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Netflix's orange is the new black: A reflection upon the struggles of imprisoned Latinas towards motherhood

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Abstract

The following research paper aims at looking closely the experiences of motherhood and the effects that prison has on the Latinas through a Netflix series Orange is the New Black. The research paper will examine the biases and prejudices Latinas women face in association with their pregnancy and childbirth within the prison, reflected through the characters of Blanca Flores, Maria Ruiz, and Dayanara Diaz. The paper will also discuss the desire of Litchfield inmates to be reunited with their families, paying close attention to the ways in which the prison takes a toll on one's mental health. The research paper will also highlight upon the importance of recreating new families inside of the prison, through the characters of Gloria Mendoza and Alieda Diaz and how these two motherly figures manages to look out for their own people within the prison system. All these points will be interwoven with stories of these women to the real world, relating them to the inequalities and injustices of the prison system and the disassociation and violence these women experiences.

Keywords: Latin American women, gender studies, cultural studies, popular culture, prejudices

Introduction

Immigration and border control are two of the most debated topics in American popular culture and politics. So many families have been separated by new immigration laws that require the immediate deportation of adults seeking freedom in the United States. If the news is to be believed, nearly 13% of Americans are foreign-born. These foreign-born US citizens are treated differently than those born in the country. And when these strange people commit all kinds of crimes, they had to face cruel behavior. They are treated differently than American-born criminals, and when those criminals are women, for other than obvious reasons, the treatment is more brutal. It is mentally exhausting and physically unbearable. Despite lingering prejudices and fears about immigrants, there is a growing perception that immigrants make a constructive contribution to American society and its economy. Conversely, there is little or no evidence that immigrants have a negative effect on the wages and employment of native-born Americans. In addition, immigrants and their children are disproportionately represented in many fields of science and culture. Raising Awareness: Piper Kerman's Orange is the New Black and the Oppression of Women

American prisons

Carolyn Muller

Physical and emotional abuse of women in the US prison system is an ongoing problem increasing attention in academic research, political and human rights activism, and popular culture. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), there are currently approximately 200,000 women imprisoned and about a million in the US justice system (ACLU, 2012). The prison system burdens women of all colors, origins, backgrounds and backgrounds representatives of the sexes in the United States abuse their rights as women and treat them inhumanely. As a result, many non-profit organizations such as the ACLU, The Sentencing Project, Amnesty USA and the Pennsylvania Anti-Rape Coalition are working to raise awareness. For similar purposes, Piper wrote a memoir called Orange is the New Black (OTNB).

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Kerman also explores the issues of incarcerated women in America and tells the story from an internal perspective. After the memoir was published in 2010, it became the basis of a Netflix TV series of the same name.

To this, former US Attorney Jeff Sessions said, "Every time someone is accused of a crime in America, American citizens and they go to prison, they are separated from their children" (Mason). The lack of empathy for both children and the plight of families ignited a movement to promote family reunification and show the importance of keeping families together. Many screenwriters, filmmakers and actors have been involved in projects dealing with the subject of prison and its effects on families and their separation, and projects dealing with immigrants in particular are even more beloved. The mental abuse of non-speaking women in the US prison system is a serious problem that is receiving increasing attention in academia, political and human rights activism, and popular culture. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reported that approximately 200,000 women are currently incarcerated, and approximately one million of these are under the control of the US justice system (ACLU, 2012). The American prison system burdens women of every color, sexuality, origin and background, abusing their rights and treating them inhumanely. That's why many non-profit organizations, such as Amnesty USA, the ACLU, the Pennsylvania Coalition against Rape, and The Sentencing Project, work to raise awareness. *Orange is the New Black*, a memoir written by Piper Kerman, also deals with the issues of incarcerated women in America and tells the story from the inside. Piper Kerman spent about 13 months in a US prison, or federal prison facility, in Danbury, Connecticut. Piper met several incarcerated women while serving her time. These women come from different backgrounds. Based on personal experiences, he wrote down his thoughts in the form of a "memoir". The memoirs deal with the plight of female prisoners and how difficult it was for them to survive within the closed walls of the prison. Women, regardless of the crime committed, were led to believe that their voices would never be heard. The Culture of Prison Sexual Violence conducted a 2006 study of fifteen American states that supported Piper Kerman's report.

