

Running head: REPRESENTATIONS OF SEXUALITY

But Who's the Man?  
Representations of Sexuality and the Feminist Potential of  
*Orange is the New Black*

by

ABBY BLINCH

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Royal Roads University  
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Supervisor: Dr. matthew heinz  
December 2017

 Abby Blinch, 2017

COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Abby Blinch's Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled *But Who's the Man? Representations of Sexuality and the Feminist Potential of Orange is the New Black* and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Professional Communication:

Dr. matthew Heinz [signature on file]

Dr. Virginia McKendry [signature on file]

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon submission of the final copy of the thesis to Royal Roads University. The thesis supervisor confirms to have read this thesis and recommends that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements:

Dr. matthew heinz [signature on file]

**Creative Commons Statement**

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Canada License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca/>.

Some material in this work is not being made available under the terms of this licence:

- Third-Party material that is being used under fair dealing or with permission.
- Any photographs where individuals are easily identifiable.

**Abstract**

The amount of sexual content on television has grown exponentially over the last two decades. Much of this content works to enforce heteronormative ideals and demonstrate a male/active, female/passive dichotomy when performing sexuality. This mixed-methods study explored the representations of sexuality on the first season of the female-centric show *Orange is the New Black* from a critical feminist perspective. Interactions between three couples on the show were analyzed for the presence of the heterosexual script through a quantitative content analysis. Each of the couples, which included two queer relationships, enacted this script in their performance of sexuality. Five adult women who self-identify as feminist were interviewed to explore their opinions on the representations of sexuality on the show, analyzed through thematic analysis. Important barriers that participants noted the show had broken included having a diverse cast, a prominent transgender character, and presenting sexuality as part of larger narratives. Yet, participants questioned numerous aspects of the show, underlining a consensus that the show was not working to combat the dominant discourse of patriarchy through any meaningful ways.

*Keywords:* sexuality, heterosexual script, heteronormativity, television, popular culture, feminist, compulsory heterosexuality, female empowerment

### **Acknowledgements**

A sincere thank you to my thesis advisor, Dr. matthew heinz, for his patience, guidance, and hands-off approach that subtly encouraged me to try to answer questions on my own first. Professor heinz's expertise was critical to getting this thesis to where it is now and I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to work with him. Thank you also to my thesis committee member, Dr. Virginia McKendry, for somehow managing to boost my confidence through track changes.

To the five women interviewed for this thesis, thank you for giving me an hour of your time and for being so open and reflective in your discussions with me. I came away from each interview feeling I had learned something or gained a perspective I did not have before. I am a better feminist for having spoken to each of you.

Finally, thank you to my family and friends who supported me throughout this educational endeavour. Whether it was letting me read right up until thanksgiving dinner, understanding when I didn't reply to a text for two days (or two weeks), or doing my dishes, your support was appreciated and essential. A special note of appreciation to my brother, Dr. Jarrod Blinch, and sister-in-law, Dara Hutchison, for their intellectual, emotional, and financial support. I will work to repay my debts to you (literally and figuratively) for longer than you would probably like.

**Table of Contents**

Section 1, Introduction ..... p. 7

Section 2, Literature review ..... p. 10

Section 3, Research methods ..... p. 24

Section 4, Results ..... p. 30

    Quantitative ..... p. 30

    Qualitative ..... p. 38

Section 5, Discussion ..... p. 51

Section 6, Conclusion ..... p. 65

References ..... p. 67

### **Introduction**

What we see on television matters. Consciously or not, it guides our perceptions of all genders and can have harmful effects on women. We know that seeing women represented more often and in more nuanced ways empowers both girls and women (American Psychology Association [APA], 2007). Armed with that knowledge, I was compelled to investigate how a female-centric show may or may not present more diverse representations of female sexuality, the role heteronormativity plays in these representations, and what, if anything, they do to empower women. Current research on sexual representations on television appears to lack a focus on the impact on women (as opposed to girls). While there is a significant amount of research on binary representations of sexuality in heterosexual characters on television, as well as numerous cultural critiques on how many queer characters are actually working to support heteronormativity, there is substantially less that addresses sexual representation from a feminist perspective of female empowerment.

Ward (2003) conducted a comprehensive review of empirical research on the sexual socialization of youth through the presence of sexual content in magazines and television. She found that the amount of sexual content on television has grown exponentially over the last two decades. This increase of sex as subject matter not only includes consensual sex scenes but coercive and violent content as well; 84% of primetime episodes include an incident of sexual harassment, with a female character almost always being the victim (Ward, 2003). This is particularly concerning as a 2014 study found that men exposed to television that objectifies women are more likely to engage in harassing and sexually coercive behaviours toward them (Galdi, Maass, & Cadinu, 2014). In that study, male participants were required to watch

one of three television clips: One that sexually objectified a woman, a neutral presentation of a woman, and a clip without people. Men who watched the first clip were not only more likely to engage in sexually coercive or harassing behaviours but also more likely conform to masculine gender norms (Galdi et al., 2014). It appears women are not immune to this either; using centrefold images, Wright, Arroyo, and Bae (2015) found that the more explicit the centrefold image, the more the women who view them think they are “sights to be observed by others” and accept the male gaze (p. 1).

To address these apparent gaps, my research examined the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black* as it has an almost entirely female cast and sexuality is a major theme of the show. I was guided by the research questions: Does the first season of *Orange is the New Black* present nuanced representations of female sexuality? How can female sexuality be presented in a manner that gives power to women while acknowledging the dominant discourse of patriarchy and its influence on heteronormativity? And finally, how can women be empowered through television? I applied a feminist lens within the critical paradigm, similar to many of my key sources (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012; Kim, Sorsoli, Collins, Zylbergold, Schooler & Tolman, 2007; Mulvey, 1975). The central notion that directed my research was the “bias of compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980, p. 632). In *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, Rich (1980) argued that a patriarchal society forces both women and men (though Rich places an emphasis on women) into binary representations of sexuality and thus renders any other representation as abnormal, wrong, or simply “invisible” (p. 632). In 2007, Kim et al. applied Rich’s notion of compulsory heterosexuality to Simon and Gagnon’s sexual scripting theory (1986) to add a feminist perspective to the analysis of sexual scripts. As Rich wrote, “The lie of



compulsory female heterosexuality today... keeps numberless women psychologically trapped, trying to fit mind, spirit, and sexuality into a prescribed script” (Rich, 1980, p. 657).

To generate a fulsome and layered response to my research questions, I undertook a mixed-methods study from a critical feminist perspective. To investigate the prevalence of the “heterosexual script”, I utilized a quantitative analysis. I deductively coded specific interactions on the show using codes developed by Kim et al. (2007). With those findings, I then conducted semi-structured interviews with adult women who self-identify as feminists to explore the findings of the quantitative analysis. As I was hoping to further the discussion of sexual representations on television from a feminist perspective, I included women who identify as feminists to increase the odds that the participants would have either thought about this issue already or be able to discuss it critically from a perspective of female empowerment in a patriarchal society. I analyzed data through quantitative content analysis and thematic analysis.

To summarize, this research was a mixed methods study investigating representation of sexuality in one popular television show from a critical feminist perspective. The goals were to identify whether the first season of the female-centric show *Orange is the New Black* presents more nuanced representations of female sexuality, to explore ways this could be done while acknowledging the dominant discourse of patriarchy and its influence on heteronormativity, and to assess how women can be empowered through television.

### **Literature Review**

To introduce the larger issues encompassing this topic, I will begin by examining the binary representations of male and female sexuality in the media, which will include reviewing previous research as far back as the 1970s to demonstrate the longevity and obstinacy of the issue—and key findings. To identify why this is a concern, I will cite the impact these representations have on both women and men. I will then acknowledge the challenge of disrupting unconscious imbalances of power (in this case patriarchy) and centre my topic within this discussion. This is necessary to address the significance of the issue as well as the continued need for research to explore it. To conclude, I will outline the heterosexual script, a method for assessing representations of sexuality, as well as introduce some of the research and critiques of *Orange is the New Black*. This will justify my focus on this specific series, demonstrate how the combination of issues intersect, and illustrate how my research hopes to further the discussion.

### **Definitions**

A clear understanding of a few key terms is essential to this study. The first term, *sexuality*, is not to be confused with sexual orientation. For the purposes of this study, sexuality is defined as “sexual behaviours and attitudes” (Oliver & Hyde, 1993, p. 29). In other words, the expression of sexuality is not just through sex acts with another individual (or individuals) or by oneself but also includes more subtle behaviours such as flirtations as well as attitudes about these behaviours. Hence the definition of the second term, *representations of sexuality*, or “sexual content” as often labelled in other studies (Ward, 2003), which includes more than just portrayals of sex acts. It is “any depiction of sexual activity, sexually suggestive behaviour, or

talk about sexuality or sexual activity” as defined by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the definition that guided the work of Kim et al. (2007, p. 145). The Kaiser Family Foundation is a credible and non-partisan source for statistics on media use.

Another key word is *feminist*. I chose to use a definition provided by feminist author hooks, who also works within the critical paradigm. In *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, she wrote, “to be ‘feminist’ in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression” (1982, p. 185). This definition highlights that sexism does not just affect women, but also men, trans and non-binary individuals and hence a feminist vehicle would address all genders. Her reference to “all people” also emphasizes the importance of not ignoring racialized people, or other marginalized folks, in a feminist analysis. By highlighting “domination and oppression”, it recognizes systemic oppression, which will be discussed later through examining the unconscious patriarchy.

Finally, the study frequently uses the terms *compulsory heterosexuality* and *heteronormativity*. As coined by Rich (1980), compulsory heterosexuality is the institutionalization of heterosexuality as normal and thus other sexual orientations are “perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent, or simply rendered invisible” (p. 632). Heteronormativity refers to the “numerous ways in which heterosexual privilege is woven into the fabric of social life, pervasively and insidiously ordering everyday existence” (Jackson, 2006, p. 108). The definitions are similar, if not *almost* interchangeable; however, the difference to note is compulsory heterosexuality focuses on perceptions of non-heterosexual orientations and heteronormativity emphasizes the role heterosexual privilege has on all aspects of social life.

**Sexuality, Gender, and the Media**

In the 1975 article, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey demonstrated that owing to power imbalances between the genders, sex and pleasure had been split to reflect a male/active, female/passive dichotomy (p. 9). Four decades later there is a significant amount of research to back up that assertion, and to affirm it is still relevant today (e.g., Frohard-Dourlent, 2012; Kim et al., 2007; Montemurro, Bartasavich, & Wintermute, 2014). The media normalizes this dichotomy through enacting cultural scripts—guiding cultural rules that enforce behavioural norms—despite evidence to say following these norms is unhealthy (Sanchez, Crocker & Boike, 2005). In a 2005 study, which surveyed over 300 sexually active college students, Sanchez et al. found that gender conformity negatively influenced sexual enjoyment in both women and men. Yet, studies continue to show the gendered nature of representations of sexuality in mass media. Investigating numerous popular movies aimed at a teen audience, Smith (2012) found that movies teach three things to teen girls about desire: “Desire is unspoken, only ‘bad girls’ verbalize desire and expressing desire results in negative consequences” (p. 321). Overall, cultural scripts encourage girls to dissociate from their own desire and instead focus on *being* desirable (Smith, 2012, p. 324). It is not just teens and young adults who are impacted; adult women are hesitant to bring up the topic of sex, even to their closest friends, because sex talk is gendered and an uncomfortable topic for women (Montemurro et al., 2014). When women do discuss sex, it is usually to determine if their sex lives are “normal” (i.e., following acceptable cultural scripts) though women also turn to the media for that same confirmation (Montemurro et al., 2014). Together, this combination of power imbalance between the genders and cultural

scripts enacted through the media have worked together to inform women of all ages that their role is to be sexually passive for male pleasure.

