Representation of gender and race in Jenji Kohan's Orange is the New Black

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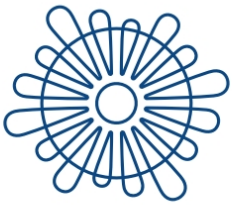

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Manuela Jović

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Završni rad

Student/ica: Mentor/ica:

Manuela Jović Dr. Sc. Zlatko Bukač

Zadar, 2021.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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1. Introduction

Incarcerated women have not been represented enough in popular media and in cases where they were, the images shown were distorted and far from reality (Wood 231). People are used to seeing men in prison use violence, join gangs, have drug wars, etc. When it comes to women, they are rarely shown as engaging in such activities in the media, although women that have been incarcerated claim it is part of their experience in prison as well (Leigh). In this thesis, I will analyse one show that stood out from the others of its genre in depicting the realities of women's prison. *Orange is The New Black* (2013-2019) is an award-winning, Netflix original series from the creator of *Weeds*, Jenji Kohan, that gave space to often unheard and silenced voices - incarcerated women and women of colour. The show's tagline, "Every sentence is a story", perfectly describes the intention of the show to humanize prisoners and show them as complex individuals who have lives outside of prison as well. It is loosely based on a memoir of the same name written by Piper Kerman, a now 51-year-old white woman who spent a year in prison in 1998 and decided to share her experience and how her identity as a white, middle-class, and bisexual woman affected her time in prison. After serving her sentence, Piper became an activist for women's rights and has spoken publicly about her and experience of other women on many occasions. The show starts with main character inspired by Piper Kerman, a 31-year-old White Anglo-Saxon Protestant named Piper Chapman, having a hard time adjusting to her new life after being sentenced to fifteen months in a minimum-security women's prison (Litchfield Penitentiary) for transporting drug money for her ex-girlfriend in her 20s. While the show started with portraying most of the prison life through the lens of a white, middle-class woman, in its later seasons more space was given to other characters, especially women of colour whose stories were shown through flashbacks and their strong relationships and emotional conversations with other imprisoned women.

Even though the show touches upon many sensitive topics that should be examined and discussed (including homophobia, transphobia, sexual abuse in prison...), due to limitations of this thesis, I decided to further examine how it displays racial tensions and class differences between characters and compare my findings with prior media representations of the same issues. Moreover, I wish to explore the connection of the show's storylines, if there is any, to current situation in the U.S. Most of the research up to this date claim that OITNB uses and thus, reinforces degrading stereotypes while portraying people of colour. While it is true that certain stereotypes are used in the first seasons of the series, same cannot be said for later seasons where some characters start to break out of those same stereotypes. In this thesis, I argue that OITNB rather challenges than re-establishes the status quo by consistently showing the deeply rooted discrimination of the criminal justice system against certain groups of people, such as people of colour, LGBTQ+ communities, and imprisoned women in general.

For the purpose of this thesis, I watched all 91 episodes of the show and thoroughly analysed certain scenes where stereotypes were used. In my analysis I focused on unravelling the deeper meaning of the text and visual content that was being analysed while also keep in mind the social context that this show was placed in. After watching the show for the first time, I have decided to examine how incarcerated women were represented in this show and in media in general through the aspect of race and gender. Furthermore, I chose to analyse the racial and gender stereotypes concerning incarcerated women and examine whether this show has challenged or reinforced those stereotypes throughout its depiction of imprisoned women. To be able to do this, I first selected typical stereotypes concerning women and people of colour, and noted when certain characters were fitting in the stereotype or breaking out of it. The examples of stereotypes used in this thesis include scenes concerning more general groups such as whites, African-Americans and people of Latinx descent, s well as breaking or showing stereotype of particular characters in the show: Piper Kerman, Angie Rice, Lorna Morello and

Mr. Healy (whites), Tasha ‘Taystee’ Jefferson, Suzzane Warren, Cindy Hayes and Poussey Washington portraying Black women, and Blanca Flores and Yadriel as members of the Latin community. Moreover, I compared my findings with previous research and analysed them within the context of literature and popular culture that the show belongs to. The goal of this thesis is to explore how incarcerated women are portrayed and represented in media and how using certain stereotypes about them and/or breaking them can shape public’s opinion who ultimately, through democracy and policy making, decides the fate of incarcerated women and people in real life.

2. Literature review

2.1. What is representation?

In order to understand and examine how incarcerated women and especially women of colour are represented in media and in this particular show, I will first explain what representation is. According to Stuart Hall, representation is “one of the central practices which produce culture and a key 'moment' in what has been called the 'circuit of culture'” (1). He explains more that culture is about 'shared meanings' which people produce and exchange through language – a privileged medium. If representation is portraying the meaning of something that exists, but is not necesserilly created by that same subjet of representation, a question of how people and places which are different from producers are represented emerges. Hall tries to answer this question with introducing the term “difference” and the “Other”. He criticizes the approach of Saussure, who argued that we only know what ‘black’ means because we know that it is opposite to ‘white’ (Hall 234). This means that ‘black’ on its own doesn’t carry the meaning, but the meaning is in the “difference” from ‘white’. As Hall claims, taking

into account only these two extremes and polarities, which usually have a relation of power between them, results in neglecting the distinctions of the ‘gray area’ (235). In other theoretical approaches, “difference” or the “Other” is again essential to the meaning, as in groups of people cannot have cultural meaning before including and talking with the “Other” or making a clear distinction from the “Other”. Hall states having no fixed meaning without constant inclusion of the “Other” as a negative side of this, as well as falling into wrong category when seperating and grouping objects, animals, people...

First it was thought that representation is simply re-presenting what already exists and has a meaning of its own. This meant it would be measured by how much it is accurate to that meaning or how distorted it is from the reality of what is happening or has happened. Later, it was found that many (if not all) events, objects, people, actions, political moves, etc. do not have one fixed meaning and therefore, representation gives them their meaning. It would mean that they cannot fully exist without representation which can give multiple different meanings to multiple audiences. In a way, it can be concluded that representation shapes people’s opinion and their perception of certain event, action, person or group of people. Things can be negatively or positively represented in media, and the question is who decides how something will be represented and thus, jugded by the viewers and receivers of these representations. The answer is, more often than not, privileged white males who owned most of the mass media throughout history (Wilson, Ernest & Costanza-Chock). This means that only a small group of certain kind of people decides how others will be represented and viewed in the world. The problem is that most of the time these representations are far from reality due to the media owners’ lack of knowledge about others’ lives and their experiences. Another reason could be found in wanting to preserve dominance and the status quo that was established by those same men in power. In order to achieve that, certain stereotypes about people of colour and minorities have appeared and been repeated in media for decades. The problem is that those stereotypes

often portray certain groups of people, such as African Americans, Hispanics, or women in general, in a negative light which then becomes the image of them in the eyes of a viewer who then makes decision based on this distorted image. This leads to neglecting the problems of Black communities or women by thinking they deserved to be treated this way because of how they are represented in media. In this thesis, I will further examine how those representations and stereotypes led to a racist and discriminative criminal justice system and how OITNB is breaking them apart.

