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Gazing at "It": An Intersectional Analysis of Transnormativity and Black Womanhood in *Orange is the New Black*

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Transgender representations are predominantly negative and represent trans identities in dehumanizing tropes. I analyze the sole Black. transgender character on Orange is the New Black, Sophia Burset, to theorize a framework for transgender subjectivity that interrupts dehumanizing tropes. Sophia's narrative on the show constructs transgender subjectivity through Sophia's medical transformation, relationship with a Catholic nun, and lack of community with Black, cisgender women in prison. I employ theory from Black feminism and transgender media studies to analyze Sophia's medical transition, interpersonal relationships, and political ideologies. Ultimately, Sophia Burset's narrative functions as a non-threatening trans woman to alleviate transphobia and render Blackness invisible in Laverne Cox's embodiment of Sophia Burset.

Keywords: Transnormativity, Black Womanhood, Hegemonic Femininity, Intersectionality

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"It's okay, honey; you can look. I spent a lot of money for it," Sophia Burset states while squatting in an open bathroom stall, wiping herself after urinating (Burley, 2013). Sophia is speaking to Piper Chapman, the protagonist of *Orange is the New Black*, during Season 1. The "it" Sophia referenced is her vagina. Piper, a White, cisgender woman, declines this invitation. Piper is uncomfortable because Sophia is a trans woman, not because Sophia is Black. The juxtaposition of a Black, transgender woman and a White, cisgender woman discussing female anatomy is representative of ideologies of womanhood as authentic or inauthentic. The invitation to look at "it" is read literally as the vagina of Sophia and figuratively as a lived experience of transgender women. The use of the word "it" as a reference to Sophia's genitalia is also indicative of language that communicates the subject position of transgender women as less than human. Transgender individuals transgress gender boundaries,

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and their gender presentation is often the core of transphobic language to dehumanize them. The pronoun of "it" is grammatically used to refer to objects; Sophia's use of "it" objectifies her body and her personhood. Our choice to look at "it" or to look at "her," must be a conscious decision to engage with difference on a television program.

Orange is the New Black is a Netflix original series based on the book *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison,* by Piper Kerman (2010). Kerman is a Smith College graduate whose book details her privileged lifestyle of international travel that resulted in a 1-year prison sentence. Kerman's memoir provides readers with a look at prison life through the lens of a White, blue-eyed, blonde-haired, cisgender, "all-American nice girl." Through this gaze, Kerman's construction of womanhood in prison focuses predominantly on traditional, second-wave feminist ideologies of sexual harassment and assault, female sexual liberation, and prison reform, rather than abolition. Throughout six seasons, *Orange is the New Black* features representations of women from diverse backgrounds; however, Sophia is the sole transgender character in Piper's life. Sophia Burset is distinct because she provides evidence of a Black, transgender woman on television and because Laverne Cox, a Black, trans woman, was cast in the role. Laverne Cox had a double burden: she needed to succeed in a hegemonic industry as the first Black, trans actress to be a series regular. Also, Cox was thrust into the position of being a national spokesperson for the transgender community.

The casting of a Black, transgender woman as a cast member in a television series was a significant shift in representations of trans identities. Before the production of *Orange is the New Black*, trans portrayals predominantly had been negative and stereotypical; television shows and films primarily created narrative plots where transgender characters were either prostitutes or people who intentionally deceived others in their gender presentations (Bettcher, 2007; Booth, 2011). The year 2013 was coined as the transgender tipping point, marking an assumption that our country was poised to acknowledge transgender identity as legitimate. *Time Magazine* featured Laverne Cox on the cover of an issue titled "The Transgender Tipping Point," making her the first transgender person to appear on the cover of *Time Magazine* (Steinmetz, 2014). Cox's visibility as Sophia Burset catapulted her advocacy for transgender civil rights to the forefront of news media outlets. Cox's visibility led to television interviews with Katie Couric, NPR radio interviews, and an interview with Janet Mock on MSNBC. Laverne Cox's fame and popularity led to her being the first openly transgender person to appear on the cover of *Cosmopolitan*.

Cox's representation of Sophia Burset paved the way for current shows, such as Netflix's *Sense8* (Nayar, 2015), FOX's *Star* (Daniels, 2016), and *FX's Pose* (Murphy, 2018), to not only hire transgender women but to center their lives as significant plot points within television shows. For example, *Pose* was the first show to hire more than one transgender woman of color and to provide various representations of transgender identities throughout the series. The characters on *Pose* were predominantly transgender women of color, and the show explored the day-to-day oppression faced by Black and Latino transgender individuals. The show took place within the context

of ballroom culture in 1980s New York, and effectively highlighted the role of queer kinships in the continued survival of transgender people (Murphy, 2018). In addition, Black, trans activist Janet Mock was hired as one of the writers for *Pose*. Although the visibility of transgender individuals in media is increasing, this does not necessarily equate to positive changes for trans people. Feder & Juhasz (2016) stated:

> Trans people are not yet authorized to set the terms of our own visibility. To be visible, we must conform to the demands placed on us by a public that wants to buy a story that affirms their sense of themselves as ethical.

