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NEOLIBERAL FEMINISED GOVERNMENTALITY: THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF A POST CORSTON REPORT (2007) WOMEN'S CENTRE IN THE NORTH-WEST OF ENGLAND

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Abstract

The article examines the role and function of one voluntary sector gender specific service, The Women's Centre (TWC),1 which opened following the publication of the highly influential Corston Report (2007) in the North-West of England, for 'offending' women and those at risk of offending. The analysis presented in this article is derived from qualitative data,2 from 16 semi-structured interviews with TWC staff, and from participant observation of procedures and interactions within the centre.3 It therefore adopts a case study approach.4 Drawing on the work of Foucauldian feminist and governmentality scholars (Hannah-Moffat, 2000; 2001; 2010; Goodkind, 2009; Rottenberg, 2014), the article evidences three key findings concerning the role and function of TWC. First, that empowerment rhetoric was mobilised as a vehicle to transform its clients into independent, self-sufficient, responsible neoliberal subjects. Second, that through a variety of practices and partnerships with statutory and voluntary agencies, TWC aims and objectives were aligned with those of the state and were concerned with the prevention of recidivism and initial offending, thus calculating women's needs as criminogenic risk factors (Hannah-Moffat, 2010). Third, that little resistance was evident in terms of TWC's acceptance of and adherence to neoliberal agendas. Instead, marketised models were generally embraced as inevitable and economically necessary for its financial survival. The article therefore concurs with pessimistic accounts on the role of the third sector in crime control (See Corcoran, 2009; 2011a; 2011b) and contends that TWC could be considered as an extension of transcarceral surveillance and control of the most marginalised women in society (Carlen & Tombs, 2006; Carlton & Segrave, 2013; 2016).

Keywords

Women's centres; gender responsivity; neoliberalism; governmentality

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[1] All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

[2] Collected from 2016 to 2017 for doctoral research.

[3] Where interactions were recorded this included data from participating staff only, where non-participating/consenting staff were involved only procedures were recorded.

[4] It is not the intention to assert that the findings presented in this article are applicable to *all* women's centres, as a case study this cannot be asserted. This was also not the intention of the PhD thesis from which the findings derive.

Gender Specific Programmes for 'Offending' Women

The recognition of women's differential needs and experiences of the criminal justice system from men has a long history. Decades of feminist research has focused on women's needs and backgrounds and has highlighted the differential impacts of imprisonment and community penalties on them. Feminists highlighted that these differences were frequently overlooked, and that women were predominantly met with a criminal justice and penal system designed with men in mind (Smart, 1976; Carlen, 1983; 1990; 1998; Heidensohn, 1985; Worrall, 1990). Feminist research has therefore aimed to increase the visibility of women in conflict with the law, and to generate deeper understandings of their 'deviance', and the differing mechanisms of social control that they experience.[5] These acknowledgements provided substantial support, and demand, for gender specific policy for women in conflict with the law.

The creation of the Women's Offending Reduction Programme (WORP) at the Home Office in 2004 was a considerable move in meeting this demand. From the work of WORP, the Ministry of Justice and Home Office supported several gender specific projects, operated by partnerships between local voluntary sector groups and probation services, that aimed to support resettlement, diversion from custody and noncustodial supervision of women in their communities (Corcoran, 2011b). During the first decade of the 21st century, the work of women's centres attracted attention due to their perceived capacity to meet these aims, specifically within the highly regarded, and influential, report by Baroness Jean Corston (2007).

The Corston Report was published in 2007 and had been initiated in response to the controversial self-inflicted deaths of women in prison in England and Wales. Of note was HMP Styal, where six women had died in a 12-month period, from 2002 to 2003 (Moore et al, 2018).[6] These events compelled the government to reflect on the number of women sentenced to imprisonment and to take into consideration the negative impacts that imprisonment had on them and their families (Hedderman, 2010). Corston was thus commissioned to review the adequacy of services for women. She made 43 recommendations, which she stated constituted a blueprint for a woman centred approach.[7]

One of her most significant and influential recommendations[8] was that the existing profile of women's centres be extended to form a large network of centres, in accordance with a national plan, which should be drawn up by the new commissioner for female offenders and those at risk of offending. Corston (2007:10) gave specific attention to two women's centres, Asha and Calderdale, and stated that these centres were 'the right way to treat women'.

Women's centres are specialist community-based 'one-stop shops' that provide services for women offenders and those at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system.

[5] It has been acknowledged that women and girls are not only subjected to the formal mechanisms of control, but they are also subject to informal controls in the domestic sphere (Pizzey, 1974; Smart & Smart, 1978; Hutter & Williams, 1980).

[6] Julie Walsh, Nissa Ann Smith, Anna Baker, Sarah Campbell, Jolene Willis and Hayley Williams (Moore, Scraton & Wahidin, 2018:1).

[7] For a detailed consideration of the Corston Report see Elfleet (2017a).

[8] Alongside this, her most radical recommendation was that women's prisons should be replaced by smaller custodial units, for women that had committed serious offences.

Women's centres vary in terms of the services provided but they all claim to provide a welcoming atmosphere where women can spend their time and receive support. Many women's centres provide counselling and mental health services, drug treatment, employability skills, domestic violence support, childcare, and housing assistance (APPG, 2016).