2.2. Representation of crime and criminal justice system in media

Prisons and jails in American popular culture and media are often portrayed as violent and dangerous. No matter the security level of a prison, the incarcerated are presented as vicious criminals that deserve to be there and the possibility of them changing and developing as human beings is almost impossible and rarely shown in media. As Yvonne Jewkes describes it in her *Handbook on Prisons*, the criminalized are often portrayed as a failure to society, meaning they continuously break the law, even post-release (xxv). While the media far too often puts the blame on the offenders, the government and corrupted system get little, if any, media presence. Incarcerated people, especially women, are usually portrayed as simple characters who have committed a crime and therefore are now in prison. There is no grey area – people are shown as either guilty of the crime or innocent. The reason behind this is that, in order to entertain and captivate the viewers, the media shows only the most offensive crimes (e.g., murder or rape) and leaves out the more common violations of law, such as breaking and entering or theft of a vehicle and personal object (Cheliotis 5). Even though viewers are more likely to experience and witness such non-violent crimes during their lifetime, Joe Levenson in his book *Criminal Justice Matters* explains that violent and serious crimes are favoured in media simply to trigger

popularity and attract more viewers (14). Due to such preference of more ‘popular’ crimes, only particular images are used to depict the penal system, most of which include the highest forms of punishment, such as long or even life sentences, neglecting the fact that most criminals are not even sentenced to prison (Marsh 163). Moreover, the media often shows only the most dramatic scenes, such as police chases and prison riots, where the most attention is given to high-profile cases. As entertaining as it is, focusing only on such themes results in complete ignorance of the many issues incarcerated people face within prisons and after they are released (Greer 17-18). This is problematic because, as Levenson found in his surveys, the media is people’s main information source about the criminal justice system and therefore, it shapes people’s opinion and their knowledge of prisons and judicial system (14). Although the media is an information source for the people, according to Cecil, more attention is given to the entertaining part than the informing one, which results in only a partial look into prisons. One example of this distorted reality of prisons is "over-representation of white people as victims and people of colour as criminals" (Ghandnoosh 22). These misconceptions of crime and criminals contributed to creating certain stereotypes about people of colour and minorities. Instead of breaking those stereotypes, the producers of TV shows started relying on them and thus, started producing shows that further support them in belief that this is what the audience wants to see (23-24).

Given that the United States is the leading country in the world by the rates of incarceration, it is understandable why the penal system occupies an important part of the American cultural, political and media space (Sweeney). Prison films as a sub-genre has developed as early as 1930s with more than 60 films produced in Hollywood (Gonthier). From the first Hollywood film of the genre *Prison Bars* (1901), through films such as *The Big House* (1930), *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), the image of prison life was marked by similar messages: escapism, injustice, a ‘negative hero’ fighting an inhumane prison system

and cruel, violent prison guards (Rafter 11). The prisoners were often portrayed as violent as well and their physical appearance supported this message with characteristics such as shaved heads, tattoos, muscularity, etc. Furthermore, shooting mode, music and dialogue used in the media only amplify the image of "evil" which these prisoners represent (Mason). Creating these images reinforces the stereotype that most prisoners are violent and socially dangerous, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the later section of this thesis.

While mass incarceration affected mostly Black communities, the media continued to neglect this reality, even though people of colour had higher chance of being imprisoned than white people in the United States. In the rare cases where they were represented, the focus was on glamorizing the gangster lifestyle, which again created a distorted image of race and the penal system, leaving the voices of minorities unheard of (Cecil). Another group of people has been left out of media representation of the criminal justice system and that is incarcerated women. Even though films and television shows (e.g., *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Oz*) have been produced to portray and represent the experience of prison life, almost all of them focused solely on incarcerated men (Britton 3). That is why in the next section I will focus on (mis)representations of women in the media and explain how gender and, more specifically, gender roles affected those representations and people's reactions to them.

2.3. Incarcerated women: The invisible population

For the purpose of this thesis, it is crucial to understand how gender plays a major role in representation of crime and criminals, and how it affects people's expectations of how, in this case, women should or should not behave. Gender can be defined as "a social construction that refers to how differences between girls and boys and women and men are created and explained by society" (Denmark et al. 5). According to Steph Lawler, the social world is

“divided along gender lines” and all people are “assigned to” one of two genders – male or female (129). Moreover, there are certain gender roles that can be described as society’s expectations of masculinity and femininity that include "personality, duties, mannerisms, and cultural expectations" (Nagoshi et al. 406). This can be connected to previously explained representation, meaning that some things are considered as feminine, and others as masculine. One side is represented through and in connection with the “Other”. Gender roles are usually binary opposites (masculinity vs. femininity), just like in the approach that Hall criticised as having power dynamic where one group dominates the other. In this case masculine is often represented as having power over feminine, while women are mostly seen and portrayed in media as submissive, nurturing, caring, etc. (Wood 33). Their role is to take care of the family and the home. Moreover, Lawler argues that ‘roles’ such as gender roles should not be confused with identity but rather be defined as identity categories, which include categories of gender, class, race, nationality, etc. (7). Identity, according to Lawler is a complex term that captures the meaning of who a certain person is. People usually identify themselves as members of some social or even political group in relation with others. They rely on what seems as fixed and stable identity surrounding gender or nation the belong to. In recent years with development in social awareness, feminism and globalization – all these “fixed” identities became unstable and fluid (3). While gender and sexuality were becoming more fluid, gender roles still remained “relatively fixed” (5). Reducing someone’s identity to a certain category such as gender can be compared to stereotyping which also reduces a person or a group of people to only a few simplified characteristics.

Women in prison are perceived as both breaking out of their role and failing as females. This results in double stigmatization – first as criminalized women and then as a failure to their role of a home-maker. The consequences include judgement from both men and women during their incarceration and especially after their release which affects their reintegration into society.

They are faced with difficulties finding a job and housing, they risk losing custody of their children while having to comply with strict parole rules. None of this is a common subject in media depictions of prisons and incarcerated people. In the next paragraph I will briefly explain how women in prison have been represented in media so far – that is, in the rare cases they have actually been represented.

For a long time, incarcerated women have been an invisible population in the eyes of the public. Most shows and feature films had male protagonists and were usually set in men's only prisons. In rare cases where women were included the images of them and their experience were distorted and far from reality. In the early production women in prison genre relied on the promise of prohibited entertainments like sex (*Love Starved Women!*) and violence (*Rape, riot, and revenge*) to attract viewers. Women in prisons were mostly sexualised and portrayed as either lesbians or innocent heterosexual prey. They were shown only through a relationship with a male character (such as guard-prisoner relationship that would most likely include sexual harassment and abuse) or through a sexual relationship with another female character. Moreover, in the later films, such as *Caged* (1950) *or* Lewis Seiler's *Women's Prison* (1955) certain stereotypes emerge, "from the wicked head matron (Ida Lupino), to the wrongly accused woman, the pregnant one, the crazy, the kind doctor, and the blonde bombshell" (Shai).

