5. QUEERNESS (UN)SHACKLED

Theorizing Orange Is the New Black

As one of the most talked about series today, Orange is the New Black (OITNB) has garnered praise and criticism in its depiction of women inmates at a fictional federal prison in Litchfield, New York. Based on Piper Kerman’s book, Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women’s Prison, the series focuses on the trials and tribulations of Piper Chapman (played by Taylor Schilling), an upper-middle-class, white, bisexual woman who was sentenced to 15 months for illegally transporting drugs ten years prior, for her then-partner Alex Vause (played by Laura Prepon). Written and created by Jenji Kohan, who is no stranger to creating women-centric series—as evidenced by her Showtime dramedy Weeds (2005-2012)—OITNB debuted as Netflix’s fifth original series on July 11, 2013. While it is more difficult to determine viewership for a series outside the traditional television platform, it has been speculated that OITNB brings in between 8–15 million viewers per episode (Obensen, 2013). Obenson points to the first season’s success: “[Orange is the New Black] will end the year as our most watched original series ever and, as with each of our other previously launched originals, enjoys an audience comparable with successful shows on cable and broadcast TV” (para. 1). OITNB’s second season debuted on June 6, 2014, and before that airdate Netflix announced that the series was renewed for a third season.

Regarding its most recent success, the Netflix series garnered 12 Emmy nominations for its first season—and won three. Some of OITNB’s other recognition include the 2014 Television Critics Association Award for “Outstanding New Program,” the 2014 Gay and Lesbian Entertainment Critics Association (GALECA)’s Dorian Award for both “TV Drama of the Year” and “LGBT TV Show of the Year,” and the 2014 AFI Award for “TV Program of the Year.” Thus, both its cultural prominence and critical success make OITNB a cultural text worthy of examination.

To date, much has been written on the series—both praise and criticism. OITNB has garnered much applause for featuring a mostly female cast, including multiple characters of color, highlighting female friendships, and depicting transgender issues. The latter has been achieved particularly through its portrayal of trans inmate Sophia Burset (played by real-life trans woman, Laverne Cox). Evidence of this praise was reified in July 2014, when Cox became the first trans individual to receive an Emmy nomination for her role in the series. Just a month earlier, Cox became the first transgender person to grace the cover of TIME magazine.

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However, just as the series has received much applause, it has also received a great deal of criticism. As recently as September 3, 2014, a former prisoner who served time at Danbury Federal Prison—the same prison that OITNB is based on, and where author Kerman served time—wrote an Op-Ed critiquing the series’ depiction of prison life. As Codianni (2014) wrote, “I spent 15 years in the federal prison system, mostly at the Danbury Federal Prison Institution…Unfortunately, I know what ‘real’ prison is like. It sure isn’t what non-incarcerated viewers were led to believe by their weekly diet of Netflix’s prison caricature” (para. 3). Codianni discusses the series’ inaccuracies in portraying its visiting room scenes, the repercussions of same-sex relationships in prison, and the “real-life collateral consequences” of women losing custody of their children for mostly nonviolent, low-level drug offenses (para. 6). Some criticisms by others, which were explicitly aimed at the first season, were addressed by episodes in the second season. For instance, some argue that the first season’s storytelling needed to be tightened and by the second season, Kohan had done just that (Nussbaum, 2014).

Most of the discussions around OITNB have stemmed from mainstream and popular press. Given this, our analysis aims to contribute to academic scholarship through the examination of gender performativity and compulsory heterosexuality as illustrated throughout the Netflix series. Applying theories from Judith Butler and Adrienne Rich, we examine OITNB’s depictions of queerness, including the intersections of race and body type that affect how queer narratives play out onscreen. We also deconstruct the shift that takes place in the symbolic punishment of queerness from the first season to the second. Through narrative and character analysis, we interrogate how queerness (as embodied by lesbian, bisexual, or transgender characters) is showcased, circumscribed, and even punished at times on the series.

This chapter argues that OITNB challenges gender performances and compulsory heterosexuality, while simultaneously privileging mostly white-on-white female sexual relations as well as reinforcing the gazing of women who reify idealized body types (or in this case, thin figures). Starting with our theoretical framework, we look at how two key conversations in queer theory are crucial in unpacking queerness in OITNB. Next, we examine OITNB’s queer narratives and how they often function as tales of morality for viewers. Our analysis stems from a textual reading of all 26 episodes to date of the series (seasons one and two). We close with our discussion section, which offers readers some final thoughts on the series, as well as important factors to consider regarding queer narratives.

