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The Influence of the Male Gaze on
Women in Prison Movies: A Case
Study of *Chained Heat* (1983) and
Orange Is the New Black (2013)



Introduction

"She's what we call a 'stud,' which is very confusing for a nice girl like you, because, let's be honest, she looks like a man. . . My advice? Let her down easy. Lesbians can be very dangerous. It's the testosterone" ("Lesbian Request Denied" 35:20). This advice by the inmate counselor Sam Healy to the protagonist Piper Chapman in the third episode of season one of the show *Orange Is the New Black* represents the attitude of many people concerning women in prison. Lesbians especially have had a particularly bad reputation in movies about female prisoners and many movies still support those obsolete views. However, it is indisputable that the representation of women in prison in US popular culture has changed massively between the 1950s and the twenty-first century. One of the most dominant influences on movies about imprisoned females is the male gaze. The heterosexual male perspective combines the views of both the person behind the camera and of the audience. This specific way of looking at female bodies with the aim of male pleasure, especially in an environment without men, has largely shaped the portrayal of women in general and, more particularly, of lesbians inside prisons.

The movie *Chained Heat* by Paul Nicholas is a typical women in prison (WIP) film from 1983. The recurring plot elements of the genre are employed, including pictures of violent abuse, lesbian sex and male dominance. It is incontrovertible that the depiction of incarcerated girls and women has improved immensely since then. Sexual relations are shown to be more realistic and less tailored to male desire. While the sole purpose of WIP movies, a sub-genre of exploitation films, between the 1950s





and 1980s was the objectification of the female body, today the portrayal of WIP focuses far less on heterosexual categories and more on sexual diversity.

One prominent example of a less fetishized WIP film work is the TV show *Orange Is the New Black*. It was released in 2013 and tells the story of Piper Chapman, a seemingly innocent woman finding herself in prison. The audience follows the protagonist on her journey to freedom, not just literally but also sexually and personally. Yet, despite the happy ending with her prison wife Alex Vause, some WIP movie stereotypes are used to satisfy the erotic cultural fantasy of hyper-sexualized female prisoners. The male gaze's dominance over the portrayal of women in movies playing within women's prisons remains remarkable. Nevertheless, *Orange Is the New Black* (*OITNB*) manages to break several clichés surrounding women in prison movies. In contrast to *Chained Heat*, *OITNB* is no longer solely defined by the male gaze. A female perspective that has other functions than to please a male audience is included to portray lesbianism.

The aim of this paper is to critically analyze the influence of the male gaze on the representation of incarcerated women, with a specific focus on the depiction of lesbianism. Through a comparative analysis of *Chained Heat* (1983) and *Orange Is the New Black* (2013), the progress of modern WIP film works in terms of subverting conventional tropes of sexualized female prisoners is exemplified. In order to grasp the significance of the change that *OITNB* has brought, the male gaze needs to be inspected more closely. This gaze can be detected in the majority of WIP movies, among them *Chained Heat*. After comparing the exemplary WIP movie to *OITNB*, a clear distinction





between the two becomes apparent. Despite *OITNB* using some WIP movie elements, it has a different message. The stereotype of the prison lesbian, as pictured in original WIP movies, is broken to show lesbians with very different appearances and attitudes. The TV show is not scared of portraying diverse love that transcends the homo-and heterosexual binary system. From a feminist point of view, progress is evident.

The Male Gaze in Cinema

The term “male gaze” was first coined by the British film critic Laura Mulvey. In her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" from 1975, she describes this particular view on females in literature and movies as the aesthetic pleasure of the male viewer. According to Mulvey, there is a fusion of the male camera perspective and the male audience (17). The relationship between the camera and the viewer relies on the voyeuristic pleasure of a heterosexual male audience and the display of women, often nude, on screen. Women are seen as sex objects instead of active subjects, unlike the men in movies. The male gaze perceives the female body as an object of desire with the purpose of providing pleasure.