Although it is very common in real life, mothers and pregnant women were hardly ever represented in popular media. Similar to what was previously explained, only high-profile crimes, subjects and elements that are most likely to be popular and entertaining to the audience were used in depictions of incarcerated people, and in this case, women. The media fail to show the image of the real and more common crimes that women commit and experiences that they go through. In addition, media focus on images from prison, while completely neglecting the complexity of circumstances and life situations that got women to do the crime in first place as well as life after prison which can be the most difficult time for women (no education, no job,

extra surveillance, no support from family, ex-cons pushed out from society, no housing, etc.). One could think that women simply were not incarcerated at the same rate as men, but the statistics showed that this is not the case. Even though women, and specifically women of colour, were the fastest growing prison population in the United States, Hollywood did not give any media attention to them and continued to represent mostly incarcerated males (Sudbury). Even though prison conditions are having long-term consequences on women, both the public and the media creators seem to not be interested in such issues. In her book, *Women Behind Bars: The Crisis of Women in the U.S. Prison System*, Silja J.A. Talvi explains that in prison, the most basic necessities of life, such as clean water, sufficient food, and adequate housing, are practically impossible to obtain. Furthermore, she adds that many Americans believe that incarcerated women are undeserving of basic human rights as a result of their repeated dehumanization.

One particular group of people can be considered as the most vulnerable in the U.S., and that is incarcerated Black women whose intersectional identities as women, people of colour, and women in prison, place them at the bottom of American criminal justice system. In an attempt to fully understand the disproportionality of racial populations in prison, I will now examine how race is represented in American prisons and how it was connected to the growing incarceration rates.

3. Representation of race in prisons

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2018 black males made up 34% of the total male prison population, white males 29%, and Hispanic males 24%. Moreover, "white females accounted for 47% of the prison population, while black females comprised 18% of the female prison population" (US Census Bureau). Even though the number of white females is higher, it

is very disproportionate to the percentage of white and black females living in the United States. In 2019, "White women comprised 60% of total women population, while Black or African American women accounted for only 12.9% of total women population in the United States" (US Census Bureau). Accordingly, the incarceration rate for black females was 1.8 times higher than of white females. This disproportionality is caused by many reasons that were affecting minority communities gradually through history. In the next section I will further explain how racism and, more specifically, certain racial stereotypes developed and shaped today's criminal justice system.

3.1. History of racism in criminal justice system

Nowadays there is a lot of talk about the effects of mass incarceration on Black communities. It is important to understand how racism developed through history and how, despite all the progress made, criminal justice system still continues to discriminate people of colour and minorities in the US. Due to limitations of this thesis, I will focus only on the development of certain stereotypes that have negatively affected minorities. I will mention some events and policies that influenced and fuelled the creation of said stereotypes. To be precise, certain political moves have shaped the way people viewed criminals, which in turn helped to justify the cruel policies and laws that were put in place. For example, President Richard Nixon proclaimed drug problem as "public enemy number one and declared the War on Drugs" which greatly impacted the mass incarceration rates in America (Britannica par.2). President Ronald Reagan expanded Nixon's campaign and had more funding which helped to criminalize and take legal action against drug users instead of treating them. This resulted in increased numbers of incarcerations for non-violent drug offenses. Furthermore, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act from 1986 has put into place a mandatory minimum sentence of five years for drug offenses but it also made a difference between crack cocaine and powder cocaine which meant people could

possess up to 5g of crack cocaine and 500g of powder cocaine before being incarcerated. Due to availability of crack cocaine in Black neighbourhoods and powder cocaine being used by predominantly middle to high-class white people (according to Oxford Treatment Center), this Act targeted Black communities, especially the ones already on the margins, leading to mass incarceration of Black people and leaving multiple effects on their families, such as financial debt, low security level, etc. The result of this was not only devastating lives of many people of those communities but public image of them as well. Even though both drugs contain same active ingredients, users of crack cocaine were seen as degenerates and powder cocaine was associated with wealth. The discrimination extends to other drugs as well. According to an article from 2019, "Black Americans are 3.73 times more likely than white Americans to be charged for marijuana possession" even though the usage is equal on both sides (Editorial Staff). The problem lays in belief of the public that people of colour deserve such sentences because of the stereotype that they are more prone to commit crime, they are violent, culturally unevolved, etc. Even if they are not sentenced to prison for it, just being arrested and convicted of a crime is enough for them to lose jobs, have their driver's license suspended and have harder, if not impossible, access to federal student loans (American Civil Liberties Union). Discrimination towards Black communities is rooted in federal funding which supported militarization of local police officers who admit that these programs encouraged departments to crack down drug use in minority communities. They targeted Black Americans because they had less political and financial power than white Americans and due to their economic situation, they could not afford adequate legal help. They were easy to charge and process because they would operate on the streets of neighbourhoods that were being over-policed with officers oftentimes using excessive force and abusing their power. Not only they were over incarcerated and over-policed, but Black Americans have also been killed by police brutality at, once again, disproportionately higher rates than white Americans. In 2020, African Americans made up 28

percent of those killed by police despite the fact they account for only 13 percent of the US population which makes them 3 times more likely to be killed by a police officer than white Americans (Rothschild). *Orange is the New black* sheds light on most of these issues, and before analysing the particular scenes from the show, I will briefly explain one term that describes the hidden motives of mass incarceration and prisons going private (the same happened in Litchfield Penitentiary when MCC took over).

3.2. Prison Industrial Complex (PIC)

Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary defines prison-industrial complex as "the profit-driven relationship between the government, the private companies that build, manage, supply, and service prisons, and related groups, such as prison industry unions" ("Prison industrial complex"). It is also considered that prison-industrial complex (PIC) is to be blamed for (and is benefiting from) increased incarceration rates of mostly poor people and minorities that are usually sentenced for non-violent crimes. Angela Davis often argued that PIC does not serve incarcerated people nor contribute to their rehabilitation but quite the opposite – it exploits prison labour in benefit of big corporations and governments that use prisoners as cheap labour force. It is also notable that population percentage of prison is disproportionate, especially in terms of incarcerated Black people and people of Latinx descent. Forcing people of colour to work for few cents per hour is reminding many prison opponents of enslavement. In an article titled *Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex*, Davis remarked that the "fastest growing group of prisoners are black women and Native American prisoners" (2). Prison-industrial complex is well represented in OITNB, where women were assigned jobs that provided a wage from few cents up to one dollar. When a private company MCC took over Litchfield, women were assigned new jobs. One of them was sewing underwear for a big

company that benefited from using imprisoned women as cheap labour force. In later episodes, Piper seized the opportunity and started a 'panty-business' which eventually led to a prison war with Maria, a Latina woman that wanted her share in the market. Although Piper started the business and profited the most from it, Maria took the fall for it. This is another example of Piper knowingly using her white privilege to avoid being punished which I will examine more in the sections that follow.

