

"Counter-images" and counternarratives: Exploring the use of auto-photography and photoelicitation with women offenders

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#### Overview

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### Introduction to my PhD

- Community sentences are increasingly used for female offenders in the UK, yet research into their experiences of these kinds of disposals is limited (Malloch and McIvor, 2011; Gelsthorpe, 2011).
- Women, particularly those in receipt of social assistance, find themselves subject to high levels of surveillance, moral scrutiny and punishment, often along classed and raced lines (Bumiller, 2013).

#### Research aim and questions

#### **Aim**

To explore the everyday lived experiences and sense-making narratives of women who have offended or who are considered to be 'at risk' of (re)offending at the penal-welfare nexus.

#### **Research questions:**

- How do women subject to community-based criminal justice interventions experience surveillance, social control and punishment in the community?
- How do they make sense of their status as 'offender' or 'at risk of offending'?

#### Research questions (continued)

- What helps / hinders their desistance from crime?
- What strategies do they develop to deal with being simultaneously inside and outside of the criminal justice system?
- How do their lived experiences contrast with prevailing ideas on female offending in public opinion, policy and practice?
- How does their relationship with key workers shape their experience?
- To what extent do key workers resist or reinforce dominant narratives on female deviance and offending?

#### **Research context**

- Women constitute: 18% of those arrested; 23% of those receiving out of court disposals; 25% of those convicted; 15% of those under supervision in the community (Ministry of Justice, 2014).
- Overall, most common sentence outcome for men and women is the fine. "Monetary sanctions or fines ...are a neo-liberal punishment par excellence" (Vaughan, forthcoming).
- Welfare conditionality and sanctions regime has been likened to the mainstream judicial system, a "secret penal system" (Webster, 2014).

### Theoretical inspiration

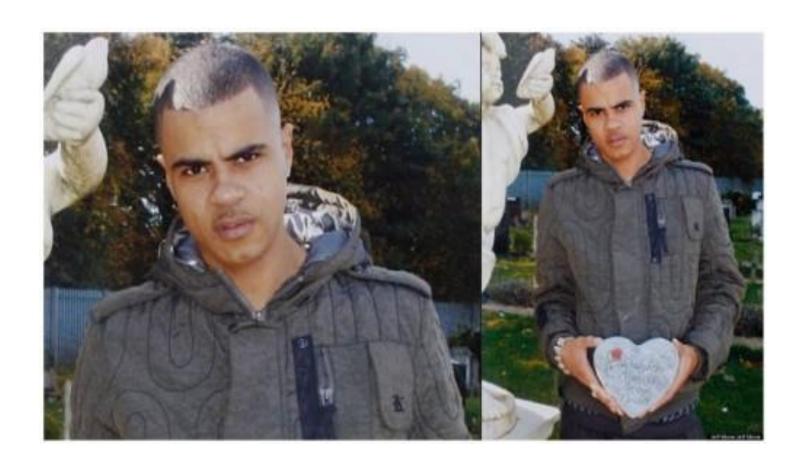
- 'Grand theories' of social control and punishment have neglected women
- Wacquant: 'carceral-assistential net'
- ignores women's imprisonment and engagement with CJS in community
- US-centred perspective
- Garland: penal-welfarism, control, the victim
- gender specific policy is not problematised
- complexities of victimhood under explored
- Foucault: disciplinary society thesis
- the prison continues, bodily forms of punishment remain
- useful in understanding the role of women's centres in instilling normatively acceptable behaviour

### The visual in criminology

- Contemporary society saturated with images of crime and the criminal
- Images are inherently political
- Absence of "counter-images" that could challenge 'carceral culture' (Brown, 2014)

 A "just image" - one that does justice to what it represents (Carrabine, 2012)

## The visual in criminology



Source: Wade (2014)

### Methodology

- Feminist ontology and epistemology
- "Women's own perspectives and experiences" is integral to feminist research (Presser, 2005)
- "Sustained empathetic inquiry" (Yanow, 2003)
- "Looking, seeing and knowing have become perilously intertwined...rendering our world as primarily a 'seen' phenomenon" (Jenks, 1995)
- 'Reality' is something socially experienced and interpreted rather than 'discovered'
- Knowledge production should be "studied, critiqued...made explicit" (Ackerly and True, 2010)

## Research methods

- Auto-photography: 15-20 participants will be asked to take photographs ('counter-images') of their lived experiences
- Walking methods (O'Neill and Hubbard, 2010)
- Photo-elicitation: the photographs will be inserted into research interviews, this "audiencing" of the photographs supports the development of rich data for interpretation and analysis (Rose, 2012)
- Auto-cartography and timelines as mnemonic devices
- In-depth interviews: key worker participants

### Ethical considerations

- Feminist research ethic:
  - power of knowledge and epistemology
  - boundaries, margins, silences, intersections
  - relationships and power differentials
  - sociopolitical position of the researcher (Ackerly and True, 2010)
- Participants may be experiencing serious social and/or economic exclusion factors
- What right have I to represent you? (Levi-Strauss, 2003)

### Ethical considerations

- "Attempting to create a more equal relationship can paradoxically become exploitation and use" (Acker et al., 1996)
- "The potential for relationships to end abruptly and for participants to feel that they have been misunderstood or betrayed, especially...when...priorities diverge" (Kirsch, 2005)
- "Epistemological authority" (Skeggs, 2004)
- "Just an image" or a "just image"? (Carrabine, 2012)

### Challenges

- Making the case for studying women
- NOMS National Research Committee

 Recruiting gatekeeper - balance of research aims/org aims; feeling of being an inconvenience

Changes in my personal life

### Thank you for listening

Any questions?

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