The whole theory is based on the studies of the psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan who were both engaged in the concept of scopophilia, or in other words, the concept of deriving sexual pleasure from looking at something aesthetically pleasing. Mulvey profoundly criticizes the traditional representation of females in cinema because the male gaze perpetuates hetero-patriarchal norms. The reason behind the male need for hyper-sexualized women seems to be a fear of castration, at least as stated in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (Mulvey 6). Since a woman's





lack of a penis threatens men's masculinity, the male species tries to compensate for this anxiety through voyeurism-sadism and fetishization (Mulvey 7). Either women need to be punished for their guilt caused by being phallus-free or certain parts of their bodies are oversexualized in order to reduce the male fear of castration. Therefore, in cinema, the camera tends to show multiple close-ups of women's bodies for longer periods. This shows the desire of not only a character within the movie but also that of the male spectator. Women who want to enjoy cinema are forced to identify with this male gaze of the male character as there is no alternative. Thus, the dominance of men over women is established. Women are dehumanized and only noticed because of their appearance. They are supposed to be objects of desire, not making any decisions or influencing the story in other ways than by showing their bodies: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female." (Mulvey 16). A man limited to this role would be unthinkable: "The male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification" (Mulvey 17).

This representation of the male and female gender is anything but equal and, therefore, partly causes the patriarchal hierarchy of dominant men and submissive women. Mulvey's study has severely been criticized as it disregards the representation of Black women, transwomen and queer forms of female spectatorship. Yet, for the purposes of this paper, Laura Mulvey's definition is adequate and the cinematic techniques of portraying the male gaze are vital for a successful analysis of *Chained Heat* and *Orange Is the New Black*. Typical examples of the male gaze include medium close-up shots of women from a man's perspective. A male character observes a





female from a distance. Usually, the women wear revealing outfits. Shots that fixate on a woman's body or fractions of it are encountered frequently. Common camera angles are the worms-eye perspective from beneath, high angles looking down on a woman or hip-level shots. Their main function is mirroring sexual gratification for the heterosexual male. This reaction is enhanced by many actresses being stereotypically attractive. A recurring character is the naive woman that makes up for her lack of intellect by being pretty. In the majority of movies with a noticeable male gaze, the actresses' careers in acting are secondary to their modeling careers. All of these reasons make it obvious that the movie industry is still male-dominated and the male gaze perpetuates patriarchy.

Women in Prison Movies and the Prison Lesbian

The Women in Prison movie is a subgenre of the exploitation movie. All WIP films tell stories of abuse, particularly sexual and physical exploitation. Their main goal is to show vulnerable women having a hard time inside a tough prison. These usually very attractive women have to endure abuse by fellow inmates, often the prison lesbian, as well as guards. Certain characteristics of WIP films are rarely missing. Those recurring plot elements include the protagonist, an innocent girl, being sent to prison. The criminal offense she has committed tends to be nonviolent. Once inside, she is immediately confronted with the forced exposure of her body. Through strip searches, group showers and cruel guards, the protagonist is forced into excessive nudity. Rape by prison guards or forced prostitution are also common features of WIP movies. In addition to that, the suicide of a fellow inmate, hard labor and revealing uniforms are





often included. This image of hyper-sexualized women is additionally reinforced by the forced sight of lesbian sex, several catfights and the unwanted attention of the prison lesbian who has already been mentioned. This character is significant for most WIP movies. More often than not the prison lesbian attempts to seduce the innocent new convict.

In her essay “Containing ‘Deviant’ Desire: Lesbianism, Heterosexuality, and the Women-in-Prison Narrative”, Ann Ciasullo explains the importance of this specific character by describing the difference between a “true” lesbian, thus the prison lesbian, and the “pseudo” lesbian, often the protagonist. The prison lesbian enables the categorization of resolved sexual identities (Ciasullo 212). She massively differs from the “pseudo” lesbian, who only engages in homosexual activities because of her lack of choice. These differences become clear through her appearance and attitude. Generally, her name is short and very masculine, she dresses in traditionally male clothes and her body resembles that of a male person. She tends to have narrow hips and a flat chest (Ciasullo 209). The prison lesbian is often considered to take the place of men and threaten the “pseudo” lesbian’s heterosexuality. Yet she is also the female character that men can identify with the most, especially during lesbian sex scenes.