4. Orange is the New Black

As mentioned before, *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019) is Netflix Original Series that many viewers and critics consider as controversial due to its intensive use of racial slurs and degrading stereotypes while also portraying prison as a reality for a lot of women who all have stories and lives inside and outside of the institution. I will first briefly examine the role of Netflix as s streaming site in creation of the show. Netflix is a subscription-based streaming service which allows its members to access the site at any time. Members can play, pause and resume watching, all without commercials or commitments. This is what allowed Netflix to stream shows that some would deem as controversial, such as, in this case, *Orange is the New Black*. Since there are no ads or sponsors, there is no threat of them pulling their sponsorship if the show doesn't comply with their rules. In 2011, Netflix started developing and producing its own original programming with the series *House of Cards* (Andreeva, 2011). The successful show was followed by many more including OITNB, which is also the longest streaming Netflix Original Series with total of seven seasons, each containing thirteen episodes lasting from fifty minutes to one hour. Furthermore, Netflix introduced what is today called 'binge-watching', meaning that viewers can watch multiple episodes in a row. This allowed for a broader perspective to be used in creating the show and as in OITNB's case – more issues to be

discussed without worrying about censorship or ratings. In the Netflix mini-episode of OITNB: *The Farewell Show*, posted in 2019 on YouTube, actors and showrunners look back and comment on the impact and importance of the show as it ends. The showrunners, Jenji Kohan and Tara Hermann, reveal and confirm how Netflix allowed them to be free with their writing and talk about important subjects not from the past or fictional future, but about events and issues that actually take place in today's society, at the moment of the show's streaming. In the next section, I will examine and analyse how those events and issues were represented in the series.

4.1. Representation of race in OITNB

First of all, after watching and analysing a total of 91 episodes of *Orange is the New Black*, I can argue that the show displayed a diverse cast of people of almost all colours, sex, and age, including a transgender character played by a transgender actress Laverne Cox. When it comes to population, representation of race in the show is quite accurate to previously presented data – 48 percent of women incarcerated are white, 22.5 Black, 22.5 Latina, and 6 percent Asian. Although the numbers show inclusivity and diversity of the characters played by people of colour, marginalized communities, transgender and homosexual people, it is the way people are represented in the show that is concerning to many. To this date, not many research has been conducted on this series or representation of imprisoned women in general for that matter. There are some academic papers and master theses that can be found but they mostly examine only first season or seasons 1-3. For example, Michael R. Chavez in his thesis examined how race, gender, and sexuality are represented in OITNB, but only through four chosen characters and their development through first season of the show. Jamie Gesualdo approached the show through intersectional analysis of incarcerated women and examined 14

main characters in seasons 1-3. Both of the authors used in-depth analysis and came to similar conclusions that OITNB still uses racial and gender stereotypes and thus it is not revolutionary in its genre. This thesis takes in account all seasons and all character developments which allows me to come to different conclusions and new perspectives. For example, what might seems as reinforcing the status quo in seasons 1-3 can seem much different after examining all seasons and seeing how they unfold. I will now provide some examples of racism, segregation and discrimination from the show.

In the first episodes, viewers get a clear image of what prison looks like – separate dorms and bathrooms for each race, inmates of the same race sitting together in the common rooms, etc. Later in the show we find out that each dorm was named by others, e.g., 'Spanish Harlem' for Latinx women, 'Ghetto' for Black women and 'The Suburbs' for the white population of prison. When Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling) arrives to prison, another white inmate named Lorna Morello (Yael Stone) gives her, and only her, a hygiene set as a welcome gift with a comment "We look out for our own", followed by "oh don't get all PC on me. It is tribal, not racial." ("I Wasn't Ready" 00:32:10-00:32:19). Lorna broke this rule only once, when she gave the hygiene set to Brook Soso who is half-Japanese, half-Scottish because she doesn't look "full Asian". Another example of discrimination can be found in guard-prisoner relationships, for instance, when it comes to strip searches or stop-and-frisk policies, Black and Latina women are the ones most affected by it. The fact that in 2011, 685,000 people were stopped and 87% of them were Black or Latina shows how accurate the show's representation of it is ("Stop-and-Frisk Data"). In the show, Piper took advantage of her white privilege when the guards were looking for a responsible person of the illegal panty business that she first started. She planted the evidence to Ruiz counting on the segregation of prison and knowing she wasn't a target. Later in the show, Blanca, a Latina woman, protested this discriminating policy which eventually led to a murder of an inmate and a prison riot following it.

In one particular episode, the racial differences between inmates are explained through conversations of women inside the 'tribal' groups. It is the episode concerning The Women's Advisory Council (WAC) elections, where groups of prisoners were supposed to elect their representatives who would discuss their demands with a correctional officer of Litchfield Penitentiary, Mr Healy. During a conversation, Nicky (another white inmate) explains the WAC elections to Piper: "You can only vote within your race or your group. Look, just pretend it's the 1950s. It makes it easier to understand" ("WAC Pack" 00:18:14 - 00:18:18). Lorna then continues to explain that everyone elects a representative "from their own tribe – white, black, Hispanic, golden girls, and others" (00:18:20-00:18:24). Piper wonders how this is effective because, as she claims, "not every Hispanic person wants the same thing" (00:18:37-00:18:40). Lorna responds with a very stereotypical description of the Hispanic community saying they live in overcrowded households with many children, they're dirty and greasy and their food smells 'nasty'. As shocked as some of her friends are, she is not the only one making comments like this. At every table they make derogative comments about people of other race in a more or less comical manner. Taystee and Poussey, the girls from the Black prison community, make everyone at the table laugh by impersonating two white women, 'Amanda and Mackenzie', talking about yoga, sushi, wine tasting, and 'hedge funds'. Although not portrayed seriously, it shows that racism is still very much present in the U.S. and a lot of people engage in it, whether they are aware of it or not. In the next section, I will provide examples of Piper's privilege and how it influenced the viewer's perspective of the show.

4.2. Piper's privilege

Ignorance is a big issue nowadays, displayed best in OITNB through Piper's character and her inability to grasp the idea of how serious the topic of white privilege is and how, by

staying ignorant of this problem, she is actually contributing to it. In the pilot episode, viewers can see a clear difference between Piper and other inmates. Even though she might not have been aware of her white privilege in her life before prison, the harsh criminal justice system eventually made her realize it. She enters the Litchfield Penitentiary as middle-class, highly educated white woman, who owns a line of artisanal bath soaps with her best friend. Her initial plan is to spend her sentence by reading everything on her Amazon wish list. This plan is disrupted very fast by the shocking reality of prison. Even though she becomes aware of the harsh conditions of prison, she is not discouraged (yet) and tries to change that by talking with administration and sharing her ambitious ideas with her counsellor, Mr Healy. He is a middle-aged, white male correctional officer and counsellor for some of the women in Litchfield. He welcomed Piper on her first day and showed interest in her ideas, believing that, together, they can change this place. Since Piper was well-educated, she expressed her ideas eloquently and had high hopes that someone would listen and act on her requests. She was disappointed that her fellow inmates did not join her fight and she did not understand why they were afraid to speak up. An event that happened shortly after her imprisonment revealed her the true side of Healy, and of the system she was now in.