Before the Corston Report there were a small number of Women's Centres in England and Wales. As Plechowicz (2015) highlights, most of these gender specific projects had been created independently to meet local need, however some were in partnerships with local probation trusts. These projects included the Together Women's Pilots from 2005, in Yorkshire, Humberside and the North-West of England which were funded by the Labour Government as demonstration projects. Approximately nine million pounds was allocated to the pilots, which operated across five sites (Gelsthorpe, 2011; Plechowicz, 2015). These centres offered a one-stop-shop approach to provide holistic services for women with a primary aim of reducing offending, and a further aim of diverting women at risk of offending from prosecution and custody (Gelsthorpe, 2011). Whilst the range of services varied between the five centres, according to local need and partnership arrangements, the basic provision included 'training on issues such as parenting, managing mental health, life skills, thinking skills, and addressing offending behaviour' (Gelsthorpe, 2011:139). Each centre held surgeries that addressed a range of issues, such as housing and benefits, but also operated on a drop-in basis where women could access activities, for example reading groups, and complementary therapies. Further aims of the Together Women pilots were to identify lacunae in provision and to fill them, and to link up with external local services whilst not duplicating their work (Gelsthorpe, 2011). The momentum for the provision of further interventions to address female offending thus clearly gathered pace in the first decade of the 21st century. Women's centres, as highlighted, gained considerable attention in the Corston Report and the expansion of these gender specific programmes for women is often considered to be one of the main successes of this report (Roberts, 2017).

The Women's Voluntary Sector

The gender responsive framework advocated before, and after, the Corston Report is predominantly delivered by the voluntary sector (Cooper & Mansfield, 2020). This sector, under the New Labour government between 1997 and 2010, had been viewed somewhat as a 'missing link', which in conjunction with commercial providers would revitalise public services, in 'a 'mixed economy' of public service ownership' (Corcoran, 2011b:37). New Labour increasingly viewed the incorporation of the voluntary sector in offender management as a way of renewing notions of participatory citizenship, as well as being an agent to steer public services towards 'competition, choice and performance-based incentives and motivations' (Corcoran et al, 2018:189). Therefore, under New Labour, the sector was considered a close government partner and a source of expertise (Corcoran et al, 2018). However, as Corcoran et al (2019:97) highlight, after the election of a coalition government in 2010, the language of partnership gave way to 'an emphatically marketised, competitive, target-led approach, as the state favoured fiscal austerity and downsizing'. As such, the contemporary picture of the operation of the voluntary, private and public sector in criminal justice is dominated by 'the interests of large-scale providers working within hierarchical commissioning structures' (ibid). This commitment to the marketisation of criminal justice was further evident through the implementation of Transforming

Rehabilitation, the government's flagship justice policy, which initiated the part-privatisation of probation services (APPG, 2016).[9]

An orthodox view of the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector, from the post-war period, has generally characterised this relationship as one of 'mutual dependence and a balanced partnership' (Corcoran et al, 2018:187). This view also contends that whilst there may be occasional conflicts, governments are nonetheless refrained from indiscriminately curtailing the actions of civil society actors. Despite this account there has been increasing attention from academics, policy commentators and activists, warning that the potential incorporation and co-optation of charities into 'a shadow penal estate' may diminish 'the sector's distinctive, humanitarian, relatively autonomous and publicly legitimate standing' (ibid). Important to the sector's distinctiveness and autonomy is undoubtedly funding. As funding is reduced, and made short-term, the security of funding becomes a key concern for the women's voluntary sector, a concern which may take priority over political commitments and the values of working with women in the criminal justice system (Cooper & Mansfield, 2020). As Cooper and Mansfield (2020:209) argue, throughout funding cycles voluntary sector organisations must demonstrate that they are 'good value for money' to purchasers at central and local government, and 'align their work practices, organisational roles and infrastructure to develop more efficient organisational systems and enterprising techniques that meet the demands and requirements of neoliberal funding models'.

From their research which investigated the adaptation of the penal voluntary sector to the mixed market of criminal justice service delivery in England and Wales, between 2015 and 2017, Corcoran et al (2018) acknowledge three key findings which highlight the complexity of the relationship between the voluntary sector and marketized models. First, that the voluntary sector predominately complied with or, in a minority of cases, actively embraced competitive marketized models. Second, that the sector normalised organisational efficiency and greater alignment with bureaucratic practices. And third, that most voluntary sector organisations acknowledged conflict in terms of prioritising financial stability with their original aims and values. As such, these findings would indicate that whilst many voluntary sector organisations working within the criminal justice system do attempt to maintain their own values and aims, financial stability is likely to be a key factor that hinders their willingness and ability to do so in practice. Indeed, as Corcoran et al (2019:102) emphasise, amongst some penal voluntary sector organisations examined in their research, in the context of lost funding avenues deeply exacerbated by austerity measures and increasing marketisation, there was awareness 'in stark existential terms to adapt or perish'. Whilst there has been some criticism of research that primarily focuses on marketisation (See Tomczak, 2014), the analysis presented by Corcoran et al (2018; 2019) is pertinent to an analysis of TWC. As will be evidenced, the careful marketing of TWC was deemed essential to secure its funding and thus sustainability. This was a prime motivating factor that structured the aims of TWC.

Governing from a Distance

As Tomczak (2017a:153) acknowledges, there are two general views on the role of the voluntary sector in criminal justice. One view is that voluntary organisations 'empower prisoners and probationers enabling them to build social capital'. The second view suggests

[9] The relevance of TR to women's centres is considered in further detail later in this article.

that they extend social control, through expanding the scale of penality (Foucault, 1977; Cohen, 1985; Cooper & Sim, 2013). As Cooper and Sim (2013) contend, in relation to the latter assertion, such measures are part of a joined-up governmental response to crime and deviance that 'can be understood as relying upon numerous and diverse discursive practices that compel individuals to act within and upon their own subjugation' (Cooper and Sim, 2013: 196).

