

CLONING THE IDEAL? UNPACKING THE CONFLICTING IDEOLOGIES AND CULTURAL
ANXIETIES IN "ORPHAN BLACK"

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ABSTRACT

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In this project, I undertake a queer Marxist reading of the television series *Orphan Black*. Specifically, I investigate the portrayal of women and queer characters in order to discover the conflicting dominant and oppositional ideologies circulating in the series. Doing so allows me to reveal cultural anxieties that haunt the series even as it challenges normative power relations. I argue that while *Orphan Black*'s narrative subverts traditional gender roles, critiques heteronormativity, and offers sexually fluid queer characters, the series still reifies the traditionally ideal Western female body—thin, attractive, legibly gendered, and fertile. I draw on Antonio Gramsci's theory of ideology and hegemony, Heidi Hartman's analysis of Marxism and feminism, and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to unpack the series' non-normative depiction of gender and its simultaneous reliance on a stable gender binary. I frame my argument with Todd Gitlin's understanding of hegemony's ability to domesticate radical ideas in television.

I argue that *Orphan Black* imagines spaces and scenarios that offer the potential to liberate women from heteronormative expectations and limit patriarchy's harm. The series privileges a queer female collective and envisions a world where women have freedom from normative conceptions of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, as I will explain throughout this project, these narrative freedoms come at a cost, as the series domesticates the radical ideas it presents. The series' amalgamation of cultural influences becomes apparent through its inconsistent messages about women's bodies and autonomy. In the series' critique of patriarchal institutions and ideas, it fixates on a specific female body and biological kinship.

To those who have helped me on this adventure of life and school,
though at this point they're pretty much the same thing.

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INTRODUCTION

"I am not your toy. I am not your experiment. I am not your incubator. I am not your weapon. I am not your property" ("Catch Up"). In an advertisement for *Orphan Black*, this dialogue is played over video that crosscuts between the different cloned women who are the protagonists of the series. As this advertisement suggests, a constant, if not main, theme throughout this series is women's desire for and attempts at autonomy. These cloned women face a constant threat: those in power trying to take control over their lives and their bodies. They face this opposition from corporations, the government, the military, and religious institutions. This female narrative focus defies the common television tendency to privilege stories that place men in the active role and leave women as passive objects. These traditional television series reinforce male domination, making *Orphan Black's* focus on women's attempts to possess autonomy seem like a feminist oasis in a culture that perpetuates restrictive views of women. But while the series dramatizes this journey for women's autonomy, I am hesitant to label this artifact a paragon of feminist media. The series offers this potentially radical message; however, upon closer analysis, *Orphan Black* domesticates this message because the series' imagined freedom is only available to a small portion of women. I will argue this illusive freedom proves that *Orphan Black* is unable to fully break away from the influence of the male dominated culture that produces it.

Orphan Black's narrative imagines spaces and scenarios that offer the potential to liberate women from heteronormative expectations and limit patriarchy's harm. The series privileges a queer female collective and envisions a world where women have freedom from normative conceptions of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, as I will explain throughout this project, these narrative freedoms come at a cost, as the series domesticates many of the radical ideas it

presents. Because *Orphan Black's* feminist message is most often attributed to these imagined spaces and scenarios that allow women to subvert male power, I will focus my analysis on investigating the meaning that is actually generated and conveyed through the narrative's portrayal of women, the freedoms it imagines for these women, and the women permitted to have these freedoms.¹ The series' amalgamation of cultural influences becomes apparent through its inconsistent messages about women's bodies and autonomy. In the series' critique of patriarchal institutions and ideas, it fixates on a specific female body and biological kinship. We can see that women must still possess specific and set qualities. These expectations reinforce a limiting view of the acceptable woman and reify the idea that relationships are more valuable if they continue genetic lineage. I argue that these inconsistencies and fixations echo the workings of contemporary patriarchal power. This type of power grants women enough freedom to give the illusion of autonomy for all, but in fact provides only limited forms of freedom to a specific set of privileged bodies: the thin, attractive, white, and fertile bodies that align with patriarchal standards.

Background

Orphan Black is a Canadian television series that started in 2013 and airs concurrently on American basic cable (airing on Space and BBC America, respectively). The narrative begins with the protagonist, Sarah Manning, getting off of a train in Toronto, Canada where she sees a woman in tears remove her expensive heels and purse, meticulously take off and fold her suit coat, and then look at Sarah right before jumping in front of a moving train. This is no random woman, but one who looks identical to Sarah Manning. Sarah, a grifter, takes this opportunity to steal the dead woman's belongings and identity. This impersonation is the catalyst for the rest of

the series' events. Sarah discovers the reason that she and Beth look the same is that they are clones, though she does not realize this immediately. The main clones on whom the plot hinges are Sarah Manning, soccer mom Alison Hendrix, biology doctoral student Cosima Niehaus, corporate overseer Rachel Duncan, and mentally unhinged Helena. A shadowy scientific corporation called Dyad Institute created these women. Dyad identifies the program that created them with the title Project Leda, so this term then encompasses all of the clones created from that specific genetic genome. The actress Tatiana Maslany plays all of the Project Leda clones, and new clones enter the series' framework as it progresses.

Sarah's daughter and foster family also play a large role throughout the series. In the first episode, we learn that Sarah left her daughter, Kira, in the care of Siobhan Sadler (most often referred to as Mrs. S) and Felix, Sarah's foster mother and foster brother respectively, as she sold drugs with her abusive boyfriend: Vic "the Dick" Schmidt. Sarah returns home in an attempt to repair her relationship with her daughter. It is not until Sarah meets Cosima and Alison that she discovers she is a clone. The three women start a journey to ascertain both the origins of their creation and the origins of the health issues that plague them. Also central to the plot are Alison's verging-on-dopey husband, Donnie Hendrix, and Cosima's on-again/off-again French girlfriend (and scientist at Dyad Institute) Delphine Cormier. The second season introduces a group of male clones (Project Castor); however, their role appears to end with the conclusion of season three. I will concentrate my analysis on the Project Leda clones because they are prominent in all three seasons. Additionally, we are not given much background on the Project Castor clones besides that they were reared in the military and that the male clones, unlike the majority of the female clones, are fertile.

Since *Orphan Black's* inception, popular culture critics have hailed it as a rare

progressive depiction of gender and sexuality on basic cable television. It does not relegate women and queer characters to secondary roles. Lili Loofbourow of *The New York Times* describes it as “TV’s strangest—and most sophisticated—meditation on femininity,” and *The New Yorker*’s Jill Lepore states, “it could be said that *Orphan Black* is a feminist *Frankenstein*, if it weren’t true that *Frankenstein* was a feminist *Frankenstein*.” In addition to these readings of the series, *Orphan Black* showcases strong female characters in roles usually reserved for men. Women take active narrative roles and are seen in careers often reserved for men, like the head of a multi-national corporation or as successful scientists. The series incorporates numerous LGBTQ characters in significant and recurring roles. However, as I will explain throughout this project, integrating these feminist elements does not mean that the series functions purely as a piece of progressive feminist culture.

Theoretical

I will be using Antonio Gramsci’s conceptions of hegemony and ideology as a theoretical lens to analyze *Orphan Black*, so that I can reveal the ways in which the series both embraces and domesticates ideas of feminist rebellion.² While Gramsci focuses his theory around analyzing class systems, his understandings of class struggle can be applied to hierarchical gender system that is based on an imbalance of power relations between men and women. I am analyzing gender and sexuality as a hierarchical class system, and Gramsci’s theories will allow me to explore the ways in which hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality are generated through conflicting cultural beliefs surrounding women. I will be specifically using Tony Bennett and Todd Gitlin’s approach to a Marxist analysis of popular culture, both of which draw on Gramsci’s understanding of ideology and hegemony.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of the relationship between ideology and hegemony provides a theoretical lens that allows me to examine *Orphan Black* as a cultural artifact that reflects both feminist and patriarchal culture. If we understand the ideologies that the series circulates, we can then illuminate the ways in which the series both subverts and reinforces the dominant power structures that work to subjugate women. According to Gramsci, ideology refers to a specific system of ideas; contradicting ideologies interact with each other until one proliferates throughout society. This interaction of ideologies brings "about not only unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity [. . .] thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups" ("Hegemony" 211). Gramsci argues that cultural hegemony is not static, but is instead constantly reproduced by a conflict between different levels of ideology, mainly dominant and oppositional ideology. Dominant ideology is the most prominent in a culture and it shapes the main social beliefs.

Tony Bennett elaborates on Gramsci's theories when he discusses popular culture's role in circulating ideology. Bennett posits that popular culture exists in a constant tension between the ruling class's attempt "to win hegemony" and "the forms of opposition to this endeavor" ("Introduction" xv). Furthermore, popular culture is not simply "an imposed mass culture that is coincident with dominant ideology," nor is it simply "oppositional culture," rather it exists in "an area of negotiation between the two" that mixes "dominant, subordinate and oppositional culture" and ideology ("Introduction" xv-xvi). Contemporary dominant ideology and culture are those of the "white male, Western, middle- or upper-class subject position, of positions that see other races, classes, groups, and gender as secondary, derivative, inferior, and subservient. Ideology thus differentiates and separates groups into dominant/subordinate and superior/inferior, producing hierarchies and rankings that serve the interests of ruling powers and

elites” (Kellner 61). In short, our dominant ideology is patriarchal. This ideology favors masculine values such as aggressiveness, dominance, and a desire to reify male domination (Gartzia and Van Engen 297; Johnson 7). For this project, I will be focusing specifically on corporate values—aggressiveness, control, dominance, etc.—as an example of these patriarchal and masculine principles (Johnson 7). Corporate culture prizes these types of traits as they allow corporations to maintain their power. Because these characteristics are associated with both masculine and corporate values, I will be reading corporate values as coded masculine.

Bennett argues that subordinate culture consists of the non-oppositional beliefs of the governed, which are shaped to adhere to dominant ideology. Oppositional ideology resists through attempts to separate from and oppose dominant ideology (“The Politics of the Popular” 18-19). The oppositional ideology I will be examining favors feminist and queer values like equality, community, mutuality, cooperation, and anti-normativity (Johnson 7; Tong 7). While my analysis will be using these feminist/queer values, it is important to note that there is not one monolithic or unitary set of feminist/queer values or ideology; however, these listed traits hold the most relevance for this project (Tong 1). Once one identifies the ways in which dominant ideology operates within popular culture, it becomes easier to see how subordinate culture works to enforce dominant beliefs, as subordinate culture circulates dominant ideology. We can also then see how oppositional ideology works to subvert dominant beliefs. As I will discuss in Chapter One, we can see the ideology-culture relationship in the hegemonic beauty standards circulated through the subordinate culture.

Furthermore, Gramsci argues that governing groups dictate dominant ideology, and these groups therefore possess great influence over economics, politics, and social and moral beliefs (“Hegemony” 211). He explains that ideologies “are real historical facts which must be

combated and their nature as instruments of domination revealed [. . .] for reasons of political struggle: in order to make the governed intellectually independent of the governing” (*Prison Writings 1929-1935* 196). Following Gramsci’s advice, the governed can uncover instruments of domination, in order to become intellectually independent of the governing. Popular culture exists as an amalgamation of conflicting ideologies, making it a prime example to investigate in order to reveal these instruments of domination.

Todd Gitlin takes a Gramscian cultural Marxist approach to popular culture, specifically looking at television media. Gitlin uses Gramsci’s theories of hegemony and ideology to look at the ways that television relays, reproduces, and packages “ideology that is constantly arising both from social elites and from active social groups and movements throughout society (as well as within media organizations and practices)” (“Prime Time” 253). He discusses how this ideology extends beyond class systems; ideology shapes views on race, gender, and sexuality, among others. According to Gitlin, cultural hegemony is not definitive; he writes, “major social conflicts are transported *into* the cultural system, where the hegemonic process frames them, form and content both, into compatibility with dominant system of meaning” (“Prime Time” 264). These oppositional conflicts are domesticated when they are framed into a message that, at least in some way, aligns with dominant culture. The potentially subversive ideas exist, but they become less threatening to the governing. For example, dominant culture could domesticate a message of gender equality if this equality results in the further Othering and alienation of a different subjugated group, say, women of color.

Overall, I agree with Gitlin’s understanding of popular culture’s domestication; however, I want to make a nuanced distinction between his views and my own. While I do believe that *Orphan Black’s* feminist message is on some level contained, I do not find that this message is

made fully compatible with the dominant systems of meaning. Instead, I argue, that in this process of containment, we can reveal the ways in which the series contemplates female independence and systemic gender power relations. Therefore, regardless of whether or not the idea is domesticated, I believe *Orphan Black* brings some message of feminist empowerment to the television screen.

For the purposes of this project, I will analyze two kinds of opposition to dominant (patriarchal) ideology: feminist and queer opposition. These oppositions counter the dominant “sexist ideology [that] serves the dual purpose of glorifying male characteristics/capitalist values, and denigrating female characteristics/social need” (Hartmann 21). Heidi Hartmann combines Marxist and Feminist theory in order to fully understand our capitalist society and the position women hold within it. She argues that feminist Marxists need to address both the struggle against patriarchy and that against capitalism (24). Hartmann explains that dominant patriarchal ideology is “a set of social relations between men” that create “solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women” and create hierarchies—both between men and women and groups within each—that work because society has “vested interests in the status quo” as “those at the higher levels can ‘buy off’ those at the lower levels by offering them power over those still lower” (11). By taking Hartmann’s approach to Marxism into account in my analysis, I can better understand how capitalism and patriarchy act together to create the instruments of domination Gramsci discusses.