That study found that 71% of female prisoners were very aware of sexual relations between staff and prisoners. In addition, the data showing that 9.1% of men and women in prisons were aware of "a prisoner who was raped by a prison employee" is very problematic.

However, only 28% of incarcerated women reported knowing an inmate who reported abuse (National Institute of Justice, 2007). In addition, in her memoirs, Kerman describes other striking aspects of the treatment of women in prison, the horrific body searches that women often suffer, even though they have no way to complain or report sexual violence. If they file a complaint, they are placed in solitary confinement for their protection and held there pending retrial, but as a result lose their previous housing assignments, program activities, work assignments, and other privileges (Kerman, 2010, 268F.). As a result, women are afraid to speak up because it will make their situation better, not worse. After the memoir was published in 2010, it became the basis for a Netflix web series of the same name. In my opinion, no film does as much justice to the subject as Jenji Kohan did with her series *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019).

Directed by Jenji Kohan, Netflix's original American comedy drama *Orange is the New Black* follows the lives of several women at Litchfield Federal Prison for Women. It shows their struggle with loneliness, isolation and separation from family. The show is loosely based on Piper Kerman's memoir *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* (2010). The main character of the play is Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling), a white woman who is in prison for a crime committed ten years ago. Later in the series, Piper Chapman's storyline is interrupted and we see African-Americans and Latinos struggling with life. The series presents the ethnicity of these female prisoners. Through this ethnic group, we see many Latin characters such as Gloria Mendoza (Played by Selenis Leyva), Dayanara Diaz (played by Dascha Polanco), Maria Ruiz (Played by Jessica Pimentel), Aleida (played by Elizabeth Rodriguez), Blanca Flores Laura Gomez etc. each of these characters struggles with being separated from their children. The following research takes a closer look at different experiences of motherhood through different characters and the impact of prison on Latinos in *Orange is the New Black*. The article focuses primarily on women of color, and therefore these interesting identities play a crucial role in understanding how oppression manifests itself. By deconstructing this idea of white supremacy and looking at women's feminism, we can understand how our intersectionality affects our experiences much better. The term intersectionality is often "whitewashed," but let's not forget that its purpose has always been to explore the experiences of women of color and the marginalization they face from time to time. The purpose of the research is thus to investigate the reproductive disorders associated with Litchfield's pregnancy through the characters of Blanca Flores, Dayanara Diaz, and Maria Ruiz. It also deals with the longing for family reunification. And how the whole process strains the psyche. In addition, the article also discusses the importance of family within the four walls of prison through the characters of Gloria Mendoza and Alieida Diaz and the ways in which they built their families in prison. In doing so, these women's stories engage with the real world, the prejudices of the prison system, and the disruption and violence these women experience.

Assumptions of maternity

Pregnancy and childbirth are the two most important elements of motherhood. However, pregnant women in prison are denied the right to spend time with their children because they are treated only as prisoners and not as mothers. Lauren Kuhlik notes that "prisoners are chained during pregnancy, labor and delivery and are denied adequate prenatal care and nutrition." He goes on to explain that "even if the pregnancy went well, the woman only had two or three days with the child" (Kuhlik 533). This can be worrying for both mother and baby, as it can potentially disrupt the entire bond formed during pregnancy. Characters like Blanca Flores lose the chance to be a healthy mother when a prison doctor tells her that she has a "limited number of eggs" and that her eggs are "declining exponentially." Blanca realizes that she may never have a healthy pregnancy. He is seen talking to a character named Nicholas about the same thing:

Blanca: I want a baby. But if I leave here, this it might be too late. The doctor probably says that already late

Nicky: No. Now my pop and his new wife recently did a fresh white privilege and they are much older. Two words: Artificial insemination. Blanca: Right, I'm sure the prison HMO will cover it.

