

**DECONSTRUCTED DESIRABILITY A CRITICAL STUDY OF QUEER
SEXUALITIES IN THE TV ADAPTATION OF PIPER KERMAN'S *ORANGE IS THE
NEW BLACK***

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ABSTRACT: *With the intention to pinpoint queer identities within all-female correctional institutions, a research has been conducted on the TV series Orange Is the New Black, whose miscellany of queer personae allows for an inclusive examination. Essential to the study's argumentation is, whether the prison environment provides women with the potential to rise above masculine power relations and norms, by way of adopting transgressive sexual patterns of behavior. Heterosexuality is limited to inmate-staff's consensual and nonconsensual interactions. Expounded on through reference to the role imprisonment plays in its emergence, homosexuality is categorized into three different groupings within the confines. Thereafter, the discussion comes to an end by bringing to notice bisexual patterns of behavior. In closing, it is claimed that queer sexualities appear in women's prisons more than the society at large; it is due both to the potentiality inmates' primal concentration in an all-female correctional facility brings about, and deprivations and pains of imprisonment that cannot be dealt with, unless through substitution by queer sexuality.*

KEY WORDS: Queer Theory, Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, Bisexuality.

INTRODUCTION

Ungrounded as queer studies is, there are limited specific formulations to define it theoretically as a school of thought. It is constituted, in plain words, on the basis of a partial repudiation of feminist and sexuality studies conceptions, especially identity. Feminist activists' struggle to refute identity stability was, to a certain extent, followed by queer theorists; the latter diverged, however, at the point where woman identity construction was achieved, by the avowal that all identities should be deconstructed. As an ensuing phenomenon to feminism, queer theory has not to a serious extent focused on women, and almost seldom has it subjected to scientific analysis queer sexual outlets in women's prisons. Literally meaning, in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (2004) "differing in some off way from what is usual or normal" (C. Mish 2004: 1020) 'queer' has specific implications as an adjective quite similar to the common definition given above. Queer studies or queer theory, firstly named and given credence to by Teresa de Lauretis at a conference in the 1990s, in a similar manner, refers to that which strays away from the normal as far as sexuality and related discussions are concerned. Defining queer theory is not an easy task, seeing that it is basically predicated on the negation of fixities and dichotomies.

Normativity is, as Spargo contends, "a type of operation of power that establishes and promotes a set of norms (of behaviour, of being);" heterosexuality is normal, because "the normativity of current understandings of sex grants it the status of a norm, defined against *abnormal* practices and desires" (Spargo 1999: 74). By way of foreclosing heterosexuality's supposed centrality, not only does queer studies refute the very existence of the hetero-norm, but also it makes way for the normalization of 'abnormal' sexualities. It is intended, in this article, to

apply queer theory on the all-female prison as depicted in the TV series *Orange Is the New Black*, so as to subject to scrutiny so-called abnormal sexualities within female correctional institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effort has been made, in this article, to study women's sexual deviations, with respect to practices of transgressive heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality that appear behind bars. In so doing, theorizations extracted from particular theoreticians is brought to notice: inmate-staff heterosexual encounters are studied from the viewpoint of Angela Pardue and her editorial board; homosexuality is discussed in terms of hypotheses Gresham Sykes puts forth, which describe the reason why inmates adopt homosexual behavioral patterns, also, types of homosexuality which find corresponding counterparts among prison inhabitants are introduced by Fedwa Malti-Douglas; thereafter, based on Simon LeVay's justification, bisexuality is to be traced through incarcerated women's behavioral patterns.

