Incarcerated Women's Views on Orange Is the New Black

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Incarcerated Women’s Views on Orange Is the New Black

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April 4, 2017

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ABSTRACT:

The unprecedented rise in the United States incarceration rates since the 1980s only recently leveled off, yet continues to have tremendous impacts on women. Research on incarcerated women was extremely rare until the 1980s, but has grown since. The Netflix series Orange Is the New Black (OITNB) premiered in 2013, yielding an unprecedented, that is, the most public narrative of women “doing time,” in the case of OITNB in a federal prison. Although there have been a number of studies on OITNB using analysis of the series, to date no research has been conducted on incarcerated women’s views on Orange Is the New Black. This study aims to give voices to these women who are often rendered invisible and helps illustrate to the non-incarcerated members of society how accurately or inaccurately this show aligns with their lived experiences and perceptions of incarceration.
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CHAPTER I:  
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

Mass incarceration has been a growing and concerning U.S. phenomenon, with the steep rises in the rates over the last 30 years, until very recently (see, for example, Alexander, 2011; Belknap, 2015; Stevenson, 2014; Sharp, 2014; Sered and Hawk, 2014, Sentencing Project, 2015). When the general population thinks about mass incarceration, they often think of incarcerated men, given that men are the predominantly incarcerated gender, and incarcerated men are the primary focus of mass incarceration by the media and researchers (see Belknap, 2015:225). While the incarceration rates of both men and women have spiked over the past 30 years, women’s incarceration, in specific, increased by 14.1 times from 1960 to 2011 whereas men’s incarceration rate only increased 7.25 times within the same time frame (Belknap, 2015).

Despite the staggering increase in incarcerated women, they are still what some call, an ignored and invisible population (Belknap, 2015; Cecil, 2007; Owen, 1998; Talvi, 2007). Even when women are recognized or more visible, the stereotype of women and girl “criminals” is exacerbated by persistent and reinforced representations of scandalous “fallen women” who have transgressed with their designated roles (Talvi, 2007). Talvi (2007:5) argues that women offenders are invisible until they commit “scandalous crimes, usually involving the murder of their children or their spouses, or sexual acts with younger boys.” In
addition to this limitation in the portrayal of incarcerated women, numerous scholars also emphasize that women’s incarceration needs to be addressed through an intersectional lens of race, class, gender, and sexuality (as well as other lenses of oppression, such as disability, immigrant, and mental health status) (e.g., Belknap, 2015; Flores, 2016; Owen, 1998; Richie, 1996, Ross, 1998). Moreover, the realities of women’s imprisonment is far more complex and underreported than most realize (Talvi, 2007). This neglect of incarcerated women and their actual experiences results in the non-incarcerated society’s tendency to essentialize and stereotype them based on little to no information, and most troubling, by misinformation.

The Netflix series Orange Is the New Black (OITNB) is based off of a memoir of the same title by Piper Kerman (2010), about her experiences during her time at a federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut. After graduating from Smith College and in her early twenties, Kerman began dating an older woman who was in the drug trafficking business. Kerman became briefly involved in drug trafficking, through this girlfriend, and ten years later, while involved with a man and leading a law-abiding life, Kerman was indicted for drug trafficking and money laundering.

The Netflix series OITNB premiered in 2013 with great viewership and has remained popular over the ensuing years (see Artt and Schwan, 2016; Belcher, 2016; DeCarvalho and Cox, 2016; Enck and Morrissey, 2015; Fernández-Morales and Menéndez-Menéndez, 2016; Fryett, 2016; Hammond, 2016; Kim, 2016; Schwan, 2016; Silverman and Ryalls, 2016; Sullivan Barak, 2016; Terry, 2016; Young, 2016). OITNB is currently in its fourth season and is one of the few television shows (or films) that is about women's incarceration and how they “do their time” (Kohan,
In my thesis, I seek to resolve the ways incarcerated women are represented in the media and the ways in which these media representations potentially inform or misinform the non-incarcerated society by asking currently or formerly incarcerated women their views of *OITNB*.

**CURRENT STUDY GOAL**

Racial disparities (e.g., Belknap, 2015; Flores, 2016; Richie, 1998; Ross, 1998), mental illness (e.g., Lynch et al., 2014), prison/jail conditions (e.g., Belknap, 2015; Díaz-Cotto, 1996; Owen, 1998; Rafter, 1989; Ross, 1998), relationships with and concerns about their children (e.g., Belknap, 2015; Kubiak et al., 2012; Owen, 1998; Siegel, 2011), and the war on drugs (e.g., Chesney-Lind, 2003; Sharp, 2014) have had significantly powerful impacts on incarcerated women. Research focusing on incarcerated women was quite scant until the 1980s, and even still, there is far more research on incarcerated men (see Alexander, 2011; Belknap, 2015; Pager, 2007; Urbina, 2008).

Limited research has been published that is specifically on *OITNB*, which is not surprising given that this series only premiered recently in 2013. The few articles published on *OITNB*, while consistently using a feminist perspective, focus on analyzing the series from of a communication/media analysis disciplinary lens (i.e., Artt and Schwan, 2016; Belcher, 2016; DeCarvalho and Cox, 2016; Enck and Morrissey, 2015; Fernández-Morales and Menéndez-Menéndez, 2016; Fryett, 2016; Hammond, 2016; Kim, 2016; Pramaggiore, 2016; Schwan, 2016; Silverman and Ryalls, 2016; Sullivan Barak, 2016; Terry, 2016; Young, 2016). Although these studies are useful in their analyses and findings on *OITNB*, to date, no scholars have
conducted research on what currently or formerly incarcerated women think about the *OITNB* representation of incarcerated women in this incredibly popular television series.

Through interviewing incarcerated women about *their* views on this Netflix series, my findings provide what “real” currently and formerly incarcerated women believe about the representation of offending women and how these women do their time. More specifically, using focus groups and one-on-one interviews with 29 currently or formerly incarcerated women, my thesis research asked these women *their* perceptions on the accuracy of this show in its portrayal of incarcerated women and incarceration on a larger scale.

**THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: CRITICAL RACE FEMINIST THEORY**

Emerging in the 1980’s, critical race theorists asserted that both procedures and essence in U.S. law are structured to maintain white privilege (e.g., Berry, 2010; Few-Demo, 2014; Valdes, 2002). These theorists set out to expose and dismantle this structure from a “race-conscious” and “critical outsider” perspective (Valdes, 2002). There are three dominant beliefs that critical race theorists continue to reject. First, is the idea that “blindness” will erase racism. Next, it challenges the accusation that racism is matter of individuals, and not systems. Lastly, is the idea that one can fight racism without paying attention to other oppressions such as sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation, transphobia, etc. (Valdes, 2002).

Critical Race Feminist Theory (CRFT) is a combination of both Critical Race Theory and Feminist Theory that aims to specifically address issues of power, oppression, and conflict for not just white women, but also Women of Color. It
examines how society organizes itself among intersections of race, class, gender, and other forms of social hierarchies and places Women of Color at the forefront through story telling and counter-storytelling (Berry, 2010). This notion of storytelling allows theorists to learn from past experiences of Women of Color and inform the ways in which social, historical, cultural, and political identities affect these women.

Focusing on these intersectional identities and the multiple ways oppression can manifest, it is crucial to understand the ways in which these different identities contribute to the treatment and outcome within the CLS. Hillary Potter (2015:40) notes that to be unaware of, ignore, or not acknowledge the basis in which intersectionality was founded on Women of Color’s feminist theorizing is to risk misunderstanding intersectionality. Intersectionality as both a term and a theory is an extension of and a product of racial/ethnic feminisms and critical race feminist theories (Few-Demo, 2014). However, it is important to note that often when we think of feminism and feminists, we are thinking of white feminists and feminisms. By deconstructing this idea of white superiority and examining feminisms of Women of Color as well, we can better understand the ways in which our intersections affect our experiences. There is often times a “white washing” of the term intersectionality, but we must not forget that the intent was to analyze the experiences of Women of Color and the marginalization that they face.

Within my thesis study, CRFT can be placed at the center of analysis in understanding the ways in which legal systems reinforce white privilege and provide an analysis of power within institutions. In addition, the primary character
of *OITNB*, a white woman of upper class, perpetuates this idea of white privilege and continues to be instilled in the shows plot that attempts to recreates the conditions within the CLS.

**CONCLUSION**

In attempt to examine critical race feminist theory and the ways it connects with *OITNB*, we can begin to see the ways in which power and privilege play out in not only the criminal legal system, but in the television series *OITNB*, as well. We begin to see the gendered elements that are in place in institutions and how the media reinforces these gendered portrayals. Piper Kerman’s intersectionality and especially her whiteness can be seen as a leverage point in which her time is most likely done differently than Women of Color because of the idea of reinforcing white privilege in institutions in particular. CRFT challenges the assumptions that white women’s experiences are representative of all women’s experiences, which is the theory and approach guiding my thesis.

The next chapter provides a fairly comprehensive review of the literature in regards to women’s incarceration. This includes the war on drugs, women’s unique conditions and experiences while incarcerated, race and ethnicity in the CLS, and incarceration and motherhood.
CHAPTER II:
LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The United States has the highest documented incarceration rate in the world and there has been exponential prison growth during the last 2 decades increasing fivefold (Irwin, 2005; Kruttschnitt et al., 2013; Stevenson, 2015). With over 2.2 million people currently incarcerated and roughly 6,899,000 people under adult correctional supervision, these numbers continue to grow (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; Sentencing Project, 2015; Stevenson, 2015). Today, the number of girls and women doing time has increased about 7.1 percent annually compared to 4.9 percent for men. The United States incarceraes about 716 people per 100,000 people, which is higher than any other country (Prison Policy Initiative, 2016). Men are the majority of the prison population, while women constitute approximately 7 percent (6.7%) (Bureau of Prisons, 2017). Although women constitute only 7 percent of the prison population, what is of concern is the growing rates in which these women are being imprisoned, and the gendered pathways and institutionalization of women in the U.S.

In particular, Women of Color are disproportionately affected and are incarcerated at higher rates. African American women are two to three times as likely to be incarcerated than white women, and Latina women were incarcerated at a rate 1.2 times the rate of white women (Newman, 2016; Sentencing Project, 2015). The increase in both those who are incarcerated, and the length of time they must serve has a disproportionate effect on women, and especially women who used
There is an increasing reliance on correctional facilities to deal with women’s involvement in crime (Sentencing Project, 2015). The literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the unique conditions in which women in the Criminal Legal System (CLS) face. To understand the unique conditions of women, we must also understand the ways in which their gender affects not only their conditions within this system, but also their pathways to offending.

**THE WAR ON DRUGS**

Beginning in the early 1980’s, the “War on Drugs” has arguably been to blame for the staggering increase of incarceration of those convicted of drug crimes. Currently 1 in 5 people in prisons/jails are locked up for nonviolent drug offenses and nearly half a million people are in state or federal prison for drug offenses today compared to 41,000 in 1980 (Prison Policy Initiative, 2016; Stevenson, 2015). 1 in 5 women in state prisons also report a history of substance abuse and 1 in 8 women in federal prisons receives treatment for substance abuse (Sentencing Project, 2015). However, incarcerated women were more likely than men to have been convicted of a property or drug crime (59% vs. 40%) whereas 55 percent of convicted men were imprisoned for violent offenses compared to 37 percent of women (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; Mauer and Chesney-Lind, 2002).

