Extended “Visiting Hours”: Deconstructing Identity in Netflix’s Promotional Campaigns for Orange Is the New Black

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Abstract
This article interrogates Netflix’s use of unconventional marketing strategies for season 2 of Orange Is the New Black (OITNB), and argues that the company takes a mixed approach to cast a wider net for potential subscribers. One campaign emphasizes stereotypes that the program itself problematizes, and another humanizes the images of real-life incarcerated women. Using feminist textual analysis, we explore these campaigns in relation to intersectionality and analyze the construction of intersectional identities within Netflix’s two promotional campaigns: The New York Times’ paid promotional content “Women Inmates: Why the Male Model Doesn’t Work” and the “Crazy Pyes” food truck campaign. Applying theoretical work from scholars such as Lotz and Gray, we discuss the ideological messaging of the campaigns, and examine how Netflix commodifies images of OITNB’s incarcerated, female characters, and also images of actual incarcerated women—and how these images function in exchange for viewership for Netflix and OITNB.

Keywords
feminist media studies, Orange Is the New Black, Netflix, marketing, intersectionality, identity

Introduction
On June 12, 2014, New Yorkers stood in line for free dessert in the SoHo area of Lower Manhattan. A food truck labeled “Crazy Pyes” spent the next three days making

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stops around New York City to celebrate the season 2 premiere of *Orange Is the New Black* (*OITNB*) (Kohan 2013–Present). In addition to free food, attendees received posters and the chance to pose with cardboard cutouts of the series’ most prominent characters. By and large, the *OITNB* food truck yielded mixed reviews. Some, such as SheWired’s Rebekah Allen (2014, par. 1), thought highly of the event and its capacity to “spread *OITNB* joy wherever it goes!” Salon’s Daniel D’Addario (2014, par. 2), however, argued that “the marketing phenomenon takes prison as a big joke.” “Crazy Pyes” was one of several marketing ploys—and one of two that will be analyzed in this article—commissioned by Netflix to entice viewers to watch the second season.

This article interrogates Netflix’s use of unconventional marketing strategies for *OITNB* and argues that the company deploys a variety of strategies and techniques to cast a wider net for potential subscribers. One campaign that will be covered here emphasizes racist ideology and stereotypes that the program itself problematizes, and another uses native advertising—that is, advertising that subtly blends into its delivery medium—in the guise of humanized images of real-life incarcerated women. Specifically, we analyze the construction of identities within Netflix’s “Crazy Pyes” food truck campaign and *The New York Times*’ interactive article, “Women Inmates: Why the Male Model Doesn’t Work.” We examine how these events constructed the identities of incarcerated women and ask, how is power being represented in these constructions? Who is being represented and by whom? What is at stake by these representations? Critical conversations regarding *OITNB* are proliferating in the popular press and the academic realm (see Enck and Morrissey 2015; McHugh 2015; Pramaggiore 2015). However, little has been written concerning Netflix’s marketing tactics for its most popular original series (Gelt 2013).

To fill this void, we examine how Netflix conceptualized notions of identity in the aforementioned campaigns for season 2 of *OITNB*. Using feminist textual analysis, we explore these campaigns in relation to “intersectionality.” In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined this term, arguing that various factors such as age, gender, race, and sexual orientation simultaneously affect one’s perspective and identity. In recent years, Jennifer C. Nash (2015) has coined the term “intersectional originalism” as a way to examine scholars’ preoccupation with Crenshaw’s work—specifically, how power struggles within women’s studies are at work in writings about intersectionality. Kathy Davis (2008, 79) highlights that intersectionality reflects “an instance of good feminist theory,” as it encourages feminist scholars to practice self-reflexivity and critical engagement for the sake of accountability. We take these arguments into consideration throughout our analysis.

Furthermore, applying the theoretical work of Amanda D. Lotz and Jonathan Gray, we discuss how television networks have traditionally promoted their new programs and why, in the digital era, the same models do not apply to online streaming services like Netflix. We also examine the ideological messaging of the campaigns and how Netflix commodifies images of *OITNB*’s incarcerated, female characters but also images of actual incarcerated women. These images of incarcerated women, both fictional and real, draw in viewership for Netflix and *OITNB*. Given this, we explore *OITNB* to understand how identity is constructed through unconventional marketing.
In the next section, existing scholarship on how television networks have traditionally engaged in program promotion will be discussed.