Approach and Methodology

With respect to the above-stated outline, contra-normative sexualities that are most prevalent among incarcerated women, will be elaborated on. In *Sex and Sexuality in Women's Prisons: a Preliminary Typological Investigation* (2011), staff's sexual misuse of power is categorized in the exercise of "manipulation," "compliance," and "coercion," which are to be studied in sequence. The least extreme in effect, manipulation is conceived of as a "quid pro quo relationship," concentrated on a mutual give and take; usually, the officer demands sexual fulfilment in return for petty objects or favors the inmate asks for, such as drugs, cigarettes, a mirror, a job assignment, and the like. The sexual misuse of power, compliance, explains the sort of relationship in which an inmate, totally unwillingly, allows a correctional officer to abuse her; either threatened to be punished in case she refuses the order, or guaranteed protection against a perturbing situation or person, the woman finds it worth to take the deal. Characterized by force, the utmost form of violence acted out on woman convicts is manifested in the practice of coercion; here, the former give-and-take relationships, thus, the prisoner's blessing is absent. The most frequent type of coercion is seen in the practice of rape (cf. Pardue et al. 2011: 290). US government's most recent policy for the cessation of such activity, legislated in 2003, is the "National Prison Rape Elimination Act (NPREA)" (Spade 2012: 192); with the growing number of assaults on female inmates, it is necessary to put to question the policy's effectiveness.

Queer theorization's spectrum extends to include a diverse range of social, political, and psychological analyses. With respect to that, an effort was made to develop Gresham Sykes's general body of ideas into a particular dichotomy of hypotheses, shedding further light on the formation of homosexuality in and among incarcerated individuals. The prisoners who opt homosexuality "as a rare act of sexual deviance under the intolerable pressure of mourning physical desire" are assumed to enact the 'deprivation hypothesis;' whereas, those whose homosexuality is "a continuation to an habitual pattern" extending from their pre-prison lives are advocates of the 'importation hypothesis' (Sykes 1958: 72). The former are labelled in different texts as "situational homosexuals," "habitual homosexuals," or "jail turn-outs," all of which represent the same kind of individual (Van Wormer 1984: 22, Sykes 1958: 71, Ward and Kassebaum 1964: 167); while on the contrary, inmates who import homosexuality into the

prison are known as “true homosexuals” or “dispositional homosexuals” (ibid 1984: 22, ibid 1964: 167).

Drawing a fine line between transgression and normalcy, the researcher would like to put forth the claim that not every homo-behavioral pattern is transgressive, nor is it necessarily sexual. To make the distinction tangible, reference to the second volume of Malti-Douglas’s encyclopedic account of sex and gender is required. She names homo-sociability, homo-affectivity, and homo-eroticism as homosexuality’s three distinct derivatives. Characterized with pure sociality, ‘homo-sociability’ is identified as a grouping of people of the same cultural standing, with similar intentions and mutual interactions; “the all-male worlds of medieval guilds, boarding schools, and the army, or the all-female worlds of sewing circles, sororities, and maternity wards,” are instances to which the research adds ‘same-sex relations of female incarcerates’ (Malti-Douglas 2007b: 713). ‘Homo-affectivity,’ as the name suggests, is predicated on affection and love as its constituent elements; it “describes same-sex emotions expressed or enacted by individuals or groups, but does not necessarily include sex acts” (ibid: 711); this latter argument is what distinguishes homo-affectivity from homo-eroticism. Most affiliated, compared to other manifestations, with homosexuality, homo-eroticism shares with it the conscious congregation of one’s emotional and erotic aspects. It is, still and all, different from homosexuality, in that it rejects “the explicitly biological that is a component of the term homosexual;” by so doing, homo-eroticism “is able to describe feelings, attitudes and desires that reach beyond (often pathologized and medicalized) gender identities” (ibid: 712-3). Malti-Douglas’s proposal of the above-named manifestations, was not initially meant for appliance on any particular social setting. Fittingly feasible in the prison milieu though, homo-sociability, homo-affectivity, and homo-eroticism are alluded to in this article.

Frequent as bisexuality has been in practice, it has, to a lesser degree, been the subject of study in the academy. Presently, there are no particular classifications through which one can analyze it wholeheartedly; yet, the researcher, persistently incorporates it in the body of this study. The present study extracts, on that account, from *Gay, Straight and the Reason Why: the Science of Sexual Orientation* (2011), two adjectival terminologies which she finds practically noteworthy in the unfolding of bi-oriented desirability, that is, “*gynephilic* (woman-loving),” and “*androphilic* (man-loving).” Seeing that gynephilic and androphilic bondings are, similar to bi-behavioral patterns, characterized with the potential engagement of both women and men, one can find a reasonably justified connection between them. Concentrated, wholly, on the object of desire, the bondings are unconcerned with the sex of the subject. Put differently, a gynephile could be a straight man or a homosexual woman, likewise, an androphile could be a straight woman or a homosexual man (cf. LeVay 2011: 7).