The current visibility of transgender individuals in media is highly formulaic and supports dominant structures that uplift White, neoliberalism ideologies of acceptance and equality. Sophia Burset's character illustrates societal anxieties over the recognition of trans people as worthy of personhood and protections under United States law. Laverne Cox's representation of Sophia on *Orange is the New Black* constructs transgender subjectivity through Sophia's medical transition and lack of racial community within the prison.

This paper utilizes Black, feminist theories of intersectionality and transgender theories to explore race and gender embodiments in cisgender and transgender Black women on *Orange is the New Black*. In its simplest form, "intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis, 2008, p. 68). Similarly, Smith (1998, p. xvi) outlined the usefulness of an intersectional analytic that adheres to the ideology that "power relations that dominate others are complicit in the subordination of Black and other women of color as well." This article considers the social and political factors that constrain and construct agency for Sophia and the Black, cisgender women on *Orange is the New Black*. The intersectional identities of trans and cisgender Black women provide valuable insight into the diversity of Black womanhood. Sophia's representation functions to silence systems and institutions of oppression via constructing her agency outside of racial community formations.

I read Sophia's narrative as a neoliberal coming of age story in which ideologies of individualism, colorblindness, and White, hegemonic womanhood become embodied in trans subjectivity. Since Sophia's storyline purposely circumvents critical dialogue on race and anti-Black racism in prisons, she functions to appease societal anxieties of trans people as deviant and dangerous. Sophia's narrative further reaffirms a post-race, colorblind society that erases her racialized sexism and establishes her transgender identity as operating outside of racial formations; thus, Sophia achieves transgender subjectivity by making her embodiment of Blackness invisible. This de-racing of Sophia occurs via the show's failure to place her in community with Black, cisgender women. Hall (2001, p. 17) asserted that media representations make use of similarities and differences "to establish relationships between concepts or to distinguish them from one another." Sophia's isolation from sisterhood with Black, cisgender women suggests that cisgender and transgender

Black women do not form strong familial bonds with each other. By constructing Sophia's personhood outside of racial formations, *Orange is the New Black* creates a non-threatening transgender woman worthy of subjectivity. Through ignoring Sophia's racial identity and foregrounding her gender identity, the writers of *Orange is the New Black* reproduced ideologies of a single-axis identity and issue.

I begin my analysis by focusing on the representation of her medical transition during the episode "Lesbian Request Denied," which constructs her personhood via visual evidence of her crossing gender binaries to achieve womanhood (Burley, 2013). Next, I consider how the character of Sophia Burset affirms the humanity of trans people via framing a trans woman as non-threatening, desexualized, and morally capable of being socialized into a neoliberal subject. Sophia's vaginal hubris, openness about her sexual reassignment surgery, family, and battle for hormones are the center of her narrative. Lastly, I focus my analysis on interpersonal relationships of kinship among Sophia, Sister Ingalls, and Black, cisgender women. Sophia remains mostly absent from community with Black women and instead forges a friendship with a Catholic nun. Sophia's separation and disassociation from the Black, cisgender women suggests that transgender civil rights are more salient to her personhood than Black civil rights. In addition, it posits that Black, cisgender women are transphobic and incapable of accepting Sophia's transgender identity.

"Trans is, trans ain't?": Visualizing the embodiment of transgender subjectivity

The history of "seeing" and "looking" renders gaze as a privilege, often only afforded to the dominant group. For example, enslaved Black people in the United States were punished for looking directly at White people (hooks, 2009). Similarly, for transgender women, visibility is simultaneously a privilege and oppression. A. Finn Enke (2012, p. 66), a transgender theorist, asserted that "cissexual privilege is instantiated in part through the activity of 'reading' and assigning male or female sex/gender to others." When Piper was offered a chance to look at Sophia, she occupied this position of privilege to view Sophia's body as a spectacle and to label her gender identity. Furthermore, the opening scene of "Lesbian Request Denied" marked Sophia simultaneously as a man, a woman, transgender, Black, middle class, and a firefighter. The sole focus on her body in this episode represents how society reads gender identity; individuals look for identity markers on the body (Hall, 2001; Stryker, 2008). Approximately 1 minute of screen time was utilized to focus exclusively on Sophia's naked body, deliberately avoiding her face. As visual markers of her transition appeared in this episode, it highlighted how "gendered identity helps racialized identity become operative" (Joseph, 2013, p. 4). To gaze upon Sophia's body in this episode is paramount to representing Sophia's gender transition. In this episode, we also learn about Sophia's family, the transphobia she experienced within and outside of prison, her previous occupation, and how Sophia became an inmate at Litchfield Prison.