**Television Promotion: Then and Now**

Traditionally, television networks have used several approaches for self-promotion, such as on-air promotion. As Lotz (2007, 108) states, “Networks commonly included clips from upcoming programs within their commercial blocks and, for the most part, limited their promotional activities using network airtime.” There were occasional cases where networks took out-of-the-home approaches, such as billboards, but these were limited in scope. Considering this, “the few viewing options of the network era made on-network promotion particularly efficient” (Lotz 2007, 108).

With the increase in channels came competition and the need to increase on-network promotions. Although broadcast networks traditionally depended on themselves for the bulk of their promotion, this changed with the emergence of cable. As viewers turned away from broadcast, networks needed other avenues for promotion. This included synergistic tactics, alongside traditional strategies such as critics’ reviews and press tour events (Lotz 2007). In addition, cable networks turned to off-channel promotional efforts to keep a competitive advantage over broadcast networks.

**Divergence: Promotion in the Digital Era**

Marketing for over-the-top (OTT) services, such as Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu, diverges from on-air promotion and other approaches taken by both broadcast and cable television. Reliance on algorithms and data mining has enabled OTT digital platforms to keep promotional costs down (Carr 2013), as viewers tune into programming thanks to user interface recommendations (Schwerdtfeger 2015). Some OTT services rely on online advertising (such as Amazon’s banner ads) or on the word of mouth from other subscribers (Schwerdtfeger 2015). Many concentrate on using social media, such as releasing viral promos or having Twitter campaigns, as inexpensive means of promotion (Carr 2013). In addition, native advertising is being used more often by OTT services. Netflix, in particular, has continually increased its clever uses of native advertising, escalating from Wired magazine, The Atlantic, and now to the Times (Miles 2015), as will be discussed later in this article.

**Media Promotion as Paratextuality**

Discussing promotional material for television programs, Gray (2010, 3) states that “hype, synergy, promos, narrative extensions, and various forms of textuality position, define, and create meaning for film and television.” He argues for the study of these forms of textuality, especially in regard to their promotion of the initial text. However, as each of these terms (e.g., hype, synergy, promos) has “inherent problems” (p. 5), Gray uses “paratexts” and “paratextuality” as more appropriate terms for taking a critical view of these too often neglected aspects of “off-screen studies” (p. 6). Gray
extends Gerard Genette’s work on paratexts to film and television, and offers his own categories to describe what he finds in film and television research: entryway paratexts and in medias res paratexts. The former alludes to paratexts that “control and determine our entrance to a text” and the latter references paratexts that “inflect or redirect the text following initial interaction” (Gray 2010, 35). Such texts reflect ideological views, and may influence some viewers’ interpretations of the programs. For this article, the food truck event and the Times’ interactive piece will be examined, as they both serve as “entryway” and “in media res” paratexts.

Social Media, Live Events, and Interactive Storytelling

It is important to speak briefly about the shift in strategic advertising from OITNB’s first to second season. As Rolling Stone’s Scott Neumyer (2013, par. 4) asserts, Netflix rolled out four new original series in 2013, although “Black arrived with the least promotion, buzz and fanfare.” Michael Liedtke (2013), from the Associated Press, attributed this lack of pre-release promotion to Netflix’s confidence in the series’ creator, Jenji Kohan, and her success with Showtime’s Weeds (2005–2012). As both Weeds and OITNB were produced by Lionsgate, it was Kohan’s previous success—and her pre-existing relationship with Lionsgate—that paved the way for OITNB, with very little marketing on Netflix’s part. These characteristics worked in tandem with Netflix’s streaming model, which influenced the series’ content. As Mashable’s Nora Grenfell (2013, par. 7) writes, Netflix’s online streaming platform was ideal for the series’ treatment of issues regarding race, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, and mental health, as, “[it] does not treat these complicated problems as arcs that can be introduced and solved in a 50-minute episode.” These factors, in addition to the success of Piper Kerman’s memoir, helped elevate season 1 without much promotion. More so, OITNB’s second season was renewed before its first season even aired (Stelter 2013).