When Poussey Washington, a Black inmate, and Piper were running on prison grounds, he punished Poussey and sent her to Security Housing Unit (SHU). On the other hand, even though she caused the whole incident, Piper has not suffered any punishment because, as Healy says, she is new and just made a mistake. He then warns her to avoid interacting like this with the inmates in the future: "They’re not like you and me. They’re less reasonable. Less educated." ("The Chickening” 00:42:48-00:42:53). In OITNB, Healy exemplifies the advantages that white women gain by allying with white patriarchy and it becomes clear that, in order to maintain its power, this same patriarchy depends on hierarchies and divisions between women. Although Piper received special treatment and help from Healy in the beginning, it was all taken

away from her when he found out about her relationship with another female inmate, Alex, which he strongly disapproved. After having a hard time adjusting to prison life without any help from those in power, Piper had a revelation and shared with her mother during visitation, that she is no different than any other person in there. Even though it sounds like she became more aware of her surroundings, what she says after proves that she is in denial of a structural racism happening in the same world she lived in for years. Piper shows her true feelings when she says that her own bad choices got her in prison and no one else is responsible but her. While this could be true for her and other incarcerated women, most of them did not end up in prison solely for making a single bad choice. This is what Piper fails to recognize and as characters in literature and media typically represent a certain group of people - those people fail to recognize this issue as well. A similar situation happened when Piper had been recognized by Susan, a white female prison officer, who knew Piper prior to her detention. After remembering those times, Susan tells Piper: "As far as I'm concerned, you and me are the same. … The only difference between us is when I made bad decisions in life, I didn't get caught." ("Blood Donut" 00:42:22-00:42:31). While this is progressive and 're-humanizing' the incarcerated people in the sense that they are still humans just like anybody else, it is equally ignorant to the fact that so many of those incarcerated are not in prison because they got caught when making a bad decision – they got caught trying to survive in a system that is racist and discriminative towards their communities for years.

In the beginning of the show Piper is seen fighting for GED program and reopening of the track in the prison backyard. She has many more ambitious ideas and goals but she does not realize she is fighting only for what benefits her or where she is included. For example, she does not fight for all women to have their track back; she is fighting because she wants it for herself. After, in the riot, she joins the fight but Alex (her ex and, at the time, current girlfriend) points out it is only because she likes to feel useful and like she is doing something for the cause.

Nevertheless, she did have a moment where she was standing up for her friends and the rights of others, for instance, when she stood on the table next to Blanca to show support and protest with her.

When talking about Piper, it is worth explaining why Jenji Kohan, the show's creator, chose her to be the main character and a lens through which viewers experience the prison realities. After season one, Kohan stated that:

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

I would argue that using Piper to tell stories of Black and Latina women was a strategical move which helped gain a wider audience. Even though it succeeded in attracting viewers, many of them argued that stories of minorities should not be told through someone else to make them more appealing or relatable. This is stated and criticised on the show as well which may approve the way the showrunners decided to put Piper in front because in the later seasons, they started giving each character their own story and more interactions between inmates of colour were given space on the show. In one particular episode, they took a stand and gave them their own voice. During a prison riot that broke out after the murder of Poussey Washington, a Black inmate, prisoners made a list of their demands and prepared a speech that Judy King was supposed to read to the crowd outside of the prison facility. Janae, another Black inmate, was

strongly against this plan and claimed multiple times that this is "our fight". Judy was not one of them, she was a rich white lady famous for her cooking show and was charged for tax avoidance. She self-surrendered and was given special privileges during her whole stay in Litchfield. She did not know about the struggles that other women, especially women of colour, have been experiencing in that same prison. In the final moment before the speech would take place, Taystee took the paper and started reading the list of their demands on behalf of all the women in prison, and especially women of colour, finally taking back the voice that was taken from them a long time ago.

Another important subject that this show touches upon are the socioeconomic problems that women face and because of which some of them end up in facilities and institutions for most of their life. OITNB is one of the rare shows that gives space to issues women face prior to and after their incarceration – it is common to think that people who are imprisoned did something wrong and so they deserve to be there and serve their time but, what most of the population today ignores or is not aware of is that the consequences of their crime never seem to stop even after they served their time and have been released. The whole point of prison is to prepare the prisoners for the life after prison without crime but it usually makes it harder for them to abide the law and stick to all the strict rules. One must have a secure job, support their family, have a permanent address, pay taxes, etc., which can be extremely hard due to expensive and intense parole, random checks by police and the pressure to find a job while being judged and stigmatized by employers and society as a whole.

To best portray how different upbringing and surroundings can influence a person's life choices, I will compare Piper's and Taystee's life stories and their lives prior and after incarceration in which, once again, Piper's privilege plays a major role. She grew up in a middle-class family, she has only one brother and they both had access to quality education. Her crime was

smuggling drug money for her girlfriend. She did not need extra money and was involved in this criminal activity ‘just for fun’. Taystee, on the other hand, jumped from foster home to foster home throughout her turbulent childhood. In one adoption centre she met Vee, who ran a heroin drug ring in the neighbourhood. Vee took in Taystee and saved her from a life on the streets, but this did not come free for Taystee. Vee forced her to work as an "accountant" for the drug operation and even though the show does not disclose Taystee's exact charge, it can be guessed that it involved this drug ring. She ends up in prison where she finds people of the same background and makes friends. After being released she struggles to find a permanent home and a decent job. She has no one to support her outside of prison and eventually commits a minor crime in order to get back to prison, where she has a friend, Poussey. Although Piper goes through relatively similar struggles when finding a job post-release, she has her whole family supporting her and although the rules of parole are hard for her to follow, she manages to find her way through it. The inability of prison to serve its main purpose – rehabilitation, and its consequences can be best described through a quote from last episode of the show by Suzanne Warren (Uzo Aduba) talking about her chickens: "I never prepared them for the life on the outside. Of course they turned to drugs" ("Here’s Where We Get Off” 01:16:56-01:17:03).

