Internet-Distributed Television and the Pedagogy of Queer Crossovers

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Abstract

Internet-Distributed Television and the Pedagogy of Queer Crossovers

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We are arguably living in a "Golden Age" of Queer TV ushered in by internet-distributed television. Although the nonlinear affordances of internet protocol have transformed TV's industrial practices and economic structures, which are said to affect content and creative programming decisions, this dissertation reconsiders the technologically determinist assumption that internet-distributed television platforms unquestioningly afford "freedom" in terms of viewer and content autonomy, particularly in increasing diverse queer and trans* representation. By offering a comparative analysis of three American "queer crossover" series—*Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013-2019), *Transparent* (Amazon Prime Video, 2014-2017, 2019), and *Her Story* (YouTube, 2016)—this project brings together a Television and a Platform Studies approach to Queer TV Studies. This methodological contribution is key to understanding how TV's changing structures of production, distribution, and consumption are impacting the broader socio-cultural role of TV alongside the recent proliferation of queer and trans* content.

My central argument is that queer crossovers, insofar as they reach a broad audience, are inherently pedagogical in how they construct and disseminate knowledge about queerness. Because these TV series target mainstream audiences, first and foremost, they rely on a "Trojan Horse" structure as part of their pedagogy—they use predominately white, educated, upper-middle class, and nominally straight and/or cisgender protagonists to draw viewers into their series. However, as queer crossovers circulate, they must respond to cultural contestations over their use of this device, which centers mainstream viewers as a site for education, pleasure, and

viewership. This feedback is incorporated into the production and development of each series over time as the shows themselves (i.e., producers, writers) "learn to learn" from queer and trans* communities. This act of "teaching back"—that is, how each show's learning becomes its own form of "scaffolding" for audiences—results in changes to queer crossovers in terms of their material conditions of production, their content choices, and their storytelling and aesthetic strategies. Thus, this supplanting of the Trojan Horse structure with another pedagogical strategy not only reflects a shift in *who* is being taught *what* and *when*, but also implies a dynamic relationship between TV, audiences, and pedagogy.

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***

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Dedication

For Rose & Wayne

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Chapter One

Introduction: Internet-Distributed Television and the Pedagogy of Queer Crossovers

"'Orange Is the New Black' is the latest release from Netflix, which is quickly establishing itself as a real rival to cable. Smart, salty, and outrageous, the series falls squarely in the tradition of graphic adult cable drama; were you pitching it poolside in Beverly Hills, you might call it the love child of 'Oz' and 'The L Word.'"

— Emily Nussbaum, *The New Yorker* (2013)

The "Golden Age" of Queer TV

On July 1, 2013, Television Critic for *The New Yorker* Emily Nussbaum praised Netflix as a worthy rival to cable following the premier of *Orange Is the New Black* (*OITNB*)—a scripted, original program depicting a diverse group of queer, working-class, and racialized women at a minimum-security prison called Litchfield. Nussbaum's associations between the online-streaming giant and "quality TV" have since become commonplace in televisual discourse, with Netflix positioned as a "disruptive, [a] gamechanging, and [a] transformational" force in the industry (Sim 187). However, what struck me about Nussbaum's review was how she described *OITNB* as the "love child of 'Oz'[1] and 'The L Word'"—that is, a worthy replacement for those left ravenous for queer representation since *The L Word* ended in 2009, and yet a show still appealing enough to viewers who may not actively seek out queer content ("Vice Versa").

[1] *Oz* is an American drama television series created by Tom Fontana. It aired on HBO from 1997-2003. The show focuses on the inmates and correctional officers inside a fictional men's prison called the Oswald State Correctional Facility, nicknamed "Oz." The series is well-known for its brutal and graphic depictions of prison violence, rape, and murder.

Nussbaum's use of the term "love child"—that is, something illicit and transgressive—is a striking metaphor for thinking through the ways in which queer content has "crossed over" into mainstream culture with the rise of internet-distributed television, in addition to the effect this mainstreaming of queerness can have for different audiences. Comments like Nussbaum's have circulated widely since *OITNB*'s debut. The fact that *OITNB* "looks and feels like a lot of other high-calibre shows," alongside its alternative and diverse depictions "of prison, of identity, and of sexuality" (McIlveen, "New Netflix Show"), demonstrate a number of changes to the TV landscape—that queer content now has the production budget, the audience, and the industry buy-in to "look" like mainstream TV. Whether we want these changes, however, is a different story.

We are arguably living in a "Golden Age" of Queer TV ushered in by internet-distributed television.[2] With numerous listicles like "55 of the Best LGBTQ+ Shows You Can Watch Right Now On Netflix" (Damshenas, "55 of the Best"), "The 10 Best Queer TV Shows on Netflix, Hulu, HBO, and Amazon" (Ariano, "The 10 Best"), and "The Best TV Shows Featuring LGBTQ Stories That You Can Stream Right Now" (DiValentino, "The Best TV"), queer and trans* visibility is at an all-time high (if listicles can be an appropriate barometer). GLADD's annual diversity report identified 2018 as a record-breaking year for LGBTQ+ representation: 8.8 percent out of 857 broadcast TV series featured series regular characters as openly gay, transgender, or queer, and, for the first time, LGBTQ+ people of colour outnumbered their white counterparts on screen by 50 to 49 percent (GLADD, *Where Are We on TV* 2018-2019). The report also identified Netflix as the leading streaming platform for diverse representations of LGBTQ+ characters, with the service's animated dark comedy *BoJack Horseman* featuring the

[2] Internet-distributed television refers to TV distributed using internet protocols (see Lotz's *Portals*).

only asexual character found on a streaming platform. The success of queer and trans* internet-distributed television programming has not gone unnoticed either, with a number of dedicated LGBTQ+ streaming services like Revry and Dekko recently entering into the market (Watercutter, "The Streaming Service").

Following *OITNB*, there has been a proliferation of television programs engaging with queer and trans* content: *Transparent* (Amazon Prime Video, 2014-2017, 2019), *Her Story* (YouTube, 2016), *Sense8* (Netflix, 2015-2018), *Pose* (FX, 2018-2021), *Euphoria* (HBO Entertainment, 2019-Present), etc. These scripted series share several specific attributes: they feature ensemble casts and depict a range of body types and characters with overlapping identities across the axes of gender (e.g., cis, trans*, masculine, feminine), sex (e.g., lesbian, queer, heterosexual), class (e.g., working, upper-middle), and race and ethnicity (e.g., African American, Puerto Rican, Asian American, Caucasian). The representational politics of these shows also extend behind the scenes to their production. Many of these series employ LGBTQ+ people in all facets of the creative process as writers, producers, directors, actors, content consultants, and even crew members (Villarejo, "Jewish, Queer-ish" 20). This inclusion of LGBTQ+ entertainment professionals both in front of and behind the camera reflects an unprecedented level of diversity. Television critics, academics, and fans have thus celebrated these programs for offering more complex portrayals of queer and trans* life. Often described as "bold," "transgressive," and even "revolutionary," these shows have not only reinvigorated debates surrounding queer and trans* visibility, but also demonstrated the affordances of online, accessible, and mobile media.

This dissertation asks whether internet-distributed television is as disruptive or as transformational a force in the industry for Queer TV as it is heralded to be. My critique is aimed

at two different levels: First, I extend a critical eye to the technologically determinist assumption that internet-distributed television and platform variability unquestioningly afford "freedom" in terms of viewer and content autonomy, particularly in increasing diverse queer and trans* representation on TV. Relatedly, my second critique interrogates a politics of representation that sees visibility as a "rights-granting" mechanism that necessarily leads to political and social change—that it is simply "better" to have more queer and trans* people on TV than fewer (Villarejo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 390). In introducing these different levels of critique, this project examines this recent body of internet-distributed programming, which I term queer crossovers, in terms of both its material conditions of production and its content choices. More specifically, I consider *how* representation works for which audiences, and what can result from these different processes. As will be discussed in more detail below, all of these factors are constitutive of "Queer TV," which may demonstrate how the recent proliferation of queer and trans* content with internet-distributed television may not necessarily be celebrated in ways that are wholesale.

Queer crossovers raise concerns about the mainstreaming of LGBTQ+ identities into dominant and popular culture. Because TV promotes certain discourses about gender and sexuality, queer and trans* representations play a significant role in identity formation for LGBTQ+ folks, and they are seen to educate heterosexual and/or cisgender viewers in understanding the experiences of Others (Parsemain 9). However, despite TV's potential to teach audiences about queerness, these images can simultaneously give rise to assimilationist, commercialized, and apolitical representations of queer and trans* life. It goes without saying that, while queer and trans* visibility may be at an all-time high with internet-distributed

television platforms, this recent proliferation of LGBTQ+ characters, storylines, and themes has not eliminated the problem of heteronormativity (Peele 5).

Although queer crossovers are not the first programs to depict queer and trans* people on TV (Joyrich, "Epistemology" 449; McCarthy, "*Ellen*" 615; Villarejo, *Ethereal Queer* 3; White 2), I argue that these recent series emerged as an identifiable body of programming in the last several years, roughly at the beginning of 2013. This current proliferation demonstrates the confluence of several factors: the technological affordances of internet distribution, which have resulted in changes to television's structures of production, distribution, and consumption; the popularity and critical acclaim received by works centering on queer and transgender characters, storylines, and themes; a public climate characterized by an increase in mainstream education about marginalized communities; and a growing need to have queer and trans* people tell their own stories. More specifically, TV's increasing platformization and its changing economic and industrial practices present a unique juncture for considering how the mainstreaming of queer and trans* identities is a process of commodification. Many internet-distributed platforms have expressed concern regarding representational diversity in their TV series, and content providers have started promoting gender and sexual diversity in their original programming to set themselves apart from the "hegemonic discourse long associated with broadcast networks" (Boisvert 184). For example, Netflix's "Inclusion & Diversity" campaign (*Netflix Jobs*) champions the service's commitment to better representations of diversity on TV (Jenner 24), which echoes Brittany Farr's statement that we are living in a "television era where the driving economic logic is that diversity sells" (155). This ethos of choice and diversity can be seen in how internet-distributed television departs from the norms and industrial practices of broadcast and specialty or premium cable distribution, where the former aims to produce and market

content to attract as many viewers as possible with demographic characteristics advertisers desire, and the latter aims to produce and market content to smaller niche audiences through narrowcasting. In contrast, internet-distributed television frees content from linear scheduling (i.e., content available at a particular time) and eliminates capacity restrictions (i.e., limited content available).[3] These changes have resulted in new revenue and financing structures for TV, which are said to affect content and creative programming (Lobato 24-25; Lotz, "Show Me the Money" 339). As Amanda Lotz explains, because internet-distributed television services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video rely on a subscriber-funded model, they are less concerned with developing programs for one specific audience than they are in targeting multiple taste groups with a "conglomerated niche strategy" (*Portals*). Thus, many of these TV platforms can "achieve scale, like a mass service, but without a mass focus" (Lotz, "Evolution or Revolution" 492), so long as they attract enough subscribers to support their total programming costs (Lotz, *Portals*). Consequently, many of these services offer robust libraries with thousands of licensed and exclusive content titles, and this range of media entertainment is said to reflect a broad-based and worldwide subscribership. This targeting strategy is further supported by the fact that these platforms have direct access to audience behaviour and viewing data (Lotz, "Evolution or Revolution" 492-492). Indeed, many of these internet-distributed platforms rely on strategic data mining, and the filtering and aggregation of user information, to make licensing decisions and highly personalized viewing recommendations to audiences. Thus, a platform's content must be desirable enough to encourage new users to subscribe, but it does not require *all* of its users to watch *all* of its original programming to be commercially viable.

[3] Linear scheduling and capacity restrictions were previously assumed to be an inherent part of the medium of TV. However, with internet-distributed television, these viewing and industrial practices have since been revealed as protocols particular to broadcast and cable TV as distribution technologies. TV as a medium does not necessarily require a linear viewing schedule (see Lotz's *Portals*).

Within this shifting technological and industrial context for TV, queer crossovers remain key sites of negotiation for challenging the heteronormativity of television. On the one hand, these series make space for queer and trans* audiences within dominant and popular culture. Because queer and trans* life is foregrounded in these programs, viewers no longer have to search for the hidden signs and codes of queerness, and they purportedly no longer have to engage in resistant and/or oppositional readings. On the other hand, these shows appeal to more mainstream viewers who may enjoy the types of original programming distributed by internet-distributed television platforms, but who are now being encouraged to interact with forms of queer and trans* media that they would not actively seek out otherwise (such as at a queer film festival, for instance). Additionally, many scholars and TV critics have noted how the industry's technological transformations have contributed to new aesthetic shifts both in programming and in audiences' experiences of television (Goddard and Hogg, "Introduction" 471). As Michael N. Goddard and Christopher Hogg suggest, TV's changing structures can potentially "open new avenues for a trans or queer aesthetic, not only in the greater proliferation of non-heteronormative characters, narratives and viewers experiences but also as a queering of television itself" ("Introduction" 471). But what are the implications for queer and trans* visibility and the politics of representation, given this recent proliferation of internet-distributed television programming? How do these changes to TV affect LGBTQ+ content? What is the significance of queer crossovers and their political interventions within the TV and cultural landscape when so many people are watching so many different things?

To better understand the broader socio-cultural role of TV alongside the recent proliferation of queer and trans* content, it is necessary to examine the industry's evolving economic structures and its changing modes of production, distribution, and consumption,

alongside the new narrative and aesthetic strategies that are produced *within* and *through* these structural shifts. New habits of television production, distribution, and viewing are irreversibly underway, and although TV's "dualcasting" to queer and mainstream audiences is not new (Sender 314),[4] this recent increase in queer and trans* visibility is significant, particularly in how internet-distributed platforms are said to proliferate queer and trans* content.

LGBTQ+ people may now be more visible than ever on TV; however, platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, Crave, Disney+, Apple TV, etc., are being framed as the impetus for change in the industry (Sim 189). More specifically, the vast catalogues of programming offered by these services, in addition to their subscription-based and direct-to-consumer models supported by big data, make it easy to assume a direct correlation between queer and trans* programming content and what viewers desire (Sim 191). As a result, this new economic model for TV is understood to benefit programming in general: producers are supposedly "free" from the "dictates of decency standards and of corporate risk aversion," programs are "less constrained by rigid conventions routinely imposed on narrative content and episodic structure," and users' viewing habits are now being tracked to help platforms give their subscribers the kinds of programming they want, when and where they want it (Sim 190-191). This idea of viewer choice and creative autonomy has become a lure within Queer Television Studies: the positioning of internet-distributed television platforms as benevolent media giants ignores how industrial attachments and technological contexts continue to shape the intersections between television, gender, and sexuality. In other words, the way the industry's newfound

[4] Katherine Sender defines "dualcasting" as the targeting of two specific audiences with the same TV show. For example, in the early 2000s, Bravo used gay content (e.g., *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*) to dualcast to gay men and heterosexual women aged 18 to 49. This address to multiple audiences was part of parent company NBC's larger diversification strategy, and it not only shifted the network's audience demographics, but also increased the channel's profile (see Sender's "Dualcasting").

"freedom" is said to proliferate queer and trans* content impacts how we conceive of gender and sexual freedom itself. This discourse of a "Golden Age" of Queer TV obscures how content and programming decisions continue to be tied to bottom-line demands and to the profitability of gender and sexual diversity—practices that have historically been a part of "legacy" television.[5] Indeed, the TV industry's desire to court pink dollars, and to "cash-in" on the burgeoning and previously unrecognized queer market, highlights how internet-distributed television's "freedom" is still bound to a particular set of cultural and economic imperatives, which are further tied to the "unfreedom" of the very groups that are now said to be represented on TV.

Television is evolving, but the digital's promise of access, mobility, and viewer and creative autonomy demands the critical evaluation of internet-distributed television platforms alongside the social relations mediated by these technologies. Scholars are becoming increasingly critical of this emerging digital mediascape. As Valerie Wee explains, "there is a perception that the new media environment allows content producers and distributers, and media users, consumers, and audiences to freely interact and to mutually and simultaneously participate in both the creation and the consumption of media content" (134). Cross-media convergence may be eroding the separation between different media forms and their content, and audiences may now be able to access entertainment across a number of different multi-purpose devices (Jenkins 11), but these changes do not guarantee more diverse gender and sexual content (Wee 138). Moreover, Lotz argues that more work needs to be done to explore what kind of impact TV's new revenue and financing models will have for content and for industry creatives (*Portals*).[6] As

[5] Legacy television refers to scheduled and time-based distribution via broadcast, cable, or premium subscription networks (Christian 4).

[6] Because internet-distributed television platforms rely on subscriber-funded revenue models, Lotz argues that they have the potential to structure storytelling differently because they do not need to schedule regular commercial breaks. This nonlinear affordance can enable greater flexibility in terms of program length, for example (see Lotz's *Portals*).

she continues, "industrial processes are generally nearly unalterable and deeply entrenched in existing power structures" (qtd. in Evens and Donders 69). Although internet-distributed television may reconceptualize industrial and audience practices, it is likely that "the impact of the ongoing transformation of the television business will be accelerated or decelerated, or at least mediated, by pre-existing social formations, market structures, and institutions" (Evens and Donders 69). Under these terms, it is clear that internet-distributed television has not replaced legacy TV in straightforward ways (Lobato 5; Gray and Lotz 3). Thus, any claims about the "Golden Age" of Queer Television, particularly in relation to TV's changing structures of production, distribution, and consumption, must be examined critically.

This dissertation offers a comparative analysis of three American, internet-distributed queer crossover TV series: *Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013-2019), *Transparent* (Amazon Prime Video, 2014-2017; 2019), and *Her Story* (YouTube, 2016). I have selected these programs because they were released in quick succession, and at a time when internet-distributed television platforms were first gaining momentum in the industry.[7] Although many of these platforms have since become global-based companies in the internet distribution of a variety of audiovisual content, they each began as American-based services around the time when queer crossovers were starting to emerge as an identifiable body of programming.[8] Moreover, these series were often referenced together in public discourse, with official press and promotional outlets pitting these programs against one another in a battle for audiences, awards, critical acclaim, and "streaming wars" (Lobato and Lotz 89). These intertextual links, alongside the pervasiveness of

[7] *OITNB* and *Transparent* were "breakout" original series for Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, respectively.
[8] For example, Netflix's operations were limited to the United States until 2010, at which time the company expanded its streaming service into Canada. From 2012 onwards, Netflix expanded into Europe and launched activities in the United Kingdom, followed by the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries (Evens and Donders 72). Therefore, until 2017, most of Netflix's subscribership was in the United States, and maintaining this American market was crucial to the service's global expansion (Lobato and Lotz 136).

American TV and popular culture, make *Orange Is the New Black*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* ripe for comparative analysis.[9]

One central argument of this dissertation is that queer crossovers, insofar as they reach a broad audience, are inherently pedagogical in the ways they construct and disseminate knowledge about queerness. Because these programs have been tasked with the responsibility of introducing mainstream viewers to queer and trans* communities, they educate viewers about queerness through various entertainment techniques (e.g., narrative and storyline development, camera work, editing, etc.). Although this explicitly pedagogical address has the potential to foster empathy toward LGBTQ+ characters, and to encourage heterosexual and/or cisgender viewers to "see" things from others' perspectives, this centering of mainstream viewers as a site for education, pleasure, and viewership often comes at the expense of queer and trans* self-representation, and other forms of storytelling and aesthetic innovation for Queer TV. Because the pedagogical and representational value of these series has different effects for queer and mainstream audiences, it becomes important to consider not only *where* but also *how* these programs emerge. Thus, the study of queer crossovers necessitates an ethical consideration of *what* and *how* TV teaches—that is to say, who is being made visible, how, and for whom. As will become clear in the following sections, this body of programming requires a specific methodology for analysis—one that accounts for the complex intersections between program texts, television's political economy and platformization, the politics of representation, and sites of viewer reception. One of the goals of this project is to bring together a Television and Platform Studies approach and Queer TV Studies. This methodological contribution is key to

[9] Although this dissertation focuses on internet-distributed television series, it is important to note the shifts in queer and trans* programming that have taken place across broadcast and specialty cable TV with shows like *Glee*, *The Fosters*, and more recently *Pose.* These changes not only highlight new possibilities for representation in this time period, but also further challenge the idea that internet-distributed television ushered in these changes exclusively.

understanding how internet-distributed television affects queer and trans* representation, and how we make sense of these changes amidst a period of increased diversity that has been particularly pedagogical. I aim to acknowledge the specificities of each internet-distributed television platform (e.g., Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, YouTube), while identifying TV's continuities with broadcast and cable distribution, especially at the level of text, engagement, and experience (Lombato 44). By offering readings of political economy and platformization, of character representations, of narrative trajectories and storyline development, of intertextual and paratextual engagement, and of audience reception practices, I argue that queer crossovers rely on an inherent "Trojan Horse" structure as part of their pedagogy—these programs use predominately white, upper-middle class, and nominally heterosexual and/or cisgendered main characters to draw mainstream viewers into a series; however, as these shows (i.e., producers, writers, etc.) respond to and adapt their programs in response to pitted critiques from queer and trans* communities, they learn to problematize these entry points of identification and positions of looking in later seasons / episodes. As a result, the Trojan Horse structure of queer crossovers not only presents a particular kind of pedagogy for specific mainstream audiences, but also reflects the TV industry's continued need for gender and sexual diversity to appeal to certain demographics, even with the affordances of internet distribution.

Queer Television Studies: Situating Queer Crossovers

Before I outline this Trojan Horse structure as the conceptual apparatus for this dissertation, it is necessary for me to situate queer crossovers within the larger field of Queer Television Studies, which will help define the project's methodological considerations and theoretical interventions.

I then consider the pedagogical potential of queer crossovers in relation to a politics of queer representation, and I conclude this introductory chapter by briefly outlining the remaining sections of this dissertation. For the purpose of this discussion, I talk about queer and trans* representation together under the larger umbrella of "queerness" and/or Queer TV; however, I intend to nuance these representational politics in subsequent chapters—to elaborate how the Trojan Horse structure of queer crossovers works differently for queer and trans* representation, respectively.

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Representation is essential for TV. Although the term can be defined in many ways, it can be understood in terms of "presence" or "absence" within a visual context. TV representations are thus *re*-presentations of someone or something. As constructed images, they are neither truly real nor objective. In other words, the relationship between "the real thing" and its representation is one that is always politically fraught. Therefore, representations must always be interrogated for their ideological content, and for their ability to reinforce systems of inequality and subordination.

Queer Television Studies analyze televisual representations of marginalized gender and sexual identities, broadly speaking. To contextualize the stakes and interventions of this project, this section provides a brief overview of key debates in the field, as well as my position in relation to this scholarship: the invisibility / visibility binary, the normalizing and assimilating effects of mainstreaming queer identities, and queer audience reception. Early research in Queer Television Studies focused on questions of invisibility / visibility. For decades, LGBTQ+ folks were either absent or misrepresented on American popular television. Before the 1990s, TV series tended to focus on characters and themes concerning "heterosexual marriage, the nuclear

family and traditional gender roles" (Parsemain 2). When queer characters were depicted, if at all, they often appeared in marginal or token roles, and they only served as plot points for developing heterosexual characters and their narratives. Additionally, gay and lesbian characters were frequently framed as a joke, or associated with deviancy, perversion, and/or criminality (Capsuto 3). Thus, for many academics and television critics, the 1990s and early 2000s was seen as a period of increased diversity.[10] By the mid-2000s, many long-standing TV franchises like *Ellen* (ABC, 1994-1998) and *Will & Grace* (NBC, 1998-2006; 2017-2020) included gay and lesbian characters and storylines, and new programs like *Queer as Folk* (Showtime, 2000-2005) and *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004-2009) featured LGBTQ+ characters as central to their narratives. Queer Television Studies scholars considered this shift from invisibility to visibility to be a sign of substantive progress—that the incorporation of gays and lesbians on mainstream television contributed directly to the queer visibility and LGBTQ+ rights movement.

As queer characters and storylines became more rich and plentiful on TV, some Queer Television Studies scholars became more apprehensive about the incorporation of queers into the dominant currents within televisual flows (Joyrich, "Queer Television Studies" 134). As Rebecca Beirne explains, TV has been "widely fetishized as the ultimate conferrer of visibility" (*Lesbians in Television* 46). In other words, visibility has been conflated with queer emancipatory struggles because there is a prevailing assumption that TV, as a mainstream medium, *ought* to reflect its viewers—that it has an "*obligation* toward diversity of representation," and that this diversity will ultimately lead to political change (Villarejo, *Ethereal Queer* 3). But political progress is about more than visibility in numbers. Thus, many researchers began to problematize the

[10] The 1990s was a particularly important time for "queer" discourse. For example, LGBTQ activist organization Queer Nation was founded in March 1990, and Queer Theory emerged as a discipline following Teresa de Lauretis' 1991 work in the feminist cultural studies journal *differences* entitled "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities." These events help contextualize early formations of Queer TV Studies.

valorization of this presence of queers on screen. These latter critiques questioned the idea that television can be queered or diversified simply through the incorporation of queer characters, storylines, and themes. Consequently, scholarship began to move beyond the invisibility / visibility binary to focus instead on evaluating the normalizing and assimilating effects of mainstreaming queer identities.

This consideration of the normalization of queer identities introduced the question of *how* queer characters were represented. More specifically, Queer Television Studies scholars focused on qualifying representations as either "positive" or "negative," and, in terms of methodology, this research primarily included textual analyses and hermeneutic readings of specific episodes or programs, characters, and/or storylines. Some authors championed the transgressive power of queerness as an interruptive force within mainstream TV, whereas others examined how queer characters were either heterosexualized and/or depicted within "asexual contexts," particularly when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Jackson and Scott 237; Raley and Lucas 25). This latter research tended to focus on how queerness was rendered intelligible by conforming to conventional gender norms. Speaking specifically about lesbian representations, Daniel Farr and Nathalie Degroult identified how only a certain type of woman embodied "the lesbian" identity on TV: thin, white, middle-upper class, feminine, able-bodied, etc. (426). This "lipstick" lesbian stereotype not only rendered queer women "consumable" for mainstream audiences, but also contributed to the further invisibility of masculine and "butch" characters.

There has been much debate over whether the normalization of queer identities on TV can be considered a "positive" development. As Glyn Davis explains, contemporary television series suggest that TV is "capable of making queerness 'ordinary,' serial, mundane" (137). These "everyday" images of queers have the potential to increase awareness and to foster "tolerance"

toward queer people. At the same time, the integration of queerness into the normal fabric of everyday life demonstrates how queer identities are necessarily commodified; "positive" images of queer people frequently refer to "sanitized, desexualized, normative, whitened, lightened, or otherwise well-behaved folks accommodating to a liberal embrace" (Villarjeo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 390). Consequently, the TV industry has been critiqued for "cashing-in" on queer markets, with its courting of pink dollars most exemplified in the tokenization of queer characters, the inclusion of "sweeps week lesbian kisses," and in the use of various forms of queerbaiting. Thus, for many scholars, the integration of queer identities into mainstream culture simultaneously gives rise to assimilationist, commercialized, and apolitical representations of queer life. This creation of a commodified, acceptable, and "consumable" queer identity subsequently marginalizes other gender and sexual identities that are considered not "sufficiently" normative. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak elaborates this tension in the double practice of representation. She makes a distinction between representation as *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*, wherein the former refers to the act of "stepping in someone's place" or "to tread in someone's shoes" (Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* 108). This type of representation is "political representation"—that is, *speaking for* the needs, desires, and interests of someone or something. In contrast, *Darstellung* refers to representation as *re-presentation*—an act of "placing there" (Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* 108). Representation is thus both "proxy and portrait"; by *speaking for* and *representing* someone or something, we always engage in an act of *re*-presenting. This double practice of representation—the complicity between "speaking for" and "portraying"—must always be considered with representation (Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* 108).

Reflected in the work of this Queer TV Studies scholarship is an inherent tension between TV—"a medium that reflects dominant ideologies"—and queerness—"which, by definition, subverts the norm" (Parsemain 2; Davis and Needham 6; Joyrich, "Queer Television" 133; Ahn et al. 120). Because television is "the most ordinary, everyday, and commonplace of our media forms" (Joyrich, "Queer Television" 134), it is often considered the very determinant of the mainstream. As a domestic medium, TV is closely associated with "the home, the family, the quotidian; in other words, the heteronormative" (Davis and Needham 6). Heteronormativity refers to the institutionalization of heterosexuality as the default, normal, or preferred sexual orientation. This belief assumes a "natural alignment" between sex characteristics and/or physical body parts related to reproduction and development, gender identity and expression, and sexual desire, and it precludes anything outside of the binary (i.e., an either-or option of male/man/masculine or female/woman/feminine) (Parsemain 1). Conversely, queer is defined as the "subversion of the ordinary"—it is "the strange, the irregular," which necessitates a disruption of "our regularly scheduled programming" (Joyrich, "Queer Television" 134). The term "queer" does not exclusively refer to "non-heterosexuality"; in fact, "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) identities can be considered queer because they disrupt the normative alignment between sex, gender, and sexuality" (Parsemain 1). Therefore, by definition, "queer" entails a fluid and shifting understanding of the self and of structures of identity (Parsemain 1).

Because of these competing definitions, scholars have noted how Queer Television Studies is inherently paradoxical (Joyrich, "Queer Television" 134). If television is defined by the normal, the ordinary, and the mainstream, then how can TV be queer (Parsemain 2)? This tension between TV's mainstream status and queer's destabilizing effect on norms continues to define much of the scholarly work within the field, with visibility remaining the central discourse

through which queer television is studied (Villarejo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 389). But the idea that queer representations are either normalizing or transgressive, "positive" or negative," is a rather fatalistic approach to Queer Television Studies. Scholars likes Amy Villarejo have since become increasingly critical of this visibility discourse as the primary lens through which queers on TV are studied. As Villarejo explains, visibility is often promoted in identarian terms as an "*unquestioned* good" ("Materiality, Pedagogy" 390). In other words, there is a tacit understanding that it is "simply better to have more gay people on TV than fewer" (Villarejo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 390). This approach to visibility is problematic because it does not question the "*costs* of such images or likeness, particularly the ways in which conformity to normative representations and images can have devastating psychic and political consequences" (Villarjeo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 390). Moreover, because visibility politics rely on a binary logic of "positive" versus "negative," this approach not only elides the complexities and limits of representation, but also flattens history into "the march of progress" (Villarjo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 391). The assumption behind this evaluative approach assumes that mainstreaming queer identities into TV's dominant currents supposedly undoes the disruptive force that makes queer *queer* in the first place (Joyrich, "Queer Television" 143). In other words, when queer folks "make it" on TV, they are no longer *quite* queer (Joyrich, "Queer Television" 134). This framing of queer visibility aligns with linear notions of historical change—that is to say, "more and more gays on TV means things are getting better and better" (Villarejo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 391)—and this idea of continual progress conflates "spending power" with "social power." Indeed, a queer commodity identity does not necessarily translate to an empowered social and political position (Villarejo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 391).

Cáel Keegan extends these reflections by further asserting that "good" media representations do not necessarily reduce political or social antagonism. Speaking about trans* media representation specifically, he explains how visibility may in fact "ensure further persecution as the wider public becomes more familiar with—and more hostile toward—transgender identities" (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 26). Trans* media objects are therefore only considered "good" when "they fold transness into the visual economy of existing normative media" (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 27). Such images, which are largely created for mainstream audiences, tend to enforce gendered standards of beauty and comportment for transgender people (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 28). As Keegan elaborates, because "the great majority of transgender media images are thin, able-bodied, conventionally attractive, and gender normative," these "good" representations "do not problematize the standards for becoming recognizable as a gendered subject" ("On the Necessity" 28). Consequently, "good" trans* media objects may invite engagement with transgender identifications; however, they do so by neither forgoing the economy of sexual difference, nor threatening the intelligibility of preexisting gender identifications (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 27).

As reflected in Keegan's argument, visibility politics have a tendency to assume that TV images are intrinsically meaningful to viewers—that there are widely accepted "positive" and "negative" criteria for queer representations, and that all audiences will read these images in the exact same ways. As a result, this visibility discourse and "positive / negative" binary reaffirms normative grounds of recognition: if queer representations are *too* normative, then they are not disruptive enough of gender and sexual categories. This argument ultimately undermines the very identity politics that support LGBTQ+ visibility—that seeing representations of queer characters on TV has transformative effects on cultural norms.

In response to this visibility discourse, scholars have called for new models for *doing* Queer Television Studies. For example, Villarejo argues for the importance of the pedagogy of the visual—that is to say, the work TV does in "strengthening or loosening the ties that bind the idea of queerness to a broad sense of political and ethical engagement" (Villarejo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 389). To think about TV pedagogy is thus to think *beyond* programming. As Villarejo explains, Queer Television Studies must "return to models provided by cultural studies research, whereby readings of individual texts nestle within rigorous and fully elaborated contexts, including material/industrial contexts" ("Materiality, Pedagogy" 390). Similarly, Keegan argues for the pedagogical value in analyzing media texts that have been labelled "bad." By returning to "bad" media objects, he maintains that new techniques for reading and valuing can be developed to expand upon the qualities of "badness" contained in these texts, and that such analyses can therefore "expose how the exemplary trans media of the current moment might actually reflect new restrictions on the transgender [and queer] imaginary" (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 29). I align my analysis with both Villarejo's and Keegan's approach over the course of this project. Although it is imperative to analyze queer representations in terms of characters, storylines, etc., it is equally important to discuss how these series are situated with a broader political, economic, and cultural context, and to assess the pedagogical value of queer and trans* representations, particularly as they are received by different audiences.

This project thus aligns with more recent scholarly work in Queer Television Studies by moving beyond questions of visibility and the "positive / negative" binary. More specifically, I wish to suspend normative judgements about queer representations as simply "good" or "bad." Although a critical evaluative approach is important to a politics of representation, I argue that in order to be fruitful, the study of queer and trans* people on TV ought to examine the cultural

work of representation—that is to say, how structures of power influence the mediation of queer and trans* identities (Hall, "The Work" 25). Foucauldian ideas regarding the discursive nature of power demonstrate how TV images are not neutral. Television representations are not simply reflections of reality; rather, they construct and re-produce it by disseminating and/or disrupting dominant ideologies about gender and sexuality. Popular TV is particularly impactful because it "has the unparalleled opportunity to connect with people in their living rooms" (S. K. Ellis, "From the Desk" 3). TV familiarizes viewers with different social and cultural identities, and it promotes specific discourses about gender and sexuality (Parsemain 2). These representations not only contribute to the formation of viewer identities, but also influence norms, values, and attitudes we have about queerness (Himberg 5).

Following this vein, contemporary Queer Television Studies research has offered more medium-specific and social and historically situated analyses of queers on TV. For example, scholars like Wendy Kathleen Peters have examined how gender, racialization, and class influence which queer identities are represented, and how these privileged identities become synonymous with queerness (12). Melanie E. S. Kohnen similarly identifies how visibility is informed by the intersections of "knowledge, power, and sexuality" (14). As she explains, queer visibility in mainstream TV relies on discourses of whiteness; because normative (i.e., white) gay and lesbian identities are central to imagining queer subjectivities in Western culture, some queer identities, practices, and knowledge are rendered visible over others (Kohnen 12-13). Televisual representations of queers on TV are thus shaped by dominant structures of gender, race, sexuality, class, etc. This evaluative and intersectional approach is useful insofar as it considers the ways in which queer characters and storylines are structured by heteronormativity, sexism, and racism, for example.

As demonstrated by the work of Peters and Kohnen, there is a growing need in Queer Television Studies to reject a visibility or a "positive / negative" evaluative approach; however, many of these recent analyses continue to focus exclusively on the structure of a particular TV show, and thus they neglect how dominant power structures also frame a program's production and reception. Because queer visibility and a politics of representation must be attuned to "historical, cultural, and media specificity" (Kohnen 3), I argue that it is also essential to examine the *process* of *who* and *what* becomes visible—that is to say, *in what ways* and *for whom*. This approach is particularly useful for the study of queer crossovers, given their reliance on predominately white, upper-middle class, and nominally heterosexual and/or cisgender main characters for introducing mainstream viewers to queer content. As will be explained further in Chapter Two, "The Political Economy of Queer Crossovers," the inclusion of these characters is closely tied to a particular set of economic and cultural imperatives for TV, which still require gender and sexual diversity to appeal to certain demographics, even in the digital era. The study of queer crossovers thus necessitates an examination of not only character representations and storylines (i.e., the structure of a particular TV show and how they are shaped by heteronormativity, sexism, and racism, etc.), but also the political economic interests behind the production and "greenlighting" of these shows to begin with.

Other ways Queer Television Studies scholarship has attempted to move beyond the visibility discourse and the "positive / negative" binary is through an examination of viewers' queer receptions of media. Queer audience research underscores the importance of ideological resistance to structures of heteronormativity and binary gender (Cavalcante et al. 3). This body of work explores how viewers engage with media texts in complex and creative ways, and it emphasizes the importance of cultivating a "queer gaze" or queer modes of looking. Because

much of this research is empirically based, it tends to highlight the role of resistant or transgressive readings—that is to say, how audiences read and use media to foster various types of gender and sexual identifications, and how these myriad interpretations help to establish the queer potential of dominant and popular texts (Shaw and Persaud, "Beyond Texts"). For example, the increasing popularity of slash fiction demonstrates how same-sex TV characters can be subversively made into queer subjects by audiences. Queer audience research thus considers the formation of a queer sensibility to be an integral part of dominant and popular culture; it acknowledges audiences as meaning makers by emphasizing what viewers are actively *doing* with televisual texts—viewers are able to "read against the grain," and they are able to appropriate cultural texts for their own individual purposes. José Esteban Muñoz advances this idea with his theory of "disidentification" to discuss how queer audiences of colour can survive in a media environment organized around heterosexuality and whiteness (11). As he explains, this mode of engagement "neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, [it] is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology" (Muñoz 11). For Muñoz, disidentification enables queers of colour to actively engage with dominant and popular media when outright opposition is neither tenable nor desirable (Cavalcante et al. 4).

This emphasis on the "active" viewer in queer audience research stems from Television Studies' lineage to Cultural Studies, which seeks to challenge the idea that viewers are merely "passive" subjects positioned by the cinematic apparatus (Mayne 8). Although the active dimensions of viewing remain important to understanding how audiences interact with queer media, Television Studies has a tendency to overemphasize the viewer's role in meaning production. In other words, the capacity for viewers to "choose" how they engage with queer representations assumes TV viewing to be a largely conscious process. Because queer crossovers

address both queer and mainstream audiences, I argue that it is possible for viewers to watch and take up these programs in ways that are unanticipated by the modes of address in a series, as well as by audience members themselves. As will be explained further in Chapter Four, "Queer Crossovers and the Pedagogical Value of the Trojan Horse Structure," the pedagogical and representation value of these series has different effects for queer and trans* viewers. Thus, it becomes difficult to assume that viewers possess the capacity to privilege certain vectors of social identity (i.e., gender, race, class, sexuality, etc.) in their viewing, since their investments in a series many not always be consciously apprehended. To account for the unconscious and psychic processes that impact how viewers watch or invest in TV, this dissertation re-theorizes parts of feminist psychoanalytic spectator theory in light of both the proliferation of queer content and TV's changing structures of production, distribution, and consumption. Contemporary scholars like Bobby Benedicto and Wendy Chun have supported a return to these psychoanalytic paradigms, and, alongside these authors, I excavate this theoretical discipline and synthesize it with Queer Television Studies in the interest of re-imagining a different kind of active process of spectatorial positioning for TV. More specifically, I wish to combine the subjective effects of viewing with a different understanding of the "cinematic apparatus" for TV in order to address some of the shortcomings concerning intersectionality and subjective differences within this framework.

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The "Golden Age" of Queer TV discourses assumes a politics of representation to be tied exclusively to visibility, wherein visibility refers to the presence and/or absence of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines on screen. However, as demonstrated by this brief overview of the literature, the study of queer crossovers is about more than content. Although questions

concerning the mainstreaming of queerness are not new, *how* we understand TV's new internet-distributed platforms and economic models has significant implications for queer visibility and a politics of representation. Queer crossovers thus require a specific methodology for analysis. By linking Television and Platform Studies to Queer TV research, this project brings together close readings and textual analyses (i.e., tracing character, narrative, and formal developments across *multiple* seasons) with larger questions concerning political economy, platformization, and TV's changing structures of production, distribution, and consumption. This interdisciplinary methodological approach is a productive development for Queer Television Studies; it not only encourages a queer and trans* politics of representation to move beyond questions of visibility, but also enables this project to explore the pedagogical and representational value of queer crossovers for different audiences within this shifting technological and industrial context for TV.

In extending this scholarly work, I take as my starting point the idea that queer crossovers are inherently compromising: these programs belong to and are a product of "the market," even as they represent alternative modes of being that "escape the market's inexorable determination" (Ahn et al. 120). Rather than equivocate between critiques of these programs' normative dimensions and their transgressive possibilities for queer representation, my goal is to think about what this body of work might *do* pedagogically—for viewership, for culture, and for industry. As will be discussed in more detail below, queer crossovers may initially set out to draw mainstream audiences into their series to teach these viewers particular lessons about queer and trans* identities; however, the shows themselves (i.e., producers, writers, etc.) eventually become "schooled" by committed audiences, new content consultants, critiques of the shows' representations, and pressures to render casting and production crews more inclusive, etc. These

shifts that take place in queer crossovers over time therefore represent content that has been "taught back" by the movement of these series through a set of social spheres that are spaces of contestation, community-building, and critique.

The programs examined here thus share concerns about how queer representation intersects with television's form, content, storytelling, and operational aesthetics (e.g., editing, camerawork). *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* can each be characterized by an explicit engagement with queer and trans* content, whether through the representation of LGBTQ+ characters, the narrative exploration of queer and trans* themes, or in the employment of LGBTQ+ professionals as writers, producers, actors, directors, and crew members. Although the concept of "queer TV" can also refer to the queerness of the televisual medium (i.e., programs that feature few or no LGBTQ+ character can also be considered queer because they disrupt TV's conventional format, its viewing experiences, and/or its modes of consumption), this project does not focus on textual queerness (i.e., queerness of the TV medium) (Parsemain 13-14). Instead, I am concerned with *how* queer and trans* folks are depicted in these programs that highlight LGBTQ+ identities (i.e., who is being made visible, in what ways, and for whom). This analysis is essential for elaborating an ethical consideration of the ways in which TV teaches, particularly in how representations are pedagogical in their address to different categories of viewership. Although I focus on three shows in this dissertation, this body of programming includes a number of different series produced by, for, and/or in consultation with queer and trans* communities.

I consider *Orange Is the New Black*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* as an expression on behalf of a group of people who share the same political commitment to represent the complexity of queer and trans* life on screen, although the means by which they do so vary widely. Many of

the entertainment professionals who work on these shows are either queer- or trans-identified, and their commitment to queer and transgender politics extends beyond their individual involvement with their respective series. For example, Laverne Cox (who plays the role of black transgender character Sophia Burset on *OITNB*) has used her success and celebrity as a platform for critically engaging with trans* issues; she has appeared on numerous news programs and has spoken to college students on campus across the country about transgender rights, for which she has received numerous awards and recognition.[11] Additionally, many of the writers and producers on *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* share a commitment to introducing viewers to different perspectives that sit outside more conventional framings of queer life on TV. Jenji Kohan has referred to *OITNB*'s lead character Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling) as her "Trojan Horse"—that is, an access point for explicating narratives of racial, ethic, sexual, and gender minorities to more privileged viewers—and *Transparent*'s Joey Soloway[12] has emphasized how Jeffrey Tambor's casting as Maura Pfefferman encouraged viewers who were already family with Tambor's previous role as a relatable "dad figure" to watch a show about an ageing transwoman. Similarly, Jen Richards and Laura Zak implicitly understand how *Her Story* challenges dominant representations of transwomen, despite their claims that their show is "about people rather than politics" (Carrera, "*Her Story*"). By writing against representational stereotypes and expectations, Richards and Zak see *Her Story* potentially altering the perception of transgender people held by viewers both within and outside of LGBTQ+ communities (Klein, "Entertaining Ideas" 912).

[11] One of Cox's many accolades includes GLADD's Stephen F. Kolzak Award, which is presented annually to an openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender media professional who has made a significant difference in promoting equality in the Entertainment industry.
[12] Soloway identifies as nonbinary and gender non-conforming, and the showrunner will be referred to using they/them/their pronouns throughout this document.

Across all these programs, there is an underlying appeal to the pedagogical. Although some writers and producers resist explicitly naming their shows as educational—indeed, one of their many concerns is that the inclusion of politics may affect the appearance of impartiality, or that the need to represent "all sides" would not lend itself to entertaining television—they are generally aware of the lack of diverse representation of LGBTQ+ people on screen, even within the context of digital TV (Klein, "Entertainment-Education" 52). These entertainment professionals tacitly understand the vital role their programs play in broadening debate on political and social issues related to LGBTQ+ identities (Klein, "Entertainment-Education" 52), and they see their shows as communicating and challenging more conventional media framings of queer and trans* life (Klein, "Entertaining Ideas" 913-914). But what does it mean to call this kind of TV content pedagogical? What kind of learning is happening here, how, and for whom?

The incorporation of queerness into the mainstream flows of TV always risks being (homo)normativizing, at the same time this integration offers a fruitful perturbation of the heteronormativity of television. My consideration of the pedagogy of queer crossovers acknowledges the transformative effects of these series on gender and sexual norms, particularly in teaching viewers how to read TV texts queerly—that is to say, how a show's character representations, narrative trajectories and storyline developments, and operational aesthetics (e.g., camera work, editing) combine to cultivate a "crossover gaze" or "queer sensibility" that can resist the ideological structures of heteronormativity and/or binary gender beyond viewers' identifications with specific characters. The term "crossover" emphasizes the social and cultural impact of these series both within and across programming genres and audiences as they teach different viewers about queer and trans* identities. Queer crossovers recognize an exchange between queer and heteronormative cultures, but they resist the idea that this encounter between

different organizations and/or forms of knowledge is politically neutral. Instead of positioning heteronormative culture as the "invisible" ground against which these programs emerge, queer crossovers imply a dynamic relationship—one wherein my references to the dominant, to the mainstream, and to the popular almost always refer to North American, straight, white, upper-middle class, and cisgender culture as sites of power. Moreover, because queer crossovers are situated at this unique historical juncture for TV, I see them as offering different ways of knowing and representing queer and trans* life. As will be further explicated in subsequent chapters, many of these programs encourage viewers to engage in different types of identifications, but they continue to rely on a tacit caricaturing and typification of queer and trans* identities in the service of educating others.

Queer crossovers thus question the industry's newfound "freedom" and how internet-distributed television is said to proliferate queer content. Indeed, television's changing structures of production, distribution, consumption have not necessarily led to more diverse representations of gender and sexuality. Although many of these programs have been written by, for, and/or in consultation with queer and trans* people, with the express purpose of intervening in a body of more conventional media framings of LGBTQ+ representation on TV, they must continue to make assumptions about who is watching and who needs to be educated. The following section considers the pedagogy of queer crossovers. I ask: Can TV educate audiences? What do queer crossovers teach us about queer identities? How do they teach and to whom? What do these programs teach us about the "freedoms" of internet-distributed television platforms as sites for queer content?