The focus of declaring the War on Drugs was initially to target drug kingpins, but shortly after shifted its focus on arresting and prosecuting low-level drug offenders and targeting over-policed communities which had a disproportionate effect on People of Color, especially Women of Color (Bush-Baskette, 1998; Alexander, 2011;
Sentencing Project, 2015). This “War on Drugs” has been the most influential in the nationwide expansion of the prison population, notably for women (e.g., Alexander, 2011; Bush-Baskette, 1998; Guerino et al., 2011; Sharp, 2014).

The United States has declared a costly “war” on people with substance abuse problems (Stevenson, 2015). Notably, this “war” has had a disproportionate cost on women. In 1971, when the War on Drugs was implemented by President Nixon, there were 6,329 women incarcerated in State or Federal prison, which rose to 112,797 women by 2010 (Guerino et al., 2011). The U.S. drug policies and laws put into place during the 1980’s and 1990’s, then, continued to disproportionately impact women (Chesney-Lind and Pollock Byrne, 1995; Chesney-Lind, 2003). In 1986, 12 percent of women in state prisons were incarcerated for a drug offense and by 2014, nearly 24 percent were incarcerated for a drug offense (Sentencing Project, 2015). The gendered war on drugs has also been dangerously influenced by mandatory minimum sentencing laws which dramatically increased drug-related convictions. When this policy was enacted in 1951, (although it has been altered throughout the years), it began to limit judicial discretion for certain offenses relating to the War on Drugs including mitigating factors (USSC, 2011).

Recent research reports that drug crimes account for at least half of the new receptions into the Department of Corrections each year, and women in state prisons were more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug offense (29% vs. 19%) or property offense (30% vs. 20%) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; Sentencing Project, 2015; Sharp, 2014). Moreover, drug and property offenses are related; many of those who have committed property offenses have committed
them as a means of being able to obtain drugs (Sentencing Project, 2015). Women in state prisons in 1998 were more likely to report using drugs at the time of their offense than men (40% vs. 32%), and nearly one-third of these women reported that they committed their offense to obtain money for the purchase of drugs (Sentencing Project, 2015). Nearly 60 percent of women in state prison have a history of drug dependence, which arguably can be a result of their pathways/life course into further offending (Sentencing Project, 2015).

Mauer and Chesney-Lind (2002) rightly argue that the “War on Drugs” can be more accurately viewed as a “War on Women,” due to the additional consequences this war has had on women in comparison to men. These additional consequences can have far-reaching effects in addition to the confinement of incarceration, such as the gendered punishment of not being able to see and raise the children they have had primary or sole parenting duties prior to incarceration. The gendered adverse life events they faced prior to getting involved with drugs (e.g., DeHart et al., 2014), exemplifies the ways in which the CLS exploits women and girls of color who are wrongly labeled as offenders, who have committed a crime, or who are experiencing multiple oppressions of racism, classism, sexism, and often heterosexism, as so poignantly seen in Beth E. Richie’s work (1996, 2012). Ironically, while the number of women incarcerated has increased, drug rehabilitation programs in women’s facilities have simultaneously decreased (Pollock, 2002).

**RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM (CLS)**

In viewing the statistics of those who are incarcerated compared to the general population representation, there are many discrepancies and nuances when
examining a range of offenses. More specifically, when examining the intersections of race and gender by offense type, important patterns emerge.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Census (2015), Whites consist of approximately 62 percent of the U.S. population, Blacks 13 percent, Latinx 17 percent, Asian Americans 5 percent, and American Indian and Alaska Native 1 percent. Translating this into the United States prison population, Whites are often underrepresented in jails/prisons (39% vs. 62%) while Blacks are often overrepresented (40% vs 13%) (Gabbidon and Greene, 2009; Prison Policy Initiative, 2016). Native American’s are grossly overrepresented in prisons/jails compared to the percentage of the population that they make up (3.2% vs. 1%) (USSC, 2013).

Black Feminist Legal Scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term “intersectionality” to illustrate the ways in which individuals’ different identities differentially impact our lived experiences, and that we cannot separate these experiences. Understanding intersectionality in the context of the CLS is imperative to recognizing the ways in which the systems work for and against certain groups with certain identities, particularly intersecting oppression identities. That being said, identifying how both white women and Women of Color are treated in the CLS is crucial in understanding the different ways in which we punish Women of Color. These identities include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, socio-economic status, religion, nationality, and ability.

We cannot begin to talk about race in the CLS without mentioning racism, racial bias and racial profiling. Racism is defined as any attitude, action, institutional
structure, or social policy that subordinates persons or groups because of their color (Jones, 1997; Ponterotto, Utsey, and Pederson, 2006; Wing, 2010). There are different types of racism such as institutional and cultural, which targets People of Color in institutions and our culture as a whole.

**CONDITIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN'S INCARCERATION**

Incarcerated women are placed at a unique intersection of identities that include but are not limited to race, gender, class, and sexuality. This uniqueness provides women with unusual experiences that often positions them at a disadvantage because of their identities. Women offenders are often held personally responsible for their actions in the CLS. Schur (1984) identifies them as "double-deviants" since they have not only violated criminal laws, but also violated the norms of "ideal womanhood." With about 215,332 women currently in jail/prison and 966,029 women on probation, the rise of women's incarceration over the last few years has been researched in hopes of finding a trend as to why these women are being targeted (Sentencing Project, 2015). The slight increase in research on women's incarceration has allowed for examination of the unique conditions that women have to face that cannot be understood through the generalized conditions of prisons and jails.

There are a multitude of gendered conditions that arise while women do time. These include, but are not limited to health care availability, early release, access to resources, disproportionate sentencing (comparing to their male counterparts), sexual harassment/abuse in facilities, work release, employment, as well access to other programs (Davis, 2003; Ross, 1998). Many current criminal
justice policies are ill equipped to handle the conditions of incarcerated women as well as the spaces that they occupy (Chesney-Lind, 2003).

While there is a belief that there has been a shift in women’s criminality over the last few decades, some reports show that this may be a result of the change in the CLS that is becoming more punitive, especially towards women and particularly for nonviolent crimes (see War on Drugs sub-heading) (Bloom, Chesney-Lind and Owen, 1994). This “shift in criminality” can be attributed to other factors as well, including the pushout of women/girls in schools (especially Women of Color) (e.g., Morris, 2016), lack of mental health care (e.g., Belknap, Lynch, and DeHart, 2016), and lack of access to other resources which are often deemed essential (for a recent review of these, see Belknap et al., 2016).

Nearly three-quarters (73.1%) of women in state prison in 2005 were said to have a mental health problem compared to 55 percent of men in prison (Sentencing Project, 2015). Approximately 12 percent of women in jails have a severe psychiatric disorder and fewer than 25 percent of them receive mental health services at all (Sentencing Project, 2015). Women have a higher rate of HIV infection as well as mental illness, but not satisfactory healthcare. DeHart, Lynch and Belknap et al. found “there is a need for gender-responsive and trauma-informed practices to address both mental disorders and victimizations among women offenders” (2014: 138).

Educational disparities among incarcerated women are also to known to be problematic. Nearly half (44%) of incarcerated women had not completed high school prior to incarceration. The school-to prison pipeline is a disturbing national
trend that can be seen to affect the likelihood of women to be incarcerated. Many of these women who are “pushed out” of public schools are generally funneled into juvenile detention centers and Criminal Legal Systems (ACLU, 2016; Morris, 2016). Many of these children have histories of abuse, poverty, or neglect and would have benefitted from additional education programs that catered to their unique circumstances. But instead, they are punished and pushed out.

This population has gender-specific needs that differ from men in prison that are primarily due to the fact that women are far more likely to be the primary caregivers of their children both before and after incarceration (Newman, 2016; Pollock, 2002). These gendered conditions not only occur during incarceration, but often in trial and well after. As previously mentioned, after being released from prison, many women face additional barriers when re-entering society but especially when they have children. Many of these women find themselves being the primary care provider of their children, and trying to support themselves as well as their children without recidivating.

Women of Color, who are disproportionately poor (relative to white women), also find themselves restricted from governmental assistance programs such as housing, employment, education, and other benefits (Newman, 2016). Promoting such excessively punitive responses to crime limits women’s ability to successfully reintegrate into society (Sentencing Project, 2015). Many states impose bans on people with certain convictions from working in certain industries such as nursing, childcare, and health care which are fields in which many poor women and Women of Color happen to be disproportionately concentrated (Newman, 2016). These bans
greatly restrict women’s social mobility and increase the risk of poverty for Women of Color and their families.

A multitude of studies have found that one of the most prominent gendered differences among incarcerated women and men is that women more often face some type of abuse (DeHart, Lynch, and Belknap et al. 2014; Mauer and Chesney-Lind, 2002). Women are disproportionately victimized by emotional, physical, and sexual abuse prior to incarceration (Newman, 2016).

**INCARCERATED WOMEN AND MOTHERHOOD**

Parenting is a gendered phenomenon outside of prisons, so as expected, it is also gendered among the incarcerated and their children. There is an array of social expectations of what a “good mother” looks like and the gendered expectations of motherhood are often challenged when the mother is incarcerated. Notably, the sanctioning of incarcerated women as mothers is a particular intersection for analysis.

With the growing research of incarcerated women, some have examined the impacts of motherhood and incarceration on both the children and the mothers. With 75 percent of women in prisons being mothers, this is a special condition in which they face. Two-thirds of these women have children under the age of 18, and 72 percent of those women with children under the age of 18 lived with them before entering prison (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; Newman, 2016). Although this connection between the impacts of incarceration and families is not widely recognized, many who have been incarcerated know how prevalent this is in women doing time. For many women, being incarcerated means being separated from their
children, which are often the most important relationships in their lives.

This separation extends beyond the walls of the prison. There are not as many women’s facilities, therefore making it more likely that these women will be housed further from their kids. This increased distance from their children can make it hard for their children to visit them, and can impact the relationship between child and mother (Belknap, 2015; Ross, 1998; Sentencing Project, 2009). A majority of parents in state or federal prisons are held over 100 miles from their prior residence, and in federal prisons 43 percent of parents are held over 500 miles from their last home (Sentencing Project, 2015). This distance can often cause fallouts of communication and can make it difficult to maintain relationships during incarceration. Over half of women prisoners have never had a visit from their children and one in three mothers have never spoken with their children by phone while incarcerated (Sentencing Project, 2015).

The impact of having an incarcerated mother has on children has maintained a constant subject of examination (Brown and Bloom, 2009). In addition to these women being separated from their children, their incarceration is shown to have an effect on their children. Over 1.5 million children have a parent in prison, and more than 8.3 children have a parent under correctional supervision (Sentencing Project, 2015). For many women, incarceration may last for a significant part of their child’s formative years and can lead to a loss of parental rights. A study conducted by Siegel (2011) found that a number of young children with incarcerated mothers had significant emotional and psychological issues. The study of paternal incarceration reveals that fathers do not have the same role with their children as incarcerated
women do.

