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**White, Niki Jana ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1277-9157> (2022) A case study about women's responses to encounters with Spice in prison. In: British Society of Criminology Conference, 30 June 2022, Surrey. (Unpublished)**

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/14864>

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# A case study about women's responses to encounters with Spice in prison.

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Panel C8: Women and the Criminal Justice System I:  
Regulating Women's Experiences.





## Key terms within this presentation

**Spice:** A synthetic cannabinoid; Most commonly found drug in prisons in England and Wales; Attributed to rising levels of instability, vulnerability and harm across entire prison population (e.g. HMIP, 2015; Black 2020).

**Governmentality:** Methods of power exercised through a network of institutions, practices, procedures and techniques, act to regulate social conduct (Garland, 1997, 2018; Brown, 2017). Governmentality as theoretical tool has been applied in feminist analyses, as well as analyses about drug practices to highlight how modes, such as those of 'responsibilisation' and 'gender norm conformity' act upon those who are subjects to governmentality (Rhodes, 2009; Wakefield and Fleming, 2009; MacLeod *et al.*, 2016).

**The 'care and control' mantra:** Reflected in policies about victimised and criminalised women; Critical scholars have highlighted ways victimised and criminalised women are regulated through institutionalised methods of care and control (Hannah-Moffat, 2010; Brown, 2011, 2017; McKim, 2014; Hart, 2017; Henriksen, 2017).



## Approaching modes of governmentality as practices

**responsibilisation and gender norm conformity:** Act as internalised modes of governmentality and chiefly operate as introspective, individual practices; they call upon the governed subject's self-identity.

**care and control mantra:** Expresses itself as an external mode of governmentality and chiefly operates through explicit institutional codes and regulations.

## About the Study

**Qualitative Research Study:** Data from five semi-structured interviews with formerly incarcerated women; Transcripts analysed thematically with NVivo using a reflexive approach to coding (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Terry and Hayfield, 2020).

**Analysis process:** I identified modes of *responsibilisation* and *gender norm conformity* in participants' narratives, as they relayed what they *did* in spice encounters; I reflected on how the *care and control mantra* also expresses itself as a *mode of governmentality* in women's narratives.

**Can we talk about drugs in prison? Anonymous and confidential.**

**Who's doing the research and what is it about?**  
Hello! My name is Niki and I am doing a PhD at the University of Greenwich. My research is about synthetic drugs (such as spice) and women's experiences with these drugs, while they were in prison.

**Why am I asking you about this?**  
I would like to know what your experiences (good or bad) with spice in prison have been, whether you took spice yourself or not. Not much is known about spice in women's prisons and your personal input could help change this!

**Do you have to take part?**  
Your participation would be completely voluntary. I would be so grateful if you considered taking part. Thank you.



**What will happen if you choose to participate?**  
Your participation would involve a conversation with me. We can chat over the phone or via video call, whichever you prefer. I will use a voice recorder, but after what you said has been written up, your name will not be associated with the recording of the conversation.

**Are you interested? Great! This is how you can get in touch with me:**  
Please contact me either via email at [n.j.white@gre.ac.uk](mailto:n.j.white@gre.ac.uk) or via mobile on 07704 411 319. If you have any questions, please contact me for an informal chat. I look forward to hearing from you!

Recruitment flyer: 'Spice in women's prisons'

## Zoning in on governmentality ...

## Violet's encounters with another woman who had taken Spice.

MODES OF GOVERNMENTALITY	APPLIED TO HERSELF	APPLIED TO ANOTHER WOMAN
<p><b>GENDER NORM CONFORMITY</b></p> <p><i>[internalised: gendered expectations]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'I helped her out. Her pants were down and everything so rude naked on display.'</li> <li>• 'She asked me, could she have some of my orange squash? So I went to my sink to rinse out a bottle for her.'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'She was oblivious to the fact that her underwear's around her ankles and everybody can see everything.'</li> <li>• 'She was a lovely girl, but not when she was taking spice.'</li> </ul>
<p><b>RESPONSIBILISATION</b></p> <p><i>[internalised: behavioural expectations]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'I had managed to get enhanced status'.</li> <li>• 'I said 'listen, I'm not having a clean record all the time I've been in here and then getting accused of taking spice as I am being released.'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Wow, she's coming to my room and while she's waiting for me, she's smoked some spice.'</li> <li>• 'We had all been locked down because she did not make it to the bottom of the stairs before she collapsed.'</li> </ul>
<p><b>THE CARE AND CONTROL MANTRA</b></p> <p><i>[External modes and regulations]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embraces the <b>duty of care</b> for a vulnerable person.</li> <li>• <b>Controls unorderly</b> behaviour in a public space (naked in corridor).</li> <li>• <b>Embraces the prison's imposition of rules and regulations:</b> 'You're not allowed your door shut with somebody else in there' and 'as an enhanced prisoner as opposed to a standard prisoner [...] you've lost your TV and things like that because you had too many negative entries.'</li> </ul>	



## Reflections: Modes of governmentality in Violet's encounters

- The actions and practices Violet described to me in her Spice encounters have congruence with modes of gender norm conformity and responsabilisation, but they also replicated the wider care and control mantra as an enacted mode of governmentality.
- Violet's encounters demonstrate how internalised modes of governmentality (responsibilisation and gender norm conformity) intersect with external modes (care and control) through individual practices in Spice encounters.
- The care and control mantra conceptualised as a mode of governmentality, enriches the theoretical understanding of what influenced Violet's actions in the Spice encounters. For example, it helps to contextualise why Violet is nervous about having someone pass out in her room.



## Examples: Governmentality in the wider study

- **Participants ‘worked hard’:** To maintain the order in the prison, their own reputation and rehabilitation track record, as well as that of women who were using Spice.
- **The notion of care towards women on Spice:** Participants assigned to themselves roles of care and described women who use Spice as: 1) ‘child-like’, 2) ‘childish’, 3) interventions offered to women who use Spice ‘extremely childish’.
- **No ‘good woman’ trope for women who use Spice** (Rutter and Barr, 2021): Smoking ‘irresponsibly’, being a nuisance (lockdowns, ambulances, noise, smoke), being unproductive, exposing oneself (‘naked’)...





## Opportunities: How to move forward with governmentality and why?

**How to make sense of the ‘mode of reflexive vulnerability’ in participants narratives:** distinct from ‘compliance’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘resistance’ practices observed elsewhere in governmentality literature (e.g. Crewe, 2007; Macleod and Durrheim, 2002; McKim 2016).

**The ‘mode of reflexive vulnerability’ in Spice encounters is expressed through participants articulation of ...**

- a) personal vulnerabilities and emotions.
- b) ripple-on harms on others within the prison.
- c) how women who use Spice are specifically vulnerable.

**Methodologically & epistemologically:** The mode of reflexive vulnerability helps to explore...

- a) agentic capacities of participants in situations of governmentality.
- b) situational outcomes depending on reflexivity in governmentality actors.
- c) multiple aspects of harms associated with governmentality situations.

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Slide 1: Flower Painting Canvas Art, Barokah Studio, Canva. Available at: <https://www.canva.com/templates/EAFCAO9Uplc-flower-painting-canvas-art/>.

Slides 2,3,6,7,8: Yellow Minimalist Quote Instagram Post, Canva. Available at: [https://www.canva.com/design/DAE\\_Izj7RnA/xw3YR3jWmxVjibMpNkgoHw/edit](https://www.canva.com/design/DAE_Izj7RnA/xw3YR3jWmxVjibMpNkgoHw/edit).