Queering the Normative

In an all-female environment, women are expected to unite powers, celebrate self-determination, and enjoy the freedom to exercise varied types of sexualities; conflict arises when this coming together occurs behind bars. It is the research’s intention to raise the question, whether the authority and its ensuing hegemony have leaked into the prison, or the walls provide women with a safe haven where the masculine norm does not apply? To that end, sexualities whose appearance is prevalent in female correctional institutions, especially in the structure of *Orange Is the New Black*, are brought to notice.

Inasmuch as the analysis’s scope is minimized to incorporate unauthorized practices in the prison setting, heterosexual transgressions are interpreted in relation to inmate-staff

engagements in manipulation, compliance and coercion. An inmate's acceptance of objects or bodily assaults as a trade-off for a desired object or favor, typifies manipulative relationships between her and a male staff member; worth mentioning is the realization that the sensual is not a determining factor in the emergence of manipulation, whereas the inmate's consent is. Necessarily accompanied with the sexual, compliance portrays the disinclined participation of an inmate in venery with an officer; it is, to a great degree, called forth by fear or threat of punishment. Coercion is characterized with a repulsive imposition of force on a prisoner's body, which is executed with neither consent nor advantage on the part of the victimized.

Despite all the power that is granted him, Officer Healy is a delicate man who is in need of care and counselling; Red Reznikov is, on the other hand, meant to be an inmate wiped of all power, yet, she maintains a strong mien in order to survive. The situation's irony is intensified once the audience is presented with a picture of Red and Healy as, respectively, giver and recipient of counselling concerning his personal life. This is the starting point of a mutual feeling between them which remains unspecified and undealt with until the end. Aside from that, one can mark their relationship on a give-and-take basis. As Healy's translator and mentor, Red provides him and his Russian wife with advice on different occasions; similarly, Healy helps put Red in charge of the prison kitchen. Once she is disqualified by a superior officer, Joe Caputo, Red tries to manipulate Healy into giving her the kitchen back by way of flirtation. It is noteworthy that manipulation need not have the sexual at its core; notwithstanding, to respond one favor with another in a heterosexual engagement, or to tempt somebody into fulfilling ones wish through words or gestures, is characteristic of a manipulative relationship.

Inmate Dayanara Diaz is, accidentally impregnated by Officer John Bennett, with whom she is madly in love. Her fellow inmates are brainstorming so as to come up with a plan, in which Dayanara could have been impregnated some place else, plans like getting her a furlough, claiming that she was pregnant before incarceration, and the last and most effective of all, making it look like Officer Mendez is the father. That way not only could inmates get rid of him and his bullying once and for all, but also Bennett's career and personal life would have remained unthreatened. 'Compliance' is, of the three inmate-staff heterosexual transgressions mentioned earlier, closest in definition to this occurrence, in that the inmate "reluctantly but obediently participates" in the event with a "correctional worker of some perceived or real standing and/or influence" as a result of "fear, a need for safety or protection, or to avoid victimization" (Pardue et al. 2011: 290). Reluctant because Dayanara loves Bennett, obedient because she is convinced into doing it by Red and Aleida against her will, with the most feared of prison staff, just to guarantee the protection of her dear John.

Rather diverse in practice, yet, similar in essence, heterosexual violations of the body do not leave Tiffany Doggett unaffected. As a ten year old, she has been taught to give in to men's power and desire; a motherly advice she has, apparently, well understood and internalized. In flashbacks the distorted personality of Tiffany, who is reduced to a means of satisfaction in exchange for a box of beer, for instance, is portrayed. On occasions, the man's forceful violation of the body, despite Tiffany's discontent, makes the audience sympathize with her. Behind bars, she is temporarily in charge of the prison van which is accompanied by the newly employed Officer Charlie Coates. He tells Tiffany to stop by a donut shop he used to work at so that they can have some donuts while chatting and running the prison's errands. The two seem like good friends, and Tiffany is happy a man is treating her decently and humanely. The good mood goes away as one day they go to a lake to feed the ducks; he orders her to kneel and quack like a duck, subsequently to fetch donut particles with her mouth from a muddy

ground. Tiffany does as he says, but once he starts kissing her violently she freezes with an expression of helplessness and indifference. He stops, only to later lose his temper and rape Tiffany in the van, due to misunderstanding her friendliness for flirtation. Seeing that Tiffany is a victim to rape, Coates's relationship with her is marked as coercion.