In her analysis of gender responsive programmes in Canada, Kelly Hannah-Moffat (2000; 2001) has argued that neoliberal strategies of governance go far beyond direct forms of repression, discipline, social control and welfare restriction. What has become increasingly apparent in analyses of neoliberal governance is the governance of individuals from a distance (Rose, 1993; Hannah-Moffat, 2001). One of the main features of this mode of governance is self-governance, which constructs the individual as a rational, free, responsible consumer who is capable of managing and minimising risk, not only to themselves but also to others. Of importance here is the notion that the exercise of authority is the outcome of freedom of choice, and therefore it has been acknowledged that strategies of responsibilisation are integral to such notions (Garland, 1996; Hannah-Moffat, 2001). As has been argued elsewhere,[10] the principles underpinning the woman centred strategy advocated by Corston adhered to this approach.

Whilst Corston (2007) acknowledged the numerous vulnerabilities experienced by criminalised women, dividing these into three main categories: domestic circumstances, such as domestic violence; personal circumstances, such as mental illness; and socio-economic factors, such as poverty, it was the former two factors that received the majority of her attention (Kendall, 2013; Elfleet, 2017a). Moreover, whilst she asserted that a combination of these factors was likely to lead to imprisonment, her solution to these hardships was to suggest that they 'must be addressed by helping women develop resilience, life skills and emotional literacy' (Corston, 2007:2, para.1). She thus suggested that women's centres were the right way to treat women and their work must be extended due to their capacity 'to treat each woman as an individual with her own set of needs and problems and to increase their capacity to take responsibility for their lives' (Corston, 2007:10). The main concern with this assertion is that women's difficulties are presented as surmountable through the adoption of the key neoliberal principles of adaptability, resilience and individual responsibility. As such, Corston considered women's social and economic difficulties, primarily, as a matter of personal failure and social inadequacy (Kendall, 2013; Elfleet, 2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2019b). Therefore, as Clarke and Chadwick (2018:52) argue, albeit unintentionally, Corston 'decontextualised women's imprisonment from broader social structures' and instead reinforced the belief that if women's imprisonment is to be downsized the woman herself must be the focal point for 'correction'.

Whilst neoliberalism is evidently concerned with economic dimensions (such as deregulation, intensive privatisation and corporate profits alongside the dismantling of the welfare state), it is also a modality of governmentality in terms of managing the conduct of individuals (Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Rottenberg, 2014). As Rottenberg (2014:420) contends, it is 'a dominant political rationality that moves to and from the management of the state to the inner workings of the subject, normatively constructing and interpellating individuals as entrepreneurial actors'. Neoliberalism encourages individuals to view themselves as active, individual subjects who are solely responsible for ensuring their security and success.

[10] See Dunbabin (2013) and Elfleet (2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2019b).

Collective forms of action are minimised, as individual responsibility, self-reliance, resilience and efficiency are hailed as appropriate and desirable behavioural attributes. It was with these concerns in mind that an analysis of a post Corston Report women's centre was deemed essential, in terms of its function for criminalised women.

The Women's Centre (TWC): A Post Corston Report Women's Centre

The original doctoral thesis (see Elfleet, 2019a), from which the findings of this article derive, adopted a case study approach to realise a core aim of analysing the role and function of a women's centre for criminalised women. A case study method was thus utilised to systematically gather in-depth information about TWC. Therefore, as noted from the outset, the findings presented in this article are specific to TWC and do not claim to be representative of all women's centres. The methods used were exclusively qualitative and included the use of semi-structured interviews with, and participant observation of, 16 members of TWC staff and 14 clients. The use of participant observation was considered a vital means of observing the practices of TWC, and the interactions between staff and clients who had consented to take part in the research. This allowed for the gathering of data in relation to the broader function of TWC for its clients. Additionally, the use of feminist Foucauldian discourse analysis allowed for a critical analysis of the narratives of TWC staff, and clients of TWC, by checking for continuity, discontinuity, patterns, and themes within their discourse. A fundamental issue, following the concerns of gender responsivity scholars (Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Goodkind, 2009; Haney, 2010) were any patterns and themes that adhered to neoliberal strategies of responsibilisation. This was considered a viable approach because TWC was stated to be greatly inspired by the principles of the Corston report, a report that has been acknowledged to utilise responsibilising rhetoric (See Dunbabin, 2013; Kendall, 2013; Elfleet, 2017a; Clarke & Chadwick, 2018). For the purposes of analysing the procedural and structural arrangements of a voluntary sector organisation for women, TWC, this article focuses on data collected from staff only.11

TWC opened in the North West of England shortly after the publication of the Corston Report (2007) and was endorsed by Baroness Jean Corston. The centre is located in a low-income area of the North-West of England that is predominantly inhabited by a white and working-class population. The clientele of TWC are thus predominantly white working-class adult females. At the time data was collected, in 2016, TWC employed nine paid members of staff, which consisted of two senior managers, Jean and Jackie, who governed the overall running and management of the centre; four Empowerment Advisors (EAs), Nancy, Yvonne, Jenny and Ellie who oversaw the day to day interactions and relationships of clients in the centre; and three administrators/receptionists.[12] In addition, the centre employed approximately 25 volunteers who aided with the day to day operations of the centre.[13]

TWC began as a small female only offender management project with Jean, a senior manager, working as an Offender Manager with responsibility for a small caseload of women, in what was considered a woman centred approach for female offenders. The following year TWC relocated premises and its remit was extended to include not just

[11] A further article detailing the experiences of TWC clients is in progress.