Nicky: I think it would be more of a DIY project though scrappy is good. It would be like an Etsy pregnancy. You totally doable I know. You just have to smuggle some a warm hug from your boyfriend. Then you let it go your baby maker turkey in the pan to hang out with you feet in the air for half an hour. Ding. Easy to cook baby ("Changing Winds" (00.37.02-00.38.09).

This scene shows Blanca's extreme desire to become a mother as she seriously considers the offer. The two decide to put the plan into action. However, the plan did not work because women from another Block (C-Block) attacked them for supplying medicines to D-Block.

Both women were injured and later taken to a health center. All of Bianca and her boyfriend's desire to become parents was now due to early release. Bianca, who is seen struggling to have children with very limited time, is very excited about her early release plan. But in season 6, we see him get kicked out. He is shocked by the news. Another character named Maria Ruiz is pregnant in the first season of *Orange is the New Black*. In the eighth episode, Maria gives birth; but because of the "plague" the prison has no place in the medical department of the prison, so she gives birth in the hospital ("Moscow Pier" (00.23.10-00.25.02). This leads to one of the most disturbing moments of the series when she is taken back to the prison on the same day she gave birth, highlighting the lack of women's rights in prison, Maria is brought into the room in a wheelchair, without the child. Gloria Mendoza, the mother figure of the Latina group, tells the officer, "I got him." After the officer obliges, she is seen telling Maria, "Come on, honey. You're not alone" ("Moscow Pier" (00.48.03-00.48.49), clearly showing that the other women in the prison are able to feel. With Maria because many of them have been through the same boat. Every woman in the prison knows Maria. They look at her as if they see themselves in her. Everyone feels her pain. This is unfortunately the sad reality for many women in today's prison system (in India or abroad). Emily Halter says in this context that:

Incarcerated mothers have a right to care for their children under the Fourteenth Amendment, and therefore babies should be able to spend some time with their incarcerated mothers through programs such as prison daycare or community-based options. However, even if courts do not find that such a right guarantees mothers a physical right to incarcerated parents, lawmakers should protect the ability of incarcerated women to parent for political reasons (Halter 545).

Emily Halter also questions the treatment of mothers and their right to care for their children in the prison system. He argued that women cannot be denied their right to care for their children even when they are in prison. There should be no difference. In cases like that of Maria Ruiz, she should have spent more time with her daughter, and the possibility of her staying in prison with her could also be considered.

A 2008 study by Family Process analyzed the experiences of motherhood in prison and found that "Women coped with daily difficulties by thinking about their children and relationships with them in prison and planning their future relationship after release". Many women said things like

"What helped me cope was thinking endlessly about my daughter" and "the only hope was these two children". It gave me a reason to get up in the morning" (Shamai 327-328). Likewise, Maria Ruiz remembered her daughter when she survived her sentence. His desire to be with her opened a way out of prison depression. However, her partner Yadriel (Ian Paola) sees things differently:

Yadriel: Good day? Maria: So good *kisses daughter. Yads, thanks for that bringing him. Okay, okay, mom. See you next time a week Yadriel: I don't think so. Maria: "I don't think so?" What do you mean: "I don't you think so?"

Yadriel: He's growing up, he's starting to understand things I read. I don't want him to see his mother in prison is normal in his opinion. This we better end it now.

Maria: What do you mean "Cut it?" you are walking away from me? Yadriel: Sorry, Maria.

Maria: What, I don't have a choice here? ("Mother's Day" (00.49.04-00.50.12).

This moment made Mary feel helpless, angry and increases her desire to be with her child. During her journey, Maria does everything she can to get out of prison early.

Although Maria had to give up her child because of the consequences, a character named Dayanara Diaz willingly gave up hers to give them a better life. Dayanara herself was in a similar situation raising her younger brothers and sisters while their mother went to prison for selling drugs, Dayanara was so busy giving her younger siblings a better life that she never had a chance to do anything good for herself. Recent studies have clearly shown that children whose parents are incarcerated are "six times more likely to end up in court" than children without parents in the prison system (Conway). Although the research covers many aspects and does not lead to a specific conclusion, the numbers pointing to stigma are serious. In the series, Dayanara follows in her mother's footsteps and was imprisoned for the same crime as her mother, ie. selling medicines.

