

FINDING PSEUDO FAMILIES IN WOMEN'S  
PRISONS: FACT AND FANTASY

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# FINDING PSEUDO FAMILIES IN WOMEN'S PRISONS: FACT AND FANTASY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines prison literature concerning women's facilities, focusing on the years 1960-1979. Sixteen specific pieces of literature are examined focusing on three claims in respect to sexuality among the incarcerated women: 1. If the sixteen works include an operationalized definition of homosexuality; 2. What terminology the authors use interchangeably with homosexuality; 3. What evidentiary support do the authors use to support their claims concerning the incidence of homosexuality. The goals of the paper are to collect women's prison literature from the aforementioned time span and cast a critical light on this existing literature. I suggest that this literature should be examined from a new lens; possibly a feminist or queer theory lens to fully address the previous assertions of homosexuality.

## *Introduction*

Perspectives on what constitutes homosexual behavior have evolved from the early framework of biological anomaly and satanic influence. Both the feminist movement and queer theory have aided in this evolution, bringing the definition of homosexuality from textbook to fluid under a postmodern lens. With this being said, has this “new” take on homosexuality been applied in all modern literature and furthermore can it be applied to older literature? This paper focuses on the prison literature of the 1960s and 1970s concerning female inmates, and how homosexuality is portrayed in the pages of these revered texts. I examine how the authors operationally define homosexuality, the various homosexuality terminology used and its evolution through time, and the evidence they use to support their assertions concerning the incidence of homosexuality among the population studied. The purpose of this piece is to apply a critical lens to an existing body of literature suggesting that previous definitions of homosexuality are not applicable in modern work and that although these earlier works should continue to be cited, their age and outlook on homosexuality should also be acknowledged.

## *Goffman as a Disciplinary Anchor*

Two theoretical frameworks of prison culture appeared in “cultural turn” of the 1960s: Goffman’s concept of the total institution and Foucault’s concept of the panopticon. Goffman’s work (especially *Asylums*) is cited significantly more in the prison literature of the 1960s and 1970s than that of Foucault. Goffman’s discussion of the total institution as its own level of analysis is especially salient in this work. His analysis is in response to the physical removal of external “social discourse” (*Asylums*, 1961). This physical removal refers to the actual embodied structure of a prison facility- imposing exterior walls and distinctly separate living quarters. Total institutions were developed to mirror outside society somewhat being that there are schedules, though strict and removed from individual choice, that allow time to eat, sleep, and for social interaction. There are even opportunities for institutionalized social mobility. Inmates are rewarded with more enjoyable jobs or jobs with an increase in pay. This becomes an incentive to work within the boundaries established by the institution- good behavior and strong work ethic. Social mobility is also restricted since an inmate will never possess an institutional position of power over a guard.

When studying incarcerated women, the total institution is often considered an independent variable that is strongly correlated to unique social interaction. For example, the phenomenon “gay for the stay” occurs specifically in response to the total institution (Kunzel, 2002). The qualifications for reactions based upon total institutionalization occur in response to the desocialization/resocialization process. Upon entering a prison you are stripped of your “outside” identity and reassigned a new identity based on the



crime you committed in respect to your location within the institution. Once stripped of traditional identity labelers and conventional class indicators such as clothing, inmates are theoretically all placed on an equal plane in respect to the hierarchical functions enforced within the institutions. These aforementioned social markers, or labels, are referred to by Goffman as an “identity kit” (Asylums, 1961). Without this identity kit inmates are left to assign one another new social standings within the institution. Any new hierarchy formed among the inmates can be attributed to the resocialization process. Alliances and role taking are developed in response to the total institution. The resocialization process is often begun with a “rite of passage” ritual upon intake. Inmates are demeaned, reminded of their removal from society, and scare tactics are implemented. This “official” rite of passage is implemented by the guards as a way to enforce their prowess. An official rite of passage occurs among inmates as they are socialized into a specific group. Male facilities are informally organized by race, and initiation into a racialized group is dictated by their leader, or “shot-caller”. Women, often, do not have organized “shot-callers”; they operate under a matriarchy often known as a pseudo-family (Selling, 1931).

### *Conception of “Pseudo-Family” Terminology*

Selling’s initial use of the term pseudo-family spawned an entire generation of interest in incarcerated women. Throughout his innovative piece he maps out an example of a pseudo-family by identifying traditional familial roles such as mother, father and aunt. In doing so he created a gendered dichotomy among the women by categorizing

them in masculine or feminine familial roles. His evaluation of these newly identified pseudo-family members resulted in his identification of four categories of homosexuality: lesbianism, pseudo-homosexuality, mother/daughter relationships, and friendship. Lesbianism, aka “individual homosexuality” is defined most notably by occasional kissing and fond name calling. Pseudo-homosexuality refers to women who engage in the above behavior only when incarcerated. The mother/daughter, or group family, category sheds light on the use of pseudonyms that mirror traditional, patriarchal, family structure. The “father” is usually a woman with short hair and a husky voice, where the “mother” speaks softly and possesses a curvy figure. The last kinship descriptor identified by Selling is “friendship”. Friendship refers to all other non-hostile relationships within the facility.