QUEERING CONVERSATIONS: GENDER PERFORMANCE AND COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

For feminist and media studies scholars, questions concerning the intersections among gender, sex, and sexual orientation have been longstanding. While the biological determinism of sex and the social constructedness of gender have long
been theorized by feminist scholars, it was the groundbreaking work of scholars such as Butler (1990), de Lauretis (1991), Sedgwick (1990; 1994), and Rich (1980) that gave rise to queer theory as we know it today. The goal, as Butler (1990) writes, is to:

think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian bond, but through mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity. (p. 34)

Linking the centrality of gender to personal identity, Butler (1990) posits that it is only when we both recognize the constructedness of gender and disassociate it from sex and sexual orientation are we able to understand it for the performance that it is.

GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

While queer theory takes to task discursive constructs and the ways in which we understand sex, gender, and sexual desire, another key component relevant to understanding OITNB is Butler’s (1990) theory of gender performativity. Butler explains that gender is only understood as a result of the performances we enact every day. Contending that gender is not something we are, but rather something that we do, Butler argues that gender does not precede from one’s sex as a biological determinant. Instead, sex is an equally gendered construct.

In advocating for understanding gender as a performance, Butler (1990) writes, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 25). Critiquing the gender binary of male or female, Butler contends that to suggest that chromosomal, biological sex precedes gender, which then precedes sexual desire (i.e., heterosexuality), is inherently flawed. She argues that because all parts of this “heterosexual matrix” (p. 151) are socially constructed, we must understand that they all are open to interpretation and resignification. Sex does not determine gender, and gender does not determine sexual desire.

But this gender performativity is not an active choice that one makes (Butler, 1993). Rather, “gender is performative insofar as it is the effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized under constraint” (p. 21, emphasis in original). We act in accordance with the gendered norms, rules, and understandings of our culture(s); we seldom create them for ourselves. But one’s gender performativity is also inextricably linked with the ways in which one becomes “eligible for recognition” (Butler, 2009). In order to be recognized as a sexed and gendered being, one must first adopt at least some of the norms relating to gender identity. It is through performances of gender that the subject is made recognizable.
As Wright (2011) explains, “to be understood as a person means that there is a social recognition of a gendered person and that the gender must also be socially recognizable” (p. 75). In order for gender to be successfully performed, the “correct” gender identity must be understood by others. Gender, in this vein, is a continual process and is marked by repeated occurrences and constant (re)negotiations. We never “become” masculine or feminine in our own right, as Butler (1990) writes, gender is a construct that “cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end” (p. 33).

COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

More than just gender performativity, any examination into OITNB must also take into consideration Rich’s (1980) groundbreaking essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” Rich addresses the ways in which cultural understandings of sex, gender, and sexual desire have resulted in a “compulsory heterosexuality.” Rich (1980) writes

I am concerned here with two matters… first, how and why women’s choice of women as passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers, tribe, has been crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise; and second, the virtual or total neglect of lesbian existence in a wide range of writings, including feminist scholarship. (p. 632)

In examining these questions, Rich (1980) argues that heterosexuality is “presumed as a ‘sexual preference’ of ‘most women’” (p. 633). Rich examines the cultural bias toward compulsory heterosexuality, and conceptualizes it as a “political institution.” Drawing on Gough’s (1975) work, Rich suggests that male power is maintained and works to convince women that “marriage, and sexual orientation toward men, are inevitable, even in unsatisfying and oppressive components of their lives” (p. 640).