After reaching the prison, Dayanara meets someone who seems like a complete stranger. When the other prisoners asked her who the woman was, Dayanara replied, "That's my mother" (I wasn't ready (00.31.33). Soon after, she fell in love with officer John Bennett (played by Matt McGorry). They have an intimate relationship and the couple decides to keep the child. If this situation were outside the prison, it would not be unusual, but in the prison, the prisoners were not allowed to have any relationship with the people who worked there.

So the two of them plan a scene where officer George Mendez (played by Pablo Schreiber) is framed. The whole scenario later affects their relationship. John becomes obsessed with supporting the child financially, prompting him to quickly leave the area, quit his job at the prison, and never be seen again. George, who surprisingly likes Dayanara, soon learns of her pregnancy and offers the child for adoption. But later, Dayanara's mother, Aleida Diaz, mistakenly informs her that the baby was stillborn.

After the baby is born, she sends Dayanara to live with her stepfather and ex-lover Cesar Velazquez (played by Berto Colon), who himself is later arrested. After that, the child was sent to child protection. Dayanara does not want this for her child, so she finally reveals to George's mother, Delia Powell (Played by Mary Steenburgen), that the child is still alive and only asked her to adopt because she wanted a good life for the child:

Dayanara: She is in foster care. And I don't want him to be there. It doesn't prove you're right. He needs try. Please, I know this whole thing is fell But I won't let anyone down will never change my mind again. it's mine decision, I want you to get him. You will be good to him, I know you are. Please? Delia: If I agree to accept him. Dayanara: If you agree, she's yours. Not only when I'm here, but true. i want you reinvent him. Don't even tell him about me. i want for him to try something normal.

Delia: I think... Dayanara: Thank you, Miss Powell. Look, I won't tell how to raise him or what life is like he should be or whatever. It's not like me no way to know. But. if you could. let him Do you know any rooms? Like when he is learn to walk, you have to let him try. Even if he falls sometimes or a lot times. But if he is not like that the mother who takes him dusts him and pretending nothing happened. You have to be ok when he cries and farts. Because he the testament. Because she is mine. It's in his blood, you know ("Tethered to the Rails" (00.46.44-00.51.25). This scene shows how a mother's love for her daughter overcomes her longing to be with her. She knows she is not there to take care of her daughter. For many children around the world, this is very true. When their parents go to prison, they are either sent to foster homes or left homeless on the streets, fighting for their lives, beaten, not shown love. By giving her child to George and Delia, Dayanara ensures a stable (normal) future where she feels the child will be given the best chance at life.

Giving up her child for life did not sit well with Dayanara, and in response she started a deadly prison riot. As Shamai points out, "[imprisoned mothers'] feelings of failure, guilt, and disappointment were themselves so overwhelming that many women tried to escape their feelings through emotional detachment, using such means as suicide attempts, 'behaving like a robot.' or increased drug abuse (Shamai 330). As seen throughout the series, Dayanara experiences these feelings as she is seen trying to hide her pain by going on rampages, murdering a security guard, and becoming addicted to pain pills.

Wish to Connect

Every mother on OITNB represents the desire to bond with her children. Gerrma's "Crying Woman" character is one of the most touching and reflects a different kind of longing to be with the boys. Although Gerrma doesn't get much screen time, she can still be seen crying on the phone several times while talking to her sons. The analysis of Gerrma's character must necessarily begin with her style of dress. Gerrma always wears a blue tuxedo that resembles something of a suicide suit. This, along with the constant crying over phone calls, makes a person realize that they are severely depressed and suicidal. His love for his family is the only thing that keeps him alive. For Gerrma, the desire to reunite with her sons and family brings hope and motivation to survive. Michal Shamai states that motherhood "offered protection from insanity, harmful behavior, and even death for some women. Some women managed to maintain contact with their children during their imprisonment and tried to cope with their pain and guilt" (Shamai 332). Looking at Gerrma's situation, she mostly uses talking to the children as a coping mechanism because she is not physically in their lives. He can be seen constantly talking about what to do and how to do it, and he can feel that he is