Equally qualitative in practice, yet, greater in quantity, female homosexuality had never been as much attended to as was male homosexuality. Its "public presence" was the result of "the fictionalisation of experience and translations of sexology, philosophy and cultural theory into the figure of the masculine female super-invert" (Bauer 2009: 142). Despite the fact that homosexuality and lesbianism are, sometimes, used interchangeably to denote same-sex relationships among women, they are not exactly the same. General as the former is, it covers a wider range of relationships which may, or may not be sexual in essence; on the other hand, the latter is employed more specifically, to refer to the necessarily sexual. The researcher intends, as a consequence, not to mention the specific, unless where its implication matches the context's intention.

Theoretically speaking, one can suggest two dominant hypotheses at work regarding women's inclination toward same-sex relationships in prison; on the one hand, indirectly referred to by Gresham M'Cready Sykes, and elaborated on by Blackburn et al., 'deprivation hypothesis' "proposes that the creation of the inmate social world is impacted by psychological deprivations inmates face once incarcerated" (Blackburn et al. 2010: 60). Disallowing inmates to continue the pursuit of sexual pleasure with a loved one in the outside, is the reason why they are pushed "in the direction of deviation from, rather than adherence to, the legal norms" (Sykes 1958: 22). On the other hand, there is 'the importation hypothesis' which contends that "both the inmate and custodians – [...] bring with them the attitudes, beliefs and values of the larger world. The prison as a social system, does not exist in isolation any more than the criminal within the prison exists in isolation as an individual" (ibid: 8-9). Dedicated to the study of men's conditions in New Jersey State Maximum Security Prison, Sykes's *The Society of Captives: a Study of a Maximum Security Prison* (1958), hardly offers any perspective specific to women incarcerated. Notwithstanding, some of his argumentations have been brought into consideration in the present study, owing to the experiences of imprisonment and deprivation that are shared by male and female prisoners.

Nicky Nichols is introduced as a drug addict who stops using with Red's help; sent to Maximum Security for smuggling drugs in the prison, Nicky is drawn back to addiction, mainly due to detachment from her prison family. Other than drugs, Nicky is very active sexually; she experiences varied affairs with fellow inmates. The series does not show one such encounter, with either men or women, in Nicky's pre-prison life. She spends a lot of time with her addict friends, but they never get physically involved. She substitutes the pleasure of drugs with that of venery, in order to overcome the pains of isolation. Nicky, this study claims, is a jail turnout; the type of person who establishes due to the impact of deprivation hypothesis on her, homosexual relationships with other women, but is to be back to heterosexuality upon release. Alex is a confident woman, the type of person who strives for what she wants. Flashbacks reveal that she had a girlfriend at the time she made advances toward Piper Chapman; due to the love Alex feels for Piper, she breaks up with the former girlfriend. Alex and Piper are portrayed throughout the series as, respectively, the active and the passive partner. Ups and downs of their relationship leads to a temporary, yet, serious breakup during which Nicky Nichols and Alex become close friends. Unlike Nicky's playfulness, and Piper's adventurousness, Alex's relationships is predicated on love. Smuggling drugs and money

between countries, Alex is a professional agent in Kubra's drug cartel; she has male colleagues, but is never shown to be attracted to them. The bars are not the means through which Alex can find sexual fulfilment; since she 'imports' her homosexuality into the prison, Alex is recognized by this article as a true homosexual.

Homosexuality is findable, much like the free community in the exercise of homo-sociability, homo-affectivity and homo-eroticism behind bars. Marked as the distinguishing factor with regard to the afore-mentioned categories, sex determines the graveness of homosexual patterns from the least to the most intense. Characterized with nonattendance of physical engagement, homo-sociability finds practicability in mutual intentions and interactions of individuals within a shared community; not obsessed with the presence of sexuality, homo-affectivity centers attention on affection, yet welcomes sexual intercourse in case of appearance; the resultant effect of an inevitable unification of the emotional and the sexual, homo-eroticism is homosexuality's most identical coordinate. The social relationships that exist among inmates, such as ladies in the electrical, the kitchen ladies, the cleaning crew, etc. represent homo-sociability. The temporary span of affection that occurs between Nicky and Alex, cannot be regarded as homo-erotic, since their tie is predicated on friendship, rather than sexuality. In that sense, they are believed to be engaged in homo-affectivity, the end result of which is not necessarily sexual. Homo-erotic behavior in a women's prison, can be properly exemplified by the encounter of the butch and the femme persons.