However, OITNB faced the challenge of sustaining its audience after viewers binge watched the entire first season, but had to wait a full year until the next season. Traditional network television uses branded promotional spots and on-air promotion to keep viewers interested both between seasons and episodes. As James R. Walker and Susan Tyler Eastman (2003, 618) discuss, “on-air promotion’s function has become more important in generating program sampling, maintaining audience size, and branding program services.” However, these promotional spots are unavailable for online streaming series. The runaway success of the first season therefore prompted Netflix to take a cross-media marketing strategy for its second season, and this is where Netflix’s Twitter campaign, “Visiting Hours,” came into play.

Eight days after the premiere, Netflix launched the first of a series of Twitter question-and-answer segments with cast members. During the Q&A on July 19, eleven of the cast members participated. The series has continued to do multiple Q&A sessions per year to sustain fans’ attention between seasons. Amy Zimmerman (2013, par. 3) from the Daily Beast writes, “The questions, posted with the hashtag #AskOrange, were both personal and plot-related, and ranged from serious to funny to super
flirtatious.” The “Visiting Hours” social media campaign maintained buzz for *OITNB* and provided fans with the means to participate in the active construction and (re)affirmation of the characters and their intersectional identities—that is, fans asked their questions as a way to further develop the various characters. While the use of Twitter and other social media has been successful for Netflix, it has also branched out to use live events and interactive storytelling, as discussed next.

“*Crazy Pyes*” Food Truck

In recent years, there has been a transition in the nature of food trucks: moving from a feature of construction sites and other blue-collar work spaces to urban prominence and to captivating the attention of hipsters and chic consumers. Historically, food trucks have shifted in their functionalism; initially known as “chuck wagons” in the 1860s and “roach coaches” in the post–World War II era, today they more typically operate as “gourmet” or “high-end” food purveyors (Weber 2012, 2–4). Although “roach coaches” declined in popularity as they became synonymous with “immigrant culture and unfamiliar ethnic food” (Weber 2012, 3), the re-emergence of the food truck is often credited to Los Angeles’ Kogi BBQ food truck in 2008. In addition, it is no coincidence that the modern food truck arose during the recession. As times were tough for many consumers, it was more affordable to eat gourmet food from a food truck than dine at a restaurant. As a result, “the number of trucks roughly doubled between 2007 and 2012 and annual revenue soared to $716.2 million from $339.7 million during that period” (McMillan 2014, par. 7). With the increase in popularity came higher prices for the food being sold, which explains the change in customer base from blue-collar workers to hipsters and urban professionals.

The “*Crazy Pyes*” food truck was parked in the SoHo neighborhood of Lower Manhattan. This particular neighborhood is considered one of the city’s most trendy and expensive areas. Similarly, other city stops (Los Angeles, Guadalajara, and Mexico City) targeted a more affluent demographic. With the history of food trucks and their current demographic focus, it is interesting to consider class dynamics and power struggles at work within the food truck event. The “*Crazy Pyes*” truck disseminated free dessert to urban professionals by women dressed in white chef jackets or orange or tan jumpsuits (similar to Litchfield prison garb). Both displayed the Netflix logo in place of nametags. For this campaign, Netflix positioned itself over the identity of those carrying out the labor (serving food, in this case). Furthermore, in this depiction of prison life, Netflix invited passersby to participate in the silliness of the food truck event. Not only were the desserts served at no cost in an affluent area, but there was also an added layer of privilege and class in that the servers were mostly women of color and dressed as “incarcerated women.” The commodification of incarcerated women here is constructed by Netflix to entice and recruit viewers to tune into the latest season of *OITNB*. The “viewers” in particular here are affluent, urban professionals already accustomed to the gourmet food typically offered by the modern food truck trend. Netflix affords potential viewers an opportunity to participate in prison culture without serving any time—and sets itself apart from other media marketing campaigns in that it fetishizes
poverty. Similar to the fake slum that was created for privileged tourists in Bloemfontein, South Africa, and made international news in 2013 (Cha 2013), Netflix’s take on prison culture is akin to removing the politics of “slum tourism.” The horrors and inequities of prison culture are removed and replaced with free dessert.

