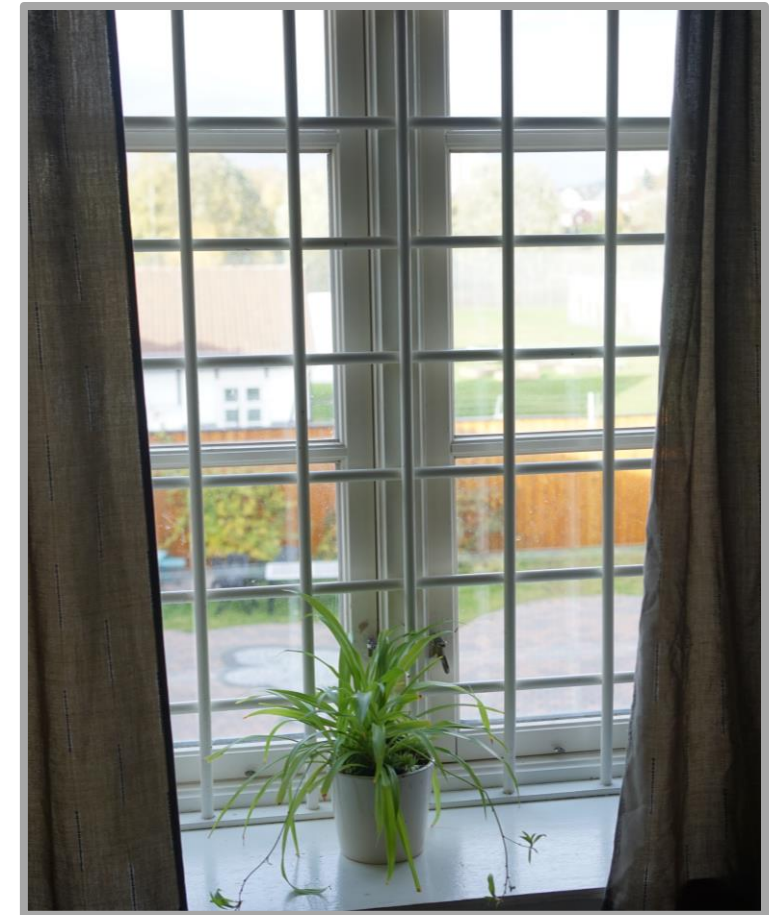
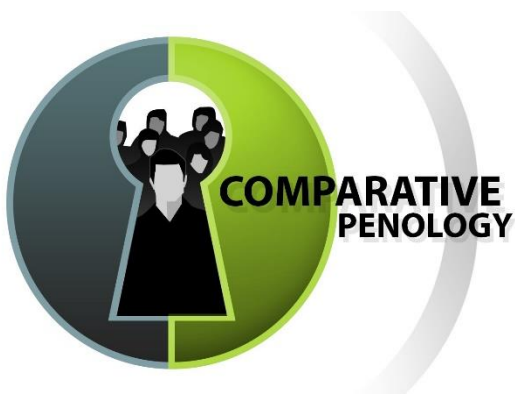


Order, regulation and gender practices in women's prisons in England & Wales and Norway

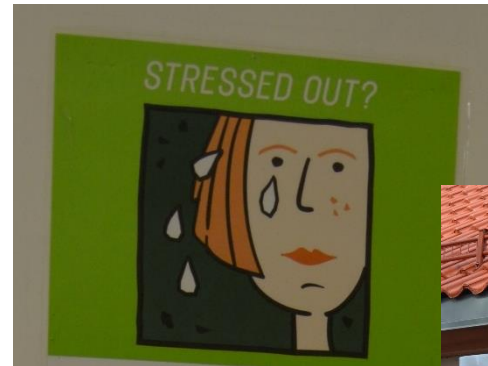


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1. Introduction



- Women's imprisonment has principally conceptualised experiences of social life in relation to gender
- Much research is concerned with embodiment, identity and relationships while overlooking issues of legitimacy, power, fairness, and authority (Rowe 2016)
- Discussions around gender and prison are loaded and challenging to navigate
- 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)



- What does vertical regulation look like and what does it tell us about gendered dynamics? How do staff regulate female prisoners?
- How does lateral regulation shape power dynamics?
- Is there an overarching gendered dimension at play that influences women's imprisonment in both countries?



2. Weight, power and vertical regulation



‘If there was communication, if everybody [staff] **was reading off the same page**. (...) There's none of that. It gets on my nerves. I don't like not being able to communicate with people and for them to understand what my qualms are, what I need, where I need to be. It's just frustrating. (Maddison, E&W).