[12] Only one receptionist/administrator, Enid, participated in the research.

[13] As acknowledged, all names used in this article are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and confidentially.

women sentenced by the courts to community orders and licence conditions, but to all adult females at risk of contact with the criminal justice system. Its expansion was explained to me by staff as a means of being able to prevent women entering the criminal justice system, and as such I was told that TWC largely had a reputation as a preventative organisation. It was from this point that senior manager Jean stated that the centre truly 'fitted in with Corston's principles', by providing a holistic woman-centred approach for female offenders *and* those at risk of contact with the criminal justice system.

Any woman, aged 18 years and over, could attend the centre. However, it was acknowledged to be particularly beneficial for women who had transgressed the law, and those at risk of doing so. Indeed, the centre's initial and sole focus was statutory, as a site for Offender Management Services. In addition to this, TWC hosted privatised probation services, and thus received funds from its region's Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC). CRCs were created by the reforms outlined in *Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform* (MoJ, 2013). Transforming Rehabilitation established the National Probation Service (NPS), which would supervise high risk (ex-) offenders, and privatised probation supervision, which would supervise low to medium risk offenders, through the creation of 21 CRCs. These reforms followed Ministry of Justice (MoJ) consultations on community sentences and probation (see MoJ, 2012), and enabled voluntary organisations to feature as junior partners in almost all the partnerships currently owning CRCs (Tomczak, 2017b:141).The inclusion of privatised probation within TWC was an important structural dynamic. *Transforming Rehabilitation* (MoJ, 2013) highlighted the role of CRCs and 'voluntary organisations in payment-by-results (PbR) contracting' (Tomczak, 2017a:152). PbR is a mode of contracting that proposed to reduce public expenditure so that 'the taxpayer will only pay providers in full for those services that actually deliver real reductions in reoffending' (MoJ, 2013:3). As Plechowicz (2015:130) has noted, a key concern associated with PbR, 'which, by its nature, does not fit well with female offenders or women's centres', is that since female offenders represent a minority caseload of offenders for Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), the level of demand is such that female offenders are undesirable in terms of making fast and easily gained profits. Additionally, whilst attendance at women's centres is generally voluntary, in some cases it is enforced via Rehabilitation Activity Requirements (RARs), specifically within those centres that have active partnerships with probation services.[14] As Plechowicz (2015:125) has observed, this raises concerns regarding the 'enforcement or coercion of engagement with women's centres' since voluntary attendance is generally considered crucial to the support of female clients and establishing rapport with staff. As such, given its contact with its regions CRC, TWC made for an interesting, and important, case study of a large gender specific project for female offenders and those at risk of offending.

Daily client numbers at TWC were stated to often exceed 150 visitors. It is accessible to any adult female, however, given the presence of privatised probation services, for some women their presence at the centre was mandatory since they had been referred to offender management services; for some women this included participation in onsite community payback. TWC also recruited its clientele through referrals, for example from

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[14] RARs were introduced by the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014. They are a single requirement that courts can include as part of an offender's community sentence. They are stated to consist of a variety of appointments and activities to monitor and support offenders during their rehabilitation (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2017).

the Job Centre, General Practitioners, and through other voluntary organisations who were aware of the services offered by TWC. Upon referral, clients were expected to fill in a referral form which asked for basic information, such as contact details. In addition to basic information, the referral also included a survey which asked the clients for more detailed information in order to identify the types of support required. Clients were asked about domestic abuse; physical health and disability; mental health; money management; accommodation; training, education and employment; emotional wellbeing and thinking skills (which included self-esteem); children/family; substance misuse; and sexual abuse and exploitation. They were then asked to detail any areas of specific support they required.

A range of services were offered daily, from clothes washing, to personal hygiene facilities and food. Additionally, TWC offered courses on parenting, domestic violence, and substance misuse. The centre accommodated support groups for women with mental health problems, substance misuse, and those with experience of domestic violence. In addition to this, it provided classes on knitting, sewing, dressmaking, card making, floristry, and choir singing. A daily timetable for these classes and courses was displayed in the large community room so that women could check to see which events were taking place in the centre.

Empowered to be Resilient

It was apparent that TWC staff utilised feminist empowerment rhetoric as a vehicle to transform TWC clients into independent, self-sufficient, responsible (neoliberal) subjects. Examples of such feminist empowerment rhetoric could be seen in the aforementioned courses and programmes that TWC offered. These were set up to encourage women to take more personal control, and ultimately responsibility, over different aspects of their lives. For some clients, namely those subject to community orders, engagement with these courses was mandatory, via RARs.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) was also offered in the centre. NLP is described as a practice of understanding the way in which thoughts, feelings, language, and behaviour impact upon outcomes. It includes a variety of methods to change thought patterns and behaviours (NLP Academy, 2017). During my time at TWC I took part in one NLP programme titled ‘a better and brighter future’.[15] The primary aim was to ‘re-write unproductive behaviours, beliefs and patterns of living’. Other aims of this course were to ‘change responses to the past and our thoughts about it’; ‘to divert attention from unproductive thoughts to positive resourceful ones’; and ‘to clear the past, create a focussed present, in order to create a compelling future’ (Observation notes). Whilst courses came and went, according to the availability of agencies providing them, they nonetheless worked with very similar aims; the creation of self-sufficient, adaptable, and compliant subjects. Furthermore, counselling was advertised in the centre under the slogan ‘enabling and empowering women to find their voice, make the most of their lives, and be open to opportunity’ (Observation notes). As Goodkind (2009) has argued, the notion that you can be anything you want to be, you just must believe it, is a key component of neoliberal gender responsive strategies. Low self-esteem was thus presented as a significant challenge to a successful and fulfilling life due to its perceived impact upon an individual’s capacity for taking control over their own social and economic circumstances. A core theme emerging from staff discourse was that self-esteem was deemed integral to empowerment, and that this would enable

