally, the social constructionist model is best portrayed by Piper and her complex sexuality. Piper's sexuality is related to the social constructionist model because her sexuality is represented as less static due to the fact that it changes depending on time and location. Her sexuality changes during her time in prison, and is portrayed through flashbacks as changing when she met Larry. In the first episode, "I Wasn't Ready," Piper is seen with her fiancé Larry, but then only seconds later in a flashback to years earlier she is seen with her ex-girlfriend. During the course of the season, Piper struggles with her relationship with Larry and her past relationship and present incarceration with Alex.

Piper Chapman's sexual orientation, or struggle with, is often a focal point during *Orange Is the New Black*. While Piper never actually explains her sexual orientation, based on the information presented within the first season of *Orange Is the New Black* I hypothesize her sexual orientation as bisexual. Piper is a female and is shown having attraction to her fiancé Larry and her ex-girlfriend Alex. According to Meyer (2010) bisexuality tends to not follow the same narratives as gay and lesbian characters. Accordingly, Piper's sexuality is portrayed differently than the other characters in the series. During the series Piper continues her relationship with Larry while dealing with her feelings for Alex. Piper's sexual orientation is often labeled as lesbian by others in the series. In fact, during episode ten, "Bora Bora Bora," Piper is called a "hardcore lesbian" by one of the correctional officers giving a tour to at risk youth. In Episode three, "Lesbian Request Denied," another inmate assumes Piper is a lesbian and wants her for a "prison wife." In her love triangle between Larry and Alex, Piper often is presented as

struggling with her decisions about which person she wants to be with. Even in episode 12, "Fool Me Once," Larry begins to question whether Piper is now a lesbian or not. Larry wonders about the issue of her sexuality because of the rift between Piper and him that has led to their relationship falling apart and their taking a break. Not only is Piper's sexual orientation often labeled or a point of interest in the series so is her sexual behavior.

During Piper's incarceration she experiences her sexuality in different ways than other characters in the series. In the beginning of her incarceration Piper is forced into a relationship with a "prison wife" Suzanne Warren, whom inmates refer to as Crazy Eyes. Suzanne is a black inmate in her late twenties or early thirties who throughout the series is depicted as showing interest in other women and has a masculine appearance. In episode three, "Lesbian Request Denied," Suzanne gives Piper the nickname "Dandelion" and continuously makes advances towards her. Hensley et al. (2003) found that a significant number of incarcerated women experience sexuality coercion by other inmates. While the relationship is always portrayed in a comedic sense, it masks the reality that women experience sexual coercion while in prison. Later in the episode Piper brings her concerns about Suzanne's advances to Mr. Healy. He blames Piper and tells her to not get involved with lesbians while she is in prison. In addressing her concerns in this way, he places the blame on her and gives her the responsibility of confronting Suzanne, possibly putting herself in greater danger. Piper eventually confronts Suzanne about these advances and explains to her that she has a fiancé already and that they cannot be a couple. The rejection causes Suzanne to lash out and urinate on the floor of Piper's cell.

Additionally, *Orange Is the New Black* depicts incidents of homophobia. Dow (2001) has critiqued television series with lesbian characters for rarely portraying instances of discrimination or hate. Piper's sexual orientation is a focal point of tension between herself and Tiffany Doggett, a character portrayed through the stereotype of "white trash," and known as Pennsatucky. Throughout the series, Pennsatucky claims that Piper is sinful and going to hell because of her "lifestyle." This causes Piper and Pennsatucky to be at odds with each other. For example, during episode eight, "Moscow Mule," Pennsatucky locks Alex inside a dryer in the prison laundry room while Alex is helping Piper. Piper is lectured for allowing Alex to help her and for getting stuck inside the dryer.

Further, in episode nine, "Fucksgiving," Pennsatucky gets Piper thrown in to the segregated housing unit (SHU) for dancing with Alex. Pennsatucky voices her concerns about the two women dancing together to Mr. Healy, who has warned Piper about lesbian activity before. This incident demonstrates that Piper experiences homophobia from both inmates and staff. In episode 13, "Can't Fix Crazy," Piper faces the threat of violence when she is physically attacked by Pennsatucky and must fight her off. All of these instances are examples of the way that *Orange Is the New Black* portrays homophobia and how it impacts Piper's incarceration. While Piper's sexuality is a major focal point and receives significant attention, other character's sexual orientation and behavior are portrayed very differently.