Antonio Gramsci’s conception of hegemony and ideology will form the foundation of my analysis, as I will be relying on his understandings of these concepts. For this project, I will also be drawing on Bennett’s ideas about how the levels of culture and ideology function in popular culture, Gitlin’s understanding of hegemony’s ability to domesticate radical ideas in television,

and Hartmann's connection between patriarchy and capitalism. Bennett, Gitlin, and Hartmann's theories will allow me to investigate the ways in which *Orphan Black* circulates conflicting ideology and the message that is generated as a result.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter One I examine how dominant and oppositional ideologies play out and interact in the series' overall portrayal of gender and sexuality. Specifically, I look at how the series challenges dominant conceptions of gender roles, sexuality, and heteronormativity. However, the series does so at the expense of privileging a specific female body. Chapter Two then takes a similar approach in investigating conflicting ideologies, but looks more specifically at corporate values and control in the form of a specific patriarchal institution: a scientific corporation. I focus on the normative and subversive power relations between the Dyad Institute, which represents corporate values and patriarchy, and the feminine/queer family on whom the series is centered. This feminine family represents feminist values and an opposition to male control. However, as I will explain, even as the series posits feminist values over corporate ones, it still fixates on biological kinship. Throughout these two chapters, I will show that despite the series' seeming efforts, it domesticates its potentially radical feminist message.

When we examine how these conflicting, and at times contradictory, ideologies interact, we can see Gramsci's theory of hegemony play out. As I previously quoted, these different ideologies bring about unison of "intellectual and moral unity [. . .] thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group" over other groups ("Hegemony" 211). In the case of *Orphan Black*, this intellectual and moral unity grants women the illusion of universal autonomy, but, in reality, this freedom just belies cultural hegemony that reinforces other hierarchies of race, class,

and body legibility.

Notes

¹ Jessica Goldstein of *Think Progress* describes *Orphan Black* as “one of the most unapologetically feminist shows on the air, digging into the questions about female agency, reproductive rights[. . .] and personal autonomy. Who owns a woman’s body? Who gets to decide how women live their lives? Who has the right to stand in judgment of those choices, and what do you do when you are judged and found wanting?” and Jezebel’s Tracy Moore writes “It’s like a show you’d normally expect to be written with dudes [. . .], except written with women. It relishes in violence, action, intrigue, suspense, sex (for men and women) and sexuality (for hetero and queer) — a kind of Bourne Identity but with women, gays, clones and jokes.

² The series works to contain this radical message by domesticating it. By domesticate, I mean that the series presents this radical idea, but then tames this message and makes it less threatening by still reinforcing certain hegemonic ideas that work to keep a power imbalance both between men and women and within subgroups of women (race, appearance, class, etc.).

CHAPTER ONE.

FREEDOM, POSSIBILITY, AND CONTAINMENT:

UNDERSTANDING *ORPHAN BLACK*'S DOMESTICATED FEMINIST MESSAGE

A white van speeds down a street, eventually pulling into a garage. Two men, fleeing the police, are in the van, one of whom has been shot. The uninjured man, who is wearing a bandana over his face, helps the injured man out of the vehicle. The uninjured man removes his bandana and the audience is presented with a familiar face: that of a Project Leda clone. However, this face clearly belongs to a man. He has a goatee and speaks in a low-pitched voice; he is wearing baggy clothes that are coded as male, and his companion refers to him with male pronouns and referents. Having the same actor (Tatiana Maslany) who plays the other Project Leda clones play Tony is the only indication in this scene to the fact that this is a trans* clone. There is no time in this scene devoted to explaining the gender identity of this character. He is introduced in a high action chase scene that focuses on the two men's escape and the second man's injury, rather than being introduced in a manner that belabors or attempts to justify his gender identity. Furthermore, while it is common in popular culture to kill the trans* character, the cisgender character—the man who has been shot—is actually the one who dies in this scene. Judging from this fast paced and intense moment, we see how *Orphan Black* presents bodies not often seen on network or basic cable television. This series seems to imagine a space for bodies that are often relegated to passive roles and/or forced to reiterate common narrative tropes. However, despite these possibilities, *Orphan Black* cannot conceive of these less traditional bodies and roles without containing the radical ideology these bodies suggest.

As I will explain, there are inconsistencies in the way *Orphan Black* wrestles with gender, heteronormativity, and sexuality. Analyzing these inconsistencies in the series will help

us see how dominant and oppositional ideology interact. Through these interactions, we can reveal how *Orphan Black* domesticates the radical ideas it presents about gender and sexuality. The series conceives of scenarios and spaces in which female bodies wrest freedom from normative gender roles and narrow views of sexuality. However, the series does not imagine these freedoms as available to all; only specific bodies that align with dominant ideology can be freed, a vision of freedom that is limited at best. I argue that analyzing the series elucidates that women within the narrative are only granted this freedom if they still somehow fulfill patriarchal expectations and desire for an ideal and legible female body, making this potentially revolutionary message less threatening.

I will use Tony Bennett's Gramscian conception that popular culture negotiates dominant and oppositional ideology so that I can analyze the ways *Orphan Black* presents, and then domesticates, views of gender and sexuality that are still uncommon in television. This negotiation allows the series to convey a feminist, and at times radical, message, while still ultimately working to support a cultural logic that privileges hegemonic ideas of beauty and gender (Bennett xv-xvi). As I will explain in this chapter, oppositional ideology is articulated when the series subverts contemporary depictions of gender roles and when the series offers well-developed and non-normative views of sexuality. These non-traditional depictions of gender and sexuality are still rare finds in popular culture. However, by reinforcing stigma around queer sex and valuing a female body that is legibly heterosexual and fulfills patriarchal desire through visual stimulation, the series still circulates dominant ideology that contains this opposition. Investigating how the series plays out these ideological inconsistencies will illuminate the series' role in perpetuating hegemonic views about women.

Thin White Female—The Acceptable Woman

While television critics often hail *Orphan Black* as a prime example of feminist mass media, viewers must remain cognizant of Bennett's concept that popular culture is not solely a piece of oppositional culture, nor does it fully support the ruling class's dominant ideology. If we analyze how the series negotiates these contradicting ideologies, we will better understand how mass media both circulates and domesticates radical ideas like freedom from traditional gender roles. *Orphan Black* reflects women's changing role within society, but it also works to contain these ideas about women's new freedoms, or more specifically, about the women who benefit from these freedoms. I argue that the series shows women who are no longer confined by traditional gender roles. And yet, to gain this liberation, women must have a specific body type: thin, white, and attractive.

Most popular culture puts male characters in an active narrative role, relegating women to passive positions in order to progress the male protagonist's story; however, *Orphan Black* works to complicate these traditional male/female roles. *Slate*'s Jessica Roake writes that straight men in the first season of "*Orphan Black* are stupid, weak, simple, unethical, violent, buffoonish, and easily manipulated. [. . .] Like most women in the history of entertainment" the men in this series "are given the job of being reactive. *Orphan Black*'s men are simply inert without the women to activate them—they don't show any agency, display any power of individual thought, or demonstrate any critical thinking skills." The heterosexual male characters serve little independent plot function. They take on roles normally reserved for women: their narratives advance the women's plots, and they are not developed outside of their relationship with the female characters.

However, *Orphan Black* subverts traditional gender roles beyond that of which gender

takes an active narrative role; the series complicates normative roles of men and women in both the public and private sphere. Alison and Donnie Hendrix, a suburban married couple, best exemplify the series' re-envisioning of traditional gender norms. The couple starts a business selling (illegal) prescription drugs to suburban housewives. Alison and Donnie display their business relationship dynamics when Donnie is put in charge of menial tasks, like transporting the product, while Alison is responsible for more complicated tasks, like planning and managing the drug business and cover operation: Bubbles. Viewers also learn Alison is better than Donnie at completing physically strenuous tasks because Donnie is unable to lift heavy soap storage containers, but Alison easily lifts them. Furthermore, when Alison and Donnie want to buy Alison's mother's soap company (Bubbles) to launder more money, Alison's mother—Connie—hesitates because she believes Donnie is incompetent. Connie worries Donnie cannot successfully co-run a business, so she decides to sell the couple her company only after deciding Alison will “wear the pants at the new Bubbles” (“Community of Dreadful Fear”). Alison and Donnie's switch in gender roles reverses what is expected in male-dominated society. Alison takes control of the mentally and physically demanding tasks; Donnie's only responsibility is following orders, which he is not even able to do well. Alison is free to take on an active, typically masculine role instead of being forced to occupy a passive position in her relationship.

Here, Alison and Donnie's gender role reversal subverts patriarchal ideology which dictates that women should stay in the private sphere and only men can be successful in the public sphere. When Alison and Donnie occupy these unconventional roles, they illustrate that men and women can functionally take on nontraditional social positions. Alison literally exhibits more strength than Donnie; it's not just that she has better business sense, but she is physically stronger and able to lift more than her husband—threatening to make the male's position

unnecessary. However, Connie's repeated references to Donnie's failures to perform traditional masculinity hint at a dominant ideology that requires men to perform masculinity in a specific way. This traditional masculinity puts men in a socially controlling position, so masculinity is crucial to maintaining current gender power relations. Connie is characterized as narcissistic and judgmental, so it is unlikely that viewers are meant to agree with her assessment of Donnie. Nevertheless, Connie's view holds weight since the series consistently portrays Donnie as incompetent and often uses him as comic relief. Alison, in contrast, is never depicted as less of a woman for taking on the more typically masculine position, which allows the series to suggest it is natural for women to take on this role. In this scene, *Orphan Black* has a feminist moment, but to do so, the series reinforces a specific masculine gender code. Through this example, we can elucidate that it is more acceptable for women to take on traits typically coded as masculine than it is for men to take on characteristics that are more often coded feminine. Also, when Donnie takes on a weak or passive role, it is a moment of comedy. So while Alison's gender role reversal is an example of feminist empowerment, Donnie's lack of masculinity is a punchline. Therefore, it seems that it is acceptable to assume traits typically coded as masculine, but it is humiliating and comedic if one gives up or loses masculinity.

Even though *Orphan Black* depicts women who are liberated from traditional gender roles, it does so at the expense of women who do not fit with traditional views of Western beauty, effectively upholding hegemonic standards of female beauty and domesticating the narrative's seemingly radical message about gender. This negotiation is particularly apparent in the physical bodies displayed on screen. All of the well developed adult women in the series seem to be the embodiment of stereotypical Western beauty, as they are thin, white, and attractive (e.g. see fig.1 and fig. 2).¹ There are a few women in the series who do not fit this



Fig. 1 – Still of Sarah from “Variable and Full of Perturbation”



Fig. 2 – Still of Alison and Aynsley from “Entangled Bank”

ideal, but these women function differently than the women whose bodies do fulfill this ideal. Sarah Stubbs, a member of Alison’s community theatre group, is the only overweight female character. While she appears in six episodes, she is naïve and often used as comic relief. Additionally, characters often use Sarah Stubbs and her naivety for their own benefit, so she takes a passive role within the narrative. The presentation of the thin female body juxtaposed against the less traditional body creates a hierarchy between these two bodies that favors the former and positions it as superior.

In each season, there is also one minor recurring role for a character clearly legible as a woman of color. In the first season, this character is Meera Kumar, Alison’s neighbor. She has very few lines and mainly appears as a background character. In the second season there is Yvonne (no given last name). She is a rehab orderly woman of color who appears in three episodes. Finally, in season three, Marci Coates is the incumbent for the school board position Alison is attempting to win. Marci plays a fairly substantial role in this season; however, she is not a character with whom the audience is supposed to identify and is instead depicted as uppity, conceited, and self-serving. She is trying to rezone the school district, which will require

Alison's children to switch to a worse school: an idea that horrifies Alison. It is important to note that, historically speaking, the idea of a worse school typically stands as code for a more economically, ethnically, and racially diverse school environment and community. This possibility seems even more likely given that we are asked for worry about the possibility of Alison's children having to switch schools. It seems then that Marci is jeopardizing suburban families. *Orphan Black*, in turn, asks us to side with Alison and her white privilege over the one adult woman of color in this season.

When Marci appears, she is always antagonistic and condescending toward Alison, and she often tries to use trickery to get what she wants. Thus, while these "Othered" bodies are present they are not as developed as the thin white bodies, and viewers are invited to ignore or denounce them. In the case of Marci, the "Othered" body is posing an actual threat to Alison's privileged suburban life. In the series, these bodies exist in to bolster and progress the plot of women like Alison. This use of non-white bodies suggests that female bodies in *Orphan Black* are only able to claim freedom for themselves so long as they fulfill some patriarchal desire, in this case, providing visual stimulation for viewers. The presence of these "Othered" bodies seems to function solely for the narrative advancement of the ideal bodies. Furthermore, this hierarchy between women, while granting more freedom to those on the higher end, works to further subjugate the bodies that lie outside of traditional standards of beauty.

This physical ideal is further reinforced since the same actress, Tatiana Maslany, plays over half of the main female characters. Even though each clone Maslany plays differs in physical appearance, they all fit into a pre-determined standard of beauty, perpetuating (or should I say cloning) dominant ideology's ideal female. When viewers examine the male characters, it becomes more apparent that the series is articulating a female ideal. The main male

cast varies in race and weight: allowances not made for the leading women. Kristen Harrison remarks that an analysis of television “show[s] that thinness has become the norm, and the most desirable or successful female characters and media personalities are typically thin” (256). From Harrison’s assertion, we can then recognize that *Orphan Black* is following the norm when it privileges this specific type of body. In doing so, the series makes its feminist notions more palatable to governing and subordinate groups.

Taking these various cultural influences on media into account, feminist scholar Christine Glendhill explains that feminist criticism of popular culture must “perform a dual operation” of examining a text’s negotiation on an “‘imaginary’ level, internal to fictional production, and on a ‘realist’ level, referring to the sociohistorical world outside the text” (245, 246). If we look at *Orphan Black* as circulating conflicting messages about women’s freedom from gender norms and follow Glendhill’s suggestion to analyze the series considering this dual operation, then on the “imaginary” level, the series suggests women can be freed from traditional gender roles that place them in a subservient position to men. In the world of the series, women can take on this active and assertive role in their lives and their relationships with men. On the “realist” level, however, the series limits the bodies that are able to escape these traditional roles. When we perform this dual operation, it gives us a lens into the series that allows us to show how these potentially liberating ideas about women’s bodies are domesticated because these bodies are presented as favorable at the expense of the “Othered” female body. Additionally, this operation also illuminates a complicated cultural discourse surrounding women’s freedoms and social roles.