Sophia's gender transition was predominantly represented through the use of a private bathroom stall and a mirror. The mirror scene in "Lesbian Request Denied" is a film trope that produces a "dysphoric experience" in which the character does not feel at home in their body (Keegan, 2013). Sophia searches for a private bathroom stall in the locker room to hide her gender identity from the other firefighters. The silence and lack of eye contact from Sophia while in the locker room illustrate her disconnection with her male, cisgender identity. In the private bathroom stall, Sophia begins to change clothing. The gaze of the camera is positioned on Sophia's torso and moves up to showcase her chest. Her masculine chest is adorned with a lacy, pink bra, and the camera focuses our gaze on the juxtaposition of masculinity and femininity in the fire station locker room. The objectification of Sophia's body occurs the moment she pulls her shirt up and partially covers her face, preventing our gaze from viewing the rest of her person. The covering of Sophia's face while the camera gazes at her body highlights ideologies of the cisgender gaze. The cisgender gaze refers to how transgender and other nonbinary individuals are scrutinized for pleasure and consumption by cisgender individuals (Pullen, 2016). Underneath the cisgender gaze, the ambiguity of a transgender body is a spectacle. The cisgender gaze is, thus, a dominant way of seeing that privileges bodies that are easily read as "male" or "female." The cisgender gaze objectifies Sophia and attempts to emphasize her gender identity solely; the camera solidifies this identity through a full appraisal of Sophia's body.

The screen momentarily goes black and zooms out to show Sophia in a different bathroom, once again gazing at herself in the mirror. Sophia's use of the mirror allows her to gaze at her body, while the audience gazes at her. The scene morphs the locker room in the fire station into the bathroom at Litchfield Prison. The camera repeatedly zooms in on typically sexualized parts of Sophia's body. Her pert breasts, flat stomach, and muscular legs fill the screen. The focus on her breasts multiple times emphasizes her womanhood; albeit, an object that is sexualized. This frame, in particular, is representative of the male gaze, preoccupied with the visual pleasure of feminine bodies (Mulvey, 1975). Sophia's body is the ideal trans body in its performances of femininity. Cisgender assimilation is the expectation that transgender women should conform to cisgender (and often heteronormative) standards of appearance, behavior, and performance. This notion essentializes transgender identity as an imitation of hegemonic womanhood and reduces transgender gender identity to body presentation alone. Sophia holds her head high, looking directly into the mirror, beaming with pride and enjoyment. The male and cisgender gazes of Sophia simultaneously produce a transgender subject that is both woman and object. The cinematic shift of Sophia's gaze in "Lesbian Request Denied" implicates Sophia's transition as central to her personhood and development, while also indicating she is more than just a transgender woman in prison.

Sophia's previous occupation as a New York firefighter in a (post-)9/11 society, as well as her family relationships, bring complexity to Sophia's narrative that moves beyond traditional transgender tropes of deceivers (Bettcher, 2007; Malatino, 2016). Sophia Burset's character provides evidence of the existence of transgender people

as non-threatening, reinforcing transnormativity via her media transition and relationships with other characters. The prison, as the primary location of *Orange is the New Black*, is a further level of gender correction that disciplines the transgender subject into gender binaries, emphasizing gender sameness over race difference. As Sophia was arrested and imprisoned shortly post-operation, the majority of her visibility as a trans woman occurs while incarcerated. Caputi (2015, p. 1141), in her examination of social justice issues on *Orange is the New Black,* stated that prisons are "total institutions, places where guards and officials exert complete control." The disciplinary power of prison seeks to socialize deviant bodies and identities into proper subjects, creating a prison industrial complex (Davis, 2003; Spade 2015). The restriction of Sophia's hormones during "Lesbian Request Denied" simultaneously affirms her gender identity and marginalizes her in interactions with cisgender people (McIntyre, 2018). The medical staff in prison lower the dosages of Sophia's prescribed hormones to save money and appropriate the funds to other departments. Racism and economic profit drive the prison industrial complex" an ideology that is explored during Season 3 when Management & Correction Corporation, a private prison company, purchases the prison. Sophia is assimilated into her gender under the structure of the prison through her relationship with Sister Ingalls and the cisgender, Black women. As with many transgender, incarcerated individuals, Sophia receives very little protection, support, or respect from inmates within the prison institution.