Television, Entertainment, and Pedagogy: Learning from Queer and Trans* Communities

According to John Hartley, TV is a "teacher in the best sense" (32). Often referred to as a form of travel, TV teaches in the anthropological (Hartley 31)—it introduces viewers to "people [they] might otherwise never meet," and to "lives and ideas that are foreign to [them]" (J. Gray, *Television Entertainment* 55). Moreover, TV communicates across different demographics, and it teaches "people from 'they' communities how to operate successfully in institutions, from school to 'life,' not of their own making" (Hartley 31). The teaching that happens on TV thus allows viewers to cohere as a society; we learn to understand the differences between us, and we learn how to behave toward one another (Hartley 46).

Although existing TV scholarship focuses on questions of educational content (i.e., *what* television teaches), pedagogy can be described as "the *process* through which knowledge is produced" (Lusted 2; emphasis added). In other words, pedagogy "addresses the 'how' questions involved not only in the transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also in its production" (Lusted 2-3). Thus, *what* is being taught by TV is inseparable from *how* TV teaches and *how* audiences learn (Lusted 3). This dissertation uses "pedagogy as a method" (Parsemain 4) to consider *how* TV teaches viewers about gender and sexual identities—that is to say, *in what ways* and *by what means* queer crossovers educate audiences?

At first glance, pedagogy may seem at odds with popular television. As noted above, many entertainment professionals are reluctant to identify themselves as educators, let alone their programming content as educational, and TV audiences are not keen to be lectured at by industry experts (McKee, "The Importance" 506). Unlike the educational model (which gives audiences what they "must" consume), the entertainment model aims to "give the audience what it wants" (Mckee, "The Power" 767). Consequently, popular television has often been associated with the

commercial imperative to increase revenue by appealing to larger audiences. This need to maximize profits is seen as antithetical to TV's educational potential. But entertainment and learning are not incompatible (Parsemain 5). As a reception phenomenon, TV is an "experiential response that involves enjoyment," and this enjoyment manifests itself through "pleasurable feelings such as exhilaration, laughter, curiosity, excitement, thrill, relief, enjoyable sadness, tenderness, melancholy, and/or sensory delight" (Parsemain citing Dyer, Gray, and Vorderer et al. 4). Because enjoyment and pleasure are at the core of the TV experience, television can educate audiences about identities, relationships, and social issues through various entertainment techniques (e.g., narrative and storyline development, camera work, editing, etc.). As Peter Vorderer suggests, audiences are more willing to learn when they are being entertained; they are "more interested, more attentive, and therefore more eager to select, to follow, and to process the information given by a program than those who are not" (250).

Educating audiences through entertainment is ultimately a delicate balance. Indeed, television must explore topics without "lecturing" or being "moralizing" (Moyer-Gusé and Nabi 29). Rather than tell audiences what to think, many TV professionals choose to illustrate "lessons" through narrative and storytelling, seriality, emotion, aesthetics, characters, and celebrities, etc. For example, TV's episodic and serial format offers increased opportunities for sustained viewer engagement. Writers can explore identities, relationships, and social issues in-depth through complex story arcs, with narratives that span over months or even years. As a result, viewers can become more familiar and emotionally involved with TV; their ability to

identify with and relate to TV characters is one of the prerequisites for an enjoyable entertainment experience (Vorderer et al. 397).[13]

In the case of queer crossovers, television teaches us about the complexities of queer and trans* identities, and how these representations can address different categories of viewership. Because TV promotes certain discourses about gender and sexuality, it plays a significant role in identity formation, particularly for those who are LGBTQ+ identified (Parsemain 9). As Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay explain, viewers' gender and sexual identities are formed through the recognition of "shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an idea, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (2). For LGBTQ+ audiences, even those who do not yet identify as such, TV subsequently holds the potential to provide sites of (self-)recognition. Many studies of LGBTQ+ audiences confirm that when queer people see themselves represented, they experience decreases in feelings of isolation and increases in self-esteem (McKee, "Images of Gay Men" 86). Queer representations also help heterosexual and/or cisgender viewers understand the experiences of Others (Parsemain 9). LGBTQ+ representations not only foster knowledge about queer identities, but also encourage audiences to interact with difference in a way that promotes "understanding and respect" (Parsemain 10). As Hartley describes, TV prepares "populations for difference, mobility and change; easing the way for communities based on ethnic and sexual difference to be treated with respect" (181). LGBTQ+ representations can thus encourage empathy in viewers by inviting them to imagine themselves in place of Others.

[13] Vorderer et al. identify several other prerequisites for an enjoyable entertainment experience, which include viewers' willingness to suspend their disbelief, in addition to their degree of interest in a particular topic, problem, and/or domain being represented in a series (397).

Although queer representations have the potential to teach viewers about empathy, diversity, and acceptance, TV continues to fetishize, deny, and/or pathologize queer and trans* difference in the service of educating others. For example, *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* all rely to some degree on universalizing narratives that emphasize the similarities between LGBTQ+ people and their heterosexual and/or cisgender counterparts. These narratives frame queerness as something unremarkable: acceptance is granted only when otherness is minimized (Walters 919; Parsemain 11; Ng 260; McCarthy, "Crab People" 97). Because many shows struggle to create subject positions for queer and trans* characters without alienating mainstream audiences, these representations of "normal" or "relatable" TV queers are constructed primarily for mainstream viewers (J. Reed 17). Although these assimilationist and normalizing images of LGBTQ+ people are seen as preferable to those that associate queerness with deviance, perversion, or criminality, they ultimately depoliticize queerness by ignoring the systemic and structural aspects of trans- and homophobic violence, marginalization, and institutionalized discrimination. Such representations suggest that we are living in a "post-closet era" wherein "the closet is gone and the homophobia that constructed it is increasingly irrelevant" (Becker 129). Under these terms, TV may teach us about queerness, but it is clear that increased LGBTQ+ representations have not eliminated the problem of heteronormativity (Peele 5).

Pedagogy is thus closely tied to a politics of queer representation. Ultimately, it is not enough to have those who are positions of power *speak for* queer and trans* individuals, and it is not enough to have LGBTQ+ people *speak for* themselves.[14] This idea of "speaking in the name

[14] The complicity between "speaking for" and "portraying" is essential to understanding how TV constructs and disseminates knowledge about queerness. In reproductive heteronormative society, queer individuals struggle for social and political agency. Because our social world continues to be organized by institutionalized heterosexuality, gender and/or sexual identities that deviate from the norm are considered different; this difference makes some LGBTQ+ people more vulnerable to experiencing marginalization, oppression, and discrimination, particularly those who are part of racialized and working-class communities. Consequently, within reproductive heteronormative society, it is very difficult for queer individuals to generate discourse and/or meaningful utterances through

of" is problematic because it maintains the current representational structures that render LGBTQ+ people unable to speak at the outset (Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* 63). Instead, Spivak advocates for "persistent critique" as a way to avoid "constructing the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others because of the ones who are getting access into public places due to these waves of benevolence" (*The Post-Colonial Critic* 63). She argues for the creation of enabling conditions through which the disenfranchised and marginalized can be empowered to speak, of which the first step is to "learn to learn from the subaltern" (Spivak paraphrased in Morton 160). TV shows like *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* can thus only empower LGBTQ+ people by teaching audiences how to identify dominant systems of political representation, to question the ways these systems silence and exclude queer and trans* people, and to perhaps consider viewers' own complicity within these structures (Spivak paraphrased in Morton 161). This practice of "learning to learn" not only requires a re-thinking of the subject from the standpoint of the subaltern but also considers a "multiplicity of subaltern languages"

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speaking—they occupy the position of the subaltern (see Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"). Accordingly, those who are in positions of power are more inclined to *speak for* and *re-present* the needs, desires, and interests of those who occupy these positions of disempowerment. This benevolence can be seen in the TV industry's inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines in longstanding franchises, or in the way internet-distributed television is said to offer viewer choice and creative autonomy in terms of queer and trans* representation. This increase in LGBTQ+ visibility is equated with political agency, but it does little to change the structures of representation that render queer and trans* people unable to speak in the first place. A prime example is in the historical casting of cisgender actors in trans* roles: Jaye Davidson in *The Crying Game* (1992), Hilary Swank in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), Felicity Huffman in *Transamerica* (2005), Kerry Washington in *Life Is Hot in Cracktown* (2009), Jared Leto in *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), Eddie Redmayne in *The Danish Girl* (2015), etc. Although these representations are said to give visibility to trans* communities, many of these stories continue to frame trans* subjectivity through a cisgender lens, with cis entertainment professionals receiving awards and recognition for their writing and portrayal of these narratives, rather than the communities they seek to represent.

In response to the industry's supposed benevolence, there has been a growing need to have queer and trans* people tell their own stories. This call for LGBTQ+ self-representation—that is, to have queer and trans* communities *speak for* and re-*present* themselves—may seem like an adequate solution, but the complicity between "speaking for" and "portraying" remains. Indeed, there is a tacit understanding that only LGBTQ+ communities can adequately portray the complexities of queer life on TV. However, because diverse representations of marginalized groups are so few, these limited portrayals are assumed to be representative of all marginalized peoples. In other words, representations are "overcharged with allegorical significance"—the idea that only LGBTQ+ people can *speak for* and re-*present* themselves implies that the experience of other disempowered and marginalized people can stand in for Others (Shohat 170).

(Spivak, *Other Asias* 42). In other words, one of the aims of queer crossovers should be to teach mainstream viewers how to read TV programs queerly—that is to say, how a show's character representations, narrative trajectories and storyline developments, and operational aesthetics (e.g., camera work, editing) combine to cultivate a "crossover gaze" or "queer sensibility" that can resist the ideological structures of heteronormativity and/or binary gender beyond viewers' identifications with specific characters. However, because TV must "entertain *to* teach" (Parsemain 5), the learning that happens when viewing queer crossovers must often be communicated via structures such as the "Trojan Horse," which can sometimes prevent audiences from adopting deeper modes of sustained queer critique. Although this conceptual apparatus works differently across the programs considered here, I argue that the copying of this Trojan Horse device indicates its utility in encouraging mainstream viewers to watch queer programming; however, this structure must eventually be supplanted by another pedagogical strategy wherein the shows themselves (i.e., producers, writers, etc.) "learn to learn" from communities who have different stakes in queer and trans* politics and social justice. Thus, the shifting nature of queer crossovers over time is integral to the pedagogical value of the programming genre itself, and to the larger social, political, and cultural goals that can be moved forward by each individual series.

The Trojan Horse Structure of Queer Crossovers

"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... 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."

— Jenji Kohan, *NPR's Fresh Air* (2013)

In her interview with *NPR Radio*, Jenji Kohan's reference to Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling) as her Trojan Horse implies that the showrunner's inclusion of *OITNB*'s lead character was not only strategic to the show's conception, but also essential to explicating the narratives of racial, ethic, sexual, and gendered minorities to more privileged viewers. The figure of the Trojan Horse is a powerful metaphor for elucidating the pedagogy of queer crossovers, and for demonstrating how we can "learn to learn" from LGBTQ+ representations. In Greek mythology, the Trojan Horse refers to the great wooded figure built by the Greeks to hide an elite force. Because the horse was the emblem of Troy, the idea was to fool the Trojans into thinking the Greeks had surrendered the war and returned home, which would lead the Trojans to wheel the wooden horse into the city as a trophy. Then, from inside the city walls, the Greeks would launch their covert attack—a tactical strategy that would help them win the war. Thus, a Trojan Horse first appears as a gift—it comes to you from the outside as a seemingly innocuous offering—but it is ultimately an act of trickery that leads to one's defenses being broken.

Queer crossovers use a Trojan Horse structure to teach mainstream audiences about queer and trans* identities in anticipation of viewers' defenses potentially being up—to unleash queerness on an unwitting unconscious mind. In Sigmund Freud's 1894 study "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence," the term "defense" describes the ego's struggle against "painful or unendurable ideas or affects" (qtd. in A. Freud 42). Anna Freud elaborates this definition to

explain how feelings of anxiety arise when the ego is unable to mediate the conflict between the id and the superego—that is, the tension between our unconscious instinctual impulses and the socialized control that we have over these drives, respectively (30-31; 44). Defence mechanisms protect the ego against these instinctual demands; the ego mitigates anxiety and attempts to restore balance by implementing various protective measures and behaviours, which are largely unconscious (A. Freud 32). Thus, when we us defense mechanisms, we are often unaware that they have been enacted, and, as psychic barriers, they operate in ways that distort reality (A. Freud 44).[15] For example, a person who self-identifies as heterosexual, but who experiences sexual attraction to someone of the same sex / gender, may express thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviours that are opposite to their unconscious and instinctual inclinations—this person might make fun of a homosexual peer while they themselves experience attraction to someone of the same sex / gender. Here, reaction formation—that is, adopting beliefs that are contrary to one's socially unacceptable thoughts or behaviours—is a defense mechanism against the anxiety produced via the contradiction between the subject's self-identity and his/her experience of queer desire (A. Freud 44).

For mainstream viewers who are more normatively identified, moments of contradiction are plentiful when viewing queer crossovers. Accordingly, the pedagogical aim of the Trojan Horse structure is to invite these viewers to engage with queer content, and to render conscious their psychic defenses—that is, resistances to queerness that are informed by our social, historical, and cultural understanding of gender and sexuality. This process must be tactically "hidden" from viewers in order to be effective and meaningful, which is why the protagonists in

[15] A. Freud elaborates S. Freud's initial theory to include ten methods of defense: regression, repression, reaction formation, isolation, undoing, projection, introjection, turning against the self, reversal, and sublimation (i.e., the displacement of instinctual aims) (see A. Freud's *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*).

queer crossovers are initially presented as an approximation or "proxy" for viewer identification; these characters first appear to be authorized by the viewer to speak for and represent them, but they are ultimately a strategy for encouraging more normatively identified audiences to engage in different types of complex viewership and queer readings of TV, which can potentially exceed the Trojan Horse structure itself. Thus, in keeping with TV's imperative to "entertain *to* teach," the Trojan Horse structure of queer crossovers allows mainstream audiences to overcome defense mechanisms and barriers of psychic resistance when viewing queer content.

My theorization of the Trojan Horse device and how this conceptual apparatus fits within the shifting pedagogy of queer crossovers over time draws inspiration from Jerome Bruner's scaffolding theory in education.[16] According to Bruner, when individuals learn new concepts, they require help from more experienced teachers and/or advanced learners in the form of active support. "Scaffolding" is an intentional form of "vicarious consciousness and control" provided by the more knowledgeable or capable partner to benefit the new learner; it refers to the ways in which the experienced teacher and/or advance learner controls "those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him [or her or them] to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his [or her or their] range of competence" (Wood et al. 90). This assistance supports a new learner's achievement of understanding in "mastering" a task. Moreover, effective scaffolding not only reduces the scope of failure in the task, but also encourages efforts for the learner to advance. As Bruner explains, scaffolding refers to the steps taken to reduce new learners' "degrees of freedom" in carrying out tasks, which enables them to focus on the more difficult skill that they are in the process of acquiring

[16] Bruner's scaffolding theory emerged in 1976 as part of social constructivist theory. He was influenced by the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who argued that individuals learn best in social environments—that is to say, learners construct meaning through their interactions with others.

(245). Scaffolding thus helps new learners accomplish and/or master a task that they would not have been able to do alone and/or individually. Although new learners are initially dependent on this assistance, they eventually acquire the skills and knowledge to become more independent in their critical thinking, at which time their support is gradually faded. This scaffolding process is intended to be dynamic and reciprocal; teachers will respond and adapt to the needs of their learners, and vice versa. As a result, new learners are able to build on already acquired areas of knowledge in ways that are deeply impactful. In some instances, learners will acquire the skills to become experienced teachers and/or advanced learners to assist other individuals in their learning.

OITNB, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* do not take for granted the level of knowledge their potential mainstream viewers have about LGBTQ+ identities, and they do not presume at the very least that audiences have an explicit interest in queer and trans* content. Therefore, these programs anticipate varying levels of interest, learning, and ability amongst their viewership by initially constructing and disseminating knowledge about queerness via a Trojan Horse structure. More specifically, the main characters in these programs function *as* Trojan Horses: white, upper-middle class, and nominally heterosexual and/or cisgender protagonists are used to draw mainstream viewers into a series—that is to say, how these characters are represented, how their narrative trajectories and storylines are developed, and how their experiences of queerness are framed by a show's operational aesthetics (e.g., editing, camera work, etc.) combine to establish easy access points for viewers who share similar subject positions via a "proxy" for identification. These characters are therefore intended to operate as active supports (i.e., scaffolding) for viewers' introduction to queer and trans* content—they teach mainstream audiences how to identify with queer and trans* characters, as reflected in the "teachable

moments" and intended lessons that are communicated by the producers and writers of each series.

As queer crossovers circulate, however, they must respond to critiques and cultural contestations over the use of this Trojan Horse structure, particularly in this device's centering of mainstream viewers as a site for education, pleasure, and viewership. In attending to this pitted criticism, the shows themselves (i.e., producers, writers, etc.) are subsequently "schooled" by queer and trans* communities who "teach back" and problematize the pedagogical value of this Trojan Horse device that is originally intended to address and educate mainstream audiences, first and foremost. These critiques are then assimilated into the production and development of each series over time. In other words, the feedback that is incorporated into these series from queer and trans* communities becomes integral to the scaffolding process of queer crossovers as the Trojan Horse structure is optimally supplanted by another pedagogical strategy—one that occurs *within* and *through* the series over time as producers, writers, and mainstream viewers "learn to learn" from queer and trans* communities.[17] This act of "teaching back"—that is, the ways in which each show's learning becomes its own form of scaffolding for audiences—can result in a number of changes to queer crossovers in terms of their material conditions of production, their content choices, and their storytelling and aesthetic strategies. As will be discussed in more detail below, many of these series choose to displace and/or vilify their Trojan Horses in later seasons. This de-centering of mainstream audiences allows the shows to teach new "lessons" that explore complex intersections between LGBTQ+ identities, of which mainstream audiences may not be familiar. Additionally, in learning how to read TV texts

[17] It is possible, however, that the shows themselves (i.e., producers, writers) and/or audiences fail to learn from these cultural contestations, or that the commercial drive to mainstream and/or create "crossover" content overtakes the drive to be responsive and accountable to queer and trans* communities.

queerly, viewers are also invited to problematize and critique the original points of identification through which they entered into a series in the first place. This shift in queer crossovers therefore implies a dynamic relationship between TV, audiences, and pedagogy; the supplanting of this Trojan Horse structure through a kind of reciprocal and scaffolded pedagogy enables these programs to become sites of different educational work that can better support queer and trans* audiences and self-representation practices, alongside other storytelling and aesthetic innovations for Queer TV.

This dissertation examines the Trojan Horse structure of *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*, the pedagogical value of this device for different audiences, and how this mechanism can be succeeded by other forms of scaffolded pedagogy that are informed by queer and trans* cultural contestation. Although the Trojan Horse device is used across all the programs considered here, these characters function in very different ways, and they provide different entry points and pedagogical aims for queer and mainstream viewers. In contemplating TV learners, the proceeding chapters identify how queer crossovers use entertainment techniques (e.g., narrative and storyline development, camera work, editing, etc.) as pedagogical tools in communicating "intended" lessons via this structure. I consider how each series uses its character representations, narrative and storytelling, and operational aesthetics to introduce viewers to queer and trans* life on TV, and I suggest that the imagined intended audience of these programs (i.e., white and normatively identified mainstream viewers) is not only embedded in each program's textual features, but also an inherent part of their pedagogy. Throughout this document, I refer to queer crossover learners as "viewers" and "audiences," and I use these terms

somewhat interchangeably.[18] Although this project grapples theoretically rather than empirically with audiences, it is important to note that actual TV viewers can interpret televisual texts in multiple ways (Hall, "Encoding, Decoding" 515). Because viewers' readings of a TV program do not always align with a text's dominant meaning, viewers may or may not learn from TV's intended lessons (Hall, "Encoding, Decoding" 515-516). Thus, my textual analysis may be informed by reception studies, but my theorization of the audience intends to capture some of the unexpected and unanticipated ways in which viewers may watch and learn from queer crossovers, which I argue are essential components to viewing these programs.

The idea that viewers can exceed the ways in which queer crossovers address them via a Trojan Horse structure not only speaks to the competing and shifting pedagogical value of these programs, but also challenges the assumption that internet-distributed television platforms necessarily afford freedom in terms of gender and sexual diversity. Because TV's new platforms and media models are tasked with introducing mainstream viewers to queer and trans* content, perhaps for the very first time, queer crossovers must be necessarily pedagogical in their address. These programs establish positions of looking for audiences in order to draw them into a series; however, as these shows respond to cultural criticism and make adjustments from season to season, they have the potential to teach viewers how to read TV texts queerly through a kind of "crossover" viewing position.

Although the Trojan Horse structure of queer crossovers serves primarily to introduce mainstream viewers to queer and trans* identities, it is a deeply ambivalent device, as much as it is integral to the programming genre. As will become clear in the proceeding chapters, this

[18] Viewers and audiences can be defined as "the people who, in their capacity as social actors, are attending to, negotiating the meaning of, and sometimes participating in the multimodal processes initiated or carried out by institutional media" (Schrøder 160).

structure often caricatures and typifies queer and trans* identities to make them legible in the service of educating mainstream audiences. However, at a time when educating people about systemic and structural inequality is often the burden of those who experience marginalization and oppression, the "war" that is won through this device is that TV can teach mainstream viewers how "learn to learn" from queer and trans* communities; once viewers learn how to read TV queerly, they can extend this newfound "crossover gaze" or "queer sensibility" to their past and present viewing experiences, which can potentially exceed the Trojan Horse structure itself (White 197). Therefore, the inclusion of Trojan Horse characters may reflect the TV industry's continued need to mitigate and manage risk by appealing to "certain demographics" and bottom-line demands; however, this structure can also provide a compelling "hook" and/or foundation for deeper learning, insofar as this device is accompanied by an alternative learning structure that occurs *within* and *through* a series—one that is "taught back" by queer and trans* communities. In other words, to move forward the larger social, political, and cultural goals of queer and trans* politics, producers, writers, and mainstream audiences must eventually learn to "let go" of this Trojan Horse figure of white, cisgender (hetero)normativity as they are taught how to read TV texts in ways that "crossover." The pedagogical and representational value of these programs, and their ability to educate viewers queerly, is therefore different for queer and mainstream audiences. Accordingly, this examination of the pedagogy of queer crossovers challenges the underlying assumption that TV's new distribution and economic models proliferate queer and trans* content in ways that are necessarily "beneficial" for everyone.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation offers a critical analysis of how pedagogy can develop a productive engagement with queer and trans* difference. The chapters collectively draw on my readings and interpretations of *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* as a way to demonstrate the competing and shifting pedagogical aspects of queer crossovers. Because internet-distributed television has transformed the norms of consumption and viewers' experiences of TV, I also consider different dynamics of watching and evolving "cultures of use" (Turner 229). More specifically, I address how the sites of viewing initially afforded by the main characters in these series can shift and transform with continuous, successive, and/or multiple screenings of a particular scene, episode, and/or season of programming. Throughout this project, I take note of my own shifting viewing position, and I identify how these changes contrast more popular readings of the protagonists in each series.

Chapter Two, "The Political Economy of Queer Crossovers," examines how the technological affordances of internet-distributed television have resulted in changes to TV's economic structures and industrial practices, and it discusses how these shifts in TV production, distribution, and consumption are said to afford certain "freedoms" to viewer and content autonomy, particularly in terms of increasing diverse queer and trans* representation. The chapter offers a comparative analysis of the political economy of *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*. By fleshing out the specificities of internet-distributed television as a platform, an infrastructure, and a commercial model, I identify how industrial attachments and technological contexts continue to shape the intersections between TV, gender, and sexuality. Because TV's current constraints are still tied to specific sets of cultural and economic imperatives, which are not dissimilar to legacy TV, the "freedom" that is lauded by internet-distribution ultimately

constrains definitions of gender and sexual freedom within LGBTQ+ visibility celebrations. This discussion therefore provides the social and political-economic context to explain how the Trojan Horse structure emerged as an explicitly pedagogical device during this moment in Queer TV history. The chapter concludes with an examination of a selection of Season One posters from the official marketing campaigns of each *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*. I turn to posters (rather than algorithms) to highlight how the TV industry's inherent risk-aversion continues to structure queer and trans* representation through the solicitation of certain "target" viewers and the perceived success of these programs.

Chapter Three, "Theorizing the Trojan Horse Structure," identifies *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* as key moments in queer and trans* televisual history. Because these programs were released in quick succession, and at a time when internet-distributed television platforms were first gaining momentum in the industry, they serve as canonical examples of how the pedagogical mode of the queer crossover programming genre functioned in this period, namely through a Trojan Horse structure. This chapter illustrates how queer crossovers parallel a broader history of queer and transgender political and scholarly interests, particularly surrounding questions of visibility. Although related, these histories reflect different cultural moments, audiences, and political and industry attachments. Therefore, this discussion elaborates the pedagogical value and vexed nature of the Trojan Horse structure to explain how this device works differently for queer and trans* representation. Although the Trojan Horse structure works differently across the programs considered here, I suggest that the copying of this device reflects its utility in encouraging mainstream audiences to watch and support queer and trans* programming.

Chapter Four "Queer Crossovers and the Pedagogical Value of the Trojan Horse Structure" reads the Trojan Horse device across *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*. I argue that the Trojan Horse structure functions as a particular kind of pedagogical tool for instructing mainstream audiences about queer and trans* identities. Many of these programs use white, educated, upper-middle class, and nominally straight and/or cisgender characters as proxies for viewers' identifications and entry into a series. These proxies are intended to "scaffold" viewers' learning; they allow white and more privileged viewers to overcome various defense mechanisms and psychic barriers of resistance when viewing queer and trans* content by anchoring these audiences to a "safe" point of (normative) identification. Although these Trojan Horses are frequently used as the first step in teaching mainstream viewers how to "learn to learn" from queer and trans* communities, this device ultimately re-centers white and more privileged viewers as a site for education, pleasure, and viewership—a move that often comes at the expense of queer and trans* self-representation and other forms of storytelling and aesthetic innovation for Queer TV.

In recognizing how the Trojan Horse structure can be a site of frustration and alienation for queer and trans* audiences, Chapter Five, "Problematizing the Trojan Horse Structure," examines how the circulation of queer crossovers can open up space for queer and trans* contestation, community-building, and critique, particularly surrounding the politics of production and representation. I suggest that the active reception practices of queer and trans* communities indicate other ways of reading queer crossovers beyond their intended "teachable moments." These alternative viewing strategies, alongside the various struggles in industry regarding queer and trans* (self-)representation, are opportunities for LGBTQ+ communities to "teach back" and "school" TV producers, writers, and showrunners about the pitfalls of their

series. This feedback becomes assimilated into the production and development of each series over time as the Trojan Horse structure is optimally supplanted by another pedagogical strategy that occurs both *within* and *through* a series as queer crossovers "learn to learn" from the communities they seek to represent. This act of "teaching back"—that is, the ways in which each show's learning becomes part of its own form of "scaffolding" for audiences—can lead to transformations in a show's direction over time (i.e., its production, cast members, writers' room, and storytelling and aesthetic strategies, etc.), with many of these programs choosing to displace, de-center, and/or vilify their Trojan Horses in later seasons / episodes. This shift in *who* is being taught *what* and *when* therefore implies a dynamic relationship between TV, audiences, and pedagogy.

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This dissertation reflects my own readings, interpretations, and experiences of teaching, pedagogy, and Queer TV. I have instructed introductory-level courses on media, gender, and sexuality studies since 2013, largely to students who have limited experience with LGBTQ+ communities, politics, and/or social justice issues, and I often use popular culture as a way to introduce students to these topics. I have therefore watched a lot of television over the years, and a particularly outstanding amount while completing this project. All of these teaching and viewing experiences have collectively shaped the conclusions presented here. Throughout this document, I offer various anecdotes and readings of *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*. My intention in including these personal reflections is to capture some of unexpected and unanticipated modes of viewing that I consider essential components to watching queer crossovers. One of the reasons I began this project was to account for the fact that I did not see my viewing experiences reflected in what I was reading about these series, both in academic and

non-academic circles. In sharing some of these moments now, I hope readers will reflect on their own encounters with TV and ask themselves how my readings and interpretations may support, contradict, or challenge their own televisual and/or pedagogical engagements. Thus, in the same way that television invites viewers to identify with what the characters *feel*, I hope this work enables readers to *feel* my viewing process—to trace my shifting journey and to sense the act of discovery, the moments of pleasure, and the points of exhaustion in recognizing the various "teachable moments" presented in each series.

Chapter Two

The Political Economy of Queer Crossovers: Internet-Distribution and TV's Changing Structures of Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Technological innovation has transformed how media are produced, distributed, and consumed. However, rather than disrupting or killing off "old" media, new technologies have forced media industries to respond to these technological changes by adapting their business models, organizational structures, and industrial practices (Lotz, *Media Disrupted* 2; Evens and Donders 6; 48). The technological affordances of internet-distributed television have resulted in substantial changes to the TV industry. TV has been specifically affected by platformization—that is, the rise of platforms as the dominant infrastructure and economic model for media entertainment. Therefore, to understand the broader socio-cultural role of TV alongside the recent proliferation of queer and trans* content, it is necessary to examine the industry's evolving economic structures and its changing modes of production, distribution, and consumption.

Because TV production cannot be separated from the medium's commercial imperative to achieve financial gains, this chapter offers a comparative analysis of the political economy of *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*. By fleshing out the specificities of internet-distributed television as a platform, an infrastructure, and a commercial model, I identify how industrial attachments and technological contexts continue to shape the intersections between TV, gender, and sexuality, even in the digital era. Queer crossovers appear to benefit from greater "freedom" in terms of viewer and content autonomy with the rise of internet-distributed television. This understanding of "freedom" has been said to contribute to a "Golden Age" of Queer TV ushered

in by new platforms and media models. However, this chapter challenges this assumption: I argue instead that television's newfound "freedom," and how internet-distributed television is said to proliferate queer and trans* content, is incredibly overstated. Because TV's current constraints are still tied to specific sets of cultural and economic imperatives, which are not dissimilar to legacy TV, the "freedom" that is lauded by internet-distribution ultimately constrains definitions of gender and sexual freedom within LGBTQ+ visibility celebrations. Accordingly, I argue that the "Golden Age" of Queer Television is in fact a "Golden Age" of Queer Crossovers, which continues to center mainstream audiences as a site for education, pleasure, and viewership in conjunction with the industry and market forces that produce these programs. This discussion therefore provides the social and political-economic context to explain how the Trojan Horse structure emerged as an explicitly pedagogical device during this moment in Queer TV history. As a distinct programming genre, queer crossovers are embodied not only by particular flagship series, but also by a set of political economic and technological shifts that enabled these programs to take the shape that they did in the first place. The distribution and access models used by these series (i.e., internet protocol) are very much a part of the "crossover" modality that is being traced here in this dissertation.

The second half of this chapter extends these reflections by examining a selection of Season One posters from the official marketing campaigns of each *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*. I turn to posters (rather than algorithms) to highlight how the TV industry's inherent risk-aversion continues to structure queer and trans* representation through the solicitation of certain "target" viewers and the perceived success of these programs. As particularly static paratexts, posters are ripe for examining the embedded assumptions about who is watching and who is the intended audience of a specific series. Because the economic and industrial practices for queer

crossovers are not entirely dissimilar to legacy TV, posters therefore demonstrate how queer crossovers continue to manufacture a "privileged" audience position. This section outlines the importance of paratexts to Television Studies, it addresses the function of these extra-televisual materials in framing viewers' expectations and interpretations of a series, and it highlights how *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* each position themselves within specific mainstream audiences, which will help contextualize the different political aims of each series and their subsequent pedagogy in later chapters.

New TV Platforms and Media Models: Netflix's OITNB & Amazon's Transparent

"I think [Netflix has] the smartest business model out there. When you give artists the opportunity to make what they want to make, place faith in them, allow them of take risks, to push boundaries, to even flirt with failure and take those risks, then you're going to get the best possible work, because that's what they thirst for."

— Beau Willimon, (qtd. in Prudom, "'House of Cards'")

Queer crossovers demonstrate how the mainstreaming of queer and trans* identities on TV is a process of commodification. Popular television is often associated with the commercial imperative to maximize profits by appealing to larger audiences. Although TV's move toward internet distribution is a critical departure from both the broadcast and premium or specialty cable models, the medium's desire to achieve financial gains cannot be separated from the production of television programs.

Platforms have become an inherent part of TV viewing and culture. Services like Netflix, Amazon Video, YouTube, etc., are now the dominant infrastructure and economic model for media entertainment. Although there are fundamental differences between these services, internet-distributed television raises important questions about the way platforms mediate our engagement, interaction, and experiences of TV (Lobato 36). As Tarleton Gillespie explains, platforms are not "neutral" intermediaries—that is to say, services and websites intended to host, organize, and/or recommend content in ways that are seemingly open, impartial, and noninterventionist ("The Politics of 'Platforms'" 348).[19] Rather, platforms "shape the communications, interactions, and consumption that they facilitate—through interface design, moderation policies, terms of service, algorithmic recommendation, and so on" (Lobato 38). As powerful infrastructures for knowledge, public expression, and participation, platforms both mediate *and* constitute public discourse, especially for TV (Gillespie, "Platforms Are Not Intermediaries" 199-200). While broader questions concerning platform governance and responsibility are outside the scope of this dissertation (i.e., the liabilities—or lack thereof—in the kinds of user content and activity these services host and/or provide), the following sections touch on some of this literature regarding platformization to flesh out the political economy of queer crossovers, to explain how TV's commercial interests currently impact the "mainstreaming" of queer and trans* identities, and to evaluate the affordances of internet-distributed television platforms in purportedly contributing to more visible and diverse representations of LGBTQ+ content.

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[19] Gillespie further explains how "platform" terminology has been historically used to appease different stakeholders that have competing interests, with content and behaviour responsibilities often placed directly onto users and/or partners. Consequently, the term "platform" elides the tensions embedded in these services, particularly between commercial interests and audience-centered programming (see Gillespie's "The Politics of 'Platforms'").

To say that Netflix has revolutionized TV is an understatement. At first glance, Netflix may look like a "hero" to both viewers and content creators, but the company's decision to "flirt with failure" is not only a consequence of TV's changing economic and industrial practices, but also the result of a methodically guided mitigation of financial risk that is not dissimilar to legacy TV. The American online streaming giant started in 1997 as a DVD by mail rental service and it expanded into internet-video distribution in 2007. The company entered into both film and television production in 2013, where it began producing original programming exclusively for its own distribution. Netflix's first slate of original programming—*House of Cards*, *Orange Is the New Black*, and Season Four of *Arrested Development*—established the service as a legitimate competitor to legacy TV; the company provided a distinct viewing experience that allowed subscribers to watch an entire season of programming at a self-determined pace, completely free from commercials or a network-imposed schedule (Lotz, *Portals*). Although Netflix's entry into original production was initially marked by uncertainty, the platform attempted to manage this risk by imitating the brand and content strategies of HBO. Quickly surpassing its own expectations "to become HBO faster than HBO can become us" (Sarandos qtd. in Hass, "And the Award"), Netflix has become a global and multi-territory platform, and it is currently the leading producer of original television programming: the service is now available in over 190 countries and has over 209 million paid subscribers worldwide, with more than 74 million paid memberships in the United States and Canada (Kats, "Netflix Statistics"). In 2019, Netflix released over 2,796 hours of original content, including movies, TV shows, and other productions (Stoll, "Number of Hours").

As a subscriber-funded internet-distributed service, Netflix has different affordances and priorities for developing content distinct from advertiser-supported, scheduled television.

Because the company's primary metric for success is subscriber numbers, the service must offer content that is distinct and valuable enough that viewers are willing to pay for it (Lobato and Lotz 97). Rather than develop programs for one specific audience to view at a particular time, Netflix uses as a "conglomerated niche strategy" to attract multiple taste groups (Lotz, *Portals*). Netflix's goal is to build a library, not a schedule. The service boasts a vast catalogue of programming that includes thousands of licensed content items, which consist of popular new releases and older hits, as well as original titles that vary widely in terms of tone, style, and genre.[20] Netflix's original series are arguably much more varied than network or even speciality or premium cable television, and their content ranges from comedies to political thrillers to romances, etc. As a result, Netflix does not require all, or even many, of its subscribers to watch its programming at a certain time in order to be commercially viable.

Netflix's direct-to-consumer approach also enables subscribers to receive the content they want, when and where they want it, and it purportedly affords the platform a freedom from advertisers that supposedly yields different kinds of television stories, representations, and storytelling. For example, Jason Mittell explains how Netflix provides viewers more control over how they watch TV than previous media formats, with streaming sharing similarities to the TV-on-DVD model (38). More specifically, Netflix's emphasis on serial continuity has been said to contribute to more complex forms of storytelling that enable producers to construct lengthier story arcs and deeper, more intricate plots with nuanced and well-developed characters. Programs are now being designed for a discerning viewer to "rewatch in order to notice the depth of references, to marvel at the displays of craft and continuities, and to appreciate details that require the liberal use of pause and rewind" (Mittell 38). Although these televisual viewing

[20] These licencing contracts were incredibly lucrative for network and cable TV providers, and they eventually because key to establishing Netflix as a worthy rival to legacy TV.

strategies are still possible via linear and scheduled television, they are greatly enhanced by streaming (like they were previously by DVDs) (Mittell 38). Casey McCormick similarly argues that TV's structural changes have transformed viewer engagement and storytelling through binge-viewing. Although binge-viewing is not a new phenomenon, she suggests that Netflix's interface, particularly its use of the "continue watching" button, helps facilitate "smooth" binges, which can affect viewers' expectations of TV finales and endings (78-79). Netflix's leveraging of the affordances of internet protocol (i.e., nonlinear distribution, eliminating capacity restrictions, etc.) is therefore seen to benefit content and creative programming decisions in general, especially for queer content. More specifically, queer crossovers demonstrate how LGBTQ+ audiences have become part of the "conglomerated niche strategy" used by Netflix to attract multiple taste groups to its service (Lotz, *Portals*). As a result, these programs are seen to reap the rewards of these greater "freedoms" afforded by internet-distributed television. The assumption is that platforms like Netflix have single-handedly contributed to innovation in queer content wherein the company's changing economic and industrial practices have led to more diverse and complex representations, characters, and storylines about queerness.

As an internet-distributed service, Netflix also has the advantage of accessing user-generated data. The company's reliance on algorithms and big data enables the platform to understand much more about how their subscribers watch, and to strategically develop programs based on these observed viewing patterns (Lotz, "Show Me the Money" 343). Netflix's tracking of users' data specifically contrasts with Nielsen's recording of demographic information. Referred to as the "Netflix Quantum Theory," the company's database includes user profiles and metadata generated by users' viewing habits. These figures include previously viewed videos, liked and/or disliked programs, viewer velocity (i.e., the length of time it takes for users to pause,

to complete, or to abandon a series), home screen navigation (i.e., the location where users stop and/or pause on the interface, as well as which content suggestions they ignored), volume levels, geo-locations, devices used to run the platform, associations between genre and time of day (i.e., the types of programming screened at a specific time of day, or on a specific day of the week), and so on. Each title in the Netflix's catalogue is also tagged according to an elaborate system of labels.[21] This information is aggregated into a database of criteria that includes things like genre, content, tone, character attributes, narrative resolutions, etc. Although Netflix primarily uses this data to generate personalized recommendations, and to help the company make licencing decisions, the platform's strategic use of users' viewing information has been used to help explain the success and popularity of its original programming (Madrigal, "How Netflix"; Fiegerman, "Netflix Knows You"; Hirsh, "How Netflix is Using Big Data"). Most notably Netflix's recommendation algorithm was central to the company's marketing strategy for both *House of Cards* and *OITNB*. In the case of *House of Cards* specifically, much of the promotional hype surrounding the series suggested that it was Netflix's algorithm that selected the show, its star, and its director (Havens 6). But *House of Cards* was neither self-produced nor commissioned by Netflix; it was acquired from Media Rights Capital. Thus, much like commercial programming, including legacy TV, Netflix "took the data available to them and made decisions about what television content to acquire based upon their 'gut' feelings" (Havens 7). *House of Cards* was therefore a close approximation to what Netflix's algorithm predicted would be successful, based on Netflix executives' interpretations of the data. While big data analytics remain key to understanding how audiences consume content, which in turn affects

[21] In 2014, Netflix's recommender algorithm produced over 76,987 micro-genres (for roughly 6,000 programming titles) that included very specific tags such as "Critically-acclaimed Emotional Underdog Movies," "British set in Europe Sci-Fi & Fantasy from the 1960s," "Gritty Discovery Channel Reality TV," "Mind-bending Cult Horror Movies from the 1980s," etc. (see Madrigal's "How Netflix").

programming decisions and industrial practices, *House of Cards* exemplifies how the direct influence of Netflix's recommendation algorithm is perhaps overstated (Havens 5; Evans and Donders 71).

OITNB's meteoric rise also demonstrates how TV's new economic and industrial practices are specifically said to proliferate queer content. Although the series initially lacked star-power and premiered with "the least promotion, fanfare and buzz" when compared with Netflix's other originals (Neumyer, "How 'Orange Is the New Black'"), *OITNB* quickly became one of the platform's most successful scripted programs. In its first week, the show received more viewings than either *House of Cards* or Season Four of *Arrested Development*,[22] notwithstanding its limited publicity (Kafka, "Netflix's No-Name Show"). Netflix's chief content officer, Ted Sarandos, attributed *OITNB*'s streaming success and popularity to the platform's use of strategic data mining, in a similar way as *House of Cards*. As he explained, a large percentage of Netflix subscribers share an interest in dark comedies, in plots involving prison or crime, and in series depicting a likeable female lead—key elements all featured in *OITNB* (Hirsh, "How Netflix is Using Big Data"). Thus, for Netflix executives, the assumption inferred from the data was that viewers who would potentially be interested in *OITNB* would likely see the show featured as a recommend title and would subsequently watch it (Fiegerman, "Netflix Knows You"; Sarandos 177-178).

But Jenji Kohan's account of *OITNB*'s conception complicates this story told by Netflix executives and their data-driven decision-making: the show was initially pitched to Showtime and HBO *before* it was accepted for development by Netflix. This development trajectory

[22] *Arrested Development* is an American television sitcom created by Mitchell Hurwitz. It originally aired on Fox from 2003-2006. Although the series received ongoing praise by critics, in addition to having a devout audience, it received low ratings and viewership on Fox, which eventually led to its cancellation in 2006. The series was then moved to Netflix seven years after is cancellation for Season Four (2013) and Five (2018-2019).

therefore challenges the company's brand and marketing narrative that *OITNB* was ostensibly commissioned by the platform as a result of the data. In an interview with *NPR Radio*, Kohan explains how her inclusion of lead character Piper Chaman exemplifies the industry's continued need to appeal to certain demographics. Referring to Piper as her "Trojan Horse," Kohan describes the challenge of pitching a show about "really fascinating tales of black women, and Latina women, and old women and criminals" to TV executives (*NPR's Fresh Air*). As she continues, "if you take this white girl, this sort of fish out of water, and you follow [Piper] in, you can then expand your world and tell all of those other stories… 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" (Kohan, *NPR's Fresh Air*). For Kohan, Piper's character was not only integral to the show's creation and its sale to Netflix, but also essential to explicating the narratives of racial, ethic, sexual, and gendered minorities to more privileged viewers (*NPR's Fresh Air*).

OITNB may demonstrate how, in the digital era, traditional marketing and promotional models used by network and premium or specialty cable networks need no longer apply. Netflix's use of algorithms and big data may affect what shows will be produced; however, it is clear that the character representations and narrative developments within these series are still shaped by a program's intended "targeting," even for Queer TV. Accordingly, Netflix may be better able to predict viewers' preferences, but Kohan's statement is a reminder of how content and programming decisions must continue to appeal to certain audiences. As a subscriber-funded service, Netflix benefits by having titles that make the service appealing enough for viewers to subscribe; in other words, there is a deliberate need on behalf of TV producers and distributers to mitigate and manage risk, as programming decisions continue to be quantified and commodified,

even with internet-distributed television. This predictive intent—that is, the data-drive rational behind the greenlighting of *OITNB*, in addition to Kohan's playing to "certain demographics"—interrupts any assumption that Netflix necessarily provides content and viewer autonomy, particularly in terms of queer representation. Therefore, when Netflix creates a hit show like *OITNB*, they are not guessing at what viewers want—and they are certainly not acting in the interest of viewer choice and creative autonomy alone (Sim 192).

New habits of TV production, distribution, and viewing are irreversibly underway, but it is clear that Netflix's programming decisions are still the result of a methodically guided mitigation of financial risk. As Lotz explains, "industrial processes are generally nearly unalterable and deeply entrenched in existing power structures" (qtd. in Evens and Donders 69). Thus, internet-distributed television has not replaced legacy TV in straightforward ways (Lobato 5; Gray and Lotz 3). As new platforms to distribute and consume television continue to emerge, it is plausible to assume that content will resemble the TV programming we have long known (Evens and Donders 71).

Netflix may leverage the affordances of internet protocol (i.e., nonlinear distribution, eliminating capacity restrictions, etc.), which are said to affect content and creative programming decisions in general; however, as indicated in the example of *OITNB,* the idea that internet-distributed television has led to "creative freedom," particularly in terms of queer content, is ultimately misleading.[23] Because queer audiences have become part of the "conglomerated niche

[23] Scholars like Charles R. Acland have started to question Netflix's "vastness" and expanded complexity. As Acland explains, "the Netflix model is currently the centerpiece for an idea about access and plenitude in moving-image culture, yet its catalogue of about six thousand 'viewables'—which is Netflix's own measure, one that includes each individual episode of a television show, regardless of length—is well below what one could expect at a midsized video rental store a couple decades ago" (52). Therefore, this conflation of "the immediate of certain kinds of availability" and pendetide obscures how current services like Netflix may in fact be more restrictive than other previous analog means (Acland 52). Additionally, the idea that Netflix allows for deeper and more intricate plots has also become part of the company's brand identity. Indeed, season length is not always a sign of depth and complexity. For example, with seven seasons and ninety-one episodes, *OITNB* remains an outlier for Netflix (it is

strategy" used by Netflix to attract multiple taste groups to subscribe to and sustain its service (Lotz, *Portals*), Netflix's "freedom" to take risks is clearly part of a larger targeting and marketing strategy used by the platform to appeal to the pink dollar and to bottom-line demands. Within this shifting technological and industrial context for TV, shows like *OITNB* must continue to pitch "queer content" on certain conventional and risk adverse terms, with recognizable actors, plotlines, aesthetic strategies, and "crossover characters" that conform to the new economics of internet-distributed television platforms, which are not entirely dissimilar to legacy TV.