Butler (1990) argues, “The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation … and this differentiation is accomplished through practices of heterosexual desire” (pp. 22–23). Butler discusses how this “heterosexual matrix” keeps intact hegemonic models of sex, gender, and sexual desire (p. 151), as well as how it functions by repressing homosexual desires. Compulsory heterosexuality is enacted and embraced by dominant discourses, while lesbian homosexuality is denounced and erased from social consciousness (Rich, 1980). According to Rich, the “erasure of lesbian existence” emerged as a response to threats against compulsory heterosexuality, because to acknowledge that for women heterosexuality may not be a “preference” at all but something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagated, and maintained by force, is an immense step to take if you consider yourself freely and ‘innately’ heterosexual (p. 648).
Similarly, Wittig (1992) notes how a refusal to enact prescribed heterosexual relations can influence gendered understandings. She writes,

the refusal to become (or remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or woman, consciously or not. For a lesbian this goes further than the refusal of the role ‘woman.’ It is the refusal of the economy, ideological, and political power of the man. (p. 105, emphasis in original)

Thus, lesbian existence encompasses a wide range of women’s experiences (both homosexual and homosocial) that conflict with compulsory heterosexuality. Indeed, it is because of this conflict that lesbian existence is often erased from the workings of popular culture (e.g., Rich, 1980). When lesbian existence is incorporated, it is often treated as “less than” heterosexuality and in need of explanation.

Ultimately, Rich (1980) argues that the lie of compulsory heterosexuality is problematic and crippling for hetero- and homosexual women alike. While heterosexual women are encouraged to embrace compulsory heterosexuality, it is lesbian women who are likewise circumscribed into a very limited, if not completely absent, existence. Women are repeatedly denied the fluidity to explore alternative combinations of sex, gender, and sexual desire, as a result of compulsory heterosexuality.

IF THE PUNISHMENT FITS THE CRIME:
A LOOK AT QUEER NARRATIVES AND CHARACTERS IN OITNB

Over the course of two seasons, viewers have witnessed the backstories of the Litchfield inmates, most of whom have had trouble fitting into society in some way. For instance, one character (Alex Vause) was teased as a young girl due to her lower socioeconomic status; a different character (Tasha “Taystee” Jefferson) spent most of her life being tossed around foster care; and yet another (Sister Jane Ingalls) never quite felt like she belonged in a congregation because God did not “speak” to her. Multiple characters have experienced hardship from the lack of belonging and acceptance—hardship that stems from transgressing heterosexuality and instead attempting to move fluidly outside of societal norms. These characters include: Piper Chapman, Sophia Burset, and Suzanne “Crazy Eyes” Warren. The storylines around these particular characters, we argue, work two-fold for audience members: first, they allow viewers to see the daily struggles of individuals who do not fit neatly (or at all) within society’s heterosexist framework; and second, they also serve as tales of morality on a symbolic level. While the former is more obvious, this chapter focuses on the latter and highlights the various narratives and character relationships. Due to space constraints, it should be noted that our analysis does not include all characters who are members of the LGBTQ community at Litchfield. Instead, we focus on the characters who were given more programming time to divulge their hardships experienced, as a result of transgressing heterosexuality. Because of this, we omitted analysis of Nicole “Nicky Nichols, Poussey Washington, Carrie “Big Boo” Black, and Tricia Miller.
PIPER CHAPMAN’S ON-AND-OFF AGAIN RELATIONSHIP WITH ALEX VAUSE

In the opening montage of the series’ pilot, viewers see flashbacks of Piper first in the shower with Alex and later in the tub with Larry. Both of these shots are quickly juxtaposed with a shot of Piper in a prison shower, hating her current living conditions. Interestingly, it wasn’t her relationship with Larry that landed her in prison. Even though Piper never labels herself as bisexual, gay, or straight, viewers are reminded throughout the series that it was her romantic relationship—with Alex, specifically—that landed her in Litchfield.

In season one, episode eight (henceforth S#-E#), Piper begins to open up again to Alex, but only after having Alex tell her that she wasn’t the one who ratted her out (in S1-E3) and having this “confirmed” by Larry (in S1-E5). In S1-E9, Piper and Alex are shown dancing close together, at the celebration for Tasha “Taystee” Jefferson’s impending prison release. The dancing is cut short, however, when Tiffany “Pennsatucky” Doggett (an inmate known for her extreme religious conviction) tells Sam Healy, the prison’s counselor, of Piper and Alex’s intimate behavior. As a result, Piper is thrown in the Secure Housing Unit (SHU) for what Healy claims is attempted rape. Viewers are privy to the fact that because of Piper’s intersectional identity as a white, middle-to-upper class, “straight” woman, Healy holds Piper to a different standard than the other inmates, and has difficulty accepting Piper’s romantic relationship with Alex. (It is important to point out that, throughout the series, Healy symbolizes a white, straight, conservative, patriarchal society that intervenes to preserve the dominance of compulsory heterosexuality.) When Healy comes to visit her briefly, Piper calls him out on his heterosexist mentality and his obsession with her in particular; Healy leaves, having the last word since he controls her continued stay in solitary confinement. After being in the SHU for quite some time, Piper commits herself to behaving and avoiding Alex at all costs, if that is what it takes to never be in solitary confinement again. However, this “lesson learned” is short lived, as Piper has sex with Alex in the Chapel immediately upon being released to her regular bunk area. Instances like these are ones where OITNB challenges compulsory heterosexuality.