[15] The name of this course has been changed.

women to turn their lives around. TWC hosted numerous courses on confidence and self-esteem. Empowerment was considered so integral to this that during my time in the centre, after the appointment of new members of staff, the job title of Project Worker was changed to Empowerment Advisor (EA). This change was considered viable since the role of EAs within TWC was '*to empower and motivate women'* (Nancy, emphases added).[16]

Empowerment can assume differing meanings depending on how, and by whom, it is used (Hannah-Moffat, 2001). In neoliberal political economies the original liberal feminist idea of empowerment is increasingly transmuted into a mechanism to create self-sufficient subjects (Rottenberg, 2014). Low self-esteem and a lack of confidence are increasingly perceived as barriers to a successful, independent and fulfilling life (Goodkind, 2009; Hannah-Moffat, 2010). Empowerment, as a result, is divorced from its original feminist associations of collective action, solidarity, and social justice. Instead it is transformed into a neoliberal governmentality (Rottenberg, 2014), which aims to create individually responsible subjects who are fully capable of managing a whole range of risks (Goodkind, 2009). This offers no challenge to neoliberalism, instead "the neoliberal feminist subject is mobilised to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair" (Rottenberg, 2014:420).

These individualising and responsibilising features were a prominent part of TWC, not just within programmes and courses (many of which were provided by external services). Primarily, empowerment was understood as a strategy to motivate women to take charge of their lives. Discussing the importance of this strategy one member of staff stated:

> Mostly it's about empowering women who need our support as well, you know, to access our services to come and see what we can do for them. *To empower them to take…to make those decisions for their own so they have a better life a better future. You know, a more comfortable secure and safe sort of futur*e. (Enid, Emphasis added)

For Yvonne, an Empowerment Advisor (EA), an empowered woman was:

> *Someone who is able to stand on their own two feet*, someone who is aware of what services are out there, someone who feels empowered as a woman. *Basically, you can stand on your own two feet. That says it all.* (Yvonne, emphases added)

Staff statements about empowerment were clearly circular, and self-perpetuating. There was no clear agreement on what empowerment specifically entailed, or how it could be achieved, beyond TWCs clientele just believing or thinking that they had been empowered. This was emphasised in Yvonne's statement that empowerment is simply 'someone who feels empowered as a woman'.

As Rottenberg (2014) has argued, whilst the feminist movement in the early 1970s called for self-transformation, or self-empowerment, this was accompanied by a critique of structural discrimination and/or systemic male domination. Conversely, conceptualisations

[16] Nancy was an EA.

of empowerment in neoliberal contexts place the burden of responsibility for change with the female subject, as opposed to recognising and challenging the structural inequalities experienced by women. As such, it is purged of all aspects that would position its focus outward, for the good of the public.
Talk of empowerment within TWC was detached from a challenge of structural inequality. It was instead wedded to an anti-dependency rhetoric. An empowered woman was therefore someone who was able to self-care and take sole responsibility for ensuring that her future, and that of her family, was secure and comfortable. TWC's utilisation of empowerment did not challenge the role of the state in the manufacture of social and economic inequality and how these factors impact on the likelihood of a secure future, and the relationship of this to criminalisation. Furthermore, it drew upon on the neoliberal notion that financial and social insecurity are inevitable as opposed to being products of a profoundly unequal society. As such, it was primarily regarded as the responsibility of TWC clients to negotiate these changes, to adapt, and to seize opportunities as they present themselves (Joseph, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014):

> They've got to want to help themselves. There's a big saying that you can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink from it. That woman's got to want to change. We can't force anybody to change whether that is in the criminal justice system or just a woman attending the centre. They've got to meet you halfway. But that's where we come into it, the Empowerment Advisors, because it's motivating them and letting them see that there is light at the end of the tunnel. And do you know what… you can change, you have a choice. (Nancy, emphases added)

For clarification, I asked Nancy if she felt there were opportunities and she stated:

> Yeah, there's always opportunities, but you've got to get up there, *get off your backside and work for them*. (Nancy, emphases added)

This is however not to say that staff did not express admiration of clients, and sympathy in relation to the structural oppressions they experienced. Poverty, mental health difficulties, physical and sexual abuse were acknowledged by staff to be serious issues. It was also not the case that the services of TWC were viewed negatively by its clientele. In fact, regardless of the highlighted concerns, TWC was overwhelmingly viewed as a lifeline by many clients who took part in the original doctoral research, in terms of providing guidance and support with navigating social welfare systems and crucially, for many clients, providing social interaction and company.[17] However, when staff discussed how structural oppression may be addressed, they utilised a neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility:

> A lot of them are an inspiration because a lot of them have got such stuff going on, such difficult stuff. Even the ones that have come out of it, the fact that *they're strong and resilient and they carry on despite what's happened*. So many things have happened to them, they've lost their kids, for various reasons, but they're still coming along, trying to do some courses trying to

[17]As noted earlier, an article detailing the experiences of TWC clients is in progress.