Even though *Orphan Black* reinforces a traditionally beautiful body, the series places responsibility for the creation of these cloned women on the government and a scientific

corporation (Dyad Institute), which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Two. The series implicates patriarchal institutions in the duplication of this ideal body. These institutions dictated the clones' physical appearance (and the clones' replication), but not their social and cultural development. Therefore, we can find a connection between patriarchal institutions and this specific enforcement of hegemonic beauty standards. However, we cannot completely discount the series' role in further advancing this favorable body type, since women outside of the Project Leda clones, such as Delphine, Shay, and Aynsley still adhere to this narrow definition of acceptable bodies. By reading the series' negotiation this way, we can see that even this seemingly radical subversion of gender roles is only possible at the expense of already marginalized groups, specifically plus-sized women and women of color. It seems that when the hierarchy between men and women begins to be deconstructed, and then the hierarchy between different groups of women must be further enforced. Within the narrative, equality for all women is an illusion because in order for this concept to be presented in popular culture it must be domesticated. Analyzing *Orphan Black* allows viewers to recognize the ways in which the series perpetuates cultural hegemony that makes more social allowances for women, assuming they still meet these specific standards.

Sexuality—How Much is Too Much?

It is not just in the series' conception of gender roles that we can reveal cultural hegemony's domesticating power, but also in the series' negotiation of oppositional ideologies regarding gender and sexuality. These oppositional ideologies allow the series to imagine narratives where women can depart from traditional views and tropes of sexuality and gender identity, but these women must still be contained. In the project introduction, I discussed Todd

Gitlin's argument that the hegemonic system is not definitive because it absorbs oppositional content and frames it into harmony with dominant systems of meaning ("Prime Time" 264). We can see this dominant system of meaning at work in *Orphan Black*. Often when television shows incorporate queer characters into their narratives, they rely on the same tropes, and these tropes offer limited representation of LGBTQ individuals in popular culture.² Dominant culture's influence on these tropes enforces a clear gay/straight and male/female binary and privileges heterosexuality. In contrast, an alternative view offers queer characters who are not confined to these limited narratives. Considering the ways that both of these ideologies are superimposed on the series, we see contradictory messages arise in the way the series treats queer bodies on screen. In the inconsistencies of *Orphan Black*'s portrayal of gender and sexuality we see the clear mobilization of Gitlin's theory that social conflicts are absorbed into the cultural system where they are framed into dominant systems of meaning. The series humanizes its queer characters and avoids common tropes often integral to mass media depictions of queer characters. However, while the queer women are well developed and have greater narrative freedom, these representations are still restricted in their visual presentation, as the series does not explicitly illustrate queer sex, and the series reifies the gender binary.

The series deviates from stereotypical portrayals of LGBTQ characters because it presents queer characters' sexualities as an important aspect of them, but not as their sole defining characteristic. While my analysis focuses mainly on queer women in *Orphan Black*, Jessica Roake's description of Felix, a gay man, illuminates the series' ability to achieve this balance. She explains that Felix's portrayal celebrates his queerness rather than forcing him to conform to heteronormativity. In an article on the first season, she writes:

Orphan Black's one fantastically vital, multidimensional male character is Felix,

Sarah's foster brother and moral compass. Felix is an artist/rent boy given to swanning about his loft in open shorty kimonos, so he's generally shunned, dismissed, or harassed by the idiot straight men of *Orphan Black*. He feels a kinship with the plight and alienating experiences of his literal and spiritual sister in the Clone Club, and takes on an increasingly active empathetic role in their lives, though the creators avoid making him the dehumanized 'gay friend.' Felix's open, televised sexuality excludes him from *Orphan Black's* point about the sexist, heteronormative confederacy of dunces facing down the clones. ("Empty Suits")

Felix's sexuality is not hidden or glossed over; he is the most developed male character. Additionally, he takes on an active role in narrative arcs, and these arcs function independently of his queerness, which keep him from functioning as the sassy gay best friend. Furthermore, as Roake notes, Felix is open about his sexuality and is not ashamed of his femininity, as evidenced by his "open shorty kimonos" (e.g. see fig. 3). He is the most developed male character in the series, and therefore, avoids being pigeonholed as a stereotypical effeminate, flat gay male character.

Fig. 3 – Felix (right) in his "open shorty kimonos" in "Conditions of Existence"



Like Felix, the queer female characters of *Orphan Black* are developed beyond their sexual orientation, and they illustrate that sexuality is a fluid spectrum. One of Cosima's series long story arcs focuses on her scientific research to cure the clones' genetic illness, and Delphine's narrative often revolves around her position at Dyad rather than her sexuality, suggesting that these characters' sexuality is not their primary narrative focus. By analyzing the development of these queer characters, we can locate the series' recognition that LGBTQ individuals are just as complex as heterosexual ones when they are not reduced to queer tropes.

The queer romantic relationships are depicted as natural and are essential to the plot: a still surprisingly rare feat in network and basic cable television. Cosima and Delphine's narratives incorporate their same-sex relationships, which is important for characterizing them in the same manner as the straight characters. However, the focus of this relationship is on the romantic connections between the characters rather than on the fact that they are both women. In "Variable and Full of Perturbation," after Delphine approaches Cosima about Cosima's worsening illness, the two decide to consume marijuana together and get "completely baked." While high, they lay on the couch in Cosima's lab with their hands intertwined. Delphine looks at Cosima and says: "There is something important I want to tell you. Je t'aime." The two proceed to discuss how Delphine's feelings led her to repeatedly lie to Cosima in ill-conceived attempts to help Cosima discover a cure for her sickness. Cosima then tells Delphine that to love her, she needs to love the other Project Leda clones as well. After Delphine agrees to this, Cosima states: "And I love you, too." While the two women had recently broken up, this conversation marks the rekindling of their monogamous relationship. Cosima and Delphine are not eroticized for the male gaze, nor is this scene intended to titillate the audience, as camera shots do not linger on either woman's physique, nor are they overly sexualized or naked. Neither

the relationship nor the characters are depicted as aberrant. In fact, Cosima and Delphine's romantic relationship is one of the fundamental storylines throughout the series. Most of the clones' romantic/sexual partners rarely interact with the clones with whom they are not in a relationship, but Cosima and Delphine's relationship is so central to the plot that Delphine often interacts with other characters and clones, especially Sarah. Delphine repeatedly demonstrates how much she cares for Cosima as she always puts Cosima's personal well-being before their relationship, which draws viewers in to value and care about these women's connection. Through these characters, the series invites us to see queer relationships as equal to their heterosexual counterparts. In doing so, the narrative works to expand cultural norms surrounding sexuality because it reflects developed and lived experiences of a group not often depicted on television.

This queer relationship may be depicted in a similar manner to a heterosexual one, but it still maintains some non-normative qualities, keeping it from being completely subsumed by heteronormative cultural logic. The women's relationship differs from the straight couples in that the former values the female clone collective in a way the latter does not. Cosima requires Delphine to love all of her sisters, but her sisters are also her genetic identicals, and no one knows how many Project Leda clones exist. When analyzing this scene, we must keep in mind that the term "queer" can refer to more than one's sexuality. To borrow the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, queer "can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances," as the term "can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality" (8-9). This scene between Delphine and Cosima is queer in more than just the women's sexuality. We see this idea of the recognizable mixed with the unfamiliar in Cosima and Delphine's relationship. To begin with the familiar, this scene elucidates the culturally dominant value

placed on monogamy. Heteronormative beliefs emphasize fidelity in straight relationships, so it makes sense that this expectation would expand to queer partnerships as well—it seems LGBTQ characters must partake in the same types of committed relationships as their straight counterparts in order for viewers to care for them as a couple. *Orphan Black* legitimizes this relationship by depicting it as fulfilling this normative characteristic. While the series upholds sexual monogamy, this scene creates an interesting and queer emphasis on one's family and community, which is where Sedgwick's idea of dissonance overlaps with resonance of heteronormative monogamy. Unlike a typical relationship, Delphine must love all of the clones for her relationship with Cosima to work. This relationship then has an unconventional value placed on the larger community, creating a non-normative family dynamic. It is not a partner's typical family Delphine is forced to love (which would be quite normal), but her girlfriend's genetic copies. While a romantic partner will often need to love the other's family, the series queers this typical dynamic because that family is comprised of clones, rather than the family in which Cosima was reared. Incorporating both traditional and unfamiliar elements works to complicate our conventional conceptions of what makes a family, and in this overlap, the series presents us with a queer relationship that benefits a larger community: the clone collective. This characteristic does not extend to the straight relationships. Cosima and Delphine's relationship works to subvert the normative notion of family with one that places greater value on an ethics of care and shifts the focus from the masculine values to feminist values I discussed in this project's introduction. *Orphan Black* works to instill the shift that Rosemarie Tong discusses in that the series suggests "women's capacities for care as a human strength rather than a human weakness" (163). The series values this feminist ethics of care, supporting the notion that women are not confined to a single path or quality.

Orphan Black also offers viewers a complex view of sexual identity. The series presents sexuality as a non-binary fluid spectrum, which challenges the common notion that sexuality is always a rigid either/or quality or that queer individuals just have yet to find the right person of the opposite sex. The series incorporates characters with a range of sexualities, and these are revealed at various points throughout the narrative. Viewers learn that Cosima is queer halfway through the first season when she flirts with and kisses Delphine; however, she does not self-identify as a lesbian (or with any other label) until the end of season three. By not defining her sexuality immediately, the series develops her character and attraction to women without relying on sexuality labels, and any associations that may accompany such labels. While Cosima's sexuality is stable, Delphine is sexually fluid, which allows the series to move away from showing sexuality as a stable binary. In the episode "Entangled Bank," Delphine arrives at Cosima's apartment, and Cosima apologizes for trying to kiss Delphine the previous time they were together because, as Cosima says to Delphine, "I know, I know, you're not gay." However, moments later Delphine, nervously biting the edge of her lip, confesses to Cosima that she enjoys being around someone who "gets" her and that she "can't stop thinking about that kiss." Delphine explains her thought process about her sexuality: "I've never thought about bisexuality. I mean for myself. But as a scientist I know that sexuality is a spectrum. But, you know, social biases, they codify attraction. It's contrary to the biological facts, you know?" They stare into each other's eyes, and Delphine moves past the social biases that previously organized her understanding of her own sexuality when she caresses Cosima's cheek and kisses her.

Here, Delphine calls the audience's attention to a dominant ideology that codifies attraction in, as she describes, opposition to human's natural biology. In doing so, the series illuminates not only the possible restrictive impact of social beliefs that paint sexuality as a

permanent stable binary for all people, but also suggests instead the possibility of fluid, non-binary sexualities. By showing Delphine consciously work through understanding her sexual fluidity and the cultural logic that surrounds sexuality, the series presents viewers with a socially prevalent belief that sexuality is pre-determined and stable and works to deconstruct it. In contrast to sexual stability, the series articulates a broader understanding of sexuality: sexual fluidity. Acknowledging sexuality as a spectrum and incorporating characters with fluid sexualities disrupts the sexual hierarchy between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Without a clear sexual binary or definitive distinctions in sexual preferences, the series begins to dismantle the idea that there is one superior sexuality and anything else falls in the category of sexual deviancy. Furthermore, when the series presents sexuality as a spectrum, it reflects an increasing acceptance for those who do not identify with a stable label, especially since Delphine is never disparaged by characters for her evolving understanding of her sexuality. One should also note that Cosima identifies as a lesbian, so the series recognizes that there are various possibilities for sexuality, both stable and fluid. This fact is important because labels can allow for marginalized groups to form a community around the quality that makes them outcasts from dominant culture.

Orphan Black's narrative presents sexuality as fluid and usually portrays queer and heterosexual relationships in the same manner; however, this is not the case in regards to representation of straight and queer sexual intercourse. This fact suggests that there still remains some stigma around same-sex sexuality as even a seemingly sexually open series domesticates its depiction of non-normative sexuality. The main heterosexual Project Leda clones are all shown having sex on screen: Sarah and Paul are shown having sex several times, Rachel and Paul have a sadomasochistic sex scene, and Alison is shown having sex (separately) with both Donnie and Chad (her neighbor's husband), the latter of which occurs in Chad's minivan, outside

of her children's youth ice-skating practice. In these scenes the actors clearly simulate sex on screen. For the queer characters, however, sex is heavily implied but never actually shown/simulated. While Cosima and Delphine date in all three seasons, the two are only seen kissing or laying in bed together after sex. Cosima's relationship with Shay follows a similar pattern. The women are shown kissing and lying undressed together, but never having sex. In comparing the depictions of straight and queer sex, we reveal that there still exists a hierarchy between these different bodies. The queer ones are not permitted the same freedom on screen as the heterosexual ones. Since the series refuses to show gay sex on screen, it not only suggests this stigma, but perpetuates it as well.