In S1-E11, Piper lays with Alex and they kiss, as both of them admit to being in love with the other. They are once again interrupted, but this time by Nicky Nichols, who tells them that it is 11AM and Larry’s radio interview about Piper’s imprisonment is airing live on public radio. During his air time, Larry is passive aggressive in letting Piper know that he is aware that she and Alex are growing close again in prison. Piper later confronts Larry about his on-air stunt, which results in serious consequences for her prison life. Piper learns the truth about Alex; she was indeed the rat who landed her in prison. By now, viewers are used to the same old pattern—Piper and Alex grow close, only to have Piper punished (both figuratively and literally) shortly after. Compulsory heterosexuality is repeatedly reaffirmed as the “correct” route for women through the punishment of Piper.
In S1-E12, Piper tries to maintain her distance from Alex, but eventually they end up holding hands again. At the end of the episode, she is “punished” when Larry visits her and gives her an ultimatum—either they get married while she is in prison, or their engagement/relationship is over. However, after meeting Alex for the first time during visitation, Larry is informed that it was Piper, not Alex, who re-initiated their intimacy while in prison. This leads Larry to end his relationship with Piper. The tale of morality does not stop there though, but instead is solidified in the season two opener: Piper is transferred to a prison in Chicago and learns that she must testify at the trial of Kubra Balik, the man whom Alex worked for in the drug trafficking ring. Piper is reunited with Alex, who has also been temporarily transferred to the same prison. Alex begs Piper to lie under oath and say that she never met Kubra, otherwise their lives could be in danger. Piper initially refuses, but later changes her mind (despite her lawyer, who is also Larry’s father, advising her not to lie at all). Piper lies under oath for the woman she loves, while Alex tells the truth in court and ends up being released. Piper is left alone in a Chicago prison, as a result of her commitment to Alex.

While most of season one shows Piper being punished time and again for caring and showing affection toward Alex, viewers are left with a change of tone at the end of the second season when Piper finally takes matters into her own hands. In S2-E13, Alex visits Piper in prison (Piper was transferred back to Litchfield in S2-E3). She lets Piper know that she is skipping town because she fears for her life now that a mistrial was declared for Kubra, who also walked. This would have typically meant that Piper was once again paying the price alone for her feelings toward Alex. However, Piper guilts her best friend, Polly, into calling Alex’s parole officer and notifying him of her plans to leave town. Piper’s plan is two-fold: to reunite Alex with her in prison but also to keep her love safe from Kubra’s men on the outside.

SOPHIA BURSET’S MALE-TO- FEMALE TRANSITION

In S1-E3, viewers first learn the backstory to Sophia Burset, an African-American woman and the series’ only transgender inmate. Once a firefighter, Sophia struggled internally with keeping up with her gendered performance. While on duty, Sophia (whose masculine name was Marcus) would play the part of the masculine firefighter wearing the uniform and heavy equipment. However, as soon as his shift was over, Marcus would change out of his uniform only to reveal that he was wearing pink lace undergarments. Sophia was hiding her true identity. This internal struggle is reified for viewers through the juxtaposition of two shots: Marcus washing and analyzing his face after his work shift, versus Sophia washing her face and applying makeup while in prison. These shots are immediately followed by Sophia stepping back to check herself out in the prison restroom mirror, where viewers see her exposed breasts (enhanced through implants) as she wears nothing but a white thong and some homemade sandals.
However, Sophia’s struggles do not stop there. In the same episode, she learns that, due to the prison’s budgetary problems, she is being forced to switch to the generic, lower dose brand of her hormone pills. Within the show’s diegesis, Sophia had undergone gender reassignment surgery where Marcus’ penis was inverted and his testes were surgically removed. After being denied permission to see a doctor (Healy didn’t consider her health concerns an “emergency”), Sophia takes matters into her own hands and swallows a small figurine from Healy’s desk. This prompts her to finally see a doctor, who informs her that she will be taken off hormones altogether until her elevated levels return to normal. As a result, the option to provide sexual favors to correctional officer George “Pornstache” Mendez is offered in return for hormone pills, but Sophia outright refuses.