> look on the positives, and trying to rebuild their life. I admire the ones who come along and take everything the centre offers. I do admire them. (Ellie, emphases added)[18]
>
> I believe that we have to have an awareness of where *we* are, and what's happening to ensure that *we're* robust you know, strong or whatever, to *be able to deal with whatever's thrown at us*. (Jenny, emphases added)[19]

As the statement by Jenny indicates, *we* should be able to assess risk, social or economic, through being 'aware' and 'robust' so that *we* are better able to manage, or avoid, hardships. As such, a neoliberal governmentalist approach appeared to be integrated into the belief systems of staff. It was thus unsurprising that a disconnection between the anti-dependency rhetoric present in their construction of empowerment, and the lived realities of their client's lives was not recognised or challenged.

Ironically, whilst articulating an anti-dependency rhetoric as part of its empowerment 'programme', the centre was dependent on the availability of women accessing their services since clients ensured that a variety of funding avenues were maintained. Client dependency on the centre was nonetheless constructed as counter-productive to the overall neoliberal conception of empowerment, the production of self-sufficient and self-governing female subjects. As Senior Managers Jean and Jackie explained:

> This centre is about empowering women. *It's not about adhering to a society that gives all the time, and people expect to be given*. *We're about empowering women.* (Jean, emphases added)
>
> We don't want to disempower women so, *we don't want to keep giving and giving and giving, inevitably that's never got them anywhere before, so it's not going to get them anywhere in the future.* We will support and hand hold to a point, and then it's a bit more like OK so where'd you go from here? (Jackie, emphases added).

Clients were predominantly constructed as women who had been 'given to'. It was this, presumed, overreliance on others that was considered central to the problems that they had experienced in life, and therefore it was also assumed that reliance on the centre would, long-term, act as a barrier to self-sufficiency. These ideas were problematic as they omitted consideration of the fact that some individuals may not have the opportunity, or capacity, to access basic necessities. The idea that support, whether financial or otherwise, results in dependency generates the idea that for individuals to be self-sufficient and productive, necessities in life should be earned and not granted freely. The goal therefore was to create resilient subjects who are better able to negotiate hardships in life; individuals who are able to 'bounce back' in the face of adversity, whether this is financial or social (Joseph, 2013). Women were therefore expected to engage with the centre to address their problems. Those who did not were considered in the following way:

> Some will just come in here and think it's a sit off because there's free tea and

[18] Ellie was an EA.

[19] Jenny was also an EA.

> coffee, free toast and stuff like that. If there's a general need then obviously we're not going to go 'you need to go', or whatever. We'd never tell anyone to leave, it's not what we're about. But *they can't just come in here and not do anything*, because that's not the point of the centre. *The point of the centre is to empower a woman to take control of her own life* and achieve and go out and do something. (Jackie, emphases added)

A further contradiction emerges from this statement. An empowered woman is someone who is able 'to take control of her own life', yet in a TWC context this did not include refusing to take part in various TWC activities, which one might expect of an independent, self-assured person. Indeed, as Jean added; 'the women know that they will be chased up. What courses have you done? What have you done?' An empowered woman was therefore one who utilises her empowered status to engage with officially approved behaviours, ones which accorded with the neoliberal principles endorsed by the centre. An empowered woman should therefore engage with courses designed to improve her ability to self-govern. As a women's centre that prided itself on following the principles of the Corston Report, this adherence to individual responsibility was unsurprising.

Preventing Initial Offending and Reoffending

It was evident that through a variety of practices and partnerships with statutory and voluntary agencies, TWC aims and objectives were aligned with those of the state and were thus concerned with the prevention of recidivism and initial offending, women's needs were thus calculated as criminogenic risk factors.20 As Hannah Moffat has argued (2010), women's needs, such as mental health problems, substance misuse, unemployment and relationships, are frequently calculated as criminogenic risks. These risk factors were sought out on initial entry to the centre, via a survey. Clients could then be referred to appropriate courses and programmes to enable them to better manage these difficulties. TWC services were noted to 'address all criminogenic need' in order to 'put things into place so they will avoid reoffending' (Jean).

There was therefore an evident focus on preventing reoffending and initial offending.[21] When I asked TWC staff what they considered to be success when working with criminalised women, I was met with a recital of statistics that were largely concerned with a reduction in reoffending, and success rates in terms of the completion of community payback and/or compliance with probation services:

> It [success] has to be reducing reoffending. (Ellie, emphases added)
>
> When we first started it was only 47% of women completing their orders and now it's something like 97% of women completing their orders since [TWC] started. So there's a significant jump in statistics to show this way of working

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[20] For a detailed consideration of the conflation of the *needs* of disadvantaged women with *risk* see Hannah-Moffat (2010; 2011). Also see Feeley & Simon (1992), Bottoms (1995), and Garland (1996) for a consideration of the prominence of risk in law-and-order politics.

[21] This was perhaps unsurprising since TWC has always had this focus, given that it started as a female only probation site.