Following Netflix, a number of different internet-distributed television services have entered into the market: Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, Crave TV, etc. More recently, legacy TV networks have joined internet-distribution with the launch of services like Disney+. Even HBO now offers its own original programming service, HBO Max, which debuted in 2020.[24] Marketing its services directly to "cord cutters" rather than television providers, HBO Max reflects a rapidly changing industry, and affirms the urgency in Sarandos' early statement to have Netflix "become HBO faster than HBO can become us." Amazon Prime Video is currently Netflix's leading competitor. In contrast to Netflix, Amazon is a mass merchandiser and ecommerce giant based in Silicon Valley—the home of computer-driven big data. Amazon's video service provides benefits for the company's business objectives, which is to increase merchandise sales and Prime Membership subscriptions—a paid service that provides free, two-day delivery on qualifying merchandise sold by the online retailer.[25] Available as a standalone

unusual for the platform to have such a long-running series). However, broadcast and speciality cable TV regularly hit these numbers and more, which indicates that internet-distributed television does not necessarily favour depth, complexity, and expansiveness.

[24] HBO Max replaced the network's older streaming services, HBO Now and HBO Go, on May 27, 2020.

[25] Currently, the annual fee for Amazon Prime membership is $99 in Canada and $139 in the United States.

monthly subscription, Prime Video launched in 2006 as Amazon Unbox in the United States and was later renamed Amazon Instant Video on Demand in 2008. The service rebranded as Amazon Video in 2011 and added access to over 5,000 movies and television shows for Amazon Prime members before the company invested in scripted television with original series in 2013. In April 2018, Amazon reported that Prime Video had more than 100 million subscribers worldwide, with over 26 million customers in the United States. Although the ecommerce giant is notorious for withholding information about its video service (like Netflix, Amazon owns their data, and they refrain from sharing this information with others in the entertainment industry), a recent report from Reuters stated that Prime originals drew in more than 5 million members worldwide between late 2014 and early 2017. Based on the number of people watching Amazon originals in early 2017, the company was projected to be second behind Netflix in terms of total audience (Dastin, "Amazon's Internal Numbers"). With award-winning originals like *Transparent*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, and *Mozart in the Jungle*, in addition to an impressive library of films, Amazon's streaming service has become a production powerhouse in its own right.

Because Amazon's star-rating system and merchandise reviews help indicate to consumers what products to buy, Prime Video launched using a similar crowdsourcing and sharing-economy model. Initially, the service debuted its pilots early online to subscribers (in contrast to Netflix, which frequently skips pilots altogether in favour of releasing entire seasons of programming all at once into its digital library), and viewers were asked to cast their votes to help Amazon Studios determine which shows would be made into full-fledged series. Although audience participation and fan ratings in TV are not new,[26] Amazon's public-rating feature was intended to be a departure from the traditional pilot model, which is typically closed to the

[26] Many singing and dancing contests on broadcast and commercial TV networks routinely ask audiences to select winners by voting (e.g., *American Idol*, *The Voice*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, *Dancing with the Stars*, etc.).

public, by involving viewers in the content creation process. The pilot format also included an open call for submissions where subscribers and non-professional writers[27] were asked to submit their original TV series or movie ideas directly to Amazon Studios.[28] Given the cost of content production, particularly the practice of investing big dollars upfront in proven screenwriters, directors, and actors, Amazon executives insisted that crowdsourcing would be a more efficient and cost-effective way to make entertainment. As Roy Price, Amazon Studio's former director, explained at the time: "We built Amazon Studios so that customers could help decide which stories would make the very best movies and TV shows" (qtd. in G. Levin, "Amazon Picks").

Amazon Studios received thousands of scripts via their open call for submissions, many of which were exclusively from non-professionals. Although the company maintained its commitment to appearing populist, with programming chief Joe Lewis championing the open submission policy as a strategy for "breaking down the walls of Hollywood" (qtd. in Gelt, "Amazon Takes Aim"), almost all of Amazon's first wave of pilots that were selected for development for its original comedy and children's programming came from already established writers or major talent agencies. Amazon's decision to develop content pitched by already established writers and producers therefore undercuts the supposed democratizing potential of the platform's "crowdsourcing" model. The company's desire to have audiences participate in the content-creation process was ultimately tempered by the industry's inherent risk-aversion and drive for profits. Thus, Amazon Studio's may be willing to give viewers what they want, but only insofar as it is deemed commercially viable.

[27] Non-professional writers include those who do not have talent agents or managers, and/or those who do not have membership to the Writers' Guild.

[28] The open call was intended to be transparent process. Amazon Studios committed to responding to all received submissions within forty-five days. Content creators were also offered a behind-the-scenes look into the development process, and audience feedback would help Amazon executives determine which projects would be made into full-fledged series.

Amazon's breakout original series, *Transparent*, began as one of these early-release pilots in the company's second wave of programming development. The show's first episode debuted alongside nine new original series on February 6, 2014, before it premiered as a full season on September 26, 2014. Describing the pilot process as similar to Kickstarter or Uber, Soloway credits Amazon's public-rating feature to *Transparent* becoming a household name. As they explain, "Normally if somebody's writing a pilot, I'm having to hope that straight white golf course male at the top of the chain will allow me to get it to my people. But my people were watching yesterday. It honestly feels slightly revolutionary" (qtd. in Willmore, "Why 'Transparent' Creator"). For Soloway, Amazon's crowdsourcing and sharing-economy model allowed them to circumvent the limitations of traditional network and cable TV, and their comments highlight the enticing power of the "Golden Age" of Queer TV discourse. Tacit in Soloway's reflections is the assumption that new TV structures and media models such as crowdsourcing necessarily afford viewer and creative autonomy. Because Soloway was able to appeal directly to their target demographic, it is understood that they were able to give their audience a show that they would actually watch. In other words, viewers who voted for *Transparent*'s pilot would likely come back to Prime Video to watch the entire series.

Amazon's supposed contribution to increasing mainstream representation of transgender people has not gone unnoticed either: *Transparent*'s engagement with trans* life has been directly correlated to the Studio's new structures of TV production, distribution, and consumption. As TV critic Sonali Kohli notes, transgender stories are now "being told in these online spaces for the most obvious reason: They haven't yet been told on TV" ("How Netflix and Amazon"). Similarly, Willa Paskin explains that *Transparent*'s ability to follow a "*House of Cards* precept" gave Amazon Studios creditability in Hollywood as a company that could

produce and distribute award-winning and sophisticated TV, beloved by critics and fans alike ("Amazon Has Finally"). As she suggests, "Your brand may be all about originality, binge-watching, and fresh business models, but that only works if you give the people a show that looks like one they already happily pay for. Amazon has finally made one of those [with *Transparent*]" (Paskin, "Amazon Has Finally").

TV's changing structures have undoubtedly shaped the conditions for *Transparent*'s conception; however, it is important to note that Soloway is both an experienced and proven writer, director, and producer—their breakout projects were never the products of crowdsourcing.[29] Although Prime Video's public-rating feature may have enabled Soloway to introduce *Transparent* directly to "their people," the decision to ultimately produce and develop the program was not a choice made by viewers and their votes alone. Amazon Studios made a calculated risk to invest in Soloway as an experienced professional *before* the pilot episode was even ordered. As Soloway later revealed in their memoir, *She Wants It: Desire, Power, and Toppling the Patriarchy*, the series was first pitched to HBO and Showtime, where Soloway had worked on previous projects, before it was subsequently turned down by FX and Netflix—the former network was already in the midst of developing a show called *Pretty/Handsome* about a trans* dad with Ryan Murphy, and the latter felt that they already had a "trans*" show with Laverne Cox's appearance in *OITNB* (Soloway 52). Amazon was therefore Soloway's "last option" for developing *Transparent* (53). The showrunner also, indicated how the series likely would not have been made "staring someone without Jeffrey's stature" in the lead trans* role of

[29] Before *Transparent*, Soloway was a writer and a co-executive producer for HBO's critically acclaimed series *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), for which they received three Emmy nominations for Outstanding Drama series. Soloway also wrote and produced several episodes for other well-known TV programs such as *Dirty Sexy Money*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Tell Me You Love Me*. They also acted as an executive producer and a showrunner for Season Two of Showtime's *United States of Tara* (2009-2011), among other writing, producing, and directing credits.

Maura Pfefferman (79), and that the initial buzz surrounding Tambor's casting, the writing, and shooting from the pilot had been "so positive" that Amazon gave Soloway's team the "go-ahead to start hiring writers and working on the season" before the final votes were in (Soloway 72).

Given these developments, Amazon's pilot format has since been disparagingly referred to as a "giant decentralized focus group" (Lloyd, "Amazon's Big TV"). As TV critic Robert Lloyd explains, "it is not the case, as has been reported, that viewers are being asked to 'vote' on the series, as if to pick which will be produced; rather, they are being asked to leave comments and take surveys that will 'help' Amazon give the people what the metrics say the people want" ("Amazon's Big TV"). Because the viewing data and audience feedback collected by Amazon is being used to tweak already approved projects, it would appear that the company's "pioneering" experimentation with crowdsourcing and media content production has subsequently given way to mainstream economics. In the case of *Transparent* specifically, the show's development trajectory highlights how the production and content choices for queer crossovers are not necessarily the result of the greater "freedoms" afforded by internet-distributed television. In fact, *Transparent*'s "green-lighting" was very similar to the legacy TV development process, which is notoriously risk-adverse, particularly in Amazon's reliance on Soloway's "proven" track-record as a writer and producer, and in the show's use of Tambor's "stature" as an already established actor.

Amazon's commercial mandate has only become more apparent in recent years. Although *Transparent* debuted to critical acclaim and experienced a successful run on the award circuit in 2015 and 2016,[30] the series consistently lagged behind Amazon's top programs in

[30] *Transparent* was the first show produced by Amazon Studios to win a major award. It was also the first digital television program to win a Golden Globe for Best Series (Musical or Comedy) in 2015, beating out Netflix's *OITNB*.

terms of viewership: the show first drew an American audience only half the size of the Studio's commercial hit *The Man in the High Castle*,[31] which then fell to 1.3 million viewers in its third season.[32] Amazon Studios reportedly remains committed to producing award-winning originals—content that has characterized the service's output to date—but the service has made some substantive changes following its announcement that it would produce the big-budget, multi-season prequel to J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy hit *Lord of the Rings*.[33] Most notably, the Studio has since nixed both its public-rating format and its open call for submissions, and in 2018, Price was replaced by Jennifer Salke, who championed the network hit *This Is Us* during her time as president of NBC Entertainment. In her brief time at Amazon Studios, Salke signed *Get Out* writer and director Jordan Peel, alongside other major talent, and she publicly announced that Prime Video would receive a much-needed upgrade. Referring to Amazon as an alternative to other streaming services, Salke continues to emphasize that the company is not looking to increase its output, despite making these substantive changes. However, it is clear that Amazon's desire to "reach a lot of people" without compromising on quality reflects a defense of its increasing commercial investments (Salke qtd. in Andreeva, "Jennifer Salke").

Amazon Studio's desire to strike a balance between profitability and "quality TV" is perhaps unsurprising given how the company views its media content: as mentioned previously, the streaming service is available as a benefit of Amazon Prime membership. Therefore, entertainment drives merchandise for Amazon. As Amazon's former CEO Jeff Bezos explains,

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[31] *The Man in the High Castle* is an American dystopian alternate history television series created by Frank Spotnitz. It aired on Amazon Prime Video from 2015-2019. The show depicts a parallel universe where Nazi Germany is the victor of World War II. In early 2017, the series drew an audience of approximately 8 million viewers.

[32] Amazon Studios evaluates the success of its TV shows by their "cost per first stream"—that is, the price associated with "hooking" a customer to Amazon Prime membership. Additionally, the production costs and marketing expenses for each series are divided by the total number of people who stream a program first after signing up for Prime membership. Lower numbers are seen as preferable (see Jarvey's "How Amazon").

[33] Amazon Studios offered $250 million for the rights to *Lord of the Rings*, with production and marketing costs initially projected to be upwards of $500 million or more for two seasons.

the company's film and TV customers tend to renew their Prime memberships "at higher rates and they convert from free trials at higher rates" than non-members (qtd. in Dastin, "Amazon's Internal Numbers"). Thus, when Amazon "wins Golden Globes," as the company did with *Transparent*, it helps them "sell more shoes" (Bezos qtd. in Dastin, "Amazon's Internal Numbers").

Netflix and Amazon Studios may be "willing" to give viewers and TV creatives what they want, particularly in terms of queer and trans* content, but only insofar as these programming decisions continue to be profitable. TV's economic models and industrial practices are changing; however, the medium's newfound "freedom" ultimately remains tied to a particular set of cultural and economic imperatives that are not dissimilar to legacy TV. In the case of *OITNB* specifically, the show's meteoric rise cannot be explained by the data alone: the buzz surround Piper Kerman's 2011 best-selling memoir *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, Kohan's playing to "certain demographics," and Netflix's confidence in Kohan as an experienced showrunner on *Weeds* (Showtime, 2005-2012), are all contributing factors that help contextualize the show's success (Liedtke, "2013"). Additionally, *Weeds* and *OITNB* were both produced by Lionsgate, which indicates that Kohan's previous success and ongoing relationship with the production company also helped paved the way in part for *OITNB*'s debut, with very little need for marketing on Netflix's end (Liedtke, "2013"; DeCarvalho and Cox 507). Similarly, Amazon Studio's reliance on Soloway's track-record as an experienced professional, in addition to the company's recent move toward a more commercial mandate, highlights the industry's continued need for gender and sexual diversity to appeal to certain demographics. Thus, any claims about the "Golden Age" of Queer Television, particularly in relation to TV's changing structures, must be questioned, as these industry attachments ultimately shape not only

how we read queer crossovers texts, but also how we understand the pedagogical value of these series alongside their limits for different audiences.

Queer and trans* people may now be visible more than ever on internet-distributed television platforms; however, this increase in visibility continues to exemplify how these programs must appeal to and be profitable amongst a particular "target" demographic of mainstream audiences (whether these viewers are real or imagined). Because these platforms remain beholden to commercial imperatives that minimize risk, the fact that the "freedom to flirt with failure" becomes part of the promotional and marketing campaigns of these platforms, particularly in terms of queer and trans* content, obscures how companies like Netflix and Amazon must continue to make calculated choices about what kinds of queer and trans* content will "work." Such considerations define these platforms' capacities for Queer TV, and these economic and bottom-line demands ultimately determine what lessons get taught by these programs, in what ways, and to whom. As will be discussed in more detail below and in subsequent chapters, the "freedom" that is lauded by internet-distributed television's ability to proliferate queer and trans* content actually constrains our understanding of gender and sexual freedom to LGBTQ+ visibility celebrations wherein visibility is seen as a necessary "rights-granting" mechanism that leads to political and social change. Thus, the "Golden Age" of Queer Television ushered in by new platforms and media models is more precisely a "Golden Age" of Queer Crossovers, which continues to center mainstream audiences as a site for education, pleasure, and viewership in conjunction with the industry and market forces that shape their production and content choices. This centering often comes at the expense of queer and trans* self-representation, and other modes of storytelling and aesthetic innovations for Queer TV.

Her Story: A Different Kind of "Crossover"

As demonstrated by the above discussion, The "Golden Age" of Queer TV is not caused by what we think—that is, the "freedoms" afforded by internet-distributed television and the ensuing visibility of queer and trans* folk that is said to result from changes to TV's economic and industrial practices. Within this context, *Her Story* provides an interesting point of comparison for queer crossovers. As a YouTube web series, the show's conditions of production are very different, which are subsequently reflected in its representational politics. Therefore, *Her Story* demonstrates how the proliferation of queer and trans* content is shaped not only by a particular intersection of nascent and evolving digital media configurations (i.e., YouTube's "accessibility" and increasing commercialization), which are different than Netflix or Amazon, but also by an explicit effort made by LGBTQ+ communities to change the terms of mainstream media production. These differences ultimately determine how *Her Story*'s content is "mainstreamed," in addition to the lessons that get taught about queer and trans* communities by the series to different audiences.

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In contrast to the other programs considered, *Her Story* aired for only one season. Jen Richards was initially approached by Christian Baker, the founder of Tello,[34] about writing a web series after he observed her posting on social media about the lack of transgender representation in film and TV. Since Tello produced web series with a lesbian focus, his only requirement for Richards was that her project include a lesbian storyline. At the time, Richards did not have any screenwriting experience, and because she was not familiar with lesbian culture, she asked Laura Zak to join the series as a co-writer. Richards and Zak eventually parted ways

[34] Tello is a Chicago-based production and new media platform that supports queer women's filmmaking. It produced the web series *Hashtag* where Richards and Zak first met.

with Tello, but Zak's friend Katherine Fisher (Speed of Joy Productions) stepped in to produce the show. Through Fisher's connections, *Her Story* was able to bring on established director and Navajo transwoman Sydney Freeland, in addition to cinematographer Bernice Eveno.[35]

As an independent YouTube web series, *Her Story* is a very different kind of crossover program than either *OITNB* or *Transparent*. More specifically, the show engages with a medium platform that has brought innovation to TV by opening mass distribution to those previously excluded from the legacy development process (Christian 4; Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 149-150). YouTube's most substantial contribution to scripted television has been to provide an alternative route into the TV industry. For example, creatives such as Issa Rae launched her HBO series *Insecure* (2016-2021) by leveraging her storytelling personalities previously distributed on YouTube (e.g., *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl*), while other industry outsiders like Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson used their following to move their independent web series *Broad City* (2010-2011; 2014-2019) to a legacy distributor (e.g., CBS, Comedy Central). Although YouTube may create opportunities for television distribution that circumvent legacy media's gatekeepers, it is worth taking note of the specificities of this internet-distributed platform and how its economic and industrial practices continue to shape content and programming decisions.

YouTube is currently the world's largest advertiser-supported platform.[36] The service began in 2005 as the primary internet-distributor for amateur, user-generated audiovisual content before gradually expanding into the semi-professional and professional sector. YouTube is used primarily for distribution, either as a way to share content, or for the distribution of audiovisual

[35] The series was also executive produced by *The Vagina Monologues* playwright Eve Ensler.
[36] Advertiser-supported video on demand services like YouTube typically derive value from mass viewing—either from single videos achieving mass popularity, or from a mass of videos collectively gathering mass attention (Lobato and Lotz 97).

material intended for financial profit (Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 148). The platform allows users to upload, view, share, rate, and comment on videos, which includes a wide selection of free content such as TV show clips, music videos, audio recordings, movie trailers, short and documentary films, live streams, video blogs, original pedagogical videos, etc.[37]

In contrast to Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, YouTube functions as a relatively open access internet-distribution platform. Because YouTube neither pays to commission content, nor owns a stake in the content it distributes, its operating costs are lower than the other services considered here, which enables the platform to fund itself through an advertiser-supported revenue model that is cross-subsidized by its parent corporation, Google (Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 150). As a cheap, mobile, and accessible platform, YouTube's core business model is "participatory culture": the ideals of "community, openness, and authenticity" are embedded in the platform and brand at all levels of commerciality, with these values most exemplified in the service's early call for users to "Broadcast Yourself" (Burgess and Green 1; Caplan and Gillespie 1). As one of the dominant platforms within a media environment that is becoming increasingly distributed, digital, diverse, and multi-platform, YouTube has the potential to provide alternative representations of gender and sexuality, particularly in terms of its independent funding structures for TV. As Zak explains, web series give creators "so much freedom, content-wise, because there isn't anyone other than the production company policing content" (qtd. in Ennis, "*Her Story* Explores"). However, YouTube is anything but a "neutral"

[37] YouTube's content mostly consists of videos uploaded by individuals. However, following Google's $1.65 billion USD acquisition of the company in November 2006, media corporations (e.g., Vevo, Hulu, BBC, etc.) were able to offer some of their material via the website as part of the YouTube partnership program. Although the majority YouTube's content is still free to view, the site now offers subscription-based channels, film rentals, and a premium version of its service which offers paid subscribers ad-free streaming and access to exclusive content made in partnership with existing users. In early 2017, more than 400 hours of content was being uploaded to YouTube each minute, with over one billion hours of content being watched on the website each day. Today, the website is ranked the second-most popular site in the world behind Google.

intermediary (Gillespie, "Platforms Are Not Intermediaries" 199-200). The service operates according to a dual logic of community and commerce, broadcast and social media, etc. As Jean Burgess and Joshua Green explain,

> There have always been two simultaneously operating YouTubes: one oriented toward professional production, with the requisite issues of copyright protection, professional aesthetics, and the challenges of commercializing reach and attention; and one more interested in sheer scale and near-ubiquity, providing a platform for everyday expression, vernacular creativity, and community formation. (6)

YouTube's competing interest are becoming increasingly entangled. This tension between the platform's drive toward commercial interests and its support for open and accessible user-generated content ultimately shape the conditions for queer and trans* visibility in web series like *Her Story.* As will be elaborated below, because *Her Story* preceded some of the changes that accompanied YouTube's increasing commercialization (i.e., demonetization), the show is constitutive of a kind of "Golden Age" of queer and trans* content for YouTube specifically—not because of the flourishing of LGBTQ+ representation at the time, but rather in conjunction with a specific set of protocols that made the platform "accessible," if only for a very brief period.

Her Story can be screened either directly on YouTube or via a YouTube display embedded on the show's official website (herstoryshow.com). It is noteworthy that the showrunners selected this platform over other popular but less commercial video-sharing services at the time, like Vimeo. Indeed, when *Her Story* debuted in early 2016, coming out videos were already a prolific subgenre on YouTube (Alexander and Losh 24; Lovelock, "'Is

Every YouTuber'" 87). As Michael Lovelock explains, with the rise of YouTube celebrity, "openly gay and lesbian video bloggers (or 'vloggers') [became] highly visible in a way rarely found in traditional media" ("'Is Every YouTuber'" 87). YouTube's top personalities in 2016 included several LGBTQ+ vloggers like Tyler Oakley, Ingrid Nilsen, and Conner Franta—many of whom came out publicly as gay or lesbian on the platform after becoming famous (Lovelock, "'Is Every YouTuber'" 87-88). For scholars like Lovelock, these coming out videos not only indicated YouTube's influence as a space for the representation of LGBTQ+ identities, but also reflected the circulation of particular "scripts" of disclosure ("'Is Every YouTuber'" 88). Most notably, the specificities of YouTube celebrity, its architecture, and its economy, structured these coming out videos as the gradual unfolding of a vlogger's supposedly "authentic" self (Lovelock, "'Is Every YouTuber'" 88).[38] This theme of disclosure and the trans* "authentic" self is one that is readily explored in *Her Story*, particularly as the show's specific conditions of production enabled the series to borrow from different sets of conventions and structures beyond the Trojan Horse device used in either *OITNB* or *Transparent*. This time period also coincided with the growing influence of digital communications technologies and online platforms within transgender communities. As Andre Cavalcante explains, "personalized computers with Internet access have increasingly become part of the everyday life of being transgender, and the affordances of online spaces" ("'I Did It All Online'" 110). Scholars like Tobias Raun have also noted how YouTube specifically has become an important space for trans* self-representation and virtual community, with many folks turning to the platform as an archival information

[38] Scholars have further explored how these coming out moments articulate a normative gay and lesbian subject position that is shaped by specific tropes, conventions, and commercial interests associated with the specificities of YouTube celebrity (see Lovelock's "'Is Every YouTuber Going to Make a Coming Out Video Eventually?'" and Alexander and Lush's "'A YouTube of One's Own?'").

source (101). Thus, with technology becoming increasingly "ready-to-hand" for transgender individuals, online spaces and new media platforms like YouTube allowed users to contest the "expertise over trans bodies claimed by medical professionals, educators, and parents" by positioning trans people as experts (Dame 46); through the creation, distribution, and sharing of transgender content, trans* folks could subsequently navigate the complexities of trans* subjectivity within a social world that excluded them (Cavalcante, "'I Did It All Online'" 110).

YouTube's presence within LGBTQ+ communities undoubtedly shaped *Her Story*'s themes and storylines, in addition to the showrunners' decision to release the series on a platform that already had an established audience of queer and trans* viewers. Moreover, *Her Story*'s debut aligned with well-established norms within the trans* vlogging community concerning the reluctance to monetize content, or to engage in explicit forms of self-commodification (Raun 103). In contrast to *OITNB* and *Transparent*, *Her Story* was produced on a modest budget of $100,000 USD. The team's intention had always been to release *Her Story* online for free. However, because a production of this scale is incredibly expensive, Richards hoped that a larger network or media platform would "see that there's a demand for this kind of content" and pick up the series to develop it further with the appropriate funds (qtd. in "The Mary Sue").[39] To help support the show's post-production (e.g., editing, sound, music and color correction, publicity, etc.), the showrunners launched an Indiegogo campaign for crowdfunding donations (see Figure 1). The team campaigned for 42 days and raised an excess of $35,000 USD.[40] Although the campaign provided a vital form of financial assistance for the series,[41] it further facilitated

[39] Although *Her Story* received a 2016 Primetime Emmy Awards nomination for Outstanding Short Form Comedy or Drama Series, the series was never picked up by a major TV distributor.
[40] *Her Story*'s contribution goal was exceeded before the deadline on September 14th, 2015, with funds totaling over $37,875 USD.
[41] Pre-roll ads do not run before the episodes when they are screened on *Her Story*'s official website via the embedded YouTube display—they only run when the series is viewed directly on the YouTube platform, which means that *Her Story* likely did not make as much money / revenue as it could have directly from YouTube.

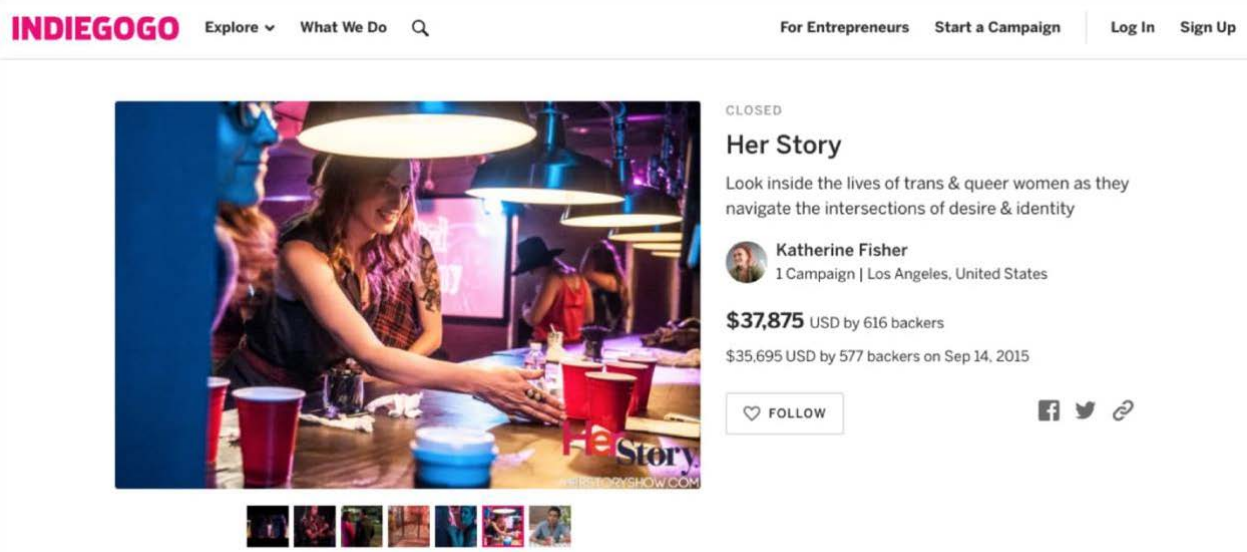

Figure 1. *Her Story*'s Indiegogo Campaign. Source: Courtesy of Indiegogo.com

connections within the community around transgender self-representation. For executive producer Katherine Fisher, the Indiegogo campaign invited the communities represented in *Her Story* to be a part of the production process and to connect with other queer and trans* creatives in the industry (Bonney, "*Her Story*"). In addition to being fully tax deductible, kickbacks for donations included a range of perks and/or official merchandise, which corresponded in value based on the total amount contributed. For example, incentives for smaller donations included a social media shout-out by a surprise cast member ($10 contribution), an invitation to attend a live Google Hangout Q&A with *Her Story*'s cast and crew ($15 contribution), a digital download of the series ($25 contribution), a public acknowledge of support on *Her Story*'s official website ($20-$30 contributions), and an official *Her Story* poster signed by Jen Richards, Laura Zak, and Sydney Freeland ($35 contribution), whereas larger contributions could receive either a 15-minute Google Hangout with Jen Richards, Laura Zak, and Angelica Ross ($250 contribution), a 4-hour style consultation with *Her Story*'s costume designer Derya Derman ($350 contribution), or various meet-and-greet packages with the cast and crew (contributions between $500-$1,000).

Her Story's foray into crowdsourcing was therefore a direct appeal to transgender advocacy and community-building; the Indiegogo campaign served as a critical departure from the Amazon model, particularly in its leveraging of the affordances of online platforms, which have been particularly fruitful spaces for transgender communities, as a networking tool (Booth 112; Jackson et al. 1872). As K. J. Rawson explains, new media platforms can be revolutionary facilitators for "creating, sharing, and preserving trans* histories that would otherwise remain untold" (39-40), and they can offer spaces for trans* people to "communicate about and construct their identities and experiences without the fraught, incomplete, and transphobic mediation of mainstream narratives (Jackson et al. 1872).

Her Story is thus a prime example how the production process of TV can support transgender communities at the outset, particularly through independent and public funding structures like Indiegogo. Indeed, for *Her Story*'s team, the show was less about maximizing profits (as it was for Amazon's pilot process and *Transparent*), and more about supporting queer and trans* self-representation. For Richards specifically, the crowdfunding support was essential to the series' politics of trans* representation: it gave trans* folks who were unable to afford subscription services like Netflix or Amazon Prime a rare opportunity to see themselves represented (Jusino, "The Mary Sue"). Thus, because *Her Story* was considered a contribution to the "community good," it was important for the series to avoid too much profit-seeking and/or self-commodification on behalf of the showrunners (Raun 103).

Although *Her Story* may extol some of the affordances of internet-distributed platforms and new media models, the digital environment is swiftly changing. YouTube has undergone substantive re-structuring to its vision and policy since it first launched in 2005 (Burgess 283; Jarrett 138). The increasing presence of advertisers and commercial media producers indicates

the platform's aspirations to become more than simply a host or repository for amateur, user-generated videos. Indeed, YouTube's desire to turn a profit reflects how the platform is becoming more like traditional media than the company is perhaps willing to admit (Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms'" 353). The recent controversies surrounding the YouTube Partner Program (YPP) and the demonetization[42] of certain videos reflect a contradiction between the platform's increasingly cautious rules regarding "advertiser-friendly" content, which involves changes to the site's financial and algorithmic incentive structure, and to the company's position as an open and accessible platform to all (Caplan and Gillespie 2). Most notably, YouTube increased its eligibility requirements for monetization in early 2017[43]—a decision that has since been criticized by many for penalizing smaller YouTube channels, particularly those featuring content from marginalized communities (S. Levin, "YouTube's Small Creators"; Southerton et al. 921). Other forms of content moderation and governance mechanisms have since included the removal of videos and/or the suspension of user accounts that violate YouTube's content guidelines regarding violence, harassment, sexual content, misinformation, and hate speech; the inclusion of warnings and/or age barriers for videos dealing with graphic and/or sexual content; and the removal of content that infringes on privacy and/or copyright agreements (Caplan and Gillespie 2). These governance strategies have subsequently impacted the accessibility of

[42] According to Caplan and Gillespie, demonetization refers to either the exclusion of a specific video from the platform's ad-revenue-sharing arrangement, or the exclusion of a content creator from the YouTube Partner Program (YPP) (2). Demonetization is often imposed as a penalty for videos that violate the platform's content guidelines. Additionally, if the terms for YPP participation change, videos can also be excluded from ad-revenue-sharing if they no longer meet the updated requirements. Demonetized videos are still discoverable and can be viewed on the platform, despite their ad-revenue-sharing stream being stopped or paused (see Caplan and Gillespie, "Tired Governance and Demonetization").

[43] The YouTube Partner Program (YPP) was first introduced in May 2007. The platform earned adverting revenue from Google AdSense, a program that targeted ads according to content and audience, which enabled YouTube to share its funds with video uploaders. In April 2017, YouTube set the eligibility requirement for monetization to 10,00 lifetimes views, but this requirement was changed in early 2018 to 4,000 hours of watch time within the past 12 months and 1,000 subscribers (see Mohan's and Kyncl's "Additional Changes").

LGBTQ+ content across the platform (Southerton et al. 922; Hunt, "LGBT Community Anger" 2017). For example, scholars like Clare Southerton et al. have noted how the identification of potentially offensive and inappropriate content is governed by the platform's content and classification systems, which are norm-producing technologies (922). Therefore, by permitting users to "flag" inappropriate content for removal, YouTube works against minority groups by subjecting LGBTQ+ content to an evaluation based on dominant norms, which are potentially discriminatory (Southerland et al. 992). In the wake of these changes, many LGBTQ+ creators reported their content being inappropriately flagged and/or classified as "adult" simply for being associated with LGBTQ+ issues, which means that their videos are no longer discoverable when YouTube's "Restricted Mode"[44] is activated (Hunt, "LGBT Community Anger" 2017). Because *Her Story* preceded some of these changes, the show demonstrates how its engagement with queer and trans* life was not the result of YouTube alone; instead, the show was made possible by a specific set of protocols that made the platform accessible for a brief period, before the effects of demonetization and the implementation of new governance strategies curbed the site's possibilities for queer and trans* self-representation. In this case, *Her Story* exemplifies how the "Golden Age" of Queer TV does not rise exclusively from the "freedoms" afforded by internet-distributed television to increase LGBTQ+ visibility; instead, YouTube's nascent and evolving configurations, alongside efforts made by *Her Story*'s team to change the terms of mainstream media production, both contributed to its different representational content.

Her Story has likely already felt the impact of these policy changes. Although the channel's total number of subscribers and lifetime views far exceeds YouTube's threshold for

[44] YouTube's Restricted Mode was first introduced in 2010. As an opt-in setting, the feature allows users to restrict videos featuring mature content such as profanity, violence, sexual content, or nudity (see Wright's "An Update on Restricted Mode"). However, in early March 2017, many LGBTQ+ content creators began reporting that their videos were being restricted on the platform (see Hunt's "LGBT Community Anger").

monetization, the number of new subscribers, user comments, and daily streams have slowed significantly since the series' debut in 2016. Consequently, *Her Story*'s channel may struggle to meet the site's new eligibility criteria, which requires videos to have a minimum of 4,000 streaming hours within the past 12 months in order to be monetized. It is also worth mentioning that the series is no longer discoverable via YouTube's search when "Restricted Mode" is turned on, which means that the show's access to earnings has been vastly reduced.

YouTube's changing vision and policy, in addition to its drive for higher eligibility requirements for monetization, reflect the increasing influence of advertisers. Although the site claims that these shifts in its financial and algorithmic structure will help improve the platform's ability to identify and support content creators who contribute "positively" to the online community, which will in turn prevent potentially "inappropriate" videos from being monetized (S. Levin, "YouTube's Small Creators"), Julia Alexander is quick to note how Internet sites like YouTube are becoming more like traditional broadcast and network television ("The Yellow"). Indeed, YouTube's content and classification strategies for identifying offensive and inappropriate material give advertisers greater control over the kinds of content their brands are paired with (R. Harris, "Improving Our"). YouTube is accordingly at a crossroads: if the website's goal is to become "a new MTV" for cord-cutters, its future vision and policy changes will certainly not prioritize and therefore diminish the visibility of works produced by independent content creators—a far cry from the open and accessible platform it was once poised to be (Alexander, "The Yellow"). Although it is difficult to speculate on *Her Story*'s success if it were to be made now under YouTube's new structures and policy agreements, these changes will unquestioningly impact the production and distribution of future queer and transgender content.[45]

[45] With the rise of influencer industry, it is also conceivable that Richards and Zak would likely be required to engage in more self-branding and self-commodification practices if *Her Story* were released today. For LGBTQ+

YouTube may have previously provided LGBTQ+ people with an alternative means for self-representation, but its recent and ongoing shifts shed light on not only *what* content in considered profitable, but also *who* and *how* one comes to matter in the eyes of corporate interest. Therefore, *Her Story* demonstrates how internet-distributed television's ability to proliferate queer and trans* content is perhaps exaggerated. The series may have capitalized on this brief "opening" in YouTube's history as an open-access platform, which helped shape its representations, characters, and storylines; however, the company's increasingly commercial drive, alongside its implementation of new governance strategies, will invariably affect the production and representation of queer and trans* content in the future.

Despite YouTube's platform changes, alongside *Her Story*'s differing yet constrained production considerations, the series can still be considered an expression on behalf of a group of people who share the same political commitment to support the self-representation of queer and transgender folks on TV. The majority of *Her Story*'s writers, producers, and actors are either queer- or trans*-identified, and their commitment to LGBTQ+ politics extends beyond their work with the series. *Her Story's* co-writer and co-executive producer, Jen Richards, is part of a larger community of trans* entertainment professionals in the industry. She appeared in Season One of *I Am Cait* with other notable trans* creatives like Zackary Drucker and Jennifer Boylan, and she also participated in *Transparent*'s Season Two mentorship program, where she was encouraged to start screenwriting by Soloway.[46] Richards' list of accomplishments also includes co-founding and co-directing "The Trans 100" (an annual list celebrating trans* activists and

content creators, these current practices often involve engaging with particular sets of tropes and/or themes that reinforce homonormativity (see Cunningham and Craig's "Being 'Really Real' on YouTube" and Lovelock's "'Is Every YouTuber Going to Make a Coming Out Video Eventually?'").

[46] Soloway liked Richards' nonfiction writing and reached out to her directly to participate in *Transparent*'s mentorship program, which sought to train and hire a transwoman writer for the series. Richards was selected as one of the top five hopefuls.

influencers), regular contributions to "We Happy Trans" (a website sharing positive transgender experiences), and a growing filmography of re-occurring acting roles (e.g., Allyson Del Lago in *Nashville*, Margo Fairchild in *Mrs. Fletcher*, etc.). Zak is also equally accomplished. In 2013, she co-created, co-wrote, produced, and starred in the web series #*Hashtag*, which was made by Tello Films. She is also a writer and voice actor for Netflix's *Twelve Forever* and Amazon Prime Video's Emmy-winning *Danger & Eggs*, and in 2018, she founded the production company Drinkwater Studios. *Her Story* can be subsequently characterized by an explicit engagement with queer and trans* content through its centering of queer and trans* characters, its narrative exploration of queer and trans* themes, and in the show runners' employment of over 80% female and LGBTQ+ professionals as part of the show's cast and crew members. As a series produced by, for, and in consultation with queer and trans* communities, *Her Story* makes a critical departure from *OITNB* and *Transparent*: the show speaks directly to the communities it represents, first and foremost, while simultaneously addressing a broader, mainstream audience.

Her Story is thus a different kind of "crossover" than either *OITNB* or *Transparent*. Because the series does not have the same industry attachments or "buy-in" structure as more commercial programs, its target audience is different, which means that its character representations and stories are ultimately different. *Her Story* therefore presents an interesting point of comparison. One the one hand, the show's conditions of production are different than either *OITNB* or *Transparent*, which are evidenced by its politics of representation. On the other hand, there continues to be a kind of mainstream "aspiration" for the series, which is made possible by the proven track-record of Richards and Zak, in addition to the show's "accessible" themes (which will be explored in more detail in the following chapter). Thus, although *Her Story* is not required to "mainstream" its content in the same way as *OITNB* or *Transparent*, its

modes of address and content choices are nevertheless shaped by its material conditions of production and the market forces that produce them.

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LGBTQ+ audiences have become part of the "conglomerated niche strategy" used by internet-distributed platforms to attract multiple taste groups to their service. However, who is the intended audience for queer crossovers? To answer this question, the remaining sections of this chapter will examine a selection of Season One posters that derive from the official marketing campaigns of each series. I turn to posters (rather than algorithms) to highlight how the TV industry's inherent risk-aversion continues to structure queer and trans* representation through the solicitation of certain "target" viewers and the perceived success of these programs. As particularly static paratexts, posters are ripe for examining the embedded assumptions about who is watching and who is the intended audience of a specific series. Because the economic and industrial practices for queer crossovers are not entirely dissimilar to legacy TV, posters therefore demonstrate the ways in which these programs continue to manufacture a "privileged" audience position that supports the "freedom" that internet-distributed television is said to offer. In the following sections, I identify how each series positions itself within specific target audiences. My analysis highlights the distributor's assumptions about who is watching a particular series—that is, the imagined or real intended audience. I argue that *how* these images frame viewers' expectations and interpretations of a series reflects the TV industry's need for queer and trans* content to be economically viable by appealing to a broad-based viewership.

Queer Crossover Paratexts: Situating OITNB, Transparent, and Her Story within Different Categories of Viewership

Within Television Studies, the screen remains the primary object of inquiry. Scholarship tends to privilege close readings, audience research, and political economic analyses of specific episodes and/or seasons for television programs. But television has arguably never been *just* TV. As Jonathan Gray argues, television and its cultural effects cannot be adequately assessed without considering a program's "many proliferations" (*Show Sold Separately*, 2).

Official paratexts or secondary texts are promotional materials created by the same entities that created the primary text; they include all the extra-televisual elements surrounding a specific series or program such as official posters, trailers, press reviews, fan merchandise, etc. (Fiske 117). A feature within Literary Studies, paratexts have been theorized as "thresholds of interpretation," and as "zones not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public" (Genette 2). Given their extended presence, paratexts are an important site of strategic industrial practice for TV—they are purposefully deployed by marketers and television distributers to capture a wider audience.

But the significance of paratexts extends beyond simply promotional or monetary terms. As conceptual framing devices, paratexts influence our experience and understanding of a story world; they guide viewers' entry into a series, they set up all sorts of meanings and strategies of interpretation, and they propose ways for audiences to make sense of their viewing experiences beyond their immediate engagement with TV (J. Gray, "Television Pre-views" 38). Consequently, paratexts not only shape viewers' expectations of a specific television series, but also help audiences decide what to watch. Many of us consume more paratexts than programs, which means that we often know certain programs only at the paratexual level. This paratextual engagement is significant, particularly given the proliferation of internet-distributed television.

With so many people watching so many different things, popular TV continues to have meaning for audiences beyond those who actually view individual programs (J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately* 26).

The function of official paratexts is to establish and address different audiences. For analytical purposes, paratexts can be divided into two categories: *entryway* or *media res*. The former refers to peripherals that "control and determine our *entrance* to a text" (J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately* 35). These paratexts inaugurate a viewing audience before a program airs, and they serve an anticipatory function: they frame viewers' initial interpretations of a television program, they set up audience expectations, and they establish a show's genre, characters, and story world. Paratexts can also work in media res. These peripherals also offer viewers interpretative strategies for TV, but they do so by inflecting or redirecting the primary text following viewers' initial interactions with a program (J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately* 35). Media res paratexts can subsequently shape an audience's engagement with a series, as the information included in these materials can change viewers' initial readings of and/or frames of reference for a particular program (J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately* 35).

Internet-distribution has transformed how viewers access and come to know TV. Although broadcast and cable TV give viewers significant time between episodes to make sense of a primary text through paratextual engagement, this gap between episodes is closing with internet distribution (J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately* 42). Platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video often release entire seasons of programming all at once into their digital libraries, which provides a distinct viewing experience that allows subscribers to watch several episodes of a series at a self-determined pace, completely free from commercials or a network-imposed schedule (Lotz, *Portals*). Additionally, audiences tend to learn about new series through different

sources. Many viewers come to watch programs like *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* through word-of-mouth suggestions (either in-person or through various social networking sites), or they may view these series as featured recommended titles by online streaming platforms. As a result, many official paratexts now work in media res: viewers encounter these promotional materials *after* they have either heard about or entered a text. Thus, official paratexts tend to speak to viewers who already have an established knowledge about a particular series.

Although these paratextual categories are not mutually exclusive, I argue for the importance of analyzing official queer crossover paratexts as both entryway and media res materials. As will become clear in the following section, this analysis not only makes apparent the distributer's assumptions about who is watching these series—that is, the imagined or real intended audience—but also underscores how viewers ought to be reading queer crossover series. I suggest that this need for queer crossovers to have an intended reading reflects the industry's attachment to producing commercially viable programs for specific target audiences. Although *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* may spotlight queer and transgender characters, storylines, and themes, there is a continued need for these series to address a larger category of viewership, and to fold these multiple audiences into the specific contents of each program. In most cases, queerness is often de-centered in the service of appealing to mainstream viewers. Thus, official paratexts may present viewers with information, ways of looking, and frames for understanding and engaging with a particular series; however, they can also contradict or challenge viewers' current readings and interpretations of a particular program (J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately* 42).

Promotional Posters: Re-directing Interpretations of Queer Media

Promotional posters are advertisements, but they also tease a program's "first pleasures, meanings, and ideas" (J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately* 50). As John Ellis suggests, official posters are part of a program's narrative, and as "narrative images," they are necessarily calculated: everything is included in these images for a reason, and "everything tends to be pulled into the process of meaning" (54). In addition to introducing viewers to the story world, posters initiate textuality: they establish a program's genre, and they network star intertexts—all of which shape viewers' interpretations of a series. Posters also raise important concerns regarding authorship. Because a considerable part of a program's paratextual creation comes from its marketing and editing staff,[47] promotional materials often subjugate a show's representations and narratives to the needs of the TV distributer (J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately* 70). In other words, what gets highlighted in these images (e.g., genre, stars, etc.) is largely based on the distributor's desire to address a certain target demographic. As particularly static paratexts, posters are thus ripe for examining the embedded assumptions about who is watching and who is the (imagined or real) intended audience of a specific series.

Scholars have discussed how official promotional materials can influence viewers' interpretations of queer media. As Andre Cavalcante explains, official paratexts perform a "double work" as conceptual framing devices ("Centering Transgender Identity" 86). Because posters, trailers, and other promotional materials operate on the textual periphery, they can "neutralize and domesticate potential threats a narrative poses to a social or cultural status quo" (Cavalcante, "Centering Transgender Identity" 86). In other words, paratexts have the potential to close down or "domesticate" meanings from specific textual decodings (Lotz, "Textual

[47] These individuals are often responsible for creating and composing promotional materials, rather than the writers or directors of a particular series (J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately* 70).

(Im)possibilities" 38; Cooper and Pease 251; Brookey and Westerfelhaus 38). This "paratextual domestication" is particularly salient for programs depicting queer and transgender characters, storylines, and themes. As Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus suggest, official paratexts can function as a kind of "digital closet" (38). For example, in some cases paratexts can deny that homoeroticism represents homosexuality within a series, or even dismiss the possibility of homosexuality altogether, by inflecting or redirecting viewers' attention elsewhere (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 38). Despite this potential for paratextual domestication, promotional materials also have the potential to validate and affirm queer and trans* identities, and to incite wider conversations about gender and sexuality (Cavalcante, "Centering Transgender Identity" 86). Because many viewers have a working knowledge of popular series only at the paratextual level, these peripherals can engage non-viewers and non-fans (i.e., those who have not watched the primary series) about the political issues addressed in these programs. Thus, for scholars like Cavalcante, official paratexts reflect a "cultural ambivalence" surrounding the incorporation of queer and trans* identities into dominant and popular culture; these materials may foreclose certain textual decodings of queer and trans* media, but their address to broader audiences simultaneously highlights complex shifts in television representation ("Centering Transgender Identity" 89).