Selling lays a powerful foundation for the examination of group relationships among incarcerated women. His creation of the term “pseudo- family” identifies a strong link to traditional family roles under modified institutional and same-sex circumstances. By creating a comparison to traditional dual sex family compositions the obvious differences highlight modified gender roles that are observed in a same-sex environment. To clarify, Selling applies traditional male familial roles to women and compares their social grouping patterns to that of a heterosexual formation. In doing so it leads to the assumption of homosexuality within these pseudo-family groupings. The roles of Mother and Father assume an emotional and sexual relationship. When the terms Mother and Father are applied in a same sex environment, it assumes that two women are engaged in an emotional and sexual relationship. Selling’s use of the term pseudo-family evolves in his piece to pseudo-homosexuality and the two are used interchangeably. The flexibility

of operational definitions and usage of his terminology and underlying conclusions imposed when assigning titles to subjects lays the foundation for an entire generation of literature that follows these same assumptions.

### *Solidifying Selling's Framework*

The prison is often identified as a community in which social interactions occur, and these social interactions are specific to an individual's location within the system (Hayner & Ash, 1940). A prison guard will have a vastly different socialization process than an inmate, and often social interactions remain separate due to different locations based on a power distribution. This distinction has been further separated into what can be labeled as formal group interactions and informal group interactions (Caldwell, 1956). Informal groups are formed by inmates who share similar interests and values and act cooperatively on behalf of them. A pseudo-family could be considered an informal group when applied to Caldwell's definition. It is made clear that informal groups formed in a total institution are limited to a single sex environment, and therefore create the illusion of only homosexual interactions. With this being said, it is implied that an informal group of single-sex individuals may hold homosexuality as a collective value. Homosexuality may be a technique of socialization into an informal group. Specifically with women, homosexuality or partnering may be a way to form alliances within the group (Caldwell, 1956). To form alliances in prison is extremely common. Alliances organize your social network, create a social hierarchy, as well as offer protection (Giallombardo, 1966). Inmates are often cited saying that these alliances are a form of

“play” and aid in the “passing of time” (1966). She also cites these alliances as taking place in the form of marital and familial unions.

Social roles in prison are introduced upon entry. Inmates often become exposed to these intrinsic roles through the desocialization process or the process of mortification (Goffman, 1957). Garabedian argues that inmates that are doing “easy time” are better able to further engross themselves in a social environment within the institution (1964). In reference to women’s facilities, which are traditionally lower security facilities, doing easy time may be congruent with the incidence of pseudo-family kinship and assumed homosexuality among incarcerated women. Emphasis is again placed on prison facilities being single-sex environments. Since all social roles fall within a single-sex framework, homosexuality is asserted as a central social role. If the commitment to a common value (homosexuality or creation of a pseudo-family alliance) is strong then the strength of membership within an informal group becomes solidified (social role). The level of conformity to an informal group is positively correlated to the salience of the group’s cohesive identity (Wheeler, 1961). If a member of an informal group is identified as a homosexual, then it is extremely likely that that identity will also be applied to the entire group.

The creation of these pseudo-family alliances is extremely important and the most prevalently cited way women organize themselves behind bars (Adamak and Dagger, 1968). Since women have commonly self-organized themselves into pseudo-families, and assigned titles associated with a heterosexual family grouping, they have also created a social hierarchy and alliance system. Inmate stays are made easier in that by integration into a pre-existing social system. If homosexuality or homosexual behavior grants one

access to a social system that provides interaction and protection then homosexuality can be viewed as a vehicle to gain access (Tittle, 1969).

### *How Do We Define Homosexuality*

When attempting to apply a definition to an identity, you must first begin with one of the scholarly pioneers of discovering sexual identity and making it operational, Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey's groundbreaking works "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male" and "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female" he elaborates on qualifications to being a homosexual. His well-known gradation scale that provided a respondent with a number that corresponded to their specific sexual identity is no longer a technique used to dialogue identity and sexuality. It, did, however, explode traditional/normative models of sexuality and offered alternative definitions to heterosexuality. Kinsey defines homosexuality as:

"connection with human behavior has been applied to sexual relations, either overt or psychic, between individuals of the same sex. Derived from the Greek root homo rather than from the Latin word for man, the term emphasizes the sameness of the two individuals who are involved in a sexual relation. The word is, of course, patterned after and intended to represent the antithesis of the word heterosexual, which applies to a relation between individuals of different sexes..."

To apply a more modern lens on sexuality you must explode the traditional binary concept of homosexual or heterosexual and look at a sexual identity as a multifaceted, complex aspect to overall identity ascription. Social marking in relation to identity development and maintenance is also seen within the prison system. The pseudo-family relationships have been [mis]marked as homosexual by numerous studies/researchers. In

order to challenge the traditional binary of sexuality, a more complex (possibly postmodern) model must be explored.