Over the course of the series, Sophia often acts as a sympathetic ear for other inmates. While cutting hair in the prison’s salon, she is often seen encouraging and empowering her clients. Viewers might read her encouragement and empowerment of fellow inmates as her way of compensating for the pain that she feels daily, especially regarding her strained relationship with her son, Michael. It also may relate to her awareness of the pain that she unintentionally brought to her wife, Crystal, who stayed with Sophia after her transition and is now raising their son alone. When Sophia’s desperate need of hormone treatment sets in (S1-E5), Sophia befriends Sister Jane Ingalls in hopes of getting some of her estrogen pills. Sister Jane, in response, tells Sophia that she will not be getting any of her estrogen supply. It is then when Sister Jane speaks about the pain that Sophia is going through with her family. Viewers are reminded of the hardship that Sophia faces in balancing who she is versus who society (and family) want and expect her to be. Similar to the outcome for Piper at the end of season two, Sophia also finds peace with herself when her son, Michael, comes to visit her in prison for the very first time. Previously, Sophia had made amends with Crystal, when she gave Crystal her blessing to date a new pastor at a church.

SUZANNE “CRAZY EYES” WARREN’S OBSESSION WITH PIPER CHAPMAN

In S1-E2, viewers first meet Suzanne “Crazy Eyes” Warren. Suzanne is a lesbian African-American inmate, who is first introduced to viewers when she is shown eyeing Piper in the cafeteria. Suzanne enthusiastically moves over to give Piper a seat near her at the table, before Piper is pulled away by Morello and instructed not to sit with her. Viewers quickly gather from her nickname alone that the character may have mental health issues. Despite her stares toward Piper in this episode, viewers see that Suzanne (who goes by “Sue” herself) goes out of her way to help Piper and even gives her spicy peppers (to aid in Piper’s attempts to make a smoothing lotion for another inmate). The tale of morality sets in at the end of this episode when Piper realizes her mistake in accepting the peppers: Suzanne sits next to Piper during movie night and shares her headphones, only to then rub Piper’s thigh and reach for
her hand. The problem is solidified through the facial expressions of both characters: Piper looks shocked while Suzanne looks content.

This marks the beginning of what becomes Suzanne’s obsession with Piper, whom she calls “Dandelion.” In the subsequent episode (S1-E3), Suzanne tries to peek in on Piper while she is using the toilet, sniffs at Piper as she runs around the outside track, recites a poem that she wrote for Piper (despite Piper not wanting to hear it), and sings a song that describes their relationship whereby Piper is “vanilla” and she is “chocolate.” When Piper tries to distance herself from Alex, Suzanne steps in, threatens to cut Alex, and then throws pie at her. In the process, viewers see Suzanne slap herself in the head—a gesture that becomes common for her character. Piper later breaks the news to Suzanne that she is not her “wife” and never will be. In retaliation of Piper’s rejection, Suzanne stops by Piper’s bunk in the middle of the night and pees on the floor as Piper watches in horror. The song that plays during this episode’s closing credits only serves to reify Suzanne’s attitude toward the situation, with lyrics such as “one crazed bitch” and “not giving a f**k about none of you.”