Regulation through intervention

‘The main thing here is **relationships**: women are wary of staff and have difficult personality traits. We have a simple screening tool for PD pathway linked to high risk, not all [women] have PD. (...) **There are far more emotionally intensive and disturbed people in the female estate.** The main things are: toxic relationships, violence & co-dependence and secrecy & self-harm. (...) It is interesting that many women are presenting as ‘stuck and unworkable’ are now being picked up by the new screening tool and PD pathway’

(E&W field notes)

‘When I come back to the office the nurse is there asking the officers to see a prisoner with her because she is trouble – they want to take her off her meds because she has been rude to the psychiatrist and threatening nurses. Staff say she is not violent but the nurses are adamant that they want at least two staff because ‘it is going to kick off – **you never know with these cats, they strike out of nowhere**’

(E&W field notes)

‘But, ugh, I talked to her [staff] and **told her I have anxiety**, that I struggle with anxiety. And later it was like **she didn’t remember anything from the conversation**. (...) I was like, fuck, why did I bother sitting there and talking openly with her? She doesn’t remember shit. So I had to tell her again.’

(Faye, NO)

‘Yes. And since I had been raped, **the scariest thing was that they [staff] had access to my key** and that I couldn’t lock it. (...) I thought that the men who work here are able to come in here, and if they come in and want to do something, I don’t have any power. So I sat in the corner of my bed the whole night.’

(Berit, NO)

I've been here six months and I've had no therapy. I said to them I want psychotherapy, I don't want to [go to a] psychiatrist, (...) because I know what is good for me. I've had a psychiatrist and a therapist when I was younger but they didn't work for me. **They finally found what worked for me, and it was psychotherapy. But they came and said to me, ‘we can’t offer you that.** We can offer you [other] therapy.’ (...) My psychotherapist actually helps me change my train of thought, what I could do to cope, what I could have done better. It's different. Here nothing.

(Susan, E&W)

Focus on the (female) body

You are standing there completely naked, not a thread on your body. Not a hair tie in your hair. Nothing, nothing. You're standing there completely naked and (...) and exposed. **You are at your most humiliated. That feeling. (...) There aren't words for it. You feel so exposed.** It's like your worth completely disappears. And you feel even more ashamed, you try to hide and protect yourself a bit, right? Because you feel much more comfortable with clothes on.

(Faye, NO)

This is not a cosmopolitan jail at all. As people themselves, they live within a 10-mile radius from this jail. So they don't see black people on a daily basis. **So when they see a black person with gold teeth and loud, a bit eccentric, 'Oh no, she's going to be trouble.** We need to keep her behind her door just in case she creates people to be friends with.'

(Violet, E&W)

'They tell her that **she has to buy brighter coloured clothes instead of black, and wear less make-up so she looks less 'goth'.** (...) She is afraid to dress in black dresses, wear lots of make-up, etc. because she is worried what the forensic psychiatrists will say. She feels like the women are constantly under surveillance'

(field notes, Dahlia, NO)

Parentalism

There are a lot of staff on my unit who try to raise me. But **I don't need parenting**. I think that it's warped for them to act that way. (...) There is always someone who comments like (high pitched annoying voice) "You can't walk around like that."

(Faye, NO)

Sometimes I think, "**I'm 50 years old, I'm not a shitty child.**" Right? Because there are some who really talk down to people, I feel...

(Trude, NO)

She follows the rules in the prison 'because rules are rules' and the prison holds power over her whole life, **they're her parents**.

(field notes, Svanhild, NO)

To be honest, **they'd tell you to grow up** if you and someone are not getting on, "Grow up". For instance, someone was making comments as they were walking past the other week, so I went in the office and he said, "This is really getting on my fucking nerves, I'm sick to death of it, why don't you all grow up?" and I thought you are a member of staff, you shouldn't be speaking to us like that. (...) they just think it's very immature (...) they are telling you, **you are acting like children, it's very childish**, grow up, it's very petty. It's not really petty though when someone is going round making your life hell.

(Tilly, E&W)

I would say yes, it is very difficult because... like it says 'knock on the door and wait'. Then, the door will be open. If the door is open, do you still knock? Even if you knock... sometimes you knock and they are looking at you like, 'Is she dumb? The door is open. Come on.' So, you just knock and wait. When the door is open, what do I do? They do not mind if you open it sometimes and you just walk in and the officer says to you, 'Read that. What does that say?' 'Yeah,' you say, 'It says "knock and wait", but the door was open, so I just came in.' So, **they just treat you like a child**.