Needless to say, butch and femme figures do not belong, specifically, to the prison; therefore, their emergence should be tracked someplace else in history. "Lesbian bars" played a significant role in the establishment of "butch-femme communities of the 1950s and early 1960s." Hence dissatisfied as feminists, especially, lesbian feminists were with the new culture, they "critiqued the specific language and performance of lesbian sexuality represented by the butch-femme relationship on the grounds that it mimicked heterosexuality" (Malti-Douglas 2007c: 874). Despite these scorns, they kept on persisting into other layers of society, such as the prison where the exercise of power through hierarchal relations is more credible. A butch resembles men, physically as well as behaviorally; while the femme, is very much like the submissive housewife who is loving and caring toward the husband. The interesting fact about femmeness is that it is not particularly attributed to women; effeminate men are, also, derogatorily identified as femmes. Instances of butch-femme relations characterized by love, and a voluntary choice of partner, refute the conception that they are necessarily predicated on the hierarchy of dominance/submission. Homosexual behaviors are deemed transgressive so long as they are affected by the touch of sensuality; unlike homo-eroticism which equals lesbianism in particularities, homo-sociability, for instance, is on no account characterized by the sexual, nor is homo-affectivity grounded wholly on a woman's physicality. The justification brought to notice refutes the belief that all homo-behavioral patterns are necessarily transgressive, or sexual, for that matter. Mere constructs as transgression and normalcy are, they can alter at any point in time depending on the culture in which they are embedded. Of *Orange Is the New Black's* personae, Carrie "Big Boo" Black best represents her kind. She is very much the same in her pre-prison, as well as present life behind bars; man-like in manner and appearance, Big Boo is what queer studies renders a butch figure. Her mother refused to accept her as a daughter, since neither her mannerism nor dressing conformed to the gender category to which she belonged. Seductive as she was, Big Boo made interactions based on love, some of which lasted quite long. She is not the kind of person who seeks sexual pleasure in the name of love; quite the contrary, she respects love; that is why she gets heartbroken when her prison girlfriend leaves her to be with another person.

The 1980s marked the appearance of bisexuality, as a credible sexual category in the academy. “Long before queerness emerged in the 1990s,” Bristow declares, “bisexuality had presented an often unwelcome challenge to the longstanding hetero/homo divide. Bisexuality presents a third term that upsets this either/or binary, demanding recognition perhaps as both/and” (Bristow 1997: 224). More often than not, it is deemed central in human beings’ wide spectrum of sexual behavioral patterns. A number of theoreticians see it as, merely, a pattern, rather than a category of sexual behavior; resulting from, first and foremost, a person’s playfulness or diversity of taste, the adoption of an occasional sexual desirability is hardly a surprise; the best example could be a heterosexual woman who establishes intimate relationships with other women. While having feelings for women and men at a time are not rare, there are bisexual people who prefer to display affections non-simultaneously for either sex. A bisexual person may have a stronger taste for one sex over the other. Else, the sexologist Alfred Kinsey is famous for having pioneered the scientific study of types of queer sensuality early in the 20th century; he did this by the close analysis of individuals and their behaviors, via interviews, questionnaires, and observations in the laboratory. Bisexuality, which was incorrectly taken as a subfield of homo-desirability for decades, finally came to be acknowledged as an entity independent of hetero/homo binarism due to Kinsey’s efforts (cf. Lerner 2006: 118). It was, however, not until the 1980s that bisexuality was approved of as a credible category in the academic argumentations of sensuality.