The likelihood that children will have parents who are incarcerated is disproportionately linked to race. Roughly one in every 14 Black children had a parent in prison compared to one in 125 white children. Black children are almost 9 times likely than white children to have a parent in prison and Latinx children are three times as likely (Sentencing Project, 2015).

**REVIEW OF CURRENT STUDIES ON ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK (OITNB)**

With their increasing detention rates, incarcerated women are slowly acquiring some visibility in popular culture and the media. However, this attention does not always shed light on the actual experiences that these women face. When Piper Kerman handed over her 2010 memoir, *Orange Is the New Black*, to the television producing company Netflix, many did not expect for this series to take off as successfully as it did. With its rise in popularity, despite its relative newness, many scholars have examined the *OITNB* series with an array of different lenses. It has sparked considerable debate in academic communities surrounding its depictions of social class, race, gender, sexual orientation, privilege, power, and motherhood (Kalogeropoulos Householder and Trier-Bieniek, 2016). However, none of these are through incarcerated women's lenses. To date, there are no studies on what actual incarcerated women think of the highly popular series *OITNB*.

Scholars’ findings on *OITNB*, consistently investigate this film from race, class, gender, and sexuality perspectives (Artt and Schwan, 2016; Belcher, 2016; DeCarvalho and Cox, 2016; Enck and Morrissey, 2015; Fernández-Morales and
Many of these scholarly articles and chapters in edited books focus on content analysis and look more into the characters and their positionality rather than actual incarcerated women (Artt and Schwan, 2016; Belcher, 2016; DeCarvalho and Cox, 2016; Enck and Morrissey, 2015; Fernández-Morales and Menéndez-Menéndez, 2016; Fryett, 2016; Hammond, 2016; Kim, 2016; Schwan, 2016; Silverman and Ryalls, 2016; Sullivan Barak, 2016; Terry, 2016; Young, 2016). These conversations include female agency, aging in prison, post-racism in the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC), privilege, color-blindness, worn stereotypes, and more. However, these articles fail to acknowledge the women that this show is based on, and the narrative of their experiences. While the critique and the support of this show can bring women’s incarceration into conversations, they do not specifically address these issues that are occurring in actual women’s lives.

The content analysis of this series does, however, expose the media industry and the ways in which the media works to appeal to their target audience. *OITNB* uses what Teju Cole names the “White Savior Industrial Complex.” This is the idea in which white people’s voices validate those experiences of People of Color or those “less fortunate” (Cole, 2012). Whether intentional or not, this series is a prime example of using Piper Chapman as the “Trojan horse” of this series (Caputi, 2016; NPR, 2013). In this particular series, Piper is used as a means of getting the target audience hooked on this show through her privilege and the ways in which the audience can relate to her. Using a white, upper class, and heterosexual woman as
the main character in this series supposedly gives more room to address the issues
with women’s incarceration. However, as previously noted, there are more Women
of Color incarcerated than white women, therefore making this idea of being
“relatable” not completely accurate.

This use of a “white savior” is particularly problematic in that it diminishes
People of Color’s voices and exemplifies the way in which white privilege is favored
in systems and even within mainstream media. In an interview with the producer of
the show, Jenji Kohan, she lays out her intentions for using a white upper class
woman as the lens in which we view these women:

"In a lot of ways Piper was my Trojan Horse. You're not going to go into a
network and sell a show on really fascinating tales of black women, and
Latina women, and old women and criminals. But if you take this white girl,
this sort of fish out of water, and you follow her in, you can then expand your
world and tell all of those other stories” (NPR, 2013).

In the early parts of the series, we hear about Piper’s “one time” crime and
how she did it for the thrill when she was younger. As the series progresses, the
audience is then introduced to the other characters and learn their backstory. Many
of these characters are in prison for nonviolent drug crimes, and many of them
Women of Color, but there is often no conversation as to why this is. The lack of
conversation within this show regarding the disproportionate rates of Women of
Color’s incarceration incites concern for the dependence on worn racial and class
stereotypes and the reliance of the upper class white protagonist to bring stories
and concerns of Women of Color into the conversation (Caputi, 2015; Enck and
Morrissey, 2015). Ignoring the ways in which lack of opportunity and power shape
women's crime has impacted the ways in which incarcerated women are treated (or
lack thereof) (Sharp, 2014).

This idea of the “White Savior Industrial Complex” reiterates the idea that white people must validate the experiences of People of Color. Belcher (2016) states that *OITNB* portrays that all inmates deserve to be inmates, and that white women are best positioned to help other inmates (specifically Women of Color), especially because they cannot help themselves. This idea reinforces the idea of the White Savior Industrial Complex and is destructive to communities of color, who are seen as defenseless. Crenshaw advocates that intersectionality must be accounted for on the big screen, as some women onscreen are afforded more privilege over others, which occurs in *OITNB* (Crenshaw, 1989).

There is also a sense of colorblindness\(^1\) in this series, which in turn is problematic in not giving these Women of Color voices and erasing their experiences (Enck and Morrissey, 2015). Colorblindness is destructive and tends to delegitimize the experiences of People of Color. Indeed, many of the scholarly articles on *OITNB* attempt to challenge the representation of these women in terms of race, but hardly do so according to their own experiences (Belcher, 2016; Enck and Morrissey, 2015; Terry, 2016). Others seem to encourage the notion of more Women of Color being on the big screen, but consequently they are represented in a problematic way such as reinforcing historically worn stereotypes (Belcher, 2016; Schwan, 2016). The different analyses suggest that *OITNB* allows the audiences to “see racial injustices,” yet it plays into the historical stereotypes of Women of Color.

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\(^1\) As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) theorizes, color blindness is not actually an inability to see or acknowledge race, but rather a claim that race does not influence matters of civil life, such as hiring and incarceration.
Belcher (2016) examines the ways in which the show communicates ideas of racism and lacks challenging these subtle notions of structural racism. Belcher notes that the show conveys ideas of the redemptive power of whiteness and privilege (Belcher, 2016). While presenting a diversity of bodies and cultures on this show, many have challenged that this idea can be destructive because the only versions of People of Color that people can relate to on the show are perpetuated by worn stereotypes. This show espouses a commitment to diversity in representations, but fails to do so because of the stereotypes carried out on screen.

While this series can appear progressive in terms of starting the conversation about women’s incarceration, it lacks agency in granting incarcerated women justice in their lived experiences. It also does not explicitly note the importance of power in these spaces (Fernández-Morales and Menéndez-Menéndez, 2016). These articles are important in understanding the ways in which the show is perceived. Some view this show as progressive in regards to racial justice (Enck and Morrissey, 2015), but others counter this argument by noting that it is destructive and consequently regressive in terms of racial justice (Belcher, 2016, Schwan, 2016).
CONCLUSION

In my attempts to place the lived experiences of incarcerated women at the center of my study, this review of the situational circumstances of incarcerated women doing time is central to the ways that they are viewed in the Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black*. Given that these factors are at the forefront in identifying women’s incarceration, the conditions and experiences that they endure are their stories to tell. I aim to unpack the ways in which the booming incarceration rates of women have led to more visibility of these women in the light of the media and the impacts this has on the women who are being portrayed---actual women who are incarcerated. The next chapter presents the methods in which the study was conducted and the limitations that came along with doing qualitative data.
CHAPTER III: METHODS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves to illustrate the methods used in designing this study and gathering and analyzing the data, as well as discussing my own position within this research. My analytical strategy included a qualitative design to conduct both focus groups and an interview on incarcerated women’s views on OITNB. Since there are no known studies on what incarcerated women think of OITNB, qualitative research was identified as the most appropriate in giving women a voice and allowing for more in-depth responses. This was accompanied by a short survey to gather basic demographics of each of the women (see, Appendix B).

While completing the study design for this research, the CU Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval had to be in place before collecting any data. After I obtained this approval for the recruitment materials, study design, focus group/interview questions, data-storage protocol, and additional review (because the participants are considered a vulnerable population due to being prisoners), I was able to begin the recruiting and data collection stage. To support my research and provide these women with compensation in the form of a gift card as well as provide them with refreshments during the focus groups, I applied for and was fortunately awarded by the CU Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) with the funding for this study.
SETTING

The data for this study were collected through one one-on-one interview at a public library in Boulder, one focus group at Sister Carmen Community Center with previously incarcerated women, and two focus groups of currently incarcerated women at the Boulder County Jail (BCJ). The criteria for being in this study included being a woman at least 18 years old who was currently and/or had formerly been incarcerated. These sites were chosen because of both the access and the privacy that the space allowed. More specifically, my thesis advisor, Dr. Joanne Belknap, has volunteered with the BCJ and was able to work with the administration and staff to allow us access for focus groups, under their conditions. One of these conditions was that Belknap be involved in the focus groups in the BCJ.

Each focus group was conducted including viewing one or two episodes (see sub-heading “Limitations”) of *OITNB* chosen by the researcher, lunch/refreshments, and a discussion containing 14 questions (see, Appendix C) conducted by the researcher team (Leigh and Belknap). Prior to each focus group and interview, the participants were asked if they could be audio-recorded (also stated in the consent form), and all participants agreed (See Appendices D & E). The episodes that I carefully selected to view with the women in the focus groups constituted of themes of race, gender, sexuality, class, and motherhood (S1: E6 “WAC Pack” and S3: E1 “Mother’s Day”). I chose these episodes believing that they most accurately reflect the series. One of the advantages of conducting the study this way included being able to take field notes of the reactions during the viewing, where they laughed,
smiled, cringed, and groaned. As expected, nearly everything that they had reacted
to in these manners came up during the focus groups.

After the first focus group, the focus group on previously incarcerated
women, it was suggested to us that we ask a question about motherhood which was
not previously something we were planning on asking. Focusing in on the
prominence of motherhood and incarceration was exemplified throughout this
study. When I decided that this would be a good question to ask, I made an
amendment to my IRB that included these changes, and this was approved.

THE OITNB EPISODES SELECTED FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS

S1: E6 “WAC Pack”

In this episode, the women in the prison campaign for a prisoners’ rights
council, which is termed the “Women’s Advisory Council,” by the women in this
episode. There are different groups within the prison who are self-segregated by
“whites, blacks, Hispanics, golden girls, and others.” Based mostly on race, these
divisive groups select a representative that advocates on their behalf. Piper notes
that “not every Hispanic person wants the same thing” and challenges the habits of
racial segregation. This episode was chosen because of the prominent themes of
race, and the assumption of that every group wants the same rights.

S3: E1 “Mother’s Day”

In this episode, a Mother’s Day celebration takes place in the prison, where
the children are able to visit their mothers and engage in a carnival-like festival,
solely devoted to fostering mother and child relationships through these activities.
Many of the partners of these women bring the children in and pick them up at the
end of the day. The importance of this episode is the idea that *OITNB* rarely touches on the amount of women behind bars who have children. Knowing this information prior to the focus groups, this episode was chosen to address this concern.