(Mollie, E&W)

Order and control opposing sense of self

He [staff member] worked at Oslo prison. And (chuckles) then suddenly **we weren't allowed chewing gum** anymore. Nothing had happened here. But suddenly, that wasn't allowed anymore. It was because there was someone who has shoved gum in the keyhole of a door in Oslo prison. **So in order to (high pitched annoying voice) "make sure it doesn't happen here," we weren't allowed.** But it's not written anywhere. That's one of those things. And then there is lemon. I don't know if that necessarily came from him, but **before we could have as many lemons as we wanted.** And then suddenly we were told that we couldn't have lemons anymore. And we were like, "What??" It's a totally normal fruit. Then we were told that heroin users use it to clean their equipment. As long as I've been here, I've never heard of someone using needles in here. **It's those types of things that "could happen".**

(Faye, NO)

How conscious are you of being watched?

Very. (...) you have to pay attention to what you say, among other things. And how you behave.

(Vega, NO)

I'm **constantly biting my tongue** because the things that I could potentially say would get me nicked, so you have to just be mindful of what you're saying all the time really.

(Layla, E&W)



Yeah, I think they abuse their authority and **they don't realise the psychological damage they have on someone**, even when they're just playing. Because they then switch and use it against you, if you're having banter with an officer and they suddenly switch, and then use that against you by giving you a negative IEP [punishment] or something. They don't understand the trauma that actually has on people.

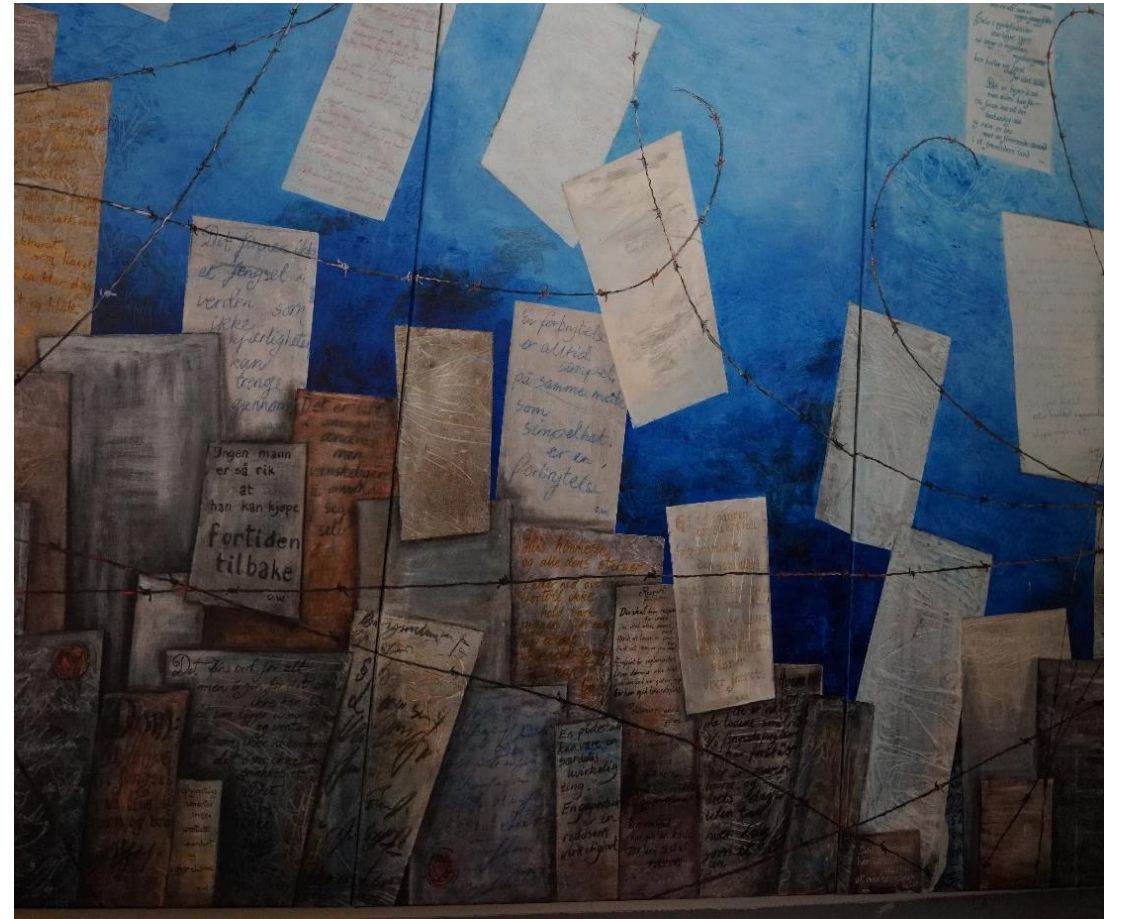
(Lottie, E&W)

Security and regulation of social life

What makes you stressed out?

Just this prison. And the way hearsay can be substantiated as real evidence. They believe the prison gossip. They're like, 'we heard this so we're going to act on this.' Hearsay is going to be in my security report now.

