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# Serial communities: The dynamics between individual and collective identity in *Orange Is the New Black*

## ABSTRACT

*The influence of soap operas on other forms of television narrative has long been remarked upon by television scholars, especially with regards to the increasing tendency towards serialized plotlines that contemporary dramas have exhibited over the last three decades. Nonetheless, the full impact of the soap opera form on the structural principles of ongoing television narratives is yet to be explored. A crucial part of this lineage is the privileged role granted to communities in soaps, a narrative strategy that has been embraced by an array of other types of serialized programming, including ‘premium’ dramas. Drawing on Christine Geraghty’s writing on soap operas’ construction of community, this article will examine how this storytelling strategy is reworked by contemporary ‘premium’ programmes. Using Orange Is the New Black (2013–19) as a case study, I will explore how the patterns of interplay between the individual and the group can shape both the form and diegesis of a programme. I will analyse how Orange Is the New Black gradually shifts from being structured around a single protagonist to being structured around the community as a whole, demonstrating that the tension between individual and collective identities can be a productive force that proliferates and expands the narrative of a programme.*

## KEYWORDS

television narrative  
television drama  
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television characters  
seriality  
soap opera

Arguing for why historicizing a genre like the soap opera is important, Elana Levine writes:

That we no longer notice the influence of daytime drama on prime-time serialization in fact may signify just how deeply the soaps' influence has pervaded our senses of what TV storytelling is; soap opera is so deeply embedded in TV narrative that its roots have become invisible.

(2017: 108)

Of course, that is not to say that the influence of the soap has been ignored entirely. Writing in 1995, Roger Hagedorn already noted the 'widespread if diffuse manner' in which the serialized storytelling of soap operas affected other programming (1995: 39). The soap's impact on other forms of television narrative, especially 'quality' television emerging in the early 1980s, has also been noted by scholars such as Jeffrey Sconce (2004: 99) and Robert J. Thompson (1997: 35). The influence is perhaps most apparent in the serialized plotlines and the consequent emphasis placed on viewer memory that have become common-place features of contemporary television series, as Amy Holdsworth contends (2011: 34). In this article, however, I would like to focus less on how the serialized plotting of soap opera has impacted prime-time and 'premium' series; instead, I would like to explore the 'widespread if diffuse manner' in which soaps' emphasis on community has permeated these other forms of ongoing television narrative. Specifically, I will discuss how the tension between the individual identities of characters and the collective communities they form echoes the formal tension in serialized narratives between a need for the linear, often indefinite, expansion of plot and the centrifugal expansion of the storyworld. Indeed, the latter often helps facilitate the former. By integrating individual identities into expansive communities, while simultaneously creating conflict between the two, series establish important mechanisms for generating future plotlines.

The soap opera's characteristic use of large ensemble casts has had a vital impact on a range of television programming. The 'multiple identification' that occurs in soap operas (Modleski 1979: 14) is relevant to an understanding of how many ongoing series create ensembles 'with wide-ranging attachments across scenes and episodes' (Mittell 2015: 129). For while not all series contain casts quite as large as soaps and do not necessarily engage with the notion of community in the same way, the concept of community itself remains useful in relation to a variety of series. This is first because the community is directly linked to soaps' paradigmatic complexity, a property that television scholars have been increasingly foregrounding in relation to other types of television narratives as well. And, relatedly, the community is a critical concept for explaining how individual characters are incorporated into the larger diegesis of a series. The community acts as a unifying force that provides a given series with a coherent identity, while simultaneously facilitating conflict between individuality and collective existence. By analysing the relationship between individual and group identities, we can better understand how these dynamics are responsible for both narrative progression, such as plot development and character growth, as well as altogether less linear trajectories. Using *Orange Is the New Black* (2013–19) as a case study, I will examine how the show manifests the tension between individual identity and community existence in both its content and form. While the Netflix series begins with a clear protagonist, Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling), at its centre, her centrality is

gradually problematized – both within the diegesis and through the series' structural arrangement of characters. Examining and comparing the finales of the show's first six seasons, we can observe Piper's changing role as she moves from being a singular protagonist to being just one major character in a community.