What makes Suzanne a particularly complicated character in the eyes of viewers is seeing her backstory and learning that she has always been deemed the Other, while also witnessing her asking Piper (in S1-E11) why everyone calls her “Crazy Eyes.” Suzanne has a look of genuine hurt on her face. This is problematized in that manner that Suzanne also has mental health issues and a history of violence. Throughout the series, she is prompt to anger and retaliation. Through all of this, the pathologization of homosexuality is again reified on OITNB, as Suzanne’s character is shown to be both gay and mentally unfit.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we examined some of the more prominent queer narratives and characters that stem from Netflix’s OITNB. Focusing on the narratives around Piper Chapman, Sophia Burset, and Suzanne “Crazy Eyes” Warren, we grounded our analysis in the application of theories from both Butler and Rich. In particular, we demonstrate not only the representations but also the implications of the latest manifestations of queer narratives in popular culture. Litchfield prison, which is mostly operated by men with a limited number of women as authority figures, works to preserve compulsory heterosexuality and keep threats against it to a minimum. Through careful monitoring and punishment, such as Healy punishing Piper time and again, the prison offers viewers a microcosm of white, heterosexist patriarchal society where any sign of “rebellion” or transgression must be dealt with. In many cases, the inmates are sent to the SHU (which the show suggests is the second worst place they can go, after the psych ward). More so, Rich (1980), who quotes and expands upon the work of Gough (1975), would argue that this exemplifies not only men denying women of their own sexuality, but also “confin[ing] them physically and prevent[ing] their movement”—both of which are what Rich and Gough describe as characteristics of compulsory heterosexuality (pp. 638–639).
While the first season of the series often symbolically (but many times literally) punished inmates who strayed away from traditional gender performances and compulsory heterosexuality, there seemed to be a shift in the second season where more control and agency were given to characters. Piper took matters into her own hands, Sophia found comfort in her ability to help others, and Suzanne prompts us to think further about the relationship between mental health issues and violence. In this way, OITNB tends to challenge compulsory heterosexuality as a whole by offering viewers multiple portrayals of LBT women—from Piper to Alex to Sophia to Suzanne to Nicky to Big Boo to Tricia to Mercy to Poussey. It also offers a rare glimpse into the hardships faced by trans women. OITNB reminds viewers that injustices are often carried out as means to preserve compulsory heterosexuality—such as when Healy makes his best efforts to punish Piper, respectively, for not abiding by societal norms of sexual orientation. Consideration should also be made around the fact that only male, and never female, correctional officers are seen engaging in sexual acts with female inmates. More so, Rich (1980) would argue that this would be reflective of “the power of men…to force it [male sexuality] upon [women],” due to the power dynamics between inmates and correctional officers. As OITNB alludes to, under New York penal law, inmates are not legally in the position to give consent and therefore even consensual sex between an inmate and a guard is defined as rape in the third degree.

Thinking further about the displays of sexuality seen onscreen, we would be remiss if we did not discuss how intersectionality impacted precisely whose actions and bodies were made visible to audiences. For the most part, when viewers see two naked women having sex within the series, they are white, thin women—such as Piper and Alex, but also Nicky and Lorna. Two exceptions to this are the following: in S2-E4, the relatively new inmate, Brook Soso, who is half white and half Japanese, has sex with Nicky, who is white; and in S2-E6, viewers watch as Poussey, who is black, has sex with her German partner, who is white. While Brook and Poussey would fall under the “thin” category, Poussey’s German love interest would be the exception in that she is of “average” weight. It is worth noting that when women’s bodies were exposed (outside of having sex), the majority of them belonged to the “thin” category. However, there was a transgression of race, as viewers saw white, black, and Latina bodies.

As such, while notions of gender performativity and compulsory heterosexuality are often challenged on OITNB, the series is not without its drawbacks. As previously noted, onscreen sexual relations between two women are typically reserved for thin, white women while the only requirement for gazing at the female body outside of sexual relations is that she must still be slender. In this sense, gender performances remain at work in the manner that only thin characters whose performances reaffirm white, heterosexist, patriarchal patrolling of women’s bodies are desired. Although the series has received much praise for the ways in which it has exposed viewers to a variety of sexual and gendered performances, it continues to keep certain expectations related to sex, gender, and sexual desire intact.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Based on what was discussed in this chapter, what is meant by “gender performativity” and how is this notion reified onscreen in *OITNB*?
2. Similarly, what is “compulsory heterosexuality” and how is it perpetuated or challenged in *OITNB*?
3. How does the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class impact the storylines of characters from the Netflix series?
4. Reflecting back on the series in general, which character most resonated with you? Thinking further about this, why might this be the case? How might the manner in which the series presented this character’s backstory have contributed to this resonance?
5. Considering what was discussed in this chapter, can you think of any examples of other entertainment programs that employ similar representations of gender, sexuality, and race? How are they similar (or different) from *OITNB*? Why do you think that is?

ADDITIONAL READINGS


REFERENCES