**LIMITATIONS**

Doing research with currently and formerly incarcerated women understandably resulted in limitations of this study. One of the biggest limitations of this study was that it was conducted with women who were primarily incarcerated in jails, not a prison, which is the setting of *OITNB*. This is not to say that some of the women in my study were not incarcerated in prison prior to this, but it is a serious limitation because prison and jails are often run differently and have inherently different structures and implications. For example, jails are operated by sheriffs and locally operated and housed, whereas prisons are operated by state and federal governmental entities, and “private prisons,” in theory, are overseen by the state or federal government. Jails also involve shorter sentences (typically under two years and can be a matter of a day or less), with less access to numerous resources, including education and programming (Belknap, 2015).

Another limitation of the current study is that BCJ, the primary research site, is in a county that is primarily white (78%), with approximately 300,000 people in Boulder County, 78 percent are white, 1.2 percent are black, 4 percent Asian, 0.9 percent American Indian, 13.9 percent Latinx, and 2 percent are more than two races (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2015). The racial demographics of those in my study do not line up with the racial disparities that are often cited regarding People of Color being incarcerated at a higher rate (see “Chapter IV: Findings”). A third
limitation of this study was that many of these women were chosen to be in the study (of course, with consent), by the staff at the jail. The women who were currently incarcerated were given a consent form to examine prior to the focus groups so they could decide whether to participate. The women who were invited to participate in the study on previously incarcerated women was also through a contact at BCJ, Ms. Ginny Holien. She personally selected the women, so we were unsure who they would be and how many were going to show up for each focus group.

The first focus group, the only one with previously incarcerated women, did not yield as many participants as expected. Understandably, still being under the control of the law did not provide them with a lot of leeway with attending our study, not to mention the class barriers that made it difficult for them to get to the focus group despite making it near a bus stop. Over three-fourths of these women had children in which they had to find childcare for before attending our study, and half of them were in halfway houses at the time and had to leave and return at a certain time, and call into their parole officers from the focus group site, Sister Carmen. Therefore, some women were quite late and time only permitted for one episode to be viewed (S1: E6 “WAC Pack”) in order to have time to answer the focus group questions. Another reason for the limited numbers of women who attended this focus group was because it was hosted on a Saturday therefore making it hard for the women to attend because the bus does not run as frequently on the weekends.

Just as there are benefits to using a certain method, there are also limitations
and challenges. Throughout the focus groups, many of the women went off on tangents illustrating their personal truths and stories and diverging from the question presented. A challenge with focus groups of 11 to 14 participants is that it can be hard to maintain on topic, especially when all of these women live/are confined together. The focus group that only had four women (the first one, with previously incarcerated women), yielded a much more “on topic” discussion because with fewer women and women who did not live together, it was far easier to stay on topic. The findings were still useful, and provided a multitude of insights on their views, but the findings may have been different had we stayed on topic more.

Finally, it is important to report on my own positionality, as a limitation of this study. There is a limitation on myself as a researcher, one who has neither had previous involvement with the law, nor been incarcerated. My identity as a white cisgender\(^2\) woman who has never been incarcerated could have influenced how comfortable the participants felt with me and affected their responses. There is importance in being reflexive when conducting research, and understanding the ways in which power operates in both institutional settings, but as well in research. Reflexivity is the process that is employed for critical researchers to identify and analyze the systems of power and their personal identities and histories on research-participant relationship as well as the construction of knowledge (Alkon, 2011). A reflexive analysis can remind the reader of the issues of power and privilege including race, class, gender, and institutional location are always present,

\(^2\) Cisgender is a term to denote a person whose identity and gender correspond with the sex they were assigned with at birth
and always matter even among allies (Alkon, 2011). In consideration of this, being self-reflexive is crucial to understanding the ways in which power and privilege work in research.

Allen (2000) identifies the value of self-knowledge and self-reflexivity as not something simply for moral self-improvement or to increase trustworthiness in our research, but rather enables us to undertake the hard work of understanding and deconstructing the implications of Eurocentrism within research. Using this to understand the research-participant relationship, especially regarding those who are incarcerated as well as my positionality, has allowed me acknowledge how power and privilege plays out in research.

Overall, the limitations of this research demonstrate the complexities of conducting research on such a vulnerable and often exploited population. Although there are limitations to this research, opening up a dialogue to discuss these topics with women who have personally lived incarceration, in turn, provided them a space to illustrate their own experiences compared to what is portrayed in OITNB.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The one-on-one interview and three focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed. I carefully and repeatedly combed through these transcripts to identify major themes. In addition, I conducted quantitative data analysis on the small survey given to all of the participants before starting the focus group (or interview) to be able to describe some of their demographic characteristics and their experiences with viewing OITNB prior to the study. The next chapter reports these findings, which unlike the existent research on OITNB, is from the lens of currently
or formerly incarcerated women.

CONCLUSION

This chapter described the methods used for the current study, and the limitations that came along with the current research. While the limitations impacted the study, this research lays the platform for research conducted on incarcerated women's views on *OITNB*. The next chapter will focus on the findings from interviews and focus groups and identify different themes that arose when analyzing the data.
CHAPTER IV: THE FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from both the interviews and the focus groups. The transcription of the recorded data provides a means of analysis and categorization into themes. The demographic sample will be introduced as well. In keeping with my attempt to represent these women accurately, their self-reported identities are used to represent them as they wish. Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants. The data were collected in late summer of 2016 over a period of one month.

As stated in the last chapter, qualitative analysis of the transcribed focus groups and interview were used to identify six themes: how these women came to hear of *OITNB* (if they have watched it, and if they stopped, why they did), race and ethnicity, exaggeration of their conditions for the media (comic relief and sexuality), motherhood, and the normalizing of women’s incarceration which includes misrepresentation of mental health, and the notion that each of their unique experiences sway their perceptions of this show. After reporting on the women’s demographic characteristics, acquired through the brief survey they completed prior to viewing the *OITNB* episodes and focus groups/interview, these six themes will be described.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

A total of 29 participants contributed in my study, all of whom were either currently or formerly incarcerated women (See Appendix F: Table 1 for a complete
The participants were asked to complete a survey prior to the focus group to gain basic demographic details of the women in the study. For IRB approval I was only allowed to ask the participants’ ages in terms of grouped ages to make it more difficult to identify them. All 29 women reported their ages, and the largest group was also the oldest of the age groupings, aged 45 and older. This was 27.6 percent of my sample. The smallest grouping was 30 to 34 years old (10.3%). The remaining age groups were very similar, ranging from 13.8 to 17.2 percent of the sample (see Table 1). I allowed my participants to self-identify their race/ethnicity on the survey. Over three-fifths (62.1%) of the sample identified as white, and almost a third (31.0%) identified as Latina (or “Mexican” or “Hispanic”), one as African American, and one as biracial, specifically, Native American/Asian American. Clearly, this is not a representative sample based on race/ethnicity; this sample is disproportionately white and older.

About a third (32.1%) of the sample reported that their highest attainment of education was “some college, but no degree.” Over half (53.6%) reported educational attainment below that, with 14.3 percent reporting no high school diploma or GED, 17.9 percent reporting a high school diploma, and over one-fifth (21.4%) reporting a GED. The remaining four participants reported college degrees ranging from associate’s to Ph.D./law degrees. In terms of relationship status, almost three-fifths (58.6%) reported they had ever been married, and 48.3% reported that they had ever been divorced. About half of the women (51.9%) reported that their current relationship status was “dating”, 27.0 percent reported this as single, and 11.1 percent reported that they were married/cohabitating.
Given the conservative nature of jails, we did not ask sexual identity. Now turning to motherhood, nearly two-thirds (58.6%) of the women had children, and 17.9 percent had four to six children.

Only 3 women (11.5%) of the sample had never been incarcerated previously, but four-fifths of the women had never been incarcerated in prison. The average number of months incarcerated was 14.1 months in jail. (See full details Appendix F: Table 2).

Finally, the short survey asked the participants to estimate the number of episodes that they had seen of OITNB and nearly one-third of the sample had never seen it prior to my study (n = 10) and three had seen all or almost all of the episodes. The remaining women in my research had watched 1 to 4 episodes (n = 11), one full season (n = 1), or 2 full seasons (n = 4).

**THE CONNECTION BETWEEN OITNB AND THESE WOMEN**

As an introduction to the focus groups and interview, a few questions were asked to gauge whether they have seen it prior to the study, if people ask them if it is an accurate representation, and if they started it and stopped it, why they did this. Many of the women admitted to not have viewed the show prior to our showing of it. They explained that the reason that many people did not watch it prior was because of being homeless, not having access to it, not being able to afford it, or simply just not having any interest in watching it. Three of the women who had previously been in prison mentioned that they had already lived it and did not want to see this show. Of these women, one was especially skeptical because of fear of discovering that it would exploit the experiences of incarcerated women. Overall,
she thought that it did not necessarily exploit incarcerated women, but that there were instances that were exploitative after watching the episodes for my study. From the backstories of the characters featured in the episodes in my study, she reported that this served as a way to show the different ways in which women are incarcerated, and that it is not always as simple as how the news or media outlets present it. Overall, for her, this show displays the actual complications leading to incarcerating women.

**RACE AND ETHNICITY**

Prior research on *OITNB* typically report that while it includes more People of Color within the series than most popular television, the portrayals of them do not always represent them in the best ways, that is, they are racist (Belcher, 2016; Enck and Morrissey, 2015; Kim, 2016; Terry, 2016). Surely with the episodes that were handpicked, there was an assumption that race/ethnicity would come up in the conversation (not only because it was a question that was asked in the focus groups/interviews), but also because of the high representation of racism within these episodes. One of my major findings was that the majority of these women did not discuss race/ethnicity. Questions about race/ethnicity were in the focus group/interview questions, but with the exception of the one-on-one interview—which was with a white woman incarcerated in prison for 5 years,—nearly no one in the focus groups wanted to talk about race as much as they did about other inaccuracies and accuracies of *OITNB*. Even when the research team redirected the discussions to better understand the ways in which race/ethnicity identities operate in this space, hardly any participants wanted to expand on this. This is a major
finding because a show so rich in content regarding race and ethnicity is virtually not talked about and disregarded.

This is also peculiar because of the rising rates of incarceration of Women of Color. In addition, the sample of participants is not consistent with the rising incarceration rates of Women of Color. Although Boulder County is primarily white, there are still discrepancies in incarceration rates of People of Color compared to their representation in the population. More specifically these discrepancies, consistent with elsewhere in the U.S., emphasize that People of Color are disproportionately represented among the incarcerated: Boulder County’s African American population is 1.2 percent, but they comprise of 4.3 percent of the Jail bookings (Justice System Partners, 2016). In 2015, as a percentage of the population, African American’s were three times more likely than whites or Latinx’s to be booked into jail (Justice System Partners, 2016).