Identity is both “other-defined” and “self-defined” including “individual behavior, cultural attribution from others, structural location, and self-definition” (Brekhus, 1996). Brekhus also discusses the development and maintenance of sexual identities along a continuum of a marking classification. By placing emphasis on the socially marked identities, Brekhus asserts that the unmarked are not given the same analytical significance. Marked identities, such as homosexuality, are considered deviant often due to their markedness. By confusing homosexuality with pseudo-family relationships, the subject of study becomes inadvertently marked due to misattribution.

To be queer is “an act of conscious gender-bending” (Neitz, 2000). Queer functions on a plane outside a binary and even outside a continuum. Neitz discusses “transgressing the male/female binary” (2000). To be queer is not to be a gendered male or a gendered female but to reject an embodied gender entirely and the sexual orientations that gender imply (Seidman, 1996). The application of queer theory to prison culture literature would explode the sexual binary used to define/mark social groupings among incarcerated women. Queer theory provides an outlet to remove a traditional marking from kinship relations. By removing the lens of traditional homosexual markers frequently defined through patriarchal kinship roles it is possible to view pseudo-family relationships as organization tools for social grouping and not as exclusive outlets for homosexual sexual fantasy.

### *Literature Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

The literature used in the analysis focuses specifically to a nineteen year period spanning from 1960-1979. There are three pieces of work included dating before 1960. The decision to include these three specific pieces was largely based upon the amount of citations they received in the later work of the 1960s and 1970s. Almost all of the later works referenced the three pieces published before 1960- Selling (1931), Henry (1952), and Clemmer (1958). There are thirteen other pieces of work included in the analysis that were published between 1960 and 1979 making sixteen bodies of work total. The exclusionary criteria for these works were very minimal- composed only by the established dates. Inclusionary criteria were extremely broad. It was my intention to compile all the literature available concerning incarcerated women and the incidence of homosexuality behind bars that was published in the previously identified 19 year span. The sixteen works examined represent the consensus of homosexual identity and incidence among incarcerated women.

After the sixteen pieces of literature were compiled each one was examined for an operational definition of homosexuality. If one was found, it was important to note how it was used in relation to evidentiary support given by the author(s). Each work was examined in relation to their use of homosexual terminology and jargon like “butch” or “femme” and how this terminology was defined and assigned. It was also important to review carefully how each author(s) supported the incidence of homosexuality. Each type of evidentiary support is noted. Lastly, I was looking for trends over time especially focusing on (and if) the language evolved- if “pseudo-family” is specific to earlier work

and if it developed into more specific terminology that evokes an image of homosexuality.

*Operational Definitions of Homosexuality*

Date Published	Author	Title	Definition Present
1931	Selling, Lowell	The Pseudo Family	Yes
1952	Henry, Joan	Women in Prison	No
1958	Clemmer, Donald	The Prison Community	Yes
1963	Field, Xenia	Under Lock and Key	No
1965	Taylor, AJW	The Significance of "Darls"	No
1965	Ward, D. & Kassebaum, G.	Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure	Yes
1966	Giallombardo, R.	A Society of Women	Yes
1966	Konopka, Gisela	The Adolescent Girl in Conflict	No
1968	Adamark, R. & Dager, E.	Social Structure, Identification and Change in a Treatment-Oriented Institution	No
1969	Tittle, Charles	Inmate Organization	Yes
1972	Heffernan, Esther	Making it in Prison	No
1973	Chandler, Edna	Women in Prison	Yes
1974	Jensen, M.	Role Differentiation in Female Homosexual Quasi-Marital Unions	No
1974	Giallombardo, R.	The Social World of Imprisoned Girls	No*
1976	Jensen, G. & Jones, D.	Perspectives on Inmate Culture	No
1978	Van Wormer, K.	Sex Role Behavior in a Women's Prison	Yes

*Table 1: Existence of an operational definition of homosexuality.*

\* Giallombardo references her earlier definition found in her 1966 book "A Society of Women".

Of the sixteen works examined only seven included an operationalized definition of homosexuality (Table 1). The others which did not operationalize the term homosexuality, referring to it as an entity that does not require definition. They also referenced the term with various forms of evidentiary support which created fragmentation since no cohesive definition was identified as a point of reference.



### *Definitions through the Years*

In 1931 when Selling provided the world with the term pseudo-family he also established a definition and subsequent stages of homosexuality. According to Selling, homosexual behavior, “consists of putting her arm around her honey, occasional kissing, and some fondling” (pg. 7). He identifies these homosexual traits among a pseudo-family setting which he defines as mirroring heterosexual familial relationships. In his four stages of homosexuality he includes the mother/daughter relationship as the 3<sup>rd</sup> step. By blurring the line between pseudo-family kinship and homosexuality he provides the sketchy framework within which future prison researchers could write.

Donald Clemmer examines the incidence of homosexuality in male facilities. I choose to include his work because many of the researchers of the 1960s and 1970s reference him heavily in order to provide a point of comparison between the incidence of homosexuality among incarcerated males and that of females. Clemmer defines homosexuality as “abnormal sex conduct” (1958). Clemmer also discusses the historical origins of homosexuality dating back to the Romans. In his brief definition concerning sexual conduct he does not elaborate on what he defines as “abnormal”.