'Put in semiotic terminology, US daytime soap operas trade an investment in syntagmatic determinacy (the eventual direction of the overall plot line) for one in paradigmatic complexity (how any particular event affects the complex network of character relationships)', writes Robert Allen (1995: 7–8). The applicability of Allen's observation to contemporary television series has been noted by multiple scholars (Mittell 2017: 149; Tischleder 2017: 123) while others have made similar comments (Newman 2006: 19). One could argue that many contemporary series attempt to balance these two forms of investment, as well as getting them to work with one another. Mittell gestures to such a possibility in reference to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1996–2003): '*Buffy*, at its most accomplished, uses forward plot momentum to generate emotional responses to characters and allows relationships to help advance plots' (2015: 20).

While various series may emphasize and develop the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of their narrative to a greater or lesser degree, in general addressing both of these aspects of television narrative remains crucial for a full understanding of storytelling strategies in the medium. It would be unproductive to deny the importance of 'syntagmatic determinacy' to a series like *Orange Is the New Black*, at least to some degree. Its relatively short seasons of thirteen episodes each, and Netflix's model of releasing an entire season at once, contribute to a less sprawling temporality than in soap operas and consequently a greater emphasis on the 'eventual direction' of any given plotline. Despite this, however, *Orange Is the New Black* and many other prime-time and premium series simultaneously engage in the development of their paradigmatic character relationships. Indeed, they rely on the outward expansion of the community and the fluid dynamics between its members in order to generate plotlines that will in turn move the series forward and (hopefully) ensure longevity. As Allen writes: '[T]he serial spreads its narrative energy among a number of plots and a community of characters, and, what is even more important, sets these plots and characters in complex, dynamic, and unpredictable relationships with each other' (1995: 18). Allen's understanding of the serial raises the question of exactly how characters are bound together into a 'community', a question Christine Geraghty (1991) addresses in relation to British soap operas. Her observations hold great relevance for a range of television narratives because they help explain how the interrelationships of television characters become structured by patterns of similarity and difference between them.

In her initial definition of community, Geraghty states that 'although community is an important unifying factor, it often proves elusive. British soaps offer the notion of a harmonious community but the chimera is rarely pinned down. [...] It becomes an ideal which has to be worked for' (1991: 85). For Geraghty, the aspirational ideals of the community are based on 'an ethos of sharing, an acceptance of each other's individual characteristics and a recognition that everyone has a role to play if the community is to continue' (1991: 85). A very significant aspect of this definition is that it allows for the coexistence of characters' 'individual characteristics' and the community. Geraghty goes on to stress that the 'emphasis on unity is not at the expense of

individual characters' (1991: 89). Indeed, the community as an ideal can exist only *through* the accommodation of individual idiosyncrasies:

It is in the nature of the soaps' ideal community that it can draw into itself all sorts of characters – the grumpy, the cantankerous, the complaining, the eccentric – and that they do not need to be transformed into ideal types for the community itself to be celebrated.

(Geraghty 1991: 86)

While not all television communities represent the same values Geraghty identifies in the communities of British soaps – sharing, acceptance – they do possess a comparable tension between the unique attributes of the individual character and the collective force of a group identity that both defines and contains the individual. This tension is directly linked to the proliferation of the series. The precise nature of the plotlines a series may generate will depend not only on any one character's individual traits, but on the particular chemistry of their combination established through a pattern of alignment and difference with others. In many television series, as in soap operas, this formal tension is articulated through narratives about integration and belonging. In *Orange Is the New Black*, the prison setting increases the stakes of such communal assimilation while simultaneously necessitating that characters look out for their individual interests. As such, the series is an instructive case study of narrative principles that it inherits from the soap opera and shares with many other contemporary series.