During the only one-on-one interview that was conducted, the questions regarding race really sparked this participants interest and I was able to obtain a lot of information on what she expressed was important in terms of accuracies and inaccuracies. Regarding race and ethnicity, she was quite thorough with her observations after spending nearly five years in the Department of Corrections (DOC). Nora, a 35-39 year old white woman expressed her hesitation with the portrayals of People of Color in the show versus her own experience being incarcerated:

I think that they do a good job in terms of not over-stereotyping. I think that the African American women and how they are portrayed is....the bonds they form and the relationships they form are 100 percent accurate in terms of how they form serious friendships. The Latina women however...I did feel
like was a little over stereotyped. I felt like that was really stereotyped because in my experience, a lot of Latina women...they didn’t just separate out by race. There was a lot of intermixing and the Latina women did not necessarily hangout with other Latina women. I also felt like they did a disservice to Latina women. I wish they would have shown more than white people being educated, because my Latina friend is so smart and they don’t show anyone but white people being smart.

Nora has seen all episodes of *OITNB* therefore allowing her to be able to elaborate on the content and the different ways in which race and ethnicity is portrayed.

Alana, an African American woman picked up on some of the stereotypes that were portrayed, and expressed her concern of a comment made in the episode:

> I hated it when the Mexican girls said the thing about crack...’cause not all Black people do crack. That was really racist.

What Alana was referring to was a comment made by some Latina women inferring that all black people smoke crack, which supports the stereotype that African Americans are more likely to smoke crack (which is incorrect; white people do crack three times as much as African Americans) (SAMHSA, 2015).

*“Grouping”: Jail vs. Prison*

As mentioned earlier, one of the serious limitations of this study is that it was conducted in a jail with primarily women who have not been to prison (22 vs. 7), therefore not gaining sufficient knowledge of the way *OITNB* represents incarcerated women in *prison*. Having said that, seven women within the sample have noted that they had been in prison prior, and there were serious differences in the way that the women “grouped” (chose to affiliate with other inmates). In jail, many women grouped up by people they either knew on the streets, or by their drug of choice (if they were addicts). They would also group up by either being drug distributors or by who was consuming these drugs. Of those who mentioned that
they had previously been in prison, they identified different strategies of “grouping.” Some of these women who had been in prison voiced that the women grouped off by race, while others disagreed. Unsurprisingly, most focus group discussions came to the consensus which facility you are in and with whom you affiliate matters.

Gangs turned out to be a primary predictor on whether those in the facility were going to group up by race or not. The only one-on-one interview that was conducted in this study yielded the most conversation about race, including women dividing themselves based on gangs. Nora had served a few years in prison and reflected on her experiences about race in facilities:

I guess that is where this season is starting to bother me...with the racial stuff they [OITNB] leave gangs out. When there are strong racial divides [in facilities] that they are starting to show...that’s where is typically lays....more in gang activity than it does in race. If you were not affiliated with a gang, then you generally had no issues with the people who identified as being a part of a gang. You could be friends with whomever you wanted.

Nora’s experiences in a Colorado women’s facility suggests that racial divides are not dependent on what race you identified with, but rather what gang you were associated with. She mentioned that many of the gang ties were not “that serious” because many of the women associated with gangs were affiliated through “a man in their life” being either a husband, brother, or father. She claims that many of the women did not act on their affiliation with the gang. The only gang she identified as being very prominent was the white supremacist gang. She saw them as “the most aggressive” and identifies that OITNB does a “pretty good job” showing how aggressive and persistent they can be. Nora also mentioned that if you were not associated with a gang that you were able to “intermingle” more and that there were not as many restrictions on with whom prisoners can talk.
Another participant, Andrea, a white woman aged older than 45, “did time” in an Oregon prison. After hearing other women talk about grouping by drug of choice, she explained her experience with grouping differently:

I think that’s one of the differences between jail and prison...because in my experience [in prison] it was definitely by ethnicity. That’s one thing I noticed about [the prison in] Oregon was that they were accommodating of different cultural differences and stuff like that, but there was a definite divide between races and even between tribes.

Andrea also explained that there were differences between jail and prison and that it made sense that some women grouped up differently because it was usually for a shorter time period, but in prison inmates are “stuck” with those women, so they often divide much differently.

Another white women in my study who had been to prison mentioned that in a prison in Wisconsin, the prison administrators racially segregated the inmates. They were segregated by the Native American’s on the bottom tier, and the whites on top. She explained that this made her feel “so uncomfortable” because of the institutionalized segregation. Furthermore, there was one other white woman who had been to prison who expressed her experience:

In Ohio, the prison I was at had a lot of people I grew up with in it. It’s not as racially segregated in Ohio as it probably is other places. The racial thing...it’s just where you are in the country and the people in that area.

Overall, these women told their experiences through their own personal stories. It is important to note that six out of the seven women that had mentioned that they had served sentences in prison were white, significantly skewing this representation for my study. This is peculiar and troubling given the over-representation and rising incarceration rates of Women on Color, which is not
represented well in my sample.

The other women in the focus groups who had not been to prison were
adament about the fact the people in jail grouped up by who they knew on the
streets and drug of choice, and not by race. First, this indication exemplifies the
ways in which many women in jails are incarcerated for crimes involving drugs. The
notion that most of them first mentioned that they associate by drug of choice
(because it is the most relatable), is consistent with the statistics of nearly 60
percent of women who are incarcerated having a history of drug dependence
(Sentencing Project, 2015). Ashley, a 30 to 35 year old white woman explained her
experience that seemed to be consistent with others experiences in BCJ:

We grouped up where we came from on the streets. I mean for me, I grouped
up with more of drug dealers, who kind of ran the streets where others, who
were doing the dope [drugs], and on the streets it varies on where you group
in. You also are likely to know people [from the streets] so when you're in
you group up with them too.

A few other women noted that not only does your drug of choice matter in
terms of grouping up in jail (because not all women are in for drug crimes), but also
that their experiences and what they have left behind matters. A Latina woman
voiced:

Cliques are not always solely based on race. Some clique up by drug of choice,
and some by experience. Experience includes what you were charged for,
addictions, children, and previous events in your life, it all really depends.
Because sometimes where you see people withdrawing off of something
you've withdrawn from, you relate to them and can help them get through it.
Or if they have kids, you can feel for them because you both miss your kids.

Grouping up based on experiences can be easier when being in jail because this is
most likely a time with a lot of emotions and many of these women are likely going
through something similar, so it is easier to relate to someone with similar
“SELLING HOLLYWOOD”: OITNB’S EXAGGERATION FOR THE MEDIA

The media is something that generally has a target audience in mind when creating a show, and OITNB is no different. Although this series was originally a memoir, it is mostly falsified compared to the memoir. This series’ primary audience is expressed as being for “straight white cisgender males” ages 16 to 25, but there is no official comment on that. With this in mind, there are ways in which the producers and directors cater the show to please that audience. OITNB is known for being “over the top” on occasion, which is consistent with what many of the women noted in my study. More specifically, the idea of exaggeration for OITNB viewership is illustrated by the women in my study identifying the ways in which the exaggerated portrayals appeal to their target audience. There are two main themes that these women identified as overly exaggerated: their experiences as a source of comic relief, as well as the suggestions that this show is exploiting women’s sexuality, particularly within these facilities. Some of the women, however, expressed that regardless of the dramatization this show possesses, they continue to watch it because it is “interesting and entertaining.”

Comic Relief

The sense of comic relief was raised in every focus group (and the one interview). While there were different instances in which each of the women raised it, they denoted comic relief as a way in which this show inaccurately portrays incarcerated women, but understandably with the interest of getting more viewers.

A primary example women identified as comic relief was the use of Women
of Color as the butt of the joke, especially for enacting known stereotypes that are harmful. In *OITNB* there are racist stereotypes portrayed about the African American women as uneducated, loud, and from inner cities, which was unsettling (Nora, white, 35-39). This show is categorized as a drama-comedy, but a lot of this comedy plays off stereotypes of Women of Color and people who identify as LGBTQ, including calling the transgender Woman of Color a “lady-man,” and the idea that every queer/lesbian-identified woman is attracted to all other women. The use of comic relief can bring representation of Women of Color onto the screen, however it comes at a high price because these representations are perpetuated by harmful stereotypical narratives. While there is this idea that the show is a comedy and supposed to be funny, it can actually be destructive to these communities through the stereotypes they are fulfilling.

Alma, a Latina woman who is 25 to 29, noted that the use of “Crazy Eyes” (an African American character) as a comic relief is “not okay.” She stated:

She [“Crazy Eyes”] has mental health issues, and it is not okay to joke about. It needs to be addressed. Mental health is not something to joke about.

Other participants explained that although there are other instances in the show where comic relief is pretty accurate (for instance, converting to Judaism so you can have Kosher meals), the majority of it is “over the top” and harmful to the range of communities who are being portrayed negatively within the series.

“Gay for the Stay”: Sexuality in Women’s Facilities

*OITNB* is widely known for explicitly showing scenes of women having sex with other women. When the incarcerated women were asked to freely identify an inaccurate representation in the show, this is one of the first and most prominent
examples they raised. Every focus group and interview brought up the term "gay for the stay." This term is used primarily to refer to people who are incarcerated who generally engage in heterosexual relationships prior to incarceration, but engage in same-sex sexual relationships while “doing time” because there is no other option. Among OITNB, “gay for the stay” is a concept that comes up regularly, and those who have been or are incarcerated mention that they are asked about this all of the time, from people who have never been incarcerated.

There was a lot of talk about being “gay for the stay” and what it meant to the women in my study. While many of these women admitted that it is “pretty common” among women incarcerated in both jails and prisons, there were some discrepancies in these facilities. Andrea illustrated what she had experienced in jail versus prison:

Piper’s [main character] confusion in sexuality is probably something a lot more common. Not necessarily for a short sentence, but that whole “gay for the stay” you would have women that for whatever reason had all types of girlfriends in there [prison] but a husband on the streets.

The discrepancies that are placed between facilities makes sense, but this is not to negate that there are not relationships within both facilities and for different lengths of time. Andrea goes on to indicate that there are different types of relationships between the women, and that they are not always sexual:

When I was in prison, there was a woman who was released, and her partner was a lifer [someone who had a life sentence]. She got out, made enough money to put on their books [their accounts in prison so that they could buy items] and she reoffended so that she could come back to prison. She was in love. So to discount those types of relationships because those people are in prison is like discounting those people and that’s unfair.

Although there is a lot of hype about incarcerated women and being “gay for the
stay” and developing connections with other women, those who are intimately connected with someone else often go unrecognized because of the ways in which society stigmatizes the women engaging in same-sex or queer relationships. Other women who had been incarcerated in prison mentioned ideas very similar to the regard of women gaining life partners when they are in prison, craving a connection that is more than just sexual, and nonetheless someone to keep one company and connect with.