Ward and Kassebaum provide a definition of homosexuality that is most in-tune with assumed common perception of the time. They focus on mainly physical attributes of a homosexual relationship defining it as, “kissing and fondling of the breasts, manual or oral stimulation of the genitalia, and simulation of intercourse between two women” (1965). The definition is included early in the book and is rarely referred to throughout.

In Society of Women, Rose Giallombardo frames her definition of homosexuality within the context of a “marital relationship” or a “relationship dyad”. She defines these homosexual interactions as “meaningful personal and social relationships” (1966). This definition differs from earlier versions since it does not deal explicitly with physical contact. This focus on social relationships represents a temporary shift in the literature in which homosexuality is not defined under the umbrella of sexual encounters.

Charles Tittle’s work on the social organization of inmates defend homosexual “attachments” as, “relatively enduring primary relationships, that take place in more stable unions and are viewed more often in terms of a total relationship” (1969). Similarly Esther Heffernan focuses on the social aspects of these women’s relationships rather than the sexual. Heffernan does not provide the reader with a definition of homosexuality but offers her take on the complexity of this identity marker, “There are almost as many views of the extent, form, significance, and expression of homosexuality and pseudo-homosexuality in prison as there are persons describing the phenomena” (1972). This temporary shift away from sexual activity qualifiers is revoked the next year.

Edna Chandler’s 1973 study defines homosexuality as, “physical contact (P.C.), such as holding hands, arms around the waist, hugging, or the lightest kissing”. Again, we are presented with another definition that when removed from its contextual clues would yield no differentiation between homosexuality, pseudo-homosexuality, pseudo-family kinship, and friendship. Because these given definitions are so ambiguous, it allows the aforementioned terms to be used interchangeably.

Arguably the most transparent, Katherine Van Wormer's definition closes two decades of work when published in 1978. She defines homosexuality specifically in reference to the context of prison. It is as follows, "Prison homosexuality indicates involvement in actual sexual relations with members of the same sex while in prison-situational homosexuality". Her term "situational homosexuality" is built upon heavily by the modern works of Meda Chesney-Lind and Barbara Owens. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century situational homosexuality has now been renamed "gay for the stay" adapting to the actual argot used by women inmates (Kunzel, 2000).

There is no obvious evolution of the literature towards an agreed or concise definition of homosexuality. Of the seven out of sixteen works that provided a definition of homosexuality, over half included physical contact as a qualifier, while others qualified social relationships as homosexuality. The definitions including physical contact ranged from hand holding to genital stimulation, though they never intersected or were identified in a seemingly sexual progression. The descriptions of the social connections between these women seemed to identify friends. The label of homosexual appears convenient since these women are in a single-sex environment. Various language is used by the authors to identify the "type" of homosexual within these relationships. The terminology used mirrors common stereotypes surrounding women homosexuals and is applied to the incarcerated women for various reasons.

*Butches and Femmes*

Date Published	Author	Title	Homosexual Terminology, argot, and language
1931	Selling, Lowell	The Pseudo Family	Masculinity; pseudo-family; pseudo-homosexuality
1952	Henry, Joan	Women in Prison	Butch
1958	Clemmer, Donald	The Prison Community	N/A
1963	Field, Xenia	Under Lock and Key	N/A
1965	Taylor, AJW	The Significance of "Darls"	Darls
1965	Ward, D. & Kassebaum, G.	Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure	True homosexuality; jailhouse turnouts; butch; femme
1966	Giallombardo, R.	A Society of Women	Penitentiary turnout; lesbian; stud, femme
1966	Konopka, Gisela	The Adolescent Girl in Conflict	Lesbianism
1968	Adamark, R. & Dager, E.	Social Structure, Identification and Change in a Treatment-Oriented Institution	Pseudo-family and homosexuality used interchangeably.
1969	Tittle, Charles	Inmate Organization	Friends
1972	Heffernan, Esther	Making it in Prison	Friendship; play families
1973	Chandler, Edna	Women in Prison	Butch; femme; turn-out
1974	Jensen, M.	Role Differentiation in Female Homosexual Quasi-Marital Unions	Quasi-marital
1974	Giallombardo, R.	The Social World of Imprisoned Girls	True Butch; true femme; trust-to-be butch; trust-to-be femme; jive-time butch; jive-time femme; straights
1976	Jensen, G. & Jones, D.	Perspectives on Inmate Culture	Butch; femme
1978	Van Wormer, K.	Sex Role Behavior in a Women's Prison	Homosexual marriage alliance

