

RESPONDING TO PUNISHMENT IN THE COMMUNITY: CONFORMITY AS RESISTANCE IN A WOMEN'S PROBATION HOSTEL ¹

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Abstract

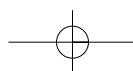
In recent years there has emerged an inspiring body of feminist literature which has examined the range of strategies employed by incarcerated women to manage, negotiate and resist institutional regimes. However, although this literature has opened up new areas of scholarly debate and has challenged the myth that women (and women offenders in particular) are 'feeble' and 'muted' social agents, the analysis has primarily been limited to women within custodial institutions. It is the intention of this article to expand on these debates by examining the experiences of women subjected to punishment within the community, specifically within a probation hostel.

It will be argued that the construction of femininity plays a crucial but contradictory role in women's strategies of resistance. Based on original research the article will explore the ways in which women in a probation hostel managed to navigate and resist their confinement through apparent displays of conformity. It is argued that women frequently endorsed feminising discourses and practices promoted within the institution in order to avoid further scrutiny and regulation and thus their actions can be considered as a means of 'resistance'.

Key words: agency; conformity; femininity; hostel; probation; resistance.

Introduction

Since the nineteenth century, when it was decided that the association of male and female prisoners was undesirable, particular and specific custodial regimes have been constructed for women, regimes that have primarily been assembled around idealised models of femininity (Carlen, 1983; Zedner, 1991; Howe, 1994; Bosworth, 1999). In recent years, the strategies utilised by incarcerated women to manage and resist those



Alana Barton

regimes, and the feminising discourses around which they are constructed, has become an important area of inquiry for feminist scholars.

For as long as there have been power relationships, a whole range of resistance strategies (political, legal, academic and personal) have existed and have been utilised by women. Some scholars have focused on the more explicit forms of resistance employed by incarcerated women. Although historically women in prison have not been involved in collective protest to the same extent as incarcerated men, they have nonetheless been able to contest and disrupt the imposition of control through some form of confrontation, challenge or non-compliance (Mandaraka-Sheppard, 1986; Faith, 1994). Alternatively though, as other scholars have argued, women may appear to conform and comply with institutional regimes, and indeed endorse dominant gendered discourses and expectations. This can be used as a means of avoiding further scrutiny and surveillance and can thus, it is argued, be regarded as a method of resistance (Faith, 1994; Bosworth, 1999).

However, as sophisticated and convincing as these debates are, they are lacking in one significant way in that the contextualisation of power, agency and resistance has been largely located within one specific site of formal social control: the prison. Little consideration has been given to the power relationships and the negotiation of those relationships within the realm of 'community' punishment.

It is the intention of this paper to build on the theoretical debates around resistance by shifting the emphasis from the prison onto the probation hostel. By drawing on original research, conducted within a women's probation hostel in the 1990s, this paper will examine various strategies employed by women to negotiate and manage their period of institutionalisation.² A primary aim of the research was to examine the way in which women coped with their time in a probation hostel (either on bail or as part of a probation order) and the ways in which women attempted to resist the methods of discipline and control imposed upon them. A few incidents of explicit resistance did occur during the fieldwork, for example a small number of women absconded from the institution and on a couple of occasions staff were faced with (threatened and actual) violence from residents. However these were generally rare events and this raised the question of why this was the case. Were the majority of women at the hostel simply inherently conformist or was there some other explanation for their apparently passive acceptance of the institutional rules and regime? The former explanation seemed unlikely, especially given that most of the women interviewed did not appear to be intimidated by authority and indeed stated themselves that much of their lives had been spent challenging and struggling against oppression in one form or another. So another explanation was required. By drawing on Mary Bosworth's (1999) study of women in prison, in which she argues that displays of conformity and the endorsement of dominant gendered discourses can be identified as methods of resistance, it was possible to revisit the data and re-examine the testimonies of staff and residents in the light of these debates. Thus the way in which women's compliance might be re-defined as a means of resistance will be the focus in this paper.