In the same foundational article, Mulvey (1975) introduced the term “male gaze” (p. 9). Through her investigation of film, Mulvey asserted that women were victims of “scopophilia” (being objectified), resulting in them being presented as an “erotic object” either for the male character in the film or for the male spectator in the theatre (p. 10). Women in film, Mulvey argued, rarely functioned to enhance or move the story along; in fact, they were often no more than a distraction to it (p. 10). The application of her ideas are not limited to film, however, as Smit (2015) discussed Mulvey’s ideas in relation to television. More recently it has been found that the more women's bodies are put on display, the more it reinforces the cultural construct that women are “sights to be observed by others” (Wright et al., 2015, p. 1) showing that the male gaze is currently relevant and still problematic. With women representing 42% of major characters on television in 2014-2015—up only three percent from 1997-1998 (Lauzen, 2015)—what appears to be lacking is an assessment of *whether* there are more nuanced portrayals of female sexuality on television and, if so, how they can push back against cultural scripts, and the impact they may have on women. Given that this gendered dichotomy has been present for at least four decades, it is essential to recognize how deeply embedded these norms are, and what real change to the “unconscious patriarchy” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 6) might look like.

### **Unconscious Patriarchy**

Scholars from Foucault (1978) to hooks (1982) have studied dominant ideologies and how groups in power use discourses to construct and control subordinate groups. In discussing the various perspectives of these (and other) academics, Stoddart defined discourses as “systems

of thought, or knowledge claims, which assume an existence independent of a particular speaker. We constantly draw upon pre-existing discourses as resources for social interactions with others” (2007, p. 203). This is important for this research as patriarchy is a discourse that works to control a subordinate group. The label for this concept is “unconscious patriarchy” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 6). It is not easy to challenge or change dominant discourses, like unconscious patriarchy, because of how instinctive they are in our systems of thought.

When discussing dominant discourses, it is important to recognize the idea of intersectional feminism, as introduced by Crenshaw (1989). In the paper where she coined the term, she argued that the liberation of working class Black women could not be achieved by simply approaching it through an anti-racism or class analysis as these women encountered multiple axis of oppression and their gender could not be ignored. While Crenshaw coined the term intersectional feminism (1989), Latinx feminist were working within an intersectional framework much farther back, beginning substantively in the 1960s (Hurtado, 1998). Around the same time, in the 1960s and 1970s, the idea also emerged that lesbianism was a way to liberate women from male oppression (Marcus, 2005). Feminist authors have more recently questioned this thought, that when women completely abandon everything masculine they then free themselves from patriarchy (Marcus, 2005). However, the introduction in the media of lesbianism, or queerness in general, has been heralded as a step forward to promoting less binary representations of sexuality (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012). Questioning the ease of thinking outside dominant discourses, Minnich (2004) argues that one cannot alter a single aspect—in her example it is language—and assume a deeply rooted systemic change. She references the current unacceptance of referring to Black men as either “boys” or “kaffir boys” (p. 104). While this

change in language is an important step, Minnich argues it does not signify an understanding of the deeply imbedded and nuanced cultural and societal forces that created it, nor does it change them (p. 105). This raises the question: What kind of impact does the presentation of alternate forms of sexuality in media actually have?

Echoing Minnich's sentiments, Chevrette (2013) asserts that when comparing a marginalized group to a privileged group, the privileged group becomes the exemplar by which the marginalized are judged. In other words, the dominant discourse prevails and biases our interpretation of a non-dominant group. A study on heteroflexibility in the comic book series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* found that images in the media have become more representative of sexual minorities; however, that has not seemed to disrupt the heterosexual script and other heteronormative assumptions (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012). In fact, "many critical scholars argue that the commodification of queer sexuality in the media has actually contributed to reinforcing binaries of sex, gender and sexuality" (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012, p. 719).

Many of the more recent studies referenced (Chevrette, 2013; Frohard-Dourlent, 2012; Jackson, 2006) work within queer theory, which came into prominence in academia in the 1990s (Chevrette, 2013). In her article on interpersonal and family communication, Chevrette discussed "feminist applications of queer theory" (2013, p. 170). She notes that feminist theory works with queer theory to ensure its presence in "gendered domains" and to ensure gender differences are considered when investigating queer themes (p. 173). "Scholars have noted how in the absence of an analysis of gender, queer theory can re-inscribe white gay male identities, erasing gendered and racialized differences," (Chevrette, 2013, p. 172). Though queer theory was not present when Rich (1980) was writing, her notion of compulsory heterosexuality did inform the

development of queer theory (Chevrette, 2013). As such, this study recognizes the base knowledge provided by scholars such as Rich, while also working within more recent discourse of queer theory, which affects elements of my study such the use of the term queer as an umbrella term inclusive of lesbians (instead of using the term homosexual, which has been criticized in the past) (Chevrette, 2013).

**Heterosexual script.** Cultural scripts exist to both guide and control our behaviour in pre-determined socially acceptable ways. Sexual scripting theory was developed to address how human sexuality responds to sociohistorical requirements to perform sex and desire (Simon & Gagnon, 1985). Kim et al. (2007), however, felt the script lacked a feminist perspective. They modified Simon and Gagnon's theory and applied Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality to produce the heterosexual script and eight specific themes to quantify the presence of the script (as shown in table 1.1 below). The premise that there is a heterosexual script that through societal or cultural forces people are impelled to follow, and that this script is presented through television, movies, advertisements, and various other medias has been discussed by numerous scholars (Kim et al., 2007). However, the heterosexual script remained a concept, similar to the idea of heteronormativity, until Kim et al. formalized a codebook to represent it (2007). This allowed for a standardized application of the heterosexual script across genres and various representations of sexuality to assist in determining whether, for example, representations of sexuality work within or outside of dominant discourses. This codification is important as it allowed me to assess the presence of the script on *Orange is the New Black* and compare it to previous research, adding to this area of investigation.



Table 1.1

*Description of codes for the heterosexual script.*

Code	Acronym	Description
Sex as Masculinity	SM	<p>“Positions sexuality as a defining component of masculinity and encompasses notions that men are sexual initiators who are preoccupied with sex and who will go to great lengths to have intercourse. It includes the idea that men are supposed to sexually objectify women and value them primarily for their physical attractiveness. Comments about phallus size or references to men’s fears about being unable to perform sexually also reflect this idea that it is important for men to actively exhibit their sexual prowess” (Kim et al., 2007, p. 147).</p>
Good Girls	GG	<p>“Describes women as sexual gate-keepers, and accordingly, holds several contradictory ideas in tension. It encompasses notions that women are passive partners in sexual relationships who do not expect, demand, or prioritize their own sexual pleasure, but who do partake in sexual activities to fulfill the sexual needs of their male partners under acceptable conditions (i.e., to keep a relationship). This code also incorporates the belief that women are responsible for setting sexual limits, for</p>

---

		thwarting men's sexual advances, and for dealing with the negative sexual consequences of sexual activity (e.g., pregnancy, feeling used). The use of words that link a woman's sexual history to her value as a person (i.e., slut, tramp, skanky, loose, jezebel, bimbo) warrants a Good Girls code" (2007, p. 147-148).
Masculine Courting Strategies	MCS	"Describe the active and powerful ways in which men attract and/or court a female partner. They encompass notions that men are protectors and providers in romantic relationships, that they assert their power in the courting ritual by buying gifts or showing off their physical strength, and that they are responsible for making the first move in dating relationships. Portrayals of women being attracted to men who exhibit wealth, power, or physical strength also warrant this code" (p. 148).
Feminine Courting Strategies	FCS	"State that women wait to be asked out by men rather than asking them out directly. They describe the passive and indirect ways in which women attract or court a male partner, such as by dressing provocatively, touching themselves suggestively, using playful innuendo, ego-stroking, or pretending to be in need of assistance. Central to this code is the notion that women objectify themselves

---

---

		and exploit their bodies to attain power in romantic relationships” (p. 148).
Masculine Commitment	MC	“States that men actively avoid commitment, marriage, monogamy, or taking their romantic relationships ‘to the next level.’ It states that men do not take part in relationship maintenance (e.g., resolving a fight, spending time together) and try to evade becoming emotionally involved with their female partners. The MC code also describes men as prioritizing sex and other activities or people (e.g., career, friends) over their romantic relationships. Accordingly, depictions of men cheating on their girlfriends or wives warrant the MC code, as do comments that either mock or pity monogamous men for having lost their freedom, power, or masculinity” (p. 148).
Feminine Commitment	FC	“Encompasses ideas about women prioritizing their romantic relationships, making sacrifices for the sake of their partners (e.g., giving up a career, spending less time with friends), seeking or asking for more commitment, monogamy, or marriage, and needing a boyfriend or a husband to feel like their lives are complete” (p. 148).
Male-Oriented Homophobia	MOH	“States that men must avoid behaving in a manner that could be construed as homosexual. Accordingly, men who

---

---

are ‘caught’ in such situations express discomfort or embarrassment. Jokes that hinge upon the audience’s understanding that a male character is being ridiculed for behaving in a manner deemed homosexual warrant the MOH code. Jokes that rely on transgressions of gender roles are not coded if no explicit ties are made to a character’s sexual orientation. For example, a boy who dresses in girl’s clothing receives the MOH code only if it is clear that the other characters believe his choice of apparel reflects his sexual orientation” (p. 148).

---

Appropriation of Female Homosexuality	AFH	“Describes homoeroticism between female characters as arousing or as a ‘turn-on’ to men” (p. 148).
---	-----	--

---

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

Television is a powerful force in constructing our understanding of socially acceptable behaviour (Kim et al., 2007; Smit, 2015) and it continues to normalize power imbalances between genders (Smith, 2012). In 2013, Netflix launched the series *Orange is the New Black* to critical acclaim; the series was nominated for 12 Emmy awards its first season (Householder & Trier-Bieniek, 2016, p. 1). Set in a women’s prison with a mostly female cast, the show has been heralded by some critics as empowering women and breaking down barriers across race and gender (Maxwell, 2014; Poniewozik, 2013). The show features female characters

underrepresented on mainstream television, including various racialized backgrounds and sexual orientations (Weiss, 2014). While the body of commentary and reflection on the show is growing, there is only a small amount of academic work published about the show (Householder et al., 2016), most of which stems from the field of cultural studies (Barak, 2016; Kim, 2016). Many of these studies explore the problematic nature of the representation of sexuality on the show, some going as far as to refer to the characters as “some of the most racist and sexist stereotypes in the history of television” (Householder et al., 2016). Yet, when watching the show, do female viewers feel the same way? In addition, how do the representations of sexuality on the show compare to other shows?