In contrast to Mulvey’s essay, the spectator does not adopt a male position as there are no men around in those scenes. Hence, cross-gender identification is made possible and male viewers imagine themselves in the prison lesbian’s position. The producers of WIP movies have to lessen this threat of masculinity being replaced by homosexuals accordingly. It is a situation that the majority of male WIP viewers would





not approve of. Ciasullo offers two solutions. Firstly, many women reunite with important men in their life upon being released from prison. This can be their husbands, fathers or priests. All of these men are possible characters with whom the male spectators can identify. Often, they save the innocent women from the philandering of the prison lesbian (Ciasullo 217). Secondly, prison lesbians tend to remain in prison. Through that, the male fear of the contagion of homosexuality among women is diminished. It can certainly be observed that there is a tremendous influence of the male gaze on the entire genre of WIP movies. Often there are explicit scenes of pornography. Their function is to fuel the male pleasure of the spectator. Through the eyes of a male prison guard or the prison lesbian, their sexual fantasies can be lived out. Desires such as voyeurism, fetishism and sadism can be experienced in a second-hand manner. Strip searches, whippings, spraying with water hoses, bondage and beatings are performed on the women. The initiator of these actions is usually a prison guard. This character is, most of the time, either male or a lesbian. This person in a position of power fortifies the strict hierarchies within the prison walls and lets the typically male audience enjoy the sensation of power.

This feeling is achieved through the degradation of attractive women who have no possibility of refusing the actions that are forced upon them. The patriarchal dynamics between men and women are manifested. Women have few options for escaping the abuse they have to endure since they are imprisoned. The institution, whether penitentiary or reform school, offers people in power, especially male guards, the chance to act out their most sadistic fantasies without any fear of repercussions.





Few other environments provide less protection for their inhabitants. Prison, at least the way it is pictured in WIP films, is the epitome of patriarchy. The whole concept of the movies is to create a space that allows men to disparage women. Almost all characters in charge are male, whether the typically cruel warden or the guards. The others, including the prison lesbian, possess at least some characteristics associated with masculinity. This can be their gamine appearance, dominant attitude or aggressive sexual behavior. Concerning perceptions this explains the most common camera angles in WIP movies. They tend to linger on nude women's bodies from a distance. This is the point of view of a prison guard. Explicit lesbian sex scenes, contrariwise, are often zoomed in. Now the spectator takes up the role of the prison lesbian. The protagonist's perspective is rarely shown since the characters of identification are supposed to be men or at least characters with male attributes.

Undoubtedly, prison is portrayed as an anti-feminist space with the sole purpose of pleasing men. One might think that this attitude ended when WIP movies became less popular after the 1990s, but new productions have not become more emancipated.

***Chained Heat* as a Typical Example of WIP Movies**

Chained Heat is an R-rated movie from 1983 directed by Paul Nicholas. It is a representative example of an American WIP film. Not only are most of the recurring plot elements of WIP narratives included, but the camera angles also comply with most WIP films. Already the poster stresses the male gaze's impact on the movie. The silhouette of a woman in a tight shirt and a skirt that flares out at the hips can be seen.





This straightforwardly puts a focus on her narrow waist and wide hips. She has long blonde hair and stands in a voluptuous pose behind bars. Despite not seeing her face, most viewers would consider her attractive. Her anonymity, caused by the lack of visible facial features, reveals the male gaze. She is already interchangeable, a mere object. In addition to the convict behind bars, two women fighting can be spotted at the bottom of the poster. They are solely black shadows but again certain traits associated with femininity can be detected. Both have long hair, detailed breasts and well-shaped legs. All women are situated in the background of the poster compared to the correctional officer on the top right. He is the only person pictured in color. His fingers are visible in full detail, as is the gun in his hand and his strong biceps. In this case, his hidden face is not a symbol of exchangeability but a way of letting male spectators identify with him more easily. Everything about the man signifies power. Of course, his extraordinarily strong arm is one factor. Besides that, he also carries a gun in his hand, although not the way one would expect a prison guard to hold it. Instead of carrying it around over his shoulder or actively attempting to shoot, he just lets it lie in his hand without his fingers being close to the trigger. It is pointing towards the woman behind bars. The combination of the man's tense arm and his gun pointed at the thighs of the woman reminds the viewer of a phallus. This act symbolizes sexual dominance over the attractive blonde and is supposed to make male viewers want to watch the movie. The specific pose could also be explained by Mulvey's theory of male castration fear. The male spectator is reassured of the superiority of the male genitalia over female prisoners. Hyper-sexualized women and punishment are promised. Not





only the man in color symbolizes power but also another guard who is standing some feet away from the fighting women. He stands with his feet wide apart and a gun in his hands. Because of the dark, it is unclear whether he enjoys watching the women or whether he is simply a passive bystander, just like the audience.