In addition to its fetishization of poverty, Netflix dubbed its food truck campaign after the nickname of an OITNB character with an undisclosed mental illness. Televisual depictions of mental illness have historically been both problematic and scarce (Franzese and Price 2014, 868). Within the last decade, the numbers of characters with mental illnesses have increased, but the portrayals remain problematic. Characters with mental illness “look different from others” and are “portrayed as unlike most real people (or even other people in the television world) who have family and jobs that establish their identities as participating members of society” (Wahl 1997, 42). The most common representation of TV characters with mental illness depicts the individuals as “violent and criminal” (Wahl 1997, 56). Two examples include Dexter Morgan from Dexter (2006–2013) and Andre Lyon from Empire (2015–Present). Otto Wahl (1997, 36) argues that the Othering of those with mental illnesses often translates into these characters being the source of “disrespectful humor.” Representations within popular media, however, are slowly shifting toward more humanizing, dynamic roles (see Acierno 2013; Gleason 2015; Hopgood 2014; Rubin 2012). For instance, Fincina Hopgood (2014) points to Homeland and United States of Tara as recent examples that explore mental illness with more sensitivity and complexity. This negotiation of mental illness onscreen became part and parcel for Netflix’s “Crazy Pyes” campaign, which highlighted a character with differences, for the purpose of enticing a privileged cohort of viewers.

OITNB’s Suzanne is a black lesbian who has a mental illness and an unhealthy obsession with Piper Chapman. Although in some instances OITNB showcases Suzanne’s character in a progressive light, far too often she is Othered based on her illness. Throughout season 1, Suzanne’s unpredictability causes anxiety for Piper and audience members. In season 1 episode 11, however, viewers start to feel sympathetic toward Suzanne as they realize her pain in being called “Crazy Eyes,” and being mocked in Larry’s NPR interview. In the latter, Larry refers to Suzanne as “insane” and makes fun of her obsession with Piper, while also painting her as potentially dangerous.

During season 2, Suzanne’s unpredictability shifts and serves as comedy, which is paralleled by Piper getting to know her better. But viewers’ sympathy toward Suzanne is reinstated when they realize she is terrified of being transferred to a maximum security prison for a crime she did not commit. We are encouraged to feel pity for her in numerous episodes (e.g., in season 1 episode 11, season 1 episode 13, season 2 episode 6) and especially in season 2 episode 3, when viewers learn Suzanne’s backstory as a struggling, adopted child of a white couple. While growing up, Suzanne wrestled with feeling Othered—especially compared with her sibling who was a biological child of her adoptive parents. In another example from the same episode, a flashback shows Suzanne’s mother dropping both Suzanne and her sister Grace off at a sleepover. Although an invitation was only extended to Grace, Suzanne’s mother fights to ensure that Suzanne has the same opportunities; nevertheless, Suzanne experiences exclusion from the wider
What is telling is that Suzanne’s character, overall, is defined by her mental illness and racial difference. If these elements were removed, her narrative would be drastically different—all of her storylines are tied up with her differences in identity.

It is precisely those differences in identity that Netflix plays up in its food truck event. For instance, audiences’ reception of Suzanne, and her tendency to throw pies and sing about her relationship with Piper as “chocolate-and-vanilla swirl,” is invoked for comedic effect. The food truck sports a picture of Suzanne with pie filling daubed like tribal war paint on her face (see Figure 1). Sucking pie off her thumb, one could deduce how she received her nickname as she stares at event attendees. Suzanne’s appearance comes across as sporting a “Game On” intimidation face not unlike the use of eye paint by athletes for reducing sun glare and intimidating rival players. Suzanne’s hair is parted into Bantu knots, which date back a thousand years and are heavily associated with the South African Zulu people (Christie 2015).