My favorite sister is Catholic: Idealizing White hegemonic femininity

Sophia's desire to maintain her medical transition causes her to befriend Sister Ingalls to gain access to estrogen in the episode "The Chickening" (Burley, 2013). Sister Ingalls is well respected in the prison community and continues to practice her Catholic religion daily. Sophia uses this to her advantage and agrees to meet Sister Ingalls for Bible study in the library. The camera swiftly focuses on Sophia, providing a close-up of her face as she says: "so you do understand what I've been going through?" Sister Ingalls looks intently at Sophia and compassionately replies: "I know changes in the body can be painful. But remember, your body is just the ship. Your soul is the passenger." Sophia looks at Sister Ingalls with disbelief, chuckling slightly; her chuckle implies she is not getting the answers she wants. The metaphor that Sister Ingalls invokes separates the body from the mind and acknowledges that gender identity and gender presentation are distinct. However, Sister Ingalls simultaneously minimizes Sophia's desire for her "ship" and "passenger" to be one. The minimization of Sophia's gender transition is transphobic and representative of our neoliberal ideologies of "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" (Bassichis, Lee, & Spade, 2015, p. 32). Sister Ingalls insinuates that losing medical access for a transgender woman equates to an opportunity to learn a moral lesson. Sister Ingalls not only functions as Sophia's moral compass in prison, but also represents the type of respectable subjectivity that Sophia should embody as a trans woman: sexually pure, focused on family relationships, and ethical.

Sophia tries harder to create empathy, paralleling changes of menopause with her hormonal changes. Sophia lowers her head, in respect to Sister Ingalls' status as an elder, and states: "see, it's especially hard for me . . . because . . . it's taken me so long to get to this point. And I'm . . . just not ready to give it up, you know?" Sophia's language deliberately invokes ideologies of White feminism via equating the experience of menopause with that of losing her hormones. She continues her plea for help, never breaking eye contact with the camera or wavering from her convictions, stating, "I sacrificed so much."

> *Sister Ingalls*: Yes, you said. *Sophia*: I feel like finally! Finally, I'm the woman that God intended me to be, you know? *Sister Ingalls*: That's wonderful. You're not getting my hormones. (Burley, 2013)

Sister Ingalls's tone mirrors Sophia's: empathetic and firm, gently chastising Sophia for her attempt at manipulation. Sophia's admission of "not giving it up" and "I'm finally the woman God intended" indicates that both her gender presentation and gender identity are equally important. Sister Ingalls chastises Sophia's desire to maintain her womanly figure and instead attempts to save her soul by making her a "true woman." Matt Richardson (2013, p. 115) expounded upon the significance of gender to trans individuals, stating that "for the trans person, to deny one's gender identity is comparable to suspending life: one is alive but not living." The loss of hormones for Sophia is a genuine fear, indicative of the daily nightmare transgender women face as they struggle for health care in an oppressive system that devalues their medical needs (Spade, 2015). This is especially true because Black, trans women are "disproportionately impacted by physical and structural violence" (Hunter, 2015).

Sophia and Sister Ingalls' relationship begins as a way for Sophia to get hormones, but eventually continues as Sophia gains knowledge into White, hegemonic womanhood. Sister Ingalls and Sophia's relationship continues to flourish through codirecting a Christmas pageant, church visits, and talks in which Sister Ingalls counsels Sophia on personal and family problems. In the Season 1 episode "Fucksgiving," Sophia seeks Sister Ingalls' counsel on her marriage with her wife Crystal. Sophia's marriage to a Black, cisgender woman provides an opportunity for *Orange is the New Black* to explore a same-sex relationship outside of prison and represent intimacy and desire between cisgender and transgender Black women. However, Sophia is desexualized in the relationship. During their Thanksgiving visitation, Crystal states that she is "lonely and misses men" and is in love with her pastor (Burley, 2013). She requests Sophia's blessing to have a sexual relationship with him. Sophia immediately refuses to give her approval and discusses her predicament with Sister Ingalls while in the chapel.

Sister Ingalls' advice is for Sophia to give Crystal her blessing, stating: "she married a man with a penis because I assume, she wanted to use it occasionally. You got what you needed at a pretty big cost to your family. It's the *right* thing to do." Sister Ingalls' advice reduces Sophia's gender transition to a moral choice and reinforces heteronormative relationship structures. In addition, Crystal's need for a penis occurs

through a sexual relationship with a religious leader. Sister Ingalls presents her advice as logical and compassionate: a moral choice that a good woman would make to keep her marriage. Effectively, this legitimizes Crystal's extramarital affair through the eyes of God. Sophia eventually takes the advice of Sister Ingalls and gives her wife permission to have sex with her church pastor. However, Sophia has no sexual relationship with her wife or any other person, expressing no desire for either men or women throughout the series. The exclusion of sexual desire from Sophia's personhood mirrors that of Sister Ingalls, a nun. As a desexualized subject, Sophia bypasses tropes of transgender women as violent sexual predators (Bettcher, 2007). Disciplining Sophia into a desexualized, transgender subject within White, hegemonic femininity occurs through modeling her personhood after Sister Ingalls.