4.3. Stereotypes

As it was previously mentioned, in media, and particularly in this show, certain stereotypes of gender and race can be found through characters dialogue, their physical appearance or relations with others. Stereotypes can be defined as "cognitive structures that contain the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about human groups" (Peffley et al. 31). In theory, stereotyping is a set of “representational practices” which, according to Hall,

“reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature” (257). People always try to make sense of their surroundings and to help classify things they use what Dyer explains as ‘types’. They are neutral terms, accurate to what they represent. Stereotypes, on the other hand, are exaggerated and simplified versions that reduce, essentialize, naturalize and fix 'difference' (Hall 258). Moreover, stereotyping is often more present in spaces where power is not equally shared, which results in one side dominating and using power against the other in reducing the other to a stereotype, often a negative one. Since the focus of my analysis are incarcerated women, I will examine the stereotypes through which they are usually represented in the media. Namely, I will examine how they are stereotyped as prisoners, as women and as women of colour. Various images of prison are portrayed in media, creating certain messages about crime and punishment, prisoner stereotypes, prison life and the role of prison in the society and culture (Cecil). The most frequent image of prison is that of violent and sinful people who upon their arrival to prison remain the same, proving they are unfit to live according to societal norms. The ones convicted and given long sentences are usually portrayed in media as gang leaders and drug lords – their character reduced only to their gang activity. In OITNB, the embodiment of this representation is Dayanara who, after she is sentenced for life, falls into a stereotype and becomes involved with drug gangs, trying to assert dominance in prison as she sees it as her home for the rest of her life now.

Moving on, I will explain some traditional stereotypes about race focusing on media’s depictions of people of colour. Racial stereotypes can be explained as constructed beliefs that all members of the same race share particular characteristics, which are usually negative (Jewell). Some of the traditional racial stereotypes and images such as the Sambo, Jim Crow, the Savage, Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebelle have shaped people’s view of African Americans. For example, those stereotypes created beliefs that blacks were "mentally inferior, physically and culturally unevolved, and apelike in appearance" (Plous & Williams 795). The one

traditional image I find relevant to topic of discrimination in criminal justice is the portrayal of the Savage who was seen as a terrifying threat and thus needed to be tamed, or in this case, locked up in prison. The stereotype of the Savage sent a message that whites have to keep the social order, even if that means using violence (Boskin). When it comes to females, they were either non-sexual and non-threatening beings like Mammy, or extremely sexual like Jezebelle (Jewell 41). Another traditional stereotype was portrayed through the images of Sapphire, who is emasculating and dominating men with her use of language, the equivalent of which in today's world is being "sassy". This stereotype is usually used for humorous purposes, which can be also seen in OITNB, through a character called Cindy Hayes who is often used for comic relief in the series.

When it comes to modern stereotypes, African-American males are seen as brutal and violent while the females are the dominant and lazy ones (Peffley et al.). According to Hall, there are many stereotypes of black people suggesting they are "poor, childish, subservient, always shown as servants, everlastingly 'good', deferential to whites, never the heroes, cut out of the glamour, the pleasure, and the rewards, sexual and financial" (272). Moreover, mass-media is often portraying black men as criminals, athletes, and entertainers which have also become stereotypes of African American males. Nowadays, stereotypes of black people are based on culture more than biology. In 1990s, most of the white Americans believed that black people were less intelligent, lazier, and more violent than whites (Bobo et al.). Even though more African Americans appeared in media, their roles were mostly stereotypical. Black men were often showed as lazy and unlawful, while women are presented as intimidating or as sexual objects ("Sights Sounds, and Stereotypes").

When talking about gender stereotypes, media plays a major role in restating the already existing cultural image of women as "dependent, ornamental objects whose primary functions are to look good, please men, and stay quietly on the periphery of life" (Wood 33). *Orange is*

the New Black manages to go beyond said stereotypes by developing the narrative and characters, giving them backstories through flashbacks. In the next section I will examine the results of my analysis in which I was aiming to find examples of characters in OITNB breaking the mould and challenging the stereotypes.

4.3.1. OITNB - Challenging or reenforcing stereotypes

Moving on, I will now explain how displays of race, gender, class and sexuality in the media can either be conforming to the already existing norms or challenging them. Which of those is true for OITNB is a question often raised in discussions regarding the show. I would argue that even though the show uses degrading stereotypes and racist slurs it most certainly does not promote them or encourages the continuation of their usage in the society. This can be supported with the fact that in season four, Jenji Kohan broke the cycle of discrimination and segregation when all the inmates stood together in a protest, despite the differences, fighting the same enemy – specifically C.O. Piscatella and in a broader picture – American criminal justice system.

Many academics argue that OITNB is making progress in representing diversity and being more accurate to reality of American prisons in terms of numbers and systematic issues that are developing in them. On the other hand, they claim that it is going down the regressive path by using stereotypes when depicting certain characters, especially the ones of colour. I would argue that although it is true that the usage of degrading stereotypes, racial slurs and negative connotations about people of different race, class, gender or sexuality is very high in this series, it is not put there accidentally or just for comic relief - quite the opposite. I believe they are used so radically to cause discomfort rather than to entertain. Of course, in some instances the characters are just seen making jokes and having a laugh but most of the times their comments

are so striking and insulting that it causes fights between certain groups in the series. Most of the up-to-date research has only examined first few seasons in the show which, in my opinion, is not sufficient to make statements as to what OITNB represents or which lessons it has to give to the audience. After examining all seasons, one can say that the show is revolutionary and a big step forward in the right direction.

Stereotypes are more prevailing in the first season because characters are introduced through Piper's perspective and her own view on such issues. It is in the later seasons that characters are telling their own story mostly through flashbacks and breaking stereotypes by extending their identity beyond race and gender. Moreover, characters in the show are given back-stories and are shown as whole human beings who have emotions and have gone through difficult times, just like everyone else. This makes them relatable to the viewers who can then see past any stereotypes and see them for who they are. OITNB is not displaying prisoners as failures to society, but the failure of criminal justice system and failure of society to recognise and address this. In addition, although inmates in the beginning of the how grouped mostly by race, in the later seasons we see them breaking out of their groups and forming new cliques. This escalates when they are separated and sent to maximum-security prison where they group up by drug of choice or by experience, which can include the charges, addictions, children, events prior to incarceration... The show has evolved greatly from the first season and although it did not give happy ending and justice to some of the people's beloved characters, it did succeed in bringing stories of many different women form every walk of life.

I will now provide examples of characters and scenes in OITNB that have, in my opinion and through my analysis, challenged some of the traditional and modern stereotypes regarding imprisoned people, race, and gender. When dealing with serious offenders that serve long or even life sentences, media often uses stereotypes of violent prisoners, often involved in gang

activities. Tasha ‘Taystee’ Jefferson shows the viewers that even though prisoners have life sentences, they are still people with struggles and doubts who search for the meaning of life in the moments of despair. Taystee tried to commit suicide which is a reality for many prisoners with long sentences, but she broke out of stereotype by having hope and ambition, even when unfairly sentenced for life. Another usual portrayal of prison life includes escapism as a central theme in most prison films genre and a main focus of the protagonist which is often seen planning and dreaming about the escape and life outside of prison as a sign of hope despite all the injustice and violence happening in prison. Depictions such as this create a stereotype that incarcerated people only think about escape and do not serve their sentence as they “should”. This is challenged in OITNB, where few of the prisoners manage to escape prison but only because of a sudden circumstantial opportunity, such as in the case of Angie Rice (Julie Lake) who is accidentally released due to staff changes and new computer system that had officers confuse her for another inmate of the same surname: Sara Rice. Even though she tried her chance at freedom, she is soon found by C.O. Caputo at a local bus station, with little money in her hands and no plan in her head. She eventually agrees to return to prison with spending a couple of days in the SHU as her punishment. This can be decoded as another attempt of OITNB to humanize incarcerated women and depict images from prison reality that are not represented enough in the media.