The “joke” for the public is that the truck is poking fun at what Others Suzanne: her instability, her race, and her obsession with Piper. Part of the allure of Suzanne’s photo here is that it evokes a sense of “craziness” as the subject being shown is not abiding by “civilized” norms. Netflix could have easily shown Suzanne eating with silverware and without pie on her face but instead resorts to using racist ideology in its marketing, that which—thanks to the lingering impact of colonialism—positions black individuals as uncivilized and primitive (see Auerbach 2002). The image reflects that of the racist “Pickaninny” stereotype; as Joanna L. Jenkins (2014, 208) discusses, “Pickannies are racial caricatures of Black children. In such depictions, young Black girls appeared wild, ignorant, and unkempt.” Jenkins emphasizes how such representations served to “marginaliz[e] and disempowe[r] conceptualizations of the Black female experience” (p. 208). The “Crazy Pyes” campaign contributes to this marginalization and disempowerment.
Consistent with the series’ depictions of her, Suzanne’s mental illness is foregrounded as something to laugh at. The campaign invokes notions of public ridicule and mockery, not unlike “historical freak shows” (Lorenz 2012, 23). As crowds of “normal” people gather to laugh at Suzanne’s mental illness, the question remains if the construction of her character negates the harm that comes from Othering those with mental illnesses in real life. At the same time, food truck patrons are reminded that “abnormal” mental health continues to be a point of difference.

Considering this, it is no wonder there were mixed assessments of the food truck. During the truck’s visit to New York City, a protestors (and former inmate) named Jermeen dissented on a nearby corner. In an interview with the Observer’s Vinnie Mancuso (2014), Jermeen asserted her displeasure with the memoir that OITNB was adapted from and how it profits from women who have served time. The food truck acts as a catalyst for Jermeen’s protests as it gives her a targeted audience and strengthens her argument that incarcerated women are ultimately being used to make a profit. Kerman (2011, 323) has stated that a motivation for her memoir was to share her story, as “[her] own story is relevant to that of millions of Americans, even though there’s no question that middle-class white women are far from the majority of the prison system.” However, the memoir’s adaptation into television is entirely different. Series creator Kohan puts (mostly disadvantaged) women in the spotlight to “write a solid, entertaining, engaging show” and to “start discussions” about critical issues related to women in the prison system (Dawes 2013, par. 12–14). But the advertising campaigns for the series are generated for another reason. The overarching goal is not to raise awareness of the prison system or the treatment of women with mental illness, but to commodify, poke fun, and feed viewership back into the series.

Interestingly, Mancuso (2014) notes that most of the “Crazy Pyes” patrons he interviewed had not seen season 1, which aired eleven months prior to this 2014 event. This makes the use of Suzanne’s mental illness dually problematic. Considering Gray’s conceptualization of paratexts, the food truck event can serve either as an “entryway” or “in media res” paratext. For some patrons, this event might be their first exposure to OITNB characters. For those who may have already watched the first season, the food truck could also serve as an “in media res” paratext as viewers of the series automatically understand the intertextual references to Suzanne and who she is as a character. Although Suzanne’s onscreen character has moments where viewers are meant to understand her as a person, these progressive characterizations were not at play among those patrons who had not seen the series. For them, her mental illness likely offered comedic value and little else.

The New York Times’ Interactive Promotion

Beyond guerrilla marketing in the form of the food truck, Netflix soon found other ways to entice consumers. In 2012, The New York Times circulated a new project dubbed “Snow Fall,” which narrativized “through text, photos, videos, and interactive graphics” (Sonderman 2012). On June 13, 2014, a Snow Fall piece—commissioned by Netflix—ran in the Times to underscore issues that women inmates face (Negra
The main text provided statistics about women inmates and emphasized how the current system fails them. The challenges for women both inside and outside of prison were discussed, and readers were presented with an alternative model of rehabilitation that has worked for women inmates.5 As editorial content was combined with the commercial backing of Netflix, Amanda Walgrove (2014, par. 3) describes the piece in its entirety: “It’s awesome and elegant. It’s also a piece of branded content.” At first glance, the article resembles a feature story written by a journalist for the Times. However, the author, Melanie Deziel, is not a journalist but a “content strategist” who works to create branded content to help advertisers and sponsors “provide deeper value to their audience, creat[e] new revenue streams for publishers, and ope[n] opportunities for quality creators to make great work” (Deziel 2015). The branded content that Deziel created for Netflix is a form of native advertising, which “blurs the distinction between a journalist’s effort to inform the public and an advertising copywriter’s effort to promote a brand” (Foreman 2016, 175). This native advertising is disguised as an article from the Times.