Sister Ingalls represents the moral good of White women and their acceptance of trans women. Sophia's friendship with Sister Ingalls serves as evidence of her decency. Sister Ingalls gains a "daughter" and an audience on which to bestow her neoliberal, religious wisdom. This relationship serves as Sophia's only kinship within the prison. For example, when Sophia suffers a hate crime perpetrated by a Black, cisgender woman in the episode "Don't Make Me Come Back There" (Season 3), she receives no words of support from other inmates or prison staff. During the confrontation, transphobic comments about Sophia's genitals indicate that she does not belong in a women's prison. As she violently grabs Sophia, a Black, cisgender inmate states, "you still got your dick, and my man is having a hard time at Lexington. Meanwhile, you are hiding out here pretending to be a female." These words from a Black, cisgender woman are meant to isolate Sophia from community with Black women and equate her personhood as a trans woman to her genitalia. Her transphobic words lead to a physical altercation when she tries to view Sophia's genitalia as proof of her gender identity. Sophia's wig is ripped off, and the scuffle heavily bruises her face.

After the attack, Sophia requests that the prison staff undergo "crisis and sensitivity training" to better handle incidents of transgender hate crimes at Litchfield. Sophia's White, liberal solution to social justice mirrors a "quest for inclusion and recognition by dominant U.S. institutions rather than questioning and challenging the fundamental inequalities" inherent in prison systems (Spade, 2015, p. 30). Sensitivity and diversity training do not provide adequate resistance to the structures that led to Sophia's hate crime. However, Sophia continues to push her neoliberal agenda and threatens to sue the prison and make national news via sensational headlines, such as "She-Male Jail Fail" and "Balls to the Wall in Tranny Prison Brawl." She seeks solace and comfort while visiting with Sister Ingalls. With a sad voice, Sophia tells Sister Ingalls, "I'm here because I realized you *might* be my only friend." Sister Ingalls advises Sophia to accomplish her goals through nonviolence, once again replicating a liberal politic that historically has done very little to progress the lives of transgender individuals. Sophia is to remain civilized, suffer in silence, and take the morally higher ground of the path of least resistance. The choice to cast a White nun as a Black, transgender woman's best friend functions to remove her from community with Black, cisgender women, while socializing Sophia into a proper, neoliberal citizen.

My other sistas are ratchet: The ghettoization of Black womanhood

Sophia's interactions with Sister Ingalls and the Black, cisgender women are drastically different. Sister Ingalls is kind, compassionate, and nurturing to Sophia. The Black, cisgender inmates—Taystee, Janae, Black Cindy, Poussey, and Crazy Eyes—are petty-minded, loud, rude, crazy, conniving, and transphobic in their interactions with Sophia. The difference in Sophia's relationship with Sister Ingalls and the Black, cisgender inmates is illuminated during the first season, in which we learn about the prison's race-based social system in the episode "W.A.C. Pack." This episode features an election in which each residential unit can vote for one member to represent the interests of the group in political matters with the prison administration. Inmate Lorna Morello explains the election process while advocating for herself to represent the White women:

> You can only vote within your race or your group. See, everyone elects a representative from their own tribe: White, Black, Hispanic, golden girls, others. And those five gals, they meet with Healy, they tell him what we want, then he speaks to the higher-ups. It's like student council. (Burley, 2013)

The racial nature of the election process reveals the ideologies of each group via the person they choose to represent them and what each group deems as politically significant. Racial differences are visual and verbally coded as Black, White, Latino, and Asian.

Sophia and the Black, cisgender women make up the racial group labeled as "the ghetto." The use of the term "ghetto" is not only an offensive, racially charged word, but it cruelly makes a mockery of the historical injustices experienced by Black Americans. Patricia Hill Collins (2008, p. 69) noted:

> Because Blacks had limited options in a context of racially segregated housing, landlords raised rents and pushed families into overcrowded and unhealthy housing conditions—limited job opportunities and residential segregation combined to produce a new form of prison, racially segregated Black urban neighborhoods that became knowns as "ghetto."

The use of the label of ghetto to describe the inmates and their residential space solidifies their Blackness to viewers; not only are we given visual evidence of their Blackness, but verbal confirmation as well. Although Sophia is a member of the ghetto because of her race, she is absent from many of the scenes in which the Black, cisgender women create communities of support, friendship, and kinship. Within the context of prison, Sophia's alienation and emotional detachment from Black, cisgender women disassociate her identity from controlling images, such as the welfare queen, the angry and loud Black woman, and the hypersexual Jezebel.