In contrast to Piper, Daya expresses her sexual behavior in the television series in different ways. Daya never directly states her sexual orientation, but based on the presentation of her sexuality during and before prison I assume she is heterosexual. I

make this assumption based on the fact that she is only shown engaging in sexual behavior with males before and during prison. She is portrayed as having an intimate relationship with her mother's boyfriend Cesar after her mother is sent to Litchfield. During prison she is shown primarily with Bennett, a white prison guard at Litchfield.

Despite policies against sexual activity between staff and inmates, these types of activities do occur in actual prisons. These experiences involving sexual activity between prison staff and inmates have been documented by Baro (1997), Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson 2002), and Hensley et al. (2003). The relationship between Daya and the prison guard Bennett illustrates the complex ways in which *Orange Is the New Black* portrays these relationships. While the series does portray the relationships as illegal, the series also depicts the relationship as her idea and something she initiates. Daya begins a relationship with a prison guard named Bennett early in the season. Daya's sexual behavior toward Bennett starts out as slight flirting and progressively moves towards the sexual as time goes on. Her behavior with Bennett starts in episode two, "Tit Punch," with a small amount of flirting in which she asks him for gum. In episode four, "Imaginary Enemies," the two meet outside and start talking to each other. Bennett allows her to try some of his chewing tobacco. During the series Bennett continues to give Daya praise for her artistic talent and reciprocates her flirting.

Additionally, Bennett can be seen multiple times in the series passing Daya notes and secretly meeting up with her. Their relationship changes from flirting to sexual in episode six, "WAC Pack," when they sneak into a janitorial closet for sex. The relationship between the two remains a secret because Bennett is scared of others finding out. Numerous times during the series he mentions how their relationship is illegal,



against prison regulations, and how he could go to jail if people found out. During episode eight, “Moscow Mule,” Daya experiences morning sickness, causing her mother to confront her about her pregnancy. *Orange Is the New Black* depicts the relationship as consensual, but fails to fully explore the power differences between the two individuals. As noted earlier, the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) mandates that an inmate may not give an officer consent for sexual activity because of the power differences between the two (Prison Rape elimination Act, 2003). As a guard, Bennett has considerably more power than Daya, which is illustrated during the series when Bennett pretends to disciple Daya in order to pass her notes and messages.

The way that the sexuality of Big Boo is represented is different than Daya or Piper. Historically, the sexuality of butch lesbians has not been represented in mainstream television (Ciasullo, 2001). Big Boo breaks that rule by being a prominent butch lesbian character during the first season of *Orange Is the New Black*. Big Boo is very open about her sexuality and attraction to women. She is described by other inmates as having a number of “prison wives” during her incarceration. She is never shown during the first season engaging in sex with other inmates or staff, but she does exhibit sexual behavior during the series. Typically, lesbians in television have been portrayed in socially acceptable ways such as being gentle, sensitive, and soft-spoken (Harrington, 2003). Big Boo’s actions and attitudes during *Orange Is the New Black* illustrate none of these qualities. During the course of the series Big Boo can be describes as loud and confrontational. In episode four, “Imaginary Enemies,” Big Boo confronts the new girlfriend of her old “prison wife” and threatens her. Later in the same episodes she constructs a device for masturbation, using a screwdriver and a plastic glove.

In episode six, “WAC Pack,” Big Boo asserts her masculinity when she and another inmate move and start dancing with each other. Big Boo begins thrusting her pelvis toward the other inmate and dancing very close to her with body parts touching and rubbing against each other. Raley & Lucas (2006) explain that LGBT characters are typically represented as isolated and distant from other LGBT characters, yet Big Boo is the opposite. She is shown as having close friendships with other lesbian inmates. Big Boo mostly associates with other inmates who exhibit sexual behaviors that would indicate they are interested in women. In a number of episodes Big Boo can be seen sitting with Piper and Alex or spending time in the beauty salon with Sophia. In episode 11, “Tall Men With Feelings,” Big Boo can be seen hanging out with Piper and Alex at a memorial for Triscia, a fellow lesbian inmate that committed suicide.

Big Boo acts considerably more masculine than the other characters. Butch lesbians are often defined as lesbians who present gender in terms of masculine behavior such as clothing style, hair style, or mannerisms (Walker, Golub, Dimbi, & Parsons, 2012). Many of the lesbian characters portrayed on television series are feminine lesbians, and there are almost no characters on popular television who are butch lesbians with the exception of Big Boo (Urquhart, 2014). Having Big Boo portrayed as butch allows for representation of different groups of lesbians who are often invisible in popular television. Instances of Big Boo’s sexual behavior are limited within the course of the first season; however, she is not the only character that has a limited portrayal of her sexual orientation and behavior during season one.