*Table 2. Homosexual terminology found in the literature.*

Throughout the literature the terms butch and femme are used to represent a relationship between two women that mirrors a patriarchal relationship on the outside. The term butch generally refers to someone who wears traditionally male clothing (Ward & Kassebaum, 1965). Other physical characteristics that are included under the butch

descriptive umbrella include short hair, husky voices (Giallombardo, 1974), cursing, and engaging in rough behavior such as pushing or shoving (Van Wormer, 1978). These characteristics, though remaining constant through common stereotypes, are extremely unreliable. When an individual enters the prison system she is assigned her standard clothing (Giallombardo, 1966) and often other aspects of their appearance are regulated including hairstyles (Field, 1963). When a woman was assigned to work duty (usually jobs involving physical labor, grounds keeping) they were assigned a pantsuit. The alternative to physical labor was domestic labor involving mending and laundry. and these duties are assigned a traditional dress uniform. By assigning certain types of clothing the facility is already creating a dichotomy. By paralleling traditional gendered duties with their appropriate clothing it is an unsound observation to assume that these women subscribe to stereotypical homosexual roles. Van Wormer's assertions that butch characteristics are typified by swearing and rough housing are symptomatic of establishing assertion and not sexual prowess. The term femme often identifies women who appear to embody a feminine gender role. They are often said to speak softly, cry, and have a penchant for gossip (Van Wormer, 1978). Often the femme is identified as the subservient to the butch and a female would be subservient to a male in a patriarchal relationship. Femmes are also described as attractive and desirable (Chandler, 1973). Again these descriptives are not indicative to homosexual behavior.

The term "darls", as identified by Taylor, is an abbreviation for the endearing term darling. His primary tool for identifying homosexual relationships among incarcerated women was their use of the term darling when referring to one another. He tracked the term "darls" through various kites (letters exchanged by inmates). He

presented these kites as evidentiary support for homosexual relationships. Terminology such as “turn-out”, “jailhouse turnout”, “penitentiary turnout” and “trust-to-be butch/femme” refer to women defined as heterosexual outside the facility but homosexual inside the facility. Giallombardo terms this as “going with boys on the outside” (1974). She develops terminology to identify what she characterizes and different types of homosexual women. The true butch/femme types embody the typical masculine/feminine characteristics and are said to have a strong commitment to homosexuality. This refers to these women who maintain homosexual relationships outside the prison. Jive-time butches/femmes are referred to as the playboys/girls in the institution. They are identified by their extended social network and often have a following. It would seem that these women would be closely related to the “shot-callers” in male facilities (Clemmer, 1958). Lastly, the “straights” refer to women who do not participate in homosexual relationships and pseudo-family kinships. This assertion places the two social groupings in the same category thereby not asserting a clear definition of homosexuality.

*Where is the evidence for these homosexual claims?*

Date Published	Author	Title	Homosexual Terminology, argot, and language
1931	Selling, Lowell	The Pseudo Family	N/A
1952	Henry, Joan	Women in Prison	Personal narrative
1958	Clemmer, Donald	The Prison Community	Kites
1963	Field, Xenia	Under Lock and Key	Photographs
1965	Taylor, AJW	The Significance of "Darls"	Kites
1965	Ward, D. & Kassebaum, G.	Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure	Kites and prison guard records
1966	Giallombardo, R.	A Society of Women	Kites
1966	Konopka, Gisela	The Adolescent Girl in Conflict	Kites
1968	Adamark, R. & Dager, E.	Social Structure, Identification and Change in a Treatment-Oriented Institution	N/A
1969	Tittle, Charles	Inmate Organization	Interview
1972	Heffernan, Esther	Making it in Prison	Inferred Narrative
1973	Chandler, Edna	Women in Prison	Inferred Narrative
1974	Jensen, M.	Role Differentiation in Female Homosexual Quasi-Marital Unions	Inferred Narrative
1974	Giallombardo, R.	The Social World of Imprisoned Girls	Kites
1976	Jensen, G. & Jones, D.	Perspectives on Inmate Culture	N/A
1978	Van Wormer, K.	Sex Role Behavior in a Women's Prison	Personality Tables

*Table 3. Evidentiary support provided by the authors to support assertions of homosexuality.*

*Kites*

The most highly cited piece of evidence for homosexual relationships among incarcerated women is the kite. "Kites" refers to the passing of notes among inmates. The name was given due to the notes' likeness to a kite, being that inmates usually attach string(s) to the notes in order to pass them from cell to cell (Clemmer, 1958). Kites are often cited in male facilities to illustrate a drug ring or contraband trade. Various male gang members use kites to communicate to their various members (Clemmer, 1958). Women's use of kites differs from the more assertive instructional purposes of male

usage. These kites often illustrate a conversation among women about emotional needs, bartering goods, as well as gossip, advice, and setting up meetings. The purpose of setting up a meeting time is to ensure conversation with the most privacy. The women pick locations for meeting in which the ability to intermix with other inmates is possible and encouraged such as weekly religious services. The kites vary rarely include explicit sexual references but often reference showing of physical emotion such as hugging and kissing. The overall lack of sexual references infers that the basis for these women's relationship was not sexual but emotional and on a basis of friendship. The format of the following letters seemingly resemble an exchange between school girls- there is talk about other women, future plans, menstruation, and against authority. Upon evaluation I concluded that these exchanges are not those of torrid lovers but of friends. The following are examples of kites pulled directly from the various texts that used them to support their assertions of homosexual interactions among the women inmates.