Regardless, some of the women in jail understood this, but had only really spoken to the concept of “gay for the stay” because of their time in jail being short and not enough time to usually form deep connections. Heidi, a white woman who was serving her first time in jail, posited a different reflection regarding gay for the stay:

I don’t want to feel institutionalized. When they say a lot of people are “gay for the stay” it just means they are feeling too comfortable with being here. Heidi’s equation of “gay for the stay” and “feeling too comfortable” may illuminate feelings of internalized homophobia. This comment came shortly after a discussion on how some women who go in and out of jail are “gay for the stay” and that they get back together with some of their girlfriends when they come in and these women think it is funny. Heidi’s insights on the ways in which she is resisting the institutionalization of incarceration is an important perception on the ways in which some heterosexual women might also grapple with the institutions of prison and heterosexuality simultaneously. Since some women might use prison or jail as a means to navigate different identities in different ways, it is notable to recognize carceral spaces as sexual spaces and how OITNB exaggerates that.
Alternatively, it is important to acknowledge the different implications these facilities have on women who do not conform to the gender binary, which is often conflated with sexuality. During one of the conversations in the interview, there was some talk about the ways in which *OITNB* represents transgender women, and her experiences in which a transgender inmate was treated. Nora offers her experience of this topic:

> Although it is sort of a touchy topic, I think *OITNB* has gotten into the transgender issue within facilities. It wasn’t huge where I was in the sense that we didn’t have people that were “officially” transitioning. Like, I had a roommate who was ordered to shave her face. So there’s definitely that element there with how the DOC deals with that. Interestingly, it’s been an issue long before the issues with the bathrooms. I think that when you look at how they put Sophia [a transgender Women of Color] in the hole [solitary confinement] that is hands down the kind of thing they would do.

In addition to the treatment of people who identify as LGBTQ in these punitive institutions, Eric Stanley (2011) uses a collection of voices that suggests “gender, ability, and sexuality as written through race, class, and nationality must figure into any and all accounts of incarceration, even when they seem to be nonexistent” (2011:4). Thus, these notions exemplify the ways in which different intersecting identities impact their experiences and how incarcerated women do time.

Given that the target audience of *OITNB* is white cisgender males, the commentary given by the women in the study reflect how grossly Hollywood utilizes exaggerations of harmful stereotypes that create comic relief based on a history that can be traced back to those who implemented the very harmful narratives the show utilizes today: white cisgender male slave owners who treated Women of Color as chattel (Davis, 1981).
Likewise, the exaggeration women identified in the study as “gay for the stay” misrepresents critical relationships incarcerated women experience in a myriad of ways, whether they identify as LGBTQ, heterosexual, or cisgendered. Such exaggeration perpetuates a heterosexual cisgender male fantasy that sexualizes women to satisfy the same target audience that finds stereotyping Women of Color as comical. What was ultimately found from the women in this study is that such a male gaze does a disservice to the lived experiences of women inside the very facilities *OITNB* is portraying. By distracting from the reality of experiences these women experience, the show fails to represent these particular surveyed women’s realities in more dynamic racialized and sexualized ways.

**MOTHERHOOD**

As previously noted, the number of incarcerated women with children is staggeringly high, and for a show that aims to replicate incarcerated women’s conditions, *OITNB* rarely touches on these relationships and the importance they often carry for women during their incarceration. The episode “Mother’s Day” was chosen to watch in the focus groups because of the known statistics of incarcerated mothers. Almost all of the participants raised concerns about the portrayal of motherhood in *OITNB*, and agreed that this was not an accurate representation of the relationships between incarcerated mothers and their children. Indeed, they were almost uniformly upset about the misportrayal of the access to see your children is not a simple as *OITNB* implies. Visiting as well as merely just having access to seeing your children can be difficult due to custody related issues or the notion that children might have to miss school in order to oblige by the visitation
hours schedule and not all primary caregivers want to go through such great lengths.

Marie, a Latina woman, expressed her experience of incarceration and motherhood:

Portions of each of these episodes, I can relate to, and I like that, there are other ones that are completely unrealistic. The Mother’s Day episode....where the dad says that he can’t do it anymore and can’t deal with it, [Marie started crying here], that hits me. I can’t talk to my kids because I’m in jail. Their dad won’t let them talk to me.

The testimonials that these women share about their own motherhood experiences exemplifies that these women are facing the realities of being incarcerated by having to leave their children behind while they serve time. Another women said that when she is in jail, she tells her children that she has to go to “mommy time out” to get the children to “kind of” understand where they are at and what they are doing. For women who are frequently incarcerated, explaining this concept to a child can be complex as well as heartbreaking because of the mere fact that they do not understand the complex implications that “mommy time” has on them.

NORMALIZING THE INCARCERATION

OITNB’s portrayal of incarcerated women normalizes the conditions and experiences that are shown on the screen. When the women who are actually living out these experiences come in contact with this show and the implications it has on incarcerated women, it can be stigmatizing and diminish their experiences because of what people see on TV.

“The Bubble”: Misrepresentation of Mental Health
Mental health among incarcerated women is widely unheard of but also greatly stigmatized when recognized. The reputable nature of incarcerated people, as being “crazy” is something that *OITNB* does not attempt to challenge. There is a very select few characters that are identified as having mental health issues within this show, and two of which are considered “extremes.” Both “Crazy Eyes” and Lolly are suspected to have mental health issues, there is one inmate in which is denoted as depressed and is given anti-psychotics.

Every focus group and interview participant raised the inaccuracies of mental health portrayed in *OITNB* compared to their time incarcerated. The two participants, noted above, were most certainly used as a comic relief and a way to lighten up the situation. As mentioned earlier by a woman in the focus group, these women would need help if they were really in a facility, as well as the fact that mental health should not be treated as a joke. Anna described mental illness in facilities in the following way:

A piece that I think they [*OITNB*] left out is the prevalence of mental health. There is a lot of, you know, just depression and bipolar and illness that may not be as extreme as Lolly or ‘Crazy Eyes,’ but nonetheless exist. Ugh, and the treatment is awful. They basically give them anti-psychotics they don’t even need and these women walk around like zombies. It is much more frequent, like they use her [Brooke Soso—a character with depression] as one example and then drop it. Mental health issues are so profound in there and I can’t even describe how much it exists. There should be 50 times as many Brooke Soso’s in the show than they have right now.

This illustration of how many people in these spaces suffer from mental health is indicative of the ways in which people with mental health issues are often stigmatized and erased within these narratives, unless they conform to a role that is beneficial to others, for instance, comic relief.
Within BCJ, and other county jails across the country, there is this practice called "the bubble." The concept of "the bubble" was described to me in each focus group as a room in BCJ in which you are put in to make sure you do not hurt yourself. This "bubble" is called just that because everyone in that pod can see you. Those who are put into "the bubble" are generally stripped down (so that they cannot use their clothing to hurt/strangle themselves), and sometimes they put a "turtle suit" on the inmate which serves as a green velcro suit to "calm" whoever is in there.

After explaining this concept, the women reflected on this idea of "the bubble" and how humiliating and embarrassing being placed in there is. They also reflected on being in a facility in which they didn’t feel as if they received adequate mental healthcare (or healthcare for that matter). The reflections on the bubble from these women included:

Putting people in a glassed cage or kennel is not going to help someone’s mind, spirit, self-esteem, etc. I’ve felt like an animal when I was in there. You have no clothes, and everyone can see you, and it is humiliating [crying].

A few other women tagged onto this mentioning that even if you do not have mental health issues, the guards will still threaten to put you in "the bubble" (similarly to solitary confinement in prisons). Overall, the rising rates of mental health issues in women’s facilities can speak to the amount of women who are marked by this stigma that we so often do not treat properly.

*Experience Matters: “This Place is Not Fun”*

Regarding my last major finding, the women’s responses to *OITNB* were bimodal: the participants tended to report either great despair in the portrayals of
women and incarceration in *OITNB* or they found it funny. Many of them who found despair, were very clear on not just viewing this as “not funny,” but as actually very offensive. The “experience matters” idea speaks to the fact that each of these women have unique experiences and so surely not all of them are going to agree on the ways in which *OITNB* portrays incarcerated women’s experiences.

Some of the women in the focus groups discussed the ways in which *OITNB* “glamourizes” being incarcerated and gives a false sense what incarceration really consists of. Anna, who has been incarcerated multiple times, expressed how she was feeling after the viewing of the episodes:

> This show is too happy—sure you have some laughs in jail, but how much fun the women in this show are having is unrealistic. Some of us are here to do our time and not mess around so that we can go home. *OITNB* is a joke compared to the actual incarcerated life.

Many of these women also reflected on the ways in which doing time is not as easy as the show makes it seem. Alongside of this, a multitude of the women in the focus groups reiterated that the show is “too funny” and that being incarcerated is “not that funny.”

As a result, there was a consensus among these women that what kind of experience you have had while being incarcerated really impacts the way that you view this show. Some viewed it as funny and not really pertaining to them, while others were grossly offended and vowed to never watch it again. Ashley concluded with her perception of the show:

> There is no way to explain it...you have to experience it [incarceration]. I mean, is this an actual representation? Not a serious one. So if you think it’s funny, it’s not. Jail is not funny.

In addition to the ways in which incarceration is not generally humorous, it is
important to acknowledge the intersections of these women and the multitude reasons of why incarceration is not funny. Particular intersections and experiences can play into the way in which they see themselves represented (or not) in this series, and the ways these characters may or may not represent their experiences.

**CONCLUSION**

Through expressing their thoughts and reactions of *OITNB*, incarcerated women in my study provided profound and varied contributions to *OITNB*. My results stress the ways in which *OITNB* does not necessarily provide the non-incarcerated society with an accurate representation of these women’s experiences. While there are instances in which this show does incorporate some of their experiences, overall, nearly all of the women came to the consensus that this show simply is not an accurate portrayal of the situations incarcerated women face, the struggles that they must endure, and the means in which they do their time. The next and final chapter summarizes this thesis and comments on future research and policy implications.
CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Incarcerated women have been a historically invisible population in the larger context of society as well as in the media. The scarce amounts of research on incarcerated women and their conditions, while increasing significantly in the past couple of decades, still suggests a need for further research and policy attention to this still largely invisible population. The Netflix series *OITNB*, while offering unprecedented attention to incarcerated women, also proposes a certain image of women and the ideal woman behind bars. Prior research has studied this show from a cultural studies, communication, or media analysis. My thesis is the first study of *OITNB* to study this popular series by asking incarcerated women their opinions of this show.

The data for this thesis come from two focus groups of women while they were incarcerated in the Boulder County Jail, one focus group in the community with women previously incarcerated in BCJ, and one one-on-one interview with a woman who served a five-year prison sentence (also conducted in the community). All of the 29 participants also completed a brief survey about their demographic characteristics, prior incarceration, and their viewing of *OITNB* prior to the study participation.

Careful analyses of the qualitative data resulted in six major themes of misrepresentation of the women's experiences in *OITNB*. While there were some instances in which women found themselves relating to the characters and their experiences, they were primarily small instances, such as women trying to claim
Jewish faith just so they could have a good Kosher meal during Passover, that struck them as accurate. Other than these small instances, the experiences that really mattered to these women, or were seemingly impactful for them, were not represented on the big screen, or were done so in a manner which was not favorable. Examples of this included depictions of mental illness, race, lesbianism, and motherhood.