*Responding to Punishment in the Community:
Conformity as Resistance in a Women's Probation Hostel*

It should be acknowledged here that 'resistance' can be a contentious concept for feminists and trying to define particular actions or behaviours as forms of 'resistance' is inherently problematic. There is necessarily an issue around interpretation. Bosworth and Carrabine (2001) ask whether an individual has to intend his or her actions to be defiant or subversive for them to be considered as such. It could be argued that a degree of consciousness regarding the purpose of an individual's actions would seem essential otherwise *all* interactions could potentially be considered as 'resistance' and this would undermine the very meaning of the concept. On the other hand, if an action does result in the subversion or disruption of dominant power relations, regardless of the intent or even without the knowledge of the actor, and thus results in a renegotiation or redistribution of power in favour of subjugated groups or individuals, is it possible to analyse such actions *without* resorting to a discussion of 'resistance'? It is this latter proposition that underpins the argument put forward in this paper. The hostel residents may or may not have intended their actions to challenge or undermine the authority of the institution but if their actions managed to disturb or interrupt the dominant power relations, albeit unknowingly, then it seems legitimate to discuss those actions within the context of 'resistance'.

Brown (1995) has argued though that there is the potential for the concept of 'resistance' to be misused by scholars and researchers. She comments that an over-emphasis on women's ability to resist can potentially legitimate oppression by allowing observers to accept the situation of marginalised and relatively powerless groups as unproblematic thus providing little motivation to contest and confront established regimes or practices. However, as Bosworth (1999) asserts, at the very least feminists can and should utilise debates around resistance to challenge the perception that women (offenders in particular) are simply continual victims with little or no control over their own lives. Thus, an emphasis on resistance does not have to mean that women's actual oppression is ignored but taking resistance seriously does allow the ways in which women manage to articulate their differences, and thus develop strategies through which they can negotiate power relationships, to be brought to the fore of feminist debate.³

Expectations of Femininity Within a Women's Probation Hostel

The inference of any form of punishment based around the notion of supervision is that the offender is in some way inadequate and is therefore incapable of redressing his or her own behaviour without some external intervention (Worrall, 1997). Consequently the practice of supervision is a dynamic one and its purpose is to instil in the individual the characteristics of 'normal' behaviour whilst setting the boundaries between appropriate and censured behaviour. Within the hostel setting, supervision is generally considered to be salutary (in that its primary aim is to 'empower' and thus bring about positive effects). However it can also be an intrusive process, the objective of which is to control and instruct the individual to a pre-determined (but discretionary) standard of behaviour. At Vernon Lodge the boundaries between acceptable and proscribed behaviour were sometimes set beyond a criminal/non-criminal agenda, instead they were set according to

Alana Barton

a gendered agenda, creating a demarcation between 'respectable' and 'non respectable' behaviour for women.

Expectations of femininity were found to underpin some of the activities and recreational facilities available for the women at the hostel. Of course certain activities (such as abseiling, archery, bowling matches) were original, stimulating and, as many of the women themselves explained, empowering. But such activities did not take place regularly and it could be argued that the more routine recreational activities (such as the cookery and hairdressing sessions) functioned to endorse an 'appropriate' standard of femininity deemed necessary in order for true 'rehabilitation' to take place. As one (male) representative of the hostel management committee commented:

Rehabilitation is attempted through assertiveness courses, drug work, even the hairdresser coming in once a week. This gives the women pride in their appearance.

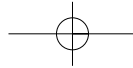
Bartky (1988) has argued that the constant demands placed upon women to adhere to particular standards of external 'beauty', or appropriate standards of outward appearance, can lead eventually to the absorption of such images by women themselves. Consequently, constant reassertion of these idealised images could eventually lead to a self-regulating and, it could be argued in the context of the probation hostel, a fully 'rehabilitated' female subject.