Communication by sexually abnormal inmates is sometimes carried on by "kites," samples of which follow :

Dear Buddy:

"Honey" tonight I'm lonely and yet I don't know why, unless it's because I miss you so; your love, your kisses, your everything was my life. Now we are apart and I never knew I loved you until now. Isn't love a funny thing? And what won't a guy do when he is in prison and in love? Gee! I only have 8 months and then I'll be free and we by chance may meet where there are no guards to watch us. And then, oh, Boy! Do you need tobacco or anything? Guess I'll eat a little lunch and go to bed. Wish you were here tonight. Answer tonight or in the morning, Babe.  
"The Vamp."

Buddy Mine:

You little devil! If I was over there you wouldn't be lonesome. Say, kid, if you can spare it bring me 3 or 4 sacks of tobacco and some matches out to the game Sat. I'll pay you back when sis sends me some money. Your time is so short, be careful. I wish I had only 8 months, but I have over 2 years yet. Well, shorty, I'll see you Sat. I never did like to write.

Your old side kick.

Figure 1. Kite. Clemmer, Donald, 1958. "The Prison Community".

The nicknames Buddy, Buddy Mine, Vamp, and Old Sidekick are indicative of friendship. "Vamp" is the only term that could be construed as endearing in a way that channels an intimate relationship. However it is not enough to assume that by using the endearing term "Vamp", which is also complementary in the context of the time it was written, you are in a sexual relationship. Clemmer's inclusion of these two brief letters (which I assume to be representative of a dialogue though it is not stated explicitly that these two letters are an exchange) to support the incidence of homosexuality among incarcerated women in fact only confirms that there is communication among the inmates (Figure 1). Vamp asks Buddy if she needs tobacco, confirms that she misses her and they will talk soon. The conversation between Vamp and Buddy relays a need for a product, rudimentary schedules such as eating and sleeping. The beginning of the letter is more personal. The word "love" is used and there is an underlying sense of yearning for the

other woman. Is the yearning sexual? Clemmer asserts that it is, citing the use of the “kissing” reference. According to his definition of homosexuality (“abnormal sex behavior”) the letter does not epitomize that. There is no reference to sexual behavior which points to inconsistencies in the analysis. The second letter or response letter again references a yearning. The type of yearning appears to be relational since there is no sexual reference present. Side kick references a need for tobacco and makes plans for a future meeting. In addition to lack of sexual references there is also no reference to a committed relationship outside of friendship. The letters are not signed with conventional relationship terms such as “girlfriend”. They are also not signed with a traditional “love”.

My Darling and My Secret Love, I miss you so much (no shit). Hey, like today is my day off plus no school this afternoon and where are we. Remember when we were talking about our periods I told you, oh, oh! That's bad. But I never said why. Well, I guess I am a little bit coo coo (smile). Superstitious maybe but it's strange how everything I believe in comes true. Yogi (smile) no, but at first our periods weren't together – but as soon as we started fucking and doing everything together, we did that too.

I knew eventually we'd be over here but I didn't know it'd be for this. I thought it would be for Fucking (smile). Wished it was now, seeings how we will be separated. Sure is cold. I keep hoping they'll give us a break but damn that bitch wrote us bad, so unnecessary. The kissing part she didn't have to tell that. I didn't deny anything . . . I told the truth or I should say close to the truth. They read the thing to me. It said D. and L. were laying on the bed fully clothed in a – they used some word like comp – something I got so salty and disgusted I never even asked what the word meant but I guess it's not good (smile). The door closed and a dress hanging over the wicket and this added to the very bottom. I have warned D. and L. about kissing before so they asked me why I went down there knowing I was out of bounds. I said I went for some coffee but she had none so we started talking about her parole and so forth. Naturally we are both from L.A. so therefore we have a lot in common (about that time).

*Figure 2. Kite. Ward & Kassebaum, 1965. "Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure".*

This letter is unsigned but addresses her darling and secret love (Figure 2). These adoring terms are why (I am assuming) that Ward and Kassebaum qualified them to be characteristics of homosexuality. The conversation is fragmented- jumping from topic to topic. Most notably is the discussion of the author's menstrual cycle reflecting a common "female conversation". The letter discusses another incident of inmates being written up for being in the same bed. Again, there is no explicit sexual or committed relationship referenced between the author and the recipient.

You waved at me this afternoon, so I figured it was safe to write, even after telling you how I felt.

I watched by the window tonight after you left work, but the bell rang, and I missed you, but I'll try again.

Don't guess you noticed, but I'm on a diet, "a needed one". I've lost 5 pounds, I'm real proud of myself.

Yes, I will see you Sunday in Mass.

My room mate is a sleep. We can't even talk to each other. She is Mexican, I can't speak Spanish, and she knows very little English.

I wrote you a poem. I'll put it on the last page.

I'm lonely. Sure wish you were here to keep me company.

I'm praying they put me where I want to be. Maby I'll be lucky and they will, if they don't I may develop a complex and go mad on them.