Clearly, if a feminist series with a progressive depiction of sexuality is reluctant to visually show queer sex then there is still a taboo aspect to depicting it on network and basic cable television. If only the queer female characters were not shown having sex, one could argue that the series is taking extra care to avoid fetishizing queer women. However, this pattern is consistent for queer male characters: Felix is never shown having sex on screen either. The narrative's avoidance of fetishizing women could be one factor, but its aversion to visualizing any type of LGBTQ sex suggests a link between this type of intercourse and cultural anxieties around non-normative sexualities. Comparing the sexual activities the series is willing to show with the ones it refuses to show illustrates a sexual hierarchy that places heterosexual sadomasochistic relationships and heterosexual extramarital affairs as more appropriate for television than same-sex intercourse. It seems that the series is able to show LGBTQ relationships in a more liberal manner because it domesticates these relationships by making them less sexual. *Orphan Black* does not go so far as to desexualize their queer characters (a common trope in popular television); however, their sexuality is contained to a less threatening

portrayal, suggesting that social stigmas of disgust are still present surrounding queer sex. Now stigma has taken the form of avoidance, rather than outright shaming.³

Furthermore, the queer characters' freedom in terms of sexual fluidity and on-screen portrayal only appear to be available to women who clearly identify along the male/female gender binary. The belief that gender exists as a clear binary and that one must be intelligibly gendered is especially pervasive in visual media, as there are few, if any, realistic non-binary characters on television. *Orphan Black's* dependence on legibly gendered female bodies exemplifies how this binary circulates in popular culture. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity allows us to better understand the ways in which avoiding liminal bodies in the narrative reifies traditional and normative perceptions of gender. As Butler explains, gender is a construction that "regularly conceals its genesis; a tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as culture fictions," with punishments for those who do not agree to believe in the gender binary, which "'compels' our belief" that this construction is necessary and natural (*Gender Trouble* 140). Since *Orphan Black* includes only legibly gendered women, the series feeds into this "tacit collective agreement" to perform polar genders as natural.

Even as the series includes well-developed queer women, it still suggests that these women must meet gender norms that allow them to be legible as straight. It seems women can have queer sexuality, but not queer gender. Butler explains that a set of cultural norms govern gender intelligibility. Gender norms allow "for certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such, [. . .] defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social" (*Undoing Gender* 42). Even *Orphan Black* defines restrictive parameters for gender performativity, suggesting just how engrained these norms are. These norms are most



Fig. 4 – Still of Cosima and Delphine from “Ipsa Scientia Potestas Est”



Fig. 5 – Still of Shay from “Ruthless in Purpose, and Insidious in Method”

apparent when we look at the female characters, as even the queer women adhere to legible heterosexual female norms. There are no butch women, as Cosima, Delphine, and Shay—the three queer women in the series—are all femme (e.g. see fig. 4 and fig. 5). All three women have long hair and wear classically feminine attire like dresses, blouses, floral patterns, heels, and jewelry: items all coded feminine. Since gender is created through sustained social performances, having women perform traditional understandings of gender reinforces dominant views about women and men and shows a limited depiction of (queer) women (*Gender Trouble* 141). Felix is the singular character not confined by gender legibility norms. While he identifies as male, his gender performance is feminine and fluid. He often wears decorative scarves, short kimonos, large sunglasses, and make up, though he will occasionally wear more masculine sweaters and button-up shirts. He is never mocked for his appearance or dehumanized for appearing feminine. It is notable that while there are more queer female characters with prominent roles, it is the one gay male lead who challenges gender norms. This dichotomy between queer male and female characters illuminates how dominant ideology’s distinct gender norms function to enforce specific iterations of gendered performance. The series may imagine a space where women can

be freed from traditional gender roles; however, this freedom is not extended to their appearance and gender.

To understand how *Orphan Black* addresses gender performativity, we need to look at Tony, the Project Leda trans* clone I discussed in this chapter's introduction. Through Tony, the series complicates the pervasive idea that gender is a stable and natural binary. Tony calls viewers' attention to the idea that gender is constructed; we cannot pigeonhole *Orphan Black's* gender construction parameters as being solely normative. While Tony is genetically identical to the female clones, he presents as male: he identifies with male pronouns, has facial hair, takes testosterone, and has a deeper voice than the female clones ("Variable and Full of Perturbation"). By including Tony, *Orphan Black* suggests that gender is not natural or pre-determined by biology. His gender differs from the clones with whom he shares identical genetics. If gender were natural and pre-determined then all of the clones would perform gender in the same way; however, since gender is a social construction, the clones are not restricted to the gender they were assigned at birth, hinting towards increasing gender possibilities. Furthermore, Tony is never depicted as ill or aberrant for his gender identity. There is one moment when Art, a police officer and friend to Sarah and Felix, refers to Tony as "her" and Felix quickly corrects Art, saying that Tony is "he." Since Tony demonstrates that gender is a social performance rather than a natural biological attribute, the series works to expand the gender possibilities it presents to its audience. These possibilities are essential because, to borrow the words of Judith Butler, "Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread. [. . . W]e should not underestimate what the thought of the possible does for those for whom the very issue of survival is most urgent" (*Undoing Gender* 29). A strict and pre-determined gender binary reinforces the pervasive belief that gender is biological fact. When one views gender in this clear divide it is easier to

hierarchize gender. This gender hierarchy usually places women as subordinate to men; therefore, characters, like Tony, who call attention to gender's construction, contest this stable hierarchy; they reveal that this hierarchy has no legitimate basis.

While *Orphan Black* includes Tony and challenges traditional understandings of gender by reminding us that gender is constructed, this more liberating view of gender is domesticated. The series avoids addressing the complexities of non-binary gender, making it seem that whether cis or trans*, one's gender must still be intelligible. Even though Tony's presence draws our attention to the performativity of gender because his gender differs from that of his genetic identicals who identify as cisgender, his presence still reifies the gender binary. It seems that the possibilities of gender are limited to those who are either male or female. Tony identifies and presents as male, rather than genderqueer, gender non-conforming, or agender. While this alone does not reify the binary, when coupled with the fact that the queer women also adhere to this clear binary, we reveal that the series cannot imagine a world outside of legibly male and female gender for those bodies that are biologically female: even in this fictional world that centers on cloning. With Tony, the series presents some gender possibilities, but is incapable of explicating further gender complexities in 43-minutes. Furthermore, Tony only plays a minor narrative role. He is not introduced until the end of the second season and only appears in one episode; his presence expands traditional understandings of gender, but only for a fleeting moment.

Television depictions of gender and sexuality that complicate cultural norms need to be contained within the narrative in order to be disseminated through popular culture. In the case of *Orphan Black*, these non-normative roles and bodies are domesticated by adhering to physical markers and traits that are intelligible and culminate in hegemonic beauty standards that read as white, thin, and attractive, especially if that body is female. It seems the only acceptable female

body imagined within the series is one that reads as straight, regardless of the personal identification of that individual. Looking at the series, we can see that notions of gender and sexuality have expanded to a certain point, but these possibilities are limited to certain women, which encourage competing interests between groups of women. These freedoms for some are only possible at the expense of already “Othered” and subjugated bodies that do not adhere to this evolving norm.

Notes

¹ For the purposes of this project, when I refer to adult women, I specifically mean adult women in the range of approximately 20-60. I am not including youth or seniors in this specific analysis of the female body.

² When the series started in 2013, most shows with queer characters—not on premium cable—focused narratives on coming out or coming to terms with one’s sexuality (*Glee*, *Grey’s Anatomy*) or desexualized and sanitized the, usually male, queer characters (*Modern Family*, *Glee*).

³ Martha Nussbaum explains that “For a long time, our society, like many others, has confronted same-sex orientations and acts with a politics of disgust, as many people react to the uncomfortable presence of gays and lesbians with a deep aversion akin to that inspired by bodily wastes, slimy insects, and spoiled food” (19). She goes on to argue that this type of view is still present today, writing “the politics of disgust is alive and well in America today, as many groups aggressively depict same-sex practices in such a way as to arouse disgust” (24).

CHAPTER TWO.

“I AM NOT YOUR INCUBATOR, . . . I AM NOT YOUR PROPERTY”:

REPRODUCTION, INFERTILITY, AND MOTHERHOOD IN *ORPHAN BLACK*

Feminist thinkers have long agreed that control over reproduction is an important theoretical and political issue. This belief is especially true now that reproductive technologies may offer both the potential to expand women’s autonomy over their bodies and new possibilities for creating non-normative families. Both feminist and queer theorists call attention to the cultural norms that define and privilege a traditional, biological family and heterosexual reproduction. These theorists examine how queer families and reproductive technologies can work to challenge the pervasive control of normative heterosexual order.

Reproductive technologies, such as in-vitro fertilization and the potential for human cloning, pose complicated conceptual and political challenges for feminists and theorists. Judith Butler succinctly describes the challenges surrounding these technologies:

Feminists who criticize technologies for effectively replacing the maternal body with a patriarchal apparatus must nevertheless contend with the enhanced autonomy that those technologies have provided for women. Feminists who embrace such technologies for the options they have produced nevertheless must come to terms with the uses to which those technologies can be put. (*Undoing Gender* 11)

Reproductive technologies seem to present possibilities of both autonomy and danger for women. These technologies do not inherently possess a specific gender politics but are instead rooted in the cultural, political, and economic contexts in which they function.

The first three seasons of the BBC America series *Orphan Black* explore the possibilities

and dangers of reproductive technology, specifically cloning. *Orphan Black* critiques the ways in which such technologies, when embedded in male-dominated corporate capitalism, can limit women's power. The series imagines a female-centered collective that potentially functions to mitigate the threat that corporate institutions—specifically Dyad—pose.¹ Yet, even as the series imagines this queer, feminist alternative as a potential solution to the threat of a male-controlled society, the series domesticates this feminist idea when it fetishizes reproduction and privileges biological kinship over the alternative queer forms of family that it appears to desire. In doing so, *Orphan Black* positions both fertility and biological motherhood as saviors within the narrative. While the series is uncomfortable with patriarchy's fixation on bloodlines, it still treats biology as the purest form of kinship. This power of kinship is so pervasive that it infiltrates even a work that appears to be feminist, such as *Orphan Black*, which longs to be free from this cultural logic but struggles to break away from it.

A Corporate Capitalist Threat?

Through *Orphan Black's* portrayal of women's role in non-normative reproductive technology, the series implies that Dyad's control over reproductive science results in the commodification of women. As I will explain, the series suggests its women can never truly be free from Dyad and the corporate patriarchy it represents, so long as they rely on Dyad's resources. Looking at the conflict between these opposing approaches to reproduction, we can juxtapose the masculine and feminist values present in the narrative. As I discussed in this project's introduction, I will be looking at corporate values as a specific representation of masculine characteristics. These corporate values are displayed through forcefulness, dominance, aggressiveness, and a desire to reify male domination and control (Gartzia 297; Johnson 7). A

further reason I am coding corporate values as masculine is that Dyad acts in accordance with patriarchal desire to reify male control over reproduction. Therefore, in the series, corporate goals align with those of the patriarchy. Feminist values, on the other hand, esteem traits like mutuality, caring, equality, and cooperation (Johnson 7). The series supports feminist beliefs that society should “value ‘feminine’ traits as much as ‘masculine’ traits” (Tong 3).²

For this chapter, I again will draw upon Tony Bennett’s suggestion that popular culture exists as a complicated negotiation between dominant and oppositional ideology and culture (Bennett xv-xvi). Bennett’s ideas will help make sense of the conflicting ideologies that circulate in *Orphan Black*’s envisioning of a world where cloning is a legitimate reproductive technology. Here, oppositional ideology appears in the series’ prizing of feminist values and in the ways the narrative values its queered and feminine family. Dominant ideology infiltrates the narrative when the series, as Todd Gitlin would say, domesticates its attempts to offer a feminist narrative, reinforcing biological kinship and motherhood. The series dramatizes Butler’s bind regarding reproductive technologies; however, it does so not by showing the wonders of this technology when employed by feminists, but instead by showing how Dyad, a scientific corporation that adheres to corporate values, has squelched the feminist possibilities and freedoms this reproductive technology offers. In doing so, the series posits Dyad as a threat to the Project Leda women’s freedom: a threat that seems inescapable. Dyad treats these women as inhuman products, and it attempts to suppress the feminist possibilities this technology offers and use the technology instead to reify its own power. It seems as though the freedom Butler imagines is actually unattainable so long as this female collective depends on corporate resources to utilize this technology. As I will explain throughout this chapter, this dilemma then acts as a narrative embodiment for the bind the series itself is in. *Orphan Black* envisions women who are

dependent on corporate institutions' resources in order to achieve their goals, much like the series is dependent on our current cultural logic and vocabulary to circulate any type of feminist message through popular television. The series contemplates this containment within the realm of the narrative, so we are encouraged to meditate on the containment the series' overall message must undergo. We can best see this idea play out when we compare Dyad's desire to maintain control of its cloning technology against Cosima's desire to use it to help her sisters. While Cosima desires to use science for feminist interests, she is incapable of fully distancing herself and her research from Dyad. In order to illustrate this, I will first look at the ways that Dyad uses this technology.

Having Dyad dehumanize the clones and treat them as products allows the series to suggest that this corporation only values the clones and the technology that created them in so far as it benefits the company. Dyad's interests oppose the clones', which encourages viewers to side against the corporation and the corporate values it embodies. Additionally, Dyad's specific motives for gaining control of cloning are never clear, making the company secretive and deceptive. When we look at Dr. Leekie, head scientist of the Dyad Institute, we can see the ways in which Dyad treats the clones as products. One example is the way that Dr. Leekie reared Rachel. Up until her adolescence, Rachel grew up in the care of Professors Susan and Ethan Duncan: the scientists who created the clones. The audience is occasionally shown VHS tapes from this time in Rachel's life that suggests she was a happy child when she lived with the Duncans. Dyad employs the Duncans when the couple creates the cloning technology, but they eventually have second thoughts about Dyad's desire to keep the cloning experiments a secret. When the Duncans decide to prioritize their family over their work (a choice often associated with women) and raise Rachel as their child rather than an experiment, they attempt to escape from

their employment with Dyad. As a result, Dr. Leekie attempts to both kill the professors and take control of their cloning science (“To Hound Nature”). When Dr. Leekie takes over, he treats the clones as subjects to further his research rather than as fully human beings: a view the television audience does not share. He performs invasive tests on the clones without their knowledge or consent, and in doing so, demonstrates that his only use for these women is in the information they provide as subjects. He cares about the data the clones can provide through blood samples and experiments, rather than caring for their well-being. It is clear that for Dr. Leekie and Dyad, these women’s only use lies in what they can provide to corporate capitalism.