The same Black bodies that are expendable in the "free world" are a significant source of profit behind bars (Davis, 2003). Their bodies are commodified to make money, and their personhood is aberrant. The backgrounds of the Black, cisgender women inmates before prison, along with their actions at Litchfield, are racially coded

via negative, controlling images of Black women (Collins, 2008). Negative images of Black, cisgender women are abundant and are historically tied to racial formations in the United States that represent Black, cisgender women as less than human. Controlling images of Black, cisgender women are fundamentally about marking Black womanhood as deviant and uplifting White, neoliberal womanhood as ideal. These controlling images, as explicated by Jennifer Nash (2014, p. 43), "render Black female bodies synonymous with certain images, oftentimes of the spectacular, the exaggerated, the hyperbolic, and the grotesque." The cisgender, Black women are coded as inferior via historical tropes of Black women as bad mothers, corrupt citizens, and flawed women.

Taystee (Tasha) has been an inmate twice at Litchfield; she spent her childhood in group homes and juvenile detention centers. Taystee eventually left these institutions as a teenager to live and work for a Black, cis woman drug dealer, Vee. Janae went into solitary confinement for her defiant attitude on her first day in prison; she returns to solitary confinement once more for her participation in an underground cigarette gang. Cindy is referred to as "Black Cindy" because the prison also has another inmate named Cindy. While working as a TSA agent, Black Cindy stole from passengers' luggage. Poussey has been at Litchfield for 2 years before the beginning of the show and is responsible for making toilet hooch for the women in prison. Lastly, Crazy Eyes (Suzanne) shows signs of mental illness in her erratic sexual behavior and makes frequent trips to the psychiatric ward of the prison. The addition of the character Vee as Season 2's main villain reinforces the ideology of the deviance of Black, cis women. Similar to Taystee, Vee (Yvonne) is also at Litchfield for the second time and is ruthless, conniving, and frightening. At Litchfield, Vee uses violence, deception, and humiliation to be a ringleader in smuggling in contraband and selling cigarettes in prison.

Most ideological tensions within the prison are predominately forged and resolved within a racial group; however, Sophia is independent of racial kinships. Sophia's interactions with Black, cisgender women construct a difference in trans and cis embodiments of Blackness. Bey (2017, p. 277) asserted that, in particular contexts, "Black people or transgender folks work toward assimilation through buying into a proper Black or transgender citizenship." Sophia's assimilation tactics of White, hegemonic femininity provide her with transgender subjectivity but do not serve her best interests as a Black, transgender woman. Blackness is erased/made invisible within Sophia's narrative to render being transgender and being Black as oppositional. Sophia's values and problems throughout the series do not align with those of the Black, cis women. As a result, Sophia lacks a crucial resource for survival. Forming kinship is central to thriving for Black folks; historically, the Black community has banded together to battle social justice issues, such as poverty, racism, inadequate health care, state-sponsored violence, and detrimental living conditions. The Black, cisgender women's tactic of kinship and community rather than assimilation furthers their collective survival within the prison system.

Black (cis)terhood: We are family

The Black, cisgender women develop a close familial bond with each other and spend the majority of their time with each other while incarcerated. They celebrate each other's successes and provide advice and support through difficult times. These acts of service are currency and are virtually the only way to create kinship. For example, the Black women plan a going away party for Taystee before her release from Litchfield in the episode "Fucksgiving." During Taystee's party, Poussey and Miss Claudette attempt to alleviate Taystee's concerns about surviving outside of prison, telling her she is intelligent and has a lot to offer to the world. After giving Taystee advice, the women begin dancing to Kelis' (2003) song "Milkshake" in celebration of Taystee's release and future success. Sophia does not attend Taystee's party and, thus, misses this moment of fellowship with the other women. Sophia also provides no words of support for Taystee when she leaves the prison. She does not have the same concerns or fears as the Black, cisgender women. Sophia is instead concerned with the predicament in which her wife is beginning a sexual relationship with a cisgender man. Sophia's outsider status and absence from this celebration and others throughout the series alienate her from community with Black women.

In the episode "W.A.C. Pack," Sophia and Taystee each campaign for votes to represent the ghetto. Taystee's platform is "waterbeds and fried chicken for everybody." The inclusion of fried chicken in Taystee's campaign is a racial trope that is considered to be universal to all Black people. Taystee looks around the dining hall room, addressing the other Black, cis women at the table, loudly and skeptically stating: "if 'yall want a man representing you, be my fucking guest." Taystee looks directly at Sophia to emphasize "be my fucking guest" and rolls her eyes with disapproval. Taystee's statement devalues Sophia's womanhood and asserts the superiority of cisgender women. Taystee's crass words about Sophia being a man show a lack of awareness and respect for transgender women, reifying notions of rampant homophobia and transphobia in the Black community (Eguchi, Calafell, & Files-Thompson, 2014). However, a study by The National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that "Black transgender people who are out to their families found acceptance at a higher rate than the overall sample of transgender respondents" (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2015). A transphobic slur coming from Taystee undermines sisterhood between transgender and cisgender Black women and advances notions that Black, cisgender women are not in solidarity with Black, trans women.