Since it is set within the confines of a women's prison, Litchfield Penitentiary, it may seem odd to use the word 'community' in relation to the collection of characters in *Orange Is the New Black* at all. The setting seems in sharp contrast to the word's connotations as invoked by Geraghty's definition. Yet the community as an 'ideal which has to be worked for' (Geraghty 1991: 85) still exists within the prison, although its achievement is more difficult and more rare. Part of the reason it exists at all is not always and not necessarily because the characters possess an altruistic desire to care for others, but rather because the interests of the individual overlap with the interests of the group. Writing about a rather different text – Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816) – Blakey Vermeule suggests that:

Austen presents a completely realistic picture of what happens to a small group of people interacting with one another over time. The group tends to become stable – not because stability benefits the group as a whole but because it benefits individuals to choose long-term stability over short-term gain. To be sure, a person can choose to take the short-term pleasure and forget about the long-term benefits, but she will be forcefully presented with reasons why she should not – not because of some mysterious force of culture but because it is in everyone's narrow interest to enforce the contract.

(2010: 190)

*Emma* may seem an unlikely point of comparison for *Orange Is the New Black*, but Vermeule's hypothesis certainly holds in relation to the show. The prisoners do often have to choose between short-term gain and long-term stability, and the latter depends on aligning one's interests (if only partially) with that of the group. Thus, in *Orange Is the New Black*, there is a continual tension

between integrating into the 'compulsory community', as Babette B. Tischleder puts it (2017: 122), and asserting one's own individuality. The latter is essential within the diegesis, as being a little selfish is key for survival in the prison, while on an extra-diegetic level having an individual identity is what allows the character to stand-out from the background of extras that help define the prison setting. Yet this balance needs to be carefully maintained.

It is telling that one of the few entirely unredeemed characters in the show is Vee (Lorraine Toussaint), a prisoner that takes being selfish too far. Vee fits perfectly into Modleski's definition of a soap opera villainess: an 'unashamedly self-seeking' character (1979: 17) whom 'we are allowed to hate unreservedly' (1979: 15). The villainess is often a mother, using her children 'in order to further her own selfish ambitions' (Modleski 1979: 16). This is exactly the role that Vee occupies: a kind of surrogate mother who exploits the loyalty of her 'children' and then betrays them. But while Modleski's villainess never fails permanently and is instead 'doomed to eternal repetition' (Modleski 1979: 17), Vee is not so lucky. She is killed off at the end of the second season, her death depicted as a triumphant moment and a lesson as to just how important a degree of communal integration is in this narrative. This tension between community and individuality is also a key facet of the series' form, guiding the way in which the episodes are structured.

The narrative of *Orange Is the New Black* commences with the incarceration of Piper Chapman, a White, educated, upper middle-class woman who was briefly involved with a drug cartel over a decade prior. The pilot chronicles both her admittance into the prison and tells, through flashback, the events that resulted in her imprisonment. But in the second episode, Piper's flashbacks are accompanied by the flashbacks of another character – the prison's Russian matriarch known as Red (Kate Mulgrew). In this manner, a pattern is established that will be maintained, with some notable exceptions, from this point onward. Each new episode will feature the flashbacks of another character, allowing us to get a richer sense of their identity. These may be characters that we have already come to know as individuals through the preceding action, or they may be almost anonymous figures, plucked literally from the background of that same action. Indeed, the cinematography of the show often adeptly mimics this narrative tendency, as camera movement shifts our attention from the foreground to the background of the scene in a single shot, reminding viewers that multiple stories are transpiring in the same space. Thus, while on the one hand the series (and the first season particularly) creates suspense around Piper's assimilation into prison life and the effects this will have on her identity, it also simultaneously works to build up a community of characters around Piper – characters with their own narrative potential to generate plot.