All in all, this poster can be seen as a taste of what is to come. The movie itself is the prototype of a WIP movie. Accordingly, the plot is rather simplistic. Carol Henderson, a young woman who accidentally killed a man in a car accident, has to serve 18 months in prison. Inside she is confronted with a prostitution ring led by guards, an intrusive warden, the aggressive top dog Ericka and physical abuse. All of this fits perfectly into the genre of exploitation movies. Prison is the embodiment of hell for the naïve protagonist in *Chained Heat*. Henderson almost immediately turns into Warden Backman's new object of desire and he eventually takes sexual advantage of her. The prison lesbian Ericka violates Carol's privacy again and again. Several minor characters are murdered. Abuse of prisoners by guards, regardless of their gender, seems to be common practice. Unsurprisingly, there is neither much diversity regarding the cast nor is there noteworthy character development. Just like one would expect from a classic WIP film, the goal of this movie is to generate male pleasure through archaic sex scenes and violence. In general, a lot of nudity can be observed. Female bodies are exposed almost constantly. Moreover, voyeurism is portrayed in various ways, often using film techniques that play a vital role in the WIP genre. An example of such film techniques and how they coincide with the impact of the male gaze on *Chained Heat* is the very first scene. A beautiful blonde prisoner suffers abuse





at the hands of a prison guard. The scene (00:20) starts with a close-up of the man's hand. The perspective is around waist height and the audience watches Stone, the prison guard, walking aggressively towards a cell while dangling his keys. While this could be a sign of impatience or sexual appetite, the gesture certainly symbolizes power over the young woman, in terms of sexual dominance but of course also her freedom. During the officer's confident walk toward the cell, the movie seems almost without color. Everything is set in grey and blue. Stone is visible as just the silhouette of a man. He could be any self-confident individual. This immediately offers spectators the possibility to identify with him. Inside the cell, there is an attractive blonde in handcuffs. The camera frontally zooms in on her extremely scared face. It expresses fear and defeat. She is the complete opposite of the guard. It is a predator and prey situation. The contrast between the two people could not be clearer. He promises danger. She, on the other hand, not only lacks all radiance of confidence but also cannot hide anywhere. This impression is further strengthened by the dark lighting in the corridor of the prison. By contrast, the room is lit up, her dress is light and her hair is blonde: the prisoner shines bright like a saint. Her childlike facial features add to the image of a virgin. In the next cut, the imprisoned girl can be seen from slightly above (00:43). This high angle leads to the spectator watching her from the abuser's point of view. The guard is standing in front of her while she is hiding in the corner of her bed. Reverse shots are used to picture the abuser and his victim successively in fast sequences. Next, there is a close-up of Guard Stone (00:45). His face glows fanatically, which is achieved by his pupils reflecting the neon prison lamps. The look on his face is





obviously one of lust. This very first scene already promises the fulfillment of one classic male fantasy. A beautiful and seemingly innocent young woman in handcuffs lies defenselessly at the feet of a powerful man. This image offers a first glimpse at *Chained Heat*.

Another scene emphasizes the voyeurism of most movies of this genre even more. In this scene (08:24), an attractive woman is doing a striptease. She is visible in a medium shot, showing most of her body including her face. Again the technique of reverse shots is used to switch back and forth between the inmate Debby and Warden Backman. The point of view changes between the warden's perspective of the woman from his lowered position in a Jacuzzi and her view of him. He lies in the hot tub in his office. Holding a camera, Backman films the prisoner undressing, clearly enjoying himself. In the next scene, the spectator sees explicitly what Backman films. Now Debby's face is partly cut off and the distinct focus is on her breasts. The camera zooms in. This same scene (08:07) shows a double case of voyeurism. On the right side of the screen, the naked warden films the pretty inmate with his camera and on the left side, Debby can be seen from behind. It is an over-the-shoulder shot since her body can be seen as well as his reaction of pure lust to it. In this way, the spectator somewhat mirrors the warden's behavior. As viewers, we simply watch Debby from the other side. Once again the woman is the object of desire and portrayed in completely different ways than Backman. He is not sexualized at all. The warden is hardly seen shirtless while Debby's breasts and buttocks are constantly brought into focus. Mulvey's theory clearly applies.