While holding her glass of orange juice, Sophia returns Taystee's glare with a discerning look. Taystee continues her speech, adding, "that bitch got a plastic pussy or some shit." Her tone remains disapproving and arrogant. Furthermore, her cursing and loud voice present her as incapable of being dignified. The frame widens, and we see the rest of the women at the table. Sophia, looking Taystee directly in the eye, mockingly replies, "you wanna see it?" Once again, Sophia invites others to view her vagina. Scoffing at Sophia's invitation, Taystee responds with more criticism: "Please! You flash that shit like it's made out of diamonds." Shrugging her shoulders with

disregard, Taystee continues, "I done seen it about ten times already today." Several Black women begin to laugh at Taystee's statement, turning Sophia's identity into a transphobic joke. The use of humor to devalue Sophia is reminiscent of tropes of transgender women as jokes, rather than as authentic identities worthy of respect and recognition. The reference to her genitalia once again highlights the difference between her and the Black, cisgender women.

With a condescending tone, Sophia looks at Taystee and states, "listen, honey, I know all you care about is what you get to watch on the TV, but me and my diamond kitty here wanna prioritize things around this place." Sophia uses Taystee's transphobic rhetoric, along with her platform, to highlight the differences in the priorities of a Black, cisgender woman and a Black, trans woman. Sophia asserts she will make "real" change; in the eyes of Sophia, Taystee's campaign promises appear trivial and silly in the framework of neoliberal human rights (Spade, 2015). Sophia elaborates on her platform, conceitedly announcing her promises for changes, "like health care, basic human rights." Human rights, in this sense, essentially means trans rights. Sophia's priorities align with contemporary politics happening outside of the prison and highlight her commitment to trans civil rights. This ideological battle between accepting trans folks as human or rejecting trans folks as less than human is a choice that becomes easier if we can identify with Sophia's political and social ideologies. Issues of gender, for Sophia, are presented as more progressive than issues of race. Sophia occupies the interstitial space of a complex identity. Her community ties are complicated, and her personhood remains questionable to both the prisoners and the prison staff. Yet, her narrative reaffirms a post-racial, colorblind society that erases racialized sexism and establishes her transgender identity as operating outside of racial formations.

The Black women mock Sophia's idealist notions of prison reform and position Sophia as an outsider in their group. Sophia is civilized and well-spoken; Taystee, in comparison, is represented once again as ignorant and foolish. Looking intently into the camera lens, Taystee straightforwardly tells Sophia, "you ain't never gonna change that shit." Laughing with ridicule, Taystee continues, "you think this is White people politics?" The camera zooms out, and the frame widens to show other people in the dining hall listening in on their conversation. Elaborating on "White people politics," Taystee and Poussey mockingly personify vernacular and ideologies they code as White. Their voices become higher in pitch and are gleeful about the topics of the conversation.

> *Taystee*: Let's talk about health care, Mackenzie.
> *Poussey*: Oh, Amanda, I'd rather not. It's not polite!
> *Taystee*: Well, did you see that wonderful new documentary about the best sushi in the world? Of course, now that I'm vegan, I didn't enjoy it as much as I might have before.
> *Poussey*: You know, I just don't have the time. Chad and I have our yoga workshop, then wine-tasting class, and then we have to have *really* quiet sex every night at 9.
> *Taystee*: Did you hear that new piece on NPR about hedge funds?

> *Poussey*: Amanda, let me ask you: do you like my bangs these days? I mean, do you like them straight down, or should I be doing a sweep to the side?
> *Taystee*: Sweep to the side, oh my god! (Burley, 2013)

When finished, Taystee and Poussey laugh and reach across the table to give each other praise for their imitations; they physically touch hands and move their fingers back and forth in a display of familiarity. Taystee and Poussey silence Sophia, while simultaneously reminding her of the hierarchy of racialized sexism of White women and cisgender privilege. Through their imitation of White women, Taystee and Poussey mark Sophia's ideologies as White, and thus not in the best interests of the women living in the ghetto.

Sophia's campaign to represent the ghetto, fueled by a White, liberal politic, assumes that an unjust system can become a just system via democracy and non-violent action by model Blacks. Litchfield does eventually undergo a social change, but this occurs via the death of Poussey, a riot, the privatization of the prison, and a hostage negotiation led by the Black, cisgender women (Burley, 2013). The contrasting ideologies of Taystee's and Sophia's campaigns position them as adversaries, both in the Women's Advisory Council election and within the confines of the prison. Taystee's campaign is built on material changes in the prison for all the women, while Sophia's campaign strategy employs contemporary rhetoric on trans civil rights that support her needs only. Taystee wins the election, and Sophia glares at the Black women with anger and disappointment. The results of the election highlight Black, cisgender women as ignorant. However, I assert that the Black, cisgender women were painstakingly aware of the limits of human rights and health care within a prison. Our oppositional gaze provides us with the ability to reject and negotiate dominant ideologies that seek to devalue our personhood (hooks, 2009). The oppositional gaze is mostly absent in Sophia's engagement with prison institutions. The Black, cis women quickly realize that the prison administrators do not want to make substantial changes: a prediction that comes to fruition during the first meeting of the Women's Advisory Council. The representatives receive Dunkin Donuts, and staff members tell them that the prison will only provide the funds to purchase coffee and doughnuts monthly.