This communal expansion parallels what Mittell has described as centrifugal complexity, a narrative mode in which

the ongoing narrative pushes outward, spreading characters across an expanding storyworld [...] its richness is found in the complex web of interconnectivity forged across the social system rather than in the depth of anyone individual's role in the narrative or psychological layers.  
(2015: 222)

Mittell's description, in turn, has a counterpart in John Cawelti's definition of melodrama, which Tania Modleski cites in her explanation of a soap's propensity to have the audience align with multiple characters:

Instead of identifying with a single protagonist through his line of action, the melodrama typically makes us intersect imaginatively with many lives [...] Through this complex of characters and plots we see not so much the working of individual fates but the underlying moral process of the world.

(Cawelti cited in Modleski 1979: 12)

Thus, the effect of the systematic expansion of the community in *Orange Is the New Black* is more than just a proliferation of characters. For with each new member of the community introduced, our perception of the community in its entirety changes. Put another way, through the flashback structure of the series, *Orange Is the New Black* encourages a composite portrait of a 'social system' to emerge through a comparison and contrasting of individual identities. This has significant ideological implications as it has the potential to continually redefine how we think of prison and the way in which we characterize the prisoners. And although a detailed analysis and evaluation of such ideological questions is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that *Orange Is the New Black* attempts to use the open-ended structures it inherits from the soap opera to consider both the problems of the prison system 'as a whole' as well as to explore the ways in which its diverse community members experience that system – experiences that intersect in different ways and to different degrees for each character, based on their race, class and sexual orientation.

Aside from gradually expanding the community, the flashbacks of *Orange Is the New Black* also achieve another effect – they place the narrative's imperative to portray a social system in conflict with a simultaneous interest in developing the 'layers' of individual identities. As I have already stated, many serial dramas exhibit a tension between the identity of individual characters and the collective identity of the community. For in order for there to be a community at all, there needs to be some overlap between the two. In *Orange Is the New Black*, the flashback structure often brings this tension to the fore. While the flashbacks usually focus on the lives of individual characters before they became part of the prison community, these are intercut with events occurring in the present context of communal existence. The aesthetics of these flashbacks typically contrast with the familiar and muted palette of the prison, as the varied costumes, make-up and settings of the past underscore the individual identities of the characters and contrast them with the enforced uniformity of Litchfield. The fact that *Orange Is the New Black* alternates between telling the backstories of a wide range of different characters signifies the importance of the community as a whole to the narrative strategies of the series. At the same time, however, it also suggests that at any moment the centre of interest in the discourse may shift.

Writing about the novel, Alex Woloch proposes a redefinition of literary characterization in terms of a distributional matrix: '[H]ow the discrete representation of any specific individual is intertwined with the narrative's continual apportioning of attention to different characters who jostle for limited space within the same fictive universe' (2003: 13). In the case of nineteenth-century-realist fiction, Woloch argues that this process is manifested through the 'dual impulses to bring in a multitude of characters and to bring out the interiority of a singular protagonist' (2003: 30). Although the literary and television mediums are different in many respects, I argue that a similar duality is indeed present in many television series – while numerous series do still possess a

central character, their dominance is continually challenged by the multitude of characters around them. The economic mandate of television programmes to continue produces what we might call a centrifugal *tendency* in most series, albeit exhibited to a greater or larger extent in any given show. Furthermore, while a series is still ongoing, the potential of the distributional matrix to shift is even greater than in a stand-alone narrative. As the series continues, characters may shift from the periphery to the centre, and vice versa. In *Orange Is the New Black*, the flashbacks demonstrate the capacity of the series to make such shifts in focus on an episodic level. But the series also undertakes a transference of attention on a much larger scale, gradually changing its storytelling mechanisms from being structured by a protagonist's journey, as in classical film, to creating a series structure based around the community as a whole, as is typical of soap operas.