You know I always thought that know one could get any emotion out of me anymore, but I bet if I didn't see you in the mornings I would be *awful hard* to get along with.

I wish I could see you — (illegible), but it's entirely too cold for you to be outside. I don't want *Baby* "that's you" to get cold. I'll write you a note Saturday night and try to give it to you after Mass. O. K.

You know you sure look cute down there going back and forth from one door to the other. I see you but lots of time you don't see me.

I have pretty good eyes, even from the other end of the Hall, when I want to see something. Lord I want out of orientation. I love your hair the way it is, but you know yourself you wouldn't look right with hair like mine. I don't or wouldn't order you not to have it cut, but I will say this. It's beautiful the way it is. I don't have the right to order you, but I can put in a little request "can't I."

Well I shall put the *poem* on papper, it's been following me all day.

Figure 3. Giallombardo, 1966. "A Society of Women: A Study of Women's Prisons".

This letter is neither addressed nor signed so we are unable to view any terminology that may qualify their relationship (Figure 3). It appears fragmented, jumping from topic to topic and complete with spelling errors and abbreviations. The topics vary from roommate conflicts deriving from a language barrier to discussion of diet and comparison of hair styles and appearances. Again there is a reference to a meeting time as the writer specifically suggesting mass. The author is complementary on the recipient's appearance commenting most notably on her hair. The letter does not contain a sexual reference, in

fact, not a reference to any physical contact whatsoever. The underlying theme of yearning is also present in this letter with the author referencing her loneliness. The reference to loneliness is not indicative of a homosexual relationship. There is nothing in this specific letter to indicate a romantic or sexual relationship between the recipient and author.

### *Inferred Narratives*

Inferred narratives refer to the author's interpretation and application of a quote. The following authors isolate one quote or specific incidence and assert the incidence of homosexuality from solitary interactions.

Esther Heffernan acknowledges the difficulty in assessing the incidence of homosexuality among incarcerated women. She alleges that there are as many interpretations of homosexuality as there are people assigning them (1972). Edna Walker Chandler, when assessing her own observation of homosexuality, includes a quote from an inmate she interviewed (Figure 4). The quote is not complete and is concerning being "gay on the outside". From the portion of this quote she then evokes a narrative concerning a selection process for possible homosexual partners.

“Some were ‘gay’ before they came,” she said. “They went to ‘gay bars,’ hung out with the gay crowd. They’re not about to change in here. The others?” She shrugged. “Well, you just sometimes get hungry to feel another human body real close, see if it’s warm, if *you’re* warm—if if you’re alive yet. If that’s a sign of being homo I guess all of us are to some extent.”

And the testing of the ‘fish’ continues. If she stays to herself and doesn’t snitch, but will take no part in rule-breaking escapades, she’s left alone. She is not considered trustworthy in big things like a planned escape, so she’s never taken into the ‘inner courts.’ She holds an attitude of “You do your time, I’ll do mine.” Sometimes this is her verbal answer to anyone who asks her questions about touchy happenings.

Figure 4. Walker, Edna Chandler, 1972. “Women In Prison”.

Masculinity is also communicated by the length of skirts. Butches at Eastern wear A-line skirts below the knee. The skirt zipper is left unzipped, making it possible for the inmate to place her left hand through the opening as if it were a pocket. This subtle cue, combined with all others, gives the appropriate masculine stance. Both ankle-length and knee-length socks are worn; a few inmates wore two pairs of socks to make their ankles appear less slim, which they think is more masculine. Fems also wear socks, but the inmates occupying male roles wear them almost exclusively. Butches do not wear shoes with heels; they wear sneakers, preferably boys’ sneakers (if they can purchase them). They also wear the black and white saddle shoes provided by the institution. Blue jeans and slacks are worn whenever possible in the cottage and during certain recreational activities. They cannot be worn to school; and at no time can jeans which zip in the front be worn.

Inmates at Eastern are allowed to wear inexpensive wrist watches. Consistent with their concept of masculinity, the campus males wear a man’s watch with a wide bracelet, but wear no other types of jewelry except marriage rings.

Figure 5. Giallombardo, R, 1966. “Society of Women: A Study of Women in Prison”.

Giallombardo identifies two categories of homosexuals- butches and femmes. She separates them by distinguishing between their clothing. She identifies that masculinity “is communicated by the length of skirts” (Figure 5). There is explicit reference to the amount of socks the women wear to determine masculinity. Giallombardo asserts that women who wear two pairs of socks exhibit butch behavior. Again, this is an assertion and does not reference inmate self-identification as a homosexual. In reference to the assigned inmate clothing according to their given work duty, Xenia Field included photographs of both types of uniforms.



*Figure 6. Women Inmates in “male” clothing. Field, Xenia, 1963. “Under Lock and Key: A Study of Women in Prison”.*

The women in pantsuits were assigned to this specific work duty. The assignment of pants for labor is purposeful being that pants allow for a larger range of motion as well as

modesty in specific positions required for work. Since these clothes were assigned to the inmates and not chosen they are not able to serve as qualifiers for homosexuality.