still an important part of the family that he misses while in prison. The importance of families and their reconstruction. While many of the show's characters struggle to find their family arrangements outside of prison, others are seen trying to create new families in prison to bridge the gap between what they've lost and what they might find here. Prison system. The family structure in Orange is the New Black beautifully reflects an important aspect of life, how we can look so closely at family and its isolation. Richard Bach states, "The bond that unites your true family is not blood, but respect and joy in each other's lives. Rarely do members of the same family grow up under the same roof." Lisa Miller argues that the ways in which family ties are established are "spiritual and emotional [means] rather than through blood or marriage" (QTD Miller 156). She cites many examples from her time as a midwife, showing how she was integrated into the families she helped as "Aunt Lisa". Miller also discusses the spiritual ties of family through the example of a friend's wedding, where he states that "the days we all spent together there was always a sense of family, and we all agreed that henceforth we would be known as the Hawaii 13" (Melistus 155).

The women of Orange is the New Black came together, creating family groups that love and support each other. Gloria Mendoza, the mother figure of all the Latinas of Litchfield, offers a similar vision of family, offering a love that transcends ease and comfort; it is divine. For most of the series, Gloria and other Latin Americans were in the border areas, or "Spanish Harlem", where they are discriminated in prison more than other minorities. To survive the tyrannical prison scene, these women banded together and created their own family where everyone is someone. Outside prison, Gloria Mendoza is a devoted mother to her four children. She was a victim of domestic violence and therefore struggled to keep her children safe. One of the most dramatic scenes in which Gloria appears can be seen in flashbacks where she saves her child from her abusive boyfriend Arturo with the help of her aunt. In her life outside prison, Gloria is beaten, bruised, tortured and spoken to. And this is one of the first times when the audience is shown his heart and the scenes fully convey his suffering.

Gloria thrives when she grows out of these difficulties. As the series progresses, his relationship with his children seems to take a backseat and his relationship with the inner women becomes stronger, which was also evident in the Mother's Day episode:

Gloria: I don't understand why your brother isn't here? Boy: He says it's for little kids.

Gloria: I haven't seen him in two and a half years. Look you, do you have a mustache? Jesus You have hair everywhere? Boy: Oh mom!

Gloria: It's fine, don't answer that. I can't This is good
Goodbye Boy: You too.
("Mother's Day" (00.34.20-00.34.40)

Like many other female prisoners, Gloria longs for her children to grow up. She even asks her son: "What have you been doing for the last thirty months" ("Mother's Day" (00.35.07- 00.35.19). The sad reality that women do not see their children mature for 6 years.

Conviction of Food Stamp Fraud is a very real American Latino for them as they try to feed their families, while

many women in prison are serving less time for much more serious crimes like murder.

Conclusion

The American series *Orange is the New Black* vividly portrays the serious impact that mothers and their children experience when someone has to spend time in prison away from their family. The problems of immigrants, like the Latin Americans in the series, also reflect the prejudices of the system against them. We witness families who never got a fair chance, we see mothers sentenced to 10 years in prison for selling food stamps to feed their children, and most unfortunate women who will probably never have the chance to become mothers because of the length of their sentences. Based on what they do, the show is based on real life and events, the compassion on the faces of viewers for women when we see them most vulnerable, and also looking at the effects of mass incarceration on women and mothers.

The effects of mass incarceration are clearly visible all over the world, prisons are overcrowded and enslaved people are treated like caged animals. As of 2016, there were a total of 1.6 million people in prison in the United States, and the number of women increased by 646 percent between 1980 and 2016 (Halter 542). Two-thirds of these incarcerated women are mothers or mothers-to-be. Mass incarceration is seen across the country as children are left with grandparents or forced into foster care. Several studies of the American prison system have suggested that they must be recreated in a way that does not violate the constitutional rights of inmates. As a scientist, I completely agree that no mother should miss the most important moments in her children's lives. No one should be denied the right to raise their children and watch them grow.

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