I take Cavalcante's idea of cultural ambivalence as my starting point. The idea that queer crossover paratexts are both normalizing *and* transgressive rings true, and it is almost inevitable given the nature of these programs, their position within dominant and popular culture, and their address to queer and mainstream audiences. By offering a close reading of official posters from Season One of *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*, I aim instead to identify how each program

positions itself within different categories of viewership.[48] In doing this close reading, I suggest that each series must negotiate its own sets of goals, politics of representation, and industry pressures and attachments. Indeed, queer crossovers are not all the same; the specificity of how *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* individually speak to and fold different audiences into their content reflects the divergent histories and pedagogical needs of each series, the effects of which will be explored later in subsequent chapters.

Orange Is the New Black: Centering Piper Chapman

OITNB's official Season One poster was released prior to the series' debut on July 11th, 2013, and it subsequently became the cover for the Blu-Ray and DVD (see Figure 2). As an entryway paratext, the poster frames viewers' expectations of the series by establishing the show's genre, characters, and story world: it indicates the prison to be *OITNB*'s primary setting. Moreover, Piper Chapman's (Taylor Schilling) difference from her fellow inmates is visually marked—her orange jumpsuit is the same colour as the title text, which stands out against the muted beige and grey tones worn by the other characters. This association positions Piper as the show's central protagonist. Piper's blank stare also contrasts the other inmates who are depicted either smiling or engrossed in their current activities, and, as the only white, blonde woman in the image, Piper's character is constructed as a symbol of white, upper-middle class femininity, which further positions her as an outsider within prison. The poster successfully sells the series as a

[48] Because these posters do not tend to appear on the same platforms where these series can be screened—rather, they have appeared in press reviews, subway stations, and on online database websites like IMDb—these paratexts demonstrate a need for these series to capture a wider audiences.

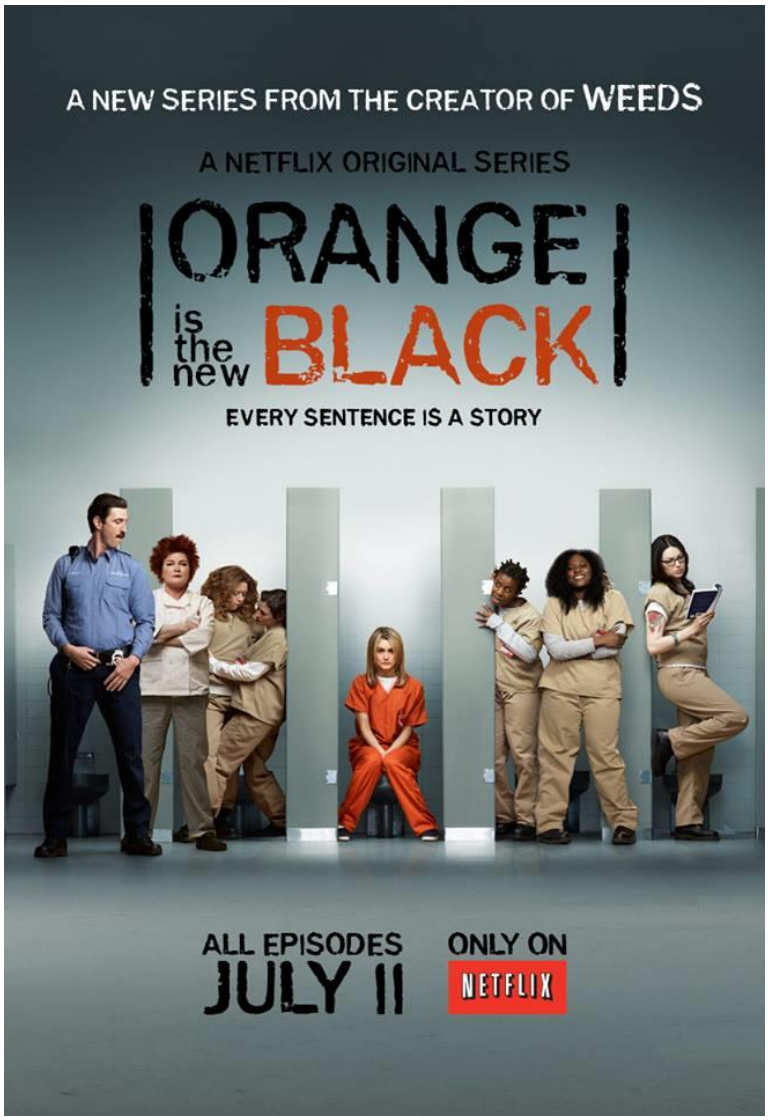

Figure 2. Centering Piper Chapman: *OITNB*'s Season One Promotional Poster. Source: Courtesy of Netflix.

comedy-drama by referencing Jenji Kohan's *Weeds*,[49] and by comically emphasizing Piper's solemn demeanor alongside the other inmates' playful expressions. The poster's tagline "Every

[49] *Weeds* is an American dark comedy-drama created by Jenji Kohan. It aired on Showtime from 2005-2012. The show follows Nancy Botwin (Mary-Louise Parker), who is a widowed mother of two young boys. She begins selling marijuana to help support her family following the death of her husband.

Sentence Is A Story" further anchors this reading: the text elicits humor by implying that there is a compelling storyline as to *why* a white, blonde lady like Piper ended up in prison.

Queerness is coded in the poster, but it remains secondary to Piper. In the adjacent bathroom stall, Nicky Nichols (Natasha Lyonne) and Lorna Morello (Yael Stone) share a passionate embrace, their bodies pressed up against one another in the small space. For those familiar with Lyonne's body of work, the poster networks her star to her previous roles as Jessica in the raunchy coming of age film *American Pie*, as well as queer teen Megan Bloomfield in the cult classic *But I'm a Cheerleader* (perhaps a subtle nod to knowing viewers that *OITNB* is a queerer series than it may initially seem). The prison setting provokes curiosity toward these characters: the poster solicits attention by portraying queer bodies as hypersexualized and sensational objects, since "girl-on-girl" action is something one would expect to see in a series about women inmates.[50] Given Piper's centering in the image, Nicky and Morello's queer encounter works to further emphasize the strangeness of Piper's experience; viewers can thus expect the series to focus on Piper's struggle to navigate prison life, and specifically her privileged position in relation to the other inmates who occupy very different racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities.

Piper's centering reflects a need on behalf of the distributor to appeal to a broad-based viewership, which is most exemplified when the poster is read in media res. In Season One, Piper struggles to adjust to prison life, as the poster suggests, but what makes her transition so difficult is the fact that her ex-girlfriend, Alex Vause (Laura Prepon),[51] is also imprisoned at Litchfield with her. The pair's history puts a strain on Piper's relationship with her friends and

[50]The women-in-prison genre has been historically critiqued for pandering to the male gaze, particularly in its representations of queer and lesbian women (see Love's "Made for TV," Beirne's "Introduction," and Hunting's "All in the (Prison) Family").
[51] Laura Prepon is best known for her role as Donna Piciotti from Fox's sitcom *That '70s Show* (1998-2006).

family, including her fiancée Larry (Jason Biggs), and much of the main storyline in Season One involves Piper re-kindling her relationship with Alex. As a media res paratext, the poster de-centers Piper's queerness to address mainstream viewers; although Piper and Alex are both depicted in the image, there is no explicit link made between the two characters, and certainly not a sexual one.

It may be tempting to say that the poster "domesticates" Piper's queerness, but Season One of *OITNB* does capitalize on the character's sexual ambiguity to draw different categories of viewership into the series. As a result, Piper's centering, alongside the absence of visual signs and codes indicating her queerness in the image, is consistent with her position in the show as a whole. As explained previously, Piper's viewpoint was integral to *OITNB*'s conception, its sale to Netflix, and its initial positive reception and online streaming success (Farr 163), with Kohan referring to the character as a "Trojan Horse"—that is, an access point for explicating the narratives of racial, ethic, sexual, and gender minorities to more privileged viewers. Therefore, this paratextual framing of Piper's character reflects the TV industry's need to appeal to mainstream viewers, wherein "mainstream" refers to North American, straight, white, upper-middle class, and cisgender culture as sites of power.

OITNB may prominently feature queer characters and storylines, with Piper's position explicitly queered in Season One, but the series cannot simply begin with her character as a queer woman. Indeed, the poster could have easily depicted Piper and Alex sharing a passionate embrace in the bathroom stall, instead of Nicky and Morello. The implication behind the poster's modes of address is that Piper's queerness would potentially alienate more mainstream and normatively identified viewers. Thus, as a "white girl" and a "cool blonde," Piper's character is constructed as an access point for viewers who identify with her whiteness, class-privilege,

femininity, and presumed heterosexuality. By addressing this target demographic, first and foremost, the poster successfully sells *OITNB* as a series that appeals to a range of viewers: those who value edgy, queer, urbane material; viewers of prison dramas; fans of Kohan's *Weeds*; Netflix subscribers who enjoy the service's original programming, and so on.

Transparent: Networking Tambor's Celebrity & Star Power via The Family

Transparent's Season One poster makes a similar address to mainstream viewers, but the means by which it does so varies widely, and with different implications for audiences. In contrast to *OITNB*'s poster, which depicts a relatively unknown cast, the image used for *Transparent*'s release prominently features well-known actor Jeffery Tambor as the series' lead protagonist (see Figure 3). A close-up of Tambor's face dominates the composition, and the collection of compartmentalized images that make up the character's expression suggests a fractured identity, particularly when read alongside the character's pensive stare. Here, Tambor's celebrity and star power invokes the actor's most notable role as the bumbling dad-figure George Bluth from *Arrested Development*. As an entry way paratext, the poster prompts viewers to question why Tambor appears feminine (i.e., the actor is depicted with long hair, and he is wearing lipstick and nail polish, etc.). But the title of the series works to eschew this ambiguity: *Transparent* is a play on words, which suggests to viewers that the series will focus on a *trans* parent (i.e., Maura) who is played by Tambor. The poster's tag line—"One Family. No Apologies."—further anchors this reading, alongside the collage of images that are reminiscent of old family photographs. In these squares, the secondary characters exhibit a range of emotions (some of them are smiling and laughing, whereas others are clearly upset or exasperated), which establishes the show as a

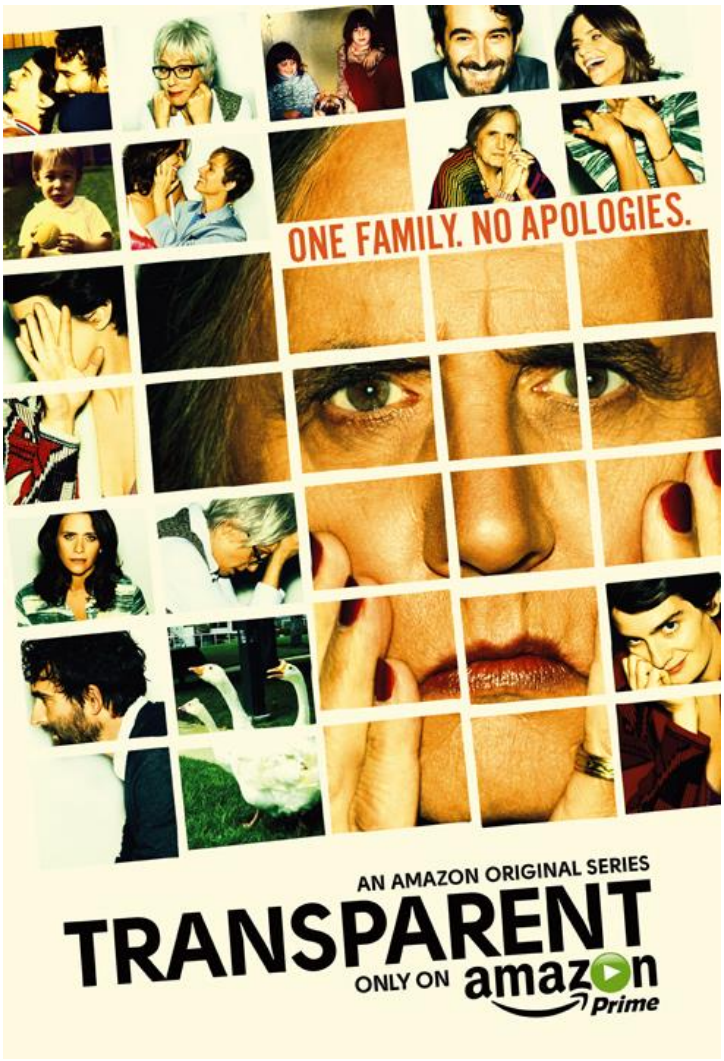

Figure 3. Networking Tambor's Celebrity & Star Power: *Transparent*'s Season One Promotional Poster. Source: Courtesy of Amazon Prime Video.

family-drama with comedic elements. Given these denoted elements, viewers can expect the series to focus on Tambor's character's struggle with her transgender identity, and the impact it will have on her immediate family.

The poster signals *Transparent* to be a very different show than *OITNB*. Maura's integration into the (heteronormative) family structure is significant, since many family comedy-drama stories on TV have historically excluded narratives about trans* people. By highlighting

more seemingly universal themes and the emotional aspects of the series, in addition to networking Tambor's celebrity and star power, the poster frames Maura's character as a relatable parental figure, especially for more mainstream and cisgender viewers who may be unfamiliar with trans* experiences. This framing of Maura not only aligns with the historical norms of TV that focus on a transgender character's gender transition, but also reflects Soloway's strategic casting of Tambor. As Soloway has noted on multiple occasions, Tambor's role was intentionally used to encourage viewers who were already familiar with the actor's work to watch a show about an ageing transwoman—one that they would not necessarily watch otherwise (Soloway qtd. in Anderson-Minshall, "Amazon's *Transparent*").

As an entryway paratext, the poster uses Tambor and the family structure to sell a show about transgender experience to mainstream and cisgender audiences. However, when the image is read *in media res*, it becomes increasingly apparent how the distributor's need to appeal to a larger demographic de-centers the show's exploration of the complexities of trans* identity. For example, in Season One, Maura's family is quickly revealed to be a site of deep dysfunction; her children are often the ones to make implicitly transphobic remarks, and they each exhibit "age-inappropriate" behaviours following Maura's disclosure (Hess 9). Consequently, Maura's family is ultimately unable to support her needs as a transgender person. These details are glossed over in the poster's valorization of the family as an adequate site for nurturing queer lives, something the show itself works hard to resist. Moreover, the framing of Maura's trans* experience within the family elides the work her character does in seeking out queer support networks and identity affirming spaces beyond biological kinship. In fact, in Season One Maura learns what it is like to be part of the transgender community by forming "families of choice" with other transwomen who are played by transgender actresses, Davina (Alexandra Billings) and Shea (Trace Lysette).

Thus, for Amazon to sell *Transparent* as a show that appeals to mainstream and cisgender viewers, Maura's transgender identity must be framed within the cultural familiarity of coming-out and/or transitioning narratives, with the impact of her gender transition on her family emphasized. In the same way that *OITNB* cannot begin with Piper as an explicitly queer woman, *Transparent*'s poster indicates the cultural and economic imperatives of TV that "necessitate" not only Tambor's casting as the show's lead transgender character, but also the framing of Maura's narrative within the context of the family.

The poster's framing of the series also de-centers the other characters' transformative journeys with gender and sexuality, specifically Sarah's and Ari's.[52] Both characters share similarities to Piper in that they are introduced as nominally heterosexual and cisgender, but their respective journeys with queerness in the series demonstrate what it means to live life outside of normative structures. For instance, Sarah's exploration of sexuality in Season One is closely tied to her struggle to find out who she is outside of label identity and the constraining monotony of her white, suburban, upper-middle class marriage, whereas Ari's journey to identify as non-binary is experienced as a politicization of her identity that is first nurtured through her graduate studies in queer and feminist theory. Indeed, the Pfefferman family is anything but "normal." However, when read *in media res*, the poster accordingly demonstrates how only certain kinds of queer identities can be highlighted and therefore commodified in the service of addressing mainstream audiences. If the poster emphasized both Sarah's[53] and Ari's queerness alongside Maura's transgender identity, it may imply a series that is *too queer* for mainstream viewers.

[52] Ari identifies as non-binary, but they are referred to as Ali (she/her) in earlier seasons of *Transparent* prior to their coming out in Season Four. Ari will be referred to using they/them/their pronouns throughout this document.
[53] The poster does include one family photo with Sarah and her ex-girlfriend, Tammy; however, the image is still de-center compared to Maura's photo. Additionally, Sarah and Tammy rekindle their relationship in Season One by having an affair.

Her Story: A Cultural Ambivalence

Because *Her Story* primarily addresses LGBTQ+ audiences, first and foremost, its official poster is perhaps the most open and "ambivalent" paratext out of all the queer crossover images considered here. As an entryway paratext, the poster establishes the show's genre, characters, and story world. The image depicts Violet (Jen Richards) with her forehead pressed affectionately against Allie (Laura Zak)—both women are smiling as they share an intimate moment, perhaps either before or after a kiss (see Figure 4). The vibrant pink and purple accents, traditionally gendered colours, stand out against the poster's balanced composition, and they help construct a visual discourse about gender (Cavalcante, "Centering Transgender Identity" 90). The image highlights the series as a romance via an intertextual link between other women-led TV series (e.g., *Sex and The City*, *The L Word*, etc.), but queerness is explicitly foregrounded with Violet and Allie coded as a lesbian couple. The poster also features Paige (Angelic Ross) locking eyes with an unidentified man (James, played by Christian Ochoa). Out of focus and with his back turned, the man's positioning denies viewers the possibility to read his facial expression, but his suit jacket and trimmed haircut are suggestive of his socio-economic status. Paige's flirtatious smirk works to dispel any ambiguity in the man's emotional state; her expression suggests that the two are engaged in playful conversation.

The "her" pronoun used in the show's title indicates that the series will focus on the three women depicted in the image, each of whom correspond to the names of one of the actresses listed on the poster. Although perhaps less known to mainstream viewers than the cast and crew of *OITNB* or *Transparent*, Jen Richards, Angelica Ross, and Lara Zak are equally accomplished writers and actors within their respective communities, and, therefore, they are presumably more recognizable to LGBTQ+ audiences who are already "in the know." Already, the poster frames

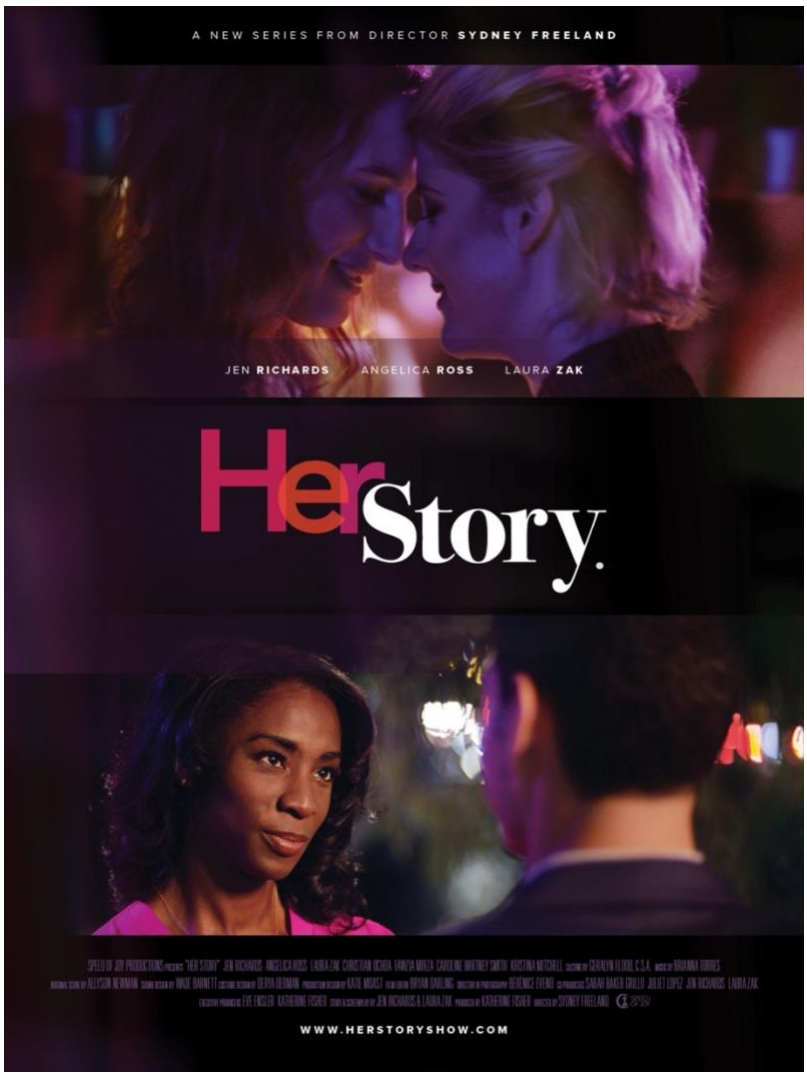

Figure 4. Centering Queer and Transgender Women: *Her Story*'s Season One Promotional Poster. Source: Courtesy of Herstoryshow.com.

Her Story to be a different kind of show than either *OITNB* or *Transparent*, particularly given its emphasis on queer and/or transgender women who are written and played by queer and trans* entertainment professionals.

When read *in media res*, the poster comes to reflect the cultural ambivalence discussed earlier by Cavalcante. Because Violet and Paige are feminine in their appearance (i.e., the characters are wearing pink blouses with full faces of makeup, etc.), and their romantic

relationships are prominently featured, these markers of normative femininity enable the characters to readily pass as cisgender women, particularly when the image is read as an entryway paratext. The show itself focuses on a number of different topics related to transgender identity, including trans* discrimination within lesbian communities, the friendship between a white and a black transwoman, transgender lesbians, and the challenges associated with disclosing one's trans* identity when one is not so easily read as transgender. However, the poster's emphasis on more universal and seemingly everyday themes like dating, love, and romance reflects the limits of representation within a mainstream medium such as TV, despite *Her Story*'s address to LGBTQ+ audiences. On the one hand, the poster's representation of transwomen within the cultural familiarity of dating, love, and romance allows the image to address an intersection of subjects and identities that have largely been absent from TV, but, on the other hand, the poster is only able to do so by using already established signs and codes of femininity.

Although Violet's and Paige's transness is contained and managed within the context of traditional femininity, it is somewhat contradictory to expect more radical content from *Her Story* and its paratexts, particularly given the traditional nature of the romance genre itself. Moreover, by framing Violet and Paige within more traditional storylines and themes, the poster emphasizes the characters as women, first and foremost. This move allows the characters to emerge as women whose difference is neither feared nor rejected: the poster centers transwomen *as* women, thereby challenging the prevailing cultural assumption that gender is reducible to sex characteristics, but this centering is predicated on the citation of feminine codes. Thus, unlike the other images considered here, *Her Story*'s poster aptly captures the double practice of representation as both "portrait" (i.e., media representation) and "proxy" (i.e., political

representation) (Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* 108). Although *Her Story* may be committed to the self-representation of queer and transgender folks, the cultural ambivalence that arises from the poster's address to audiences reflects the ongoing complicity between "speaking for" and "portraying," even when queer communities are able to *speak for* and re-*present* themselves.

Conclusion

Internet-distributed television platforms are said to proliferate queer and trans* content, but it is clear in analyzing the political economy of queer crossovers that industrial attachments and technological contexts continue to shape the intersections between TV, gender, and sexuality. Television is an inherently risk-adverse industry, which means that TV production ultimately cannot be separated from the medium's commercial imperative to maximize profits. As demonstrated in the official promotional materials for *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*, there is a continued need for these programs to address and center specific target audiences, whether they be real or imagined. Although the means by which queer crossovers address different categories of viewership vary widely, with different cultural and political effects, what gets highlighted in their promotional campaigns speaks to TV's continued need for gender and sexual diversity to be profitable amongst certain demographics. Accordingly, queer crossovers must make assumptions about who is watching, no matter how much internet distribution and TV's new economic and industrial practices are said to give visibility to queer and trans* content. As we will see in the next chapter, the differences in how *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* individually speak to and fold different viewers into their content not only reflect the divergent histories of these programs, but also indicate their differing pedagogical possibilities. My

theorization of the Trojan Horse structure demonstrates how TV's embedded assumptions about who is watching a particular program ultimately shapes viewers' identifications with a series and what kind of "lessons" get taught, particularly as these shows center white and more privileged mainstream viewers as a site for education, pleasure, and viewership.

Chapter Three

Theorizing the Trojan Horse Structure: Situating *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* Within Queer and Trans* Televisual Trajectories

OITNB, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* collectively represent a key moment in queer and trans* televisual history. Because these programs were released in quick succession, and at a time when internet-distributed television platforms were first gaining momentum in the industry, they serve as canonical examples of how the pedagogical mode of the queer crossover programming genre functioned in this period, namely through a Trojan Horse structure. Following their debut, many of these programs appeared to account for the shortcomings of the previous generation of series like *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word*, whose representations and storylines were largely critiqued for centering predominantly white, affluent, and conventionally attractive gay and lesbian characters. In addition to exploring more complex queer and trans* characters, storylines, and themes, *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* also employed various LGBTQ+ professionals as writers, producers, actors, directors, and even crew members. This unprecedented increase in LGBTQ+ visibility was heralded by many to be a result of TV's move toward internet-distribution, wherein the industry's changing structures of production, distribution, and consumption were said to bring about new and more diverse forms of LGBTQ+ representation. Accordingly, these queer crossover programs were tasked with introducing mainstream audiences to more complex images of queer and trans* life, perhaps for the very first time. *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* serve as prime examples for highlighting the importance of this period of increased diversity for the pedagogical models they offer; these series emerged from and contributed to a shifting public climate that supported not only an

increase in mainstream education about marginalized identities, but also a growing desire to have queer and trans* people tell their own stories.

Queer crossovers thus parallel a broader history of queer and transgender political and scholarly interests, particularly surrounding questions of visibility. Although related, these histories reflect different cultural moments, audiences, and political and industry attachments. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly outline and distinguish these trajectories and their representational stakes, and to contextualize how the Trojan Horse structure of *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* emerged out of this social and political-economic climate by discussing how these programs have been received within academic and popular circles. This discussion will help elaborate the pedagogical value and vexed nature of the Trojan Horse structure, and it will explain how this device works differently for queer and trans* representation.

OITNB: The Intersections between Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality within the Prison-Industrial Complex

Much of the existing scholarship on queer representations in *OITNB* focuses on visibility as a key representational stake of the show. Many academics and TV critics have noted how the show's engagement with queer content is structured by the intersections between race, class, gender, and sexuality within the prison-industrial complex, and they have ultimately problematized Piper's character as an access point for the series. This section provides a brief overview of this scholarly and popular work to see how *OITNB* is currently being read in the literature.

Debuting in July 2013, the Netflix original series *OITNB* was created by track-record television writer and producer Jenji Kohan and is based on Piper Kerman's 2010 best-selling memoir *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*. The critically acclaimed comedy-drama follows the experiences of a diverse group of women at a minimum-security prison called Litchfield, and it depicts a range of characters with overlapping and intersectional identities across gender (e.g., cis, trans*, masculine, feminine), sex (i.e., lesbian, queer, heterosexual), class (e.g., working, upper-middle), and race and ethnicity (e.g., Black American, Caucasian, Dominican, Puerto Rican). As a series about women inmates, *OITNB* addresses issues related to the intersections between race, class, gender, sexuality, and the prison-industrial complex in the United States.

Because *OITNB* is one of the first fictional representations of incarcerated women on American television, it follows a longstanding history of women-in-prison series from the United Kingdom and Australia (e.g., *Within These Walls*, *Prisoner: Cell Block H*, *Bad Girls*, *Wentworth*, etc.). The women-in-prison genre has historically been a site of queer fascination. Like "boarding schools, convents, rooming houses, and brothels," the homo-social environment of the prison is ripe for queer subtext, and, therefore, it is a "classic setting for scenes of lesbian eroticism" (Love, "Made for TV"). The prison has offered some of earliest images of queer and lesbian women on screen (Beirne, "Screening the Dykes" 27). However, the genre has been widely criticized for being exploitive, both in its pandering to the voyeuristic male gaze, and in its reinforcing of the "prison lesbian" stereotype (i.e., a woman who is masculine, sexually aggressive, and violent) (Hunting 115). Although the women-in-prison genre has ultimately been embraced by queer audiences—whose reception practices, fan engagements, and narrative revisions have created opportunities for complexity and camp—it remains a troubled site for

queer culture because of its continued use of homophobic imagery (Hunting 126; Medhurst 54, 84).

OITNB's depiction of prison is significant since the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (*The Sentencing Project*, "Criminal Justice Facts"). As Yvonne Swartz Hammond explains, "For millions of minority and impoverished people, the prison industrial complex is a familiar institution. But for those unfamiliar with prison or the justice system, popular representations increasingly provide access to what used to be a public institution" (77-78). Although it is important to be mindful that *OITNB* is not a documentary, its representations of the prison-industrial complex are already a politicized critique. As a result, many scholars see the prison as essential to *OITNB*'s politics of representation, and to the show's sustained engagement with queer sex and sexuality across multiple seasons. As Zoey K. Jones explains, prison is a space in which inmates are marked as worthy of civil, social, political, and sometimes even biological death: "their bodies are and are not theirs; their exclusion from the social sphere defines the worlds both inside and outside of prison, and prisoners regularly suffer the violence of being made less-than-human" (142). As incarcerated women, the inmates in *OITNB* are constructed as *non*women—not real, not worthy, and not feminine. This status presents the characters with unique possibilities for engaging in queer sexual expression: because the norms of (hetero)sexuality are temporarily suspended in Litchfield, queer sex is both expected and tolerated. Although the inmates' sexual behaviours and activities may stem from their isolation and loneliness, the prison's setting presents the conditions of possibility for these complex articulations of queerness (Corey 198).

OITNB thus carries a fair amount of representational baggage. However, much critical commentary focuses on how the series challenges homophobic and exploitive tropes of queer

and lesbian women. For example, TV critics like A.J. Walkley praise the show's varied portrayals of gender, sexual, and racial diversity ("Bi-Erasure"), while others like Kristen Gwynne commend the series for bringing the lives of incarcerated women into America's living rooms ("Orange"). As Gwynne explains, *OITNB* encourages viewers to "embrace the characters as *people* with strengths and flaws" ("Orange"). Kyra Hunting similarly applauds *OITNB*'s reimagining of stock characters from the women-in-prison genre, such as the "corrupt warden," the "innocent newcomer or 'new fish,'" the "mad/bad (often a lesbian) who stirs trouble," and the "worldly 'top dog' who rules the roost" (Zalcock and Robinson 90-91). Hunting sees *OITNB* as a critical departure from these generic conventions, particularly since the show does not portray a sexually coercive and/or a violent lesbian character (114). Although some of *OITNB*'s characters may be sexually assertive (e.g., Big Boo, Nicky), Hunting maintains that they differ from the predatory "prison lesbian" stereotype in that these characters do not use "the threat of violence to obtain sex, they do not substantially pursue women who are uninterested in homosexual sex, and they do not pair physical intimidation with their advances, avoiding linking sex with terror in prison" (Hunting 114). *OITNB* certainly has its memorable moments of violence; however, they are rare or momentous in comparison to other programs, and they are only used to mark an internal shift within a character or a changing relationship between two characters (Hunting 121). Rather than highlight mundane and physical acts of violence in prison, *OITNB*'s story is instead driven by moments of physical affection between the women inmates, whether platonic or romantic (Hunting 122). These encounters unfold across multi-episode arcs, and they present myriad possibilities for queer readings, interpretations, and subtext.

OITNB's sustained representations of queer sexual expression has received an outstanding amount of critical attention. For example, Jones argues that the women inmates are

able to resist the killing power of the prison institution through sexual expression, and she notes how Piper's sexual encounters exemplify the transgressive nature of queer sex (Jones 114). As she continues, when viewers first observe Piper and Alex have sex in real-time, it is framed as an act of defiance: Piper (who has recently been released from solitary confinement for dancing "provocatively" with Alex) takes Alex by the hand and leads her to the prison chapel where the two share a passionate kiss. The scene ends, presumably with the two characters consummating their newly kindled romance (Jones 147-148). For Jones, queer sex reorganizes the prison: because there are no private spaces in Litchfield, any space can become a location for sexual activity and queer sexual desire—the chapel, the library, the bathroom showers and stalls, etc. (Hunting 122). Consequently, queer sex is framed as both an escape from and a resistance to coercion and confinement: "Joyful, positive sexual pleasure is only directly seen on our screens when it is being felt by the prisoners… *OITNB* represents sex and pleasure as power—the power to live and feel joy in an institution geared toward preventing either" (Jones 147).

The inmates' pursuit and enjoyment of sexual pleasure is seen as a mode of knowledge, resistance, and connection to oneself and others. These representations contrast cultural depictions of rape in men's prisons in shows like *OZ*—that is, viewers' worst fears about prison sex. As Swartz Hammond explains, "popular narratives about prison use sex to train our gaze toward the imprisoned body as a non-normative body, an abject body subjected to violent queer sex and queer identities" (78). *OITNB* instead indulges fantasies about queer sex by suggesting that sex in women's prison can be erotic or even fun—that these relationships are born of desire rather than solely influenced by those who are in positions of power (Swartz Hammond 81-82).

But not everyone is convinced that *OITNB*'s depictions of queer sex are necessarily "positive" or transgressive. Many academics and TV critics suggest that the program's queer

representations pander to the male gaze, particularly in its hypersexualizing of queer and lesbian characters, and in its indulging of pornographic narrative tropes (Fryett 27; Gittell, "The One Thing"). Indeed, the TV series departs significantly from Kerman's memoir in its images of sexual promiscuity, with Kerman insisting that "there did not seem to be any lesbian activity" (85) at Danbury—the actual facility within which she was incarcerated. *OITNB*'s inclusion of highly eroticized scenes to some extent reflects the narrative and representational conventions associated with the women-in-prison genre—certainly, one would expect to see images of queer and/or lesbian sex in a series about woman inmates—but many academics and TV critics remain critical of the fact that only certain types of women are depicted nude and/or engaging in sexually explicit activities: thin, young, conventionally attractive, predominantly white, etc. (Gittell, "The One Thing"). *OITNB* may foreground queer sex, but the show continues to reinforce a heterosexist understanding of sexuality wherein queer and lesbian women continue to be typified in specific ways.

As we can see from the above discussion, much of the current literature on *OITNB* is situated within a visibility discourse that is characteristic of much Queer Television Studies. These close readings and textual analyses of specific episodes, characters, and/or storylines seek to evaluate the show's diverse representations. The idea is that increased "positive" representations of incarcerated women will bring about better political and social gains for queer, working-class and racialized women. Consequently, many authors claim the "subversive, emancipatory, or even 'revolutionary' effects" of *OITNB*'s representations, without demonstratable evidence of these effects in actual political or public processes (Villarejo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 390).

OITNB's reliance on Piper has also incited debate regarding the show's exploration of queer, working-class, and racialized women (Nair, qtd. in Doyle, "*Orange Is the New Black* Roundtable"; Charlton, "'Orange'"). Like many of her fellow inmates, Piper is a victim of America's extreme sentencing laws following the "War on Drugs" (Schwan 474). However, as a white, educated, upper-middle class woman who is nominally straight, her character stands apart from those who come from marginalized communities, and who constitute the majority of Litchfield's population (Schwan 474). Although Piper's viewpoint has been integral to the show's conception, its sale to Netflix, and its initial positive reception and success (Farr 163), many academics and TV critics continue to problematize her centring over other characters who have their own "deeply moving stories" (Najumi, "A Critical Analysis").

Brittany Farr develops these reflections and argues that *OITNB*'s privileging of whiteness via Piper is embedded in the show's textual features and narrative themes, which has the effect of perpetuating cultural myths about criminality and prison (158). As she explains, *OITNB* relies on flashbacks to humanize its characters; this device offers insight into the women's lives before incarceration, and it encourages viewers to empathize with the characters' plights. However, there is a marked difference between the backstories provided for the white women and for the inmates of colour. As Farr continues, "When we learn about the pasts of three of the black female characters, we are not shown the exact legal transgression that led to their incarceration… *Orange* only leaves this sort of narrative ellipses for the black female characters. The criminality associated with blackness or the crime of black sociality is explanation enough" (158).

Sarah E. Fryett argues that this privileging of whiteness is also apparent in the show's fetishizing of white lesbian bodies—specifically Piper's and Alex's. As she explains, there are many staged and hypersexualized sexual encounters between the pair within the first couple

seasons, and their purpose is to engender moments of fetishistic scopophilia (i.e., pleasure in looking). As Fryett continues, Piper and Alex provide a "voyeuristic fantasy that at once turns women into objects and also reasserts a heteronormative narrative of the male heterosexual gaze" (Fryett 26). Because Piper's and Alex's promiscuity is sanctioned and fetishized, the characters align with a longstanding history of queer representation that articulates queerness via a consumable "lipstick" lesbian stereotype: women who are white, thin, feminine, conventionally attractive, etc. In fetishizing Piper and Alex, *OITNB* further contributes to the denigration of black lesbian bodies, as for example in Poussey Washington's (Samira Wiley) unrequited love for her heterosexual best friend Tasha "Taystee" Jefferson (Danielle Brooks), or in Suzanne "Crazy Eyes" Warren's (Uzo Aduba) coding as the monstrous Other who is violent, unstable, and either overly or under sexualized (Fryett 29; Farr and Degroult 428).

OITNB's centering of whiteness is unequivocal; however, its privileging of Piper is consistent with the character's position in the show as a whole. As explained previously, Kohan has explicitly referred to Piper as her "Trojan Horse"—that is to say, a direct and strategic address to a demographic of young, urban, affluent, and predominantly white professionals who are able to subscribe to Netflix's paid streaming service. Thus, *OITNB* may have positioned itself in relation to issues concerning the prison-industrial complex, race, class, gender, and sexuality to begin with, but the show ultimately lacks continuity with this initial project. As discussed previously in Chapter Two, "The Political Economy of Queer Crossovers," *OITNB* features a white woman protagonist *because* TV "constructs and privileges white middle-class audiences as ideal viewers" (H. Gray, *Watching Race* 71). Under these terms, it is difficult to be too critical of *OITNB*'s centering of Piper when white, upper-middle class viewers are indeed the show's target audience.

Because Piper is meant to address white, upper-middle class viewers, she provides a specific access point into *OITNB*, with many researchers emphasizing the pedagogical and redemptive qualities of her character's centering. For example, scholars like Suzanne M. Enck and Megan E. Morrisey suggest that Piper offers both a comedic frame and a path into the "endemic racial politics of a punitive criminal justice system" wherein her character enables audiences to see how "new racism circulates in contemporary U.S. culture" (307). Viewers are subsequently encouraged to identify with Piper's unease and exasperation as she navigates Litchfield's racial, class, and sexual politics: they are asked to empathize with Piper's perspective that the prison system is racist, and to feel caught off-guard by her cluelessness as the result of her own privileged position (Enck and Morrisey 308). Piper's interactions with her fellow inmates are indeed cringeworthy, and her attempts to understand her peers are often met with humiliation, but viewers are expected to understand *why* Piper feels alienated (Enck and Morrisey 309). Accordingly, Piper's racial and class privilege work against her in prison; her character highlights the fundamental differences between her and the other inmates, and these comedic moments are underscored by the fact that Piper's behaviours and actions are incongruous with the other women around her. At Litchfield, Piper's adherence to the social and cultural expectations of white, upper-middle class, feminine comportment exposes the regulatory force of the norm precisely because her character is meant to address more mainstream audiences.

Piper's privileged perspective draws white viewers into the series, but many have noted how her access point is eventually problematized and decentered. In later episodes, Piper's inability (or perhaps her unwillingness) to see her own culpability in larger structures of power frames her character as the "butt" of the joke (Schwan 474). Her social differences—particularly

her race, class, and education—are laughable to the other inmates and, by the end of Season One, it becomes profoundly uncomfortable for viewers to identify with her position. Piper's blatant ignorance is also accompanied by her transformation into a full-fledged villain: at the end of Season Three, she becomes the ringleader of an underground business that sells "stinky panties to perverts" made from stolen cloth from her job at the prison's sweatshop (*Orange Is the New Black*, "Fear, and Other Smells").[54] Consequently, the perspective viewers see of Litchfield (and of the world) through Piper's eyes at the beginning of the series appears naturalized only because it "mirrors so many other representations on TV and in movies directed toward 'mainstream' (read: white) audiences" (A. Moore 170). This viewpoint, however, is quickly revealed to be untenable. As Anne Moore explains, Piper's "window into Lichfield" is eventually exposed as part of the same racist, classist, and heterosexist structures that contribute to the marginalization of queer, working-class, and racialized identities on TV (170).

Piper remains a contentious figure for *OITNB*. Tacit in the critiques of her character is the assumption that she does not adequately reflect *OITNB*'s viewership: the show's use of a white, nominally straight, and educated upper-middle class woman as an access point for explicating the experiences of queer, working-class, and racialized women is seen by many as deeply problematic, no matter how much Piper's perspective is critiqued and decentred (narratively or structurally) within the series. At the same time, Piper's character is meant to address a particular subset of *OITNB*'s audience: white and more privileged women viewers. For these latter audiences, Piper provides an entryway into the complex racial, class, and sexual politics that occur within Litchfield. The problematization of Piper's access point reflects not only an

[54] Piper's workers are mostly racialized and/or working-class women. When the workers attempt to unionize, Piper ruthlessly humiliates and fires one of her employees, Marisol "Flaca" Gonzales (Jackie Cruz), to scare the other inmates into accepting their current exploitative arrangement (see Season Three, Episode Eleven "We Can Be Heroes").

underlying appeal to the pedagogical, but also a tension within the TV's industry "mainstreaming" of racial, ethic, sexual, and gendered minorities. Piper may serve as a proxy for viewers' entry into Litchfield, and she may teach viewers how to productively engage with queer difference, but her character's centering of white and affluent mainstream viewers still has significant implications for a queer politics of representation, at a time when TV's changing structures are said to proliferate queer and trans* content. In this vein, examining Piper's character development and narrative trajectory across *multiple* seasons is essential to exploring the pedagogical potential of her character, and to assessing her representational value for queer and mainstream audiences amidst these changes to TV.

"The Transgender Tipping Point"

The problem of the "Trojan Horse" character function and representational politics is dually vexed with respect to trans* representation. The history of trans* media representation is closely tied to, and yet maintains a tenuous relationship with queer televisual trajectories. Like Queer Television Studies, early trans* critical accounts emphasized the presence and/or absence of transgender and gender diverse people on screen. Many of these works identified how trans* people have been historically absent and excluded from film and TV. On the rare occasion trans* folks were represented, they were often portrayed as victims, or stereotyped as villains, sex workers, and/or sexual deviants (Booth 112; Serrano 134). This pathologization of trans* characters tended to be racist, with such figures frequently portrayed by trans* people of colour. As a result, many scholars have since problematized these limited portrayals for being distancing and objectifying; these early images not only framed trans* people as either freaks or curiosities

(Namaste 4-5), but also implied a target cisgender audience by establishing "a logic of 'us' (non-trans) looking at 'them' (trans)" (Horak 576). Scholars have also noted how this stigmatization of trans* individuals has been used to make gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities appear more acceptable (Gamson, "Talking Freaks" 83; Gamson, "Publicity Traps" 21; Ng 260). As Joshua Gamson explains, "a new, postcloset kind of normalization pattern is at work here: the acceptability of lesbian and gay families, and of lesbian and gay people into their birth families, is predicated on their *not* exhibiting […] the 'freakish' gender of transgendered people" ("Talking Freaks" 83). Consequently, this strategic industrial practice for film and TV has contributed to the further marginalization of trans* and gender diverse people, as they continue to be positioned as secondary and Other to queer sexualities (Capuzza and Spencer 224-225).

Given the recent success of various equality campaigns in the United States and Canada to help gay, lesbian, and bisexual people access marriage, the military, and economic job security in the workplace, transgender politics has been discursively positioned as "America's next civil rights frontier" (Steinmetz, "The Transgender Tipping Point"). In the last several years, there has been a proliferation of transgender visibility in both scripted and reality television series, alongside increasing public attention toward transgender issues: the imprisonment of CeCe Macdonald at a men's correctional facility in 2012; the success and rising celebrity of Janet Mock and Laverne Cox, with the latter appearing on the 2014 cover of *TIME* magazine entitled "The Transgender Tipping Point" (Steinmetz); the highly publicized transitioning procedures of Caitlyn Jenner in 2015, and of sisters Lana and Lilly Wachowski in 2016; the Tonner Doll Company's release of the first transgender doll in 2017; the appearance of the first openly transgender playmate, Ines Rau, in the November 2017 issue of *Playboy* magazine, etc. This increase in trans visibility represents a shift in both the political and televisual landscape. What

might be characterized as the "transgender turn" thus provides context for the emergence of *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* and their subsequent engagement with trans* life.

OITNB follows this longstanding history of transgender representation in dominant and popular culture. The series arguably inaugurated the "tipping-point" of this recent wave of trans* media representation, with the casting of black transgender actress Laverne Cox as trans* woman inmate Sophia Burset—a character who was heralded by many to be both ground-breaking and revolutionary (McLaren et al. 173). Sophia's appearance as a trans woman who is already living in her affirmed gender identity was considered not only a crucial addition to the show's already highly diverse cast of women characters (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 28), but also a critical departure from previous models and negative stereotypes associated with trans* representation in film and TV. As Hil Malatino explains, Sophia is "vastly dissimilar from the types of trans characters so frequently written. She is not presented as victimized, evil, deceptive, or pathological. She isn't a cold-blooded killer, nor is she a sex worker" (97). As a more subtle and "humanized" depiction of trans life (Malatino 97), Cox's visibility and breakout performance catapulted the actress into the mainstream spotlight; she not only received an Emmy nomination for her role, but also used her success and celebrity to critically engage trans* issues. She appeared on various news outlines advocating for transgender civil rights, which included interviews with Katie Couric, NPR Radio, and Janet Mock on MSNBC, and she has used her platform to promote and support other trans* media projects in the industry. As one of the most prominent transwomen in America, Cox bridges trans* and mainstream communities; her star power gives her access to mainstream discourse, "despite the very real exclusions [she] and other members of [her] community face," and her growing influence positions her as a representative for the "publicization of counter public narratives and politics" (Jackson et al. 1880).

Although the importance of Cox's visibility for trans women of colour cannot be overstated, her role as Sophia was relatively minor compared to the other characters in *OITNB*. Following her Season One debut, Sophia's narrative and storyline began to operate somewhat independently of the other characters, with Cox's presence significantly diminished in Seasons Four and Five. Additionally, many scholars and television critics have since problematized Sophia's character for rearticulating new forms of transnormativity. For example, Victoria E. Thomas explains how transgender visibility within this tipping-point-era of trans* media representation supports "dominant structures that uplift White, neoliberal ideologies of acceptance and equality" (521). In the case of Sophia, the character reflects an "ideal" trans* body, both in her performance of femininity, and in her lack of racial community with the other black cisgender women inmates around her. By conforming to white, cisgender, and heteronormative standards of appearance, behaviour, and performance, Sophia "essentializes transgender identity as an imitation of hegemonic womanhood" (Thomas 523); she "humanizes" transgender individuals through a "colorblind, neoliberal discourse that represents trans womanhood as hyperfeminine and unthreatening" (Thomas 533). As a "good" trans object, Sophia underscores the marketability of trans* representations that are designed for largely white, middle-class, and normatively gendered viewers (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 28). As Keegan elaborates, "Good trans media objects are 'good' precisely because they allow an engagement with transgender identifications without giving up the economy of sexual difference itself—that is, they successfully absorb transgender identity into their representational fields without threatening the intelligibility of preexisting gender identifications" ("On the Necessity" 27).