When it comes to racial stereotypes, actress Danielle Brooks who plays Taystee revealed herself that she was hesitant at first because she didn’t want to play a “stereotype”. After reading the script she first though of her character as a “black woman in prison and she’s sassy.” (Nissen). After additional reading she concluded that Taystee is fighting not to be that “one person of color” or “just that sassy black woman.” (Nissen). This can be seen in the show where Taystee is portrayed as smart, ambitious woman, good at math. Although black people are often connected with stereotypes of drugs, not obeying the law, gangs, low education level, etc.,

Poussey and Taystee are examples of smart women who are well aware of white privilege and they show this through mock-conversation of their made-up characters ‘Amanda’ and ‘Mackenzie’ - two upper-class white women. Another stereotype was found in character Brook Soso’s prejudice towards black people and assumptions they come from broken home. She told another character that Poussey came from a broken family and her mother was addicted to crack. In season 4, Poussey finds out about this and reveals that she had a very close relationship with her mother, who actually had a Master's degree in Art History. When talking about racial stereotypes, Blanca Flores’ character development is a great example of breaking stereotypes through evolving. In the first season she was shown as a stereotypical dirty, crazy Latina who is obsessed with the devil. Later, we find out she created this persona to be able to talk to her boyfriend, Diablo. She is smart, she has a green card which is another step away from the stereotypes of Latin people as immigrants in America. Another example of challenging stereotypes of Latin communities is Yadriel, Maria Ruiz’s boyfriend. The couple has a child together, and even though Yadriel is seen as a tough, ‘macho’ man with tattoos on his neck and face – his tenderness and care for the child goes beyond the typical representation of both male gender roles and males of Latinx descent. When talking about gender roles and gender stereotypes, main character Piper is first introduced as a heroine, a good girl that has gone of the rail for a bit but is back on track. In her fight with Tiffany Dogget she reveals there is more to her and her actions and intentions. She breaks out of the ‘good girl’ stereotype and is given more complex characterization over the seasons. Another example is Taystee – a young woman that grew up in harsh circumstances, moved from one foster home to another until finally settling down with Vee, owner of a drug ring. Despite all that, ‘The Ghetto’ chose her to be their motherly figure – even though she is not a typical matriarch and is still very young, her friends trust her and are grateful for her empathy towards them, especially towards Suzanne who she takes special care of.

5. Impact of the show

April K. Householder, a co -editor of the book *Feminist Perspectives on Orange is the New Black*, shared her thoughts on this revolutionary show in an article for the *UMBC Magazine*. In the article, she mentions that the idea to write a book about OITNB series came when she was a professor and wanted to provide academic texts for her students who were "excited to discuss the show" (O'Grady). Together with her colleague, they collected academic papers on OITNB and found that there was large number of topics and issues covered. The show brings forward many intersectional issues, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, privilege, LGBTQ+ representations, mental illness, motherhood, drug addiction, etc. It was nominated for twelve Emmy awards just in the first season for breaking boundaries of women's traditional representations on television (O'Grady). As April explains, the show is humanizing female prisoners by giving them emotional backstories and character arcs rather than displaying them as a "backdrop" for male protagonists. It shows how their lives are affected by patriarchal institutions and in general it challenges mainstream portrayals of gender in media.

The show started with portraying the prison industrial system but ended up shedding the light on many more realities that people, particularly women, face today. Although during the first few seasons viewers and critics were struggling to define the purpose and the message that OITNB intends to send, after the show ended the showrunners put an end to this discussion by saying that they do not have the answers to how to fix the prison industrial complex or how to solve crime in America, but they want to start discussions. And judging by all the comments, articles and even movements it started, one can say that they achieved the planned, and even more. In the behind-the-scenes video, Laura Prepon, the actress who plays Alex Vause, beautifully explained that "*Orange* has become this really great voice for people." ("Orange is the New Black", 00:01:55-00:01:59). Others also point out how the show is made so that

anybody can find someone to relate to, making viewers closer to characters and caring for their stories and their lives. Danielle Brooks (Tasha 'Taystee' Jefferson) remarked how the show was shifting into something greater as the show started talking about real issues and movements that were happening (and still are) in America, such as Black Lives Matter, ICE, immigration centres and so on. "Nobody does that on television", said by Kate Mulgrew, who plays Galina 'Red' Reznikov, perfectly describes how revolutionary this show is (00:03:47-00:03:50). It reminds viewers, who oftentimes disconnect themselves from the problems of the society by thinking they are not directly affected by them, just how much other people's lives and troubles do affect a person and our society as a whole.

A big shift in the series happened with character Poussey Washington's death. In season four, episode 12, Poussey, a young Black woman, was seen laying on the floor being restrained by C.O. Baxter (Alan Aisenberg) who was attacked by Suzanne (Uzo Aduba). The guard unintentionally killed Poussey by pressing her body with his weight and blocking her breathing. Danielle Brooks (Taystee) mentioned the parallel with real life stories of Philando Castile and Mike Brown that happened since the show first aired. Moreover, Samira Wiley, the actress who played Poussey in the series said for an interview with *Variety* that the decision for her character's heart-breaking death was given a lot of thought. She mentioned names of the people who tragically died in the years prior to that episode like Eric Garner and Mike Brown. Poussey's death wasn't just a shocking scene in the show or something fans can cry about - it was a reminder that this is sadly a reality for many people in America. Wiley expressed her concerns about viewers being upset about the character dying and wished they were angrier that this is happening in real life (Saraiya). Although the show started discussions since the moment it aired, it wasn't until the fourth season when the tough conversation about racism and the Black Lives Matter movement started. The prison riot that started after Poussey’s death can now be compared to the protests and riots that were happening in the streets all over America and the

world in 2020 after the tragical death of George Floyd who died in a shockingly similar way as the beloved character in the show. Season 4 of OITNB premiered on Netflix on June 12, 2016 and while someone could think that the show in some way predicted the future, as Wiley said, it was actually inspired by past events such as death of Eric Garner who died on July 17, 2014 after a police officer put him in a forbidden chokehold for selling cigarettes on the street in New York City. It is also worth to notice the similarity of the crime since Poussey was incarcerated for trespassing and possession with intent to sell less than a half-ounce of cannabis, which makes her a non-violent offender charged with six years in prison. Another connection can be found in the last words of both Eric Garner and George Floyd — "I can't breathe" — which then became a powerful mantra of the Black Lives Matter movement. Similarly, in the show, P. Washington kept telling the guard she couldn't breathe and that he was hurting her. Then, in the same way like Michael Brown was left lying in the street after he was killed by a police officer, Poussey's body was left in the prison cafeteria for a whole night while the management was worrying about the press and rushing to find a way to change the story to their advantage. After discovering that she is one of the best-behaved prisoners and a non-violent offender, they choose a different strategy and decide to release it to the press without even mentioning her name. This enrages Poussey's best friend, Taystee (Danielle Brooks), who then informs other inmates about it and eventually starts a prison riot in hope to get justice for her friend Poussey.