The association of outward appearance with internal (mental and/or moral) well-being has long been an integral part of the reformation and rehabilitation of 'deviant' women within non-custodial, or 'semi-penal' institutions (Elder, 1972; Barton, 2000). When asked why the hostel had a hairdresser coming in every week, another (male) representative of the management committee provided the following explanation:

... it gives the women something to look forward to. They get their hair done and they look better, they feel better and I suppose you could argue that they are better (Emphasis made in interview).⁴

Thus, according to the members of the hostel management committee, those women who were perceived to have become externally disciplined, with regard to their outward appearance, were also those who were most likely to become *internally* disciplined, with regard to their behaviour and actions.

In addition to being self-disciplined about their appearance, residents were also encouraged to be self-disciplined with regard to their timekeeping. They were expected to be up by 8.30am for breakfast and dressed by 9.00am. The hostel staff claimed that the timekeeping rule was in the women's best interest and served to introduce an element of order into, what they perceived to be, disordered lives.



*Responding to Punishment in the Community:
Conformity as Resistance in a Women's Probation Hostel*

[The residents] usually have really disorganised lives and part of what is expected at the hostel is they get some order out of it. In the past they were allowed to sleep in all day and go around in their nighties but I actually don't think that's appropriate because it's not giving them an opportunity to change their behaviour and then in turn change their internal behaviourIt encourages an element of self-discipline (Staff member 10, female).

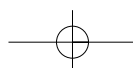
If women did not adhere to these timekeeping rules they could be 'sanctioned'. Sanctioning was an informal method of discipline imposed for minor rule infringements (such as getting up late or missing meetings). Women who were sanctioned would be required to either remain on the hostel premises for the period of one day or undertake some domestic chore or task around the hostel. The assumption, amongst some members of the staff, was that requiring women to undertake chores around the hostel was not really a form of 'discipline' but rather just part of a 'normal' disciplined life for women.

.....it's only doing the dishes, they'd do that at home anyway. Most of them here have it easy because at home...they'd be running around after husbands and families as well (Staff member 9, female).

The utilisation of sanctioning as a method of discipline highlighted the, often contradictory, expectations and assumptions made about the female residents. As Okley (1978) has declared, although women are often not allocated the level of adult responsibility that is afforded to their male counterparts, ironically there is still a greater expectation placed upon them for self-regulation and self-discipline. Thus, at Vernon Lodge, women were required to be self-controlled and self-regulating and this requirement was encouraged through particular rules and practices aimed explicitly at encouraging a degree of personal responsibility (timekeeping expectations for example). However, when women failed to achieve this level of personal responsibility, albeit through very minor infringements (such as failing to get out of bed on time), they were disciplined through a process that inferred a total inability for self-governance. Even some members of staff agreed that sanctioning was akin to the 'grounding' of children by parents and was thus in conflict with the philosophy of empowerment and personal responsibility promoted within the hostel.

In my opinion sanctioning is a nonsense.....it seems rather ironic, trying to get the women who come here to behave independently....then telling them they can't go out because they got up late. It just reminds me of school (Staff member 1, male).

However, women's behaviour is frequently understood and explained through these two conflicting sets of discourses. It is assumed that women should be self-governing and they are expected to assume high levels of responsibility (in their roles as mothers and carers for example). But simultaneously they are assumed to be lacking in the ability to be fully independent and thus require levels of external supervision (both through formal



Alana Barton

institutional regimes and informal domestic surveillance) that deny them the rights and responsibilities attributed to adult males and thus reduce them to a child-like, or 'infantile', status (see Smart and Smart, 1978; Hutter and Williams, 1981; Carlen, 1983; Worrall, 1990). Together these opposing sets of expectations underpin the contradictory nature of 'normal' femininity and thus it is unsurprising to find them employed in the 'rehabilitation' of women.

Despite the concerns of some members of staff regarding the use of sanctioning as an informal punishment, it was still generally considered to be the most moderate method of discipline. Indeed the fact that sanctioning was considered to be such a benign form of discipline actually fostered the frequency of its use thus creating a paradoxical situation for both staff and residents.