> does work. (Jackie)

Furthermore, whilst a clear theme of client responsibilisation was evident, this did not prevent TWC taking credit for any success. The success of clients was largely attributed to the role and function of TWC whilst failure was generally attributed to the client. A lack of success was generally attributed to limited engagement with TWC recommended programmes to address their 'criminogenic' needs. These depictions of success were articulated by volunteers in the centre, as well as senior managers and staff:

> *To help them stop reoffending*, it's nice to see that they haven't reoffended and some of them have had employment from coming to the centre. It's nice to see them doing well, *turning their lives around*. (Tina, emphases added)

> That girls haven't gone back into prison, and seeing them on the courses, *seeing them sort of like a normal person*, just seeing them flourish, and getting a job. (Emilia, emphases added)

As a centre that opened following the publication of the Corston Report and one which stated that it upheld the principles set out in the report, Corston's conceptualisation of success was adhered to. On the matter of success for a woman centred programme, Corston stated 'I believe that treating people as individuals is key to any successful intervention' (Corston, 2007:49, para 5.3). She further noted that this strategy was essential in order 'to increase their capacity to take responsibility for their lives' (Corston, 2007:10, para 18, emphases added). From the outset staff stated that it was a central aim of the centre to adhere to the core principles of the Corston Report, it was successful in that regard since it predominantly focused on the woman as a site for change. As articulated in the prior section, TWC courses were underpinned by neoliberal principles of choice and individual responsibility, and these were considered vital for the 'empowerment' of its clients.

Embedded Within and Embracing Neoliberalism

Perhaps not surprisingly, given TWC's adherence to state objectives concerning a reduction in offending, little resistance was evident in terms of TWC's acceptance of and adherence to neoliberal agendas. Instead, marketised models were generally embraced as inevitable and economically necessary for financial survival. The precarious nature of funding and competition from new 'innovative' charities meant that TWC aligned its priorities with state objectives to maintain its legitimacy and sustainability. The organisation itself was, at times, adapted and moulded to suit current market interests concerning third-sector organisations, as new projects emerged in competition.[22] As stated, amongst voluntary sector organisations, particularly in an austerity context, there is significant competition for funding (Cooper & Mansfield, 2020). TWC therefore was actively engaged in demonstrating its 'good value for money' when bidding for funds.

There were several funding arrangements in operation at TWC to secure its sustainability. When TWC initially launched, a senior manager (Jean) stated that funding was sought from statutory agencies who were asked for support. Funding was further derived from the Big

[22] Senior manager Jackie, during a discussion with me in the centre, expressed frustration about new charities with new ideas/programmes for women. Jackie observed that they gained attention and interest from funders and, as a result, TWC had felt the need to consider integrating similar ideas into their programme, even though they were regarded as less beneficial for women than those already offered.

Lottery Fund. Undoubtedly this was a key concern for the centre, and the bidding process was demanding but evidently vital. Funding was undoubtedly at the forefront of staff concerns when asked about the future of TWC. In terms of rent, staff salaries and other required expenditure, operational costs were stated to be in the region of 250,000 pounds per annum. Funding was also secured through various partnerships with other agencies that had independently secured funding but required clientele and premises from which to deliver their services. At the time the doctoral research was conducted, there were in the region of 140 agencies accessing TWC to provide services to its clientele, such as User Voice[23] and NACRO. The engagement of clients with these services was considered important:

> What tends to happen is other agencies will say 'we've won a bid, will you partner up with us and we will deliver to women, women are part of our target?' So, we say yeah. So, they will pay us maybe for the hire of the room. (Jean)

If the clientele could not be guaranteed, and thus used as evidence of service demand for bid processes, the concern was that those services would seek their clientele elsewhere. TWC did not pay external agencies to deliver courses, but instead guaranteed them an audience, as senior manager Jackie explained to me:

> We come at it from 'we've got no money, but we've got space and we've got clients and we've got the women, and we know that you need the women for your funders to put your figures up. So, if you come and deliver that in here, *we'll guarantee you bums on seats*.' (Jackie, emphases added)

Given this relationship between TWC and external agencies it was common to see TWC staff making announcements or to see them directly engaging with their clients asking them if they would like to sit in on courses that were due to start, this typically occurred when attendance was deemed insufficient. Whilst funds from agencies were not always provided to use TWC facilities to deliver services, their engagement was nonetheless deemed important. TWC would still engage with these services so their clientele could make use of their services. In some cases, TWC could then be written in as a partner when these agencies placed bids for funding. This arrangement was described as a "quid pro quo" by senior managers. Clients of TWC were therefore commodified. They were regarded as 'objects' in the sense that 'bums on seats' were required for the centre to generate sufficient funds to remain sustainable.

As Corcoran at al (2019) have observed, amongst some organisations within the penal voluntary sector, in the context of lost funding avenues worsened by austerity measures and increasing marketisation, there is an awareness that adaptation is imperative for survival. Careful consideration was therefore given to the marketing of TWC to highlight its potential long term, wide reaching, impacts in terms of reducing the likelihood of

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[23] User Voice is a voluntary sector organisation that provides services, such as mentoring, to offenders in the community and in prison.

reoffending, and indeed initial offending. The centre was therefore marketed as a 'preventative' organisation, to highlight the benefits to potential funders:

> When we look at [TWC] we've got to look at marketing in a particular way because it's not an emotive charity. People tend to think women, complex needs, committing offences, why would we want to fund these women? But you know what, every one of us have got women in our lives. And the intergenerational impact of our intervention with a woman, how that can have an effect within a community is massive. So, it's marketing it in a way that we're going to get attention from people who will say that's worth it, invest in it (Jean, emphases added).