The separation of the racial and political injustices experienced by the Black, cis women from the transgender political injustices suffered by Sophia frames these oppressions as mutually exclusive, rather than intertwined. Throughout the series, the Black women experience several injustices that Sophia disregards. For example, Sophia is apathetic after Poussey Washington's murder during Season 4, which occurred while Poussey was participating in a peaceful protest. The violent death of Poussey at the hands of police officials illustrates a historical and contemporary reality for Black and transgender folks. The writers evoked the contemporary social movement, Black Lives Matter, and the Ferguson riots during the prison riot to further illustrate the differences between Sophia and the Black, cisgender women (Ransby, 2018). Black Lives Matter began as a hashtag on social media following

the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin (Rickford, 2016). The acquittal of George Zimmerman in July 2013 was a devastating blow to Black folks and reproduced historical traumas of injustice within our judicial system. Yet the writers of *Orange is the New Black* failed to address racial injustices in our criminal justice system until the fourth season.

As a community, the Black, cisgender women gather support and resources to lead a prison riot to demand better conditions. Led by Taystee, the women's demands included better health care, the end of solitary confinement, and adequately trained correctional offers: the exact changes Sophia advocated for during her campaign in Season 1. However, Sophia does not participate in the riot to avenge Poussey's death, even though she is no longer in solitary confinement and has returned to the general population. This choice implies that Sophia does not care about brutality against Black, cisgender women by White officers, and only cares about her own, transgender civil rights. However, the same structures that contributed to Sophia losing her hormones are the same structures that contributed to the death of Poussey. The intersection of anti-Black racism and anti-trans violence highlights the power of the matrix of domination within the prison industrial complex.

The prison industrial complex disposes of unwanted citizens in distinct ways; thus, communities of support are essential to the survival of incarcerated trans and cis Black women. The Black, cisgender women work together, led by their representative Taystee, to avenge Poussey's violent death and make substantial changes to prison conditions through hostage negotiations. The kinship that the Black, cisgender women share is so integral to their survival that Taystee returns to the prison during the first season. The Black, cisgender women's sisterhood is a community that creates spaces for them to thrive collectively. As a result, Taystee deliberately violates her parole in order to remain physically and emotionally connected with the kinship she formed at Litchfield. Taystee's return to prison is met with sadness, but also care from the other Black, cisgender women. Building community was and still is a tactic of resistance and power, precisely because of the forced separation and historical dismantling of Black nuclear and extended biological kin. These distinctions between Sophia and Black, cisgender women devalue the experiences of kinship created within the Black community and uplift dominant ideologies of hegemonic womanhood.

Conclusion

Although the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution provides equal protection under the law for all citizens, there is no federal law designating transgendered persons as a protected class or specifically requiring equal treatment for transgender people in society (Transgender Law Center, 2016). Sophia's separation and disassociation with Black, cisgender women provide the audience with a reprieve from current racial tensions, and primes them to recognize transgender civil rights as less threatening and more progressive to the status quo than Black civil rights movements. Capitalizing on this cultural momentum of the transgender tipping point, *Orange*

is the New Black utilizes the character of Sophia to humanize transgender individuals through a colorblind, neoliberal discourse that represents trans womanhood as hyperfeminine and unthreatening. Black, transgender womanhood and Black, cisgender womanhood are represented in binary opposition through economic labor, motherhood, sexuality, and political ideologies. Sophia Burset's character moves beyond dehumanizing media tropes of transgender women to construct a character that is complex and intriguing, but ultimately an outsider in her racial community.

Ultimately, *Orange is the New Black* glosses over the complexity of the interlocking oppressions of gender, race, and class experienced by both cisgender and transgender Black women. The intersectionality of Black, trans women is overlooked and understated by the writers of *Orange is the New Black*. Sophia is Black and a woman. If one is not included in the definition of a Black woman, then one is excluded from creating and forming bonds via sisterhood. The exclusion of Sophia from Black sisterhood regards her experiences of Black womanhood as inauthentic and dissimilar. Situating trans politics within an intersectional framework is essential to unpacking media representations and lived experiences of trans and cisgender Black women. This epistemological position highlights how institutions simultaneously construct individual and group identities through moral evaluations of those identities. Collective action between cis and trans Black women is integral to dismantling systems of oppression. As a result, I reiterate the necessity and importance of an intersectional analysis to illuminate inequalities in social, political, and cultural representations of race and gender. Black is still the new Black: the indispensable marker of "otherness."

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