After conducting the focus groups with these women, the majority of them expressed that they had no interest in ever watching the show again. Some of the conditions were described concerning why they were no longer able to watch it upon their release. These included being homeless, not having money, not having time, trying to get a job, keeping themselves out of trouble, and simply, because they did not like it. There were a few women who expressed their utter disgust with this show, and could be heard through their tone as well as what they said.

“I will never watch this show again.”

“This [OITNB] is a joke, being incarcerated is not a joke.”

The comments suggested that these women did not see this show as a priority, nor did they see it as something that represented their experiences. The sheer seriousness that these women take with completing their sentences and seeing the impacts that incarceration poses beyond the time incarcerated, displays a sense of how crucial this time is. Regardless of if it is time away from family, friends, or children, the strain of being incarcerated extends well behind the surface-level comedy of this TV series OITNB. While participants identified multiple instances that they felt contributed to the representation of their experiences in a positive and
accurate light through this series, they also identified that there are destructive and harmful portrayals of not only incarceration, but also the women within these spaces.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In this study, both currently and previously incarcerated women express the complexities involved in the incarceration of women, and how their perceptions and views of *OITNB* are so individualized. In order to be properly represented in the media, there are many steps that producers and writers must do to incorporate authentic experiences and real lived experiences of these women who are doing time. While this show is based off of a memoir by Piper Kerman, her intersectional identities as a white, middle- to upper-class, well educated, woman allows her access to different spaces and for her voice to be heard in such a profound way. In order to accurately portray the women in these spaces that are doing the time, we need to challenge the white patriarchal lens that drive many TV programs and theatre films to appeal to young, white, cisgender men. Sadly, this is unlikely as ratings from their viewers drive the portrayals, regardless of the inaccuracies, such as sexism, homophobia, classism, and diminishing the horror of mental illness and separation from their children.

This rising incarceration rates of Women of Color being illustrated through the lens of a white woman in *OITNB* exemplifies how the media carefully targets viewers and invites them into watching their production. If this memoir was written by a Woman of Color, it would likely be a different story, and perhaps not as captivating as Piper’s memoir, because it would more than likely challenge us to face
the realities of incarcerated women, and especially incarcerated Women of Color. The narrative would be very different, but would most likely expose us to the ways in which Women of Color are treated within these spaces. And finally, such a narrative may never have been accepted for publication as a book by a major press, and even if so, not then picked up as a Netflix or other film series.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Although this study was conducted primarily on women who had been incarcerated in jail, the significance of these findings opens up the conversation to the conditions of women’s incarceration, and the multiple layers that are embedded into this but not portrayed, or even highly misrepresented, in *OITNB*. Given that, to date, there are no other studies on incarcerated women’s views on *OITNB*, this research lays a foundation for further research to be conducted, and to investigate the ways in which it represents and/or misrepresents the actual women who are being portrayed. My study aimed to give these women a voice and acknowledge the ways in which they are being portrayed to the non-incarcerated society, as well as illuminating how unique these individuals are, not only in their experiences, but in their insights as well.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Each focus group and interview yielded incalculable information not only on the ways in which they felt represented or misrepresented, but also what could be changed in order for the non-incarcerated society to understand the seriousness of women’s incarceration. While *OITNB* does not appear to represent these women in
the ways that many of the participants thought it should, this series, at minimum, brings attention to women’s incarceration.

Arguably, *OITNB* has started the conversation and has viewers actively talking about incarcerated women and the complexities of incarcerating them at an unprecedented rate. At the same time, however, *OITNB* continues to perpetuate stereotypes that can be potentially harmful. Hopefully, this thesis can provide the non-incarcerated society with a better sense of women’s incarceration and the implications these images have on these women. This show does not directly address the multitude of injustices that incarcerated women face on a day-to-day basis, prior to or during their sentences. It is my hopes that this thesis lays a platform for further research to be conducted, in hopes of bringing to light the different ways women are incarcerated, as well as giving them a voice to speak on behalf of their own experiences.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

As previously mentioned, this research lays a platform, and hopefully encourages, future research on portrayals of incarcerated women in the media, in order to understand not only these women’s lives and experiences before, during and after incarceration, but the harm that could result from misportrayals and minimizing these women’s oppression.

After completing what was largely a focus group study, I believe that future research on *OITNB* would be immensely benefited by conducting one-on-one interviews with incarcerated or formerly women, where they would likely feel more able to speak openly about racist and homophobic portrayals. If possible, showing
them and perhaps watching *OITNB* with them as well can help the researcher gain more sufficient results because of the fieldwork aspect, but as well as being there to discuss the emotions they were feeling during particular scenes. I would also put more emphasis on sexuality and gender identities, given the pervasiveness of this theme in the series and how it was raised during my data collection. Understanding the ways in which gender and sexual identities play out in a facility that is constantly policing women’s bodies and sexuality could provide valuable information on the gendered conditions of women’s incarceration.

To those who watch this show, merely for entertainment purposes, I challenge you to understand the implications that this series has on such a vulnerable and often exploited population, and the ways in which we can deconstruct these ideas of incarcerated women that this show tries so hard to uphold. By understanding the history of women’s incarceration and the many intricate layers of oppression and resilience incarcerated women experience, should better challenge the ways in which these women are presented.
ACLU. (2017). “School to Prison Pipeline.” Retrieved from
https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline


https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=131


Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (2015), 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Rockville, MD), Table 1.29A and Table 1.34A.


DeCarvalho, Lauren., Nicole B. Cox. (2016) Extended ‘visiting hours’: deconstructing


Silverman, Rachel E., and Emily Ryalls. (2016). Everything Is Different the Second


### APPENDIX A: Chart 1

**Review of Current Studies on *Orange Is the New Black***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type of Analysis</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artt, S. &amp; Anne Schwan (2016)</td>
<td>Screening Women’s Imprisonment: Agency and Exploitation in Orange Is the New Black</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Female-centered drama, activism, transgender representation, post feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belcher, Christina (2016)</td>
<td>There Is No Such Thing as a Post-Racial Prison: Neoliberal Multiculturalism and the White Savior Complex on <em>OITNB</em></td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Sexuality, misrepresentations of incarcerated women, race, culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>DeCarvalho, Lauren J. &amp; Nicole B. Cox (2016)</td>
<td>Extended “Visiting Hours”: Deconstructing Identity in Netflix's Promotional Campaigns for <em>OITNB</em></td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Intersectionality, marketing, feminist media studies, identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enck, Suzanne M. &amp; Megan E. Morrissey (2015)</td>
<td>If OITNB, I Must Be Color Blind: Comic Framings of Post-Racialism in the Prison Industrial Complex</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Race, post-racial colorblindness, whiteness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fernández-Morales, Marta &amp; Maria Menéndez-Menéndez (2016)</td>
<td>“When In Rome, Use What You've Got”: A Discussion of Female Agency through OITNB</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Resistance, consciousness raising, agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammond, Yvonne (2016)</td>
<td>Cleaning Up Your Act: Surveillance, Queer Sex, and the</td>
<td>Content/Scholar</td>
<td>Sexuality, race, misrepresentation of incarcerated women, privilege</td>
</tr>
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<td>Authors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalogeropoulos, Householder &amp; Trier-Bieniek (2016)</td>
<td>Introduction: Is Orange the New Black?</td>
<td>Content/Scholar</td>
<td>Intersectionality, privilege, power, interlocking oppressions, comic relief, race, gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Minjeong (2016)</td>
<td>You Don't Look Full...Asia: The Invisible and Ambiguous Bodies of Chang and Soso</td>
<td>Content/Scholar</td>
<td>Race, gender, identity politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pramaggiore, Maria (2016)</td>
<td>From Screwdriver to Dildo: Retooling Women's Work in Orange Is the New Black</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Culture, feminism, gender, labor, politics, popular culture, television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwan, Anne (2016)</td>
<td>Postfeminism Meets the Women in Prison Genre: Privilege and Spectatorship in OITNB</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Sexuality, misrepresentations of incarcerated women, pop-culture, mass incarceration, consciousness-raising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silverman, Rachel E. &amp; Emily D. Ryalls (2016)</td>
<td>&quot;Everything Is Different the Second Time Around&quot;: The Stigma of Temporality on OITNB</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Stigma, temporality, aging women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan-Barak, Katie (2016)</td>
<td>Jenji Kohan's Trojan Horse: Subversive Uses of Whiteness</td>
<td>Content/Scholar</td>
<td>Race, gender, privilege, misrepresentation of incarcerated women, sexuality, intersectionality, character analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry, April (2016)</td>
<td>Surveying Issues That Arise in Women's Prisons: A Content Critique of OITNB</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Sexuality, race, transgender, mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young, Kalima (2016)</td>
<td>We Will Survive: Race and Gender-Based Trauma as Cultural Truth Telling</td>
<td>Content/Scholar</td>
<td>Race, gender, narrative truth telling, stereotypes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: SURVEY

Brief Survey for Orange is the New Black Interviews

1. What is your age group:
   □ Under 25  □ 25-29  □ 30-34  □ 35-39  □ 40-44  □ 45+

2. Which educational group best describes you?
   □ Less than High School  □ Bachelor's/4 year College Degree
   □ GED  □ Some Graduate/No Degree
   □ High School Diploma  □ Master's Degree
   □ Some College/No Degree  □ Ph.D. or Other Doctorate Degree
   □ Associate’s Degree  □ Other (please explain) ___________

3. What is your racial/ethnic identity? __________

4. Have you ever been married?  □ Yes  □ No

5. Have you ever been divorced?  □ Yes  □ No

6. What best describes your current relationship status?:
   □ Single  □ Dating  □ Married/Cohabitating

7. How many children do you have? ______

8. In your life, how many times have you been in jail? ______

9. In your life, how many times have you been in prison? ______

10. Please estimate the total number of months you've been in jail in your lifetime: ______

11. Please estimate the total number of months you've been in prison in your lifetime: ______

12. Please estimate the number of episodes you've seen of Orange is the New Black: ______

   Thank you and feel free to ask any questions!
APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BCJ Focus Group Questions

“Incarcerated Women’s Views of Orange Is the New Black”:

The first few questions are so I can find out a little bit more about you, but of course, feel free to not answer any of the questions I ask.

1. If I were going to introduce you to one of my friends, what would you want me to tell them about you?

2. Have any of you never seen OITNB? [If any haven’t ask:] Is there a reason you haven’t seen it, do you want to see it? What have you heard about it?

3. How did you first hear about OITNB?
   a. Can you remember the first time you watched it?
   b. Where were you, who were you with, and what did you think?
   c. If you watched it with others, what did they think about the show?

4. There are a total of 4 seasons which includes a total of 52 episodes of OITNB. How many of these do you think you’ve seen? Have you seen any more than once?

5. If you started watching it and quit, why did you quit watching it?

6. What are your favorite episodes and why?

7. What are your least favorite episodes and why?

8. Do people (other than me) ask you if you think OITNB is realistic and accurately portrays jail/prison and the women incarcerated in them?
   a. If so, who asks you and how do you answer?
   b. If they don’t ask you, how would you answer now with me asking you this?