In Deziel’s (2014) feature, “Women Inmates: Why the Male Model Doesn’t Work,” there is only one reference to OITNB, where Deziel mentions Kerman’s memoir as inspiration for the series. However, the implicit association among the article, series, and sponsor is still prevalent as logos for both Netflix and OITNB are located at the top of the article. Three videos, which are each split into three segments, also display Netflix and OITNB logos in their closing credits. At the bottom of the page, there is a banner ad for season 2 with an OITNB logo on the right (see Figure 2). Below that are links to three “related” articles, similar to what one may find with any article on the
Times’ website. A subtle distinction though is that “Selected by Netflix” is off to the side of these suggestions. The links redirect readers to actual Times articles that relate to OITNB. The first article is from Kerman’s real-life fiancé, Larry Smith. The second piece, written by Kerman, was published one month after season 1 was released. The final article focuses on OITNB cast members and creators discussing onscreen performances. By disguising these links as curated content from the Times, Deziel directs readers to content that further promotes OITNB. Furthermore, the banner ad gives credibility to the overall piece. By displaying an advertisement that readers may be more accustomed to seeing, Deziel masks that the feature “article” is just another ad.

The weaving of the feature story with advertising complicates matters as it mixes promotion with admittedly important content. The first image readers are exposed to highlights how prison dehumanizes women; this is something that the “Losing Control” segment in the second video touches on as well. The first paragraph discusses women’s physical appearance in prison, and is reinforced by a video segment that emphasizes the point: “We don’t have a look. We are your everyday woman [sic] . . . that made bad choices” (as stated by former inmate, Ayana Thomas). Deziel brings to light another implication of women’s incarceration by including a quotation by a former inmate: “When you incarcerate a woman, you incarcerate her whole family.” This leads into an animation with a woman being taken to prison (see Figure 3). As the viewpoint is from this woman’s perspective, the focus is on her family members, who are watching her being hauled away. In this moment, it is the woman’s family that actually appears behind bars—the bars of the van’s back windows as it drives off. This type of content brings up crucial issues throughout the piece, issues like the impact of
incarceration on children and motherhood in prison that typically remain invisible. At the same time, it reflects essentialist notions of women, family, and motherhood (Negra 2015).

Regarding the intersectional identities constructed by this promotion, there is a duality in skin tones on the animations throughout the feature: white or black. Although the sole body type used is the same idealized body type (i.e., slim) that affords OITNB characters onscreen sexual relations (DeCarvalho and Cox 2015), the inclusion of gray hair signifies the incorporation of both young and older women. This aspect mirrors OITNB content in its depictions of older bodies (i.e., Litchfield Prison’s “Golden Girls”). In addition, the tattooed prison numbers suggest that many women are affected by the prison-industrial complex. As Crenshaw (1989) advocates, intersectionality must be accounted for, though, as some women onscreen are afforded more privilege over others. Nash (2015, 16) argues that “no texts ‘tell the truth’ of intersectionality,” and this is reflected here in how the dichotomies of black/white and young/old omit the off-screen experiences of women in prison who might be of other races, ethnicities, and ages.

Looking at the interactive promotion, one might assume that it is progressive in its call for reform of women’s prisons. Although the feature focuses on the issues that real-life incarcerated women face, one must ask, who is giving them this platform and what do they gain? The content is not wrapped in an article from a journalist or editor. Rather, it comes from the Times’ internal advertising division, T Brand Studio (Moses 2014), which focuses on native advertising. The content found in Deziel’s piece may be thought provoking, but it is published to promote Netflix and OITNB. The larger aim of the interactive piece is to bring back viewers, and recruit new ones, for the Netflix series. Although Netflix keeps a low profile in Deziel’s piece, readers are likely to connect the content with OITNB. For example, the piece’s color palette is orange and black, and the first video opens with the same format as OITNB’s opening credits—a montage of close-ups from actual former women inmates (Dunne 2013). Any person relatively familiar with popular culture would make the link between OITNB and the Times’ piece.