Most shows about female prisons focus on sex, while shows about male prisons focus on violence (Weiss, 2014). *Orange is the New Black* may have fallen victim to that expectation, but is it falling victim to any other assumptions about heteronormative sexuality? Weiss argues that there is a wide range of lesbians on the show, which is important as portrayal of lesbians are often through the cultural trope of “lipstick lesbians” to ensure heterosexual men continue to find them attractive (2014, p. 46). Despite that wider range of lesbian, however, Weiss notes that the main character Piper is a perfect representation of male desire—she is White, slim, blonde, and a bisexual who is attracted to equally feminine women (p. 47). Much like Gill’s (2008) discussion of the “hot lesbian” in advertising, the presentation of Piper as a “hot bisexual” is also in a manner indicative of heterosexual pornography on women in prison. In their exploration of the presentation of the lesbian body in the shows *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word*, Farr and Degroult (2008) note that it is important to understand that while a show may focus on queer characters, its production is still with the goal of the largest audience possible. This means that

queer characters need to appeal to a heterosexual audience. Interestingly, Farr and Degroult found that portrayals of long-term lesbian couples on both shows often had each member of the couple falling into an obvious masculine or feminine role, replicating more traditional heterosexual relationships (p. 427). The breakdown of the *Orange is the New Black* audience is unknown, as Netflix has shared only a small amount of information publically (Amol, 2016). In 2016, Netflix stated that 6.7 million people in the United State viewed the first episode of the fourth season over two days (Amol, 2016), demonstrating the significant size of the show's viewership.

As Minnich (2004) has argued, having shows that centre female and non-heterosexual characters is significant, but it is also important not to assume that it inherently means they are feminist or combatting the unconscious patriarchy. Exploring how these well-intentioned shows fall victim to the unconscious patriarchy, and how they do not, is important for continuing to offer non-heteronormative representations of sexuality, which benefits both women and men.

### **Summary**

In 1975, Mulvey wrote an important article addressing the binary representations of sexuality in the media and introduced the term "male gaze" (p. 9). Five years later, Rich presented the concept of compulsory heterosexuality and urged the recognition of lesbianism (1980). The binary and heteronormative representations of sexuality introduced by Mulvey (1975) and Rich (1980), continue to be represented on television (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012; Kim et al., 2007; Montemurro et al., 2014), despite evidence to show these representations are harmful (Galdi et al., 2014). How to work toward change has been addressed in various ways (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012; Marcus, 2005), while importantly recognizing the dominant discourses

that work to keep these norms in place (Chevrette, 2013; Minnich, 2004). Cultural scripts are one way that behaviours are normalized and they exist for sexual behaviour as well (Simon et al., 1985). A heterosexual script was developed to assess the presence of the script on television and determine how often it is replicated (Kim et al., 2007). While this is well-researched territory, I sought to build on this literature by applying the heterosexual script to a female-centric show to explore further the findings of Kim et al. (2007), to focus the discussion on adult women, as opposed to girls, and to explore female empowerment from the viewer's perspective. Specifically, my research looked to answer: Does the first season of *Orange is the New Black* present nuanced representations of female sexuality? How can female sexuality be presented in a manner that gives power to women while acknowledging the dominant discourse of patriarchy and its influence on heteronormativity? And finally, how can women be empowered through television?

## Research Methods

### Research Design

To examine representations of sexuality on the first season of the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black*, I executed a two-part study. Grounded within the critical paradigm, the research applied mixed methodology. Often used by feminist scholars, the critical paradigm focuses on power relations and patterns of dominance (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012; Montemurro et al., 2014), which were central to the goals of my research. Mixed methods research uses quantitative and qualitative research methods within one study (Brotto, Knudson, Inskip, Rhodes, & Erskine, 2010). In the present research, as is frequently the case with mixed methods research (Brotto et al., 2010), the quantitative analysis allowed for a base of knowledge to be applied to the qualitative aspect of the study, for a more fulsome investigation of the topic. The qualitative aspect of the research involved interviews examined through thematic analysis. Interviews facilitated a personal look at the participants' "life-world" and impact of the proposed topic on it (Kvale, 1983, p. 174). Thematic analysis allowed for the identification and analysis of patterns, or themes, across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, I investigated representations of sexuality through a feminist critical lens, applying mixed methods with the goal of a nuanced response to my research questions.

The notion of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) guided this study. The first part of the study, the quantitative analysis, involved applying codes derived from the heterosexual script (Kim et al., 2007) to specific interactions of the show's first season through a quantitative content analysis. The second part, the qualitative analysis, involved thematic analysis of interviews I conducted with women who self-identified as feminists. The interview questions



allowed me to query participants about the findings from the quantitative analysis, as well as to explore further the concepts of heteronormativity and the impact diverse representations of sexuality may have on female empowerment. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency counts) using Excel and by thematic coding of transcribed interviews.

### **Data and Method of Data Collection**

Data collection occurred in two parts to support the mixed methods of the study.

**Quantitative analysis.** The heterosexual script (Kim et al., 2007), described in more detail below, was used to analyze representations of sexuality between specific couples on the first season of *Orange is the New Black*. Couples included Piper and Alex, a lesbian couple (Piper is the protagonist of the show); Nicki and Morello, another lesbian couple; and Bennett and Daya, a heterosexual couple. Focusing on three couples kept the analysis of the number of interactions to a realistic amount—based on a single-researcher master’s-level thesis—and selecting one heterosexual couple gave the ability to compare the representations of sexuality between orientations. An interaction was a “segment in which one set of characters are together at one place and at one time” (Kim et al., 2007, p. 149). A new interaction began if a character exited or entered the scene, or if there was a change in time or location (Kim et al., 2007). To quantify the heterosexual script, I first watched episodes to determine which had interactions of representations of sexuality involving the previously identified couples. Then I re-watched the specific interactions and manually coded deductively using pre-existing codes. To conceptualize and create codes for the heterosexual script, Kim et al. (2007) took sexual scripting theory, developed by Simon and Gagnon (1986) and combined it with Rich’s concept of compulsory heterosexuality (1980). They produced eight specific themes to code for: Sex as Masculinity,

Good Girls, Masculine Courting Strategies, Feminine Courting Strategies, Masculine Commitment, Feminine Commitment, Male-Oriented Homophobia, and Appropriation of Female Homosexuality (Kim et al., 2007; see table 1.1 for details). The study that introduced these codes applied them to numerous interactions in popular television shows. The main difference between the applications of the codes in this study versus the original is that I allowed application of codes to all genders as opposed to codes being gender-specific. This allowed the ability to explore not only if the script was present, but if it was present in non-heterosexual relationships as well. In other words, in a lesbian relationship, for example, is there still clearly one character who fills the role of “man” and another the “woman”? After collecting and analyzing data for the quantitative analysis, the qualitative analysis began.

**Qualitative analysis.** Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews completed with five adult women who self-identified as feminists and had watched the first season of *Orange is the New Black*, which originally aired in 2013 (Householder et al., 2016). Initially, participants were required to have watched or re-watched the first season within the past six months. This criterion, however, posed a significant challenge in finding participants so the requirement became that participants had watched at least the first season of *Orange is the New Black* and felt comfortable discussing the show in relation to the themes of this research. As such, some participants commented on scenes that occurred in the second season of the show. Interviews allowed for a personal interpretation of the impact of the theme being discussed (Kvale, 1983) and for a deeper exploration of findings from the quantitative analysis.

A central criticism for qualitative interviews as a form of data collection is researcher bias, which manifests in asking leading questions or interpreting findings to support pre-

conceived opinions (Kvale, 1994). To address this concern, I explored and reflected on my own “presupposition and prejudices” as was suggested by Kvale as a step to counteract my own unintended influence on the interview as well as the interpretation of findings (p.155). These included my belief that compulsory heteronormativity was influencing the representations of sexuality on the show; my opinion that through patriarchy women, often unknowingly, internalize sexism and, as such, this may be reflected in the interviews; and, that as a heterosexual White woman I may be blind to issues significant to this research. Finally, through my own feminist beliefs, I have a connection to the intended participants (i.e., feminists), which could influence how the interviews were negotiated. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews to allow for fluidity of topics and the participants to determine what they felt had the most value for the discussion. I used themes and findings from the quantitative analysis to begin and centre the conversation, followed by more in-depth questions about compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity on *Orange is the New Black*, and the effect on women.

Selection of participants was through snowball sampling. This form of sampling is ideal for finding populations that may be harder to identify or are hidden (Browne, 2005). As identifying oneself as a feminist can be controversial and because it does not come with an obvious physical marker, snowball sampling worked well for identifying this population. I started this process by reaching out to feminist groups I am part of on Facebook, and encouraged interview participants to pass along the invitation to participate to others. Any person who identified as a woman was eligible to participate. Feminists were chosen as participants in the hope that they would have thought about or discussed these issues or, at the very least, be able to think critically about them.

**Method of Data Analysis**

Similar to the collection of data, data analysis occurred in two parts to support the mixed methods of the study.

**Quantitative analysis.** The heterosexual script was evaluated through quantitative content analysis of coded interactions between specific characters on the show relying on the Microsoft Office program Excel for descriptive statistics. Key information to ascertain was: how often the heterosexual script was enacted by each couple and how the amounts compared to one another; the amount specific characters displayed the script correlating with their gender or against it; how fluid the script was within non-heterosexual couples; and, whether the prevalence of the script was comparative to Kim et al.'s 2007 results.

**Qualitative analysis.** I used thematic analysis to analyze the interview texts. Thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun et al., 2006, p. 79). This technique allows the researcher to identify themes either inductively or deductively while also taking context into consideration (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). More often associated with essentialists or constructionist paradigms (Braun et al., 2006), thematic analysis can work “both to reflect reality and to unpack or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 81) and therefore worked well with the goals of this research to critically examine representations of sexuality, not just as they are presented but as to what those representations suggest. I coded themes deductively based on findings from the quantitative content analysis of this study, and related literature. Thematic analysis is a six-stage, non-linear process, meaning the researcher does not move from one stage to the next, but may revisit stages throughout the research process (Braun et al., 2006). The stages are: “familiarizing

yourself with your data”, “generating initial codes”, “searching for themes”, “reviewing themes”, “defining and naming themes”, “producing the report” (Braun et al., 2006, p. 87). Finally, findings from the quantitative analysis and the qualitative analysis were examined together to assess whether there were overarching themes produced from both, or any findings that may be in opposition and what those may represent.