In the following scene, Backman pulls Debby into the hot tub with him. While he puts the camera away, there is even more attention on voyeurism. Instead of showing an explicit sex scene, the camera zooms in on a hidden camera on top of the chandelier (09:40). The new camera perspective is from a high angle. Now the camera setup, especially the medium shots, resembles that of an actual pornographic video. With his professional equipment, Warden Backman's scopophilic traits become evident. He enjoys watching erotic videos at least as much as the act of sex itself since he does not give all of his attention to Debby. In this way, many viewers can further identify with him. Even if they are unable to physically please the appealing woman on screen, they can eyeball her body from behind the camera and imagine themselves in Backman's position. The film technique of using a camera within a movie enables the movie to explicitly portray the male gaze in cinema through Backman's way of filming. However, the purpose of this method is not a criticism of the objectification of women but rather the opposite. Male viewers are double-pleased in a way, since they see Debby through the movie's lens and that of Backman which focuses even more on her feminine curves than the WIP movie camera. Besides, they are reassured of the human delight in watching erotic videos. Just like Laura Mulvey's theory states, Debby is merely a sex object used by the character in *Chained Heat* and the viewer to serve their needs.

Quite predictably though, there is another scene (20:02) that perhaps takes Warden Backman's voyeurism further. *Chained Heat's* protagonist Carol Henderson arrives at the prison and has to endure the hardships of most WIP film characters. She





is visibly scared to enter the facility and has to go through standard procedures before staying for good. When having her fingerprints taken, she is surreptitiously watched by the warden and his colleague Captain Taylor. They intensely stare at the new inmates through one-way glass in a wall. Already this short scene demonstrates the warden's view of Henderson as nothing more than a sex object he wants to possess. He observes her secretly and asks Captain Taylor for more information about her. Long sequences of watching a woman without her noticing are common elements of WIP movies. The use of one-way glass is a film aid to properly portray this lust stemming from watching without Carol knowing that she is an object of lechery. In this scene (20:20) she seems to directly return his look. Then she begins to cry. At this moment it is not clear whether this happens due to her fear of prison or her defenselessness at being exposed like this. However, in the next cut it becomes apparent that from her point of view, there is only a mirror on the wall. For the viewer, this stresses the different perspectives regarding voyeurism. This is achieved through two contrasting filming methods. The first shot is from inside the spying room. It is an over-the-shoulder shot, seemingly from a person standing behind Backman. Again, the spectator adopts the voyeuristic view of all events. The next shot is from the regular hallway of the prison. Carol's reflection can be seen from the mirror and this secondhand view is all that the audience learns about her true feelings. What becomes evident in this scene is that women are not always aware of being sexualized. In another movie, this might have been a way of illustrating the creepiness of lusting men but in *Chained Heat*, scopophilia is used to portray Backman's power. He has full control over Carol Henderson. In his patriarchal eyes, her





freedom and her body belong to him. Throughout the movie, he turns more aggressive in his behavior toward Carol and eventually rapes her. There are countless scenes of violent exploitation, mostly between guards and inmates. Yet, even without a closer analysis of these, the general anti-feminist attitude of the movie leaves no space for doubt.

Nonetheless, there are some rare exceptions, one of them being the portrayal of the prison lesbian. The top dog Ericka is a beautiful and feminine woman. Her aggressive manners bear a strong resemblance to the stereotypical prison lesbian described above but her appearance is completely different. She has full breasts, long blonde hair and wears the same clothes as any other woman inside the prison. Even her name has nothing masculine about it. This femininity is true for all women pictured engaging in lesbian sex. None of them have short hair or androgynous bodies. Perhaps this is to make the male viewers less jealous of rivals, which a masculine looking lesbian would count as, and more erotically excited about homosexual sensuality that does not threaten traditional gender boundaries. However, Ericka fulfills the expectation of a “true” prison lesbian in terms of her unwanted attention towards Carol. In their very first scene together (24:28), the top dog violently jerks Carol’s face towards her and forces a kiss upon her lips. When Carol shakes her off, one can clearly see the disgust on her face (24:31). While sexual abusers are certainly not always men, Ericka’s behavior corresponds exactly to that of all men in this movie. Throughout the story, she continues to pester Henderson but, in the end, they wind up joining forces against common enemies. Ericka stops her erotic advances and eventually, if Ciasullo’s





definition of a prison lesbian is used, does not depict a “true” lesbian anymore. Only in this way is a platonic relationship between the women possible. Although the classic prison lesbian does not appear in this WIP movie, there are still more than enough examples of why this movie is representative of the whole genre. Sexual exploitation is omnipresent, lesbian sex scenes are shown in full detail, the male pleasure of watching women is pictured in the character of Warden Backman and the plot around Carol Henderson could not be more in line with the WIP film guidelines.