The woman who is the object of love in a gynephilic bonding, as much as the man in an androphilic bonding, may be loved by a man, a woman, or both. Provided that such bonding is established between members of one as well as the other sex, the loved man or woman is rendered a bisexual. That is to say, a gynephile or an androphile are, by no means, bisexual because their love is oriented toward members of a specified sex. While on the contrary, a bisexual person, necessarily experiences, one if the interaction is homo-orientated, and both if it is hetero-oriented, of gynephilic and androphilic bondings. The above-mentioned argumentation finds significance in relation to the single-sex correctional facility of *Orange Is the New Black*. The all-female population of the prison assists in the emergence of bi-behavioral relations, especially those which are gynephilic in nature.

Bisexuality is portrayed in Lorna Morello queer interactions with Nicky and loved men in the outside. Lorna’s chain of affairs with Nicky brings about a temporary state of happiness and positivity within the coarse walls of prison. Yet, her pleasant feeling gradually goes away as she substitutes Nicky with Vince Muccio; noteworthy is the fact that Lorna’s writing habit to strange men of the free community coincides with Nicky’s incarceration in the maximum security. In other words, were she not deprived of Nicky’s presence, she would not have kept herself occupied with men. All in all, her happy moments with Nicky are ceased to be continued by like moments with Vince. Unable to tolerate her current state of solitude, Nicky strives to revive their homosexual relationship; even so, Lorna resists all her seductive remarks and gestures, for the reason that she is truly in love with Vince. He is, in this instance, a heterosexual gynephile, while on the contrary, Nicky is a homosexual gynephile. Asynchronously in love with, and loved by, both a man and a woman, Lorna is considered a bisexual person whose love toward Vince and Nicky is, respectively, androphilic and gynephilic in nature.

CONCLUSION

Widely preached, and deeply internalized in the course of history, male-female legitimate relationships, the establishment of a family, and procreation have been the elementary factors to a normative, and sexually healthy society. By way of queering the normative, that is, negating the fixity of the norm, queer theory makes possible the legitimation of the non-norm. Queer studies finds new types of desirability as viable and legitimate as the heteronorm, with the capacity to constitute a person's identity; in any case, they are prone to repeated change during a person's lifetime. Equally concerned with identity formation and deconstruction, queer theory's first and foremost aim has been to "empower sexual minorities by separating out sexual identity from gender identity and proposing that these identities and their associated behaviors and appearance were all social constructs that could be reconstructed in the self and society" (Nagoshi et al. 2014: 107).

The application of queer theory on a female correctional institution, narrows down the scope of analysis to queer behavioral patterns that are extant among female incarcerates. *Orange Is the New Black* introduces a miscellany of characters whose deconstruction of desirability is portrayed in transgressive conducts they carry out behind bars. Red Reznikov, Dayanara Diaz and Tiffany Doggett, respectively stand for manipulative, compliant and coercive heterosexual engagements with the prison staff; Nicky Nichols and Alex Vause represent the habitual and true homosexual types; appearing as a butch figure in the series, Carrie Black is a true homosexual who is, similar to Alex, Nicky and many other personae, involved in homoeroticism; finally, Lorna Morello represents the nonsynchronous practice of bisexuality. Homosexuality and bisexuality occur in other layers of society, too, yet the fact that women's unification operates as a catalyst in the growing number of such activity in the prison environment, cannot be disregarded. Moreover, the type of heterosexuality incarcerated women are engaged in, differs from that which women in the free community experience. An individual's identity is taken away once they are subjected to confinement; of importance is the realization that, inmates attempt to make up for their lost identity and sense of the self through the practice of queer sexualities.

In pursuance of queer and gender identities, figures of the butch and the femme can be further delineated. Depending on the degree to which butchness is enacted, butches are placed within an spectrum as soft butch, stone butch, dyke-fag, and the like; the same rule applies to femmes, however, with less the diversity butches experience in practice. One can locate corresponding types in men's correctional institutions where the roles of wolf, punk and fag are drawn attention to.

Rather than queer studies, *Orange Is the New Black* can be analyzed under the rubric of ethnic studies. That the minority groupings of African Americans and Hispanics stand in contrast to the majority white in the series, brings to mind the question why racialization persists, even in a setting where a united womanhood in the absence of men, can be formed. Further, women's studies can coalesce with criminology, in order to survey these women's past lives and conditions, along with their subsequent criminalization.

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