



## BREAKING BAD: CHALLENGING THE HETERONORMATIVE ENVIRONMENT IN THE UK'S POLICE AND PRISONS

MONDAY 17 MAY 2021, 18:30 – 19:30

Thank you for registering for this event. Please see below additional responses to the questions posed during the event.

Dr Matthew Jones (MJ)

Dr Saoirse O'Shea (SO)

Q1 - You say there was a difference in the type of police work you get sent to (and the departments you work in?) Are you please able to give examples?

**MJ** - There is often a differentiation between uniform and non-uniform policing. The former was described as representing a more concentrated version of the traditional machismo police culture, whereas the later was perceived as more liberal, often being made up of officers who were graduates and more liberal in their attitudes. Other challenging areas for LGB officers included armed response; territorial support and counter terrorism.

Q2 - As a researcher, at the time doing the research. Doing the interviews and receiving responses. While going through this process. Was there any impact on your judgement and your interpretation? Was the intermingling and interaction with the research data something worth reflection?

**MJ** - Yes, I was very mindful of my own identity as a gay man who was considering a career in policing. It is something that I attempted to be reflexive about in my analysis.

Q3 - Do you think there is now a hierarchy of LGBTQ groups according to which LGB individuals are more included because they conform to more normative behaviours (get married, adopt children etc.) than transgender and other queer individuals who are more visibly and 'behaviourally' 'diverse'?

**SO** - I doubt that the mainstream LGBT\* groups do so consciously as most/all try to be inclusive. There are however some groups and organisations that have charitable status, but which have a reputation for being transphobic.

Q4 - Is there an intersection in the research e.g. with race? Where any ethnic minority officers' part of the sample?

**MJ** - I think we covered this verbally in the Q&A. Ethnicity certainly adds another layer of identity complexity for LGB officers.

Q5 -Do you still see disproportionality in respect of the career journey, that means that some Officers still feel the need to perform a 'traditional' gendered dual-identity to avoid LGBTQ+ 'sticky floors'?

**MJ** - Encouragingly it is less common today. But some senior ranking officers still are reluctant to disclose their LGB identity at work. The reason given is that they joined policing in the Burke era.

Q6 - Thank you for declaration of politicising your position. Is there any information on the intersection with race?

**SO** - It can be difficult as the official data provides limited information and where it does provide statistics on, for instance, ethnicity and sexuality it does not discuss correlation. We haven't looked at intersection in our research since we wanted to focus on gender first and the majority of our correspondents are white European. Work by Val Jenness in the US has considered issues of ethnicity and gender in her various studies of trans people in Californian State Prisons. I'm also involved in a separate project that will lead to an edited book where we look at the experiences of trans prisoners in different countries

Q7 - Is there any data from your project indicating that certain sorts of sex are more likely to attract censure from the staff? And other prisoners?

**SO** - Not specifically. It's a 'touchy feely' issue that is difficult to discuss as prisoners' letters may be read by and lead to censure, etc., prison staff. One would hope and think that violent non-censual sex was forbidden and would lead to action but there is an indication that this isn't always the case. Consensual, romantic liaisons would similarly be easy to assume as least like to attract problems (behind closed doors in the privacy of the cell, etc) but again this may not be the case as it's not unknown for prisoners to tell tales to get others in trouble.

Q8 - Do we need more positive portrayals through media, like Laverne Cox, to counter transphobic messages?

**SO** - Yes but the UK mass media seem intent on painting UK trans people in the worst possible way. When they do rarely put forward a positive portrait it's most often a trans person in another country and the undercurrent of the reportage is 'exceptionalism' (to borrow Jasbir Puar's concept), - we can be nice about those trans people and patronise them because they're 1000s of miles away and we get to pretend that we in this country are superior whilst ignoring that we treat trans people dreadfully. Trans rights for those abroad whilst we legislate against similar rights here.

Q9 - Thank you for such interesting and well-researched presentations. You both touched on the theme of becoming a 'good victim' as related to protection and safety from others in the criminal justice process. I wonder about the limitations of this strategy particularly thinking about how homonormativity's tend to leave/magnify marginalisation's of queer others. Any thoughts?

**SO** - Just me but I think the strategy is doomed. I'm not in favour of homonormativity, being the 'nice' gay next door, of 'passing' for cis and so on. And I'm not because all of that is wonderful until the day when it stops, and you don't 'pass'. Furthermore, I don't want the crumbs that a heteronormative society deigns to feed us, I want inclusion, acceptance and rights for who I am and

not what heteronormative society thinks is ok. I say this as a non-binary metagender person who legal has ZERO recognition or rights in this country.

Q10 - Can you tell us about your methodology?

**SO** - The methodology is a form of phenomenology. The method is qualitative, longitudinal 'letter writing' where we exchanged a number of letters with those prisoners who self-identified themselves as trans and/or non-binary over a two-year period. Letter writing gave us some advantages over in-person interviews that are more common. First, we didn't require resources from the prisons. Second our correspondents had more anonymity as they didn't have to 'out' themselves in front of other prisoners and staff to take part. 3rd it allowed our correspondents time to reflect on their experiences rather than being rushed into an answer in a room where a prison officer would be present. It also allowed us to revisit potential themes to saturate them and so on. We were, I believe, one of very few research teams that was allowed to collect data during Covid. 5/ We were geographically limited and we could also access any category of prison including those held in Cat A. The downside is that ethnographically we did not observe things first-hand - I've never physically set foot in a prison but there are plenty of TV documentaries about 'life inside prison' that can help with this. I'd also wonder about the extent to which an academic who enters a prison, is taken to an interview room by staff and then interviews a prisoner with staff present actually gets dimmersive ethnographic experience of life inside any more than we have. In contrast though our correspondent didn't just write letters though, many also sent us poems, stories, drawings, the prison canteen menu, internal magazines, a book one had written, and so on. So our method, aesthetically may draw on a range of material.

Q11 -Unfortunately it is easier for TERFs to maintain their line of argument oppressing prisoners transgender women as non-women. Generally, prisoners do not have the sympathy of the general public. What do you think should be done to affect the public discourse on transgender people residing in 'wrong gender' prisons? Not easy question, i know, but a conversation starter :)

**SO** - 2016 there were a series of trans prisoners who committed suicide in prison. This lead to a public outcry at the time and the development of PSI 2016 (the previous PSI was 2011, 5 years before. PSI2011 was the first set of instructions on the care of transgender prisoners). To some extent the 'carceral feminism' has developed since 2016 in a way that trans prisoners have been repositioned in the national press as a threat. 'Carceral feminism' (Elizabeth Bernstein's theory) points to the recent confluence of a type of 2nd wave 'leftist' feminism with types of neo-liberal evangelical Christian groups with an aim to attack marginalised groups as somehow morally unacceptable - sex workers, pro-abortionists, trans people, queer people, Travelers, A26Q cell 13for example. We need to expose the basis of this 'carceral feminist' narrative and it's 'moralising' crusade that attacks marginalised people.

Q12 - Did your research find that any of the assaults experienced by trans prisoners were due to prison staff?

**SO** - very difficult as letters may be and were censored. Having said that the majority of our correspondents were positive about their own wing staff IMHO.