Knowing that Dyad’s motives are selfish, it becomes clearer that when in Dyad’s full control, reproductive technology possesses the threat of, to return the Butler’s argument, “effectively replacing the maternal body with a patriarchal apparatus” because Dr. Leekie hints that he wants to replace women’s role in reproduction (*Undoing Gender* 11). One way we see this overreach is when Dr. Leekie briefly mentions that he is attempting to grow artificial wombs. Even though he never states his intentions with these wombs, this action seems to at least suggest that he wants to create humans without women, otherwise he would have little need for what seems to be a womb that functions outside of a human body. At this point, Dr. Leekie has already shown that he views the cloned women as products, so there is no reason to assume that he would view these wombs differently. Dr. Leekie treated Rachel in a similar manner, as well. He did not attempt to rear Rachel in an emotionally supportive environment. He groomed Rachel to become a tool for Dyad, and the two rarely, if ever, show any emotional attachment to one another. They are strictly professional when they interact, never having any personal discussions or sharing any physical contact. Their relationship illustrates a dramatized version of Butler’s fear that this technology could be used to replace “the maternal body with a patriarchal apparatus” as Rachel is

now perpetuating corporate values (11). She is no longer the happy child she once was in the VHS tapes. These videos can be contrasted against the fully-grown Rachel, who was reared by Dr. Leekie and Dyad, and now occupies an important position within the corporation. Allan Johnson notes that “patriarchy can accommodate a limited number of powerful women so long as the society retains its essential patriarchal character.” However, to do so women must “embody values culturally defined as masculine: they’[re] tougher, more decisive, more aggressive, [and] more calculating” than the majority of the men that surround them (Johnson 8). This is the type of powerful woman Rachel is. Now that Rachel is an adult raised by this corporation, she seems to embody corporate values and perpetuates Dyad’s desire to work for its own benefit.

We further read Rachel’s association with and dedication to Dyad as threatening because she is Sarah’s foil. It is clear Rachel is subsumed in corporate culture because she has taken up these traits of corporate masculinity, and she places her own and Dyad’s needs above her clones. Masculinities scholar Tony Coles explains that “within the offices of a multi-national corporation,” the dominant masculinity is “the slender, fit, young, aggressive” businessperson dressed in a “designer-label suit,” descriptions that apply to Rachel, as demonstrated in figure six (32-33).



Fig. 6 – Still of Rachel (left) and Cosima from “Governed by Sound Reason and True Religion”

Rachel is ruthless and aggressive in her attempts to achieve her goals; throughout the series we learn that she is willing to kidnap, abuse, and murder to get what she wants.

Here, we must closely consider how Rachel differs from the other Project Leda clones, as they all go to extreme limits and commit questionable actions to fulfill their goals. There seem to be two main ways that Rachel's actions differ from those of Sarah, Alison, et al. The first main difference is in the purpose of the action. Rachel's actions stem from a desire to help herself. Rachel kidnaps Kira because she wants a child. She wants to remove Sarah's ovaries so she can cure her own sterility. A desire to help their family motivates the clone collective's questionable or aggressive actions. Alison goes into the illegal prescription drug business to provide for her children and husband, and Sarah assaults Rachel to gain information about Kira's whereabouts when Kira goes missing. All of these instances show these women are willing to commit extreme actions to get what they want, but Sarah and Alison's actions are coded as acceptable because they are for their family's greater good. Rachel, on the other hand, is selfish because the only person she wants to benefit is herself. Additionally, Rachel's actions have a larger scope of harm than the actions of the other Project Leda clones. In the previous example I discussed, Rachel kidnapping Kira, Rachel reveals that she has no limit of causing harm and trauma to achieve her goals. We can assume that if she is willing to traumatize a child by separating her from her supportive and loving family, then Rachel likely has little concern about the impact of her actions on others. Sarah and Alison's actions rarely, if ever, directly harm the characters about whom the audience is supposed to care. By the time Sarah assaults Rachel, the narrative has already set Rachel up as an antagonist, so the audience supports Sarah's attempts to gain knowledge about her daughter in this manner. The women Alison sells prescription drugs to are uppity suburban women; women the series spent the entire first season depicting as self-centered, competitive, and

unpleasant. Therefore, through these two main differences, *Orphan Black* is able to distance and separate Rachel's actions, which the audience reads as corrupt, from the actions of the other Project Leda clones, which the audience understands to be a means to help characters they have grown to care about.

Furthermore, Rachel is so taken by corporate culture that it functions as her family and community as opposed to the other clones who bond with each other. Being reared in this corporate environment traumatized Rachel. She takes on corporate traits to the point that she is driven to instability when she is alone. She is so concerned with maintaining toughness and control over her emotions in public that she relieves herself of her pent up distress by sitting alone, drinking a martini, and watching childhood videos while slapping herself in the face and muttering "stupid" ("Variable"). During this scene, it becomes clear that Dr. Leekie and Dyad's influence have traumatized Rachel by treating her as a product rather than as a developing child. Dyad's control of this technology is a threat to women because the series repeatedly demonstrates this control's overarching purpose, perpetuating corporate culture and Dyad's personal power.

Through Rachel's relationship to Dyad, the series implies that the corporation's control of science is not only a threat because this control suppresses feminist possibilities, but also because it is potentially fatal to those who interfere with its goals. In her attempts to gain control of the cloning technology, Rachel risks the other clones' lives. She imprisons Sarah with the intention of performing an oophorectomy on her because Rachel believes this will help cure her own infertility ("By Means Which").³ Rachel is willing to have an invasive and dangerous surgery performed on Sarah without Sarah's consent, so it is clear Rachel values her own interests and those of Dyad (which have fused together) over the needs of the women who surround her. She demonstrates that she has no limits to how far she will go to achieve her goals—including the

removal of Sarah's reproductive organs. In this instance, Rachel's villainy is attributed to the fact that she valorizes women's fertility over all else, including the lives of living women like Sarah. Her constant opposition to the clone collective conveys the sustained threat Dyad poses and the lengths it will go to in order to maintain power.

Keeping in mind the series' depiction of corporate values, we can examine Cosima, the feminist values she represents, and her relationship with Dyad, to see how corporate control poses a potentially inescapable threat. Through Cosima, the series creates a binarized struggle for control of this reproductive technology. Whereas Dyad views the clones as products and intends to use the reproductive technology to expand its own power and control, Cosima desires to free herself and her fellow clones from the corporation's influence and counteract its threat. When creating Project Leda, Dyad purposefully tampered with the clones' genetic sequence to sterilize them, which I will discuss in greater detail later. This biological tampering is inadvertently killing the clones, and Cosima is positioned as the character best able to cure the clones and free them from their dependence on Dyad. Because Cosima's illness is advanced, her biology contains information needed to remedy the condition that afflicts the clones. Even though Cosima eventually works for Dyad, she repeatedly insists that she should have control of her biology and that she should decide who studies her biological samples: a plea that is ultimately ignored. Her desire implies that she has little faith in Dyad's dubious intentions. Cosima gives her biological samples (blood and urine) to her girlfriend and fellow scientist, Delphine, with the understanding that Dyad will not gain access to them; however, Delphine gives the samples to Dr. Leekie anyway because she (wrongly) believes he can cure Cosima ("Nature"). Dyad gives Cosima little reason to believe it has the clones' best interest in mind. The corporation's disregard for her wishes supports the idea that her and Dyad's overall goals do not align, which is the real reason

this corporation is a threat. Instead of assisting the clones, Dyad focuses on its own goals.

These cloned women depend on the very organization from which they desire to be freed. They are forced to sacrifice autonomy to gain access to the resources necessary for survival, suggesting that this desired freedom might well be impossible to achieve. Here, then, we can see Antonio Gramsci's idea that the governed are dependent on the governing (*Prison Writings 1929-1935* 196). The clones depend on Dyad for access to the information and material that they need to survive. This bind reflects the stronghold of corporate domination and the current Western class system. In order to discover a cure for the clones' illness, Cosima must work for Dyad. As a large corporate capitalist entity, Dyad has seemingly unlimited monetary funds and resources. Dyad provides Cosima with a state-of-the-art scientific lab, supplied with any equipment she desires and access to Dyad's limitless resources in exchange for her cooperation and access to her research. Cosima is forced to decide between using her research to save the clones' lives or trying to gain control over her genetic material and research. She is forced to buy into the corporate system because, with her and the other Project Leda clones' lives at stake, she simply has the appearance of a decision. In reality, her only option is to work with Dyad so she can use the corporation's resources to discover a cure. This illusion of choice mobilizes the idea that one cannot fully function outside of a system that has control of necessary resources. On some level, people are forced to buy into the dominant system in order to survive. It is in a similar manner, I will later argue, that *Orphan Black* ends up containing its own feminist ideas. Like Cosima's reliance on Dyad, *Orphan Black* relies on finding a place within the current popular cultural discourse to find an audience, which results in the series circulating ideas (biological kinship and fertility) that run counter to its alternative narrative; again illuminating Gramsci's idea that the governed are forced to rely on the governing.

Returning our attention to Cosima and Dyad's use of science though, we see that the freedom this technology can offer is tied up in Dyad's desire to control reproductive technologies for its own benefit. However, the series associates Dyad's corporate values with the irreparable damage committed against the protagonists. While there may be no clear path to autonomy for these women, the series locates this feminist threat in corporate capitalism and its all-encompassing control over material resources. These women are forced to be corporate tools to survive, implying that true freedom may be impossible to achieve. In creating this near dystopic world, the series makes us long for the possibility that these women will somehow escape from corporate influence; the only hope the narrative provides lies in the queer, feminine family on which the clones rely.

A Queer, Feminine, Clone Collective

In response to the threat Dyad poses, *Orphan Black* positions a queer, feminine family as a potential solution to address the clones' subjugation under corporate capitalism. This collective seems to be the only potential path to autonomy that the narrative imagines. The series places its feminist values in contrast with corporate ones. This opposition appears in both the lived experiences of the Project Leda clones and within the confines of the scientific laboratory. We see this opposition in the way the series contrasts male-female relationships with female-female ones. The series imagines that families can exist outside of a heterosexual order and potentially operate in a more effective queer/matriarchal one. The clones are created through techno-sex and are reared by adoptive, foster, or surrogate parents.⁴ These non-traditional forms of relation stand in contrast to the nuclear family that has been privileged for over a century. In envisioning this queer and uncanny family, *Orphan Black* positions a women's-oriented, queer collective as the

best path to these women's autonomy over their lives and bodies.

One instance when the series places Dyad and the queer, feminine collective at odds is in Sarah and Rachel's upbringings. When we examine these two characters, we see that *Orphan Black* posits this collective as a potential solution to the corporate threat. Rachel is mobilized as Sarah's foil in order to critique the corporate culture in which Rachel is reared. When Dr. Leekie takes over Rachel's care from Susan and Ethan Duncan, she transforms from a happy child into a controlling and narcissistic adult. Rachel grows up in a corporate environment that primes her to take over Dyad and perpetuate corporate values, which we know because she dehumanizes those around her. For instance, she discusses how Sarah must "come to heel": an idiom that most commonly references a dog-training tactic. This idiom is used to refer to gaining control over another person or thing, so Rachel wants to possess control over Sarah. Moments like this indicate that Rachel sees people as a means to an end to achieve her (and Dyad's) goals, like controlling Sarah. Dr. Leekie may take on the role of Rachel's father, but he treats her in a professional manner: the two are never shown having a personal conversation. Judging from Rachel, this corporate structure in which she grows up works to indoctrinate her with its values rather than encourage her personal and emotional development. While this change could be seen as a critique of the non-nuclear family, as Rachel's unemotional corporate personality begins after leaving a married, heterosexual two-parent home, I do not find this to be the most convincing reading. Instead, I argue Rachel's change actually allows us to illuminate the ways in which the series posits a matriarchal community as an alternative to a corporate male-led one.

Rachel and Sarah both grew up in single parent homes, which make them the best examples for comparison. Rachel is an antagonist. She endangers the lives of the clones with whom viewers are supposed to identify. She risks Cosima's life by withholding treatment until

Sarah cooperates with her wants, and she attempts to remove Sarah's ovaries without consent. We even see Rachel comparing herself to Sarah. Repeatedly, she asks herself (and others) why Sarah always thwarts her machinations and why Sarah can have children, but she is barren.

The biggest difference between Rachel and Sarah is the environment in which they were raised. Rachel is reared by men and groomed seemingly for the sole purpose of transitioning to take over Dyad, whereas Sarah's queer family consists of women or feminine individuals. This family is headed by Mrs. S and consists of four Project Leda clones (Sarah, Alison, Cosima, and Helena), Felix—Sarah's queer, feminine foster brother, and Kira—Sarah's daughter. Mrs. S is Sarah and Felix's foster mother. This queer family is developed in a complex manner. Mrs. S's relationship with Sarah is strained at times, like when they disagree about whether or not Kira should donate her bone marrow. However, it is clear Mrs. S always has Kira's best interest in mind. Mrs. S repeatedly states this, and her actions support it. For example, she offers to leave her life in Toronto behind to keep Kira away from Dyad's control. There is also no dominant male position in this family. Felix is a man, but he identifies as feminine and queer; he often takes a more passive role in the family, taking direction from Mrs. S or Sarah. Having a family without an active male role stands in stark contrast to patriarchal society.

Since there is not male to automatically assume the dominant position, as there is no father figure, the queer feminine collective is better able to operate in a collaborative manner. Sarah and Mrs. S are often forced to negotiate the authoritative role. We see this when the two women discuss whether or not they should allow Kira to donate bone marrow to Cosima. Mrs. S insists that Kira, as a child, should not be asked to undergo the donation procedure, but Sarah is adamant that this is the only way Cosima will survive. The two have an aggressive argument about which path to take. Eventually, they decide to allow Kira to choose what she wants instead of imposing

either of their opinions on her, which leads to Kira choosing to donate her marrow to help “Auntie Cosima.” This family welcomes Sarah’s clones: Cosima, Alison, and Helena. Even though these women did not grow up together and were not raised by Mrs. S, they are fully accepted into this feminine familial community. With this collective, *Orphan Black* imagines families that can expand in non-normative ways outside of marriage and childbirth. This family is not restricted by traditional expectations that rule heteronormative families and enforce male authoritarianism, which allows them to combat Dyad’s threat.