### **Ethics**

As with any study involving human participants, there were ethical considerations. Prior to beginning the study, as required by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board, all participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the study and their role within it, informed on how they may opt to decline from participating, any potential risks, and the limits of confidentiality. As there was no deception in this study, and little personal information needed from participants, ethical issues were minimal. Most important was ensuring participant confidentiality, not just in this final paper, but also when storing and analyzing data. Data were stored on two password-protected USB devices (one main and one for backup) to avoid personal information remaining on a personal computer or cloud saving feature. Numbers identified participants to avoid names being associated with data. Redaction of any identifying information in the interview, such as a name of a partner or significant other, also helped maintained anonymity. Participants could opt out of participating up until all interviews were completed and transcribed, with no one opting to do so. The timing of the opportunity to opt out was determined by the time limitations of a master’s thesis and the challenge it would present to continue to meet deadlines after that substantial stage in the process.

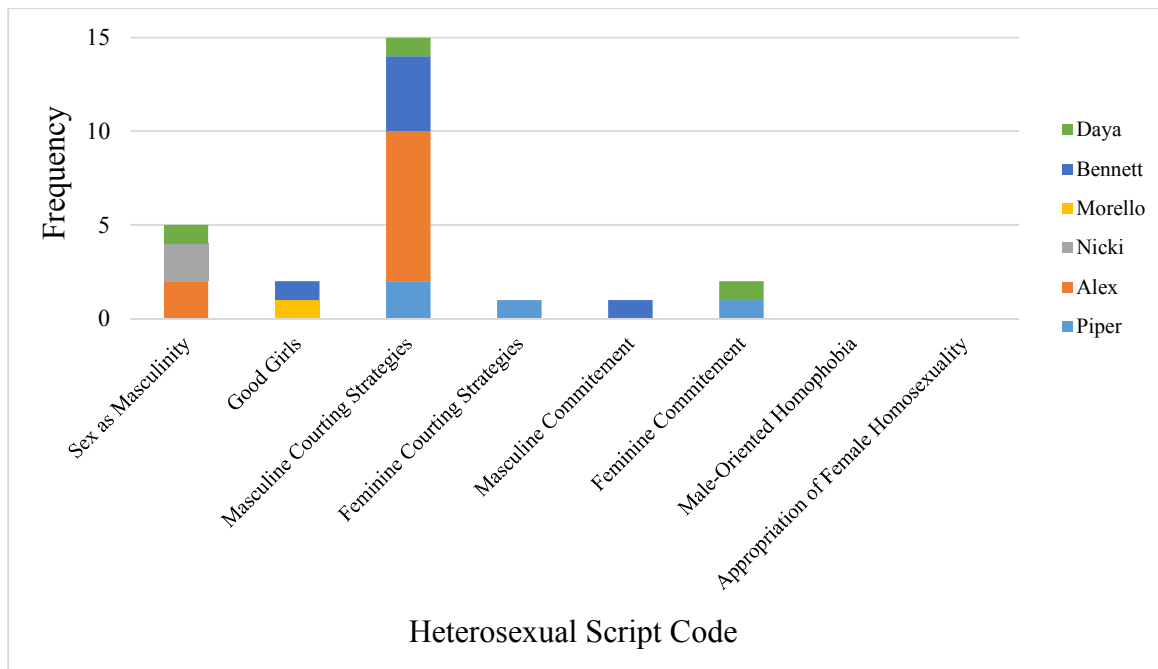
## Results

Results are presented in two parts, the quantitative analysis followed by the qualitative analysis. Discussion of findings is in the following section.

### Quantitative Analysis

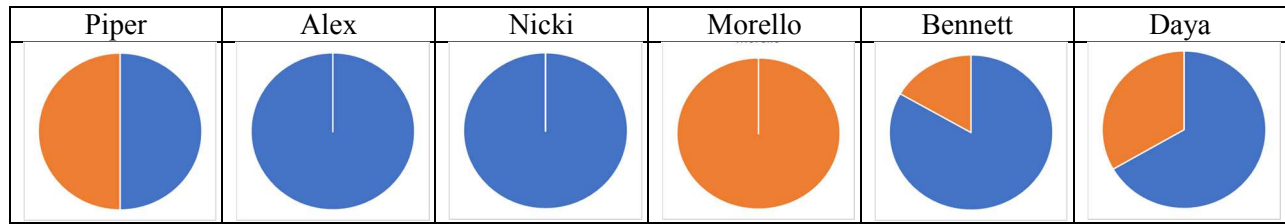
In the 13 episodes of the first season of *Orange is the New Black*, the heterosexual script was enacted 26 times between Piper and Alex, Nicki and Morello, and Bennett and Daya, averaging two references to the script per (approximately) hour-long episode (Figure 1). In the 2007 study by Kim et al., there was an average of 15.53 references to the script per one-hour of prime-time television (p. 149). While the 2007 study considered all interactions, making it challenging to compare results (due to my significantly smaller sample size), my results appear congruent with the number of references found previously. Overall, the reference of Sex as Masculinity appeared five times, four of those times by Alex and Nicki and once by Daya. Good Girls appeared only twice, once by Morello, and once by Bennett, the only man in any of the couples being analysed. Masculine Courting Strategies was the most enacted script, represented 15 times. Masculine scripts were presented significantly more often than feminine scripts, which is congruent with the findings of Kim et al. (2007).

Figure 1. Frequency of heterosexual script.



Within the three couples I examined, each had a partner who showed a trend toward more masculine references to the script; the other partner, however, did not always fall into the feminine category (Figure 2). Within Piper and Alex's relationship, Piper referenced the script four times, evenly divided between masculine and feminine references. Alex, however, referenced the script ten times using masculine references exclusively. For Nicki and Morello, whose relationship did not last the entire season, together they referenced the script three times with Nicki always referencing masculine scripts and Morello, feminine scripts. Bennett and Daya referenced the script nine times. Daya had two masculine and one feminine reference while Bennett had five masculine and one feminine references. Description of each reference to the script is below, organized by couple, in Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3

Figure 2. Percentage of feminine (orange) and masculine (blue) references to the script.



**Piper and Alex.** Enactment of the heterosexual script occurred 14 times between Piper and Alex, a lesbian couple. Table 2.1 lists the enactments in the order they appeared.

Table 2.1

*Description of heterosexual script enacted by Piper and Alex.*

Episode	Character	Script	Details
One	Piper	FCS	In a flashback scene, Piper begins swaying to some music playing and then more seductively moving her hips. Alex is sitting on a large four-post bed. Piper turns to move toward her and uses one of the posts as a makeshift stripper pole to perform while Alex watches.
	Alex	MCS	Alex is trying to convince Piper to come with her while she travels for her job. She tells her to quit her job and that she will buy her a plane ticket and “take care of her.”
	Alex	SM	Alex is again encouraging Piper to join her on her trip saying with less than subtle sexual innuendo,



“oh, I want you to cum.”

	Alex	MCS	When Piper expresses concern about travelling with Alex due to her illegal occupation, Alex assures her that she will not get in any trouble and that she will protect her.
	Alex	SM	When Alex and Piper finally meet in the airport after Piper has smuggled a suitcase of money, Alex is thrilled that she made it and says she is going “to eat her for dinner”.
Three	Alex	MCS	In a flashback scene, we see how Alex and Piper meet. Piper is handing in a résumé at a bar where Alex and her friends are drinking. Alex approaches Piper, makes fun of her résumé (which is mostly made up) and uses information on her résumé to flirt with her and signals to the bartender that she will pay for Piper's drink.
Six	Alex	MCS	At a party together, Piper remarks that she feels like she is playing house as they are hosting a party in Alex's lavish apartment. Alex comments she would like to “play doctor.”
Eight	Alex	MCS	Alex offers to help Piper fix the dryer in the prison even though if caught she will get in trouble. She

implies because she is around the machines all day  
she will know what to do

	Piper	MCS	Locked in the dryer by accident, Alex panics.  Piper wants to leave to get help but Alex begs her not to, saying “don't leave me.” Piper stays to try to get Alex free and to protect her from getting into trouble.
	Alex	MCS	Piper and Alex are having a heart-to-heart in her bunk. Alex reaches out to hold Piper's hand.
Nine	Piper	MCS	Piper gets out of the SHU (Security Housing Unit) and immediately looks for Alex. When she finds her, she pulls her into the Chapel, begins kissing her, and removes her top.
Eleven	Alex	MCS	Piper is complaining that Alex and she never spend time together anymore; Alex says, “Let me take you out tonight, anywhere you want to go.”
	Alex	MCS	Alex and Piper are laying together on Alex's bed. Alex tells Piper she “hearts” her and then kisses her.
Twelve	Piper	FC	Piper tells Alex that she found out that it was Alex who gave her name to the detectives investigating their case and, hence, put her in jail. She says it is

fine and that she is over it, thus maintaining her relationship with Alex after Larry ends it with her.

**Nicki and Morello.** The script was identified a total of three times between Nicki and Morello, a lesbian couple, listed in detail below in the order they appeared.

Table 2.2

*Description of heterosexual script enacted by Nicki and Morello.*

Episode	Character	Script	Details
Three	Nicki	SM	Standing behind Morello, Nicki possessively grabs her breasts as Piper walks by.
Five	Morello	GG	After having sex in the prison Chapel, Morello tells Nicki that they cannot be intimate anymore, setting the sexual limits of their relationship.
	Nicki	SM	After going down on Morello and Morello telling her they cannot be intimate anymore, Nicki gives her a hardtime, saying she is going to have “blue balls”.

**Bennett and Daya.** The script was identified a total of nine times between Bennett and Daya, a heterosexual couple, as described below in the order they appeared.

Table 2.3

*Description of heterosexual script enacted by Bennett and Daya.*

Episode	Character	Script	Details
Two	Daya	MCS	Daya asks Bennett for a piece of gum. He says he cannot give it to her as it might appear she likes her. She asks “Don't you?”
Three	Bennett	MCS	Another inmate is giving Daya a hard time for keeping pictures up in her room. When Bennett is brought in to mitigate, he says she can keep them up, even though it is technically not allowed.
Six	Bennett	GG	When they go into the broom closet to make out, Daya goes to perform oral sex on Bennett, which he tries to stop. While he is not successful, he does attempt to set sexual limits.
	Daya	SM	Although Bennett tells Daya not to perform oral sex, she insists saying “I want to feel all of you”.
Nine	Daya	FC	Daya decides she wants to keep the baby but wants to make sure that Bennett does not get in trouble. She knows she will need to figure

---

			something out in order to keep the baby and her relationship.
Ten	Bennett	MC	Bennett confronts Daya and tells her he knows she is pregnant. He asks if there is a pill she can take. She says she wants to keep it and that if he loves her he would want that too. He says, "If I love you? It has nothing to do with that."
Eleven	Bennett	MCS	Bennett comes up with a plan to cover up the pregnancy by suggesting they fake a death in the family so Daya can leave for the funeral. When she begins to show, she can say she had sex then.
	Bennett	MCS	Daya wonders if Bennett would be with her, on the outside. He says if they had met at a bar he would have bought her a drink, chatted her up. Then, making sure no one is watching, he kisses her.
Thirteen	Bennett	MCS	When flames shoot out of an oven when opened, Bennett, who was the guard on duty in the kitchen, grabs Daya to protect her.