The narrative arc of the first season of *Orange Is the New Black* begins with Piper entering Litchfield prison and revolves largely around her journey – the way that she will adapt to prison life. Indeed, it is possible to critique the series for precisely this centrality of a White, wealthy woman in a world populated largely by women of colour. The show's creator, Jenji Kohan, does admit to using Piper as a 'Trojan horse' to enter this community, which on its own would have been a 'much harder sell' (Kohan cited in Kohan 2014: 110). But as the show progresses, Piper's centrality wanes and, as it does, the structure of the show changes. Although Piper starts out as an active protagonist whose actions determine the direction of the plot, in later seasons she becomes a much more passive observer as the series seems to prioritize not only admitting but foregrounding more diverse perspectives and experiences of its diegetic world. For a demonstration of how *Orange Is the New Black* goes from telling the story of a protagonist to telling the story of a community, we can look at how the narratives of each season finale shift from generating suspense chiefly around Piper's individual plotlines to creating cliff-hangers that involve the prison community as a whole. Such analysis can help illustrate the increasing importance of paradigmatic complexity to the series as it progresses, and the ability of this paradigmatic complexity to in turn generate forward momentum. For as the show's community expands, and as the centre(s) of narrative interest become more diffuse, opportunities are created for a greater number and greater diversity of plotlines.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the first season cliff-hanger revolves around Piper. After spending the duration of the season negotiating a love-triangle between an ex-girlfriend in prison and a *fiancé* on the outside, Piper finds herself losing the affections of both. The trajectory of this plotline then intersects with another ongoing plot involving Piper – her antagonistic relationship with an inmate nick-named Pennsatucky (Taryn Manning). As Pennsatucky takes an opportunity to attack Piper in the prison yard, Piper's despair becomes transformed into anger; in the final moments of their encounter, Piper gets an upper hand and starts brutally beating Pennsatucky, raising questions as to whether Pennsatucky will survive and what the consequences for Piper will be in Season 2. Importantly, the fight is juxtaposed with another event that is occurring at the same time – the prison's Christmas pageant, at which most of the community is present.

'The community defines itself particularly in moments of celebration', writes Geraghty of soaps (1991: 87), while Modleski notes that 'soap opera catastrophes provide convenient occasions for people to come together' (1979: 19). In *Orange Is the New Black*, each season will make a point of ending with

either one or both of these events, precisely to emphasize how integral the community is to the narrative of the series. In Season 1, this moment of togetherness serves as a contrast to Piper's isolation – both her physical isolation in the yard where Pennsatucky has cornered her, and the overwhelming loneliness she has to face after losing two romantic partners. The pageant is portrayed, both narratively and visually, as a moment of communal gathering characterized largely by positive emotions: joy, levity, contemplation. The bright colours and glittery accents of the pageant's set and costumes differ not only from the more typically dull tones of the prison in general but also specifically from the cold and austere atmosphere of the prison yard where Piper finds herself. Even the soundtrack contrasts the activities of the community with those of Piper, as the episode plays out with a children's rendition of the hymn 'Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful', ironically juxtaposed with a tight close-up of Piper savagely beating Pennsatucky. In terms of plot development, however, the Christmas pageant has little significance and few narrative consequences that spill over into the second season. Instead, this communal event serves more as a 'backdrop' for the action involving Piper, an episodic structure that is indicative of the first season's overall narrative predisposition. Throughout Season 1, Piper's character is privileged in the series not only through screen time and forward plot momentum but also through the way in which her identity is brought into tension with that of the community. Her 'fish out of water' narrative is 'set against' the backdrop and identity of the community as a whole, as we watch to see whether prison life will 'corrupt' Piper. But as the seasons progress, the narrative centre of the show gradually shifts away from revolving primarily around Piper and instead begins to prioritize the fate of the prison community as a whole, while simultaneously exploring the experiences of that community from more diverse perspectives.