The four clones’ relationships seem to mirror those of reunited sisters; the first few episodes examine these women meeting and getting to know one another. They compare their similarities, like the first time Sarah and Cosima get drinks at a bar and Sarah asks Cosima if she also gets a dry patch of skin between her eyebrows (“Variation”). This exchange suggests that the women are in one sense familiar, yet are not well acquainted with one another. However, their relationship is more complicated than reunited sisters because they are actually genetic identicals. The uncanny nature of their relationships allows us to consider how Eve Sedgwick’s definition of queer applies to this family.⁵ Even though sisters typically have similar genetics, these women share identical DNA. Plus they look the same but possess starkly different personalities. These different personalities work to further illuminate the mesh of “overlaps, dissonances and resonances” in what is typically expected of a family (Sedgwick 8-9). In short, this family at first reminds us of a traditional one, but upon closer analysis departs from familial expectations. The familiar aspects allow this family to be legible to the television audience, and the queer aspects expand the narrative’s discourse about who can make up a family.

The clones come from the exact same genetic material, but they are different ages (separated by a few months), grew up in different cities, and were reared in different

environments. This family is a non-normative combination of genetic and chosen relations, and they have made the decision to form a family. These non-normative relationships are dynamically developed to reflect complex ways of interacting. Their differing backgrounds do, at times, cause dissonances from the traditional family. For example, Cosima and Alison have a brief argument when Cosima patronizes Alison because Alison is stressed about the opening night of the play in which she plays the lead, but Cosima finds this concern a bit trivial. Alison expresses her worry to Cosima, who is performing a pathology study on a deceased Project Leda clone. Both women are concerned about the safety of their collective, but because they come from different backgrounds, they are forced to come to terms with their varying concerns for their group's well being. Worrying about a community activity seems normal, but performing an autopsy on a clone is not a common experience. They are forced to navigate these unusual situations, and this multifacetedness authenticates the portrayal of this non-normative family. In this interaction, we see how growing up in different environments causes complications for this queer family. Past experiences and views do not always align and this causes tension. The series crafts a nuanced portrayal of this collective in order to show that it is in these fraught encounters that the characters actually grow and learn from one another.

The series values this seemingly unorthodox kinship since this family is offered as a narrative alternative to the conventional male-led one. The clone collective appears as the most functional and supportive example of a family throughout the series. While this family certainly isn't perfect, the other families are significantly more self-centered and dysfunctional. Rachel is traumatized by her family and, as I discussed in Chapter One, Alison's mother is narcissistic and manipulative, making this feminist alternative seem all the more appealing.

This queer family is central to the overall narrative. Sarah often risks her life to protect her

queer, feminine family, and the characters in this collective form the deepest bonds with one another. Whereas Sarah most often associates with women, or in the case of Felix, a feminine queer man, Rachel is surrounded mainly by men. Outside of Sarah, the characters with whom Rachel most interacts are Dr. Leekie, Daniel (her bodyguard and monitor), and Paul. Also, the narrative arcs most often center on Sarah, Cosima, and Alison, so their relationships with each other are the most developed. Furthermore, we constantly see the female collective working to help each other. For example, when Sarah needed to be two places at once, a police station and with Kira, Alison pretends to be Sarah so Sarah can technically be in both locations at the same time. This type of impersonation happens frequently throughout; the series seems to fixate on this non-normative measure of mutual support. Having these women switch roles with one another conveys a complicated message about women. The switches imply these women are interchangeable because they can successfully impersonate one another. Only two times in the series do other characters recognize that the clones are switching roles. The first is when Alison pretends to be Sarah, and Kira recognizes Alison is not her mother. The second time is when Sarah impersonates Cosima to infiltrate Dyad and Delphine notices the clone is Sarah. Both of these characters have intimate relationships (of a different kind) with their respective clones, so it seems that only those with these deep emotional bonds have the ability to notice that the women aren't interchangeable. Since these women are repeatedly able to successfully impersonate each other, the narrative suggests that these women can substitute one another. However, they do so in order to benefit their collective, which creates a feminist world where women work together to mutually benefit each other. When Sarah impersonates Cosima, she does so to sneak into Dyad and confront (and eventually assault) Rachel. When Sarah is there, she—as Cosima—convinces Dr. Leekie to increase the benefits of the job he offered Cosima. Even though Sarah is there to get

information from Rachel, she still goes out of her way to help women in her family and neutralize Dyad's threat.

When the female clone collective impersonates one another, it is for the betterment of their whole group. However, the one time Rachel impersonates Sarah, she does so to kidnap Kira, further illustrating the danger of corporate capitalism and the series' response in a queer family. Rachel, dressed and acting as Sarah, sneaks into the hospital keeping Kira, drugs Felix, and abducts the young girl, all in hopes of rearing Kira as Dyad reared Rachel, which we know since when Kira wakes up and sees Rachel, Rachel tells her "I know how frightening this all must be for you, but you'll get used to it [living at Dyad]. You may even grow to like it here. Just as I did" ("Things Which Have"). Rachel hopes to indoctrinate Kira into the corporate life, just as she was. Therefore we know that Rachel wants to perpetuate corporate values. Instead of treating this opportunity as a viable alternative for Kira, Rachel is made to seem threatening; after all, she abducted a child from her loving mother. And yet, this moment also allows us to further see how Dyad traumatized Rachel. In this moment, she clearly sees little wrong with abducting Kira because it helps Rachel achieve her desires. Being reared according to corporate values appears to have corrupted Rachel's moral compass, so even though this scene asks audiences to find Rachel threatening, we can't help but feel some sympathy for her because we know that she went through a similar experience when she was a young girl.

Rachel's impersonation further suggests that her interests are at odds with the clone collective. Judging by how the series depicts the clones' relationships, we see that the series hinges on feminine relationships. By comparing Rachel and Sarah, we see the series' critique of corporate influence on women beyond just its role in the clones' conception. The possibilities and fears Butler describes are playing out on screen. Rachel and her trauma represent the danger of

Dyad's influence on reproductive technology, and its desire to metastasize its control. Rachel even poses danger to future generations of children. She represents what happens with male control over science, whereas Sarah exemplifies the influence of a female collective. The latter is a favored alternative by the series.

The clone collective is also mobilized as a potential solution to Dyad's corporate threat through the women's response to the clones' illness, and in both Dyad's and the clones' actions we can locate the conflicting ideologies *Orphan Black* articulates. As I will explain, the series plays out this conflict by dramatizing Butler's concept of feminist versus patriarchal control of science. In doing so, the series suggests that the clone collective desires to use this scientific technology to limit the damage it may cause women whereas the corporate power structure is concerned solely with using the technology for its own benefit. In order to illustrate this opposition I will compare Rachel and Cosima's motives for finding a cure for the clones' autoimmune disorder. Rachel's motivations appear to stem from her desire to cure infertility and figure out how to make new clones, no matter the cost. Rachel works for her benefit and corporate culture of Dyad, and while it is also a collective, it functions according to corporate values. Rachel and the clone collective both go about pursuing their interests in a similar manner: often through trickery, like impersonating each other. However, since the series has already set up that Rachel is corrupt and working against the best interests of the protagonists, when she pretends to be Sarah to abduct Kira, her actions are seen as abhorrent and unforgivable, especially since her crime involves an innocent child. It is justifiable when Sarah pretends to be Cosima to threaten and assault Rachel for information about Kira because Sarah does this to locate and rescue her daughter. The series sets up that when Rachel pursues her interests through trickery it is because she is deceptive, but Sarah is resourceful and doing so out of necessity. This

further enforces the idea that Rachel treats people as property because she views Sarah and Kira as Dyad's product. For example, she is willing to harvest Sarah's organs in order to discover a cure for her own infertility and allow Dyad to produce new children. Rachel's actions pose a literal threat to Sarah's wellbeing. The threat Dyad poses is not quite as clear as the threat that Rachel poses, but both are dangerous within the confines of the narrative. Rachel desires to have children; the most information we are given about Dyad is that they want to use cloning technology to create little girls. Both of their wishes culminate into a cohesive desire to use the other clones to fulfill their wishes. These actions show Rachel/Dyad view cloning and fertility as products that will yield a benefit. Operating with the goal of one's own betterment is, according to Todd Gitlin, heralded as a crucial trait of hegemonic corporate masculinity, and supports reading Rachel as an embodiment of corporate values (261).

On the other hand, Cosima's interest in curing the autoimmune disorder stems from her desire to cure the clones' deadly illness. Whereas Rachel represents corporate values, Cosima embodies qualities associated with feminist values, like compassion, vulnerability (as she's often takes on the role of patient to help uncover what is ailing the clones), and even "a readiness to negotiate and compromise" as she's forced to work with Dyad and follow its rules to gain access to resources to cure the autoimmune disorder (Johnson 7). Cosima and her collective work to free themselves from being treated as property. Unlike Rachel, Cosima shares strong emotional bonds with most of the Project Leda clones, which we know because, throughout the series, Cosima and Sarah repeatedly share extended and touching video chat and telephone conversations. Furthermore, Cosima is not concerned, *per se*, with fixing the clones' infertility. She instead wants to ensure she and her sisters are not at risk of prematurely dying. Cosima's illness is the most advanced, so it is implied, but never directly stated, that her desire to fix the autoimmune

disorder is to prevent death. So in this comparison we see that Cosima is concerned with the overall health of the Project Leda clones, and Rachel's only concerned with them as a product. Through Cosima, this queer feminine family is then positioned as working against corporate capitalism in order to minimize Dyad's threat.

Comparing Rachel/Dyad and Cosima/feminine family allows us to locate how *Orphan Black* dramatizes this conflict between corporate and feminist value systems. It is important that it is with Cosima whom the audience is supposed to identify, rather than Rachel. This identification aligns us with the feminist value system Cosima embodies. The narrative treats Rachel as self- and corporate-serving, which the narrative implies is threatening (potentially deadly) to the feminine family upheld as the most valued and functional relationship. Rachel's actions, which work to demonize her and the corporate values she represents, are dangerous to the protagonists. Through Cosima, the series treats feminist values as less selfish and more beneficial to a larger community. In doing so, the series works to subvert the treasured corporate values.

Motherhood and Bloodlines

Even as the series offers this queer, feminine family as a response and potential solution to the Dyad's threat, the series' view on blood, kinship and motherhood is quite complicated. Upon close examination, it is in *Orphan Black's* esteemed female collective that we can locate the series' obsession with bloodlines and relations. At first, the series raises the possibility of alternative kinship and invites us to question what constitutes a family, but, in the end, it fails to create an alternative that breaks away from valuing bloodlines and biological motherhood. In examining this collective, we discover that while the series longs for a disconnection of

heterosexual order, it struggles to fully break away from the enduring power of the cultural logic. As a result, the series domesticates its own attempts to create a truly alternative family as it privileges and legitimizes biological kinship.

In leveling this critique against corporate values, *Orphan Black* often privileges biological kinship over the queer forms of relations for which it longs. This privilege demonstrates how ingrained cultural lineage norms are. While the series at first seems to offer this alternative queer family, it turns out that more than just the clones are biologically related. Looking at *Orphan Black* then seems to suggest that in order for a familial unit to be intelligible, it must possess some type of biological relation. Mrs. S is of the same bloodline as the clones and Kira. So while this family destabilizes normativity through its queer and feminine composition, this central family is still biologically connected. This revelation becomes clear when we learn that the Project Leda clones are copied from Mrs. S's mother's DNA, meaning that, besides Felix, this queer family is actually related by blood. The specific relationships become a bit convoluted. For example, Mrs. S reared Sarah, but Sarah is cloned from Mrs. S's mother, which positions Sarah as genetically similar to Mrs. S's mother, but reared in the role of her daughter, hinting at a web of unclear and complex relationships. However, in these complexities we can uncover that most of this family is related by blood. In one way, this connection actually further queers this family. This convoluted web works to destroy generational hierarchies, as there is no way to concretely delineate familial lineage of grandmother, mother, daughter, granddaughter. Furthermore, this labyrinthine genealogy makes it even clearer that there is no authoritative leader because the family has no definitive senior head member, making their family more anti-normative. Yet, even with these queer forms of relating, the series belies these relations with biological kinship. While the convoluted familial relationships function to call the audience's attention to the idea

that a family needn't look one specific way or follow a power hierarchy it comes with the caveat that there should be some type of blood connection. This queer family has been domesticated.

Through *Orphan Black's* depiction of biological reproduction and adoption, the series illustrates the seemingly insurmountable privileging of biological kinship. A value of bloodlines is most apparent through Alison and her adopted children, Gemma and Oscar Hendrix, and Sarah and her biological daughter, Kira, creating a hierarchy between women who can and cannot reproduce. Alison, who adopted children because she couldn't conceive, expresses jealousy and a hint of longing when she discovers that Sarah can reproduce. Through Alison's desire for fertility, the series creates a hierarchy between biological and adopted children, which clearly favors a blood connection. The series successfully depicts that Alison loves her children and it never labors on the fact that her children are adopted, only having occasional references to this fact. Yet there are moments, particularly early on, when *Orphan Black* hints at Alison's jealousy towards Sarah for having a biological child. This jealousy is most evident when Alison first learns that Sarah can have children. Alison discovers this information when Sarah tells Alison that she decided to stay in Toronto because she wants to be close to her family. The two women are speaking freely, but when Sarah tells Alison she also has a family—her daughter—Alison displays a puzzled, slightly troubled facial expression. She asks Sarah “Wait, your daughter? Is she your biological child or adopted like mine?” and when Sarah informs Alison that Kira is her biological child, Alison becomes quiet and turns away. Her face expresses a mixture of agitation and an attempt to hold back tears. The music changes to minor chords to further convey her sadness. Alison then loses her temper with Sarah, snapping that Sarah should have mentioned Kira earlier; furthermore, Alison's demeanor and behavior become more aggressive and contemptuous than mere moments before (“Effects”). Alison's animosity towards Sarah and the

scene's change in mood occur at the precise moment that Alison discovers Kira is Sarah's biological daughter. This knowledge triggers her reaction, which implies that on some level Alison is envious of Sarah's ability to reproduce. As Alexandra Hill explains, "alternative models of parenthood (e.g., through surrogacy or adoption) are lower on the reproductive totem pole," and this encounter between Alison and Sarah seems to support Hill (168). It is not just Alison's reaction that suggests a favoring of biological kinship. The mood and music of the scene also change to encourage the audience to empathize with Alison. The music slows down and plays in a minor key. The scene functions on the understanding that the current cultural logic already places alternative models of reproduction lower in the hierarchy; it draws on the understanding that Alison would be jealous that Sarah can reproduce but she cannot. This scene plays on these emotions and logic to ask the audience to empathize with Alison because of this apparent lack she experiences. While Alison is longing, even if only briefly, for biological children, Sarah never expresses envy that Alison has adopted children.