***Orange Is the New Black* as Modern WIP Representation**

Orange Is the New Black is an American TV show created by Jenji Kohan in 2013 and one of Netflix’s most-watched original series. After six years the show ended, leaving its fans with seven seasons of drama revolving around the protagonist Piper Chapman. Unlike *Chained Heat*, it can definitely be classified as mainstream film work. At first sight, its plot resembles *Chained Heat*. Piper Chapman is blonde, pretty and seemingly innocent, thus matching the appearance of a classic WIP movie protagonist. For a crime she committed in her youth she is sentenced to 15 months in prison. Hence, most of the show plays inside Litchfield Penitentiary. Multiple prisoners’ struggles with corruption, guards brutalizing prisoners, sexual abuse and rivalry among the inmates are depicted. However, *OITNB* by far exceeds older WIP movies, including *Chained Heat*, in terms of illustrating sexual diversity, racial inequality and class-related issues. There is a clear focus on intersectionality, which is already visible on the cover of the first season. It is a long shot of a group of inmates and guards in a prison bathroom. In the middle, there is the protagonist, Piper Chapman. She looks directly at the camera.





Her body language seems rather scared. Her shoulders are slouched, her hands are hidden between her knees and the look on her face is full of worries. With her shoulder-long hair and her generally feminine appearance Piper seems like a typical WIP movie character. The other women and guards on the poster highlight *OITNB*'s more progressive portrayal of prison. In the bathroom stalls next to Chapman, there is a diverse group of inmates. They are Black, Latinas and some are older than fifty, a rarity in WIP narratives. Of course, some familiar prison stereotypes are picked up. George Mendez, the male guard on the left, stands straight and with his legs apart. One hand lays on his belt buckle and the other partly holds on to his handcuffs and partly rests on his crotch. This pose once again demonstrates power, sexually and physically. What makes him somewhat similar to Warden Backman is his intense gaze. Shamelessly and full of lust he stares at two lesbians in the stall next to him. His face is turned to the side so the viewer can see him giving the women his full attention. The two women, Nicky Nichols and Lorna Morello, are queer in accordance with the male desire. Even on this poster, their bodies are intertwined. In the two stalls on Piper's left, there are three inmates. Here, in contrast to Mendez and the LGBTQIA+ couple, diversity that was nonexistent in former WIP movies can be seen. Especially the character of Poussey Washington, standing between Chapman's girlfriend Alex Vause and Tiffany Doggett, breaks the image of a prison lesbian. Her appearance may appear androgynous but throughout the show, she is not pictured as an aggressor at all. Despite of her short hair and narrow hips, she does not show any harsh behavior towards women she is interested in. By creating a lesbian that does not fulfill any





negative homosexual prisoner clichés, like a tendency towards sexual harassment that can be seen in *Chained Heat*, *OITNB* has gained an extremely likable character. Alex Vause, right next to Piper, is another lesbian who does not fit Ciasullo's categorization of a prison lesbian. Neither she nor Piper look masculine in any way even if Alex is initially depicted as the "true" lesbian. On the contrary, out of the two, Alex is the one with the curvier body. The possible relationship between the two women, however, is not hinted at yet.

Besides Alex and Poussey, the other characters on Piper's right portray diversity. The African American community, on the poster represented through Suzanne Warren and Tasha Jefferson, is visible. This is a big step compared to WIP movies that usually just feature one character of color, if any. Often the Black lesbian served as an aggressor threatening the white protagonist. Suzanne Warren stares at Piper Chapman in this obsessive manner while Jefferson happily smiles at the camera. As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the prison counselor Mister Healy describes Warren's appearance as that of a man in an extremely derogatory way. Her gaze certainly resembles Mendez'. However, during the first season, her mental illness and likable character are underlined. Eventually, her initial obsession with Chapman turns into friendship. Next to Jefferson, there is Galina Reznikov. She is an inmate older than forty and therefore unthinkable in any WIP film. The genre solely features young women without natural signs of aging. Additionally, a transwoman is standing next to Reznikov. With Sophia Burset, there is probably more representation of gender diversity in *OITNB* than in all WIP movies from the last decade combined. Rigid gender





divisions are disassembled one by one. Through all seasons, the show depicts homosexual men and women, pansexuality, bisexuality, inmates of androgynous appearance and transwomen. While the two Latinas in the poster, Gloria Mendoza and Dayanara Diaz, add to the racial variety in the show, the way Officer Bennet holds Diaz in the far right stall is reminiscent of the guards in *Chained Heat*. From their pose, it cannot be said if their obvious sexual relationship is consensual.