These tensions regarding transnormativity play out in different ways in relation to *Transparent*. The Amazon Prime Video original series was created by Joey Soloway and is based on their experience of having their own parent come out as transgender. Premiering as a full season in September 2014,[55] the critically acclaimed and award-winning comedy-drama follows the Pfeffermans—a white, Jewish, upper-middle class family living in Los Angeles—after the person whom they know as their father Mort reveals that she is transgender. By centering trans* characters and storylines, *Transparent* has helped paved the way for how we imagine trans* people on screen, and in what audiences are willing to accept when it comes to who can and should tell transgender stories, despite the show's misstep in casting a cisgender man to play the lead trans* character in the series.[56] The show's production team has taken its responsibility to trans* visibility seriously, particularly in its "Transfirmative Action Program" (Villarejo, "Jewish, Queer-ish" 20). Apart from Maura, all of the transgender characters depicted in the series are played by transgender actors, who range from early-career performers (e.g., Trace Lysett in her role as Shea) to more established entertainers (e.g., Alexandra Billings[57] in her role as Maura's best friend, Davina). The production team also made an explicit effort to employ trans* writers, directors, and crew members, and to hire prominent trans* figures like Zachary Drucker, Rhys Ernst, and Professor Jennifer Boylan as early content consultants. *Transparent*'s filming set also included gender neutral bathrooms, which indicated the shifting modes of televisual production on set. This intentional incorporation of trans* people both in

[55] The pilot episode of *Transparent* debuted alongside nine new original series on February 6, 2014, before the show premiered as a full season on September 26, 2014.
[56] According to GLAAD's 2013-2014 *Where We Are on TV* report, when *Transparent* first premiered in 2014, there were only three prominent trans* characters featured on TV: Unique Adams from Fox's *Glee*, Adam Torres from CTV's *Degrassi*: *The Next Generation*, and Sophia Burset from Netflix's *Orange Is the New Black*. However, GLADD's 2018-2019 report indicated an exponential increase in transgender representation, with a total of twenty-six regular and/or or recurring trans* characters featured across network, cable, and streaming TV.
[57] Alexandra Billings was one of the first openly transgender performers to play a transgender character on television in ABC's 2005 made-for-TV movie *Romy and Michele: In the Beginning.*

front of and behind the camera reflects a "conscious collaboration"—that is, a political commitment on behalf of the show's writers, producers, and directors to involve the communities the series seeks to represent (Adams, "Men Who Play").

In addition to employing trans* entertainment professionals, *Transparent*'s appeal to LGBTQ+ communities is also exemplified in the show's casting and textual features. For example, the series spotlights a number of guest roles and cameos played by notable queer and trans* entertainers and celebrities, not all of whom may be recognizable to more mainstream viewers (e.g., comedian Tig Notaro; Tony Award-winning actress Cherry Jones; musician and comedian Carrie Brownstein; transgender actress and model Hari Nef; former Olympian and public figure Caitlyn Jenner; Emmy Award-winning screenwriter Lean Waithe, etc.). The show also features several historical LGBTQ+ plotlines as backstory for Maura's tragic family history. For example, the flashback series in Season Two depicts Maura's mother, Grandma Rose (Emily Robinson), living with her transgender sister Gittel (Hari Nef) during the 1930s Weimar period in Berlin, days before the city's flourishing queer subculture was destroyed by the Nazis.[58] Many of these scenes take place at the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, run by real-life German physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, which is where Gittel lived. The flashbacks serve as a kind of queer "Easter egg" for audiences—they not only add a layer to viewers' understanding of the Pfeffermans and inherited trauma,[59] but also highlight an often-untold

[58] Soloway drew inspiration for the flashbacks from Robert Beachy's book *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity*.

[59] In the flashbacks, Yetta (Maura's grandmother) arranged for herself and her children, Rose and Gittel, to escape to America to join her husband Haim. However, Gittel was taken away during a Nazi raid of the institute, and the family was forced to leave without her, leaving Gittel never to be seen again. Years later in America, an adult Rose (played by Gaby Hoffman) gives birth to Maura who, as a young child, begins to explore her gender identity in secret by dressing in her mother's clothing (see Season Two, Episode Eight "If I Were a Bell"). When Haim discovers Maura's secret, he attacks her, despite Rose trying to stop him. Haim furiously states that Gittel "burned in the ovens" for similar behaviour, although he does not use the word transgender. Rose is traumatized by the incident, and she packs her suitcase and leaves; it is unclear how long she is gone for, where she goes, or when she came back into Maura's life. Throughout the series, Maura is unaware that there is another trans* person in her

moment in LGBTQ+ history within dominant and popular culture. For queer and trans* viewers who are already "in the know," the show's fictionalization of this historical event affirms the continual existence of queer and trans* folks throughout history, whereas for more mainstream and normatively identified audiences, these moments allow access to previous forms of subjugated knowledge, and they serve as a means for educating viewers about an important moment in LGBTQ+ history.

Although *Transparent* has made substantial contributions to increasing trans* visibility, scholars have been critical of the show's character representations and storylines, particularly its chronicling of Maura's gender transition as an ageing transwoman. For example, Amy Villarejo is quick to note how *Transparent* takes place within a "carefully constructed white world" ("Jewish, Queer-ish" 12), while Kay Siebler explains how transgender characters in film and TV are often depicted within coming-out and/or transitioning narratives (76). These storylines tend to emphasize how a character's gender transition impacts the cisgender people around them, and they frequently involve narrative conventions that require an onscreen "unmasking" of a trans* character's identity in order to build tension in the story. Such revelations are often delayed, and they are intended to prompt discomfort, fear, or even disgust in the cisgender characters' reactions to this discovery (Miller, "Fear and the Cisgender" 4; Miller, "Becoming One" 140). Maura's trajectory aligns with these historical norms of film and TV; her gender transition is largely explored via its impact on her (mostly white, upper-middle class, and cisgender) family and friends, with their reactions to Maura's disclosure centered. This same trope can also be seen in *OITNB*. Although Sophia is first introduced as a transgender woman who is already living in

family; she had either misheard, misremembered, or had been lied to about what happened to her aunt, and she was led to believe that there were actually two people, an aunt Gittel and her husband Uncle Gershom (which is in fact Gittel's dead name). Maura eventually learns the truth about Gittel in Season Four.

her affirmed gender identity, the series uses flashbacks to highlight how her transition has negatively impacted her relationship with her wife and son.[60]

For Michael Lovelock, TV's conflation between trans* identities and gender transition frames televisual representations of transgender subjectivity within a "wrong body discourse," wherein a character's feelings of being born or trapped in the "wrong body" are overemphasized (Lovelock, "'I Am…'" 740). This preoccupation with transition narratives thus excludes other representations of trans* experience. For example, trans* characters are rarely depicted within romantic storylines, or portrayed in erotic or sexual relationships (Abbott 32): Maura is only given a casual love interest in Season Two, and while Sophia from *OITNB* is married, her relationship with her wife is estranged by her imprisonment, and she is never shown being sexually intimate. Additionally, scholars like Steven Funk and Jaydi Funk point out how Maura is often depicted feeling physically disoriented in her body (884). Although feelings of disorientation are a perfunctory part of the trans* coming-out process, S. Funk and J. Funk argue that these moments are fetishizing because they construct Maura's body as "exotic and worth of special attention" (891). Indeed, Maura ultimately lacks the autonomy to name herself and her identity, and the show attempts to normalize her dispossession by framing her experience through her own internalized transphobia. As S. Funk and J. Funk explain, Maura's initial reluctance to come out to her family, as well her assumption that her children will neither understand nor accept her, rests on her inability to comprehend alternative forms of gender expression outside the binary (S. Funk and J. Funk 884). When Maura does eventually disclose her transgender identity, the recognition she receives from her children comes at the expense of

[60] Through the flashbacks, viewers learn that Sophia committed credit card fraud to finance her social, medical, and legal transition, and to spoil her adolescent son, Michael, who had difficulty accepting Sophia's changing identity. Although Sophia's wife, Crystal, is supportive of Sophia's choices, Michael eventually informs the police about Sophia's crimes to avenge himself of the embarrassment he feels that she has caused.

her autonomy (S. Funk and J. Funk 881). As the authors continue, "Not only must Maura tell her cisgender friends and family that she willfully 'deceived' them from a 'truth' she knew since she was five, but she must also learn that she will never be recognized fully as a woman because she was once considered male. This forever frames her body in the cisgender imaginative as either inferior, marked by lacking, or as exotic, made conspicuous through spectacle" (S. Funk and J. Funk 889). Maura's disclosure thus reinforces cisnormativity—it reifies binary gender by framing transgender dispossession in the service of a cisgender gaze.

This criticism that Maura's coming-out / transition appeals to a cisgender gaze is true, largely because mainstream cisgender viewers are in fact one of the show's target audiences. Soloway has noted on multiple occasions how Jeffrey Tambor's casting as Maura Pfefferman was a strategic decision used to encourage viewers who were already familiar with the actor's work to watch a show about an ageing transwoman—that is, a show that they would not necessarily watch otherwise. As Soloway explains, "America already loves Tambor. To watch him become Mort and then become Maura it's like, here's somebody you already know and love who is trans" (qtd. in Anderson-Minshall, "Amazon's *Transparent*"). But Tambor's performance has incited much debate over the casting of cisgender actors in trans* roles. Speaking about the issue, Nick Adams, director of GLADD's Transgender Media Program, explains how the continued casting of cisgender actors in the roles of transwomen sends viewers two "strong and wrong messages"—first, that "being transgender is an act, a performance, just a matter of playing dress-up," and, second, that "underneath all the artifice, a transgender woman really is a man" ("Men Who Play"). However, Adams maintains that Tambor's portrayal of Maura is a rare exception: his casting fits the story being told of an older transwoman beginning her transition later in life ("Men Who Play"). Rhys Ernst—a transgender artist and filmmaker who served as a

producer, director, and content consultant for *Transparent*—similarly echoes Adams' position. Although Ernest agrees that film and TV productions have a responsibility to cast trans* people in transgender roles "98 percent of the time," he argues that exceptions ought to be made in "pre-transition" situations like Maura's (qtd. in Ginelle, "'Transparent' Producers"). Because *Transparent* begins with Maura presenting as Mort, Ernst maintains that it would be offensive for the showrunners to hire a transwoman and "put her in male drag" for these flashbacks and early scenes (qtd. in Ginelle, "'Transparent' Producers").

Although Tambor's portrayal of an ageing transwoman may allay some of the criticism surrounding his casting, the actor's performance follows a longstanding history of cisgender actors playing transgender roles: Jaye Davidson in *The Crying Game* (1992), Hilary Swank in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), Felicity Huffman in *Transamerica* (2005), Kerry Washington in *Life Is Hot in Cracktown* (2009), Jared Leto in *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), Eddie Redmayne in *The Danish Girl* (2015), etc. As a result, many academics and TV critics have problematized the language of "early transition" used to defend Tambor's portrayal of a character who beings her transition later in life. As S.E. Smith explains, "since Maura doesn't 'pass' as a woman by cis standards" many assume that "it's okay for a man to play her" (Amazon's "Transparent"). Smith's comments are particularly salient when considering how other TV series have addressed this problem of casting cisgender actors in transgender roles. For example, Laverne Cox's identical twin brother, M. Lamar, was cast as his sister's "pre-transition" character, Marcus Burset, in two episodes of the series. Additionally, more recent programs like *Her Story*, *Pose*, and *Euphoria* have sought to move beyond this casting issue entirely by choosing to only represent trans* characters who are already living in their affirmed gender identities, and who are played by transgender entertainment professionals. Jen Richards, co-writer and co-executive

producer of *Her Story*, similarly takes issue with Tambor's casting. Although she acknowledges the actor's ability to represent a "natural and endearing clumsiness that comes with someone who doesn't begin to express their femininity in a public way until their much older" (Richards qtd. in O'Donnell, "How Authentic"), Richards ultimately remains critical of the fact that *Transparent* depicts yet another story about a "late-transitioning, middle-class, white transwoman with a family" ("How Amazon's 'Transparent'"). Indeed, it would appear that Hollywood's preoccupation with coming-out and/or transitioning narratives is at the core of these larger casting issues.

The issue of self-representation has become a cornerstone debate within transgender politics, particularly after a number of white cisgender actors received recognition and several high-profile awards for their portrayal of transwomen (e.g., Jared Leto's 2014 Oscar win for best supporting actor for his role as Rayon in *Dallas Buyer's Club*, Jeffery Tambor's 2015 Primetime Emmy and 2016 Golden Globe wins for his portrayal of Maura in *Transparent*, Eddie Redmayne's 2016 Oscar nomination for best actor for his performance of Lili Elbe, the first transwoman to receive gender confirmation surgery in 1931). Although many entertainment professionals in the industry have cited the lack of transgender talent as justification for the continued hiring of cisgender people to write, to tell, and to perform transgender stories, trans* artists and activists have since exposed the transphobic assumptions that underpin these casting decisions. Adams explains that transwomen are specifically in a double bind where they don't look "trans" enough to play transwomen but are still denied opportunities for other acting roles ("Men Who Play"). Moreover, the casting of cisgender actors in transwomen roles continues to define trans* people by their bodies, and through a rhetoric of lack and difference: sex

characteristics and the physical parts of the body related to development and reproduction are invariably used to signify a trans* person's gender identity (S. Funk and J. Funk 881).

Extending these reflections, Richards understands that writing, acting, and directing are learned skills—indeed simply being trans* does not necessarily make one a good storyteller or performer—but she asserts that it is "ridiculous to think that there aren't great trans artists, or that a cis person could tell a trans story well without engaging with trans people" (Richards qtd. in Jusino, "The Mary Sue"). Accordingly, trans* people have faced limited employment opportunities within the entertainment industry *because* production companies and showrunners have not been actively seeking out and/or hiring transgender talent. This longstanding history raises several critical questions regarding transgender representation—that is, who can and should tell transgender stories, and how ought these narratives be told? Although trans* lives are now being spotlighted on TV, in almost all of these cases, these stories continue to be told by cisgender creators with trans* roles played by white cisgender actors.

Because of these rapid changes in visibility, Richards contends that trans* communities have since become increasingly vocal about how they are being portrayed. As she explains, "trans activists and their allies refuse to be quiet as their stories are exploited for drama and pathos by artists who know little to nothing about their experiences, as cis actors reap rewards for the bravery of the performances while failing to acknowledge the actual current struggles of trans people" (Richards, "Behind the Scenes"). This push for transgender self-representation—to have trans* people write, tell, and perform their own stories—is a critical departure from queer representational practices, which do not tend to consider the sexual orientation of an actor and/or actress when casting for roles (Martin 282-283).

In response to this criticism from trans* communities, *Transparent* became more "flexibly responsive" to the desires of its fans and audiences in later seasons (Goddard and Hogg, "Streaming Intersectionality" 431). The series began grappling with the question of intersectionality in its third season, particularly in highlighting Maura's lack of awareness of her own position of privilege as a white, educated, upper-middle class transwoman (Horvat 470). As Anamarija Horvat notes, the show's humor and comedic elements shifted to stem from Maura's "clueless narcissism and self-absorption" alongside her family (Horvat 469). Tambor was also promptly fired from the series in 2017 when the actor became implicated in #MeToo allegations of sexual harassment toward fellow trans* co-stars Trace Lysette and Van Barnes—a revelation that stood in stark contrast to the show's politics. The show was put on hiatus before returning for its musical finale in 2019 in the absence of Tambor/Maura.

In the years following *Transparent*'s conclusion, the show has been re-framed by many as a product of TV's "proto phase" of production developments concerning internet-distributed television, diversity, and inclusion (Goddard and Hogg, "Introduction" 257), particularly in its problematic casting of white, cisgender actor Jeffery Tambor in the lead transgender role of Maura Pfefferman. As Joy Press writes in *Vanity Fair*, "While *Transparent* was a landmark in transgender visibility on television, for many trans creatives, it felt like a baby step" ("*Pose's* Rise"). Thus, *Transparent* was always a show about the Pfefferman family and their responses to Maura's disclosure than it was about Maura herself as a transwoman (Goddard and Hogg, "Introduction" 256)

Her Story is acutely aware of this history of trans* visibility, and it reflects a political commitment to the self-representation of transgender folks. Debuting January 19, 2016, on its official website herstoryshow.com, the six-episode web series was co-written and co-executive

produced by Richards and Lara Zak, and directed by Navajo transwoman Sydney Freeland. The critically acclaimed and Emmy-nominated series follows the dating and romantic experiences of two transwomen friends, Violet (Jen Richards) and Paige (Angelica Ross), who are already living in their affirmed gender identities, and, like the other programs considered here, the show depicts a range of queer and trans* characters with overlapping gender (e.g., cisgender, transgender, masculine, feminine), sexual (e.g., lesbian, queer), and racial and ethnic identities (e.g., Black American, Caucasian). Richards considers the series an intervention within these limited portrayals of trans* people in film and TV, and she emphasizes the authenticity of *Her Story*'s characters alongside the importance of trans* created and acted stories. Indeed, audiences may "have learned some basics about trans issues" thanks to shows like *Transparent*, and to the hyper-visibility of transgender celebrities like Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, and Caitlyn Jenner, but there are still "many more stories to be told" when it comes to trans* representation (O'Hare, "'Her Story'").

Moving beyond transitioning narratives, *Her Story* centers more universal and seemingly everyday themes like dating, love, romance, and friendship, which is something rarely seen on TV. For Richards, this move is essential for transgender representation. As she explains,

> There is real power in seeing yourself represented. It's something that a lot of people can take for granted—they grew up and can always identify with the heroes of stories. When you grow up in media and you are only ever a tragedy or a joke, it's hard not to see your own life as a tragic joke. I think for us to show this other model of possibility, to show what it's like for trans women to have friendships and to be in relationships, to laugh, to have joy, very human dramas,

> that include but can't be reduced to their trans-ness. (Richards qtd. in Rude, "'Her Story' Stars")

Her Story also highlights several complex topics, including the friendship between a white and a black transwoman, transgender lesbians, and the challenges associated with disclosing one's trans* identity within both a dating and a professional work context, particularly when one is not so easily read as transgender. Many of these characters, storylines, and ensuing dialogue are based on the actual lived experiences of transgender people, including the showrunners themselves (Lang, "The Only"). For Richards, it was important to build the show around the experiences of her closest friends who "happen to be black and Latina trans men and women, as well as queer people, sex workers, addicts, survivors, people living with HIV," and so on (qtd. in Jusino, "The Mary Sue"). As she explains, "I don't think you can write diversity, at least not well, but you can live diversly and then write authentically… We sought out people we wanted to work with" (qtd. in Jusino, "The Mary Sue"). Richard's approach to *Her Story* is therefore a critical departure from both Kohan's and Soloway's. In contrast to the other showrunners, she and Zak built the series from the ground up with the expressed purpose that queer and trans* communities would play a key role in the creation, production, and development of the series from the outset. The goal for *Her Story* was always to be a series *by* and *for* queer and trans* people, and in many ways, the series provides a pedagogical model for mainstream Queer TV.

Although some of *Her Story*'s storylines are specific to transgender experiences, Richards maintains that all viewers, regardless of how they identify, can relate to the show's larger themes: the characters address what it means to be a "woman" and/or a "lesbian," but they do so by navigating their experiences through the familiar intersection of desire, love, friendship,

and label identity. *Her Story* may be intended for trans* audiences, but it continues to make an appeal to larger queer and mainstream viewers. As Zak explains, "I think the lesbian community and gay male community have had their moment where they got their *Queer as Folk* moment or *The L Word* moment where there's a more mainstream show about love lives and dating lives… hopefully, [*Her Story*] could be something like that" (Zak qtd. in Rude, "'Her Story' Stars").

The debate surrounding the casting of cisgender actors in transgender roles, and the move toward trans* self-representation, have helped define what is now acceptable in terms of depicting trans* life on screen. For example, in 2018, Scarlett Johansson received a considerable amount of backlash when it was announced that she would play a transgender man in the upcoming film *Rub & Tug*, which ultimately led to her exit from the project and the film's inevitable cancellation. Soloway has also changed their initial position on Tambor's casting. As they explained in an interview with *TV Insider,* "I would unequivocally say it is absolutely unacceptable to cast a cis man in the role of a trans woman. Ever. I know that sounds ironic coming out of my mouth, but at this point I would throw that down as absolute" (qtd. in Russell, "Why 'Transparent'"). Soloway expanded on these reflections in their 2018 memoir, *She Wants It*: *Desire, Power, and Toppling the Patriarchy*, which was published during *Transparent*'s hiatus. In the book, Soloway reflects how they were "protecting [their] privilege" (74) in the wake of Tambor's casting, and they acknowledge how they should have perhaps listened to the series' transgender content consultant, Jennifer Boylan, who indicated early on that the show would likely receive a "fair amount of blowback for not hiring a transgender actor or actress to play the part of Maura" (qtd. in Soloway 75).

Soloway's own learning and self-reflexivity speaks to the radical changes in representing trans* characters; however, there is an underlying assumption in this shifting climate that

"good," more diverse, and non-stigmatized images of trans* people who are played by trans* entertainment professionals will continue to improve the political and social representation of trans* and gender diverse folks (Keegan, "Bad Trans Objects"). In contrast to this assumption, many trans* media scholars like Cáel Keegan, Laura Horak, and Eliza Steinbock attest that "such 'visibility' has not yet resulted in improved conditions for transgender people as a whole" (Keegan et al. 6), despite the fact that media can "act like a staging ground for the types of life that are permitted to become real and to shape reality in turn" (Keegan et al. 7). Most notably, this unprecedented increase in trans* visibility has been paradoxically accompanied by a growing trans* antagonism, as exemplified in increasing anti-transgender violence, and in the tightening of sex categories in the reinforcement of the sex-gender binary through new forms of medical and legal legislation in the United States and Canada (e.g., anti-transgender bathroom laws, Quebec's initial tabling of Bill 2,[61] etc.) (Keegan, "Bad Trans Objects"). This antagonism continues to disproportionally affect trans* people from economically disadvantaged communities and communities of colour (Koch-Rein et al. 2). Consequently, the demand for more "positive" images of transgender people coincides with a subsequent regulation of trans* identities and expression, which contradicts the assumption that visibility necessarily leads to political and social change.

The representational stakes for shows like *Transparent* and *Her Story* are thus very different than *OITNB*'s queer-centered claims. As Koch-Rein et al. explains, "representing trans*" is always a crucial debate that involves concerns about "who can speak for trans people and how trans lives should be represented. But it is also a testament to the fact that representation

[61] Bill 2 was first introduced by Justice Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette in October 2021. It intended to impose the requirement of gender-affirming surgery on people seeking to change their sex designation on official government documents, or otherwise have separate categories listed for "sex" and "gender." The bill sparked outcry from trans*-rights activists, which eventually resulted in the removal of the controversial articles.

expands the realm of the intelligible" (2). The authors put forth the idea of shifting discussions of trans* from questions of representation to ones of *reading*, wherein *trans** itself can be understood as a methodological tool for analysis, similar to the use of "queering" as a verb (Koch-Rein et al. 6). Because representing trans* "is fundamentally tied to the ambivalences of visibility in relation to embodied trans lives," Koch-Ren et al. conclude that trans* representations are not simply "a progressive signposting of liberal inclusion and a celebration of more 'mature' and realistic depictions of trans lives," but rather a consideration of the "*transing* of TV genres and conventions" (6). In other words, the politics of trans* representation cannot be solely defined by "authentic" or "good" representations of trans* folks; instead, representing trans* ought to "intervene and *trans* our ways of looking at the world" (Koch-Rein et al. 7). This approach is one that will be taken over the course of this project to help distinguish the representational value of shows centering trans* characters, storylines, and themes, and to help differentiate representing trans* from queer televisual trajectories.

Conclusion

The historical conjuncture in which *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story* emerged reflects an important moment in queer and trans* televisual history, particularly as an acutely pedagogical period. Across all the series considered here, there is a continued emphasis on the role central characters play in introducing viewers to queer and trans* content. However, because TV must "entertain *to* teach," the learning that happens when viewing queer crossovers must be communicated via a Trojan Horse structure, which often centers mainstream viewers as a site for education, pleasure, and viewership. Although this centering of mainstream audiences can

sometimes prevent queer crossovers and their respective audiences from adopting deeper modes of sustained queer critique, many of these protagonists (i.e., Piper, Maura) are eventually problematized and de-centered in later seasons. This displacement of the Trojan Horse structure not only reflects a shift in pedagogy—that is, *who* is being taught *what* and *when*—but also implies a dynamic relationship between TV, audiences, and pedagogy. In other words, the learning that happens in queer crossovers occurs both *within* and *through* a series as it develops over time. Accordingly, I argue that it is necessary to examine the trajectories of these characters and storylines across *multiple* seasons to explore how these changes in representation intersect with television's industrial and technological transformations, and with queer and trans* cultural critiques—a task that will be undertaken in the remaining chapters of this project. Although the Trojan Horse structure works differently across the programs considered here, the copying of this device reflects its utility in encouraging different audiences to watch and support queer and trans* programming. As will be elaborated below in the next chapter, the pedagogical value of this structure is not the same for queer and mainstream audiences, with this device presenting an extra challenge for trans* representation specifically.

Chapter Four

Queer Crossovers and the Pedagogical Value of the Trojan Horse Structure

This chapter examines the Trojan Horse structure of queer crossovers. I read this structure across *OITNB*, *Transparent*, and *Her Story*, and I take note of the similarities, main tropes, and effects of this device. My main argument is that the Trojan Horse structure functions as a particular kind of pedagogical tool for instructing mainstream audiences in learning from queer and trans* content. Many of these programs use white, educated, upper-middle class, and nominally straight and/or cisgender characters as proxies for viewers' identifications and entry into a series. These proxies are intended to "scaffold" viewers' learning; they allow white and more privileged viewers to overcome various defense mechanisms and psychic barriers of resistance when viewing queer content by anchoring these audiences to a "safe" point of (normative) identification, and they are frequently used as the first step in teaching mainstream viewers how to "learn to learn" from queer and trans* communities. However, despite these affordances, this structure ultimately re-centers white and more privileged viewers as a site for education, pleasure, and viewership—a move that often comes at the expense of queer and trans* self-representation and other forms of storytelling and aesthetic innovation for Queer TV. Consequently, the Trojan Horse structure is both a political-economic and an ideological concern. In the former case, this device reflects the TV industry's need for gender and sexual diversity to appeal to certain demographics; even with the technological affordances and changing revenue structures of internet-distributed television, there is a continued desire to avoid alienating mainstream audiences, whether they are real or imagined. In the latter case, this structure demonstrates how the terms under which queer and trans* lives become representable

on mainstream TV are centered around cultural values that are neither queer nor trans* at all. In other words, queer crossover must pitch "queer content" on certain conventional and risk adverse terms, with recognizable actors and "crossover" storylines and themes that are intended to address mainstream audiences. Thus, it is therefore misleading to state that internet-distributed television has led to "creative freedom," particularly in terms of queer and trans* content, when the representations, character developments, and narrative and aesthetic strategies used in these programs must conform to the new economics of TV's changing technological and industrial practices.

With these factors in mind, the chapter brings together character, narrative, and formal analyses found within methods proper to Television Studies with larger questions concerning political economy, platformization, and TV's changing structures of production, distribution, and consumption. This methodological approach—that is, the linking of close readings and textual analyses to other spheres of access and platform studies—is a productive development for Queer Television Studies, as it enables a queer politics of representation to move beyond questions of visibility. As will be discussed in more detail below, the Trojan Horse structure of queer crossovers is closely tied to pedagogy, and *how* viewers learn from queer and trans* content both *within* and *through* a particular series.

OITNB: Piper as a Trojan Horse

"You don't just turn gay. You fall somewhere on a spectrum, like a Kinsey scale."

— Piper Chapman, "The Chickening" (2013)

Jenji Kohan's reference to Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling) as a Trojan Horse is the starting point for this chapter. As mentioned previously, Kohan's strategic inclusion of Piper was not only integral to *OITNB*'s conception and its sale to Netflix, but also essential to explicating the narratives of racial, ethnic, sexual, and gendered minorities to more privileged viewers (*NPR's Fresh Air*). The following section analyzes Piper's role as a Trojan Horse. I explore how, as a character proxy, Piper introduces viewers to queer content by offering a voyeuristic look at queerness in prison—the effects of which are different for queer and mainstream viewers. I then take Piper's position as a Trojan Horse and extend it to other figures who perform similar roles across the queer crossover genre. I suggest that the copying of this Trojan Horse device in different forms is part of the TV industry's pressure to ensure the commercial viability of gender and sexual diversity for specific "target" audiences.

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As a Trojan Horse, Piper's goal is to bring mainstream viewers into *OITNB*—to invite audiences to watch and support queer content on TV through a voyeuristic look at queerness in prison. However, as Season One unfolds and audiences become more familiar with *OITNB*'s characters and storylines, Piper cultivates a "crossover gaze" or "queer sensibility" that allows viewers to engage in more complex viewership and queer readings of TV, even if these viewers do not identify as queer. This "crossover gaze" not only helps viewers resist the ideological structures of heteronormativity and/or binary gender beyond their identifications with specific characters, but also makes them more agile in disrupting the narrative arc (i.e., via Piper) through which they acquired these queer reading skills in the first place.

As a program with queer crossover content, *OITNB* acknowledges its mainstream audience by establishing Piper as a proxy for viewers' identifications and entry into Litchfield. In

Season One, Piper's storyline invites audiences to enter prison with her: viewers acclimate to the harsh realities of Litchfield with her character, and then they begin forming attachments elsewhere as Piper's narrative arc becomes one of many interconnected stories told by the series. Piper's initial centering is consistent across the broader landscape of the show (as discussed earlier in *OITNB*'s official Season One paratexts, and in Kohan's playing to certain demographics). Additionally, as a white, educated, and upper-middle class woman who is nominally straight, she is constructed as a "proxy" or normative point of identification for mainstream audiences. Because Piper narrowly approximates white and more privileged women viewers' own identities, her character invites these audiences to watch and identify with her whiteness, class privilege, and presumed heterosexuality (C. Moore, "Getting Wet" 124). Piper's role is thus to draw mainstream viewers into the series, and to introduce them to the various stories of queer, working-class, and/or racialized women in prison.

As a proxy character that ultimately functions as a Trojan Horse, Piper's position is significant in *how OITNB* teaches mainstream audiences to access a "crossover gaze" through various textual features and entertainment techniques (e.g., character representations, narrative and storyline developments, operational aesthetics, etc.), and in what viewers can learn from these encounters. Like the other programs considered here, Piper offers viewers their first introduction to queerness in the series, of which her character is an active participant. In the pilot episode aptly titled "I Wasn't Ready," the opening montage features a shot of infant Piper bathing in a kitchen sink (the past), a shot of adolescent Piper playing in a bubble bath (the past), a steamy shot of Piper making out with Alex (Laura Prepon) in the shower (the past), a shot of Piper having a romantic bubble bath with her fiancée Larry (the recent past), and a final

flashforward to a miserable Piper showering in prison (the present).[62] Within seconds, *OITNB* delivers on its promise of "girl-on-girl" action as part of the women-in-prison genre; however, the linear timeline purposefully leaves Piper's sexuality open to multiple readings and interpretations. On the one hand, Piper can easily be read as presumably straight for first-time, mainstream viewers who are more normatively identified—indeed, Piper's present-day engagement to her fiancée Larry (i.e., the primary timeline in which the story takes place) confirms that she is "not still a lesbian" by framing her previous relationship with Alex as either experimental or simply a phase (*Orange Is the New Black*, "I Wasn't Ready"). On the other hand, for those viewers who are more familiar with the signs and codes of queerness, Piper's character can be easily read as a queer and/or bisexual woman. In either reading, however, Piper is framed as the show's central protagonist, and the sequence invites viewers to question why a white, blonde lady like Piper ended up in prison.

The opening montage capitalizes on Piper's sexual ambiguity / queerness to address both queer and mainstream audiences (J. Reed 13). However, despite the show's attempt to fold different categories of viewership into the series, Piper's character development and narrative trajectory ultimately re-center white and more privileged women viewers as part of the program's pedagogy. For example, once Piper is established as viewers' entry point into the series / Litchfield, she becomes the primary vehicle through which audiences witness their first queer sexual encounter in prison. In this additional scene from the pilot, Piper (like the audience) is still new to prison life: the character is depicted moving slowly and deliberately through the prison bathroom, taking in her surroundings with a child-like fasciation, and her scrutinizing

[62] This information—that is, who Piper is, as well as the primary timeline in which *OITNB*'s story takes place—is conveyed only after the montage sequence ends and the non-diegetic narrator is revealed to be Piper (i.e., the woman depicted in the series of consecutive shots).

gaze is meant to highlight the peculiarity of her situation. Piper soon hears a woman yelling in Spanish behind a closed bathroom stall; she bends over to catch a quick glimpse of the woman, but the door swings open to Blanca (Laura Gómez), who meets Piper's gaze with a "Boo!" Caught staring, a startled Piper scurries for the exit, but not before something else captures her attention off-screen: the camera cuts to a medium-long shot of inmate Lorna Morello (Yael Stone) receiving cunnilingus from Nicky Nichols (Natasha Lyonne) in the communal shower, as the non-diegetic sound of a bass guitar, reminiscent of a vintage porno, begins to swell. The shot immediately cuts back to Piper, who sheepishly looks away. Piper tries hard not to stare, particularly after being shamed earlier by Blanca, but her curiosity gets the best of her once again: the image cuts back to a close-up of Morello's face, this time from Piper's point-of-view, who appears to be on the edge of orgasm (see Figure 5). The camera slowly pans down Morello's naked body, as if to mimic Piper's stare, before it stops on Nicky's face buried between Morello's legs. Like Blanca, Nicky feels Piper's hard and curious stare; she coyly looks up to meet Piper's gaze, and, caught staring once again, Piper looks away and exits the bathroom.

Figure 5. Adopting Piper's Eye-Line: Season One, Pilot Episode "I Wasn't Ready." Source: Courtesy of Netflix.

In this scene, Piper's voyeurism is unequivocal, and it offers viewers a fetishizing look at queer sexual expression in prison. More specifically, the camera work and editing invite audiences to adopt Piper's eye-line as their own. The shot-reverse-shot sutures the viewer's gaze to the look of the camera / Piper's point-of-view, which enables the viewer to see what Piper sees (C. Moore, "Having It All Ways" 8, 10). Here, Piper's "fish-out-of-water" narrative combines with the scene's formal elements to construct queerness as exotic and worthy of spectacle: Morello and Nicky are literally made the objects of Piper's (and, by extension, the viewer's) gaze.

Although Piper's role as a Trojan Horse is to introduce viewers to queerness, this task is accomplished by replicating voyeuristic tropes of lesbians in prison, which have historically been a part of the women-in-prison genre. This voyeurism allows white and more privileged women viewers to engage with queer sex from Piper's own distant and removed viewing position—that is to say, the white, educated, upper-middle class, and "straight" perspective to which they are accustomed. Because Piper is constructed as "not still a lesbian," there is a tacit understanding that her character is "straight," which means that mainstream audiences can interpret her character's desire to look as one of curiosity, rather than arousal. In this vein, Piper's fetishizing gaze invites mainstream viewers to observe Morello and Nicky have sex without experiencing it as a contradiction to their (straight) self-identity; Piper's voyeurism allows viewers to overcome any potential resistances to queerness by encouraging them to remain anchored to a "safe" point of (normative) identification in this scene. This device is by no means unique to *OITNB*—it has been used across several different TV series to introduce audiences to queer encounters, as for example in *The L Word* when Jenny observes her neighbours have sex in the pool next door behind a partially obstructed fence (Symes 44-45). Therefore, Piper's role as a Trojan Horse

indicates how TV must continue to pitch "queer content" on certain conventional and risk adverse terms that center the experience of "straight," white characters as entry points into a series.

Although Piper's role complicates critiques of the show's supposed pandering to the male gaze by making space for white and more privileged women viewers to experience voyeuristic pleasure in queer sex, the effect of this voyeurism is different for queer audiences who are already "in the know." Rather than identify with the look of the camera / Piper's point-of-view, these viewers may instead identify with Morello and/or Nicky, and thus they may desire to be *in* the shower with these characters. Here, *OITNB* makes visible queer subjects within dominant and popular culture by foregrounding them in this scene through a shot-reverse-shot, but this act of seeing oneself represented is ultimately an exposure: to identify with Nicky and/or Morello in this scene is to be complicit in one's own fetishization and objectification. Consequently, the scene's rendering visible of queer sex may deliver on "girl-on-girl" action as promised by the women-in-prison genre, but these representations are primarily used to draw mainstream viewers into the series, first and foremost; they are part of the industry's need to ensure the marketability and commercial viability of its queer programming to specific "target" viewers, rather than an explicit centering of queer audiences and self-representation practices.

Piper's role as a Trojan Horse is thus to offer an anchoring point in *OITNB* that is both normative and voyeuristic; however, as viewers become more familiar with the show's characters and storyline, the pedagogical work of the series shifts to open up spaces for learning that were initially precluded in the pilot episode. In other words, Piper teaches white and more privileged women viewers how to access a "crossover gaze" that enables them to enjoy queer content from a non-objectifying standpoint. For example, as Season One unfolds, Piper's

position is explicitly queered: her storyline evolves to center on her rekindling her romance with Alex, who is also coincidentally serving time at Litchfield. The pair's heated yet flirtatious encounters exemplify a classic "will-they-or-won't-they" scenario, and Piper's fixation on Alex's every move in prison subsequently causes tension in her relationship with Larry, who feels threated by Alex's influence on his fiancée. Piper and Alex do eventually hook up in prison, and although some mainstream viewers may simply extend the voyeurism acquired in the pilot episode to Piper's own sexual encounters with Alex (indeed, Piper's presence in these scenes, combined with the tacit understanding that she is "not still as lesbian," allows viewers to remain anchored to her character as a normative point of identification), her queering nevertheless provides a space wherein mainstream viewers can engage in more "heteroflexible," "homo-voyeuristic," and/or "bi-curious" modes of queer looking beyond the initial voyeurism she inoculates (Manuel 281; C. Moore, "Having It All Ways" 20). More specifically, Piper's queering acts as a kind of "scaffolding" for viewers' learning; her queerness and sexual ambiguity become essential to her ability to teach viewers how to cultivate a "crossover gaze" and to become more "agile" in their identifications, particularly as Piper begins to operate within the liminal spaces of straight society (J. Reed 13). For example, at no point in the series does Piper name her sexual orientation, even after she rekindles her relationship with Alex. Although many of the supporting characters attempt to categorize Piper's sexuality based on her inconsistent behaviours and actions in prison, Piper frequently refutes any labelling of her sexual identity. This refusal to categorize her sexuality / sexual identity is most exemplified when Piper's best friend Polly (Maria Dizzia) shares her concern that Piper might "turn gay again" after spending close quarters with Alex in prison. Here, Piper is quick to eschew her friend's apprehension by referencing the "Kinsey scale" and pedantically explaining that one

doesn't "just turn gay" but instead falls "somewhere on a spectrum." Piper's indirect answers make it impossible to *not* know that something queer is going on (J. Reed 13; Doty xv-xvi). Indeed, if Piper did subscribe to normative heterosexuality, she would have no problem explicitly identifying herself as such. However, by rejecting any particular identity, Piper not only foregrounds heterosexuality as an institution, but also establishes a "queer discourse" that invites queer readings of both her character and the series; thus, her character comes to represent an *un*symbolizeable moment of queerness to viewers—she stands in for an incapacity to render her own sexuality intelligible, particularly because her character is somewhere between her supposedly heterosexual relationship with Larry and her desire for her former flame, Alex.

By placing Piper outside the norms of heterosexuality, but not placing her in another sexual category, *OITNB* capitalizes on the political potential of Piper's queerness for audiences. On the one hand, Piper's queering offers a safely ambiguous proxy for experimentation for more normatively identified mainstream viewers. Rather than maintain a distant and removed voyeurism, these audiences may now access various fantasy and roleplay opportunities wherein Piper's desire for Alex may be adopted through a kind of sexual and/or identity "tourism." To explain further, because the pilot episode encourages viewers to adopt Piper's eye-line as their own, Piper's queering subsequently *queers* the viewer's own field of vision. However, since Piper is still framed as "not still a lesbian," the presence of her character in her own sexual encounters with Alex still encourages viewers to remain anchored to her as a "normative" point of identification; viewers can interpret Piper's decision to sleep with Alex as an act of defiance (as explained earlier in Chapter Three by Jones), or as the result of her being (hetero)sexually deprived in prison (i.e., Piper sleeps with Alex because she is unable to have sex with Larry). Under these terms, white and more privileged women viewers are able to temporarily share in on

the same queer sensibility of which queer viewers are already be familiar, even if only under very specific and normatively prescribed conditions.

On the other hand, Piper's queering also allows more "agile" or "flexible" mainstream viewers to operate "outside the relatively clear-cut and essentializing categories of sexual identity under which most people function" (Doty 15). Her character makes space for intentional shifts in identification, and in the slipping of categories (J. Reed 15-16). For these viewers, Piper's queering teaches them how to read her character and *OITNB* queerly; viewers learn how to identify queerness as an "open and flexible space"—that is, a quality related to a range of expressions that may be potentially unclassifiable (Doty xv-xvi)—and this alternative viewing strategy can subsequently resist the ideological structures of heteronormativity and/or binary gender beyond viewers' identifications with her character. Although both viewing positions enable mainstream audiences to access a "crossover gaze," the latter position demonstrates a productive and transformative engagement between TV audiences and queer difference. By acquiring this "crossover gaze" via Piper's scaffolding, mainstream viewers can learn how to engage in queer readings of televisual texts, and these queer reading skills can subsequently be extended to viewers' past, present, and future TV experiences, broadly speaking (White 197). In other words, white and more privileged women viewers learn how to position themselves outside the ways in which they are addressed by the series as normatively gendered and sexed subjects.

For more agile and flexible mainstream viewers, Piper's queering subsequently invites them to reconsider previously viewed episodes in search of early indications of her queerness. As Jason Mittel explains, *OITNB* can be viewed as part a recent proliferation of complex television—that is, elaborate forms of narrative programming facilitated by changes in new technologies and modes of distribution that challenge the episodic and serialized conventions of

American TV (3). Because *OITNB*'s narrative complexity retains a heighted degree of self-consciousness, the series demands more formally aware modes of viewing (Mittell 46-47). As demonstrated in the pilot's opening montage, the show uses nonlinear modes of serial narration such as individual character flashbacks and flashforwards to weave long-term story arcs within clearly defined episodic parameters (Mittell 20). Audiences are therefore expected to retroactively sort new narrative information as it becomes available: their primary task when viewing *OITNB* is to piece together the elaborate backstories of the show's characters within the present-day timeline. This prerequisite for audiences to engage in more formally aware modes of viewing are still possible via linear and scheduled television; however, these viewing strategies are greatly enhanced by the nonlinear and continuity affordances of Netflix's release of entire seasons of *OITNB* all at once into its digital library, which is similar to the TV-on-DVD model (Mittell 38). As Mittell explains, "today's complex narratives are designed for a discerning viewer not only to pay close attention to once but to rewatch in order to notice the depth of references, to marvel at the displays of craft and continuities, and to appreciate details that require the liberal use of pause and rewind" (38). Thus, Piper's queering may appear more obvious to viewers who engage in continuous, successive, and/or multiple screenings of a particular scene, episode, or season of *OITNB*. This kind of nonlinear mode of serial narration may be enhanced by the affordances of internet-distributed television; however, it nonetheless offers a particular version of queer identities that is reflected across the queer crossover programming genre, more generally. The fact that Piper's queerness is discoverable in retrospect demonstrates how queer content must be articulated via specific characters, and framed within familiar plotlines, storyline developments, and aesthetic strategies that conform to TV's new economic and industrial practices. The combination of these factors results in a very specific

(and somewhat limited) kind of "queer visibility" for TV, despite the ways internet-distributed television has been said to proliferate queer content.

With these factors in mind—specifically, *OITNB*'s narrative complexity and how the series scaffolds viewers' learning via Piper's queering—we can see how the pilot's opening montage not only presents "teases" about Piper's queerness, but also establishes the viewing and structural expectations of how to (re-)read her shifting identity. Retroactively, the montage's liberal use of flashbacks and flashforwards indicates that one of *OITNB*'s many pleasures is perhaps the eventual discovery that Piper's sexuality is not as determined as it may initially seem. Moreover, if we return to Morello's and Nicky's shower scene with this newfound "crossover gaze," and with the knowledge that Piper's position is subsequently queered in later episodes, we can see that Piper's voyeurism is under erasure from the outset. Instead of a distant and removed stare, which fetishizes and objectifies queer difference, Piper's curious gaze now reflects an act of contemplation. The cut to her point-of-view suggests that her look is perhaps deliberate and intentional: she observes Morello and Nicky closely because she conceivably desires to join them *in* the shower. This retroactive reading not only reveals Piper's sexuality to be anything but stable, but also contradicts her initial narrative coding as "straight" simply because she is framed as "not still a lesbian." (Indeed, Piper's assertion that she is "not still a lesbian" is an indication of what she *is not*—a negation of what others assume her sexual identity to be—rather than a confirmation of what she *is*). Thus, Piper's queering is key to *OITNB*'s narrative complexity and its heighted degree of self-consciousness; her shifting and ambiguous sexual identity has the potential to encourage mainstream viewers to reflect on previously watched episodes in search of early signs of her queerness that are coded via the show's other elements (e.g., narrative development, camera work, editing, etc.).

Although the TV industry is focused on the "positive" effects of increasing "queer content," I see the political potential of *OITNB* not so much in the show's incorporation of queer characters, storylines, and themes, but rather in its ability to re-configure and re-imagine a different kind of active process of spectatorial positioning for TV. Thus, there are two levels of learning that are happening in *OITNB*. First, Piper's role as a Trojan Horse is to bring mainstream viewers into the series—her voyeurism allows viewers to overcome potential resistances to queerness by anchoring them to a "safe" point of (normative) identification in the series. However, by following Piper's Season One trajectory, white and more privileged women viewers are taught a second, more radical lesson in a way that is necessarily gradual and scaffolded: through Piper's queering, viewers are able to cultivate a "crossover gaze" *within* and *through* the series that not only acts as a kind of "flexible capital" (i.e., viewers learn how to engage with queer content beyond the ways they are initially addressed by the series as normative gendered and sexed subjects), but also invites viewers to become more "agile" in disrupting the narrative arc (via Piper) through which they are taught how to cross "back and forth" as they move from "straight" to "queer" in their modes of watching. The acquisition of this "crossover gaze" demonstrates how viewing queer content can have a transformative subjective effect on cultural norms, particularly for more privileged mainstream viewers who are normatively identified, and it ultimately reconfigures the politics of representation—that is, what is specifically "queer" about Queer TV.