Consequently, in Seasons 2 and 3, the narrative interest of the finales is more evenly distributed as far as plotting is concerned. In the second season finale, Piper selfishly schemes to ensure the return of her on-again, off-again girlfriend Alex (Laura Prepon) to Litchfield while the rest of the episode depicts the various factions of the prison community all doing their part to excise the villainess Vee from their ranks. And with the appointment of a new assistant warden, narrative questions posed for Season 3 revolve not only around the fate of Piper and her relationship with Alex but also around how the dynamics of the entire community will change. In the Season 3 finale, the balance continues to be evenly distributed between Piper and the rest of the community. The season ends with several miraculous coincidences, which allow the prisoners to temporarily escape through a gap in the fence onto the shores of a lake. What follows is an extended sequence of pure joy in which friendships are forged, romances begun, alliances mended. Once again, in an echo of Season 1, the community comes together in a rare moment of idyllic harmony. And once again Piper is absent. But this time she is not the victim of a brutal attack, as in Season 1, but its instigator, as she sabotages the release of a former lover and business partner in an act of revenge. Piper's actions, dialogue and demeanour, aided by central framing and low angles, position her (or, at the very least, depict her trying to position herself) as an assertive force within the prison. However, as in Season 2, the consequences of Piper's actions are balanced, perhaps even outweighed, by changes to the community. Not only does the lakeside sequence instigate several new plot-lines to be followed up in Season 4, but the episode ends with a whole new group of prisoners arriving at Litchfield. Piper may be attempting to become

a villainess, teasing audiences with the ongoing 'corruption' of her character instigated in Season 1, but her actions will prove to have little weight in light of these bigger changes to the community. Season 4 thus sets out to quickly quash any expectations that the prison community will revolve around Piper's dominance, either diegetically or on the level of narrative form, with her supposed authority going into decline from the very first few minutes of the season.

Indeed, the Season 4 finale becomes a reversal of the first season's ending. Now the entire community is involved in the seasonal cliff-hanger, while Piper and Alex have decided to try and live an 'easy' life away from the prison's incendiary activities. The episode ends with the start of a prison riot, with almost every member of the community present as prisoner Daya (Dascha Polanco) holds a gun pointed at a guard. But in a visual representation of the shift in narrative focus, Piper and Alex are shown running in the opposite direction as the rest of the prisoners congregate in one central space. It is important to note that in all these sequences, Piper is still singled out from the community – a by-product of her central role at the start of the narrative. But as the seasons progress, this centrality is increasingly problematized, both within the diegesis as characters call her out for being too self-centred, and by the structure of the narrative, which gradually decreases the magnitude of her importance to the plot. Piper's role in the show began as a Trojan horse but several seasons into its run that function is no longer necessary. Having entered this community and having gotten to know many of its inhabitants and the dynamics between them, we no longer need a 'guide' to be at the centre of the narrative structure. The importance of the community as a whole to the series is signalled by the first and last episodes of Season 3, which break from the show's typical episode structure – instead of depicting the flashbacks of a single character, the episodes instead feature the flashbacks of several characters all united by the same theme.

Season 5 brings Piper's separation from the community to an end. Having spent much of the season staying out of the activities of the prison riot, Piper ends the season by standing together with nine other prisoners – the last women remaining within Litchfield as security forces storm its walls to reclaim control of the prison. This is the first time in the show's run that Piper is depicted side by side, literally, with other prisoners in a seasonal cliff-hanger – her fate entirely intertwined with theirs. The closing image seems to suggest that Piper is no longer *the* main character of *Orange Is the New Black*, but rather just *a* major character. In order for her to retain a place within the narrative of the show, she must retain a link to its community, a community that supersedes the dominance of any single individual.

The end of the sixth season of *Orange Is the New Black* is perhaps the most dramatic reconfiguration of Piper's relationship to the prison community. The finale sees Piper granted an unexpected early release and consequently leaving Litchfield at the end of the episode. While previous seasons of *Orange Is the New Black* have told the stories of how inmates fare after release from prison, these narratives have been less central to the series than those taking place inside the prison itself. No longer bound by what Tischleder calls the series' 'centre of gravity' (2017: 121) – its core setting – the characters outside of Litchfield's borders are at a higher risk of shifting to the margins of the narrative or, in some cases, outside of the discourse entirely. Crucially, therefore, the Season 6 finale makes sure to establish a link between Piper and the Litchfield community that will persist after her release – her relationship with the still

1. I use the word 'tendency' because I would argue for a spectrum of possibilities between these two approaches, rather than any strict taxonomy.

incarcerated Alex. Indeed, nearly half of Piper's screen time in the finale is used to depict her 'prison wedding' with Alex. While the event is a culmination of their tempestuous relationship, it also fulfils the important function of ensuring that Piper will still have a place in the series' diegesis in Season 7 – a diegesis that has gradually shifted from revolving around her to revolving around Litchfield prison and the community it contains and creates.