---

**Qualitative Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five women who self-identified as feminists. All women were in their thirties. Four women were White, with two of the white women identifying as queer. One woman was Philapino. Through thematic analysis of these interviews, I found four overarching themes: Reflecting Diversity, Showcasing Female Sexual Agency, Telling Representative Stories, and Troubling the Status Quo that relate to the representations of sexuality on *Orange is the New Black*. A total of 19 codes are within the four themes, with some codes appearing in more than one theme. Detailed descriptions of the codes and themes are below, in tables 3.1 and 3.2, followed by an analysis of the findings from the interviews broken down by theme.

Table 3.1

*Descriptions of codes used in the thematic analysis of interviews.*

Name	Description	Example Quote
Audience	Suggesting that the potential audience influences the decision of networks and/or producers and/or show creators. Commenting on what the “average viewer” would be open to watching.	“I think shows written with a female audience in mind I think they try to write a more complicated female character.”
Boundaries	Pushing beyond what has been done before, often-creating shock	“There's a little shock value to it that flips the middle finger to

	or discomfort.	heteronormativity and I'm always here for that.”
Characters	Complex characters that are not just good or bad but have numerous characteristics that can even at times be at odds with each other.	“I think it [the character Caputo] nicely shows how people who are doing bad things consistently can tell themselves they are doing good things for the right reasons.”
Consent	Representing the layers of consent in positive or negative ways	“I think they could have done a better job at showing how complicated consent can be.”
Decision Makers	Questioning the diversity of the network, writers, creators etc.	“I could not shake the image... of the all-White women writing for the show and it suddenly made total sense... these are people trying to shepherd something that they have no business shepherding and that's not right.”
Distance	Admitting improvements have been made from the past, but saying it still is not enough or still has significant improvements to make.	“Well god forbid you make it [the show] too gay!”

Heterosexual Males	Having storyline, characters, or themes that would appeal to a heterosexual male audience, includes reference to the male gaze.	“Rarely did they show the more butch women in scenes like... the people that they show having sex were definitely more appealing I think to heteronormative things.”
Limits	Not pushing boundaries past what has been done before or stopping a storyline at a certain point as if it has reached the limit of the boundaries that the creators/producers were willing to push.	“Change is incremental.”
Narrative	Scenes feel important to the narrative and not thrown in for other reasons.	“It's a relationship; it's not just for the scene in a movie that's going to sell tickets.”
Novelty	Seeing something you have never seen before on television.	“I don't think you see a lot of lesbians going down on each other like that on TV... <i>Orange is the New Black</i> may be one of the first shows, if not the first show, that I have seen sex scenes like that.”
Problems	Positioning a storyline, character,	“The way it was presented as this



	or scene in a way that the interviewee suggests is questionable, problematic, or creates uncomfortable associations.	romantic relationship when she has no power in the situation... it's like they're trying to position it like its ok because he's hot.”
Real Life	Believing a character or storyline is true to life, grounded in what the character or people would experience in real life.	“Fifteen years ago I feel like the cast would have looked a lot different and it would have been maybe sexier as opposed to trying to look real.”
Self	The importance of seeing people similar to yourself represented on television.	“The bulk of what we see is male/female and that doesn't reflect a lot of people and that doesn't reflect me. So it's nice to see something that reflects part of me.”
Sex	Showing sex as fun and positive; includes focusing on or discussing female pleasure, and promoting sexual agency in women.	“Taking this stereotypically slutty behaviour and it’s all about women in their own economic system.”
Status Quo	How seeing diversity on television can help normalize it to	“It kinda opens your eyes to what is normal for other people... it

	viewers.	broadens your ideas of what people's lives are like outside of your own.”
Stereotypes	Enforcing a stereotype by repeating their representation includes use of clichés, or cultural tropes.	“[describing the character Sophia] I'm your sassy best friend who is just here to listen to your problems and provide advice and not have this be a reciprocal relationship in any way.”
Trojan Horse	Using "ins" with the general population—in this case, it is thin, attractive, White women—in order to tell the stories of a more diverse population.	“I think it is a really practical decision because to get something green lit and to get viewers that are not queer women, you need to nod to dominant culture and make characters who are easy ins.”
Whiteness	Having storylines or themes centering White characters. Having people of colour as accessories to stories	“Why is it centered on this 'poor' White woman?”
Women	Seeing diverse women on television, having a show represent diverse women based	“As a woman, it's empowering to see all different types and kinds of women whether it's race, age, body

---

on various factors, including:  race, sexuality orientation,  gender, body type, age, etc.	types, sexualities, all of that. To see  anything represented in various  forms on television is  empowering.”
--	--

---

Table 2.2

*Descriptions of themes used in thematic analysis of interviews.*

Name	Description	Codes with Theme
Reflecting  Diversity	Encompasses the idea that  <i>Orange is the New Black</i> must  reflect diverse women for it to be  truly feminist, which includes  both the characters on screen and  key players off screen	Audience, Decision Makers,  Novelty, Stereotype, Whiteness,  and Women
Showcasing Female  Sexual Agency	Emphasizes that seeing diverse  representations of sexuality can  help women assert agency over  their own sexuality, but  problematic representations can  hinder the development of that  agency.	Consent, Sex, and Status Quo
Telling	Asserts that simply including	Characters, Decision Makers,

---

Representative Stories	certain stories is not enough. The tactics used to get a story aired, how representations of sexuality are included in the narrative, and how well it reflects reality—particularly of marginalized groups—is important.	Heterosexual Males, Narrative, Problems, Real Life, Self, and Trojan Horse
Troubling the Status Quo	Stresses that a show cannot remain stagnant and be empowering; it needs to listen to past critiques and do it better.	Boundaries, Characters, Distance, Limits, Real Life, Self, Sex, Status Quo, Stereotype, and Whiteness

---

**Reflecting diversity.** As outlined above, this theme includes six codes: Audience, Decision Makers, Novelty, Stereotype, Whiteness and Women. The theme Reflecting Diversity encompasses the idea that *Orange is the New Black* must reflect diverse women for it to be truly feminist, which includes both the characters on screen and key players off screen.

**On screen.** All participants touched on the issue of diversity in their interview. From a more positive perspective, the diversity of the female characters on the show was heralded with one participant saying, “as a woman, it's empowering to see all different types and kinds of women whether it's race, age, body types, sexualities, all of that. To see anything represented in various forms on television is empowering.” Others commented on the impact of seeing representations of sexuality that they had never seen before on television: “I don't think you see a

lot of lesbians going down on each other like that on TV... *Orange is the New Black* may be one of the first shows, if not the first show, that I have seen sex scenes like that.” Yet, participants did not deem having diverse women appear on their television screens adequate in itself. The discussion of diversity also included how the show works to enforce or reflect stereotypes, particularly concerning race, which participants presented as the most significant issue with the show. Issues discussed included problematic presentations of Latinx and Black characters and questioning why the show centered a White character. One participant noted that almost all representations of sexuality were with White characters, with only one exception she could think of. Another participant summed up the overall tone when she responded to the question whether she thought the show was feminist: “If I'm looking at it as intersectional... it's a mainstream feminist show,” suggesting that while the show does some things right, it still speaks mostly to the experiences of White women.

*Off screen.* All participants agreed that the diversity of the people able to influence the show—from the audience to the writers and producers—had a significant impact on representations of diversity. Discussions on how the audience dictates the decisions made by people in charge of the show bordered on hopeless, outlining the mainstream audience as being White, heterosexual, middle class, and cisgender with a desire to see only themselves reflected on screen. Participants often reflected on the diversity of the writers as a reason for why the presentation of some stories were not as nuanced others. One participant described feeling uncomfortable with the narratives of some characters of colour and then around that time discovering that the writing team for the show was all White women. “I could not shake the image... of the all-White women writing for the show and it suddenly made total sense... these

are people trying to shepherd something they have no business shepherding.” She went on to say: “Where *Orange is the New Black* really, really missed the mark is White women thinking they can tell everyone's stories without realizing how much privilege they wield... you can't go from the more powerful dynamic on the ability to oppress people and then decide that you're going to be the translator for more oppressed people.”

**Showcasing sexual agency.** This theme includes three codes: Consent, Sex, and Status Quo. This theme emphasizes that seeing diverse representations of sexuality can help women assert agency over their own sexuality, but problematic representations can hinder the development of that agency. Positive aspects of this theme focused on showing sex as something joyful or lingering on female pleasure. Besides simply enjoying seeing that reflected on the screen, one participant discussed how it goes deeper than that. “I also think it gives women a lot more sexual agency when it is two women negotiating what sex is going to look like other than the way that sex is normally portrayed in the media which is a man doing things to a woman, who for some reason has a bra on.” In an extension of this theme, participants discussed how seeing diverse representations of sexuality normalizes it for people, allowing them to imagine diverse options for themselves as well as accept this diversity in others. Yet, problematic presentations can also enforce heteronormative ideals. Participants extensively discussed this concept in terms of the relationship between Bennett and Daya and the clear imbalance of power. Only two participants went as far as to say the dynamic was sexual assault, but almost all of them questioned the presentation of the relationship as romantic. “The Daya and Bennett relationship, which I would argue it not consensual, cannot be consensual, it is painted as very romantic and sexual and positive and essentially that they are on a level playing field... I think

they could have done a better job at showing how complicated consent can be. In that probably if you asked the character Daya, she'd probably say, 'ya, I'm consenting to this'. And she is. But it's a very constrained choice. And I think we see as the relationship plays out that she has less and less choice and less and less ability to say no.”

**Telling representative stories.** This theme includes eight codes: Characters, Decision Makers, Heterosexual Males, Narrative, Problems, Real Life, Self, and Trojan Horse. Overall this theme asserts that simply including certain stories is not enough. The tactics used to get a story aired, how representations of sexuality are included in the narrative, and how well it reflects reality—particularly of marginalized groups—is important.

**Tactics used.** Three of the five participants discussed what they considered the reality of getting diverse stories on the air, and that it requires pandering to dominant culture. I have described this as the Trojan horse tactic, which references the Greek myth where soldiers were able to get into the city of Troy by hiding in a large wooden horse. Participants believed *Orange is the New Black* was taking advantage of the same tactic: centering the show on two White, attractive, feminine-presenting women to garner a more mainstream, and thus larger, audience. “I feel like you get the hook with these two beautiful, White, feminine-presenting women as the leads and ... that was going to be the lead to get the show funded, to get people hooked, to tell all these other stories that are far more fascinating than the White women leads.” One participant did acknowledge the problematic nature of this, “if all you ever have is the Trojan horse approach that completely by default sells out people who don't normally present heteronormatively.”

**Part of narrative.** Most of the participants commented on how impactful it was that the representations of sexuality on *Orange is the New Black* were on a more mainstream show and that the scenes were not for shock value or to garner viewers, but were an important part of the stories being told. One participant noted, “I guess it's had more of an impact because it's not just marginalized shows that are slightly pornographic and not very good stories but they [representations of sexuality] have become a part of an interesting show and its one piece of it. It is not the whole thing, but it's an important piece.”