I don't think sanctioning is the answer because you are treating [the women] like children but it's the problem of finding a good alternative...everyone needs to know that misbehaviour is not acceptable and the only way you get this across is to let people know that if you do something wrong you get punished for it. We choose sanctioning because that is the most lenient way we have to do it (Staff member 3, female).

For the most part women accepted, or at least tolerated, sanctioning as an unavoidable part of the disciplinary regime of the hostel. Conformity to the regime appeared to be a more frequent response from women within the institution than explicit confrontation and small-scale individual expressions of dissent were more common than collective forms of resistance. However this conformity should not be mistaken for inherent submissiveness. Rather it must be examined within the broader context of the plethora of strategies employed by women to manage, cope with and resist the gendered, disciplinary regimes and discourses employed within the non-custodial arena.

Subjectivity, Resistance and Agency

According to Bosworth, an examination of agency and resistance demands an 'appreciation of difference' (1999: 128) and an acknowledgement that women are not a unified group with unified experiences. Rather, as Bryson (1999) has asserted, women can be divided, as well as united, through their experiences of being women. Women experience *informal* forms of social control in their everyday lives that differ according to the defining contexts of class, 'race', ethnicity and sexuality. Therefore, those who enter the formal arenas of social control (for example the prison or, in this case, the probation hostel) do so with a conceptual framework which has been constructed around their class, 'race' and gender experiences. It is thus unsurprising that these women are then compelled to negotiate and evaluate their confinement in relation to their lived experiences. As Bosworth states, women utilise their social and personal identities to manage their period of confinement (1999: 127) and this can often occur through an apparent endorsement of hegemonic discourses and regimes. As Faith asserts, resistance can be characterised by 'a choreographed demonstration of cooperation' (1994:39).

*Responding to Punishment in the Community:
Conformity as Resistance in a Women's Probation Hostel*

Women on bail at the hostel often claimed that they deliberately chose to conform as a means of improving their chances at trial.

I just do as I'm told really.... because I want a really good report for my court appearance. I just keep my head down and get on with it (Sarah).

Women like Sarah were prepared to co-operate and comply with hostel rules as they saw their compliance as a strategy which would reduce the chances of further regulation and intervention. Other women, like Sandra, took a similar approach. Sandra openly admitted that she was totally prepared to conform to any rules, not because she expected this to help her at her trial but rather because she equated conformity with freedom. Her conformity meant she was never 'sanctioned' and thus she had the freedom to go out most days to see her family and friends. So rather than making it difficult for her to abide by hostel rules, Sandra's desire to continue a 'normal' life and remain unrestricted by the rules of the institution actually encouraged her compliance.

Overall the majority of women stated that they conformed because they wanted to avoid being labelled as a 'trouble-causer' and thus make their time at the hostel as unproblematic as possible. Some members of staff however, had a different explanation for the compliance of the residents. In contrast to the notion that incarcerated women have traditionally been seen as more unstable, emotional and thus recalcitrant than their male counterparts (Carlen, 1983; Zedner, 1991; Faith, 1993), some members of staff claimed that the women conformed primarily *because* they were women.

The women tend to conform quite quickly. They generally just accept things like sanctioning. I think maybe the women here are more keen to please than the men in other hostels. I think women are more conformist than men. I don't think we'd get away with sanctioning for things like getting up late in a men's hostel....they'd just ignore us (Staff member 9, female).

Such ideas of 'inherent' conformity and associated gendered expectations did not go completely unchallenged by the women in the hostel. On one occasion a member of staff commented that the women should willingly accept the requirement to undertake domestic chores around the hostel because this was something they would be 'doing at home anyway'. Some of the women acquiesced and agreed that this would indeed be part of a 'normal' routine for them at home, although they asserted that they did not think this was necessarily something they should be expected to do by the criminal justice system. However, one woman, Sandra, challenged this supposition, employing her own class-based experiences to negate the gender-based assumption being made of her. She explained that at home she had a dishwasher to do her dishes and a cleaner to do her housework and consequently was insulted at the way in which she had been stereotyped on the level of both gender and class (as a typically 'working class woman'). She argued that she only submitted to this requirement as she saw it as an inevitable part of the regulatory

Alana Barton

mechanism that constrained all women in the hostel, not as something she should undertake gladly just *because* she was a woman.