This comparative analysis of the season finales is suggestive of how interconnected the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimension of a television series can be. In *Orange Is the New Black*, the cliff-hangers created by the syntagmatic direction of the plot also function to demonstrate the increased importance of the paradigmatic aspects of the show. In the earlier seasons, cliff-hangers are created by leaving uncertain the effects of one individual character's actions on another. Will Pennsatucky survive Piper's beating? Will Alex return to Litchfield after Piper snitches on her to a parole officer? But such individual fates start to become offset in later seasons by questions about what will happen to the Litchfield community as whole. How will the intake of a new group of prisoners affect the camp? Will a riot break out in the prison? What will happen to Litchfield when the riot has been quelled by the authorities? That is not to say that suspense around what will happen to individual characters becomes irrelevant in later seasons. Rather, individual fates become more and more intertwined with communal ones. Indeed, by posing questions about the direction of the plot, *Orange Is the New Black* creates suspense around just how quickly and dramatically the make-up and relations of its community can change, in turn affecting individual lives.

In some television series, the communities are relatively stable: once their key members have been introduced, the series will continue to arrange and re-arrange them in order to generate new plotlines. Examples range from 'traditional' sitcoms like *Seinfeld* (1989–98) and *Friends* (1994–2004), to more contemporary dramas such as *The Newsroom* (2012–14) and *Halt and Catch Fire* (2014–17). Some television communities, however, are more porous than others. The communities of *Lost* (2004–10), *Grey's Anatomy* (2005–present) and *Glee* (2009–15) exhibit this tendency,<sup>1</sup> for example. In the case of *Orange Is the New Black*, the series seems to delight in leaving its community an open-ended structure despite the very strict spatial boundaries that define its setting, thereby exposing its soap opera roots. New characters can enter this community (almost always unwillingly) from the outside, or they may be 'pulled' from the anonymity of the background. The finales from Season 3 onward increasingly foreground this continual flux. Season 3 ends with the existing community coming together on the shores of the lake, while a new group of prisoners (outsiders) are being brought in to Litchfield. But by the time Season 4 ends with a prison-wide riot, these new prisoners have come together with the existing ones in an expression of communal outrage. And in Season 5, the community is yet again reconfigured, this time through the separation of its members. After the riot has been suppressed, the prisoners are loaded onto several buses all headed for different destinations. As Season 6 begins, we are thus left with a small contingent of the original community as they are relocated to Litchfield's maximum security prison and have to adapt to a very different way of life there. The community of *Orange Is the New Black* thus shows itself to be a fluid and mobile entity, a renewable source of both future plotlines as well as changing character relations.

I chose *Orange Is the New Black* as my case study because it is a rich example of the possibilities of serial narrative. But I would like to end by stressing

once again that it is by no means an isolated case. As many contemporary serial dramas seek to satisfy a need for the sense of narrative progress while simultaneously providing for the pleasures of indefinite continuation, they draw on the structural tools that have, for a long time, been part of the soap opera's arsenal. As a result, both the narrative progress of these shows and the source of their longevity become rooted in the dynamics between individual characters and the communities they form. These dynamics, like the engine of the show, are capable of producing plotlines that move the narrative forward. But this movement is also accompanied by another – a movement outward. For individual plotlines may be begun and ended, but their consequences will reverberate through the community, causing changes within its make-up and simultaneously generating a new series of events. And so the narrative goes on, continually moving both forward and outward, sometimes playing within the existing boundaries of the community and sometimes reshaping its borders.

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*Friends* (1994–2004, USA: NBC).

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