The cultivation of this "crossover gaze" can subsequently be extended to other characters and scenes in *OITNB*, particularly as the show develops. For example, although audiences are privy to numerous other queer sexual encounters at Litchfield, one of the most notable and longstanding couplings is between Morello and Nicky. If we return to early episodes of *OITNB*,

we can see how Piper's queering teaches viewers how to read Morello's character differently. Even before Piper begins hooking up with Alex in Season One, audiences witness another graphic sexual liaison between Morello and Nicky in the prison chapel in episode five (see Figure 6). In this scene, Morello ends her sexual relationship with Nicky immediately after she climaxes—she laments to Nicky that having sex with her is "not fair" to her fiancée Christopher, and she expresses a desire to start "tightenin' up" before her wedding since the copious amount of sex she is currently having is starting to make her "feel like a cave" (*Orange Is the New Black*, "The Chickening"). In contrast to Morello's and Nicky's first shower scene from the pilot (which encourages viewers to observe the characters from Piper's point-of-view), the chapel scene does not suture the camera to either Morello's or Nicky's perspective. Because the look of the camera remains the viewer's own line of vision, the scene has the effect of positioning the viewer *inside* the chapel with these characters. Rather than observe Morello and Nicky voyeuristically from

Figure 6. Locating the Viewer as a Participant in the Chapel: Season One, Episode Five "The Chickening." Source: Courtesy of Netflix.

afar (i.e., through the perspective of another character), audiences are brought directly into this scene as an active participant.

When first viewing this chapel scene, mainstream viewers may find Piper's absence disconcerting. With no tenable site of identification (i.e., Piper), it may be difficult for these viewers to observe this queer encounter. In response to this discomfort, first time and/or less flexible viewers may simply extend the voyeurism acquired via Piper in the pilot episode to this subsequent scene between Morello and Nicky. For these viewers, Morello comes to stand in as another (heterosexual) character proxy; her willingness to engage in queer sex stems from her isolation and loneliness, and, therefore, her actions are to be somewhat expected and tolerated, given the fact that she is (hetero)sexually deprived in prison. Put simply, Morello sleeps with Nicky because she cannot sleep with Christopher. Because Morello's desire for Nicky is understood to be temporary and exceptional, her identity remains contained within the categorical expectations of normative heterosexuality.

But Piper's absence from this scene also indicates alternative ways of reading *OITNB*, as acquired by the show's Trojan Horse structure. For viewers who learn how to "crossover" in the series, Morello's position as a character proxy (like Piper's) may be under erasure from the outset. In fact, Morello's sexuality becomes quite complex when this chapel scene is read retroactively with viewers' newly acquired "crossover" reading skills. In other words, because Piper teaches audiences how to identify queerness as an expression that is potentially unclassifiable, viewers can read Morello's decision to end her sexual relationship with Nicky as one that is *not* contingent on the fact that she is having sex with a woman. Although Morello sleeps with Nicky because she cannot have sex with Christopher, the act itself still contradicts her character's avowed heterosexuality. Indeed, if Morello were completely "straight," she

would not desire to sleep with Nicky at all, even if she were (hetero)sexually deprived. As Morello's backstory unfolds in Season Two, this queer reading of her character is only confirmed: viewers come to understand that her relationship with Christopher is entirely fabricated (i.e., he is Morello's stalking victim, which tacitly suggests that her heterosexual desire may in fact be pathological),[63] and Morello eventually develops feelings for Nicky, despite their relationship no longer being sexual.

This retroactive resorting of narrative information reframes Morello's desire for Nicky and the pleasure she receives as excessive to an intelligible sexual identity. Like Piper, Morello neither adheres to the categorical expectations of normative heterosexuality, nor fits within the category of "lesbian" (in the same way that Nicky does as a "card-carrying lesbo," for instance). If anything, Morello's willingness to engage in queer sex exemplifies how heterosexuality must be constantly recited and reiterated in order to maintain its natural and originary status (Butler 70). Accordingly, if mainstream viewers are able to read this scene queerly via a "crossover gaze," they may no longer feel dauted by the fact that they have been placed directly *in* the chapel with Morello and Nicky since these viewers have learned how to read *OITNB* and its characters in more agile and flexible ways that do not necessarily require a voyeuristic and objectifying look at queer sexual difference. For queer audiences, this reading of Morello (or even Piper) may be accessible and obvious from the start, but it is a lesson that ultimately needs to be scaffolded for mainstream audiences to help them overcome various defense mechanism and psychic barriers of resistance when viewing queer content.

[63] Morello's backstory with Christopher is revealed in Season Two, Episode Four "A Whole Other Hole." In the episode, the pair meet at a post office. Christopher asks Morello out, they go on one date together, after which Cristopher states that he is no longer interested in pursuing the relationship further. Unwilling to let the relationship go, Morello truly believes that she and Christopher are still dating, which the show suggests to be a result of Morello's undiagnosed / untreated mental health issue.

Thus, Piper's role is to teach viewers how to engage in "crossover" modes of watching *OITNB* in a way that is necessarily scaffolded. First, her character is established as a normative point of identification for white and more privileged women viewers. By identifying with Piper's whiteness, class privilege, and presumed heterosexuality, these viewers are granted a voyeuristic and fetishizing look at queer sexual expression in prison. However, the initial voyeurism Piper promises is ultimately a Trojan Horse for teaching viewers how to engage in more agile and flexible readings of *OITNB*. Piper's queering educates audiences on how to access a "crossover gaze" or "queer sensibility" via multiple points of identification through a retroactive resorting of new narrative information.

Once viewers have acquired this queer sensibility, Piper's shifting and ambiguous sexual identity opens up alternative ways of reading her character and the series. Audiences come to understand that Piper's sexuality no longer fits within the current heteronormative structure: her voyeurism becomes too implicated, her pleasure becomes too visible—and yet, viewers continue to watch. Accordingly, Piper may inoculate a specific mode of viewing—namely, to provide a narrative entry point for viewers into the world of queer sexual expression in Litchfield; however, her own shifting identity provides a critical space wherein viewers can experience complex and transformative effects when engaging with queer content. If audiences are able to learn how to engage in different types of queer identifications with *OITNB*, and if they are able to extend this newfound queer sensibility to their past and future viewings of the series (and perhaps even to other queer crossover programs), then it is ultimately possible for viewers to position themselves outside of the initial voyeurism Piper promises at the outset. In other words, viewers may be able to enter the world of queer sexual expression in Litchfield through a position *other* than Piper's, which is perhaps a modest goal for mainstream Queer TV.

Herein lies the aim of Piper's character as a Trojan Horse: by teaching mainstream viewers how to become more agile in their looking practices and in their processes of identification in the show, Piper provides audiences with the tools for engaging in "crossover" readings of *OITNB* through *multiple* points of identification that are no longer exclusively tied to her character / a normative character proxy. Although audiences may have gained entry into the world of queer sexual expression in Litchfield through Piper's voyeurism, their potential enculturation into a queer sensibility can fundamentally be sustained by *OITNB*'s narrative complexity, and the show's nonlinear affordances (i.e., the continuity that is offered by viewing episodes at a self-determined pace)—a move which no longer requires a fetishizing and objectifying look at queer difference. Thus, it is the combination of *OITNB*'s character representations, narrative trajectories and storyline developments, and operational aesthetics (e.g., camera work, editing) that invite viewers to sustain their flexible modes of queer looking, rather than their identification with a normatively identified character proxy (i.e., Piper). This learning process requires audiences to re-orient their past, present, and future viewing experiences of *OITNB*, and this retroactive resorting of new narrative information subsequently re-enforces viewers' newly acquired "crossover" reading skills, which can then be extended to viewers' other encounters with Queer TV.

As a Trojan Horse, Piper is a powerful device for teaching mainstream viewers how to read TV texts queerly via a "crossover gaze"—her role as a character proxy is important to a "queer crossover" politics of representation insofar as it necessitates a transformative engagement between TV representations and the viewing process, at least for more "agile" and "flexible" mainstream audiences. However, there is ultimately a re-centering of white and more privileged women viewers, at the expense of queer self-representation. Although *OITNB* is said

to make space for queer audiences within dominant and popular culture, the show must make a primary address to mainstream audiences, first and foremost, which invariably shapes what lessons get taught by the series, to whom, and in what ways. Indeed, for queer audiences, *OITNB*'s Trojan Horse structure can be a site of frustration and alienation. Because these viewers may already know how to access a queer sensibility, independently of Piper's character, *OITNB*'s scaffolding via Piper's sexual ambiguity / queering can reflect a moment of exhaustion when it comes to pedagogy. For these viewers, there are already multiple ways to read Piper's character and the series beyond the show's intended "teachable moments." Under these terms, *OITNB* only partially fulfills the demand for queer self-representation on TV, even with Netflix's leveraging of the content and creative affordances of internet-distributed television. The show's primary address to white and more privileged mainstream viewers thus reframes what counts as queer "representation," particularly as the showrunners must continue to make assumptions about who is watching, who needs to be educated, and in what ways.

Transparent: Teaching Trans* Experience via the Pfefferman Family

JOSH: "So what does this mean? Everything Dad has said and done before this moment is a sham? Like he was just acting the whole time?"
ARI: "It just means we all have to start over."

— Josh & Ari Pfefferman, "The Wilderness" (2014)

Transparent shares similarities with *OITNB*'s Trojan Horse structure; however, its end goals and methods of teaching are very different, particularly given the show's theme of gender

transition, and its position within broader transgender politics. Because Season One largely explores Maura Pfefferman's (Jeffery Tambor) gender transition via its impact on her (white, educated, upper-middle class, cisgender) family, the Pfeffermans play an integral role in educating mainstream cisgender audiences about transgender experience. Jeffery Tambor's familiar presence as a relatable "dad figure," most notably from his previous role as George Bluth on *Arrested Development*, acts as a kind of Trojan Horse, particularly given the history of casting cisgender men in transwomen roles within mainstream film and TV. As Soloway explains, the actor's star power and history with audiences encouraged viewers to watch a show about an ageing transwoman that they perhaps would not have watched otherwise (qtd. in Anderson-Minshall, "Amazon's *Transparent*"). Thus, as a set of characters, the Pfeffermans attempt to normalize Maura's gender transition within the context of the family. Like Piper in *OITNB*, the Pfefferman siblings—Sarah (Amy Landecker), Ari (Gaby Hoffmann), and Josh (Jay Duplass)—specifically serve as character "proxies" for white and more privileged cisgender viewers to enter a world with which they may be unfamiliar. However, because Season One centers the siblings' reactions to Maura's disclosure, their selfish and morally questionable behaviours cultivate empathy for Maura's plight, alongside Tambor's familiar presence. Thus, the goal of *Transparent*'s Trojan Horse structure is to make Maura's transition less exceptional, and, in doing so, it demonstrates how the "loving" heterosexual family cannot fully meet Maura's needs as a transgender person. The following section explores the Pfefferman family as part of *Transparent*'s Trojan Horse structure. Although this device uses different pedagogical methods than *OITNB*, the similarities and main tropes used across both series nevertheless challenge the queer- and trans*-centered claims of Netflix's and Amazon's internet-distributed programming.

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Transparent's title is a double entendre: Maura is a *trans* parent who is struggling to be *transparent* about her identity with her loved ones. Because the Pfeffermans are at the core of the series, the show raises important questions about the family as an appropriate site for nurturing queer and trans* lives. In the immediate years following *Transparent*'s debut, the loving heterosexual family was valorized as one of the primary pillars of support for queer individuals; it absorbed the coming out process, and it named itself the protector of queer individuals by ensuring their transition into "healthy" queer adulthood (Jacobs 325).[64] This ideological fixation on the beneficial role of the family ignored how heteronormative family members, even those who were determined to "tolerate, love, and protect" their queer kin, were unable to familiarize these same individuals with the "traditions, habits, social roles, aesthetics, or values of specifically queer communities" (Jacobs 320). This inability to adequately nurture queer and trans* lives was especially true of family members who insisted that their queer and trans* friends and relatives were "the same" as their straight and/or cisgender counterparts. The assumption was that unpersecuted queerness would "fall easily into the structures and rhythms of straight life rather than charting out new ways of living—other forms of care, friendship, community, and political alliance" (Jacobs 320). This image of a lovingly "accepted" queer and trans* subject elided the work queer and transgender people did in forging their own connections with one another, and it overlooked the heterogeneity sustained by these very relationships (Jacobs 320).

[64] In 2022, there has been a re-criminalization of the family in the fight over new anti-LGBTQ legislation, as for example in Greg Abbott's (the Republican Governor of Texas) directive to investigate parents for child abuse if they provide certain medical treatments and/or gender-affirming care to their transgender children. This re-criminalization of the family is also seen in new discourses of "grooming" that are highly homophobic and transphobic. In this latter case, accusations of "grooming" are being used to attack the motivations of those who support LGBTQ+ rights—particularly teachers, family members, companies, and politicians—who are said to take advantage of children's vulnerability to "indoctrinate" and/or "recruit" them into their cause.

In *Transparent*, the Pfeffermans attempt to "tolerate, love, and protect" Maura. Although Maura's children are initially supportive of her gender transition to varying degrees, they are quickly revealed to be self-absorbed, emotionally unavailable, and profoundly dysfunctional, even if upper-middle class and Jewish-neurotic. Because the Pfeffermans are unable to fully meet Maura's needs as a transgender person, she ends up seeking other forms of queer and trans* kinship through two transwomen friends who are played by transgender actresses, Davina (Alexandra Billings) and Shea (Trace Lysette). The implied lesson to mainstream viewers—that queer and trans* people *need* other queer and trans* people—is one that cannot simply begin with the show's transgender characters. Rather, the Pfefferman family, as a set of characters, serves to teach viewers about this complex facet of trans* experience, of which mainstream viewers may not be familiar.

The pilot opens with the Pfefferman siblings living seemingly "normal" and uneventful lives: Sarah is taking her kids to school, Ari is struggling to find gainful employment, and Josh is sleeping with a young woman musician whom he is representing at the music label he works for. Like Piper in *OITNB*, the siblings are constructed as character proxies / normative points of identification: as white, upper-middle class, and (nominally) cisgender and/or straight individuals, they encourage mainstream audiences to identify with their whiteness, class- and cisgender privilege, and presumed heterosexuality. Following this opening sequence, the siblings allow access to Maura: we later see them at the family home, brought together by Maura (who is presenting as Mort) under the pretense that she has important news to share. At the dinner table, the family dynamic is chaotic—Sarah, Ari, and Josh interrupt and talk over one another, in the way that close siblings do, and they bicker and speculate wildly amongst themselves about what could be wrong with Maura. Unable to get a word in, a frustrated Maura eventually snaps "I'm

selling the house," only for the siblings to begin squabbling over whom should get the family home. When the siblings leave, viewers see Maura alone in a dress, lamenting the fact that she was unable to come out to her children.

In contrast to *OITNB* (where viewers are encouraged to adopt Piper's eye-line as their own), the audience's point-of-view in this scene remains unsutured to any of the characters. Because the audience's perspective is tied to the look of the camera, the effect of observing this scene is intentionally distancing. As "outsiders" to the Pfefferman family, viewers are able to see the siblings' behaviour for what it really is: self-absorbed narcissism. The siblings' self-centeredness is later confirmed toward the end of the pilot when Maura shares her struggle to come out to her children with her trans* support group. She describes her kids as "so selfish," and, in a moment of foreshadowing, she wonders out loud how she could have raised three people "who cannot see beyond themselves" (*Transparent*, "Pilot"). Here, the pilot's narrative trajectory and operational aesthetics (i.e., camera work, editing), in addition to Tambor's role as a relatable "dad figure," combine to foster empathy toward Maura. Because audiences are privy to more narrative information regarding Maura's identity than her children, viewers become implicated in Maura's "secret"—tension builds in the story as viewers become more emotionally invested in her character and the outcome of what is perceived to be her inevitable disclosure. Already, we can see that *Transparent*'s methods of teaching are different than *OITNB*'s. As character proxies, the Pfefferman siblings allow access to Maura, but viewers are not invited to look at Maura's character in ways that are fetishizing and objectifying, which is a critical departure from how trans* people have been historically portrayed in film and TV (Villarejo, "Jewish, Queer-ish" 10). These formal elements align with Koch-Rein et al.'s discussion of "trans" as a methodological tool for analyzing media (6). The scene's ability to foster empathy

toward Maura without fetishizing or objectifying her character can be seen as a "*transing* of TV genres and conventions," particularly in relation to the ways in which trans* characters have been previously depicted on screen.

When Maura eventually comes out to her children, the show centers the siblings' morally questionable reactions. Sarah, Ari, and Josh each exhibit "age-inappropriate" behaviours as they come to terms with their new perspective of their childhood following Maura's news; they act like "self-involved teenagers more often than not, blurring the lines between childhood and adult. They fail to fulfill and sometimes even to recognize responsibilities that society doles out to its adults with regards to such matters as family, relationships, personal accountability, and gainful employment" (Hess 9). For example, Sarah cannot stop laughing with embarrassment after Maura comes out to her,[65] and although Ari is initially accepting of Maura's new identity (they exclaim things like "You finally make sense to me" and "I see you completely"), it is a moment of clarity they can only have while high and rolling on MDMA, detached from the immediate reality of their family (see Figure 7). The next morning, a sober Ari freaks out: they confide in Sarah, and the siblings laugh uncontrollably as Ari switches between gendered pronouns and mocks Maura for painting her toe skin instead of her toenails (see Figure 8). Although Sarah is quick to correct Ari's misgendering (albeit facetiously), she pedantically explains how outing a transgender person is "an act of violence" when she hears Ari's suggestion that they share Maura's news with Josh (*Transparent*, "Moppa").

The centering of Sarah's and Ari's reactions to Maura's disclosure aligns with the historical norms of TV that emphasize how a character's transition impacts the cisgender folks around them, which often prompts discomfort, fear, or even disgust as inevitable responses to

[65] Sarah's inappropriate laughter is quelled only after her lover Tammy (Melora Hardin) reminds her that what Maura did was brave.

Figure 7. Ari Accepts Maura while Rolling on MDMA: Season One, Episode Four "Moppa." Source: Courtesy of Amazon Prime Video.

Figure 8. Ari and Sarah Mock Maura's Failed Performance of Femininity as an Ageing Transwoman: Season One, Episode Four "Moppa." Courtesy of Amazon Prime Video.

this discovery (Miller, "Fear and the Cisgender" 4; Miller, "Becoming One" 140). However, this centering is also a "teachable moment" for mainstream cisgender audiences. Because the siblings' selfish and narcissistic tendencies have already been established earlier in the pilot episode, in addition to the fact that the audience's "look" remains unsutured to either character's perspective in this scene, Sarah's and Ari's conversation becomes a reference point for viewers' critical examination of the intersection between gender and ageing (Hess 5). More specifically, the siblings' comments raise the issue of passing privilege within transgender communities. Because Maura is unable to adequately perform the codes of femininity as an ageing transwoman (hence why the siblings mock her for painting her toe skin), Sarah and Ari question Maura's decision to transition by exclaiming things like "Why is he doing this now?" and "Why did he wait so long?" (*Transparent*, "Moppa"; Enke 69). The siblings' remarks imply that *now* is the wrong time for Maura to transition—that she should have come out much earlier in life or not at all (Hess 5). Consequently, the scene not only reveals the effect of the siblings' internalized norms, but also demonstrates how trans* people tend to be more accepted only when they are perceived as cisgender (Hess 5).

Moments like these become integral to the show's pedagogy—most often, it is Maura's children who make implicitly transphobic remarks, only for the series to problematize the ideological assumptions behind their statements. Thus, we can see that *what* and *how* *Transparent* teaches is very different than *OITNB*. While Piper offers flexibility in terms of queer looking / reading via a "crossover gaze," the Pfefferman siblings' reactions to Maura become exemplars of contemporary transgender politics. As Season One unfolds, many key issues related to transgender rights play out through Maura's relationship with her kids. A prime example occurs in the Season One episode "Moppa" when Maura is verbally harassed in a public

washroom after a stranger overhears Sarah refer to Maura as "Dad." Although Sarah steps in to defend Maura (she states "This is my father and he's a woman. He has every right to be in this bathroom"), the confrontation escalates with the woman threatening to call security on the grounds that Maura is a "pervert" who is traumatizing young women. A mortified Maura urges Sarah and Ari to leave with her immediately, but not before an oblivious Ari interjects: "Dad, don't you need to go pee?"

Here, the scene works on two levels to teach mainstream cisgender viewers about several complex issues. First, Maura's harassment contextualizes public opinion surrounding anti-transgender bathroom laws. The stranger's transphobic assumption that transwomen are simply men "pretending" to be women in order to enter public washrooms is an explicit reference to the ongoing bathroom bills that are currently up for debate in the United States, specifically the passing of the Public Facilities and Security Act in North Carolina.[66] Although many of these bills claim to protect women from predatory men, the scene demonstrates how it is in fact transwomen like Maura who are most vulnerable to violence and harassment in these spaces. Because Maura's difference as a transgender person is rendered hyper-visible, the scene showcases the discrimination trans* people face in public spaces; the trauma Maura experiences demands viewers' critical distance and empathy on the issue, which is a perspective that is often neglected from these political debates (Becker 12; Hess 15).

At the second level, the scene illustrates the everyday effects of Sarah's and Ari's implicit transphobia. Although the siblings' culpability in reproducing trans* marginalization

[66] The Public Facilities and Security Act was passed in March 2016 and signed into law by Republican Governor of North Carolina Pat McCrory. The bill required schools and public facilities with single-gender washrooms to only allow individuals of the corresponding sex as listed on their birth certificate to use them. In North Carolina, individuals can only change the sex designation on their birth certificates if they undergo gender confirmation surgery (see Shoichet's "North Carolina Transgender Law").

and oppression is thinly veiled by their "supportive" insistence that Maura has every right to be in the women's washroom, Sarah's misgendering of Maura as "Dad" is what draws attention to Maura's difference as a transgender person in the first place. Consequently, Sarah commits a similar "act of violence" against Maura by unknowingly outing her in public space—the same type of misgendering she reprimands Ari for in the previous scene. Accordingly, the bathroom scene becomes an important tool for educating mainstream cisgender audiences: viewers not only learn about "the bathroom problem"[67] from Maura's perspective (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* 20), but they witness just how insidious transphobia really is, as it is Maura's "supportive" children who are equally capable of making these "unintentional" microaggressions.[68]

Sarah's and Ari's transphobic remarks provide examples of what mainstream cisgender viewers ought *not* to do when engaging with trans* people. However, these "teachable moments" may be a site of frustration for queer and transgender audiences, as the show does not propose alternative solutions or models of what the characters could be doing instead to better support Maura. Sarah and Ari make mistakes, which are indeed part of the learning process, but the characters are rarely called out for being transphobic. Consequently, the siblings' remarks can easily be dismissed by the fact that they are terrible people; because the characters are never reproached for their behaviour, they remain oblivious to the fact that their words and actions are problematic in the first place, which means that Sarah and Ari (and, by extension, cisgender audiences) never learn from their mistakes. *Transparent*'s pedagogy may indicate to viewers

[67] According to Jack Halberstam, public washrooms are physical manifestations that reflect and reinforce dominant gender ideologies; they are spaces where gender is frequently policed and secured (*Female Masculinity* 20).
[68] Sarah and Ari eventually start calling Maura "Moppa" instead of "Dad" (although it is unclear if they have learned how problematic and potentially dangerous it is to misgender a trans* person), but they continue to remain blissfully unaware of how their use of the term secures their own comfort in relation to Maura's shifting identity and to her changing role within the family. Rather than give Maura the space to name herself, the siblings' use of "Moppa" dispossesses Maura of her autonomy to name herself and her identity as transwoman (S. Funk and J. Funk 881).

what they *should not* be doing, but this is a very different lesson than teaching viewers how, exactly, to better support trans* people. As a result, Sarah's and Ari's transphobic blunders may become increasing difficult to watch; they not only re-center white and cisgender mainstream viewers as part of the program's pedagogy, but also reduce the show's teachable moments to a small subset of transgender experience, which only includes coming-out narratives, "the bathroom problem," and issues related to misgendering.

Sarah and Ari eventually tell Josh about Maura—the siblings blatantly ignoring Sarah's earlier advice on how "outing" a trans* person is "an act of violence." Out of all the Pfeffermans, Josh is the most profoundly uncomfortable with Maura's transition, despite his genuinely belief that he is "accepting" when he tells Maura that "whatever people want to do behind closed doors—that's their business" (*Transparent*, "The Wilderness"). Josh's character is meant to address the white, straight, and cis-male subject, and with him being the final Pfefferman to find out about Maura, his reactions make most apparent the siblings' internalized transphobia, which is an intended part of *Transparent*'s scaffolding. Josh's inability to come to terms with Maura's disclosure reflects his attachment to normativity, and the news sends him on a crash course: his way of educating himself about Maura's experience includes visiting a pornographic website and purchasing screen time with a transgender cam girl to ask her questions about her identity, and, after a slew of meaningless sexual encounters with random women, he latches on to and falls deeply in love with the first woman whom he is able to be emotionally intimate with about Maura's situation. Josh's understanding of normative masculinity is clearly threatened by Maura's existence, and, in an attempt to secure his own comfort and attachment to norms, he insists that Maura's transgender identity is merely a "symptom" of early onset dementia—a move which takes away Maura's autonomy to name herself and her gender identity. Josh's

comments align with the ideological assumption that trans* people are willful "pretenders" or "deceivers" (Bettcher 50; S. Funk and J. Funk 889). At one point, he wonders out loud to his siblings if Maura's entire life was a "sham" following her disclosure—that perhaps she had been "acting the whole time." Maura's transition clearly exposes how hegemonic conceptions of family are tied to "progression" and "continuity" (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 70, 74; Hess 8). Indeed, Maura's experience requires the Pfefferman family to "all have to start over," but this is ultimately something Josh cannot contend with, given his attachment to normativity and how he imagines his life "should" be as a straight, white, cisgender, and educated upper-middle class man.

Following Josh's receipt of Maura's news, the Pfefferman siblings' tactlessness and narcissism are undeniable; viewers come to realize how their selfish reactions are deeply inflected by their internalized transphobia, which makes it profoundly uncomfortable for viewers to identify with their position. This point is emphasized during a mid-season turning point where the siblings bail on Maura's apt performance of Gotye's "Somebody That I Used To Know" at the "Trans Got Talent" show hosted by her LGBT community center. The scene is excruciating to watch: the siblings snicker at the sight of Maura in a dress, with Ari exclaiming loudly "Oh my god, he looks just like Aunt Lily" (*Transparent*, "Symbolic Exemplar"), and they howl at Maura's "failed" performance of femininity when her low vocals do not match her outward appearance (see Figure 9). However, amidst the crowd of queer and trans* folk in the audience, the siblings' childish and immature behaviour is coded as deeply insensitive, if not transphobic—their rude laughter is eventually "shushed" by a nearby spectator (who is played by Zackary Drucker, one of the transgender consultants for the series), as the scene makes abundantly clear how Maura's children cannot support her needs as a transgender person.

The "Trans Got Talent" scene is an attempt to displace *Transparent*'s earlier centering of white and cisgender mainstream audiences as part of the program's pedagogy—by this point, it is impossible for viewers not to feel empathy for Maura as she looks upon an empty row of seats in the audience. However, this lesson perhaps comes a little too late for queer and trans* viewers: to teach mainstream cisgender viewers about the insidious effects of transphobia, *Transparent*'s pedagogy ultimately relies on the reification of common stereotypes about trans* people as part of its initial scaffolding process.

Figure 9. The Pfefferman Siblings Snicker During Maura's "Trans Got Talent" Performance: Season One, Episode Seven "Symbolic Exemplar." Source: Courtesy of Amazon Prime Video.

As proxy characters that operate as Trojan Horses, the Pfefferman siblings first attempt to normalize Maura's exceptional experience; they establish safe and familiar entry points into the world of gender transition. However, because the siblings are quickly revealed to be a site of deep dysfunction, their inability to perform normative adulthood following Maura's disclosure

not only elicits empathy for Maura's plight, but also exposes the effects of their internalized norms. As a result, the show's exploration of Maura's transition through the Pfeffermans perturbs "the loving family" as an adequate site for nurturing queer and trans* lives, and it questions the idea that Maura's identity can only be complete with the supplement of straight and/or cisgender acceptance.

The empathy that is cultivated toward Maura constructs her character as the most emotionally stable Pfefferman. Throughout Season One, Maura remains clear about who she is and her gender identity, despite her struggle to come out to her children. This juxtaposition between Maura and her kids transforms "the geometry of how it feels to otherize trans people" (Soloway qtd. in Ryan, "As 'Transparent' Ends"). By framing Maura as the "least complicated, emotionally," the series "normalize[s] a kind of gender nonconformingness" wherein audiences can be "more accepting of transness and their families and their friends and themselves" (Soloway qtd. in Ryan, "As 'Transparent' Ends"). This move is significant in terms of *Transparent*'s pedagogy and how it relates to a politics of representation, as it is a critical departure from Piper's role in *OITNB*: Maura's identity is never in question (like Piper's is in *OITNB*), and *Transparent* never invites audiences to look at her character in ways that are fetishizing or objectifying (e.g., shot-reverse-shot techniques). *Transparent*'s methods of teaching thus align with broader transgender politics, and a transing of TV genres and conventions (Koch-Rein et al. 6), as much as they re-center white and cisgender mainstream audiences as a site for education; by fostering empathy toward Maura, the show encourages these viewers to "look with, rather than at, the transgender body," perhaps for the very first time (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 92).

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OITNB and *Transparent* are very different series in terms of form and content. Although they use different teaching methods for specific learning objectives, both series rely on character proxies as Trojan Horses to offer a particular kind of pedagogy for mainstream audiences. These characters may be intended to "scaffold" viewers' learning, but the copying of this device across these programs indicates a need to re-center white and more privileged mainstream viewers as a site for education, pleasure, and viewership. By linking close readings and textual analyses of these series to broader political-economic concerns, we can see how this Trojan Horse structure reflects the TV industry's need to appeal to larger audiences, as much as the new economic and industrial practices ushered in by internet-distributed television platforms like Netflix and Amazon are said to offer viewer choice and creative autonomy in terms of queer and trans* representation. *OITNB* and *Transparent* may spotlight queer and trans* folks on TV, but this visibility cannot be equated with political agency; these programs may teach mainstream audiences how to read televisual texts via a "crossover gaze" (e.g., *OITNB*), or they may teach viewers how to empathize with the position of others (e.g., *Transparent*), but ultimately queer crossovers continue to rely on the caricaturing and typification of queer and trans* identities in the service of educating white and more privileged viewers. *OITNB*'s and *Transparent*'s Trojan Horse structure thus reflects the double practice of representation—that is, the complicity between *speaking for* and *re-presenting*. These programs may portray and re-present queer and trans* people, but their re-centering of mainstream viewers as part of their pedagogy does little to change the structures of representation that render queer and trans* subjects unable to speak in the first place.

Her Story's Allie: The Didactic Role of a Journalist

"I had always thought myself firmly on the progressive side of every issue, but like too many in our community, I thought my tacit acceptance of the reality of trans people was sufficient. I never questioned their total absence from my world. I now see that our great disservice is not just to those we've excluded, but to ourselves, for our world is less rich without their stories, their laughter, their voices. It's less that the world has changed for trans people and simply that we are seeing them, as people—as our brothers and sisters, our parents and children, our colleagues, even our friends."

— Allie, "Episode Four" (2016)

Her Story is a very different kind of queer crossover. Because the series does not have the same industry "buy-in" as either *OITNB* or *Transparent*, its target audience is different, which means that its character representations and stories are different. More specifically, the series intervenes within a larger body of popular trans* media narratives that have been previously created and/or acted by cisgender entertainment professionals to provide alternative modes of transgender self-representation. As a series created by and for the communities it represents, *Her Story* primarily addresses LGBTQ+ viewers instead of more mainstream and normatively identified audiences. *Her Story* thus presents an interesting point of comparison: What happens to a show's pedagogy when it is not required to "mainstream" its content in the same way as *OITNB* or *Transparent*? How are *Her Story*'s methods of teaching different? What lessons are learned?

This final section demonstrates how *Her Story* is an example of what pedagogy can look like when a character proxy is *not* required to be a Trojan Horse. *Her Story* implements a similar

structure of identification as Piper in *OITNB* and as the Pfefferman siblings in *Transparent*—Allie (Laura Zak) is initially presented as an approximation or "proxy" for viewer identification (i.e., she appears to be authorized by viewers to speak for and represent them). However, her didactic role as a journalist is explicitly used to educate viewers about transphobia within LGBTQ+ communities (i.e., there is no "hidden" or covert strategy used to teach these lessons). As will be discussed in more detail below, Allie's job is to learn about transwomen—to conduct research, to ask questions, and to report on her findings to her readership, which includes the TV audience. Her interview questions not only center Violet's (Jen Richards) perspective, but also establish the enabling conditions through which both she and audiences can "learn to learn" from trans* people. By observing Allie's own learning process, viewers come to understand the complexities of transgender experience, including what is and is not appropriate for one to say to a trans* person as an invasive line of questioning. *Her Story*'s interviewer format thus offers a more sustainable and inclusive form of pedagogy than the Trojan Horse structure of either *OITNB* or *Transparent*; it not only avoids re-centering cisgender audiences as part of the program's pedagogy, but also acknowledges how the gains made in relation to gay and lesbian representation in film and TV have yet to be extended to trans* characters.

Although *Her Story*'s showrunners are committed to the self-representation of transgender folks, they maintain that the series is "about people rather than politics" (Carrera, "*Her Story*"). Rather than be overtly political, the show offers an array of characters and a spectrum of perspectives, which allow viewers to formulate their own positions on issues raised by the show. Allie's role is explicitly pedagogical. As a journalist who is writing about transwomen in the LGBTQ+ community, her fictional article is the central plot device used to introduce her character (and, by extension, the audience) to the series' transgender characters.

Moreover, as a white, upper-middle class, and cisgender lesbian, Allie invites viewers to identify with her whiteness, class privilege, femininity, etc.—in a similar way that Piper does in *OITNB* or that the Pfefferman siblings do in *Transparent*. However, as a self-identified lesbian, Allie speaks directly to a specific crossover audience that is not as explicitly addressed in either *OITNB* or *Transparent*: white, cisgender lesbians and/or queer women. By anchoring these identities, Allie's goal is to educate viewers about transgender issues that can arise in LGBTQ+ communities; she acts as a kind of proxy for trans* representation, particularly since cisgender characters—even gay and lesbian ones—have historically received more representation on TV.

Her Story's opening scene begins with a shot of Violet serving at a bar, who then becomes the subject of Allie's and her friend Lisa's (Caroline Whitney Smith) conversation. Allie shares with Lisa her desire to write an article about transwomen in the Los Angeles LGBTQ+ community, and she expresses her concern regarding how best to approach Violet for an interview. Lisa groans "Oh come on. Jerry Springer's been doing that for decades" before she shrugs indifferently to Allie's trepidation: "So, worst case, you piss him off. And then there's one more pissed off tranny in the world. They're all pissed off anyway" (*Her Story*, "Episode One"). Lisa's misgendering of Violet is cringeworthy, just like Sarah's and Ari's in *Transparent*; the character's comments not only reflect the transphobic premise that transwomen are not real women, but also reinforce the prevailing cultural assumption that gender is reducible to sex characteristics (i.e., the absence and/or presence of specific physical body parts related to reproduction and development). However, Allie's insistence that her article focus on transwomen "in *our* community," as well as her correct use of the pronoun "her" to reference Violet, contrasts with Lisa's perspective; it is a direct address to the historical and ongoing prejudice toward transgender folks by cisgender individuals within the LGBTQ+ community. Already, Allie's role

as a character proxy is immediately constructed to interrogate instances of transphobia, and the scene ends with her calling out Lisa for being a "terrible person," which is in a stark contrast to the centering of Sarah's and Ari's remarks in *Transparent*—that is, characters who are rarely, if ever, called out for their transphobic behaviour.

When Allie eventually approaches Violet for an interview, *Her Story* capitalizes on her discomfort in educating viewers about several key issues. Like Sarah's and Ari's role in *Transparent*, Allie's questions reference common stereotypes about trans* people; she often stumbles through these conversations, but the critical difference is that she either apologizes or corrects herself when she states something potentially inappropriate and/or offensive. The scene opens with a shot-reverse-shot from Allie's perspective (i.e., the audience is encouraged to adopt her point-of-view). Following this suturing effect, Allie introduces herself to Violet, but it becomes quickly evident that she is unsure how to navigate the conversation when she bluntly states: "Ok, sorry, I'm not actually sure how to ask this, so I apologize in advance if I say anything inappropriate… Shit, I'm just going to ask. Are you transgender?" (*Her Story*, "Episode One"). Violet is caught off-guard by Allie's personal question, but in sensing her discomfort, Allie immediately apologizes and adjusts accordingly: "Sorry, was that rude of me to ask?" The scene continues with Violet wishing out loud how her transgender identity "wasn't so obvious," but that Allie's decision to ask was ultimately "better than assuming."

Here, Allie's role is a direct address to cisgender audiences: her discomfort is palpable, and, alongside the suturing effect of her gaze to the look of the camera, her position mirrors the viewer who might also be unfamiliar with how to navigate these types of exchanges. Moreover, the conversation between Allie and Violet exemplifies the types of invasive questioning trans* people receive, and the scene tactfully addresses the issue of passing privilege, as related to the

supposed readability of Violet's transgender identity. As Anne Enke suggests, because cisgender is framed as "non-trans," trans* identity must always be made visible and marked on the body through a narrow set of narrative and visual signifiers (69). This process requires trans* people to repeatedly perform their marginalized status though a series of disclosures, like Violet's to Allie. As a result, the scene demonstrates how trans* people are frequently required to explain, to defend, or to answer for their gender identity to others because cisgender is taken as the norm. Violet's repeated disclosure of her history places considerable strain on her interactions with others, particularly when she is meeting new people like Allie. Consequently, viewers are encouraged to empathize with Violet's perspective; even though audiences have adopted Allie's eye-line through the scene's camera work and editing, the fact that Allie stumbles through her introduction allows viewers to observe Violet in a way that is anything but fetishizing and objectifying. Indeed, Allie is not oblivious to her mistakes: she approaches Violet with openness and curiosity, and she corrects herself and adjusts accordingly to re-center Violet, rather than act in ways to secure her own comfort.

A similar exchange occurs in episode two when Violet agrees to be interviewed by Allie for her article (see Figure 10). In this scene, Allie asks Violet several personal questions, including if Violet was "a gay man before" she transitioned. Violet bursts out laughing, and a sheepish Allie—who is unsure how to interpret Violet's response—immediately apologies once again: "Sorry, is that too personal?" The conversation continues with Violet explaining how she dated women before her transition, to which Allie eagerly questions if this kind of "switch" is common for trans* people. Violet candidly explains,

> It's not *un*common. There's really no normal. In fact, the most common reaction I got when I told people I was transitioning was, "Oh, I didn't know you were gay."

> I mean, to be fair, I had dated men. It just never felt right, not until I was seen as a woman… It's not about them. It's about *me*. When I'm with a man, I have no doubt about my womanhood. My body, next to theirs, is so obviously feminine. (*Her Story*, "Episode Two")

Allie's questions reference some of the misconceptions, incorrect ideas, and biases against trans* people—specifically, that gender identity invariably defines one's sexuality and/or sexual orientation. However, the interview format allows *Her Story* to center Violet's response: Allie's questions invite Violet to share her experience, and, in doing so, both Allie and the audience are able to learn about the specificity of Violet's transgender experience. By explicitly

Figure 10. Violet Laughs at Allie's Personal Interview Questions: Season One, Episode Two. Source: Courtesy of YouTube and Herstoryshow.com.

offering viewers a transgender perspective on trans* issues, the interview allows Violet to challenge and correct some of the assumptions and stereotypes about trans* people embedded in Allie's questions. Most importantly, Allie's interview exemplifies the importance of amplifying

transgender voices, and it establishes the enabling conditions through which Violet can exercise her autonomy to name herself and her gender identity as Allie and the viewer both watch and learn about her experiences.

Although Violet's open and frank responses clearly make Allie unconformable, Allie becomes a model through which viewers can learn about trans* issues via the character's own learning: she listens carefully, she recognizes the boundaries and limits of her knowledge by admitting that she doesn't "know shit about transgender issues" (*Her Story* "Episode One), and she apologies and corrects herself when she makes mistakes. Most importantly, Allie does not react defensively to Violet's comments, and she avoids re-centering the conversation around herself—that is, she does not attempt to relate to Violet's experience by drawing parallel connections to her own experiences of marginalization and oppression as a lesbian woman. Thus, by watching Allie work through her own previous assumptions about trans* people in ways that support and center Violet, viewers are given the opportunity to work through their own feelings of discomfort while simultaneously gaining practical tips on how to navigate these types of conversations.

Allie's learning does not end with her relationship with Violet either. Equipped with what she has learned from her interviews, she uses her newly acquired knowledge to tackle instances of transphobia within the LGBTQ+ community, as explored via her friendship with other lesbian and queer women. A prime example occurs in the second episode when Allie's friends tease her for crushing on Violet. In this scene, the friends fold laundry together—a mundane act meant to emphasize the everydayness of their conversation, and of their lives as queer and lesbian women (see Figure 11). The exchange gets heated when the group discuss whether transwomen can really be lesbians, which is worth quoting at length:

Jenna: Did you have a date?

Lisa: With a tranny!

Allie: I'm not bi, guys.

Lisa: Why are you being all weird? You like him. I can totally tell.

Allie: Oh my god. It wasn't a date. I'm writing a feature on trans women, and it was just an interview. And yeah, I like *her*…

Jenna: Come on, seriously. Could you guys ever consider dating a transsexual?

Kat: Well, yeah!

Jenna: Really? You're going to give a blowjob? How long has it been?

Kat: Seven years.

Jenna: Right? Not unless you want to stop claiming the term "lesbian," and I'm not losing my gold star.

Kat: Seriously though, these girls—they can be like, really fine.

Lisa: These girls? They represent the exact opposite of what feminism has worked so hard to achieve.

Allie: Thank you! Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for speaking for all of us.

Lisa: It's not like I'm the first person to say this shit. A lot of people feel this way.

Jenna: Can transsexuals even be lesbians?

Lisa: Nope. Babe, if there's a cock involved, it's not a dyke.

Kat: Says the queen of strap-ons.

Lisa: If a guy wants to throw on a skirt and call himself Veronica, that's fine. I mean, I don't think he has to chop his dick off, but I don't think I have to share a bathroom with him.

The conversation presents a spectrum of perspectives on trans* issues, and it serves as a didactic tool: the scene not only complicates what it means to be a "woman" and a "lesbian," but also informs viewers about the kinds of relationships queer, lesbian, and transwomen can have both within and across LGBTQ+ spaces. More specifically, Lisa's and Jenna's comments introduce viewers to a fear of transwomen within lesbian and/or women-only spaces; their points about trans* people reproduce the common-sense assumption that gender is reducible to sex characteristics and to the physical parts of the body, which perpetuates the transphobic premise that transwomen are not "real" women. Although the stereotypes raised by Lisa are fetishizing, the showrunners see Lisa's character as intentionally antagonistic—she speaks to a "radical feminist perspective" that "doesn't accept transwomen as part of their community" (Zak qtd. in Ennis, "*Her Story*"). As Zak explains further:

> We portrayed [Lisa] as someone who feels their identity has been hard-won, has gone through a lot of suffering and discrimination for her lesbian identity, and isn't terribly open to other perspectives that she feels might challenge that. […] But especially for people outside the LGBTQ communities, that may be something that is not even known, that there are so many riffs even within the queer and trans communities. (qtd. in Ennis, "*Her Story*")

The juxtaposition between Lisa's position and the other characters' is significant, particularly since Allie's and Kat's points are meant to interrogate the ideological assumptions reflected in Lisa's comments. For example, Kat's retort about strap-ons complicates Lisa's assumption that the categories of "woman" or "lesbian" can be reduced to biology, anatomy, or penetrative sex. The exchange eventually ends with a frustrated Allie abruptly exiting the conversation. She confides in Kat and wonders out loud if dating a transwoman would make her

"less lesbian," to which Kat reassures her: "Last time I checked, 'lesbian' means loving women. So, what's the problem?" (*Her Story*, "Episode Two").

Figure 11. Allie and Her Friends Discuss Transgender Lesbians: Season One, Episode Two. Source: Courtesy of YouTube and Herstoryshow.com.

Rather than take a polemical approach, the scene offers a myriad of queer and lesbian women's perspectives. Although the conversation focuses on cisgender women's reactions to trans* people, their contrasting positions introduces viewers to the existence of a transphobic bias within the LGBTQ+ community—something that not all viewers may be familiar with. Most notably, Lisa's and Jenna's transphobic blunders are very similar to Sarah's and Ari's in *Transparent*, but rather than centering these characters and their perspectives, *Her Story* frames their remarks via Allie as the series' "model" proxy character. Allie's personal relationship with Violet allows her to push back against her friends; their implicit transphobia becomes much more apparent within this context, particularly after all Allie (and the audience) has learned about trans people. To explain further, Lisa's comments specifically reify stereotypes about trans* folks; however, her position is ultimately a setup for Allie and Kat to contest and subvert these age-old

tropes in a way that is necessarily "scaffolded" for audiences. By observing Allie's learning, viewers not only see how problematic and exclusionary Lisa's fear of trans* people really is, but also witness the importance of Allie applying what she has learned to help interrogate everyday instances of transphobia, even in her friends. Collectively, the scene works to emphasize a growing rejection against the exclusion of trans* people from lesbian and women-only spaces.

Allie's learning continues throughout the series, with her article on transwomen eventually published at the beginning of episode four. Delivered as a monologue, with Allie acting as the non-diegetic voiceover narrator, the excerpt explains how Allie, like "too many in *our* community," had previously assumed that her "tacit acceptance of the reality of trans people" was sufficient—that until she met Violet, she had never stopped to question *why* trans* people were absent from her life. Allie's use of inclusive language is once again a direct address to white, cisgender lesbian and/or queer women audiences. Rather than "speaking for" or "re-presenting" trans* issues, Allie uses what she has learned from her friendship with Violet to effect change within her community. Her article invites audiences (that is, both her fictional readership and actual TV viewers) to question how they might be complicit in reproducing structures of trans* exclusion, and she encourages them to see trans* individuals as whole people who cannot be reduced to their transness alone. Thus, Allie's journalism and the "scaffolding" of her own learning help to establish the enabling conditions through which viewers can "learn to learn" from trans* people in ways that do not re-center cisgender audiences. Indeed, Allie's character makes a direct address to white, cisgender lesbian and/or queer women viewers, but unlike *OITNB* or *Transparent*, *Her Story* does not privilege these audiences entirely as part of its pedagogical approach.