5.1. The Poussey Washington Fund

What is extremely significant and forward-thinking about this show is the Poussey Washington Fund that Taystee started in the final season as a way to celebrate her friend's name and help other imprisoned women with all the new post-release issues. At the end of the final episode of OITNB there is a link to a real Poussey Washington Fund which up to date has

collected over 480.000,00 USD of donations raised by 11,337 people in 2 years. On the official site it is said that:

> *The initiative will benefit the following eight non-profit organizations: A New Way of Life: Reentry Project, Anti Recidivism Coalition, College & Community Fellowship, Freedom For Immigrants, Immigrant Defenders Law Center, The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Woman and Girls, unPrison Project, Women's Prison Association. The Poussey Washington Fund is supported by GoFundMe.org, and donations will be evenly distributed between the organizations. (GoFundMe, 2019)*

On June 11th, 2020, the site broadcasted a live town hall event with some of the cast members from OITNB speaking about the protests following G. Floyd's death and the ongoing problems that lead up to events such as this. They were joined by some of the leaders and speakers of the anti-racism movement and together they expressed the need for criminal justice reform. It is conversations like this, that continue even after the show has run its course, that add to its significance and portray the real impact that it has on people's lives. This show is not made to give answer to all these problems, but rather make viewers question things even more and realize they have been sheltered from the truth that is a reality for many.

5.2. Path for change

Even though the show has not offered a solution to the many problems that incarcerated women and women of colour in general face in their lifetime, it did include some positive and hopeful characters who were showing how to fight the system. One of them is Joe Caputo, the former Director of Human Activities, or the Warden, of Litchfield Penitentiary. He is an example of possible change, showing what can happen if someone truly cares about the prisoners and wishes to help them. He had a positive influence on Taystee and saw the potential

she had. Corporate greed on the other hand, is the biggest enemy that is not offering a solution for the many systemic issues, but rather putting a temporary bandage on them. The issues on the show are not pure fiction and are reality for many of incarcerated people in the U.S. The recent racial equity agenda of President Biden promises to take necessary actions to end the use of private prisons and stop the systemic racism and inequality in America. While the results are yet to be seen, it is definitely a step towards ending mass incarceration, "an epidemic that disproportionately affects Black women" (LeFlouria). While abolishing private prisons may contribute to racial equity, it will not eliminate the stigma surrounding Black women's experiences (LeFlouria). This is why shows like OITNB matter, because voices of those women deserve and need to be heard. One can only hope that those voices will start a change and result in providing prisoners with a meaningful environment for rehabilitation, a chance to be seen as human beings, dramatically lower sentences, and better opportunities once they are released.

6. Conclusion

Nowadays people are given countless ways to distract themselves from the reality they live in. They can choose what they like to see online and in media in general, including the shows they want to watch, the pages they want to follow and the news they feel like reading in the moment. Many people today try to stay out of discussions and avoid difficult topics. All of this, and more, has led to a big ignorance issue in our society - pretending the problem doesn't exist and so doing nothing to solve it. *Orange is the New Black* has shown once again that the change starts with awareness and proper representation. In this thesis, I briefly explained the concept of representation and examined how certain characters and stereotypes were portrayed in this show comparing to other media. After portraying how crime and criminal justice system have been represented in media so far, I moved on to explain how one particular group of people

have been either neglected or wrongly represented, and that group is incarcerated women, and more specifically, incarcerated women of colour. I provided the statistics of prison population in the US according to race and provided a brief history of how racism developed in American criminal justice system. Further, I examined what contributed to increased incarceration rates in Black and minority communities end explained what prison-industrial complex means. In this thesis, I argued that OITNB stands out from other prison shows and crime TV because it conveys an important message and although some would argue that it reinforces the status quo, I provided examples where it does quite the opposite. I analysed few characters representing the groups of white people, African-American people and Latin people. I chose characters and scenes in which a certain stereotype was used and examined whether the show supported this stereotype or were there examples of characters breaking it. After examining all seasons, I concluded that although it still uses degrading racial and gender stereotypes, it also provides examples of breaking them and adding layers through more in-depth characterization using flashbacks and narrative storytelling. I explained how representation of certain people in media, such as, in this case, incarcerated women and people of colour, shapes the viewer's opinion of them and affects their beliefs and judgment based on which they later make decisions and thus, indirectly affect the lives and fate of those same people. I believe that OITNB challenges the highly discriminating system we live in and although it is not offering a final solution, it calls for a change.

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7. Representation of gender and race in Jenji Kohan’s Orange is the New Black: Summary and key words

Gender and race have been in the centre of many discussions between academics who oftentimes analysed how they are represented in media. Still, one group of people has not been researched enough, and that is incarcerated women who have not been accurately represented in the media through its history. The racial and gender stereotypes that are often used when depicitng the prison life of women resulted in further dehumanization and discrimination of incarcerated people. In an attempt to shed light on these problems, Jenji Kohan's *Orange is the New Black* with a mostly female cast, portrayed complex characters that do not fit strictly into certain stereotypes. Through in-depth analysis of some of the show's characters and scenes, signs of breaking and challenging the current societal order can be found. OITNB is paving the way for other shows of its genre, showing how important representation of certain groups of people in media really is.

Key words: representation, stereotypes, Orange is the New Black, race, gender, prison.

8. Reprezentacija roda i rase u seriji Jenji Kohan - Orange is the New Black: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Rod i rasa bili su u središtu mnogih rasprava između akademika koji su često analizirali kako su isti predstavljeni u medijima. Ipak, jedna skupina ljudi nije dovoljno istražena, a to su zatvorene žene koje kroz povijest nisu bile točno predstavljene u medijima. Rasni i rodni stereotipi koji se često koriste kada se prikazuje zatvorski život žena rezultirali su njihovom daljnjom dehumanizacijom i diskriminacijom. U pokušaju pružanja jasnije slike ovih problema, serija *Orange is the New Black* kreatorice Jenji Kohan s ženskim glumicama u većini, prikazuje složene likove koji se ne uklapaju strogo u određene stereotipe. Dubinskom analizom pojedinih likova i scena mogu se pronaći znakovi kršenja i preispitivanja trenutnog društvenog poretka.

OITNB utire put drugim emisijama svog žanra, pokazujući koliko je doista važna zastupljenost određenih skupina ljudi u medijima.

Ključne riječi: zastupljenost, stereotipi, Orange is the New Black, rasa, rod, zatvor.