Sophia Burset is the second character that has a limited portrayal of sexual orientation and behavior during season one of *Orange Is the New Black*. Similar to Big

Boo, Sophia is never shown directly engaging in sexual activities with other characters in the series. During my analysis I was not able to hypothesize Sophia's sexual orientation, but her sexual behavior indicates that she continues to have a relationship with a woman, her wife Crystal. During episode three, "Lesbian Request Denied," we learn that before her transition she was married to Crystal who stayed with her even after her transition and incarceration. Further, in episode nine, "Fucksgiving," Sophia meets with Crystal who tells her she has feelings for her pastor and would like Sophia's permission in case something happens between them. At first Sophia is resistant because she insists that she still loves Crystal, but a conversation with another inmate changes her mind and she reluctantly gives Crystal permission. All of these experiences caused considerable strain on their relationship.

In my analysis of these four characters during the first season of *Orange Is the New Black* sexuality is not represented equally. Of the four characters, only Piper and Daya are portrayed as expressing their sexuality. Those individuals whose presentation is masculine or who identify as a transwoman, Big Boo and Sophia, are never shown in sexual positions. While Sophia has her wife, she is never shown in affectionate positions other than holding hands, a hug, or a brief kiss. Piper and Daya on the other hand have a complicated and rich relationship throughout the series. Similarly, Big Boo has her ex "prison wife," but she too is never shown in sexual scenes with another women. The most sexually suggestive position Big Boo is placed in during the first season is provocative dancing with another inmate. Further, Big Boo lacks depth in her character due to the fact that at the end of the first season very little is stated about her in comparison with other characters. In portraying both Big Boo and Sophia as non-sexual, lesbian sexuality is

almost entirely represented through Piper and her relationship with Alex. It is notable that both of them are conventionally white, feminine, and attractive.

### **Intersectional Identities**

In this section I will examine the importance of intersecting identities for characters in *Orange Is the New Black*. I have chosen two examples from the series to help me illustrate this point. First, I have chosen the complex relationship between Piper and Mr. Healy. I will examine how aspects of Piper's identity privilege her interactions while some identities are more oppressive. Second, I will examine Sophia's running for representative of the black inmates. I will examine the intersections of her race and gender identity and the transphobia she has to deal with during her incarceration.

Piper's complex intersectional identity impacts the relationships she has with prison staff such as Mr. Healy. Healy is a white middle aged man who is a counselor at the prison and works with inmates. During the first season Piper's race and gender presentation give Healy the false assumption that Piper will have loyalty to him over fellow inmates (Charlton, 2013). This false assumption of loyalty gives Piper a lot of benefits, which do not go unnoticed by other inmates. When women of color inmates question the correctional staff, they earn time in solitary confinement. Piper, on the other hand, is repeatedly forgiven for problems that she creates for other prisoners and staff. When Piper directly question, even mocks, some correctional officers' orders, she receives little to no punishment.

Further, Healy even goes so far as to rig an election for representatives of the women's council for Piper. She is given a position of representation for the white inmates in the elections because Healy assumes that Piper will side with him and create fewer

problems in the long run. Class privilege can be described as advantages a person has due to their social class, some explains can be access to better paying jobs or education (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). Piper's college education is a signifier of her social class privilege, since most of the inmates have no college education. Piper's college education also impacts the relationship with Healy and helps in his decision to give her the representative spot on the council.

While many of Piper's identity categories give her privilege in her relationship with Healy her sexuality does not. During the course of the series we find out that Healy is homophobic towards the lesbian prisoners. Piper's sexuality causes the most tension between her and Healy. Healy even punishes Piper based on complains from another inmate, Pennsatucky. Pennsatucky is portrayed in the season as many different identities including being an ignorant hillbilly, Jesus freak, white trash, and meth head (Sered, 2014). White trash is a term used to describe the intersection of race and class, and describes a poor white person at the bottom of the white social hierarchy (Davies, 2010). When Pennsatucky brings her complaint to Healy about Piper dancing with another women she is abruptly thrown in solitary. Throughout the season this tension leads to a breakdown of the relationship between Piper and Healy. Thus Piper's identities privilege her in terms of race and class, but her sexuality leads to disadvantages such as the tension Piper has with Pennsatucky and Healy.

Unlike Piper, Sophia is a black transwomen inmate. In this section I will examine a scene depicting the intersection of race and gender identity and the impact they have for Sophia. Sophia attempts to run for representative of the black inmates during episode six, "WAC Pack." During the episode Sophia's campaign is impacted by her intersectional

identities. Due to her race Sophia can only run for representative within and against other black inmates. The election works by having representatives campaign within their racial group and be voted upon by inmates. Prison staff counts votes along racial lines as well, with inmates only being allowed to vote for representative candidates within their racial group.