The provision of funding from its region's Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) added additional considerations for TWC in relation to reoffending. Prior to the CRC contract, the input that offender management services had in the day-to-day operations of TWC was considered small. However, since the contract with the region's CRC, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had been introduced which had increased their involvement with the daily operations of TWC. Jackie described the KPIs to me in the following way:

> Our KPIs are basically sort of if …what the woman's engaged on with [through TWC], what [TWC has] done to assist and support the CRC in relation to that offender, and if that offender has completed their order; if they have completed it successfully. Then we have to identify how many have done that as well, without obviously being recalled or breached. (Jackie)

To legitimise its receipt of CRC funding, TWC was engaged in a process of validating its usefulness and success in supporting the work of the CRC in terms of reducing reoffending and ensuring compliance with probation orders. Regarding the relationship between women's centres and CRCs, several concerns have been raised. The All Parliamentary Group on Women in the Penal System (APPG) (2016) report that since the introduction of Transforming Rehabilitation, negative accounts and outcomes had been reported by managers of women's centres. For those centres that had accepted contracts with CRCs the APPG (2016) state that managers had felt that the quality of the services provided had diminished since the union, because CRCs would commission group work as opposed to one-on-one casework which was deemed essential to a woman-centred model. Thus, under the contracts offered by CRCs, case workers would no longer be able to refer women to tailored services and would instead recommend group activity. This system is noted by the APPG (2016) to be of benefit to CRCs since larger numbers of women attending these services could be recorded, and success could be claimed on the part of CRCs without any consideration of whether or not the service had been successful. On this basis, a number of women's centres refused contracts with CRCs, due to the concern that their services would be reduced to a cost effective one-size-fits-all approach, regardless of whether or not it was helpful to clients (APPG, 2016). As noted, the contract between the CRC and TWC was recent at the time data was gathered. Staff at TWC did not articulate any concerns in relation to the issues outlined above, instead the contract was viewed positively and considered a success:

> We work really closely together, and we've all got the same aims at the end of the day, to get women through their orders, and to prevent reoffending (Jean).

> You get about 90% of women completing their community work and their orders and they're not going back to court, so it's saving a lot of money for tax payers (Amanda).[24]

> It's good now because we are getting funding from the CRC, I mean our rent on here's £47,000, just for our rent (Jackie).

Staff perspectives on the success of this contract largely related to the prevention of reoffending, and the generation of funds to cover operational costs. As such, data was collated carefully to demonstrate the success of the centre in reducing reoffending, this was considered essential for funding bids:

> We have to show exactly the work that we've done, so the induction process, how they've engaged with [TWC]. What are … which criminogenic needs we've addressed during that first month. So, we're collating all that information and it's really tightened up our processes anyway (Jean).

The incorporation of privatised probation services within TWC was therefore generally embraced by staff on two fronts. First, in terms of optimising income generation to ensure its sustainability, and second, to increase the ability of TWC to minimise the criminogenic 'needs' of its clients. It is worth reiterating that TWC was established originally as a female only probation site, and thus from the outset its aims and objectives were more clearly aligned with state aims and objectives, and neoliberal principles, as a woman centred project inspired by the Corston Report.

Whilst TWC staff did express a concern for the lives of their clients, the neoliberal context which it operated within limited this interest. The empowerment strategy adhered to within TWC was evidently neoliberal, and therefore it did not challenge the structural inequalities experienced by women. Inequalities were primarily constructed as inevitable, and their clients rendered responsible for managing social and economic hardships. It was evident that the accumulation of data, to demonstrate TWC's 'success' in diverting women away from crime, was a primary concern so that funding could be obtained for the centre to remain financially sustainable.

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[24] Amanda was a volunteer at TWC.

Conclusion

TWC was evidently largely accepting of marketised models and showed very little resistance to their incorporation within the services offered. Whilst staff did articulate some frustration, on occasion, when altering or changing their programmes in order to increase their likelihood of being successful with funding bids, as new charities emerged, this was viewed as an inevitable outcome of competition in a mixed market of criminal justice service delivery, and necessary for its financial survival (Corcoran, 2011a; Corcoran et al, 2019). It was essential for TWC to demonstrate its ability to enable women to manage their criminogenic needs/risks, so that its worth could be demonstrated to funders. This requirement was a principle that underpinned the centres conception of empowerment. TWC utilised a neoliberal understanding of empowerment, whereby it was considered as a mechanism to transform women into responsible individuals, through the promotion of self-sufficiency and resilience. Empowerment, as a result, was disconnected from its original feminist associations of collective action, solidarity, and social justice (Rottenberg, 2014).

This is not to say that staff did not express sympathy toward the difficulties their clients experienced, however their strategy to 'empower' clients focused on ensuring that clients believed that they should take personal responsibility for their lives. Staff demonstrated a women sensitive perspective in that they acknowledged the different needs and experiences of women in the criminal justice system, but they did not present any fundamental challenges to the social, cultural, or economic forces that produce inequality. (Rottenberg, 2014). Instead, a neoliberal feminised governmentalist approach was endorsed to create neoliberal feminine subjects that accept full responsibility for their own wellbeing and care (Goodkind, 2009; Rottenberg, 2014).

TWC therefore represents a clear example of the neoliberalisation of the voluntary sector for female offenders, and further highlights the limitations of gender responsive scholarship when appropriated into policy development and service delivery (Carlton & Segrave, 2011) particularly in neoliberal contexts. The findings of this article thus concur with pessimistic accounts on the role of the voluntary sector in crime management (See Corcoran, 2008; 2009; 2011a; 2011b; Cooper & Mansfield, 2020) as opposed to more optimistic accounts (See Tomczak, 2014). It has been contended that TWC is as an extension of transcarceral surveillance and control of those most vulnerable in the community (Carlen & Tombs, 2006; Carlton & Segrave, 2011; 2013; 2016). What therefore remains essential to challenge this is a continuing critique of neoliberal rhetoric wherever it emerges, ensuring that the profound social and economic injustices reinforced and produced by it are kept in the public consciousness, whilst continuously working towards the removal of them (Kendall, 2013:51).

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