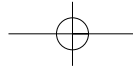
The construction of the female identity is crucial to an understanding of women's resistance to control. Often both institutional and 'common sense' notions of female identity conflict with women's own personal ideas of identity (the dispute between Sandra and the member of staff discussed above highlights this clearly) and, as Bosworth argues, the very concept of 'identity' is not in fact static, but rather it is a notion which is subject to constant negotiation. As a result:

Femininity plays a crucial, albeit paradoxical, role in [women's] resistance: while it represents the goal and form of their imprisonment, it is also the means by which they achieve their own ends (Bosworth, 1999: 7).

So women often do not reject the feminine roles encouraged by institutional regimes and social convention, but rather they knowingly adopt and adhere to them in order to develop a sense of agency and identity. Consequently, the construction of femininity can be redefined and re-negotiated and utilised as a source of resistance rather than a source of disempowerment. As Baudrillard (1987: 65) points out: 'the best answer to an adversary manoeuvre is not to retreat, but to go along with it, turning it to one's own advantage'.

One woman who managed to turn feminising discourses to her own advantage was Margaret. Margaret was a middle class woman in her late fifties. She considered herself to be 'different' from her fellow residents, perceiving them to be the 'real criminals', and consequently she objected to sharing a room with any of them⁵ In order to assist her case for a single room Margaret constructed her argument around 'appropriate' body shape, claiming that, because of her age and the condition of her body, she felt extremely uncomfortable undressing in front of much younger women. Margaret won her case and was allocated a single occupancy room, something that Debbie was not allowed. When stating her case, Debbie had not resorted to such gendered discourses but rather had articulated an account that emphasised her strong objection to drugs and the fact that she was sharing a room with a heroin user. She was informed that most of the women in Vernon Lodge were drug users and as such she would have to 'put up with it'.

The majority of women in Vernon Lodge did not perceive expectations of femininity as negative aspects of their lives or identity. Indeed, as Bosworth (1999) found in her study of women prisoners, generally they were proud of their feminine status. Hair and clothes were a source of pride and pleasure with frequent changes of hairstyle and clothes-swapping sessions. Frost (1999) has asserted that women often conform to acceptable standards of feminine beauty, through clothes, hair and beauty regimes because, in addition to providing pleasure, this process can actually improve self-esteem and mental well-being. Thus for the women at Vernon Lodge, this adherence to conventional standards of appearance could be seen to promote feelings of self-worth which served to



*Responding to Punishment in the Community:
Conformity as Resistance in a Women's Probation Hostel*

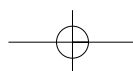
empower women who may otherwise have felt relatively powerless through their period of confinement.

You have to make the effort don't you? If you just sit around in slippers and a nightie, no make up or nothing, well then you're beat. At least it's something to think about when you get up in the morning, 'what am I going to wear today'. It's a bit pathetic but it's better than just giving up on yourself (Sarah).

One of the most significant aspects of 'idealised femininity' endorsed by the women in Vernon Lodge was the traditional ideal of motherhood. Bosworth highlights how many of the women prisoners she interviewed treasured their role as mothers and used this in a positive way. First, the status of being a mother was utilised to bring meaning to the lives of the women in that they could strive towards the goal of reuniting their families after their release. Second, being perceived as a caring and 'good' mother would improve the women's self-esteem and sense of agency and identity (Bosworth, 1999).