**Reflecting reality.** The discussions around the importance of reflecting reality were nuanced and had both positive and negative aspects in terms of how well this was done. The impact of seeing yourself reflected on television, both in terms of how the participants themselves found that empowering (“The bulk of what we see is male/female, that doesn't reflect a lot of people, and that doesn't reflect me. So it's nice to see something that reflects part of me.”) and what it could mean to other people (“For anyone who is figuring out their sexuality or knows who they are but hasn't seen anything like that before I think it is definitely a good thing to see.”) was an essential part of the conversation. Emphasis was placed on the importance of having nuanced characters and many participants applauded the show for having rich, complex characters.

Participants stressed the importance of authenticity or *getting it right* when delving into complex issues. All participants discussed the storyline of transgender inmate Sophia in terms of how nuanced it was and how well it was presented. One participant discussed how it reflected many of the issues—access to hormones and medical care, family tensions—that she had witnessed her own transgender friends face. Participants described having a transgender woman



play a transgender woman as groundbreaking as well as important if not essential. Yet, the characters and the representations of sexuality were not all seen in a positive light. When discussing an episode in season two when two butch-presenting queer women take part in a competition to sleep with as many women as possible, one participant was frustrated at how heteronormative it was: “It feels like these characters are viewing women in a way that typically we see men view women. They're objectified; they're seen as conquests rather than relationships or actual human beings who have feelings and thoughts. They're literally just numbers to check off.” All participants also discussed the relationship between characters Bennett and Daya—a guard and inmate who become romantically involved. Most participants found the positioning of this storyline as romantic to be very problematic. “The way it was presented as this romantic relationship when she has no power in the situation... it's like they're trying to position it like its ok because he's hot.”

**Troubling the status quo.** This theme encompasses ten codes: Boundaries, Characters, Distance, Limits, Real Life, Self, Sex, Status Quo, Stereotype, and Whiteness. This theme stresses that a show cannot remain stagnant and be empowering; it needs to listen to past critiques and do it better. One participant presented a concept that encompasses what all participants expressed as the need to push the boundaries, but the realistic limits of pushing those boundaries. She said, “There's this idea in politics that's call the Overton window and it's easily the bounds of what is acceptable, and the window shifts... So [television show] *Will and Grace* [which aired 1998-2006] made it so we could imagine being friends with the sassy gay guy and once we got comfortable with that maybe we could get comfortable with an Ellen [DeGeneres]-type lesbian... by getting people comfortable we can shift our Overton window so [characters

like butch-presenting Boo] are just on the outside. Change is incremental.” Likely due to this understanding that change is incremental, participants heralded aspects of the show that pushed past boundaries (“There's a little shock value to it that flips the middle finger to heteronormativity and I'm always here for that.”), while also acknowledging the show has a long way to go in certain areas (“I think it has a ways to go to really be representative and intersectional.”). Participants discussed the power to normalize representations of sexuality as well as the problems with reflecting current stereotypes in similar ways as outlined in above themes. While areas that the boundaries could have been pushed farther—such as having more butch women in romantic relationships, seeing Sophia navigate a sexual relationship with someone other than her wife, or having more nuanced depictions of the women of colour on the show—participants did acknowledge the many ways *Orange is the New Black* has taken depictions of female, queer, and transgender characters further by placing them as central characters.

### **Discussion**

The goals of this study were to identify whether the first season of the female-centric show *Orange is the New Black* presented more nuanced representation of female sexuality, to explore ways this could be done while acknowledging the dominant discourse of patriarchy and its influence on heteronormativity, and to assess how women can be empowered through television. The notion of compulsory heterosexuality guided the two-part analysis involving quantitative content analysis and thematic coding of interviews. To further explore the findings of this research and to connect the results back to the theories and studies introduced in the Literature Review, I will begin by discussing the heterosexual script and an aspect of the representations of sexuality that the script did not capture, and relate this back to Mulvey, followed by a discussion of the use of the male gaze on the show. I will then explore the role of the audience in influencing what gets aired, and the differences between the participants' views and what some researchers have suggested. A concept introduced by one participant, the Overton window, will be explored in more depth and in relation to whether or not more representation is necessarily better. Female empowerment through television and the discussion of sexual agency by participants will lead into outlining what type of feminism, if any, is being advanced by the show by revisiting the unconscious patriarchy and acknowledging that unconscious racism goes hand-in-hand.

#### **Heterosexual Script**

Using the heterosexual script to code interactions in three couples (Piper and Alex, Nicki and Morello, and Bennett and Daya), I found that each had one member who filled the more masculine role by enacting exclusively, or almost exclusively, masculine scripts. Their partner,

however, did not always fall into the feminine category as clearly. The one relationship that most closely followed the heterosexual script was the queer relationship of Nicki and Morello.

Interestingly, they both also *performed* their gender in a manner that correlated with the masculine or feminine scripts they enacted. Nicki, the more masculine, wore baggy clothes that hid her figure, had messy hair, and acted in a more vulgar and often even predatory way toward women. Morello, on the other hand, almost always wore makeup, curled her hair, and discussed her upcoming (heterosexual) wedding extensively. A major factor not caught by the script, and demonstrated well through this relationship, was which character was more likely to perform oral sex/manual stimulation and which was more likely to receive it. There was a memorable sex scene between Nicki and Morello (which every participant brought up in their interview) where Nicki is performing oral sex on Morello in the prison chapel. We see Morello orgasm and Nicki, in a slightly vulgar manner, go on about how long it took her to finish. Nicki, indicating it is now her turn begins to take off her pants. Morello stops her and this is when she ends their relationship. Nicki is frustrated and comments that she is going to have “blue balls”. Nicki is clearly taking the more masculine role in this situation with her use of this obvious male term but also through her more lewd behaviour. Morello is filling the more feminine role by setting limits on their sexual relationship as well as filling the passive role of receiving oral stimulation.

Nicki’s apparent arousal from giving oral sex plays into the very heteronormative idea, as discussed by Mulvey, of a man’s pleasure being active and a woman’s passive (1975, p. 9).

This dichotomy was also seen through Alex and Piper’s relationship, with Alex taking the more masculine role and more often being the one to initiate sex and more likely to be shown performing oral sex or manual stimulation. When Alex and *Nicki* have a brief sexual encounter,

Nicki is the one to perform manual stimulation as she is the one, through dress and behaviour, who is the more masculine of the two, even though they both fill the more masculine role in their main relationships examined through this study. For heterosexual couple Bennett and Daya, there is one oral sex scene. In this scene, Daya performs oral sex. At first glance, this could be construed as flipping the heterosexual script with the female character being more active. However, the scene is not that simple. The couple meets in the supply closet and Daya gets on her knees so she can “feel all” of Bennett. Bennett at first refuses, saying, “Please don’t”. Daya continues and we see that Bennett is an amputee below the knee on one leg. We assume his hesitation is due to being embarrassed about his condition. This is a moment where a male character could be seen as weak or more traditionally feminine, but I would argue it works to enforce a dominant narrative of masculinity: Men always want sex. Bennett very clearly says no to Daya, but because he is a man and she assumes he would obviously want sex, she continues. The viewer gets confirmation when they see his leg: It was not that he did not want sex; he was just embarrassed. The missing leg represents as a sort of semi-castration (the concept of castration was explored by Mulvey her in 1975 article), which explains Bennet’s discomfort. This makes him feels he is less of a man but when Daya still continues to pleasure him, showing that she still finds him attractive and manly, he is reassured of his status as a man.

These findings demonstrate that while queer representations of sexuality are front and centre on *Orange is the New Black*, and certain barriers have been broken such as having diverse types of lesbians on the show (as discussed earlier), the representations of female sexuality lack nuance. The heterosexual script continues to be enacted through even queer relationships and

appears to be perpetuated in ways not captured by the codes developed by Kim et al. (2007) while still enacting the male/active, female/passive dichotomy.

### **The Male Gaze**

Many of the participants I interviewed commented they appreciated that the representations of sexuality were part of the larger narratives of numerous characters. In other words, they appreciated that the representations were a genuine part of the story and were not thrown in for ratings, shock value, or to attract a larger audience. This immediately made me think of Mulvey and her discussion of the male gaze (1975, p. 9). As discussed previously, Mulvey argues that depictions of women are as an “erotic object” either for the male character in the film or for the male spectator in the theatre (p. 10). She asserts that female characters rarely functioned to enhance or move the story along; in fact, they are often no more than a distraction to it (p. 10). To have representations of sexuality be part of the story means they cannot be a distraction to it. It also means that even if female characters are presented in an erotic manner, it is for a purpose and not (at least not exclusively) for male enjoyment. While participants did not directly refer to the male gaze, I believe their enjoyment of many of the representations of sexuality in *Orange is the New Black* was because they did not pander, or at least pandered less, to the male gaze.

One way the show may have strategically used the male gaze was through having two slim, attractive, feminine-presenting leads for the show, as discussed through the Trojan horse code previously. One of the participants deemed this “the Shonda Rhimes tactic,” which references television-show creator Shonda Rhimes whose first big hit was *Grey’s Anatomy*. Centering the White, straight character Meredith Grey, the show’s supporting characters were

much more diverse and their stories took more prominence through the years of the show.

Rhimes has since launched two shows centering Black women, which she has arguably been able to do because of the success of *Grey's Anatomy*. Participants believed *Orange is the New Black* was taking advantage of the same tactic: focusing the show on two White, attractive, feminine-presenting women to garner a more mainstream, and thus larger, audience. By acknowledging the male gaze through these two characters, and thus perpetuating heteronormativity, the creators took a show that could be unfamiliar and divisive for many to one more recognizable to the audiences' lives and what they currently view on television. This, however, makes numerous assumptions about the viewing audience, which I discuss further in the next section.

### **The Power of the Audience**

Householder et al. (2016) argue that "*Orange is the New Black* challenges the assumptions of media moguls who argue that television must pander to the 18-35 male demographic, a type of cultural patriarchy that limits women's standpoints and diminishes women's experiences as active consumers and makers of media" (p. 1). Yet, the participants I interviewed spoke at length about how the audience dictates television content, and they were more pessimistic. Their perception of the mainstream audience was that they are White, heterosexual, cisgender, and middle class and would only want to see themselves reflected on screen. Where Householder et al. (2016) see the popularity of *Orange is the New Black* as hopeful in its ability to open the minds of media executives to new audience, participants blamed the audience for keeping more nuanced, diverse, and representative stories from airing.

Interestingly, participants' assumption that the audience kept stories from airing does demonstrate a recognition by viewers themselves of the power the audience ultimately has in influencing popular media content. In their exploration of the presentation of the lesbian body in shows *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word*, Farr and Degroult note that it is important to understand that while a show may centre queer characters, its production is still with the goal of the largest audience possible (2008, p. 427). This means that queer characters still need to appeal to a heterosexual audience. Yet, as the needs of female viewers and their ability to garner a large enough audience to support a show has been growing since the success of Lifetime Television Network (Hundley, 2002), it seems misdirected for researchers to continually mention the need for heterosexual (and usually male) audience to find some (often stereotypical) draw to a show. For participants, the discussion was around increasing the number of marginalized people represented on shows and the implication was that this would combat sexism as well as racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

Unfortunately, little is publically known about the *Orange is the New Black* audience as Netflix shares very little information. Only recently did Netflix publicize that the first episode of the fourth season of *Orange is the New Black* had 6.7 million US viewers over 2 days (Amol, 2016). From this information, assumptions can be made about the viewing audience of the first season. It was likely smaller but still a significantly-sized audience. The larger the audience the more likely the show is not catering to a niche viewership and attracting what would likely be considered a mainstream audience. This lack of information does bring up the interesting new dynamic of streaming television services, like Netflix, who make decisions on shows based not only on the number of viewers but by patterns and themes of viewing as well as audience ratings.