Furthermore, the blurring of feature stories and media promotion might operate counter to spreading awareness about the trials and tribulations of incarcerated women. Some individuals might recognize the interactive promotion as branded content and might be dismissive of it as an advertisement—they may not take the time to read the information concerning flaws in the women’s prison system. The Times is well known for its prestige, objectivity, and for being a newspaper of record, so its use of native advertising here is particularly problematic. Perhaps even more telling is that at the very bottom of the page is the disclaimer, “The news and editorial staffs of The New York Times had no role in this post’s preparation.” Although the information presented is important, it is only covered and promoted through a paid commission from Netflix. Thinking back to Kerman and Kohan’s intentions for the memoir and series respectively as cases of activism around women’s prisons and the need for policy reform, it is worth considering whether the Times’ feature could be another instance of activism. Again, it is not Netflix’s first use of native advertising—nor was it the last, as Netflix
later commissioned a native ad for its original series Narcos in The Wall Street Journal (Miles 2015). Results from the Times reveal that sponsored content brings in “361 percent more unique visitors and 526 percent more time spent with the [paid] post” (Wegert 2015, par. 4). Some might view the feature as an instance of activism, as Moses (2014) reports that several journalists, including the Times’ legendary David Carr, praised this particular model of sponsored content. Kerman also tweeted that viewers should use the Times’ feature as a spark of discussion after they finished watching the second season (Miles 2015). Despite the many contradictions of the “Women Inmates” feature, including its essentialist messaging, the Times’ feature may well have initiated dialogues among readers. As the main issue for us continually comes back to its journalistic home in the Times, we wonder what types of dialogues in general are facilitated, and whether the conversations around the current state of women’s prisons will outweigh those praising how clever (native) advertising can be.

**Conclusion**

As previously discussed, traditional network strategies for promoting television series do not apply to online streaming services. As a result, online streaming sites must find other avenues for promotion of television programming. One such example is Netflix taking two drastically different, yet equally controversial, approaches to maximize its audience. In this article, we analyzed two primary ways that Netflix promoted OITNB’s season 2 debut. Although season 1’s promotion was limited, Netflix increased its promotional campaigns for season 2, to ensure that fans were sustained despite a yearlong hiatus between seasons. Through our examination of promotional materials, we interrogated the construction of characters’ identities within the campaigns themselves. We argued that the food truck event emphasized the intersectional identity of Suzanne “Crazy Eyes” Warren to gain cheap laughs, while incorporating racist ideology through the integration of the “Pickanniny” stereotype. This serves to undermine the legitimacy of black women inmates and black women in general. Although OITNB eventually humanizes Suzanne onscreen, this was omitted from the live marketing event.

The New York Times’ promotion humanized the women directly affected by the largest prison system in the world. It incorporates a discussion of multiple intersectional identities. However, the interactive promotion is just that: a promotion. This native advertising subverts the issue at hand regarding women’s prisons, their diminished agency, and the need for prison policy reform; instead, it prioritizes branding, and clever storytelling, and diminishes the role of journalism. Is Netflix using itself to promote policy reform or using the need for policy reform to promote itself? The answer to this is nuanced, as Netflix has maximized its target audience through social media, live events, and interactive storytelling, but at the same time provides a platform for incarcerated women to be more than just numbers in a system. The series itself has initiated critical dialogue in the mainstream press and has brought attention to real-life activists Laverne Cox and Piper Kerman. At the same time, the series is promoted by its sponsor to spark interest and controversy, as these promotions construct images of incarcerated women that, in various ways, reinforce or undermine the onscreen narratives.
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Notes

1. This article deals with the promotional events for season 2 of the series. Space constraints prohibit analysis of the subsequent marketing events that took place to promote season 3.
2. This is not the only instance where Netflix was banking on “built in audiences.” In a recent interview, the company’s chief content officer, Ted Sarandos, stated that “[t]he other thing that’s great, like the reason why Master of None hit the ground running so fast, is we had a huge audience of people who love Aziz Ansari specials on Netflix. So we had a built in audience already that became the jumping off point for the show’s broad success” (Sepinwall 2016, par. 54).
3. Elsewhere in this issue, Schwan (2016) offers a more detailed reflection on the show’s implied audience of urban professionals.
4. See Belcher’s work in this issue for an alternate perspective on the show.
5. This model stems from the Women’s Community Correctional Center in Hawaii, which has integrated education, substance-abuse treatment, trauma counseling (all specifically geared toward women), and activities to bring inmates closer to both their families and nature.
6. Space constraints prohibit us from analyzing these videos here.
7. See Silverman and Ryalls (2016) in this issue for an analysis of representations of elderly women on OITNB.

References


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