Many of the women at Vernon Lodge were mothers and, almost without exception, they were resolute that they would not relinquish their maternal role despite being separated from their children. For these women maintaining their presence in the lives of their children was a priority, it gave them a strong sense of purpose and identity and facilitated their time at the hostel. This was of course easiest for those women whose children were not in care. Sandra, as mentioned previously, saw her children almost every day. Another woman, Jean, also saw her daughter every day. Indeed Jean's daughter was not even aware that her mother was not living at home with her father. Jean, like Sandra, complied fully with the rules of the institution and was thus never sanctioned. This allowed her to leave the hostel every morning and go to the family home in time to get her young daughter up for school. She would be at home when the child returned from school and would stay until her daughter went to bed, returning to the hostel in time for curfew. Through this method Jean ensured that her sentence was causing as little disruption as possible for her family, thus providing her with a feeling of reassurance and satisfaction.

Of course, as Bosworth warns, this strategy of endorsing motherhood is only possible for certain women at certain times and care should be taken so as not to 'glamorise' the position of incarcerated mothers or accept that, because of their abilities to resist, the situation for them is unproblematic. Institutionalised women are, after all, physically separated from their families and the pain of this separation, and the practical difficulties it can cause, can often over-shadow any positive sense of self a woman may draw from her role as a mother. The situation for mothers in hostels can often be just as difficult as for those in prison because, although in a hostel women are not normally physically prevented from leaving the institution during the daytime, due to the exceptionally small numbers of such institutions, women often find themselves a great distance from home and thus visits from family and children may be less frequent than they would expect if in custody. For Billie the physical and emotional separation from her children proved to be overwhelming and dominated every aspect of her life at the hostel. It has to be



Alana Barton

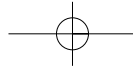
acknowledged that in dealing with cases like Billie's, equating conformity with resistance does become problematic.

For Billie, the rules of the institution and the feminising methods of discipline were minor, incidental issues in her life. Her children had been taken into care on her arrest and her distress at this situation eclipsed all other matters. Billie had, from her initial court hearing, explicitly attempted to resist being bailed to a hostel; however the weight of professional discourse against her was so powerful she felt she had no option but to submit.

My solicitor really pushed for this...I argued with the magistrate saying I'd rather be remanded...Everyone said it was best that I came here so I agreed. I thought that when my case finally came up...I'd just get probation. Then my probation officer went and recommended that I come back here as a condition of probation. The magistrate agreed. I told them I'd have been better off in prison...at least in prison I'd have got a visit from my kids occasionally (Billie)

As Worrall (1990) has argued, professional or 'expert' discourse is frequently used to 'silence' women who wish to articulate an alternative understanding of their situation. Women's accounts are frequently only listened to if they are communicated through the 'dominant modes of expression' (1990: 11). As women like Billie are often not expected to be able to construct a coherent account or explanation for themselves it becomes necessary for professionals to construct that account on their behalf. Billie's solicitor, her probation officer and the magistrates that dealt with her case did not 'hear' her own account. She attempted to communicate throughout that she would rather go to prison than to a probation hostel. However rather than 'hearing' Billie, her professional representatives constructed an alternative understanding, adhering to the liberal notion of probation as a 'benign', supportive and inherently positive alternative to prison. They decided they knew what was in Billie's own interest even if she did not know herself. Explicit resistance had proved unsuccessful for Billie and so, once in the hostel, she adopted a more compliant approach which she hoped would facilitate her time in Vernon Lodge.

Initially she was able to assert her status as a mother through letters and phone calls and utilised this as a coping mechanism, constantly looking forward to the future when she could reunite her family. However towards the end of her probation order, when she began actively to fight to have her children returned, she encountered a seemingly insurmountable problem. Billie was informed that she could not obtain custody of her children as she had not yet secured anywhere to live (having lost her home when she was sent to Vernon Lodge). At the same time she was informed that she was not considered a priority for re-housing because she was still in a hostel and her children were in local authority care. So without her children she would not get a house and without a house she would not get her children. Billie felt she had finally been deprived of what she considered



*Responding to Punishment in the Community:
Conformity as Resistance in a Women's Probation Hostel*

to be her primary status (see Smith, 1996) and she committed suicide in February 1993. On the day before she died she had commented that her children would be better off without her as she believed her absence would introduce a sense of stability into their lives that she did not feel her presence could provide.