Streaming services also require subscriptions and it is unlikely viewers subscribe for one specific show, which perhaps gives these companies the ability to take risks on some shows when they have others popular shows keeping a large number of viewers subscribing.

### **Is More Better?**

The number of lead or recurring queer characters on television has slowly been increasing over time. In the 1997-1998 television season, there were 16, which increased to 29 just three years later (Fisher, Hill, Grube & Gruber, 2007, p. 169). Yet these characters are still in the vast minority. While queer characters in recent programming are less likely to be depicted as either asexual or simply never in a romantic relationship than in the 1990s (Fisher et al., 2007, p. 170), many current scholars argue that queer characters, when present, are influenced by the ideology of heteronormativity (Dhaenens, 2013; Farr et al., 2008; Frohard-Dourlent, 2012; Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). Numerous scholars have examined specific shows in regard to the role of heteronormativity and have found a mixture of results ranging from damaging to empowering (Dhaenens, 2013; Frohard-Dourlent, 2012; Westerfelhaus et al., 2006). A 2012 study on heteroflexibility in the comic book series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* found that images in the media have become more representative of sexual minorities; however, that has not seemed to disrupt the heterosexual script and other heteronormative assumptions (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012, p. 719). One participant interviewed brought up the concept of the Overton window, which is normally used in politics. The participant described it as follows: “There’s this idea in politics that’s called the Overton window and it’s easily the bounds of what is acceptable, and the window shifts... So [television show] *Will and Grace* [which aired 1998-2006] made it so we could imagine being friends with the sassy gay guy and once we got

comfortable with that maybe we could get comfortable with an Ellen [DeGeneres]-type lesbian... by getting people comfortable we can shift our Overton window so [characters like butch-presenting Boo] are just on the outside. Change is incremental.” This suggest that while portrayals of queer characters, or other marginalized people, may not be as nuanced as we would like, more really can mean better because it is a necessary stage of creating change. Yet, to many feminists the concept behind the Overton window is insufficient, as it does not address systemic oppression or work to dismantle it.

### **Empowering Women through Television**

Empowerment can be a challenging term to define and qualify, yet it is referenced and discussed in numerous feminist (and other) studies on sexuality (Cato & Carpentier, 2010; Gill, 2008; Tolman, 2012). Many of the participants in this study discussed empowerment through the show in one way or another in their interviews. One participant discussed empowerment through the manifestation of female sexual agency by the representations of queer sexuality on the show. She noted that presenting queer women navigating sexual relationships on the show offered viewers an alternative to the heteronormative representations of sexuality that pervade popular culture and thus allowed them to consider potential new ways to express and explore their own sexual relationships. Another participant discussed female sexual empowerment through the joy of seeing gratuitous representations of queer sexuality when she discussed the competition between Nicki and Boo to sleep with the most people at the start of season two. While one participant found this to be frustratingly heteronormative (as discussed previously), this participant found the focus on women unabashedly attempting to sleep with other women a nod to the queer female viewership of the show and highly entertaining in its uniqueness on

television. As Rich wrote, “The lie of compulsory female heterosexuality today... keeps numberless women psychologically trapped, trying to fit mind, spirit, and sexuality into a prescribed script” (Rich, 1980, p. 657). I think both participants mentioned above found ways that *Orange is the New Black* empowered women but offering an alternative to the “lie of compulsory female heterosexuality” that Rich referenced.

Though not always explicitly said, the underlying message from most, if not all participants, was that diverse representation of women is empowering. One participant noted that seeing diverse women (and she noted not just race or sexual orientation but also age and body size) was empowering. This, however, brings us back to the question of whether or not a change in one aspect of oppression reflects a larger systemic change. Can a show empower women if it still operates within the dominant discourse of patriarchy and does not actively work to dismantle it? Does it matter if the viewers of the show find empowerment within it regardless?

### ***Orange is the New Black* as a Feminist Vehicle**

As outlined previously, this study used a definition of feminism from hooks: “to be ‘feminist’ in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression” (1982, p. 185). In *Orange is the New Black*, an important step toward ending sexism is the centering of female characters and showing characters beyond the Madonna/whore trope. This diverse representation of women is important to de-essentialize “woman” and female gender stereotypes. This presentation of diverse female characters is representative of liberal feminism, where the focus is on individual empowerment, rights, and access equal to that of men (Donner, 1992, p. 155). Yet, as I discussed in the Literature Review, these changes are not necessarily a reflection of a change in the dominant

discourse of patriarchy. Feminist critic McRobbie (2004) is judgmental of this form of liberal feminism in popular culture for that reason; she argues liberal feminism focuses on individual choice and does not work to dismantle systems of oppression. The participants in this study used the term intersectional feminism, which is a type of feminism that addresses multiple axes of oppression. They used the term to discuss and question the diversity of the characters as well as the key decision makers of the show. When discussing the characters, the focus was often on why a White woman was the protagonist of the show and why the storylines of women of colour seemed to be relegated to b-line stories. When referring to the writers, the criticism was on their lack of racial diversity.

Yet, intersectional feminism, as introduced by Crenshaw (1989), is more nuanced than this in its argument that women's liberation cannot focus solely on gender oppression. In a recent interview, Crenshaw notes that having multiple axes of oppression does not ensure someone's approach is intersectional (The Laura Flanders Show, 2017). This is important because the participant's comments on a lack of intersectionality on the show focused mostly on quantity, which is more indicative of liberal feminism. This does not mean the participants misunderstood the term, as I am confident most of them did not, but it does draw attention to an important distinction as to what kind of feminism *Orange is the New Black* is embracing. Similar to the Madonna/whore trope mentioned earlier, Latinx women have a gendered duality that they try to combat: "Marianismo"/"Malinchismo" (Hurtado, 1998, p. 141), "the dichotomize womanhood into the 'good woman' and 'bad woman,' depending on how women exercise their sexuality" (p. 142). *Orange is the New Black* has numerous Latinx characters on the show, yet one participant noted the stereotypical way these characters were portrayed. Daya (the most prominent Latinx

character on the show) and her mother each, arguably, each fall into one side of the Marianismo/Malinchismo trope. When discussing racial stereotypes on the show, one participant noted that all of the show's writers were White women. The importance of having female writers was clearly acknowledged by the show's decisions makers, yet it appears the same was not considered for race. With the barriers the show has broken in terms of having numerous women of colour, queer women, and a prominent transgender character, I would argue it is clear the writers were not intentionally setting out to oppress anyone; however, what this is evidence of is unconscious racism. This lack of racialized diversity on the writing team may have contributed to the less nuanced portrayals of the women of colour on the show. Criticism of the writing team as well as racist presentations of certain characters is when the participants begin to question the intersectionality of the show in earnest. These points begin to address the notion of the ways women who have multiple axis of oppression continue to be silenced by various systems, in this case through the mechanisms of unconscious sexism and unconscious racism.

By examining participants' feedback on the show, the ideas behind both liberal and intersectional feminism, as well as the definition of feminism used in this study, I would argue that the show works to push forward a liberal feminist agenda. Yet, this raises the questions: through the representation of sexuality does the show work to present a feminism analysis concerned with dismantling patriarchy?; does it work to question or re-direct the male gaze to lessen the ways popular culture works to control women?; does it work to empower women? These questions are not easy to answer. In the many studies I read on various televisions shows analyzing representations of queer characters (Farr & Degroult, 2008; Fryett, 2016; Hanan, 2013), the assessments were rarely, if ever, black and white. "My feelings on the show, though,

remain complex and at times contradictory,” wrote Fryett in her article about race and identity politics on *Orange is the New Black*. When participants were asked whether they thought the show was feminist, most hesitated when responding. I believe that this reflects their agreement that certain feminist ideals—in my opinion, liberal feminist ideals focused at the level of individual identities—are being pushed with this show. Yet, the representations of sexuality themselves seem to lack a recognition of the dominant discourses that colour them and offer little substance beyond entertainment.

### **Limitations, Exclusions, and Future Research**

In her article on female sexual agency in advertising, Gill (2008) questions the introduction of sexually empowered women in advertising in a post-feminist era and whether this perceived empowerment had actually become a way to “discipline and regulate” women (p. 35). This post-feminist and neoliberal framework is one of the many lenses and themes that while applicable to this discussion and research questions posed in this study, were beyond the scope of this research. Other feminist issues brought forth by the show include prison abolishment as well as queer masculinity that could produce interesting and significant research. While there were numerous additional themes and issues that could have been addressed by this research but were determined to be beyond its capacity, I did maintain a degree of flexibility when determining what I was able to include and what I was not. In fact, when this research was initiated, race was not an aspect that was going to be part of the study. Yet, after interviewing participants and the emphasis and concern they raised when discussing representations of women of colour on the show, it became imperative that it be part of the larger discussion within this research.

Many of the limitations within in this study were purposely maintained to observe the range of a master's thesis in a professionally-oriented program, while others were done to address issues in new ways. The heterosexual script was not originally designed to be applied in the exact way it was, which resulted in some unexpected findings as well as noticing certain behaviours that could not be captured by the script, as described in more detail above. Due to a small sample size for interviews, and likely because of snowball sampling, the group of individuals interviewed were all within the same age range and there was little racial diversity with only one woman of colour participating. All participants were cisgender—"remaining on the same side of the gender that a person was assigned at birth" (Tate, 2012, p. 18)—leaving another noticeable gap in potential audience members who may have unique and important perspectives related to my research questions. The exclusion of men and non-binary individuals from the Qualitative Analysis of this study was not due to the assumption that their opinions could not produce interesting and relevant findings. Again, due to the scope of the study, it seemed prudent to focus on women to allow for the increased likelihood of the production of themes. Exclusion of men and non-binary individuals from this study was not because of any assumption that they are unable to self-identify as feminists. Beyond addressing these limitations or exploring some of the related topics addressed above, future research could assess if improvements on the representations of sexuality occur as the show progresses, perhaps demonstrating a willingness of the decision makers to tell diverse stories once the popularity of the show was solidified. The heterosexual script could also be expanded to include new findings, such as which partner is more likely to perform oral sex/manual stimulation, as were found to be missing in this study. Finally, continuing to explore what aspects of representation of sexuality

women find empowering, what aspects they do not, and how they define that empowerment is crucial to creating television programming that dispels the male/active, female/passive dichotomy and presents feminist representations of sexuality for women to embrace.