Sophia's campaign for representative is also complicated by her gender identity. At first she runs on the platform of better healthcare for all inmates. Sophia selects this platform because she has been struggling with being denied hormones for much of the season, which has caused her problems and distress. While Sophia is giving a speech, Taystee calls Sophia's gender into question for being a "fake woman" with a "plastic pussy." Taystee is another black inmate in her twenties running for representative for the black inmates. The comments fit into the artificial stereotype that transwomen have typically been portrayed with in media (McKinnon, 2014). The comments also represent transphobia that Sophia has to endure from systems within the prison, like healthcare, and from other inmates. In this situation Sophia's race allows her to only have to run against other black inmates, but her gender identity disadvantages her due to transphobia she experiences from other inmates.

In conclusion, an intersectional analysis helps to identify the ways in which these four characters' multiple identities impact their experiences before and during incarceration in the series. While race is important for each of the characters, the ways in which it impacts their representation differs depending on other identity categories. Piper's race and social class allow her to represent a white savior, while Big Boo's race and sexual orientation allow her to occupy multiple subgroups of the main white racial

group at Litchfield. Sophia's gender identity and social class are represented as the reason she eventually became incarcerated; similarly Daya's social class plays a role in her incarceration as well. The way that sexuality is represented is mostly portrayed by only Daya and Piper, while Big Boo and Sophia are portrayed as non-sexual. While I often discuss the identities as separate categories they in fact overlap and occur simultaneously for these characters. These identities not only influence the ways in which the characters are portrayed during the series, but the ways that people view or identify with the characters.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the representation of race, gender, and sexuality in the first season of *Orange Is the New Black*. My analysis focused on these three identity categories and their intersection in four specific characters: Piper, Sophia, Big Boo, and Daya. The representation of women in *Orange Is the New Black* reflects the values and ideologies from the culture in which the television series was created. Race, gender, and sexuality are each represented within the series in different ways. While many minority women receive visibility in *Orange Is the New Black*, the representation is not always positive. In many ways the style in which women from minority groups are represented conforms to stereotypes that have mostly been used to oppress minority groups in television.

*Orange Is the New Black* does portray some women who have been almost invisible in television. It has a prominent transwomen character as well as a butch lesbian. Both of these types of women have often been invisible in other television series, including those specifically designed for LGBT audiences. The series also portrays a large cast of individuals with complex detailed histories. Women are not just single narratives but are built up of complex storylines representing each part of their identity.

Race in *Orange Is the New Black* is largely portrayed through a white lens. Whiteness becomes a privilege identity during the series because Piper, the main character, is white. The stories of women of color as well as other minority women are told through the voice of Piper Chapman. In having Piper bring issues forward minority women's voices are silenced, and their stories are validated or made visible only through the intervention of a white woman. Further, Piper is portrayed as greatly benefiting from



her white privilege in being able to go beyond the role of inmate in her relationship with prison staff such as Healy, her counselor. Having Piper come into prison and change or expose the problems that women of color or other marginalized women are experiencing during the series portrays Piper as a white savior (Hughey , 2014).

The portrayal of sexuality in the first season of *Orange Is the New Black* is a little more complicated. While Daya is represented as straight in her relationship with Bennet, a guard at the prison, the majority of the series focuses on the relationship between Piper and Alex. While Piper and Alex are not the only relationship portrayed in the series, the relationship between Sophia and Crystal is not able to be categorized. While Sophia is portrayed showing affection for Crystal the two are never shown in overt or suggested sexual behavior during the first season. Further, Crystal is portrayed as having interest in a man she met at church and asks Sophia permission to pursue him. Lastly, Big Boo acknowledges she is a lesbian, but never is portrayed in sexual acts with another women, at least not to the extent that Piper and Alex are shown.

Gender presentation in *Orange Is the New Black* season one is largely centered through a feminine presentation. Sophia, Piper, and Daya all have a feminine gender presentation, while Big Boo is portrayed with a more masculine presentation. Halberstram (1998) uses the term butch to describe lesbian women who have adopted a female masculinity. Further, characteristics such as toughness and physical strength aid in giving butch lesbians a more masculine expression (Halberstram, 1998). Big Boo embodies both of these characteristics during the first season; she is portrayed as tough and unforgiving to those who upset her.