The series valorizes biological kinship most explicitly through Kira. The relative importance of Kira, the biological child, in comparison to Gemma and Oscar, adopted children, becomes clear through a number of factors, beginning with how often each child appears. Kira appears in 22 episodes, Gemma in fourteen, and Oscar only in nine (and never in the third season). Mrs. S often discusses how Kira is special, even referring to her as "a gift," which is language never used about Alison's adopted children—further elucidating how crucial this biological connection is ("Instinct"). Additionally, Kira is often of central importance to the plot, even saving the other characters' lives. For example, her dental pulp temporarily relieves Cosima's illness, and her bone marrow is a possible cure for the clones (until Rachel destroys Kira's harvested marrow). This ability positions Kira as the potential savior for Project Leda as she is kin

to all the clones. It seems the biological child is the key to curing the clones' deadly illness. Alison's children, on the other hand, are only minor background characters, and are certainly never put in the position to save the lives of any character. These adopted children appear briefly walking into a room or coming down stairs, with only a few insubstantial lines. For instance, when Gemma walks downstairs to find Alison speaking with Cosima and Sarah, all Gemma says is "Mummy, who are those ladies?" before Alison ushers her upstairs and out of the scene (and out of viewers minds) ("Variation"). In numerous ways, the series cultivates audience investment in and sympathy for the figure of the biological child, who is elevated over and against adopted children.

However, the series' view on kinship is complicated, and at times contradictory. There are a few instances when *Orphan Black* appears to recognize and complicate this cultural logic that privileges kinship. I find it important to look at the contradictions that arise when we examine Alison's children. Even though the series treats biological relations as the truest form of kinship, if we examine Gemma and Oscar, we can see, on some level, the series is uncomfortable with the cultural obsession with bloodlines and blood relations. Alison's children are not white, but are also not easily or definitively identifiable with any specific ethnicity (e.g. see fig. 7).



Fig. 7 – Still of Alison, Donnie, Gemma, and Oscar Hendrix in “Knowledge of Causes, and Secret Motion of Things.”

The series never addresses the racial differences between the Hendrix's and their children, which is troubling in that ignoring this fact glosses over any racial and ethnic complexities that may occur when rearing children who may have a different cultural history than their parents. Nevertheless, it creates possibilities beyond the normative, racially homogenous family unit usually depicted in popular culture. Samira Kawash remarks "scholarship on adoptive motherhood has also begun to address the increasingly visible practice of transracial and transnational adoption. Scholars have used adoption as a lens for interrogating and demystifying the cultural fetishes of blood and kinship" (982). Therefore, while it seems an oversight at best that neither Gemma and Oscar's race or ethnicity are ever addressed, the fact that this family presents transracial adoption as a viable alternative for families that cannot procreate hints that the series is beginning to question our cultural fetish "of blood and kinship"; the series is just not yet at the point of truly subverting patriarchy's obsession.

Orphan Black also privileges biological kinship in the value it places on motherhood; it fetishizes and romanticizes women's maternal role. In doing so, the series valorizes women's ability to become mothers. This value further reinforces the hierarchy between the fertile and infertile women and perpetuates the notion that motherhood is a role that women should want to assume. Biological motherhood is romanticized and fetishized through Sarah and Kira's relationship. The first season revolves around Sarah's desire to be with her daughter. In fact, it is because of her desire to be with Kira that Sarah develops a relationship with the Project Leda clones. Sarah bonds with them as a way to steal \$75,000 from Alison to finance her and Kira's escape from Toronto. However, Sarah eventually feels guilt and changes her mind about stealing from Alison and abandoning her new queer family ("Effects"). Sarah attributes this decision to her desire to take care of her family. She directly refers to Kira, but the series implies she also

wants to help the Project Leda clones solve the mystery surrounding their creation. This is the time in the narrative when Sarah begins confiding in Alison about her family and past.

One scene that clearly demonstrates the way *Orphan Black* romanticizes and fetishizes biological kinship is when Kira and Sarah see each other for the first time in almost a year. This encounter is a sentimentalized reunion between the two. Jeana DelRosso explains that popular culture that focuses on the reunion of the birthmother and daughter emphasizes “the recognition of kinship, the establishment of the familial bond, and the reaffirmation of the significance of biology and blood” (529). So we see this scene working to reaffirm the significance of bloodlines. When Kira first sees Sarah, she runs towards Sarah in slow motion with a harmonious piano track playing in the background, calling on the audience’s past association of reunion scenes in television and film which often incorporate similar elements (“Conditions”). We know this reunion is fetishized because it differs from Sarah’s reunion with Felix and Mrs. S. When Sarah’s first reunites with Felix, they embrace each other, but there is an underlying humor to the scene. The first thing Felix does, even before hugging Sarah, is jokingly tell her: “Oh my god. You look like crap. No, but seriously,” and the scene is accompanied by indeterminate alternative bar music rather than a harmonious piano (“Natural Selection”). Sarah and Mrs. S’s first encounter is tense. Mrs. S is angry that Sarah disappeared for almost a year and faked her death. The two never hug, only occasionally look at one another and maintain a physical distance (“Variation”). Mrs. S and Sarah are biologically connected, but they are not genetically mother and daughter, so they do not occupy the same fetishized position as Sarah and Kira. In treating Sarah and Kira’s reunion in this manner, the series fetishizes and romanticizes only the reunion between direct bloodlines and implies that Sarah and Kira’s biological connection is strong enough to overcome any wrong Sarah may have committed. Doing so suggests an overarching

power in motherhood and biological kinship: they are the truest forms of family, if we take *Orphan Black*'s lead. The series may offer a queer, feminine family, but even this alternative fails to fully escape these pervasive cultural beliefs. However, it is important to note that while *Orphan Black* privileges this genetic maternal role, it does so without associating motherhood with purity. In short, the series does not reinforce the Madonna/whore complex. Sarah is a mother, but she also embraces her sexuality. For example, Sarah instigates sex with Paul moments after meeting him so that he does not discover that she is impersonating Beth Childs. Sarah seems to feel no guilt or shame for her actions, and instead continues to have sex with Paul throughout the first season. *Orphan Black* may fetishize Sarah's role as mother, but this does not mean that she sexually repressed. While the series' feminist message may be contained, there are still these instances when it challenges cultural logic, showing that there are holes in *Orphan Black*'s feminist containment.

Infertility and Illness

It is not just in *Orphan Black*'s privilege of bloodlines that we see it domesticate its potentially radical feminist message. Even as the series works to challenge the conception of a masculine, male dominated society it still reinforces a commonly valued quality: fertility. The series' view of infertility is connected to Dyad's attempts to gain reproductive control, making it complicated to parse out what message is being conveyed through the series' portrayal of infertility. However, when one takes into account that the series positions fertile women and biological children as saviors and associates infertility with a deadly illness, it becomes clearer that the narrative privileges a women's ability to procreate.

The series locates the cause of infertility in corporate capitalism because it is Dyad's

overreach in genetic engineering that causes the clones' infertility. What makes the view of infertility complicated, though, is that in articulating the cause of this trauma in a corporate institution that tampered with women's bodies, the narrative itself links infertility with a deadly genetic illness. Doing so not only reifies dominant ideology that a woman's infertility needs to be cured for her to be healthy and whole, but it also literally positions infertility as life threatening. In presenting infertility in this manner, we see that the narrative views infertility as a problem that needs to be cured for survival and enforces a norm that a healthy body can reproduce.

Dyad's genetic engineering shows a corporate culture that views women's bodies as property it can control through genetic alterations, rather than as autonomous beings. This control results in a failure that is now killing the clones. When Cosima speaks with Professor Duncan in season two, he explains that when he and his wife worked for Dyad they purposefully incorporated a sterility sequence into the clones' DNA. This sequence was intended to create an autoimmune disorder that would "prevent ovarian follicles from maturing." Ethan Duncan explains to Cosima, "unfortunately we didn't foresee the consequences": consequences that are now killing the clones. The Duncans worked for Dyad when they created the clones and the sterility sequence, but after rearing Rachel for several years, they began to see her as a human child, rather than as a product. However, corporate culture is concerned with its own betterment as a whole, not with those who work within it, so Dr. Leekie attempts to have the Duncans killed. He does not want them to interfere with his plans that utilize the clones as property. Now that Ethan Duncan and Cosima are working together, he tells her, "we can begin the task of correcting my mistakes" ("Things Which Have Never"). The Duncans alter the clones' ability to reproduce and, in doing so, accidentally create an illness that not only sterilizes the clones, but also kills them. This knowledge reveals that the deadly illness stems from Dyad scientists' faulty genetic

engineering, as they did not foresee the consequences of their tampering. Had the Duncans' not attempted to sterilize the clones, the clones would not be at risk of dying prematurely. In the Duncans and Dyad's attempts to control women's bodies, we see unintended consequences that show these women's bodies were traumatized from this failed attempt. And it does appear to be a failed attempt. Two of the clones are actually fertile, and those that are sterile are dying. In having the cause of the autoimmune disorder directly connected to the corporate scientists who created the clones, the series locates the cause of trauma in this corporate entity because Dyad views these women as products and believes that their bodies are its to alter.⁶ We see here that this corporate dominated world that *Orphan Black* imagines is one of trauma for the women who are forced to exist within it. In doing so, the series presents the opportunity to explore the trauma of the commodified the female body.

Nevertheless, the series itself associates the clones' illness with infertility, as it is actually because of their infertility that the clones are dying. While it is common in popular culture for infertile women to be presented as lacking or incapable to live up to their maternal potential, *Orphan Black* literally depicts infertility as deadly. Furthermore, it reinforces the idea that a "normal" healthy body is one that can reproduce. Doing so creates a hierarchy between the seemingly fertile healthy body and the undesirable one that cannot reproduce, and the latter is punished. The connection between illness and infertility becomes apparent when Cosima and Delphine realize the illness killing the clones originated in their ovaries. The two women are performing an autopsy on a deceased Project Leda clone, Jennifer Fitzsimmons, when they discover an autoimmune disorder caused the polyps on Jennifer's lungs. These growths began on her uterine wall, which (according to the narrative) indicates that the autoimmune disorder originates in the clones' uteruses and then spreads through their bodies, leading to the realization

that this disorder is responsible for the clones' infertility ("Mingling Its Own Nature"). Fatality is an unintended consequence of sterilization. While the series makes a slight distinction between illness and infertility, such as in Cosima and Rachel's differing purposes of curing the clones which I discussed earlier, this distinction does not erase the underlying implication that whenever characters speak of curing the clones' autoimmune disorder they are referring to both the deadly illness and infertility. The focus on curing infertility and illness is a series long narrative arc. Johnson Fan Cheu explains the problem with cultural pieces that fixate on curing impairments. He argues:

As many Disability Studies scholars have pointed out, representations of disability in our literary and media culture are almost always negative, tied up in notions of the disabled body as lacking, diseased, sick, different. [. . . T]he position of a sick body in need of healing or cure and the reliance upon societal institutions of medicine [. . . is a] socially constructed and perpetuated phenomena. (Cheu 4)

The series then reinforces this social construction that infertility needs to be cured. The narrative presents two possible outcomes for infertility: death or recovery. The series never rejects the idea that infertility is a disability; it only further complicates the stigma around infertility. By ratcheting up the consequences of infertility to impending death, the series raises the stakes for curing infertility and then focuses several plots around saving these women. This desire to cure infertility results in these bodies being associated with a lack or sickness—working to Other the body that strays from cultural norms. The "Othered" body must either be fixed or destroyed.

Furthermore, analyzing the ill/infertile clones against the "healthy" ones illuminates a corporeal hierarchy that not only values the fertile body more than the sterile body, but also places it as a potential savior. We see this hierarchy if we compare Sarah's, who is fertile, treatment to

that of the clones with the disorder. Most obviously Sarah does not face the looming threat of death, but it is more than that. Sarah's body is actually positioned as a potential cure for Rachel's infertility. Rachel wants to have doctors perform an oophorectomy on Sarah in hopes that this will remedy Project Leda's sterility. The series in no way supports Rachel's mission to remove Sarah's ovary, as Rachel is consistently an antagonist throughout the narrative; however, the narrative still conveys to the audience that Sarah's body is healthier and more valuable because it meets normative reproductive expectations. And while Rachel's scheme villainizes her to the audience because she wants to harvest Sarah's ovaries (an admittedly disturbing idea), we are never challenged to consider that Sarah's body may simply be different, rather than better. Instead, her body potentially holds the key to curing Rachel's infertility. Fertility is therefore fetishized. If we consider how the series fetishizes both fertility and biological reproduction, it becomes apparent that even as we are presented with this world of imagined reproductive freedoms and non-normative families, the narrative still finds a way to fetishize woman's procreation. It is realistic to assume that women with infertility may desire the opportunity to remedy it, yet when the series connects infertility to a deadly illness that must be cured, it implies that infertility is a dangerous and threatening disability. If a woman isn't able to cure her sterility then the narrative indicates her only other option is death. It seems the worthwhile female body needs to be one that can populate. The series reinforces that a woman's infertility needs to be cured, instead of attempting to reflect women's lived experiences with infertility. However, while the series domesticates its feminism in this manner, its radical message is not fully contained. As I discussed throughout this chapter, *Orphan Black* implies that corporate commodification is a threat to women and a cause of potential trauma. This fact shows that, at least on some level, the series acknowledges, and even calls our attention to the bind created when a person (or television

series) is forced to function and operate within the oppressive system that they wish to escape. So, in this way, the series begins to give us a discourse to understand its own implication in reiterating a domesticated version of feminism.