*Figure 7. Women Inmates in “female” clothing. Field, Xenia, 1963. “Under Lock and Key: A Study of Women in Prison”.*

Women who were assigned traditional women’s dress uniforms were assigned work duties in sync with domestic labor. The dress assigned to the incarcerated women parallels conventional gender roles. Domestic labor is classified as feminine and the clothing assignment reflects this assertion. Physical labor is defined as masculine and the



pant suit reflects this reflection of maleness. Both Giallombardo and Fields stretch these gendered roles to assigned inmate clothing and modifications of such.

Lastly, Katherine Van Wormer categorized stereotypical masculine and feminine behavior. Accordingly, those exhibiting masculine behavior were defined as butch and those exhibiting feminine behavior were defined as femmes.

SUB-CATEGORIES OF FEMININE COQUETTISH-PASSIVE BEHAVIOR

Term	Definition
express beauty concern	make a statement about hair, weight, some aspect of physical appearance, primp the hair, manicure the fingernails, look in a mirror, etc.
flirt coyly	bat eyes as at a man, act amorously in a playful way
giggle	laugh in a silly, undignified way especially with short, repeated gasps and titters as from juvenile amusement

SUB-CATEGORIES OF FEMININE SUBMISSIVE DEPENDENT BEHAVIOR

Term	Definition
Whine, whimper	utter a low, usually nasal, complaining cry or sound as from peevishness
engage in silly teasing	engage in irritating, petty distractions, persist in annoying, kidding behavior
fuss tearfully	display the existence of anxiety in a melodramatic way, to be near the point of tears
show passive submission	avoid when approached, run from, give up an object or a point of contention, avert gaze

Figure 8. *Feminine Behavior*. Van Wormer, K, 1978. "Sex Role Behavior in a Woman's Prison, An Ethological Analysis".

Term	Definition
argue aggressively	rebut a remark made by another in a harsh, rude way, keep pursuing a point for the purpose of putting down the other person, verbally debate a point
vocal threat	utter a warning to another so as to put down the other person and make the other person retreat (unlike above, threatening as more extreme and violent)
hit	physically strike someone in a deliberate, non-playful way
take from	remove an object from another person
curse	utter words of profanity for the purpose of displaying annoyance or anger
show mechanical interest	indicate an interest in the way something is put together, in the workings of a machine as a car
talk in low voice	talk in a voice purposely deep so as to sound tough
roughhouse	engage in playful pushing, shoving, hitting,

Figure 9. *Masculine Behavior*. Van Wormer, K, 1978. "Sex Role Behavior in a Woman's Prison, An Ethological Analysis".

### *Conclusion*

The literature available from 1960-1979 suggests a profound incidence of lesbian sexual behavior among incarcerated women. The term "lesbian" is often in reference to homosexual sexual activity, though is rarely operationally defined. Common terminology such as Butch, Femme, and pseudo family are also used synonymously with lesbian and homosexuality. I would suggest that this confusion of terminology began with the inception of the term pseudo family. Lowell Selling defined the term both in relation to familial like bonds and name-calling but also within a four layered

identification of homosexuality. The pseudo family composes the third dimension of homosexual behavior. Without an initial separation of plutonic pseudo family kinship groups from homosexual relationships the two concepts were seen as interchangeable and even causal.

Work published before Alfred Kinsey's discussion of bisexuality in "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male" dichotomized sexuality. An individual could either be a heterosexual or homosexual. Kinsey's pioneering work projected sexuality as a continuum suggesting that an individual did not have to belong to one of the two limiting categories. After Kinsey's 1948 groundbreaking work, there is a shift in the amount of terminology used to reference homosexuality. The inclusion of such terms as femme, butch and turnout all refer to lesbian women. The change in terminology reflects and expansion of homosexual role acknowledgement but does not reflect a move away from the previous dichotomy.

Another shift in the literature appears after 1974. Giallombardo is the first to qualify homosexuality by the "level of commitment" to the role. The roles range from an intense commitment to homosexuality (having homosexual relationship both within and outside prison walls) to a weak commitment (only having homosexual relationships while incarcerated). However this nod away from dichotomized sexuality is nullified by the lack of evidence for a homosexual relationship.

Most often homosexual relationship among incarcerated women are defined by their communication with one another via kites. Kites are used to illustrate the incidence of homosexuality among the women. Often they qualify homosexuality within the content of a letter by highlighting endearing terms such as "honey" or "darling". Again,

this evidence is considerably lacking considering that there is never mention of sexual intimacy. Other evidentiary support includes the assigned inmate clothing, haircuts, and whether or not jewelry is present. These are all assertions loosely based on observation, and the methods in which these assertions were drawn from are in need of examination

This examination of existing literature does not suggest that prison literature from 1960-1979 is not sociological relevant. The works mentioned in this piece are well-renowned and groundbreaking in their time, and should be regarded as such. I would suggest to further researchers that when citing these pivotal sources to take into account the methods in which they determined the incidence of homosexuality among incarcerated women. I would also suggest careful notation of the interchangeable language of the literature especially pseudo families and homosexuals.

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