In many ways the style that women from minority groups are represented conforms to stereotypes that have mostly been used to oppress minority groups in television. The prominent Latina woman in the series is portrayed as hypersexual (Bucio, 2014). During the first season she uses her sexuality to entice and attract correctional officers. Sophia is hyperfeminized during the series in a way that conforms to stereotypes about transwomen. Serano (2007) explains that representations of transwomen in the media are often related to makeup or fashion. Sophia spends most of her time in the prison salon where she works as a hairdresser, she is also portrayed during the series giving makeup and beauty tips to inmates. Piper's sexuality is largely representative of how bisexuals are often portrayed as confused with regards to their sexual orientation (Meyer, 2010). Big Boo and Sophia are largely represented as non-sexual, since they both are never shown in sexual positions during the first season. In portraying these women this way their characters are seen as outsiders and stripped of their sexual expression during the series.

Further, the television series downplays the seriousness of sexual assault and coercion that women experience while incarcerated. The story narrative with Daya and Bennett portrays their relationship as something they both had equal power in creating. *Orange Is the New Black* falls to fully examine the extreme power differences between them in their relationship. While in the show does portray their relationship as at least potentially problematic the story finds ways to keep their relationship a secret and thus under the eyes of other correctional staff. Even many of the inmates know about the relationship and that Daya is pregnant. The series also briefly highlights the sexual

danger that Sophia experiences from a correctional officer who proposition her for sex. The vast majority of sexual encounters are portrayed as consensual.

In addition, because *Orange Is the New Black* is a comedy series it often does not accurately portray the seriousness of a real incarceration. The series makes prison appear to be an experience where these women all get along with each other for the most part. While the show may not accurately portray the experiences of women in prison it does at least focus on women in prison and their experiences. Focus on the prison, both in research and television, has generally centered upon the male experience. Although, the series may be problematic since LGBT individuals have traditionally been portrayed as criminals or victims of crimes (Netzley. 2010).

While previous measures of television have focused on race and sexual orientation, these approaches are not able to examine the ways in which multiple identity categories impact representation. Clark (1969) proposed models to understand how a minority group attained representation in the media. Based on these stages I argue that the current television climate is somewhere in between the stages of ridicule and regulation, but it has not made significant enough strides to make it to respect. Berry (1980) examined minority representation of blacks on television. I argue that television today has not made it to the stabilization stage and remains in a combination of the stereotypic and new awareness stage. Even measures used by feminist scholars, such as the Bechdel test, do not examine intersectional identities. The Bechdel test examines the presence of women in film and television by asking if the material meets three criteria: there are more than two female characters that have names, the female characters talk to each other, and they talk to each other about something other than a man (Scheiner-Fisher

& Russell, 2012). A future model may wish to develop ways to measure intersectional identity categories. This would allow for a more complete understanding of how minority groups with multiple identities come to be represented.

Using these findings, future studies should continue to examine representations of gender, sexuality, and race in *Orange Is the New Black*. My findings are limited to the first season of the series, the second season has already been released and the third season is scheduled for June 2015. Future studies should examine how these complex identities change and interact with each other as the story progresses through the seasons. This will allow a more comprehensive analysis of the television series and representation that minority groups portrayed in the series receive.

In addition, research should explore other representations in the series. Focusing specifically on additional intersections in a character's identity and how those interactions impact the representation of the characters. In my analysis I briefly recognized the importance of social class in understanding the complex identities in the series. Future studies need to explore this identity category more in depth. Future analysis on representations also can address possible changes that characters have over the course of the series. Further, a future analysis of the series could include class, as well as intersections of mental illness.

In conclusion, it is important for future studies to continue to use an intersectional approach when examining the issues in *Orange Is the New Black*. An intersectional approach allows for multiple identities to be examined. Future studies need to examine the progression of characters across multiple seasons for a greater detailed examination of how different women are represented during the series. Media often reinforces the

dominate ideologies within society (Hesse-Biber, 2014). As feminist researchers we must challenge and expose these ideologies in order to understand how popular media perpetuates stereotypes.

## Appendix A

## Episodes Examined

- Kohan, J. (Writer), Friedman, L. (Writer) & Trim, M. (Director). (2013) I Wasn't Ready [Television series episode]. *Orange Is the New Black*. Los Gatos, CA: Netflix
- Kohan, J. (Writer), Ramirez, M. (Writer) & Briesewitz, U. (Director). (2013) Tit Punch [Television series episode]. *Orange Is the New Black*. Los Gatos, CA: Netflix
- Kohan, J. (Writer), Heder, S. (Writer) & Foster, J. (Director). (2013) Lesbian Request Denied [Television series episode]. *Orange Is the New Black*. Los Gatos, CA: Netflix
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