Allie's character thus provides an alternative and more sustainable form of pedagogy for queer crossovers. Although her character is intended to address cisgender audiences, first and foremost, she does not re-center them at the expense of transgender self-representation. More specifically, her journalistic role is an invitation for Violet to share her experiences as a transwoman, and this emphasis on Violet's perspective becomes part of Allie's and the viewer's own learning. The pedagogical work of *Her Story* is therefore very different from either *OITNB* or *Transparent*, of which the latter series tend to address and re-center white and more privileged mainstream viewers. Because lesbian and queer cisgender women are arguably more familiar with how to access a "queer sensibility," and because these viewers may already be attuned to how ideological structures of heteronormativity and/or binary gender can be exclusionary, *Her Story* teaches these viewers how to recognize the ways in which they may be complicit in reproducing these structures of marginalization and oppression within their own communities. In other words, the show gives audiences tangible and concrete examples on what they can do in their daily lives to challenge or correct transphobia via Allie's own learning. The goal of *Her Story*'s character proxy structure is subsequently to effect change for trans* people within LGBTQ+ communities—that is to say, to have audiences "learn to learn" from trans* experiences, without re-centering lesbian and queer cisgender women as part of a program's pedagogy.

Her Story Paige's: Re-Writing Disclosure Narratives and the Racialization of Trans* Identity

Allie's address to white, cisgender lesbian and/or queer women allows Paige (Angelica Ross) to emerge as another character proxy / site of viewer identification for the series; the character is

used to educate viewers about the specificity of her experience as a young, black transwoman who is not so easily read as transgender—something that is rarely seen on TV. As mentioned previously, *Her Story*'s conditions of production as a YouTube web series enabled the producers, writers, and actors to circumvent some of the industrial and commercial constraints of more mainstream internet-distributed platforms like Netflix and Amazon, which invariably impacted the show's characters, representations, and storylines.

Viewers are first introduced to Paige in episode one through her friendship with Violet, the latter of whom is first accessible via Allie. However, following Paige's introduction, her story immediately begins to operate independently of the other characters, with her trajectory becoming one of the two main plotlines in *Her Story*. Paige's narrative is developed through her struggle to disclose her transgender identity to James (Christian Ochoa), the Mexican American, cisgender, and heterosexual man whom she is dating. These narrative tropes of dating, love, and romance are characteristic of many mainstream, women-centered romantic comedies and/or dramas, and these aspects of Paige's storyline, in addition to the fact that she readily passes as cisgender, encourage cisgender women to identify with Paige as a woman. In other words, Paige's narrative and transfeminine identity are both part of the "crossover" appeal that invite viewers to recognize the "her" in Paige's trans* identity. Paige's character thus presents an interesting point of comparison to Allie, particularly in the lessons she teaches. More specifically, *Her Story* uses the character to re-write disclosure narratives that previously emphasize cisgender, heterosexual men's reactions to the discovery of a transwoman's history (e.g., *The Crying Game*, *Dallas Buyer's Club*, etc.). Paige's storyline flips this script, and, in doing so, *Her Story* centers her perspective to explore other facets of her identity as part of the program's pedagogy.

Her Story is similar to *Transparent* in that the series rarely invites viewers to adopt the eye-line of its transgender characters; however, one of the few instances where this occurs is when Paige first meets James in episode two—she glances lustfully over her shoulder to catch a glimpse of the handsome stranger, as a shot-reverse-shot fixes her gaze to the look of the camera. Here, the camera work and editing combine to offer viewers an opportunity to "look with, rather than at, the transgender body" (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 92). This exceptional moment is a critical departure from *OITNB*, where Piper's eye-line is adopted to offer more flexible and agile modes of queer / "crossover" looking. Rather than provide viewers with a voyeuristic and/or fetishizing look at the transgender Other (like Piper does for queer sexual difference in prison), Paige's flirtatious stare avoids centering straight and/or cisgender audiences as part of the program's pedagogy. Instead, Paige's point-of-view creates a position for the desiring transgender subject that is fortified by the traditional (white, male) operation of the gaze, which is something rarely seen on TV (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 89). This effect is intentionally distancing for straight and/or cisgender viewers—to look lustfully with Paige means to actively participate in the sexualization and objectification of a character (i.e., James) who is somewhat "like" them. As a result, the scene is an early indication to viewers that they will learn to "see" things from Paige's perspective.

By adopting Paige's point-of-view, viewers witness Paige's disclosure narrative unfold from her position—a rare first for TV (see Figure 12). For example, on the couple's first date in episode three, James playfully asks Paige to tell him everything about herself, to which she scoffs, "Everything – About what?" Because viewers are already aware of Paige's transgender identity—information that James is not yet privy too—her sarcastic remark reflects her trepidation in disclosing her identity. Here, the scene makes an intertextual reference to a larger

body of film and TV works that rely on the delayed revelation of a character's transgender history. This narrative trope that is often accompanied by the onscreen unmasking of a trans* person's identity, which often prompts fear, anger, and/or repulsion in a (male, heterosexual) cisgender character's reaction to this discovery (Miller, "Fear and the Cisgender" 4; Miller, "Becoming One" 140). James's romantic interest in Paige may motivate him to know everything about her; however, in an ironic twist, viewers understand that he may not actually want to know *everything*. Fear and repulsion are very much framed as very plausible reactions from James, should he make this discovery about Paige.

Figure 12. Paige and James on their First Date: Season One, Episode Two. Source: Courtesy of Herstoryshow.com.

Paige's history is eventually revealed to James in episode six where she is publicly outed by Lisa. The pair meet to discuss this revelation, and the scene opens with James sternly telling Paige, "You should have told me." The line is suggestive, and it leads viewers to believe that James's discovery will likely be a deal-breaker, as it has been for so many (straight, cisgender)

men before him in film and TV history. But the conversation takes an unexpected turn: James instead confesses that he has a gambling problem, and much like Paige, he was struggling to find an appropriate time to disclose this information to her. The scene ends with James stating, "Shit Paige, I really like you," which is a stark contrast to Josh's reaction to Maura's disclosure in Season One of *Transparent*. Rather than centering James's violent reactions as a cisgender heterosexual man, Paige's relationship with James re-writes this disclosure narrative from her perspective as a transwoman. This representation highlights the historical absence of these kinds of narratives in film and TV: the tension builds between the characters because viewers anticipate that James will react with fear or in repulsion towards Paige once he finds out that she is transgender. However, when audiences are given an unexpected release—with James expressing his feelings for Paige—viewers are invited to question why they would assume the scene to play out in the ways that they initially imagined. Thus, by centering Paige's perspective, and by showcasing James' empathetic response, *Her Story* constructs Paige's character as a desirable transwoman, one who is not solely defined by her transness.

In addition to centering Paige's perspective, *Her Story* uses her character to explore the racialization of trans* identity, something which is not as explicitly foregrounded in early seasons of either *OITNB* or *Transparent*.[69] *Her Story* does not shy away from spotlighting Paige's blackness: her dialogue is peppered with colloquial phrases like "Mmmhmm," "Girl," and "Naw bitch," and on her first date with James, Paige is depicted asking the server at an upscale restaurant for hot sauce, stating that she's "not gonna eat white people food without a little help" (*Her Story*, "Episode Three"). Paige's typification as a "sassy" black woman continues throughout the series, and it is used to educated white, cisgender queer and lesbian

[69] Laverne Cox's secondary role as Sophia Burset operates relatively independent of Piper, whereas *Transparent* only addresses these themes in later seasons, after the Pfeffermas have been de-centered.

viewers (who are initially addressed via Allie's character) about the intersections between race and gender identity. For example, when James is surprised to find out that Paige is an attorney on their first date, she firmly interjects: "Really? Is it because I'm black?" (*Her Story*, "Episode Three"). Although James makes a "good recovery" (he charmingly tells Paige that his question stems from the fact that she looks "so young"), Paige's interrogation of James' intent reveals the racialized assumptions embedded in his statement. Indeed, viewers are not shown the discrimination Paige has undoubtedly experienced, but the narrative ellipsis implies that Paige has worked doubly hard to get to where she is at now as a successful attorney, particularly as a young, black transwoman. Here, Paige's racial and transfeminine identity intersect with her professional storyline to foster empathy toward her character, particularly from cisgender viewers who may identify with Paige's experiences of prejudice and discrimination as a black *woman.*

A similar ellipsis is used in Paige's storyline to explain how trans* people of colour are more vulnerable to experiencing family rejection. In one particular scene, Paige describes her mother as a "hard woman" when she explains to James how she was kicked out of her home at the age of fourteen. When James questions why her mother would do such a thing, Paige simply states "She said I wasn't her…" before Paige pivots and changes the subject: "I haven't heard from her or my father since" (*Her Story*, "Episode Four"). Once again, viewers are invited to fill in the gaps between dialogue. Because viewers are already aware of Paige's transgender identity, the narrative ellipsis suggests that Paige's parents did not accept her after she came out as transgender. While parental rejection is a reality experienced by many trans* people, the fact that this storyline is presented through Paige's character (instead of Violet's, for instance)

emphasizes how trans* people who come from racialized communities are particularly vulnerable to bullying, to violence, and to family exclusion.

By presenting Paige as a black transwoman who unapologetically speaks her mind, *Her Story* later uses her character as a device for calling out transphobia. In the final episode, Paige confronts Lisa for publicly outing her at work in front of a client (who is another transwoman seeking legal action after being denied access to a women's shelter). Lisa is once again antagonistic: she sides with the shelter's decision to exclude Paige's client, and she begins to explain to Paige how transwomen are different than "real" women because they are "biologically male." Paige rolls her eyes, but Lisa attempts to placate her by making a perfunctory suggestion that there should be trans*-specific shelters. Paige snaps,

> You know how many times I run into people like you? That talk about racial inequality without a black girl in sight. Write your little economic inequality pieces, but you've never been poor. This is about women who you've decided aren't women, and you are wrong. (*Her Story*, "Episode Six")

Paige's callout addresses multiple dimensions of trans* discrimination both within and outside of the LGBTQ+ community. First, Lisa's comments reference similar arguments presented in ongoing debates about anti-discrimination bathroom laws in the United States, in a similar way as *Transparent*, but the scene moves beyond the "bathroom problem" to expose how trans* exclusion extends to other public and women-only spaces related to health and social services, like women's shelters. Moreover, in witnessing this exchange, viewers come to understand once again that this type of transphobic sentiment can also be harboured by folks within the LGBTQ+ community, and not just by those who are cisgender and/or heterosexual. Lisa may occupy a marginalized identity as a lesbian woman, but this does not excuse her from

the ways in which she is complicit in reproducing marginalization and oppression via her transphobia. Finally, Paige's interruption exposes how Lisa's fear of trans* people is an effect of her privilege as a white lesbian woman. Lisa may "speak for" and "re-present" the needs of those who come from racialized and working-class communities, but her benevolence does little to change the structures of exclusion that render such subjects as unable to speak in the first place. Paige's callout underscores Lisa's complicity in reproducing structures of domination and oppression, even across the communities she seeks to represent. Thus, alongside Allie's earlier address to viewers in her article, Paige's callout teaches audiences how neither the tacit acceptance of trans* people, nor the act of "speaking in the name of" transgender communities is enough to challenge the structures of marginalization and oppression that exclude trans* individuals. Instead, change must be affected by creating the conditions of possibility through which trans* people may be empowered to speak, as *Her Story* has done in highlighting Paige's voice and perspective in this scene. This lesson is very different than what viewers learn via Piper in *OITNB* or the Pfeffermans in *Transparent*. By centering Paige's character and storyline, *Her Story* emphasizes the specificity of her experience as a black transwoman, while continuing to address and teach its target audience through alternative forms of transgender self-representation, storytelling, and aesthetic strategies.

Paige's interruption of transphobia is a critical departure for popular representations of trans* people. At the same time, her callout risks stereotyping her character as an angry black woman: the scene renders Paige's blackness hyper-visible to teach viewers how her race intersects with her gender identity, and, once again, the onus is placed on her as a transgender person to educate cisgender folks about the perils of transphobia. In spite of these shortcomings, the scene gives Paige's character a rare moment of agency. As a successful black transwoman

lawyer, Paige makes a critical departure from historical portrays of trans people of colour as villains, sexual workers, and sexual deviants (if and when they were represented at all). Thus, Paige's character allows *Her Story* to explore the racial and class dimensions associated with trans* discrimination that occur both within and outside of the LGBTQ community, particularly as she is able to stand up for herself in the face of transphobia. Thus, Paige's role as a character proxy demonstrates the pedagogical value of *not* attacking from behind viewers' defenses via a Trojan Horse structure. Instead of introducing "difficult content" in ways that center more privileged viewers as a site of education, viewership, and pleasure, Paige "talks back" to these white, cisgender, and middle-class identity formations as a speaking subject, rather than an instrument solely intended for viewers' learning (hooks 9).

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Her Story demonstrates how TV's changing structures can influence *what* and *how* TV teaches, and it provides a pedagogical model for mainstream Queer TV. More specifically, Richards and Zak used the cultural contestations surrounding trans* representation in film and TV as their starting point for the series, which explains why the show does not use the same Trojan Horse structure as either *OITNB* or *Transparent*. *Her Story* therefore exemplifies how the shifting political-economic and cultural context for TV can shape queer crossovers, more broadly speaking. Because *Her Story*'s reliance on YouTube and independent funding structures helped shape the program's pedagogy, in addition to the explicit effort made by the showrunners to change the terms of mainstream media production, the series does not "crossover" in the same way as the other programs considered here. For example, Lisa's role in the series may be intentionally antagonist, and her viewpoints may reify common stereotypes about trans* people, but her deplorable position is not centered like Piper's or the Pfefferman's. Instead, Lisa is

presented as a "terrible person" from the start—that is, someone with whom viewers ought to *dis*identify with. In this vein, *Her Story* offers an alternative example of what pedagogy can look like. The series may address white, cisgender queer and lesbian women viewers; however, it does not solely cater to these audiences in its representations, characters, and storyline developments. Thus, by centering trans* folks in its simultaneous address to broader audiences, *Her Story* successfully creates the enabling conditions for viewers to "learn to learn" from trans* communities via forms of queer and transgender self-representation and other types of storytelling and aesthetic techniques.

Conclusion

The Trojan Horse structure is an inherent part of the pedagogy of queer crossovers. Because *OITNB* and *Transparent* address mainstream audiences, first and foremost, they do not take for granted the level of knowledge their viewers have about queer and trans* identities. As a result, these series tend to rely on white, educated, upper-middle class, and nominally straight and/or cisgender characters as proxies for viewers' identifications and entry into a series. This structure is important to a queer "crossover" politics of representation insofar as it suggests a productive engagement with queer and trans* difference—by learning how to read TV queerly, mainstream audiences may no longer require the same kinds of "scaffolding" or educational supports via a character proxy / Trojan Horse in the future. Indeed, more recent programs like *Pose* and *Euphoria* have done away with this device entirely in introducing its queer and trans* characters to mainstream audiences. Nevertheless, the copying of this device across other programs in the

queer crossover genre is therefore a reflection of the TV industry's need to ensure the commercial viability of gender and sexual diversity for specific audiences, even in the digital era.

The Trojan Horse structure may cultivate mainstream viewers' "crossover" reading skills, but this lesson ultimately comes at the cost of queer and trans* self-representation and other forms of storytelling and aesthetic strategies for Queer TV. Consequently, the "teachable moments" of this device can be a site of frustration and alienation for queer and trans* audiences who may not necessarily need the same types of pedagogical support as mainstream viewers. This centering of mainstream audiences is therefore unsustainable for queer and trans* politics in the long run. As will be discussed in the next chapter, there are many ways of reading queer crossovers beyond their intended "teachable moments." Most notably, as these programs circulate, there is an explicit attempt to displace this Trojan Horse device in later seasons. This shift is essential to a politics of representation, as it allows queer crossovers to engage in different kinds of pedagogical work that re-center queer and trans* communities.

Chapter Five

Problematizing the Trojan Horse Structure: Cultural Contestations, Teaching Back, and a Shift in Pedagogy

The Trojan Horse structure of queer crossovers can be a site of frustration and alienation for queer and trans* audiences. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, these programs must pitch "queer content" on certain conventional and risk adverse terms, with recognizable actors and "crossover" storylines and themes that are intended to address mainstream audiences. Although queer crossovers may capitalize on the content and creative affordances of internet-distributed television, they continue to demonstrate how queer and trans* content is still made for TV in hegemonic ways. This chapter examines the parts of *OITNB* and *Transparent* that exceed the Trojan Horse structure—I look at the shows themselves and their various fan and audience engagements, as communicated through audience reception practices and reviewer discourses, that either own or challenge particular aspects of each series. My central argument is that the circulation of queer crossovers opens up space for queer and trans* contestation, community-building, and critique, particularly surrounding the politics of production and representation. More specifically, I suggest that the active reception practices of queer and trans* audiences indicate other ways of reading queer crossovers beyond their intended "teachable moments." These alternative viewing strategies, alongside the various struggles in industry regarding queer and trans* (self-)representation, are opportunities for LGBTQ+ communities to "teach back" and "school" TV producers, writers, and showrunners about the pitfalls of their series—specifically, their use of the Trojan Horse structure and the pedagogical value of this device's centering of mainstream viewers, first and foremost. This feedback is then assimilated

into the production and development of each series. I argue that these cultural contestations become integral to the scaffolding process of queer crossovers as the Trojan Horse structure is optimally supplanted by another pedagogical strategy that occurs *within* and *through* the series as queer crossovers "learn to learn" from queer and trans* communities. This act of "teaching back"—that is, the ways in which each show's learning becomes part of its own form of "scaffolding" for audiences—can lead to transformations in a show's direction over time (i.e., its production, cast members, writers' room, and storytelling and aesthetic strategies, etc.), with many of these programs choosing to displace, de-center, and/or vilify their Trojan Horses in later seasons / episodes. This development of a contestatory politics of representation not only reflects a shift in *who* is being taught *what* and *when*, but also implies a dynamic relationship between TV, audiences, and pedagogy. By exceeding and/or displacing the Trojan Horse structure, queer crossovers can therefore become sites for different kinds of pedagogical work that better support queer and trans* audiences and self-representation, in addition to other modes of storytelling and aesthetic innovations for Queer TV.

TV, Audiences, and Reception Practices

To think about TV's shifting pedagogy is to think *beyond* programming. Cultural Studies approaches to understanding cultural contestation, audiences, and "the popular" are therefore useful in explaining how the pedagogy of queer crossovers evolves over time. As discussed earlier by Amy Villarejo, these approaches to Queer TV Studies acknowledge how readings of individual texts are nestled within "rigorous and fully elaborated contexts, including material/industrial contexts" ("Materiality, Pedagogy" 390). Thus, it is equally important to

discuss how queer crossover are situated with a shifting political, economic, and cultural environment, as it is to analyze queer and trans* representations in terms of characters, storylines, etc.

As a cultural object, TV is a privileged site for critique and re-adaptation that can occur both *within* and *through* a series. The medium's episodic and serial format allows writers to explore identities, relationships, and social issues in-depth through complex story arcs and narratives that can span across multiple seasons and/or years of programming (Vorderer et al. 397). Because these textual and narrative features help sustain viewer engagement, which can lead to an enjoyable entertainment experience (Vorderer et al. 397), audience reception practices maintain an important role in TV and cultural production, as viewers' preferences can potentially shape a show's direction over time. Accordingly, TV is a space wherein the intersections between the industrial, the political, the commercial, and the creative are constantly being renegotiated and reconfigured in public culture.

Audience research has received renewed interest in Television Studies, particularly with the rise of internet-distributed television (J. Gray, "Reviving Audience Studies" 81). Most notably, the technological and nonlinear affordances of internet protocol have shifted our understanding of "the audience"—viewers are now dispersed across multiple platforms, and they are able to watch programming at a self-determined pace, free from a time-specific schedule (Wilson 175). Because much digital research tends to be platform-focused, Television Studies scholars have argued for a return to analyzing empirical understandings of audiences as participating agents within an increasingly datafied culture (Das and Ytre-Arne 4-5). More specifically, algorithms shape programming content in conjunction with audiences' actions and viewing habits, which means that viewers still hold a considerable amount of power in

communicating their preferences over cultural production (Elerding, "The Digital Labor"). Of course, the extent of this agency remains partly obscured by these platforms' refusal to share their proprietary data, in addition to the fact that viewers' engagement continues to be shaped by technologies, business models, and governance structures, but internet-distributed television has nonetheless leveraged a new type of interaction between televisual texts and audiences than previously configured with broadcast and cable TV distribution (Hallvard et al. 101; Elerding, "The Digital Labor"). Audience reception practices can therefore indicate how queer crossover characters, representations, and storylines are actually being received by real (rather than imagined) viewers, and they can demonstrate other ways of reading and engaging with these televisual texts beyond their intended "teachable moments." These alternative and unanticipated readings of queer crossovers and their Trojan Horses can undo some of the "lessons" of each series, particularly for queer and trans* communities who do not necessarily need the same types of instructional support as mainstream viewers. This final chapter traces key moments of cultural contestation in the reception and circulation of queer crossovers. I outline the various public debates surrounding the changes in production, casting, and the writers' room for each series, and I discuss how these shifts in power, as communicated via various audience reception practices and reviewer discourses, oblige the producers, writers, and showrunners of queer crossovers to grapple with the social dimensions of their shows, particularly in how their programs are being received by different viewers. These cultural contestations not only challenge the supposed "freedom" of internet-distributed television and how these changes to TV are said to proliferate more diverse queer and trans* content, but also demonstrate how the pedagogical model of these series can shift as the Trojan Horse structure is overcome by producers and writers "learning to learn" from active viewing communities.

Transparent: Overcoming the Trojan Horse Structure

Transparent provides the best example of how the Trojan Horse pedagogical structure can be overcome to teach new lessons about trans* experience both *within* and *through* a series. In the years following *Transparent*'s end in 2019, the show has become an archetypal "bad" trans* object. With its focus on transition narratives and its casting of cisgender actor Jefferey Tambor, *Transparent* fails to pass the "May Test," the updated transgender version of the Bechdel Test used for women's representation (Kiley, "There Wasn't").[70] There was also no mention of the series in the recent critically acclaimed documentary *Disclosure*: *Trans Lives on Screen* (2020), despite the film's featuring of notable *Transparent* alumni (e.g., Alexandra Billings, Zackary Drucker, Trace Lysette, and Alexandra Gray), and the fact that *Transparent* played an important role in mentoring transgender talent like Our Lady J, who went on to work for other trans-related projects in the industry like the FX series *Pose*, and *Her Story*'s Jen Richards. Although parts of *Transparent*'s Trojan Horse pedagogy remain problematic, my tracing of the cultural contestations that occurred during key moments in the series demonstrates how the show was able to challenge this structure and shift its pedagogical approach. This analysis therefore works against a representational politics that continues to frame trans* representations as either "good" or "bad." Indeed, there is still much to learn from *Transparent*'s evolving trajectory over time, particularly in how the show responded to criticism from queer and trans* communities, and in the learning that took place in Soloway's attempt to better support and mentor transgender talent

[70] The May test was created by Kiley May to evaluate "good" trans media representation. To pass the test, a trans character must be played by a trans actor, they must be depicted as "happy," "in love" and/or "safe, stable, and secure," their storyline must center something other than gender transition, and they must not be a "sex worker, dealer, or thief" (see May's "There Wasn't a Bechdel Test for Trans Representation, So I Made One"). Unlike the Bechdel Test, which captures a level of "maturity" related to feminist critique, the May Test appears to be a reactionary repones to historical representations of trans* people in film and TV, particularly as the industry explores new ways of representing trans* beyond the Trojan Horse structure.

in the industry—to "correct" the show's misstep in casting a white, cisgender, and heterosexual actor (Jeffery Tambor) in the lead role of Maura Pfefferman.

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Transparent is based on Soloway's account of their own parent coming out as transgender. The showrunner drew from their first-person experience to draft Season One, with their sister, Faith Soloway, serving as a co-writer. Soloway has noted on multiple occasions how Maura's casting was one of the first decisions to be hammered out after Amazon made their offer to develop the pilot. As the showrunner recalls, "I just wasn't sure which man would be right. It never even occurred to me to cast a trans woman" (Soloway 55). Tambor was eventually selected, with Soloway explaining how the actor's "sense of humor was exactly the same as my dad's" (55).

From the outset, Soloway knew that they needed to involve trans* communities to write and produce the series. Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst were initially hired as content consultants, but they were quickly promoted to producers: their role was to offer notes on scripts, to watch rough cuts of episodes, and to work closely with the writers and actors in their portrayal of trans* lives. Soloway also instated a "Transfirmative Action Program" which required the production team to submit a trans* or gender-nonconforming person for any opening on the series. As Soloway explained, "our goal was to hire at least one trans person within each department" (93). Soloway, Drucker, and Ernst combed their networks for potential leads, in addition to issuing an open call on social media and various trans* forums requesting that all interested folks apply.[71] Although the team was able to hire an array of transgender talent for

[71] *Transparent*'s team faced several challenges in hiring qualified trans* people. Since work on set was temporary and located in Los Angeles, it was difficult to find locals and/or individuals who were willing to relocate without the guarantee of ongoing work. Additionally, because *Transparent* was a studio production, most of its hires needed to be part of the union; therefore, even trans* folks who were hired as non-union production assistants were limited in

Season One, they were unable to find a transwoman writer for the writers' room. To help fill this gap, Professor Jennifer Boylan was brought on as a consultant to help ground Maura's character. Boylan played a vital role in educating *Transparent*'s staff about transgender experiences,[72] and she was one of the first people to caution Soloway about the blowback they would likely receive from trans* communities with Tambor's casting.

With the show officially underway, the team attempted to mitigate this criticism by adding several trans* acted and portrayed characters to the series: Davina (Alexandra Billings) and Shea (Trace Lysette).[73] In Season One, the characters help Maura form "families of choices (Oswald 375), and through their friendship, Maura learns what it is like to be part of the transgender community: she finds a new apartment in West Hollywood (a city in Los Angeles with one of the most vibrant queer communities in the United States), she learns hair, fashion, and makeup tips, and she becomes educated on the social, legal, and medical aspects of the transition process (Becker 9). Davina specifically plays a key role in mentoring Maura (and, by extension, mainstream audiences) about trans* identity (see Figure 13). For example, in the Season One episode "The Letting Go," her character is the only person who cautions Maura to be mindful of her relationship with her children, particularly given Davina's own estranged relationship with her family. She reminds Maura that she is on a "really big journey," and that the transition process will require her to "let what other people say go," including that of her children. Davina's words hold true, and they operate as an instance of foreshadowing as Maura's

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their scope of what they could do. Ernst specifically found himself navigating union rules and regulations to hire prospective trans* employees, and he spent a considerable amount of time educating union officials about trans* issues in order to do so (see Richard's "How Amazon's 'Transparent'").

[72] During Boylan's first visit, she assigned the staff an assignment to read Julia Serano's book *Whipping Girl*, which helped inform the writers about some of the nuances behind the hatred directed toward trans* women given transmisogyny.

[73] Lysette initially auditioned for role of Davina, and although she did not receive the part, Soloway wrote the role of Shea for her after Lysette's audition (see Strause's "'Transparent' Star").

children are eventually revealed to be much more concerned about how Maura's transition will impact their lives rather than supporting her needs as a trans* person.

Figure 13. Davina Helps Maura with her Hair and Makeup: Season One, Episode Four "Moppa." Source: Courtesy of Amazon Prime Video.

With storylines like these, *Transparent*'s first season debuted to much critical acclaim, with many mainstream press and media outlets celebrating Tambor's humanized and empathetic portrayal of Maura. However, despite the series' inclusion of trans* characters played by trans* actresses, the show received heavy criticism from queer and trans* fans, scholars, and TV critics who were quick to critique the show's chronicling of Maura's gender transition as an ageing transwoman. For many of these viewers, Maura's Season One trajectory aligned with the historical norms of TV that depicted trans* characters within coming-out and/or transitioning narratives (Siebler 76). As Kay Siebler explains, these storylines tend to emphasize how a character's gender transition impacts the cisgender people around them, and they frequently involve a delayed revelation and/or onscreen "unmasking" of a trans* character's identity in

order to build tension in the story (Miller, "Fear and the Cisgender" 4; Miller, "Becoming One" 140). Moreover, Jeffery Tambor's portrayal of Maura has also incited debate about the casting of cisgender actors in trans* roles, with the actor's performance follows a longstanding history of cisgender actors playing transgender characters: Jaye Davidson in *The Crying Game* (1992), Hilary Swank in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), Felicity Huffman in *Transamerica* (2005), Kerry Washington in *Life Is Hot in Cracktown* (2009), Jared Leto in *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), Eddie Redmayne in *The Danish Girl* (2015), etc. These concerns were echoed by several trans* activists, who critiqued the series as "transface" that "profit[ed] off trans experience and trans pain" (Soloway 78).

In response to this pitted criticism, Soloway initially defended Tambor's casting. They explained how the "pilot probably wouldn't have been made starring someone without Jeffrey's stature" (Soloway 79), and they noted how the actor's role was a strategic decision to encourage viewers who were already familiar with the Tambor's body of work to watch a show about an ageing transwoman—something that they would not necessarily watch otherwise. As mentioned previously, several trans* media professionals like Ernst and Nick Adams came to Soloway's defense by justifying the actor's casting as a rare exception—that Tambor's performance fit the story being told of an older transwoman who transitions later in life. Drucker also responded to the criticism by highlighting the importance of having a trans* person in a mainstream production of this magnitude. As she stated, "I think if we want to assassinate anybody who attempts to represent us, include us, employ us, we are making a huge mistake—we are shooting ourselves in the foot" (Soloway 78). Despite this public support and critical praise for Tambor's performance, many queer and trans* community members problematized the language of "early-transition" or "pre-transition" used to defend the casting decision. As S.E. Smith explains, "since

Maura doesn't 'pass' as a woman by cis standards" many assume that "it's okay for a man to play her" (Amazon's "Transparent"). Similarly, *Her Story*'s Jen Richards was quick to point out that the show's depiction of a "late-transitioning, middle-class, white transwoman with a family" has long been the default representation of trans* people on screen, if and when they were depicted at all ("How Amazon's 'Transparent'"). This criticism from queer and trans* communities indicated other ways of reading *Transparent* beyond Maura's / Tambor's pedagogical role as a Trojan Horse; they not only challenged the idea that a cisgender actor was needed to encourage mainstream viewers to watch a show about a transwoman, particularly since the cost of this casting decision was simply too high for trans* communities, but also exposed how individuals who have access to channels of visibility and representation (i.e., Soloway) are typically those who benefit from the most privilege. Consequently, Soloway's representation of trans* life (i.e., their attempt to "speak for" trans* communities) was ultimately filtered through the lens of their own privilege.

Soloway headed this criticism from queer and trans* communities regarding *Transparent*'s shortcomings, particularly their misstep in Tambor's casting, and in the show's Season One centering on transition narratives, which played out through Maura's coming-out storyline to her (white, largely cisgender and heterosexual) family. In response to this feedback, *Transparent* adapted to become more "flexibly responsive" to the desires of its fans and audiences in subsequent seasons (Goddard and Hogg, "Streaming Intersectionality" 431). Silas Howard was immediately hired as the show's first trans* director, and Soloway publicly committed to recruiting a transwoman writer for Season Two. Although the search initially came up short, Soloway maintained their commitment to deliver on their promise by shifting their approach, which sought to train and mentor a transwoman to become a TV writer for the series.

The showrunner solicited short story submissions from trans* writers to join their mentorship program, of which five hopefuls[74] would be selected to participate in a scriptwriting workshop lead by Soloway and *Mad Men* veteran Bridget Bedard. The one-week intensive required participants to work on a sample script with help from Soloway and Bedard, and at the conclusion of the workshop, one writer would be asked to join the series. For those participants who were not selected, they would walk away from the experience with useful industry connections, an opportunity to join the screenwriters' guild, and a polished script spec that they could pitch to other networks for production.

Through Soloway's mentorship program, Our Lady J[75]—a singer-songwriter and classical pianist—joined *Transparent* to give her transfeminine perspective to the series. Public responses to Soloway's hiring and mentoring of Our Lady J were cautiously optimistic: the overarching concern was that Our Lady J's presence in the writers' room might tokenize her and trans* experiences. As Edward Schiappa explained, it is "a little risky" to have one person represent an entire community in the writers' room (qtd. in Holpuch, "*Transparent* Creator"). At the time of Our Lady J's hiring, TV production did not reflect the same diversity people were seeing on screen. Although several TV networks had already established programs for increasing diverse voices in the writers' room, many of these efforts simply became "diversity slots" that needed to be filled with a "one-and-done" approach to hiring minorities on staff, without helping writers feel like their voices mattered in shaping a series' direction (McDonald, "Jill Soloway"; A. Harris, "Same Old Script"). Soloway's mentorship program was therefore intended to be a critical departure from these current industry practices, with the showrunner using their skills and

[74] *Her Story*'s Jen Richards was one of the writers who was selected for the program. Soloway liked Richards' nonfiction writing and reached out to her directly to participate.
[75] Our Lady J had initially auditioned for the role of Davina in Season One, but she did not receive the part.

experience in the industry to teach trans* communities how to write and tell their own stories. The goal of Soloway's mentorship program was to equip trans* talent to work in the industry, even after the end of *Transparent*. As Our Lady J explained, "[Soloway] wanted to teach us all the tools so we can write our own shows or be staffed on other shows. It's just a way of giving the tools to trans people to actually make a living in this town" (qtd. in Villarreal, "Our Lady J").

Our Lady J's presence in the writers' room resulted in a number of structural, narrative, aesthetic, and representational changes to the series. The writer felt that Maura's character had been "protected in a sense" in the first season, especially when compared to the rest of the Pfefferman family who were "a complete mess" (qtd. in A. Reed, "Meet Our Lady J"). Thus, for Season Two, Our Lady J wanted to "dig deeper" into the lives of the show's trans* characters—to highlight Maura's "messiness" and to humanize her character (A. Reed, "Meet Our Lady J"). Drucker explained how TV's serialized narratives allowed the team to develop Maura with greater depth and more complexity. As she noted in an interview, because Season One "wasn't front-loaded," the writers could "draw things out and get deeper" with Maura's character development and narrative trajectories (Our Lady J et al., "Interview by Rick Camilleri). This evolution of Maura's character over hours of content programming was something that had yet to be seen on TV for a trans* person, and although the show's deeper engagement with transness in later seasons was a testament to how much things had changed culturally, the writers and producers still recognized that given "where we're at, we do have to teach" (Our Lady J et al., "Interview by Rick Camilleri).

With this approach, Maura's character began receding into the background of her family as Season Two began grappling with her lack of awareness of her own position of privilege as a white, educated, upper-middle class transwoman (Horvat 470). This structural and narrative shift

allowed audiences to leave the Pfefferman "bubble," which enabled the series to re-center its pedagogical approach around the perspective of its trans* characters. More specifically, Davina began to play an increasingly important role in teaching Maura (and, by extension, mainstream audiences) about Maura's position of privilege within the transgender community. For example, in the Season Two episode "The Book of Life," Davina confronts Maura after she makes a judgemental remark about her cisgender boyfriend, Sal, who is framed to be somewhat of a trans* "chaser." Responding to Maura's unsolicited advice that she "can do better than that," Davina's retort is one of the first instances in the series where Maura is called out for the normative assumptions that underpin her blind spots, particularly as a white, middle-upper class, and educated transwoman with a family. As Davina snaps, "Mind your own goddamn business. You have no right. We don't all have your family. We don't all have your money. I'm a fifty-three-year-old ex-prostitute HIV-positive woman with a dick. And I know what I want, and I know what I need."

By centering Davina's perspective, the scene not only highlights Maura to be part of the same racist, sexist, and classist structures as her children, but also demonstrates how different types of trans* marginalization and oppression can occur even within LGBTQ+ spaces. Although viewers observe Maura struggle to come out to her children in Season One, and they see first-hand what it is like for Maura to be a victim of transphobia, audiences learn in Season Two how Maura's experience is ultimately a rare exception to the realities of many trans* people who come from different class and racialized communities, including Davina's. Although Maura does eventually get back into Davina's good graces—she begins volunteering twice a week at their LGBT community center's suicide hotline—and she genuinely expresses excitement to "learn about *that* whole world" (emphasis added), her references to trans* folk as "these people"

indicate that she still has much to learn about her position of privilege and how it impacts her relationship with other trans* people. Thus, it is clear in Season Two that Maura does not see herself as part of the same community—one that she so desperately needed to be a part of in Season One as a refuge from her family.

By shifting its pedagogical approach beyond the Trojan Horse structure, *Transparent* pivoted to explore a heterogeneity of intersectional transgender experiences. Therefore, instead of reducing trans* identity to a series of "issues" only (e.g., the bathroom problem, coming-out narratives, and instances of misgendering), which is a rather paternalistic way of looking at and learning about trans* communities, the show was able to highlight the lived experiences of its trans characters, rather than using them solely as instruments for teaching specific "issue-based" topics to mainstream cisgender audiences. In other words, by challenging the pedagogical structure of its Trojan Horse device as the show "learned to learn" from queer and trans* communities, the series was able to engage in different kinds of storytelling and aesthetic innovations for trans* life on screen.

As Maura's character became more complex, so did *Transparent*'s pedagogy and its subsequent lessons. A prime example occurs in the Season Two episode "Man on the Land" when Maura and her children (Sarah and Ari) attend the 42nd Idyllwild Wimmin's Music Festival. In true self-absorbed Pfefferman fashion, the family arrives unaware of the festival's "women-born-women" policy. When the rule is eventually explained to Maura as "people who were born with a vagina and a uterus," the exchange becomes a reference point for the real-life Michigan Womyn's Music Festival policy of trans* exclusion, which has historically been one of

the most visible areas of conflict between lesbian feminists and transwomen.[76] The scene first appears to be another "issues-based" representation. For example, one of the festivalgoers explains the policy to Maura as an issue related to nudity and women's safety in public showers, which leads Ari to counter by asking if women who receive hysterectomies are no longer considered women. However, as the conversation unfolds, the scene delves deeper to explore how Maura's transgender identity intersects with her position of privilege in a queer, women-only space (see Figure 14). As the scene continues, Maura demands that she has "a right to be there too, as a transgender woman." Her comment is met with exasperation by one of the event's founders, who explains how Maura's insistence is re-centering the conversation around her to preserve her own individual comfort, which serves as a kind of "meta" commentary for the

Figure 14. Maura Learns About the Idyllwild Wimmin's Music Festival's Women-Born-Women Policy: Season Two, Episode Two "Man on the Land." Source: Courtesy of Amazon Prime Video.

[76] The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival was a feminist women's event held annually from 1976-2015 in Oceana County, Michigan. The festival's policy of only admitting "womyn-born womyn" drew criticism from various LGBTQ+ rights associations.

series' earlier centring of mainstream audiences in Season One. As the exchange continues, the festival attendees go on to connect the policy to Maura's position of privilege, and to her different experience of womanhood, particularly because Maura was "compensated as a man" before she transitioned.

The scene shares similarities to the laundry scene in *Her Story*. Rather than take an explicitly didactic approach, the conversation includes a range of perspectives on the issue from multiple characters to encourage viewers to come to their own conclusions about the festival policy. This approach is pedagogically aligned with *Her Story*'s laundry scene in that it uses the festivalgoers' antagonism as a "setup" for complicating womanhood and interrogating the idea that gender identity is reducible to sex characteristics and/or to the physical parts of the body related to reproduction and development. Collectively, the women's different viewpoints historicize a growing rejection against the exclusion of transwomen from lesbian and feminist women-only spaces; they not only highlight how the policy's notion of separatism can be exclusionary, but also underscore Maura's privilege as separate from the pain she experienced as a transwoman. Although Maura suffered privately before coming out, her experiences of transphobia do not exempt her from reproducing other structures of marginalization and oppression. This realization is ultimately traumatic for Maura, but instead of using it as a "teachable moment" and an opportunity for self-reflection (like Allie does in *Her Story*), she reacts defensively by storming off and referring to the festival's policy and its attendees as "bullshit." Viewers cannot help but feel empathy for Maura's plight; however, her defensiveness makes it difficult to completely identify with her position in the same way as before. Indeed, Maura's inability (or perhaps her unwillingness) to see her own culpability in larger structures of power reflects a shift in *Transparent*'s teaching methods: by exploring the intersectionality of

trans* identity within lesbian and feminist women-only spaces, the show attempts to re-center its queer and trans* audiences in its education of mainstream cisgender viewers.

Maura's short-sightedness comes to a head in the Season Three episode "Elizah" when she receives a distressing phone call from a young, black transwoman while working at the suicide hotline. The scene is mortifying to watch as Maura bumbles through the call center's suggested questions, and after Maura perceives Elizah (Alexandra Gray) to be in danger, she goes out of her way to South Central LA—a predominantly Hispanic, Latino, and African American neighbourhood—in search of the "troubled" teen. Maura's journey takes her to the Slauson Super Mall where she asks a group of Latina transwomen, whom she refers to as "familia trans," if they have seen Elizah "on the streets." The women scoff at Maura's racial stereotyping, which makes it profoundly uncomfortable for audiences to empathize with her position. When Elizah is eventually "found," it becomes apparent that she is in no need of saving. The scene ends with Maura fainting in the shopping center, with Elizah coming to her aid. As Maura is whisked away by paramedics, she demands to be taken to Cedars-Sinai instead of the closest county hospital. Her comment makes glaringly obvious what viewers have already come to know: that Maura is part of the same racist, sexist, and classist structures as her children. Maura's desire to help may be well-intended, but it is clear that she is in way over her head, her search fueled largely by her sense of "white guilt." Here, Maura's failed attempt to help Elizah is a critique of the "White Saviour" trope (Hughey 752); the scene ultimately pokes fun at her misguided approach—specifically Maura's lack of awareness of her own privileged position within the trans community (Horvat 470).

Maura's displacement and transformation into a rather cringeworthy character is intended to be a "corrective" to the show's earlier misstep in Tambor's casting. Season One may have

cultivated empathy for Maura's character via its Trojan horse structure by highlighting her children's selfish reactions to her disclosure; however, this attachment is used in later seasons to expose Maura as part of the same racist, sexist, and classist structures as the other Pfeffermans. Maura's culpability in reproducing structures of power demonstrates a shift in the series' pedagogy as it learns to "let go" of its Trojan Horse device in response to the pitted criticism it received from queer and trans* communities, particularly in the show's centering of mainstream cisgender audiences. Thus, by becoming a somewhat ambivalent and reprehensible character, Maura is able to teach viewers new kinds of lessons about the intersectionality of trans* identity—specifically about the ways in which structures of marginalization and oppression can occur in LGBTQ+ spaces. This displacement of her character therefore becomes a new kind of scaffolding process that becomes incorporated into the series, wherein audiences learn both *within* and *through* the series' own learning.

Although Our Lady J's presence in the writers' room clearly impacted *Transparent*'s evolution, I see the most significant changes to the series resulting from its ability to problematize and overcome Maura's / Tambor's role as a Trojan Horse. In other words, the various political effects that resulted from shifts to *Transparent*'s production team became reflected in the show's learning both *within* and *through* the series. This shift in pedagogy enabled the series to explore different kinds of storytelling and aesthetic strategies that can be seen as a "*transing* of TV genres and conventions" (Koch-Rein et al. 6), rather than an increase in "authentic" or "good" representations of trans* people on screen. For example, in Season Four, Zoe Van Brunt (who had previously worked on the series as a camera assistant as part of Soloway's "Transfirmative Action Program") was cast to play a "version" of Maura's younger self alongside Jimmy Ambrose who had played a younger Mort in Season Three. The flashbacks

for Season Four feature both "versions" of Maura's character (i.e., younger Maura and younger Mort) with the shots vacillating back-and-forth between Van Brunt and Ambrose, who are both depicted in the same scenes. The effect of this aesthetic strategy is particularly striking as it constructs Ambrose's younger "Mort"—who appears as "himself"—as a kind of "costume" or "cover" for Maura's "authentic" self, as represented by Van Brunt's version of younger Maura. Through these flashbacks, viewers are subsequently taught to see Van Brunt's portrayal of younger Maura as the "true" version of the character in a way that is profoundly pedagogical, without being didactic. This storytelling and visual aesthetic strategy not only teaches audiences what it is like to live in multiple embodiments across time, but also instantiates a kind of "retrospectatorship" (White 197) within the show itself: it models how series like *Transparent* can move back-and-forth in time (i.e., through narrative and storytelling) to rewrite and correct Maura's trans* "past" that was poorly represented to begin with. The series continued in this vein with its casting of Shakina Nayfack[77] to play Shelly's (Judith Light) version of "Maura" in the Season Five musical finale. In this final episode, Nayfack's "Maura" helps the Pfeffermans work through their grief over the loss of Maura, who died before the start of the season. This intersection between real life, casting, and storyline serves as a kind of "meta" commentary for the series, particularly after Tambor was fired from the show following sexual harassment allegations against trans* co-stars Trace Lysette and Van Barne. These departures in *Transparent*'s storytelling and aesthetic strategies demonstrate how a politics of trans* representation cannot be solely defined by "authentic" or "good" representations of trans* folks. Instead, representing trans* can also seek to "intervene and *trans* our ways of looking at the world" (Koch-Rein et al. 7).

[77] Nayfack also served as a writer and a producer on the Season Five musical finale.

Transparent's overcoming of its Trojan Horse structure also enabled the series to increase its emphasis on its trans* portrayed and acted characters as part of its shifting pedagogy. Through Davina and Shea, audiences are able to witness the different kinds of support they offer Maura as transwomen in later seasons. For example, when Maura shares her desire to medically transition with her family in the Season Three episode "To Sardines and Back," only Davina and Shea are truly supportive of her decision—the characters are quick to chime in with their enthusiastic and identity-affirming statements like "That's amazing" and "We're here for you girl." Davina's and Shea's storylines also begin to operate independently of their friendship with Maura in later seasons, and they become alternative character proxies through which viewers can engage a multiplicity of lived trans* experiences. For example, in the Season Three episode "The Open Road," Shea's character is specifically used to "school" Josh on his racial, gender, and class privilege after he makes several fetishizing remarks about her transgender identity, one of which is his realization that if the two of them have sex, Shea cannot get pregnant. Although Shea sees Josh as a potential boyfriend (she suggests PrEP as an option for the two of them to explore long-term, on account of her HIV-positive status), it is clear that Josh only views her as a casual fling, particularly given Shea's history of sex work. On the surface, Shea fails to pass the "May Test"—as a sex worker, she is neither "safe, sable, and secure," nor "happy" and "in love" (May, "There Wasn't"). However, *Transparent*'s storytelling and aesthetic strategies shift in this scene to position her character as an alternative model for representing trans* on TV. Shea snaps at Josh, "I'm not a fucking adventure. I'm a person." Her words are blistering, and the scene becomes another moment where one of the Pfeffermans is explicitly called out—this time Josh for his immature, selfish, and fetishizing behaviour. By emphasizing Shea's perspective (i.e., her face and emotional state are foregrounded in the scene, unlike Josh who has his back turned to

the camera) (see Figure 15), the exchange demonstrates just how limited the Pfefferman experience really is, and it avoids stereotyping her character has a victim, villain, sex worker and/or sexual deviant. Therefore, instead of reducing Shea's character to a narrow facet of her identity, she is represented as a whole person who cannot be defined by her transness or her history of sex work alone. As a result, Shea's call-out not only emphasizes her lived experience (over representing her within the confines of an "authentic" or "good" figure of trans* representation), but also exposes how "exemplary trans media of the current moment might actually reflect new restrictions on the transgender imaginary" (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 29). Shea may be a sex worker, but this is only one facet of her experience of being and living trans*.