### Conclusion

The goals of this mixed methods study were to identify whether the first season of the female-centric show *Orange is the New Black* presented more nuanced representations of female sexuality, to explore ways this could be done while acknowledging the dominant discourse of patriarchy and its influence on heteronormativity, and to assess how women can be empowered through television. To contribute to the scholarly research in this area, I worked to expand on the heterosexual script developed by Kim et al. (2007) by applying it to another show and by assessing the presence of heteronormative codes regardless of a character's sex or gender. I chose to focus this study on women, as there appears to be significantly less research on the effects of representations of sexuality on women as opposed to girls. By taking a feminist perspective interested in liberation from sexism, interviewing women who define themselves as feminists, and focusing on the concept of female empowerment, I took a stance that seems to be less common.

Through applying the heterosexual script to an analysis of interactions of the three main couples on the show, I found that the heterosexual script was still present and that it was enacted in queer relationships. In fact, when two of the more masculine members of two different queer relationships had a brief sexual encounter, the more masculine-presenting of the two took on the heteronormative role of the "man". Discussions with feminist women who had watched at least the first season of the show focused on aspects of the sexual representations of the show that were seen as more positive, such as the diversity of women represented, the focus on women and their sexual pleasure, and having sexuality be an important aspect of the narratives. Criticism centred on stereotypical representations of race, how White stories seemed to take prominence, and how the main central queer characters were still presented in a very feminine,

heteronormative way. As discussion moved past simply showing diverse women, it became clear that the show does work to push a liberal feminist agenda but it does not work to address the systemic oppression of women through acknowledging or working to disrupt the unconscious patriarchy. Examined together, the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this study suggest that the first season of *Orange is the New Black* has centred female and queer stories but has done little more to empower women. The notion of compulsory heterosexuality has influenced the representations of sexuality on the show by continuing to use heterosexuality as the norm to assess and represent queer relationships. Knowing who the “man” is in any relationship still appears to be a necessary element when displaying representations of sexuality.

## References

- Amol, S. (2016, June 29). Nielson unveils streaming rating for 'Orange is the New Black', 'Seinfeld'. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nielsen-unveils-streaming-ratings-for-orange-is-the-new-black-seinfeld-1467217573>
- APA, American Psychological Association. (2007). *Report of the APA task force on the sexualisation of girls*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf>
- Barak, K. S. (2016). Jenji Kohan's Trojan horse: Subversive uses of whiteness, Householder, A. P., & Trier-Bieniek, A. (Ed.), *Feminist perspectives on Orange is the New Black: Thirteen critical essays* (pp. 45-60). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Brotto, L. A., Knudson, G., Inskip, J., Rhodes, K., & Erskine, Y. (2010). Asexuality: A mixed methods approach. *Archive of Sexual Behaviour*, 39, 599-618. doi: 10.1007/s10508-008-9434-x
- Browne, K. (2005). Snowball sampling: Using social networks to research non-heterosexual women. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 47-60. doi: 10.1080/1364557032000081663
- Cato, M. & Carpentier, F. R. D. (2010). Conceptualizations of female empowerment and enjoyment of sexualized characters of reality television. *Mass Communication and Society*, 13, 270-288. doi: 10.1080/15205430903225589

Chevrette, R. (2013). Outing heteronormativity in interpersonal and family communication:

Feminist application of queer theory “beyond the sexy streets”. *Communication Theory*, 23(2), 170-190. doi: 10.1111/comt.12009

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique

of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *Chicago Legal Forum*, 139, 139-167. Retrieved from: <https://philpapers.org/archive/CREDTI.pdf?ncid=txtlnkusaolp00000603>

Dhaenens, F. (2013) Teenage queerness: negotiating heteronormativity in the representation of

gay teenagers in Glee. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16(3), 304-317. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2012.71843

Donner, W. (1993). John Stuart Mill’s liberal feminism. *Philosophical Studies*, 69, 155-166.

Farr, D., & Degroult, N. (2008). Understand the queer world of the l-esbian body: Using Queer

as Folk and The L Word to address the construction of the lesbian body. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 12(4), 423-434. doi: 10.1080/10894160802278580

Fisher, D. A., Hill, D. L., Grube, J. W., & Gruber, E. L. (2007). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual

content on television. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 52(3-4), 167-188. doi: 10.1300/J082v53n03\_08

Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York, USA:

Random House, Inc.

Frohard-Dourlent, H. (2012). When the heterosexual script goes flexible: Public reactions to

female heteroflexibility in the Buffy the Vampire Slayer comic books. *Sexualities*, 15(5/6), 718-738. doi: 10.1177/136346071244628

- Fryett, S. E. (2016). Chocolate and vanilla swirl, swi-irl: Race and lesbian identity politics. In A. Kalogeropoulos Householder & A. Trier-Bieniek (Eds.), *Feminist perspectives on Orange is the New Black: Thirteen critical essays* (pp.15-31). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc.
- Galdi, S., Maass, A., & Cadinu, M. (2014). Objectifying media: Their effect on gender role norms and sexual harassment of women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 38(3), 398-413. doi: 10.1177/0361684313515185
- Gill, R. (2008). Empowerment/sexism: Figuring female sexual agency in contemporary advertising. *Feminism & psychology*, 18(1), 35-60. doi: 10.1177/0959353507084950
- Hanan, D. E. R. (2013). 'No Limits' entertainment: All-consuming transgressions in Showtime's *The L Word*. In D. Heller (Ed.), *Loving the L Word: The complete series in focus* (pp. 202-225). New York & London: I.B. Tauris.
- hooks, b. (1982). *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. London, UK: Pluto Press.
- Householder, A. P., & Trier-Bieniek, A. (2016). Introduction: Is *Orange* the new black? In Householder, A. P., & Trier-Bieniek, A. (Ed.), *Feminist perspectives on Orange is the New Black: Thirteen critical essays* (pp. 1-14). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
- Hundley, H. (2002). The evolution of gender casting: The lifetime television network—"television for women". *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 29(4), 174-181. Doi: 10.1080/01956050209601023
- Hurtado, A. (1998). Sitios y lenguas: Chicanas theorize feminism. *Hypatia*, 13(2), 134-161. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810642>

- Jackson, S. (2006). Gender, sexuality and heterosexuality: The complexity (and limits) of heteronormativity. *Feminist Theory*, 7(1), 105-121. Doi: 10.1177/1464700106061462
- Kim, J., Sorsoli, C., Collins, K., Zylbergold, B.A., Schooler, D., & Tolman, D.L. (2007). From sex to sexuality: Exposing the heterosexual script on primetime network television. *Journal of Sex Research*, 44(2), 145-157. doi: 10.1080/00224490701263660
- Kim, M. (2016). Jenji Kohan's "You don't look full... Asia": The invisible and ambiguous bodies of Chang and Soso, A. P., & Trier-Bieniek, A. (Ed.), *Feminist perspectives on Orange is the New Black: Thirteen critical essays* (pp. 61-76). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
- Kvale, S. (1983). The qualitative research interview: A phenomenological and a hermeneutical mode of understanding. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 14(2), 171-196.
- Kvale, S. (1994). Ten standard objections to qualitative research interviews. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 25(2), 147-173.
- The Laura Flanders Show. (2017, March 21). What intersectionality really means for the movement: Prof Kimberle W. Crenshaw. [Video Fil]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dcj5tegl7I>
- Lauzen, M. M. (2015). Boxed in: Portrayals of female characters and employment of behind-the-scenes women in 2014-2015 prime-time television. Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University. Retrieved from: [http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014-15\\_Boxed\\_In\\_Report.pdf](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014-15_Boxed_In_Report.pdf)
- Marcus, S. (2005). Queer theory for everyone: A review essay. *Signs*, 31(1), 191-218. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/43274>

- Maxwell, Z. (2014, July 7). 9 ways Orange is the New Black shatters racial and gender stereotypes. *Mic*. Retrieved from: <http://mic.com/articles/91477/9-ways-orange-is-the-new-black-shatters-racial-and-gender-stereotypes>
- McRobbie, A. (2004). Post-feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 255-264. doi: 10.1080/1468077042000309937
- Minnich, E. K. (2005). *Transforming knowledge* (2nd ed.). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Montemurro, B., Bartasavich, J., & Wintermute, L. (2014). Let's (not) talk about sex: The gender of sexual discourse. *Sexuality and Culture*, 19(1), 139-156. doi: 10.1007/s12119-014-9250-5
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16.3, 6-18.
- Oliver, M. B., & Hyde, J. S. (1993). Gender differences in sexuality: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 114(1), 29-51. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.114.1.29
- Poniewozik, J. (2013, July 25). Dead tree alert: Orange is the New Black is the new way of talking about TV. *Time*. Retrieved from: <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/07/25/dead-tree-alert-orange-is-the-new-black-is-the-new-way-of-talking-about-tv/>
- Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbian existence. *Signs*, 5(4), 631-660. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834>
- Sanchez, D.T., Crocker, J., & Boike, K.R. (2005). Doing gender in the bedroom: Investing in gender norms and the sexual experience. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31(10), 1445-1455. doi: 10.1177/0146167205277333

- Simon, W., & Gagnon, J. (1986). Sexual scripts: Permanence and change. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour, 15*(2), 97-120. doi: 10.1007/bf01542219
- Smit, A. (2015). On the spectator side of the screen: Considering space, gender, and visual pleasure in television. *Feminist Media Studies, 15*(5), 892-895. doi: 10.1080/14680777.2015.1075275
- Smith, S. (2012). Scripting sexual desire: Cultural scenarios of teen girls' sexual desire in popular films, 2000-2009. *Sexuality & Culture, 16*(3), 321-341. doi: 10.1007/s12119-012-9126-5
- Stoddart, M. C. J. (2007). Ideology, hegemony, discourse: A critical review of theories of knowledge and power. *Social Thought & Research, 28*, 191-225.
- Tate, C. C. (2012). Considering lesbian identity from a social-psychological perspective: Two different models of "being lesbian". *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 16*(1), 17-29. doi: 10.1080/10894160.2011.557639
- Tolman, D. (2012). Female adolescents, sexual empowerment and desire: A missing discourse of gender inequality. *Sex Roles, 66*(1/2). doi: 10.1007/s11199-012-0122-x
- Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing and Health Sciences, 15*, 398-405. doi: 10.1111/nhs.12048
- Ward, L. (2003). Understanding the role of entertainment media in the sexual socialization of American youth: A review of empirical research. *Developmental Review, 23*(3), 347-388. doi: 10.1016/S0273-2297(03)00013-3



- Weiss, M. (2014). Lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders in Orange is the New Black. *Moravian Journal of Film and Literature*, 5(1), 45-62. Retrieved from: <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/278730974>
- Westerfelhaus, R., & Lacroix, C. (2006). Seeing "straight" through queer eye: Exposing the strategic rhetoric of heteronormativity in a mediated ritual of gay rebellion. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 23(5), 426-444. Doi: 10.1080/07393180601046196
- Wright, P. J., Arroyo, A., & Bae, S. (2015). An experimental analysis of young women's attitude toward the male gaze following exposure to centerfold images of varying explicitness. *Communication Report*, 28(1), 1-11. doi: 10.1080/08934215.2014.91504