

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Keeping House:  
Understanding the Transgender Inmate Code of Conduct  
Through Prison Policies, Environments, and Culture

By

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As the “ladies” among “men,” transgender inmates are situated within a correctional policy context that regulates gender and an inmate culture in which masculinity is revered and femininity is reviled. Drawing on original interviews with 315 transgender inmates in California prisons for men and official corrections data, this research presents the code of conduct (i.e., guidelines for interaction) for this group with a focus on the negotiation of respect and violence. An examination of correctional policies and housing environments provides the context for the development and enactment of this code. This work draws upon importation and deprivation theories of inmate culture and the “doing gender” framework to investigate the transgender inmate code as an interactional process. Findings indicate that the organizational context reifies an unrealistic gender binary and defines what it means to be male and female through policies related to physical presentation. However, correctional policies cannot regulate certain key aspects of gender performance and others’ interpretation of it. Thus, the prison remains a multi-gendered culture. Although housing environments are associated

with transgender inmate social life, these factors are less consequential for the code. Instead, guidelines for interaction are structured primarily around “gender politics,” which emphasize gendered actions that cannot be formally regulated, and are informed by respondents’ race and class backgrounds. Additionally, the code relies upon interactions with non-transgender inmates and the central tenets of the larger inmate culture. These guidelines perpetuate the inmate hierarchical order in prison, which situates “ladies” well below “men.” This reinforcement of the status structure extends beyond inmate interactions. This work suggests there is a reciprocal process between the inmate culture and organizational policy context, which together reproduce structural positioning among inmates. Just as transgender inmates have developed a code of conduct with consideration for the expectations of non-transgender inmates, perhaps the inmate culture at large maintains the gendered expectations of the organization.