Figure 15. Shea "Schools" Josh on his Transphobic Assumptions. Season Three, Episode Six "The Open Road." Source: Courtesy of Amazon Prime Video.

Davina also receives her own backstory later in *Transparent*, drawn directly from Alexandra Billings' own real-life experiences.[78] In the Season Four episode "Born Again," viewers see how Davina contracted HIV from an older gay man before she transitioned, alongside the negative reactions she received within the gay community for her participation in drag pageants (see Figure 16). The flashbacks offer a deeper understanding to the character, and they give context to her current struggle with the physical effects of AIDS and its impact on her relationship with Sal. The same season also features Billings in another TV milestone: the first full-frontal transgender nude scene.[79] The storyline idea came directly from Billings and Trace Lysette, who approached the writers and Soloway with the proposition in an effort to highlight a wider range of lived trans* experiences in the series. Speaking about the experience, Billings explains,

> I don't think it's ever been done before, where you see someone who's a trans body that was pre-op, especially of a certain age, who looks a certain way… I'm not built like a model. I'm build in a very specific way, and I'm at a point now where I'm okay with my body… I've traveled through years of not only my HIV and also my silicone injections and all the things we go through in order to survive. I wanted to show everything, but I said I don't want to be objectified. I don't want to be sexualized. And I don't want to be fetishized. (qtd. in Fallon, "'Transparent' Shows")

While genital reveals have historically been used in film and TV to reinforce the sex-gender binary, Billings' full-frontal scene resists this transphobic trope by highlighting a

[78] Actual footage from Billings' pageant performances was included in the opening credits for Season Four.
[79] Billings is no stranger to TV firsts. As mentioned previously, the actress was one of the first openly transgender performers to play a transgender character on television in ABC's 2005 made-for-TV movie *Romy and Michele: In the Beginning.*

different form of trans* embodiment that is not typically supported by popular and mainstream media (Keegan, "Bad Trans Objects"). Indeed, Billings does not pass as cisgender, and although there is an emphasis on her genitals in this scene, the reveal does not attempt to place her back in order with the sex-gender binary; there is no delayed revelation or onscreen "unmasking" of her "true" identity in order to build tension in the story—the moment simply happens at home, during an intimate conversation between Davina and her partner Sal.

Billings' and Lysette's personal influence in shaping Davina's backstory is another example of *Transparent*'s shifting pedagogy: their involvement with the series reflects a desire on behalf of the show's writers and producers to involve its trans* entertainers in the content creation process; it highlights the importance of letting trans* people tell their own stories, particularly as the series develops and responds to criticism of its previous representations; and

Figure 16. Davina's Backstory Reflects Billings' Real-Life Participation in Beauty Pageants: Season Four, Episode Four "Groin Anomaly." Source: Courtesy of Amazon Prime Video.

it demonstrates how the political effects of these changes to production can lead to different forms of storytelling and aesthetic strategies for representing trans*. Thus, as a more fully fleshed out character, Davina becomes less of a token transgender mentor to Maura—her role is not simply there to guide Maura (and, by extension, mainstream cisgender audiences) through the transition process, but to showcase the specificity of her lived experiences as a transwoman.

By problematizing Maura as an extension of the Pfefferman "bubble," *Transparent* is able to re-center its pedagogy around representing trans* differently. Moreover, Maura's displacement and lack of her awareness regarding her position of privilege questions whether the Pfeffermans as Trojan Horses were needed at all. Indeed, Soloway has since changed their initial position on Tambor's casting. As they explain:

> Where I to start all over today, it would be unimaginable for me to cast a cis man in the role of a trans woman… Would people have watched the show without a famous cis male at the center? And in some ways were we able to use Jeffrey's power as an actor and his history with the world as an understood dad, the dad on 'Arrested Development' for example, to bring people in who wanted to watch this transition? I think that was appropriate a few years ago. I think what's appropriate now is letting trans people tell their own stories. (qtd. in Melas, "'Transparent' Creator")

Soloway's comments reflect a shift in public culture, a growing need for queer and trans* people to their own stories, and a need for alternative ways for representing trans* on screen. Although the TV industry must do a better job of actively seeking out and supporting an array of transgender talent, the evolution of *Transparent*'s pedagogical approach demonstrates how this re-centering of trans* people at all levels of production, representation, storytelling, and

aesthetics can better establish the enabling conditions through which TV audiences, writers, and producers can "learn to learn" from trans* communities. Soloway and audiences have clearly learned *why* Tambor's initial casting was problematic, and, by displacing the show's Trojan Horse structure in response to this criticism, *Transparent* was able to engage in different kinds of pedagogical work that better supported queer and trans* audiences and self-representation, in addition to other storytelling and aesthetic innovations for Queer TV.

OITNB: Overcoming the Trojan Horse Structure

OITNB provides another example of how the pedagogy of the Trojan Horse structure can be overcome both *within* and *through* a series to teach different lessons about queer, working-class, and racialized women. In contrast to *Transparent*, *OITNB* is an adaptation of Piper' Kerman's 2010 prison memoir *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*. Although Kerman acted as a consultant for the TV series, the show is by no means a "faithful" account of her experience at Danbury, the actual facility within which she was incarcerated. As Kerman told NPR in 2013, there were "tremendous liberties taken" in the series, with parts of the TV show described as "pure fiction dreamed up by Jenji Kohan and by her remarkable team of writers" (*NPR's Fresh Air*). Accordingly, Kohan's reassembling of *OITNB* into a "hit" TV show resulted in a number of critical departures from the memoir. While Kohan took her narrative lead from Kerman's first-person account, her intention as showrunner was always to expand the TV series beyond the narrative boundaries of the book (Griggs 108-109). From the outset, Kohan expressed how "[*OITNB*] wasn't going to be… the story of Piper Chapman" (qtd. in McHugh 22). As she explained, "[*OITNB*] was always intended as an ensemble show… Piper was our

entrée to our world. She's always a presence and we're invested in her story, but as it grows, we're invested in everyone's story" (Kohan qtd. in Birnbaum, "'Orange'").

By extending the TV series beyond the narrative boundaries of the book—that is, the "I" of memoir / Kerman's first-person point-of-view as a "nice blond lady"—Kohan used the author's observations as a starting point to offer a more detailed and complex exploration of the lives of incarcerated women (Griggs 160). Referring to the series as her own form of "non-didactic activism" (qtd. in McClelland, "*Orange Is the New Black*"), Kohan saw *OITNB* as a way to introduce mainstream audiences to the stories of queer, working-class, and/or racialized women in prison, with current events and issues related to women and the prison-industrial complex becoming part of the show's "intertextual frame of reference" (Griggs 140-141). Thus, for Kohan, Piper's role as a Trojan Horse was always intended to be temporary; the character was meant to eventually take a backseat to the other inmates and their stories, particularly in what Kohan intended to be the show's main theme, which was the intersectional exploration of social injustices in the prison system.

With Piper Chapman at the helm of the series as Kohan's Trojan Horse, other changes to the memoir therefore focused on fictionalizing and sensationalizing certain elements of Kerman's experience. For example, although Kerman described her time at Danbury as relatively "drama-free," the TV show used elements of comedy and melodrama to develop conflict and character complexity—key features of an engaging, multi-season TV series (Griggs 160). Piper's relationship with Alex (who is based on Kerman's real-life ex, Catherine Cleary Wolters, and

who is referred to in the memoir as "Nora") was also amplified in the TV series,[80] with many of the couple's staged encounters including explicit scenes of nudity and/or sex.[81]

Despite these creative liberties taken with Piper's character, *OITNB*'s first season debuted to much critical acclaim, with many mainstream press and media outlets celebrating the show's diverse cast, and its humanized and empathetic depiction of incarcerated women. However, Piper's initial centering as a "Trojan Horse" nevertheless received a considerable amount of blowback from queer and racialized communities following Season One, particularly for the character's role in explicating the narratives of racial, ethnic, sexual, and gendered minorities to more privileged viewers. For many of these fans, academics, and TV critics, Piper's Season One "window into Litchfield" aligned with the same racist, classist, and heterosexist structures that contributed to the marginalization of queer, working-class, and racialized women on TV (A. Moore 170). As Aura Bogado points out, the Season One narratives of the show's BIPOC characters were each framed by a "white introduction," which resulted in a number of "wildly racist tropes" ("White is the New White").[82] As Mohadesa Najumi elaborates, many of the black women inmates were presented as "boisterous" and "aggressive" who functioned primarily as comedic relief. These concerns were echoed by many others, who subsequently critiqued the

[80] In real life, Kerman had very limited contact with Wolters in prison. She also maintained her romantic relationship with Larry throughout her entire sentence. The pair have been married since 2006.
[81] Kohan's portrayal of highly eroticized scenes of sex and sexuality in *OITNB* reflects the narrative and representational conventions of the women-in-prison genre—indeed, one would expect to see images of nudity and/or queer sex in a series about women inmates; however, these depictions also align with the showrunner's broader perspective on TV nudity, in general. As Kohan stated during her appearance on the 2014 New Yorker Festival's "LGBTQ TV" panel, her goal was simply to get more sex on screen and to "worry about who's gazing later" (qtd. in Kaydo, "'Transparent' and 'OITNB'"). This behind-the-scenes approach to sex, sexuality, and nudity is in stark contrast to the other showrunners who appeared on the same panel, including Joey Soloway who agonized over the difficulty in telling *Transparent*'s "old white guy editor" how they wanted to cut a specific sex scene from Ari's (Gabby Hoffman's character's) point-of-view. As Soloway explained, "I was working on the feeling of looking from the women's body instead of looking at her" (qtd. in Kaydo, "'Transparent' and 'OITNB'").
[82] Some of the examples of racist tropes Bogado cites from Season One include black women who fantasize about friend chicken, and who are called "monkeys" or "Crazy Eyes"; a Puerto Rican mother who plots with her daughter to gain sexual attention from a white correctional officer; a silent Asian woman; and a "crazy" Latina woman who hides in the bathroom stalls to take pornographic photos of her vagina (see Bogado's "White is the New White").

series for appropriating the stories of marginalized women for mainstream TV audiences (Najumi, "A Critical Analysis").

In response to these cultural contestations, supporters of the series, including Kerman herself, defended the author's commitment to prison reform, while others continued to cite how Kerman actually spent time in prison; because the TV show was an adaptation of Kerman's real-life experience, *OITNB*'s representations of incarcerated women therefore contributed to the verisimilitude of the series. Many also pointed to the fact Kohan and her team of writers had completed a substantial amount of research to portray different stories of incarcerated women, which included inviting former inmates to share their experiences in the writers' room. Kohan also continued to reiterate how Piper's role was always intended to be temporary—that her character was a useful "tool" for pitching the series to networks looking for "certain demographics," and that she would eventually be supplanted to center the lives of *OITNB*'s ensemble cast. But many queer and racialized communities remained apprehensive of the kind of visibility afford by such representations, even as the series continued to receive major accolades and award nominations.[83] At the end of the day, Kerman was a bestselling author who "sold the rights to stories of women that aren't [sic] even hers," which meant that she and the series both "profited from the criminalization of black and brown women who are disproportionately targeted for prison cages" (Bogado, "White is the New White").

Audiences' receptions of *OITNB* / Piper not only reflected a deeply emotional and affective engagement with TV (Cavalcante, "Affect, Emotion" 1187), but also challenged Kohan's initial assumption that Piper's character would be the ideal proxy through which

[83] *OITNB* received twelve 2014 Emmy Award nominations for Season One, which included acting nominations from Taylor Schilling, Laverne Cox, Uzo Aduba, Natasha Lyonne, and Kate Mulgrew. The series won three awards, which included "Outstanding Casting for A Comedy Series" and Aduba's win for "Outstanding Guest Actress In A Comedy Series."

viewers would gain entry into the series / Litchfield. More specifically, viewers' shared distain for the character indicated other ways of reading *OITNB* beyond her intended role as a Trojan Horse, and these unanticipated readings of Piper's centering therefore suggested alternative ways of entering the series that were not exclusively tied to her character or storyline. Thus, Piper may have been initially included to "scaffold" mainstream audiences' learning—to teach viewers that the prison-industrial complex is discriminatory and racist, albeit through the lens of Kerman's / Kohan's privilege—and she may have provided viewers with the tools for engaging in queer readings of *OITNB* through *multiple* points of identification; however, viewers' receptions of the character underscored both Kohan's and the industry's continued need to represent queer and marginalized content according to certain conventional and risk-adverse terms, no matter how much internet-distributed television is said to provide content and creative affordances to writers and producers. Thus, these cultural contestations surrounding Piper's centering demonstrated how *OITNB*'s contribution to effecting social and political change through its "diverse" representations was perhaps overstated.

Kohan and the writers' room grappled with this criticism in several ways. Season Two opened with a Piper-centric episode, "Thirsty Bird," which saw Piper testify in court in the trial against Alex's drug boss, Kubra Balik. The story arc was one of the final elements from Kerman's memoir, which signaled to viewers that the show's storyline would be free to expand beyond the book—that Kohan would finally be able to tell the story she really wanted to about social injustice in the prison system. Piper's storyline was therefore displaced as the primary narrative arc through which the other characters' stories unfolded, which had always been Kohan's original intention, and the move coincided with a number of secondary queer and/or BIPOC characters receiving more prominent and recurring roles in the series—most notably,

Tasha "Taystee" Jefferson (Danielle Brooks), Suzanne "Crazy Eyes" Warren (Uzo Aduba), and Nicky Nichols (Natasha Lyonne) were all promoted to the main cast. Additionally, episode two "Looks Blue, Tastes Red" and episode three "Hugs Can Be Deceiving" both opened with flashbacks for Taystee and Suzanne, respectively. Taystee's storyline nuanced her Season One narrative, which saw her complete her prison term, only to land herself back in prison "voluntarily" after she had nowhere to live following her release. The character's Season Two storyline picked up on these themes to complicate Taystee's "preference" for being in "the system"—her flashback episode highlighted the systemic and structural inequalities she faced, which eventually led to her trafficking heroin and to her subsequent incarceration at Litchfield.

In addition to Taystee's increasing role in the series, more representational space was dedicated to the show's queer encounters, which included: Nicky's and Big Boo's (Lea DeLaria) Season Two "bang-off"—the characters' competition to see how many women they can each have sex with; Poussey's (Samira Wiley) relationship outside of prison with her former girlfriend Franziska Mertensacker (Nina Rausch); Flaca's (Jackie Cruz) Valentine's Day kiss with her straight best friend Maritza Ramos (Diane Guerrero); and Piper and Alex's "origin" story.[84] Season Two also included an anatomy lesson from Sophia Burset, who proceeded to instruct the inmates (and one befuddled correctional officer) on how to identify their body parts such as the clitoris and the urethra. Additionally, Piper's Season Three fling with new inmate Stella Carlin, who was played by queer heartthrob Ruby Rose,[85] became one of the most talked about parings in the series. Rose's guest role was particularly notable for fans with many folks drawing

[84] More queer encounters are included in later seasons of *OITNB*, such as Poussey's budding relationship with Brooke Soso (Kimiko Glenn), and Suzanne's flirtations with Maureen Kukudio (Emily Althaus), both of which are in Season Four.

[85] Rose identifies as genderfluid. She has stated a preference for she/her pronouns, but Rose sometimes uses they/them. Rose will be referred to using she/her pronouns throughout this document.

parallels between her gender-fluid character Stella and Shane McCutcheon (Katherine Moennig) from *The L Word*. The actress even began "trending" on social media, with many women—particularly straight women—professing their love and adoration for the entertainer. Various iterations of "I Would Go Gay for Ruby Rose!" became a recurring motif across social media platforms, which included fan comments like "I want Ruby 2b my GF" and "When u think ur straight but then Ruby Rose comes and confuses you" (qtd. in Teitel, "Go Ahead"). Although these additional queer encounters in later seasons of *OITNB* were less narratively sustained than Piper's relationship with Alex, they continued to use the same camera work and editing techniques as discussed earlier in Chapter Four with Morello and Nicky's chapel scene (i.e., the viewer's gaze is left unsutured to any particular character). As a result, these scenes continued to offer viewers different entry points for sustaining their queer / "crossover" readings of *OITNB*, which did not require audiences to take on a voyeuristic and/or fetishizing look at queer sexual difference in prison, as initially determined by Piper.

With Piper's receding into the background of *OITNB*'s ensemble cast, Season Two once again debuted to much critical acclaim; because *OITNB* had recentered its storyline, with Piper's narrative arc becoming one of many intersecting vignettes told by the show itself, the series was now able to let the narratives of its secondary and supporting characters take center stage. But the criticism from queer and racialized communities continued, with Piper emerging as a "universally reviled" (Cobb, "'Orange Is the New Black's") figure. More specifically, viewers' reception of the character placed her in the ranks of television's most despised, which included Joffrey Baratheon from *Game of Thrones* and Skylar White from *Breaking Bad.* Additionally, with numerous episode reviews, opinion pieces, and Reddit threads titled "Do You Love or Hate Piper?," "I hate Piper Chapman," "Why Piper Chapman Is Literally the Worst," and "Orange Is

the New Black: 10 Times Piper Chapman was the Show's Biggest Villain," it was clear that Piper's de-centering failed to completely allay some of the criticism surrounding her Season One centering; her continuing role in the series was still seen by many to be problematic, no matter how much her narrative was displaced or de-centered. Thus, the pedagogical function of Piper's role as a Trojan Horse had yet to be fully overcome. Because Kohan and her team of writers had always intended to displace Piper's character, it was unclear if they had actually "learned" from the pitted criticism they received from queer and racialized communities regarding her centering. Indeed, in Season Two, Piper still made oblivious remarks, and she still benefitted for her white, upper-middle class, and hegemonically feminine identity formations, which continued to give her special treatment and access to certain privileges in prison, such her furlough approval to attend her grandmother's funeral.

Season Three and Four therefore resulted in a number of structural, narrative, and representational changes to the series: Piper's displacement was accompanied by her transformation into a full-fledged villain, with the series choosing to highlight her culpability in reproducing larger structures of power within prison (Schwan 474). A key story arc in Season Three featured Piper becoming the ringleader of an underground business selling "stinky panties to perverts" made from stolen cloth from the inmates' jobs at the prison's sweatshop. In this new storyline, which was a significant departure from Kerman's memoir, Piper's workers mostly consist of racialized and/or working-class women who make up the primary demographic of Litchfield. Piper's management style is tyrannical, and when her workers attempt to unionize in response to their poor working conditions, she ruthlessly humiliates and fires one of her employees, Flaca, to scare the other inmates into acquiescing to their current exploitive arrangement. Piper's scheming and manipulation comes to a head when she retaliates and hides

contraband in Stella's bunk after she learns that Stella has stolen money from her panty business—a move that sends Stella to Max and adds time to her sentence, only two days before her release. Piper is eventually forced to "atone" for her actions in Season Four when she is branded with a swastika by Maria Ruiz (Jessica Pimentel) and other Dominican members of "Spanish Harlem." The scene is difficult to watch, particularly as Piper cries and screams hysterically, but it is intended to be a "corrective" to Piper's fueling of racial tensions resulting from her panty business.[86] Given the character's deplorable actions over Season Three and Four, viewers may find themselves easily rooting against Piper in this scene.

Piper's displacement and vilification reflect a necessary shift in *OITNB*'s pedagogy. More specifically, the cultural contestations that occurred over her character's reception necessitated a problematization of her perspective through her transformation into a morally reprehensible character. Indeed, Piper's social differences like her race, class, and education were perhaps once laughable to the other inmates (as well as audiences), but it is clear that for queer and racialized communities, the reifying of these tropes and stereotypes was simply to teach more privileged mainstream viewers specific "lessons" about prion life, as portrayed through the lens of Kohan and her writers' room. In other words, it was not enough for the series to de-center Piper—*OITNB* needed to emphasize Piper's explicit willingness and culpability in reproducing larger structures of power precisely because the character benefitted from so much privilege to begin with. Therefore, Piper's denunciation was the only way for *OITNB* to begin overcoming its Trojan Horse structure since Kohan had always intend to displace her character from the start. The series had "killed their darling," so to speak; Piper's vilification made it

[86] Piper starts a "task force" against gang formation in Season Four to crush Ruiz's competing panty business, which was formed in response to Piper's tyrannically management style. However, the task force quickly turns into a "White Power Group," with Piper as their leader—albeit rather reluctantly. Although Piper is horrified by the situation, she goes along with the group for a time to provide herself protection from Ruiz and her group.

profoundly uncomfortable for viewers to continue identifying with her position (Schwan 474), and the move enabled the series to explore more "issues-based" and didactic pedagogical lessons regarding the prison-industrial complex in its subsequent seasons. Thus, *OITNB*'s re-framing of Piper as part of the same racist, classist, and heterosexist structures that contributed to the marginalization of queer, working-class, and racialized identities both in prison and on TV (A. Moore 170) demonstrated a key lesson that was taught to both Kohan and her writers' room, and to mainstream audiences—that Piper's role in explicating the narratives of racial, ethnic, sexual, and gendered minorities to more privileged viewers was perhaps problematic to begin with, specifically in the assumptions that were made regarding *who* or *what* gets to count as "queer" and/or marginalized content within mainstream culture.

OITNB's shift toward a more "issues-based" and didactic pedagogy was received with mixed reviews, particularly as these stories were played out via the "instrumental" narratives of the show's BIPOC characters that followed Piper's de-centering. Most notably, the death of Poussey Washington in the Season Four episode "The Animals" drew heated criticism for its parallels drawn to the Black Lives Matters movement, and to the numerous deaths of Black Americans resulting from police violence such as Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Pamela Turner, and Eric Garner, among others. In the episode, Poussey was brutally suffocated by a correctional officer's excessive use of force, and the scene included gratuitous close-ups shots of the character's final moments as she struggled to breath. Poussey's death was immediately followed by the Season Four finale "Toast Can't Never Be Bread Again" where a flashback revealed the character's incarceration to be the result of a non-violent offence: Poussey had been racially profiled for trespassing and was subsequently convicted for possession with intent to sell with less than a half an ounce marijuana. The backstory made Poussey's death all the more heart-

wrenching. While some viewers and TV critics like Emily Nussbaum praised the series for its ability to grapple with "hard-hitting" and "controversial issues" of the moment ("Empathy and *Orange Is the New Black*"), others such as Ashleigh Shackelford described Poussey's storyline as "exploitive voyeurism" and "trauma porn" for the "white gaze" ("*Orange Is the New Black*"). Although Piper's displacement and vilification created space for *OITNB* to explore more political and didactic lessons surrounding racism and social justice, it was clear in Poussey's death that the series still struggled with *how* to write its BIPOC characters; indeed, *OITNB*'s new lessons regarding racial injustice continued to center white and more privileged mainstream audiences as part of the program's pedagogy.

Tensions regarding *OITNB*'s racial explorations were fuelled further when a photo re-surfaced of the show's writers' room from 2015, which consisted of mostly white professionals (see Figure 17). The image sparked a flurry of reactions on social media, with many critics using hashtags like #HireBlackWriters and #HireBlackEditors to voice their indignation over the lack of diversity in the show's production, and specifically the absence of black voices in the writers' room (Givens, "About the Unbearable Whiteness"). For some audiences and TV critics, the photo seemed to answer earlier questions about the show's continued shortcomings regarding its racial representations, while others used the image as an opportunity to piggyback off the momentum created by the #OscarsSoWhite campaign earlier in 2015—to reflect the urgency in having black people tell their own stories, and to highlight the importance of hiring an array of talented and qualified black writers and editors in Hollywood. As April Reign (former attorney, media writer, and creator of the #OscarsSoWhite campaign) stated in response to the criticism of *OITNB*, "if you are writing for someone in whose demographic you don't fall, then I think it's imperative that you reach out to someone within that community—especially if it's a

marginalized community—and get their input, either as a cowriter, or a consultant, or even as a friend" (qtd. in Givens, "About the Unbearable Whiteness").

Because *OITNB* was already contractually obliged for a fifth, sixth, and seventh season before its Season Four debut, the series experienced a number of growing pains as it ploughed onward and attempted to adapt to viewer criticism, the shifting cultural moment, and to changes to the show's production and writers' room, which included the hiring of a new crop of "diverse"

Figure 17. *OITNB* Draws Criticism for its Mostly White Writers' Room. Source: Courtesy of Twitter.

writers. As Emily Nussbaum recounts during her visit to the Season Five set, "The new [writers'] room was more than three-quarters female, and included a gay man, and Indian-Canadian woman, an African American man, a Guatemalan woman, and an Asian-American female writer's assistant. There were no straight white men" ("Jenji Kohan's Hot Provocations"). With

its new production team, *OITNB*'s Season Five storyline traced the three-day prison riot that was sparked by Poussey's death, and Taystee was tasked once again to take center stage as she led a team of BIPOC inmates to negotiate for improvements to the prison and to seek justice for Poussey.[87] Taystee's storyline and her participation in the riot continued as a central story arc throughout the remaining seasons, with Brian Chamberlayne, a former lawyer who previously worked on appeals for inmates, being asked to join the series as a writer-producer to help flesh out the series' representations of social injustice in Season Six and Seven. Most notably, Chamberlayne was asked to write the Season Six finale "Be Free," where viewers witnessed Piper's early release from prison (see Figure 18) play out alongside several devastating developments for Tystee and Blanca (Laura Gómez)—the former being wrongfully convicted for the murder of antagonistic guard Desmond "Desi" Piscatella (Brad William Henke) (see Figure 19), and the latter being sent to an U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility.[88] The penultimate episode was built around a key conversation between Taystee and Piper from the episode "Well This Took a Dark Turn," where Taystee "schools" Piper about her privilege shortly before Taystee's trial and subsequent conviction. In this scene, an exasperated Piper can't seem grasp why she is continues to be the target of the other inmates' aggression, despite her keeping a low profile since the end of her panty regime in Season Three and Four. As Piper exclaims, "What is it about me that makes people want to fuck with me?" While her remark is mostly intended to be rhetorical, Taystee proceeds to give Piper a very didactic

[87] Although Taystee had previously acted as a secretary to Litchfield's "nice-guy" warden, Joe Caputo (Nick Sandow), the "fun-loving" and "quirky" character became radicalized following Poussey's death, particularly after Caputo's sympathy falls with the inadequately trained guard who killed her friend.
[88] *OITNB*'s staff visited an ICE detention facility with the advocacy group Freedom for Immigrants as part of their research for this storyline.

Figure 18. Piper Struggles to Adjust to Prison Life: Season Seven, Episode Four "How to Do Life." Source: Courtesy of Netflix.

Figure 19. Taystee is Wrongfully Convicted of Murder: Season Six, Episode Thirteen "Be Free." Source: Courtesy of Netflix.

explanation. As she states rather bluntly,

> It's 'cause what they see when they look at you. They don't see you. They see the shit they never had. Money, education, opportunity. That's why they never gonna stop fuckin' with you, because of what you represent. But at least that's only in here. People out there been fuckin' with me my entire fucking life. They see dangerous, poor, ghetto black girl that should be locked up in here forever. So, like, if you want to trade places, I'm game.

Here, at the end of Season Six, Piper *finally* learns about her position of privilege, its enduring effects, and how it impacts her relationship to others both in- and outside of prison. As Chamberlayne explained in his reflections on Piper's storyline, the writers wanted to "make sure that we were doing justice to [Piper's] time in prison and showing exactly what she learned and how she's grown—that she's not the same person that walked in those prison doors" (qtd. in Strause, "'OITNB'"). Although Piper's learning in this scene draws parallels to Allie's own trajectory in *Her Story*, Taystee continues to play an instrumental role in teaching Piper (and mainstream audiences) about this lesson. Thus, *OITNB*'s shift toward a more "issues-based" and didactic pedagogy may reflect an overcoming of the show's earlier Trojan Horse structure, but this new pedagogical approach is one that still centers white and more privileged viewers as part of the program's new lessons.

Following Piper's conversation with Taystee and her early release from prison, the character ends the series by becoming a didactic tool for exploring the structural and systemic barriers facing inmates during their rehabilitation. For example, in the first episode of Season Seven "Beginning of the End," Piper returns as the non-diegetic voiceover narrator to highlight her struggle to adjust to "normal" life. Most notably, the episode uses several flashbacks that

feature the "old Piper" (i.e., pre-Litchfield) intercut with shots of the "new Piper" (i.e., post-Litchfield). In one flashback, we see the "old Piper" make a thinly veiled racist comment to her friend Polly about how she does not want to eat at the restaurant "Thunder Thais" because it "looks sketch," with Piper exclaiming that she does not want to "put crap into my body." The scene immediately cuts back to the present-day timeline with the "new Piper" working at "Thunder Thais"—the sequence of shots implying that the restaurant was one of the few employment opportunities Piper could secure as a convicted criminal. As the episode continues, viewers see Piper struggle to get back on her feet, despite the privileges afforded to her as a white, educated, upper-middle class woman: she is unable to work the more lucrative dinner shift at "Thunder Thais" because of her 11:00 PM curfew, and although she was offered a position at a better restaurant, she was forced to turn down the job because the establishment served alcohol, which would violate her parole. By the end of the episode, Piper is clearly frustrated by the limitations placed on her as a former convict, and in one particular scene, she exclaims (rather didactically) to her parole officer, "I didn't realize that early release meant I was responsible for all of my monitoring and testing fees. It makes it really hard for people to get back on their feet." Here, Piper's learning serves to nuance the show's exploration of the prison-industrial complex as both discriminatory and racist. Indeed, if Piper is facing certain challenges to adjust to life after prison, the "lesson" that is implied by her storyline at the end of *OITNB* is that other inmates who come for marginalized communities most surely will too.

Although *OITNB* was initially celebrated for its ground-breaking depictions of marginalized women in prison, it is not without irony that the show found itself at the center of heated debates regarding racial representation both in front of and behind the camera in its later seasons. Kohan may have assumed that mainstream audiences were not ready for stories led by

queer, working-class and/or racialized women when the show first premiered in 2013, but a lot has changed culturally over the course of the show's seven-season run, which ended in 2019. Taylor Schilling, the actress who plays Piper, addressed this palpable shift in audiences' collective learning, which she describes as a growing sense of animosity toward her character. As Schilling recounts in an interview, "Piper held the projection of a lot of white privilege for the collective that was invested in the show… I observed that feeling of celebration shifting into resentment of Piper. I started to feel like my job in that show was just as a space-holder, to provide a steady middle so that other people could really shine" (qtd. in Harrison, "Taylor Schilling").

Kohan has also resisted the need to "cheerlead for numerical diversity" on TV (qtd. in Nussbaum, "Jenji Kohan's Hot Provocations"). For example, when asked about *OITNB*'s structural changes and evolving narratives over the years, particularly in the show's re-centring of BIPOC women in later seasons, the showrunner explained these shifts to be simply the result of following the story. As Kohan stated in an interview, "We don't go in saying, 'How are we going to deal with black characters?' We say, 'What are we going to do with Taystee or Janae?'" (qtd. in Nussbaum, "Jenji Kohan's Hot Provocations"). Kohan's position is perhaps unsurprising given her approach to TV writing in general. As she has noted on multiple occasions, she views writing as a skill that can be "nurtured but not taught" (qtd. in Nussbaum, "Jenji Kohan's Hot Provocations")—she even clashed with Soloway during the 2014 New Yorker Festival "LGBTQ TV" panel over the showrunner's decision to hire a transwoman writer for Season Two, with Kohan facetiously protesting, "I would just never want to be told I can never write male characters" (qtd. in Kaydo, "'Transparent' and 'OITNB'").

Kohan's comments resist explicitly naming *OITNB* as pedagogical—indeed, it would appear that one of the showrunner's many concerns is that the inclusion of politics may affect the show's "impartiality," or that the need to represent "all sides" would not lead to an entertaining TV experience for viewers (Klein, "Entertainment-Education" 52). At the same time, Kohan remains aware of the lack of diverse representation of queer, working-class, and racialized women on TV. She has indicated her fascination with "people interacting with the Other—forced to interact with people they'd never have to deal with in their day-to-day life," and her Trojan Horse, Piper, enabled her to do just that with *OITNB* (Nussbaum, "Jenji Kohan's Hot Provocations"). Kohan's perspective most aptly reflects the inherent tension in the double practice of representation, as discussed earlier by Spivak—that is, the complicity between "speaking for" and "portraying" (Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* 108). *OITNB*'s trajectory underscores the difficulty for those who are in positions of power to *speak for* and *re-present* the needs, desires, and interests of those who occupy positions of disempowerment; put simply, individuals who have access to channels of visibility and representation (i.e., Kohan) are typically those who benefit from the most privilege—thus, their ability to "speak for" and "re-present" others is subsequently filtered through the lens of their own privileged identity formations. Accordingly, Kohan's comments also acknowledge how it is not enough to have marginalized communities tell their own stories either, as simply being a member of a disempowered group does not necessarily make one a good storyteller. But TV and learning are anything but static phenomena, as reflected through the cultural contestations that occurred *within* and *through OITNB*'s reception and circulation. Indeed, TV can transform under the pressure of marginalized communities who are critically aware of and refuse to be taught by the intended lessons of the Trojan Horse structure, and this feedback can therefore serve to mentor

content creators, writers, actors, and mainstream viewers to do better in their teaching and/or learning.

Although *OITNB* overcame its Trojan Horse structure to shift its pedagogical approach, the effect of these political changes to the show's production are perhaps less successful than *Transparent*. While *Transparent* used Maura's displacement and transformation into a rather ambivalent character to engage in different types of storytelling (i.e., re-writing flashbacks) and aesthetic strategies (i.e., having multiple "versions" of younger Maura) as a "corrective" to address its earlier misstep in casting Tabor, *OITNB* became largely didactic in its "issues-based" approach to pedagogy. This new method of teaching enabled the series to portray "new" lessons about social injustice and the prison-industrial complex; however, unlike *Her Story* (which centered a trans* perspective in its didactic approach), *OITNB* continued to center white and more privileged mainstream viewers as part of the program's shifting pedagogy. Thus, the demand to render the casting and production crews of both *Transparent* and *OITNB* more inclusive ultimately led to very different pedagogical aims for each series as they responded to the pitted criticism from queer and trans* communities.

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OITNB's and *Transparent*'s evolving pedagogy exemplifies how producers and writers must grapple with the social dimensions of their series, in addition to the shifts in power that take place as TV lives and circulates in culture, more broadly. The demand for queer crossovers to diversify their content choices and material conditions of production is therefore an attempt to challenge the current representational structures that render marginalized communities unable to speak in the first place (Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* 63); it is a call on behalf of active viewing communities to have these program create the enabling conditions through which the

disenfranchised and marginalized can be empowered to speak—to "teach back" and "school" producers, writers, and showrunners how best to "learn to learn" from the communities they seek to represent. Thus, the most significant contribution I see for queer crossovers is their ability to learn *within* and *through* a series as these programs begin to problematize and overcome their reliance on the Trojan Horse structure over time. This shift in pedagogy can therefore enable series to explore different kinds of storytelling and aesthetic strategies for Queer TV, and it demonstrates how the political effects that can result from changes to TV production and representation can extend beyond simply increasing the diversity of a program's cast and crew members.

Conclusion

Although the Trojan Horse structure of queer crossovers presents a particular kind of pedagogy for mainstream audiences, it is ultimately a device that needs to be displaced and de-centered. Without Piper's and Maura's transformations into slightly villainous and/or ambivalent characters, the cost of centering white and more privileged viewers in these programs becomes too great, particularly for queer, racialized, and/or trans* communities. Thus, in order to better support marginalized viewers, queer crossovers like *OITNB* and *Transparent* must shift in their pedagogical approach (i.e., *who* is being taught *what* and *when*). This shift in pedagogy is essential to the representational value of these programs: by learning how to "let go" of the Trojan Horse device, producers, writers, and viewers can engage with queer and trans* lives in ways that do not necessarily center white and more privileged mainstream viewers to being with.

The dismantling of the Trojan Horse structure over time therefore demonstrates how the mainstreaming of LGBTQ+ identities can better support self-representation practices for these communities, in addition to storytelling and aesthetic strategies that can "intervene and *trans* our ways of looking at the world" (Koch-Rein et al. 7). Indeed, there are other ways of teaching viewers about queer and trans* people that do not require an initial normative address to mainstream audiences, with *Her Story* serving as an exemplarily model for mainstream Queer TV. Thus, by tracing these shifts in character representations and storyline developments across multiple seasons, we can see how queer crossovers can adapt to cultural contestations as these programs circulate, particularly in their normative / non-normative modes of address. Accordingly, the "war" that is won by the Trojan Horse structure is to access a space for queer and trans* representation between "contestatory" and purely "mainstreamed." TV's industrial practices and commercial interests may influence the representations in these programs, but so do community interests and audience reception practices.

As the TV industry and entertainment professionals "learn to learn" from LGBTQ+ communities, the shifting nature of the Trojan Horse device not only implies a dynamic relationship between TV, audiences, and pedagogy, but also demonstrates how the mainstreaming of queer and trans* content is always tied to industry pressures and to processes of commodification. Although queer crossovers must make assumptions about who is watching—that is to say, who is the imagined, intended audience—the critical reception of these series indicates other ways of reading these programs beyond their intended "teachable moments" and normative modes of address. In other words, it is possible for viewers to take up these programs in ways that are unanticipated by the norms of TV's economic and industrial practices, which are said to be supported by the accessing of user-generated data and audiences'

viewing preferences with internet-distributed television. Accordingly, queer crossovers demonstrate how viewing can be a transformative subjective experience; because watching these programs not only shapes how audiences make sense of themselves, but also influences how viewers interact with their social and material world, these programs cannot but have a transformative effect on cultural norms. Thus, as queer crossovers circulate, the discursive context of these programs expands and multiples, and this shifting context therefore becomes part of how we learn to read and engage with these programs and their representational politics as TV lives in culture.

Conclusion

Toward a Contestatory Politics of Representation for Queer TV

The "Golden Age" of Queer TV discourse assumes a queer and trans* politics of representation to be tied exclusively to visibility, wherein visibility refers to the presence and/or absence of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines on screen. Although the nonlinear affordances of internet protocol have transformed TV's industrial practices and economic structures, these changes have been said to give certain "freedoms" to viewer and content autonomy, particularly in terms of increasing diverse queer and trans* representation. This dissertation has challenged this assumption that internet-distributed television is as disruptive or as transformational a force in the industry for Queer TV as it has been heralded to be. More specifically, I have demonstrated how the Trojan Horse structure of queer crossovers is constituted by a specific of economic and cultural imperatives that are not dissimilar to legacy TV. Indeed, many of these programs continue center mainstream audiences as a site of education, viewership, and pleasure. Thus, the "freedom" that is lauded by internet-distributed television ultimately constrains our understanding of gender and sexual freedom to LGBTQ+ visibility celebrations that consider representational diversity as a necessary "rights-granting" mechanism that leads to social and political change—that it is simply preferable to have more queer and trans* people on TV than fewer (Villarejo, "Materiality, Pedagogy" 390).

This project has therefore argued for the development of a contestatory politics of representation for queer crossovers. Although queer crossovers use a Trojan Horse structure to draw specific mainstream audiences into their series, and to teach these viewers "intended lessons" about queer and trans* identities that are ultimately filtered through the privileged lens

of their producers and writers, I have demonstrated how these programs must respond to critiques and cultural contestations over their use of this device. This "feedback" becomes incorporated into the production and development of each series over time as the shows themselves (i.e., producers, writers, etc.) "learn to learn" from active viewing communities who have different stakes in queer and trans* politics and social justice. These active politics of reception and production therefore intersect with the technological and commercial affordances of internet-distributed television as these programs become sites of negotiation, contestation, community-building, and critique. Accordingly, the Trojan Horse structure is optimally supplanted by another pedagogical strategy that learns both *within* and *through* a series as it evolves over time. This act of "teaching back"—that is, the ways in which each show's learning ideally becomes part of its own "scaffolding" process for audiences—results in a number of changes to queer crossovers in terms of their material conditions of production, their content choices, and their storytelling and aesthetic strategies. In the case of *Transparent*, the effects of the political changes made to its production resulted in several critical departures for the series: Maura's de-centring and transformation into an ambivalent character; the exploration of the lived experiences of the show's trans* characters through an intersectional lens; the re-writing of Maura's past through different storytelling and aesthetic strategies, which were intended to be a "corrective" to the show's earlier misstep in casting Tambor; and the mentoring of trans* talent in the industry like Our Lady J, who went on to work for the FX series *Pose*. For *OITNB*, the show's displacement and vilification of Piper Chapman enabled the series to become more didactic and "issues-based" in its exploration of social injustice and the prison-industrial complex. More specifically, as Piper finally learns about her own position of privilege and how it impacts those around her (in a similar way Allie does in *Her Story*), she is able to teach "new"

lessons to mainstream viewers about the structural and systemic barriers facing inmates during their rehabilitation through a more didactic approach. Collectively, these critical departures for *Transparent* and *OITNB* demonstrate how the political effects of these series are about more than "positive" (self-)representation; they not only reflect a shift in *who* is being taught *what* and *when*, but also imply a dynamic relationship between TV, audiences, and pedagogy.

As a cultural genre, queer crossovers play a vital role for this kind of pedagogical work. TV specifically is a privileged site for critique and re-adaptation that can occur both *within* and *through* a series: the medium's episodic and serial format allows producers and writers to explore identities, relationships, and social issues in-depth through complex story arcs and narratives that can span across multiple seasons and/or years of programming (Vorderer et al. 397). This evolution that can take place for a series and its characters over hours of programming is still something relatively new for Queer TV. Accordingly, queer crossovers are a space wherein the intersections between the industrial, the political, the commercial, and the creative are constantly being renegotiated and reconfigured as these programs move through different sets of social spheres that are sites of contestation. Thus, queer crossovers offer new modes for thinking through the ways in which queerness can "crossover" into mainstream culture, particularly as TV can transform under the pressure of marginalized communities who are critically aware of and refuse to be taught by the intended lessons of the Trojan Horse structure.

This notion of a "crossover" program continues to organize queer and trans* content today, albeit under slightly different terms. More recent programs like *Pose* and *Euphoria* have done away with the Trojan Horse device entirely in introducing its queer and trans* characters to mainstream audiences. For example, *Pose*'s secondary storyline featuring Evan Peter's as Stan Bowes—a white, cisgender, and nominally heterosexual "family man" who starts working for

Donald Trump and begins a relationship with Angel Evangelista (Indya Moore)—was written out of the series entirely following its Season One debut.[89] The series also included the largest cast of BIPOC transgender actors in TV history, with MJ Rodrigues, Indya Moore, Dominique Jackson, Halile Sahar, and Angelica Ross cast in lead roles after a six-month nationwide search, which was led by casting director Alexa Fogel (Andreeva, "FX's 'Pose'"). Janet Mock and Our Lady J were also hired to work behind the scenes as writer-producers. Collectively, the series served as a "corrective" to Jennie Livingston's 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning*, which chronicled the drag ball culture in New York city during the mid-to-late 1980s, and particularly the African American and Latino gay and transgender individuals who participated in this community. Additionally, *Euphoria* introduced its trans* character Jules Vaughn (Hunter Schafer) without any mention of her being trans*. Rather, Jules' identity was coded into the series through her experience of *living* trans*, beyond the usual coming out and/or transitioning narratives—as for example when the character receives an estrogen shot without any explanation to the audience of what it is or why she is doing it.

LGBTQ+ consultant roles for TV are also on the rise. For example, HBO hired Scott Turner Schofield—an actor, producer, and transgender activist—to consult for *Euphoria*. In his role, Schofield completed "sensitivity reads" on scripts, he trained the production team on how to support and be respectful of LGBTQ+ actors on set, and he acted as a resource to director Sam Levinson and Schafer during shooting (Moss, "Meet the LGBTQ+ Consultants"). Schofield's position requires a very different skill set than those of a trans* actor, writer, or director. With over two decades of experience as an artist and activists, Schofield offers production teams "a

[89] At the time, Evan Peters was a well-known actor for his portrayal of Quicksliver in the *X-Men: Days of Future Past* and *X-Men: Apocalypse*. Stan's wife was also played by Kate Mara, whose previously roles included longstanding TV franchises like *American Horror Story* and *House of Cards*.

more nuanced understanding of how things might land in the [transgender] community" (Schofield qtd. in Moss, "Meet the LGBTQ+ Consultants").

While new series like *Pose* and *Euphoria* appear to account for some of the shortcomings of *OITNB* and *Transparent* as an earlier generation of series that coincided with the rise of internet-distributed television, it is important to be mindful of the visibility "trap" (i.e., the idea that increased visibility necessarily leads to social and political change) as the "Golden Age" of Queer TV discourse reconstitutes itself in the contemporary moment. As Keegan reminds us, the exemplary queer and trans* media of the "current moment" may reflect "new restrictions" on the queer and transgender imaginary in ways that have yet to be fully comprehended (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 29). In the case of *Pose* specifically, the series has been celebrated for its "good" trans* media representations; however, these images, which have been largely created for mainstream cisgender audiences, tend encourage gendered standards of beauty and comportment for transgender people. In other words, because *Pose*'s representations of transgender characters continue to be "thin, able-bodied, conventionally attractive, and gender normative," these "good" trans* media representations "do not problematize the standards for becoming recognizable as a gendered subject" (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 28). *Euphoria*'s Jules appears to fall in this same visibility "trap" in Season One, but the show was able to nuance the character's experience of being and living trans* in later episodes because the showrunners did not need to overcome a Trojan Horse structure to begin with. For example, Jules' standalone episode "F**k Anyone Who's Not A Sea Blob,"[90] which aired in between Season One and Two, offers a complex exploration of the character's relationship to her gender and how it intersects with her past trauma and co-dependence. In the episode, Jules talks to her therapist about her problematic

[90] The episode was co-written by Schafer and Levison and overseen by Schofield.

relationship to men and how it has been an expression of her desire to "conquer" and "obliterate" femininity. However, as Jules begins to shift her relationship toward femininity and being trans* as something that is "deeply spiritual," she no longer feels that it is necessary for her to take hormones. As she explains, "I think I've framed my entire womanhood around men, when in reality I'm no longer interested in men." The scene is quite powerful in its re-imagining of "the purportedly closed system of sexual difference," and it gestures towards "the existence of possibilities beyond determinist, binary categorizations" (Keegan, "On the Necessity" 29), particularly as Jules experiences being and living trans* as something that cannot be defined solely by an intelligible identity.

These two examples demonstrate how Queer TV remains a staging ground for (re-)negotiating the ways in which queer and trans* lives are "mainstreamed," even as television itself continues to evolve. TV's industrial practices and commercial interests may continue to shape the representations and content choices in these programs, but so do community interests and audience reception practices. Therefore, *Pose* and *Euphoria* illustrate the importance of a queer "crossover" politics of representation to consider how programs can better support the self-representation of marginalized communities, in addition to exploring different kinds of storytelling and aesthetic strategies that can transform TV genres and conventions. These "lessons" are ones that will likely continue to be "taught back" to producers and writers by queer and trans* communities as TV lives and circulates in culture, more broadly speaking.

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