9. In my study, I’m mainly interested in whether Orange Is the New Black accurately portrays women’s incarceration and the women who are incarcerated. You are an expert on this: In your opinion, what are some of the ways OITNB offers accurate portrayals of women’s prisons/jails and the women housed in them?

10. Changing the approach, are there inaccuracies that are portrayed in OITNB? If so, what are they?

11. Do you feel like OITNB has provided the non-incarcerated society with more
understanding about women who offend? If yes, how?

12. Do you feel like OITNB has provided the non-incarcerated society with more understanding about the conditions of women's incarceration? [If they need a prompt, the conditions, the separation from children, etc.]

13. What do you think about the portrayals of the actors in OITNB in terms of race/ethnicity? Class? Sexuality? Age? Mental Health?

14. Focusing on the prison visits from family, fiancés, and others, how accurate did this part of OITNB seem?

15. In the previous focus groups, many of the women talked about their children, which OITNB doesn’t address much in any of the existing episodes except one. What do you think about this? What would you want people to know about incarcerated women and their children?

16. Is there anything I’ve left out that you’d like to tell me?

Thank you so much for participating in my study!
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM—PREVIOUSLY INCARCERATED WOMEN

Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

Title of research study: Incarcerated Women’s Views of Orange Is the New Black
Investigator: Kaitlyn Leigh

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?
We invite you to take part in a research study because the television hit series Orange is the New Black has been a huge success, but there is no information on what actual incarcerated women think about this show. We want to know what you think about how well Orange is the New Black represents incarcerated women and their conditions and experiences. Secondarily, we are interested in knowing whether this television show has impacted you in any positive or negative ways.

What should I know about a research study?
• Someone will explain this research study to you.
• Whether or not you take part is up to you.
• You can choose not to take part.
• You can agree to take part and later change your mind (withdraw from the study).
• You can choose to skip any questions on the brief survey or in the interview.
• Your decision to not participate or skip any questions will not be held against you.
• You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?
If you have questions, concerns, complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the faculty advisor on the research team Joanne Belknap at (303)-735-2182

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). You may talk to them at (303) 735-3702 or irbadmin@colorado.edu if:
• Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
• You cannot reach the research team.
• You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
• You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
• You want to get information or provide input about this research.
Why is this research being done?
The U.S. incarcerates more people than anywhere in the world, and the growth in incarceration since the 1970s has been even higher among women than among men. Recently, Orange is the New Black has made the general population more interested in the very invisible population of incarcerated women. The goal of this study is to find out what previously incarcerated women think about this hit series. Secondly, we want to know whether Orange is the New Black has impacted you in any way.

How long will the research last?
We expect that you will be in this research study for a maximum of 3 hours.

How many people will be studied?
We expect about 15-25 women to participate in this study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?
- You will participate in a focus group regarding if Orange is the New Black has impacted you.
- A brief survey about you, for example your age, education, race/ethnicity, and how many episodes of Orange is the New Black that you have watched.
- The focus groups will be audio-taped, and we will be taking extensive notes on your responses to the interview questions.
- None of the focus group or survey questions are intended to be “tricky,” rather we want to find out what you think about Orange is the New Black and whether it has impacted you in any way.
- The findings will be written in a manner that will not disclose any participants’ identity.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?
You can opt not to be in the study at all. You can opt to be in the study and still leave it at any time. Choosing not to be in the study or deciding to discontinue your participation after you agreed to be in the study will not be held against you by the researcher.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you by the researcher. You can choose to skip any questions or stop participating at any point. There will be no adverse consequences for not participating, skipping questions, or withdrawing from the study.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?
It is possible that one of the questions may raise a topic that could make you feel uncomfortable, but you are not obligated to disclose anything or to continue in the study. For example, a participant could raise something about an episode of a traumatic event portrayed in Orange is the New Black that could be “triggering” for you (e.g., sexual abuse).

**Will being in this study help me any way?**

Women who participate in this study will be compensated $20 (from the researcher) in the form of a gift card to a local retail store such as Walmart. We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include educating the larger public about the accuracy of *Orange is the New Black*. We also hope that you will find it interesting to take part in the interview, should you choose to do so.

Participants may email either or both of members of the research team for the study results once the study is completed: Kaitlyn.Leigh@colorado.edu Joanne.Belknap@colorado.edu

**What happens to the information collected for the research?**

The data will be kept with no names and a numeric identification number generated by the research team. All data will be kept in a password protected electronic file or printed for analysis, but with no names attached and kept in a locked file cabinet. The findings will be written in such a manner that no participant’s identity would be revealed. The only people with access to the original data will be the research team.

The research team, however, cannot promise anonymity. Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could share this information with someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Please keep in mind when answering the interview questions that we do not see any of these questions as stigmatic or see this as making you vulnerable, unless you choose to answer them this way.

**Signature Block for Capable Adult**

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of subject</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed name of subject</td>
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<td>Signature of person obtaining consent</td>
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<td>Printed name of person obtaining consent</td>
<td>IRB Approval Date</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5 August 2016</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM—INCARCERATED WOMEN IN BCJ

Title of research study: Incarcerated Women's Views of Orange Is the New Black
Investigator: Kaitlyn Leigh

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?
We invite you to take part in a research study because the television hit Orange Is the New Black has been a huge success, but there is no information on what actual incarcerated women think about this show. We want to know what you think about how well Orange Is the New Black represents incarcerated women and their conditions and experiences. Secondarily, we are interested in knowing whether this television show has impacted you in any positive or negative ways.

What should I know about a research study?
• Someone will explain this research study to you.
• Whether or not you take part is up to you.
• You can choose not to take part.
• You can agree to take part and later change your mind (withdraw from the study).
• You can choose to skip any questions on the brief survey or in the focus group.
• Your decision to not participate or skip any questions will not be held against you.
• You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the faculty advisor on the research team Joanne Belknap at (303)-735-2182

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). You may talk to them at (303) 735-3702 or irbadmin@colorado.edu if:
• Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
• You cannot reach the research team.
• You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
• You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
• You want to get information or provide input about this research.
Why is this research being done?
The U.S. incarcerates more people than anywhere in the world, and the growth in incarceration since the 1970s has been even higher among women than among men. Recently, *Orange is the New Black* has made the general population more interested in the very invisible population of incarcerated women. The goal of this study is to find out what actual incarcerated women think about this hit series. Secondly, we want to know whether *Orange is the New Black* has impacted you in any way.

How long will the research last?
We expect that you will be in this research study for a maximum of 3 hours.

How many people will be studied?
We expect about 30-60 women will be in this research study and it is only being conducted at the Boulder County Jail.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?
- You will take part in a focus group with other women in this jail that will last about 2.5-3 hours.
- A brief survey about you, for example your age, education, race/ethnicity, and how many episodes of *Orange is the New Black* that you’ve watched.
- The focus groups will be audio-taped and we will be taking extensive notes on your responses to the focus group questions.
- The researcher cannot promise complete anonymity due to other members within the focus group.
- Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could share this with someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.
- None of the focus group or survey questions are intended to be “tricky,” rather we want to find out what you think about *Orange is the New Black* and whether it has impacted you in any way.
- The focus groups and surveys will be collected in the Boulder County Jail by a member of the research team. The surveys will be anonymous, used primarily to describe the sample.
- The findings will be written in a manner that will not disclose any participants’ identity.
What happens if I do not want to be in this research?
You can opt not to be in the study at all. You can opt to be in the study and still leave it at any time. Choosing not to be in the study or deciding to discontinue your participation after you agreed to be in the study will not be held against you by the researchers or the BCJ staff or administration.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you by the researcher or the BCJ staff or administration. You can choose to skip any questions or stop participating at any point. There will be no adverse consequences for not-participating, skipping questions, or withdrawing from the study.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?
It is possible that one of the other participants may raise a topic that could make you feel uncomfortable, but you are not obligated to disclose anything or to continue in the study. For example, a participant could raise something about an episode of a traumatic event portrayed in Orange is the New Black, that could be “triggering” for you (e.g., sexual abuse).

Will being in this study help me any way?
Women who participate in this study will receive a $20 gift card (from the researcher, not BCJ), to Walmart that will be placed with their belongings upon release. We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include educating the larger public about the accuracy of Orange is the New Black. We also hope that you will find it interesting to take part in the focus group, should you choose to do so.

Taking part in this research study will not improve your housing or correctional program assignments. Your taking part in this research study will not improve your chance of parole or release. Participants may email either or both of members of the research team for the study results once the study is completed: Kaitlyn.Leigh@colorado.edu  Joanne.Belknap@colorado.edu

What happens to the information collected for the research?
The data will be kept with no names and a numeric identification number generated by the research team. All data will be kept in a password protected electronic file or printed for analysis, but with no names attached and kept in a locked file cabinet. The findings will be written in such a manner that no participant’s identity would be revealed. The only people with access to the original data will be the research team.

The research team cannot commit to your anonymity in this study and we cannot guarantee that other focus group participants will not disclose anything you say during the focus group. Please keep this in mind when answering the focus group
questions, however, we do not see any of these questions as stigmatic or making you vulnerable, unless you choose to answer them this way.

**Signature Block for Capable Adult**
Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature of person obtaining consent</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed name of person obtaining consent</td>
<td>IRB Approval Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Approved by Sgt. Trujillo*
APPENDIX F: Table 1. Participant Demographics (N = 29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College/No Degree</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's/4 year College Degree</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D./Law or Other Doctorate Degree</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ever Married</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ever Divorced</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Relationship</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/Cohabitating</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1The age groups were coded from 1 (<25) to 6 (45+). The μ = 3.79 and the median = 4.
2The education categories were coded from 1 (< high school) to 9 (Ph.D./Law). The μ = 3.29 and the median = 3.00.
3The number of children ranged from 0 to 6. The μ = 1.96, the median = 2, and the mode 0.
**APPENDIX F: Table 2. Incarceration and Viewing of Orange Is the New Black Frequencies (N = 29)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times in Jail</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First time</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-9 times</td>
<td></td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-50 times</td>
<td></td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times in Prison</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>(22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Months in Jail</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-43</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Episodes of OITNB Seen</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1The number of times in jail ranged from 1 to 50. The μ = 8.46, the median = 6.50, and the mode = 10. These numbers likely underrepresent the women's number of time in jail, as the three who left wrote that they couldn't count how many times because it had been so many. Also, many of the women wrote “10+” but I coded this as “10.”

2The number of times in prison ranged from 0 to 3. The μ = 0.31, the median = 0.00, and the mode = 0.

3The number of months in jail ranged from 1 to 43. The μ = 14.11, the median = 12.0, and the mode = 24. “Only” 7 of the women served time in prison, and all 7 served different times, ranging from 1 to 96 months. Of these 7 women, the μ = 34.86 months and the median = 24.00 months.

4The number of episodes of Orange Is the New Black women had viewed ranged from 0 to 52. The μ = 9.21, the median = 1.00, and the mode = 0. I realize that this might overrepresent the number of episodes viewed if some women included what we viewed for the focus groups.