When discussing television shows, Laura Tropp writes “sometimes art can paint a more credible vision of reality than coverage of the real” (874-875). And while she is specifically talking about the HBO series *Sex and the City* when she states that the program “confronts sex/gender stereotypes regarding women and motherhood. Yet, the show is limited in its ability to break completely new ground in its exploration of motherhood,” the same idea holds true for *Orphan Black* (874-875). Even as a science fiction series, *Orphan Black* presents viewers with a “credible vision” of the issues surrounding motherhood, reproduction, and women. We can see how the series longs for a disconnection in normative forms of relation that privilege a male dominated society. However, due to the power of cultural logic that privileges biological kinship and fetishizes motherhood, the series must domesticate its non-normative alternatives. In domesticating this message, *Orphan Black* ends up reiterating a value of blood relations even as it attempts to imagine feminine and queer forms of relating. The series ultimately positions fertility and biological motherhood as saviors for society’s problems and, in doing so, reveals an obsession that obfuscates into the series’ otherwise queer narrative.

Notes

¹ In chapter one, I discuss how Eve Sedgwick expands the use of the term queer beyond sexuality. It can “refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances” (8-9). When I use queer here, I am drawing from this definition and understanding of the word.

² While this is *a* common feminist belief, it is important that there is not unitary/monolithic feminist ideology. Different feminists have altering views about what makes a trait feminist, and I do not want to universalize one standard set of feminist beliefs.

³ An oophorectomy is a surgical operation to remove a woman’s ovaries.

⁴ My use of the term techno-sex derives from Steve Garlick. He uses this term to refer to the process of creating humans through cloning, as this reproductive technology does not require “male and female contributions” (140). He elaborates that cloning “evokes not (hetero)sex but techno-sex” and that techno-sex challenges “that processes of reproduction must always proceed according to a natural (hetero)sexual order (140).

⁵ Again, I am drawing on Eve Sedgwick’s understanding of “queer.”

⁶ It is also interesting to note that the male Project Castor clones are not infertile. While there is not enough time in this project to analyze this in-depth, it goes to further support the idea that Dyad Institute went to deliberate lengths to take bodily autonomy (through reproduction) away from the Project Leda clones.

CONCLUSION

Whether we analyze *Orphan Black's* narrative or subtext, we can, as feminist thinkers, discover and understand the ways that our dominant Western culture works to contain feminist ideals in a male dominated society. As I explained in Chapters One and Two, the series calls our attention to certain methods patriarchal institutions use to control women. The narrative critiques gender roles, heteronormativity, and men's attempts to control women's bodies. Nevertheless, the series suggests that women must be of a certain physique to gain this autonomy: specifically thin, white, attractive, and fertile. In Chapter One, I explored the series' portrayal of a society that tries to constrain women, and its offer of a feminist alternative. The series provides this alternative by prizing female and queer characters that complicate normative gender roles. Chapter Two then sets up and examines the effects of men's attempts to control female reproduction and the harm this brings the Project Leda clones.

The current conversation around *Orphan Black* focuses on how the series offers a feminist narrative through its characters and plotlines, and I agree with this popular assessment, to a certain extent. I find the series provides a story that imagines a world where women have freedom from inflexible gender roles and restrictive conceptions of sexuality. Furthermore, examining the series allows us to see women who have subverted "male economic, political, and social power over women," which runs counter to the typical television narrative in the twenty-first century (Smuts 22). However, I find that this conversation overlooks the less obvious ways in which the series limits the groups of women who can imagine this freedom for themselves. Even though feminist ideas are at the forefront of the narrative, these ideas are accompanied by a more obscure, yet deep-rooted message that works to contain these more radical ideas. Disseminated in these feminist messages is the implication that women must look certain way,

the understanding that their body should work in a specific manner, and an obsession with continuing a family's bloodline: all of which work to domesticate the series' potentially liberating and revolutionary themes. This distinction and understanding is important because of the possible risks of reading the series as a paragon of feminist values. To begin, there is no singular or unitary set of feminist values; even more though, if we don't investigate what meaning the series generates, and we take its lauded feminist message at face value, then we risk assuming that we are in a post-feminist society and that no more work needs to be done to challenge current gender power relations.

Orphan Black's contradictory messages may seem at odds, but in them we can see the domesticating powers of cultural hegemony. Elaborating on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Todd Gitlin notes, "popular culture is one crucial institution where the rival claims of ideology are sometimes pressed forward, sometimes reconciled in imaginative form. Popular culture absorbs oppositional ideology, adapts it to the contours of the core hegemonic principles, and domesticates it; at the same time, popular culture is a realm for the expression of forms of resistance and oppositional ideology" ("Television's Screens" 242). Through the contradictions I discuss in both chapters, I examine how "rival claims of ideology" are expressed. For instance, the series portrays queer individuals as developed humans with their own narrative function, rather than just as queer tropes with little relevance outside of advancing the plots of the heterosexual characters, like the tokenized gay, the gay best friend, or the February sweeps female bisexual.¹ But because popular culture absorbs and domesticates oppositional ideology, queer women who are granted narrative freedom must be read by the audience as legibly heterosexual and female, and more specifically feminine. Looking at the series while considering Gramsci's conception of hegemony, we can see how popular culture expresses ideas that

challenge our cultural beliefs. Hegemony hence works to alter and contain these feminist views, so they are less threatening to masculine and patriarchal ideology. *Orphan Black* is able to present these non-traditional views on gender and sexuality because radical elements of race, class, gender legibility, etc. are contained. The subversive ideas the series explores are diluted as the series caters to the view that women can never truly be free from male-dominated society. While the series showcases these forms of rebellion, it also relies on stereotypical and narrow ideas about both women and kinship.

In his article discussing hegemony and ideology, Todd Gitlin references the ideas of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. He discusses how these critical theorists “argued with great force that the dominant forms of commercial (‘mass’) culture were crystallizations of authoritarian ideology; yet despite the ingenuity and brilliance of particular feats of critical exegesis, they seemed to be arguing that the ‘culture industry’ was not only meretricious but wholly and statically complete” (“Prime Time” 252). Gitlin offers a more nuanced and flexible understanding of popular culture’s role in reproducing and relaying ideology, which I find better reflects the current state of this type of mass media. I want to return to the Gitlin quote that I referenced in my introduction, as his understanding of hegemony is curial to my argument. Again, he explains:

One point should be clear: the hegemonic system is not cut-and-dried, not definitive. It has continually to be reproduced, continually superimposed, continually to be negotiated and managed, in order to override [. . .] opposition forms. To put it another way: major social conflicts are transported *into* the cultural system, where the hegemonic process frames them, form and content both, into compatibility with dominant system of meaning. (“Prime Time” 264)

Looking at *Orphan Black*, and popular culture in general, we can reveal how this cultural system is negotiated and managed. I do find that many television shows, especially those on major networks, operate as Adorno and Horkheimer describe. They act solely as meretricious artifacts to perpetuate the idea that women are subordinate to men and function as visual stimulants for viewers. However, investigating a more complex series, like *Orphan Black*, illustrates the nuanced process of hegemonic systems Gitlin describes. Gitlin's take on Gramsci's theory of hegemony and ideology provides us with a lens to unpack and understand the message that seemingly feminist media actually convey through contradicting narratives, iconography, and subtext. Television shows can domesticate these feminist ideals about women's autonomy by limiting the female characters' that are able to achieve this autonomy. Doing so normalizes a hierarchy for women because the audience sees this hierarchy constantly reflected on their screen. It seems that in order for women's autonomy to be palatable to the governing group, women must fulfill certain requirements to gain this power. Those women who do not fulfill these specifications are then further relegated to the lower hierarchical position. Having non-conformist views presented along side traditional ones tames feminist opposition and normalize status quo. We can follow Gramsci's suggestion that if the governed uncover "instruments of domination," they can begin to institute their own hegemony. Therefore, media plays an important role as it gives us the opportunity to locate these instruments. When we analyze television shows like *Orphan Black*, we see how media articulates forms of domination, and then we can begin to address them.

I also want to note that these hegemonic beauty standards are not limited to the actual television show. *Orphan Black's* valuing of a specific female body resonates past the confines of the narrative. After the series aired two successful seasons, the clothing store Hot Topic released

an official tie-in clothing line to accompany the release of *Orphan Black*'s third season. Hot Topic is an American retail chain that specializes in “alternative culture-related clothing and accessories,” and their customer base is adolescent to young adult girls and boys (“Hot Topic”).



Fig. 8 – An advertisement for the Hot Topic *Orphan Black* clothing line. The Sarah, Cosima, and Helena outfits.

Customers can purchase an outfit in order to dress themselves as specific characters from *Orphan Black* (e.g. see fig. 8). The available outfits are modeled on Sarah, Cosima, Alison, and Helena. A Rachel outfit is conspicuously absent. The same woman models each outfit, and she, just as Tatiana Maslany, also adheres to traditional standards of Western feminine beauty. In fact, she appears to be even thinner than Maslany, possessing the type of body most often associated with models. The Sarah and Cosima outfits appear to be direct replicas from the series. Helena’s dress and coat also appear in the actual narrative; however, there is also a sheer (Caucasian) skin colored shirt that, while simply called “Orphan Black Mesh Top,” possesses a “burgundy graphic of scarred angel wings on back” that reference the wounds we see Helena carving into her back in season one (“Hot Topic”). With this “mesh top,” Hot Topic seems to be turning a traumatized body into a gimmick that allows the company to make money from the

concept of self-mutilation and religious abuse.² The Alison outfit stands apart from the other clothing options because her corresponding outfit does not appear in the series and the outfit is not something the character would likely wear. This outfit is a dress and cardigan, which in general could be found in Alison's closet, however, both items have glue guns embroidered on them—glue guns that look suspiciously like actual guns. Alison enjoys crafting, but it seems strange that the clothing creators would make this singular outfit not directly based on clothes in the series. Hot Topic sells clothes that are what marketers term edgy; if Alison were to shop at a typical mall retail store, she would likely buy clothes from Nordstrom or J. Crew. In printing clothing with images of guns, these items become ironic, and therefore, more suitable for Hot Topic's brand of "alternative culture-related clothing."

Additionally, the sizing and pricing of this clothing line both capitalizes on and reinforces the value placed upon thin female bodies. The Hot Topic line is actually created in junior sizes; so while sizes range from XS to 3XL, they are not as large as they seem as sizing is not in women's sizes. Approximately, a junior XS is equivalent to smaller than an adult size 0 (women's sizes do not have a small enough measurement), and a junior 3XL would equate to woman's size 16/18. I want to note that while the clothes are in junior sizes, the model wearing them appears to be in her late teens or early twenties: not the key age for girl's junior clothing. Hot Topic's plus-size brand, Torrid, however, does carry the clothing line in additional sizes, up to a woman's size 28. That being said, Torrid's version of the clothing line varies in two main ways. The plus-size model appears to be a woman of color. So it seems that thinness and whiteness are valued in one body, reinforcing a hierarchy between the ideal body and the "Othered" body. There is also a significant price difference between the Hot Topic and Torrid clothes. Alison's dress from Hot Topic is \$29.63, whereas the same dress from Torrid is \$68.50.

More than double the price of the original item (Young; Torrid). Judging from these outfits and their accompanying advertisements, women who do not meet traditional standards of Western beauty literally have to pay extra to buy into the capitalist system if they wish to emulate their favorite characters. More work would need to be done in order to analyze the impact of this clothing line; however, one message is clear. While the television series just seems to suggest that there is an ideal body, the clothing line more explicitly expresses the idea that if a woman doesn't meet beauty expectations then she needs to fulfill some other—in this case monetary—ones instead.

Furthermore, this clothing line acts as evidence that *Orphan Black's* radical feminist message is not only domesticated, but also commodified. The series' ideas of feminist empowerment are literally being packaged and sold through the opportunity to dress like a character from the series. The offered female rebellion is now being further contained—this time through this commodification. This clothing line presents these feminist ideals in a way that feeds back into the capitalist system. Women's rebellion is being used to support capitalism.

Orphan Black meditates on the theme of women's autonomy both from men and the corporate capitalist system. However, as I have shown throughout this project, while the clones may insist "I am not your property," the series itself, at least to some degree, can never be truly free from the quagmire that is the Western hegemonic system. Like the female bodies that must be legible to make their queerness acceptable, the series itself inherits a cultural vocabulary it must use to be intelligible to its audience. As a result, any potentially radical message must be articulated through these cultural restraints. So we should not completely ignore the feminist messages that the series is able to convey. Both the surface meaning and subtexts must be investigated to fully understand what the series suggests about femininity, identity, and kinship.

The idea of not being one's property is hypothetically empowering, but in a capitalistic patriarchal society, it seems near impossible to fully function outside of a power system that enforces and benefits those who govern. It appears that in *Orphan Black's* containment, the series gives us the opportunity to contemplate female empowerment and the ways that it can currently be articulated and function through popular culture.

Notes

¹ The February sweeps bisexual trope occurs when a television series has one of its main female characters become bisexual for an episode or two during the television ratings gathering time in this month. Television shows will advertise women kissing in order to draw in more viewers during this month. Often after the ratings period, the recurring character will return to heterosexuality and never again be interested in women. This trope can be seen in television shows like *Rosanne*, *Friends*, and *The O.C.*

² Helena has been reared by religious fundamentalists called Proletheans. This group taught her to self-mutilate her body. There are several scenes in season one that show Helena carving angel wings into her back with a razor blade.

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