

Power, regulation and gender in women's prisons in England & Wales and Norway

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Introduction



- Women's imprisonment has principally conceptualised experiences of social life in relation to gender
- Much research is concerned with '*the private, the domestic, and the sexual*' (Liebling 2009) while overlooking issues of legitimacy, power, fairness, and authority (Crewe, Hulley, and Wright 2017)
- Many paradoxes have been under-theorised: for example, women's prisons are rarely perceived to be disordered, yet, female prisoners seem far from compliant (Bosworth 1999)



Weight, power and vertical regulation



'It's in a way very ... humiliating. But that's part of being in prison. That's the punishment, right?'
(Caroline, BE)

'The authority they have, they use it wrongly. They talk to us like we are in kindergarten. They treat us like kids in a kindergarten [...] They speak to you in an unworthy manner and try and seem very important. It's just all wrong. They don't seem to think about the fact that we are adults who are used to doing all these things [showering] on our own'
(Margit, BV)

'I don't really mind because I've become used to it [...] You kind of just have to go through it, just like everything else. So you lose a lot of that - by being in prison - in a negative way I think, that strength to protest against things, you become a bit more indifferent to everything [...] because you can't really do anything anyway. [...] You can protest, you can say as much as you want to. It still happens.'

(Bente, BV)

'You've got no give, there's no give between you and the system and the officers and their rules.'

(Jasmine, SE)



'So I think that that's a load of crap, like the way that they say you have to conduct yourself because outside you wouldn't necessarily conduct yourself and follow these types of rules, like you have to behave in a certain manner.'

(Jasmine, SE)



'In the way they answer you, they can be a bit sharp or condescending'
(Camilla, BV)



- Women challenged authority relationally, rather than collectively:
 - 'How can **you** do this to me?'
 - '**What kind of person** are you that does this?'
- Power here can be seen as a form of 'illegitimate patrichialism' (Mathiesen 1965:101) with a 'institutionalised uncertainty' (Galtung in Mathiesen 1965) where power is perceived as personal, unpredictable and unlimited

Horizontal relationships, tightness and adaptions to power

- Power and complinace are also intrinsically tied up with horizontal relationships
- Women generally describe as feeling physically safe but psychologically on edge
- Jasmine (SE) says that she is '*always kind of on guard a little bit no matter what or who you hang around with*'

'You don't want to seem too shy or too cocky. You've got to be careful in here because some people can twist things and some people can look at you differently. You have to be careful with how you act'

'The gossip is unbelievable. It's constant, every day it's something new. It's twisted hundreds of times'

(Faith, SE)

'It is not solitude that plagues the prisoners, but life en masse'

(Sykes 1958:4)



'I've had intel after intel. I've been put on a lie-down, I've had room spins for stuff that I never even did. So you do get a lot of intel but it's mainly jealousy, bitterness, spiteful'

(Jasmine, SE)



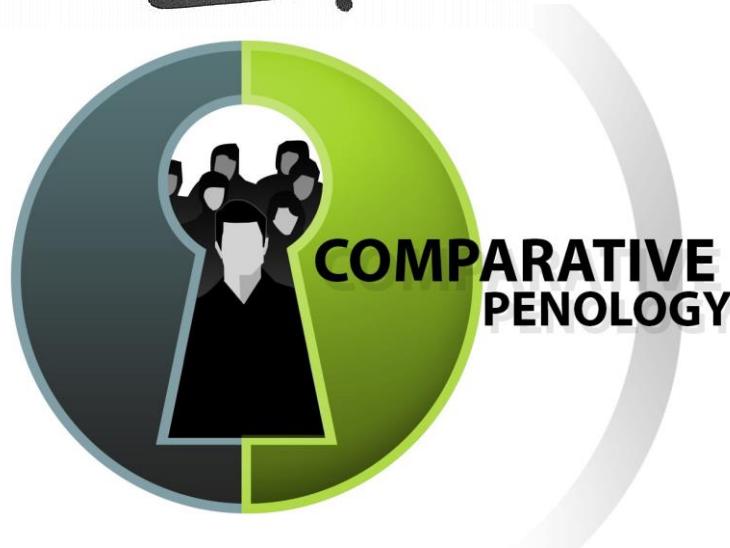
- Talk, rumours and ‘intel’ contribute to and shape order, power dynamics and hierarchies in women’s prisons
- This diffuse form of power requires constant watching, listening and reading the atmosphere

Conclusion

- Despite the differences in penal policies, varying sentence lengths and the size of the prisons, experiences are very similar, throwing up new questions about gender, penal culture and Nordic exceptionalism
- We found a combination of a flat vertical use of power which is based on uneasy and diffuse relational authority that in turn enables a tight and heavy form of lateral control



Thanks
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