All in all, the analysis of the poster of the first season of *Orange Is the New Black* leaves many open questions. On the one hand, it is considerably more progressive than other movies playing within women's prisons. The characters are all shown to be memorable individuals worth a second glance and not purely charming women with the purpose of pleasing heterosexual male viewers. Different ethnicities are shown, there is not just hetero-and homosexuality and inmates of all ages are represented. This is the main difference to the poster of *Chained Heat*. On the other hand, the male gaze has not completely disappeared. Guard Mendez enjoys watching lesbians, the vulnerable protagonist is stared at by an androgynous-looking prisoner and Officer Bennet seems to have an illegal relationship with an imprisoned woman. Just as the poster of *OITNB* offers a myriad of impressions, the show continues to observe the prison system from multiple perspectives. Although some scenes conform to the archaic elements of WIP movies from the 1970s and 1980s, the actual aim of the show is to show both a variety of stories and also the collective trauma of women in prison caused by the extremely flawed system of incarceration. However, all this is not clear in *OITNB*'s first episode.





Perhaps the beginning of the show leads people to think that the show is merely a comedy following the guidelines of most WIP film works. At least the start resembles *Chained Heat* in some ways. *OITNB* too expresses the cultural erotic fantasy that has been around for decades and leads to the production of new WIP movies. In the very first minute of the first episode, Piper Chapman is already fully exposed during her shower in prison. She looks up to the ceiling with a pained facial expression (Trailer 00:12). The camera slowly shifts downwards along with the water stream. It is a close shot and the spectator can clearly see the desperation in her face. This leads to the audience feeling pity for Piper. Unlike classic WIP movies, *OITNB* has a large percentage of females among its viewers. Thus, parts of the show are experienced through Piper's perspective and the spectator identifies with Piper. This was never the case with Carol Henderson in *Chained Heat*. For one thing, Piper presents a female perspective not known hitherto, then again, the viewer experiences prison from Chapman's biased point of view. As a white upper-middle-class Christian, she is certainly prejudiced against other income classes, ethnicities and religions. A similarity between the TV show and most WIP films is the rest of the plot of the first episode. When she arrives at Litchfield Penitentiary, Piper Chapman is immediately stripped naked, which makes her extremely uncomfortable. Next to that, there are rude guards like Mendez, other inmates staring at her intensely and first glimpses of lesbian sex. Last but not least, her fiancé Larry is introduced. He seems like a good guy, another classic WIP movie character. So far, *OITNB* does not differ much from a WIP movie.





However, in the third episode of season one, the topic of homosexuality is addressed in the show. As already mentioned, the prison counselor Sam Healy fully represents the male fear of being replaced by lesbians. The reason for their conversation is Piper being stalked by Suzanne Warren. The mentally ill woman thinks of Chapman as her wife without actually making sexual advances. Officer Healy severely dislikes Warren due to her masculine appearance and her behavior. Since he, as a character within the story, cannot identify with her, he perceives Warren as a threat. This is why he warns the seemingly straight protagonist to stay away from her. Healy even labels lesbians as dangerous, which fits perfectly into the cliché of a prison lesbian. The scene, starting at 35:05 minutes into the third episode, is shown in reverse shots, changing between Healy's and Chapman's perspectives. This allows the viewers to see both of their reactions to the conversation. Angry at the thought of Warren and Chapman sharing a cell, Healy says the title-giving words: "Lesbian Request Denied" (35:18). This statement shows his homophobic attitude towards Warren and his discontent with Piper, a woman with a boyfriend waiting for her, adopting her homosexuality in his eyes. When Piper explains that she dislikes Warren just as much as he does, Healy's voice and facial expression immediately turn softer. He supports the division of "real" and "pseudo" lesbians and believes Chapman to be a victim of a prison lesbian, in this case, Warren. Chapman is not impressed by his warning, which is visible in several close-ups (e.g., 36:08). Her attitude clearly illustrates the modern society's opinion of trivial statements like that.