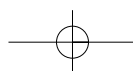
Eaton (1993) has argued that even suicide can be conceptualised as a form of resistance, representing as it does the final indication of control over one's own life, the ultimate decision that women are able to make in relatively 'powerless' situations. Billie's suicide could indeed be seen as a way of retaining some influence over, not only her own life, but the lives of her children who, she argued, would be able to lead a more stable life without her. This argument though is not wholly convincing as it could equally be argued that Billie's suicide was *indicative* of her inability to resist her situation any further. To equate suicide with resistance and self-determination is problematic as it could potentially lead to a glamorisation and trivialisation of such incidents. Instead, our concern should be with uncovering and deconstructing those discourses, regimes and practices which eventually evoke such extreme responses from women like Billie.

Conclusion

An analysis of women's resistance, and all the various forms it can take, is crucial for both feminist and criminological debates as it facilitates an understanding of the dynamics of power relations that are frequently overlooked. As Worrall (1990) argues, power is not simply a one-way relationship between 'experts' or 'professionals' and those they seek to 'understand'. Rather the imposition of power can often produce a forceful reaction that can then redistribute that power.

Although this research was a case study, and as such there is no argument for generalisation, it is apparent that many of the feminising, gendered regimes and discourses that scholars have identified within custodial institutions are present also within the non-custodial arena. However, as with women prisoners, female probationers do not tolerate such regimes without question. On the contrary, through a range of processes women are able to re-assert the sense of agency and responsibility that the institutional regime functions to remove. The women at Vernon Lodge utilised several strategies through which they could attempt to disrupt or redistribute the power relationship within the institution. Some posed explicit challenges to the authority of the institution, some conformed to the rules to avoid further scrutiny or surveillance, and some embraced idealised images of themselves as 'feminine' subjects. Some women utilised several of these methods depending on the situation.

Of course cases like Billie's cannot be overlooked in this debate. Whether Billie's final act was one of defiance or defeat is open to question. At one level she deserves the credit of the possibility that she was not completely crushed by the forces imposed upon her. However, if the state sanctioned discipline and control of women is to be taken seriously it also has to be recognised that some women are subject to such *total* domination and subjugation that they lose any will or ability to resist.



Alana Barton

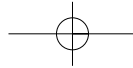
However, this paper has highlighted how some women, *sometimes*, are able to resist disciplinary regimes and renegotiate the hegemonic ideals of femininity, albeit not through explicit forms of confrontation. Indeed, it is an irony that sometimes the very regimes and discourses that sought to transform women into passive subjects produced the opposite outcome. Thus rather than accepting a submissive and powerless status, many women were able, often through their endorsement of femininity, to rediscover a sense of authority. In this sense, it could be argued that Vernon Lodge did serve to 'empower' its residents, albeit through the very processes that sought to subdue them.

End Notes

- 1 Approved Probation and Bail Hostels are now called Approved Probation and Bail Premises however as these institutions were known as 'hostels' during the time this research was conducted, this name will be used throughout the article.
- 2 This research was conducted between 1992 and 1994 and involved interviews with sixteen residents, nine members of staff and two members of the management committee of a women's probation hostel in England. For the purposes of anonymity, guaranteed at the time of research, the hostel will be referred to as Vernon Lodge. All participants are also anonymised. All but one of the hostel staff interviewed were female but both members of the Hostel Management Committee interviewed were male. The gender of the interviewee will be highlighted where appropriate throughout the paper.
- 3 For a fuller, theoretical discussion on 'resistance', what it signifies, what it constitutes and how it is commonly understood, see Bosworth and Carrabine (2001).
- 4 It should be acknowledged here that this member of the management committee did not have the same level of contact with the residents as the actual hostel staff (Assistant Wardens), however this was a view that several of the hostel staff had endorsed in informal conversations.
- 5 Margaret was on probation for fraud.

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*Responding to Punishment in the Community:
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