The show basically makes fun of outdated lesbian clichés used in WIP movies. None of the inmates in *OITNB* completely comply with the rigid standards of prison lesbians listed by Ciasullo. The most important couple in the show, Alex and Piper, does not fit into the category of “true” and “pseudo” lesbians at all. The show may start with Piper being engaged to a man and allegedly being over her former lesbian lover Alex but there is a considerable shift in her sexual identity. Throughout the story, they resume their relationship and it becomes apparent that it is more than an adventure for Piper. Their dynamics change considerably. While Alex starts their relationship by being more dominant, this shifts throughout the seasons. Piper turns into the more aggressive initiator, thereby completely losing the image of the straight woman wanting to experiment. Even though it takes seven seasons for the word *bisexual* to be mentioned, Piper’s bisexuality is omnipresent from the beginning. In the first minute of the show, Chapman can first be seen showering with Alex (00:22) and bathing with Larry (00:34). In this manner, *OITNB* finally breaks the idea of straight women in prison experimenting with lesbians and then, after having served their time, resuming their heterosexual relationships. On the one hand, she is released from prison, which provides an easy solution to the problem of the male fear of being replaced by lesbian lovers. On the other hand, she stays with her wife even after finishing her sentence instead of going back to Larry. This ending is almost revolutionary, especially compared to older representations of imprisoned females. Furthermore, Chapman is not the only *OITNB* character who refuses to label their sexuality. Lorna Morello, who is also portrayed on the cover of season one, has relationships with more than one gender as





well. All of this shows *OITNB*'s successful attempt to change the typically male-dominated perspective on women's prisons to a female one. Additionally, not only a female point of view is pictured but also a Black, Jewish, Asian American, Christian, bisexual, transgender and Latina perspective. This degree of variety is unprecedented among WIP narratives and could not distance itself further from misogynistic movies like *Chained Heat*.

Conclusion

Movies about women's prisons have changed a lot in the last decades. Generally, they are far less focused on nude females controlled by men and instead include a feminist perspective on the prison. This change is visible through the two examples *Chained Heat* from 1983 and the contemporary TV show *Orange Is the New Black*. While the former is altogether dominated by the male gaze, *OITNB* fights outdated stereotypes about women of all sexualities within prison walls. *Chained Heat* has only one single aim: male pleasure. This is achieved through close-ups of attractive women in revealing clothes or completely nude, the specific depiction of voyeurism, camera angles that force the viewer to adopt a male perspective, and a myriad of sex scenes. *Orange Is the New Black* is radically different. For one thing, it also uses some classic WIP movie elements, including a naïve protagonist with a male fiancé waiting for her on the outside. Then again, the show from 2013 exceeds all expectations set in the first episode. The male gaze, which always aims for the satisfaction of its male-dominated audience, is disregarded to make room for other perspectives. These stories include women of color, transwomen, and women of various ages. Different





sexualities are portrayed as well. The old binary system of homo- and heterosexuality is broken through the openly bisexual protagonist Piper Chapman who eventually chooses a relationship with her lesbian lover over her former fiancé Larry. This romantic development stands in contrast to the outdated view on prison lesbians that movies like *Chained Heat* largely support. Even if *OITNB* at first seems to illustrate certain characters, for example, Suzanne Warren, as predatory lesbians, it becomes obvious that all those clichés are eventually replaced. This insight simply demands another close watching of the show. Admittedly, the show focuses on Piper Chapman and her biased point of view on many characters seems to follow some WIP guidelines. Yet it does not cater to the audience of typical WIP movies, which is more interested in seeing steamy lesbian shower sex and guards having a good time with pretty inmates. Instead, the show pictures Piper's character development that goes hand in hand with her coming to terms with her own sexuality. This way women can be portrayed in a less superficial way than in classic WIP movies. Just how different those two films are can already be seen in the analysis of the two posters. *Chained Heat* is bound to demonstrate male power over beautiful women. They are replaceable and their only function is to please men inside the prison as well as the ones watching. The cover of *OITNB*'s first season shows a group of individual women of all sizes and ages. Not all of them conform to society's strict beauty standards and this variety surely does not delight all male viewers. *Orange Is the New Black*, unlike most WIP movies, thus functions as an inclusive space for a myriad of women and its worldwide success leaves





hope for more representation of sexual and general diversity in movies about women's prisons.





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