(Violet, E&W)



Responses to the system

‘You lose a lot of that (...) strength to protest against things, you become a bit more indifferent to everything [...] **You can protest [but] it still happens**’.

(Bente NO)

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

(Jasmine, E&W)

- 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 percieved as personal, unpredictable and unlimited
- Women challenged authority relationtally, rather than collectively:
 - ‘How can **you** do this to me?’
 - ‘**What kind of person** are you that does this?’

You have to walk on eggshells. When I say it out loud it almost sounds like I'm schizophrenic. Because I'm one person on the outside and a different person in here. But it's because you have to **tone down yourself for the people in here and the system.**

(Vega, NO)

No, (...) I know **it doesn't help anything if you complain either to the criminal justice system** or to the leaders here.

That is very sad, that it is that way.

They erase your personhood, in a way. My personhood is gone. It's not here.

What is that about, do you think?

Power. It's about them having power, and **you having to give up your power** whether it's right or wrong. We have to give it up because we are in prison.

(Harriet, NO)

She has **lost all faith in the CJS**, and says many mistakes have been made in her case. She says that people do not think that mistakes are made in the Norwegian system and they are blind to the faults.

(field notes, Zaynab, NO)

3. Horizontal relationships, tightness and adaption to power



How does lateral regulation shape power dynamics?

It sounds like you feel some people make mountains out of mole hills?

Yes, and the problem just sits there simmering. I have tried to say that to the guards, “you just let problems simmer.” Nothing ever happens.

(Janica, NO)

‘People are quite territorial and trying to control your every move’

(field notes, Tilly, E&W)

‘Tight social control of gossip’

(field notes, Heidi, E&W)

You said you have a mask here. What type of mask do you feel that you have to wear?

That attitude of “no, everything is fine, everything is good.” And seeming very apathetic. You can talk to me, but I’m not listening to what you’re saying. So you learn to [unclear] people. It’s real bitchiness.

(Faye, NO)

Horizontal discipline

Oh my god, it's like if one gossip starts at the wing, second wing, it comes on this wing maybe 30 minutes later, (...) it's like we're girls, we're always going to gossip either way, you can't stop it.

(Nessa, BV)

This place is very weird. **There is gossip everywhere.** Where the jail is so small, all you can do is chat shit. Everyone gossips about each other. There's nothing to do here. You have all this time and there's nothing to do.

(Violet, SE)

What type of, what type of social status do you have when you are in prison for murder?

I have heard it myself, that people way “Oh, she’s dangerous, stay away.” So you hear those things. “You have to watch out around her.” And even, I haven’t used any knives. I worked with, I had one of those little knives, and **she walked by and just “ahh.”**

In a way that made you think that she was genuinely scared? Or that...

No, I think it was just to annoy, to show me **“I know what you are in prison for.”**
(Berit, NO)

Then there’s **the social thing in the dining room where it’s whose table do I sit at?** And you don’t want to be seen to be sitting on your own. Whereas, for me, I really couldn’t give a damn. There’s a point in time when I’ll go and sit by myself intentionally and people say, “Why don’t you sit with us? Are you too nice with us?” I’ll say, “No,” because I didn’t want to be involved with the ‘she’s sitting at their table and not our table’ and all that crap. So there’s that as well, that’s quite uncomfortable. That’s kind of unsafe as well.

(Thea, SE)

They [prisoners] will go and make stuff up about you and my whole intel report, **my whole security intel is other prisoners.**

(Layla, E&W)

Yes. We know what's going on. We know who's shagging who in the toilets on a night shift. We know who stole whose husband. We know the mix-up. We know the truth. So when they're coming to us saying so-and-so, we know why you're saying what you're saying, because you got caught shagging this one's husband, so you feel some type of way, and we're all in the same boat. It just doesn't make sense. **This place is like The Hills Have Eyes.**

(Violet, E&W)



Bullying with intimate knowledge

I still feel pain when I hear people say that I am a murderer. And that I get chills, for example, I **get chills when they have called me “shovel lady.” Those things hurt.** I actually brought it up on a Friday, at morning meeting, that this is not okay. That people are sitting next to me and looking at me and saying “I should be a murderer because they get treated better.” And I hear that when they talk about me they just say “hammer lady.” So, those things hurt because it reminds me of what I have done. And I sometimes think “How long is that going to follow me. Is this thing that I’ve done going to follow me for the rest of my life?” Yeah.

(Berit, NO)

I also got **one report on me because I threatened one girl to beat her.** But that was like...when so many month of her bullying me and I was like trying to be the bigger person there, even though she was like 30 years older than me, and then it was like...boiled from me, you know, it was like now I had enough. If you don’t shut up I will beat you up!

(Nessa, NO)

Female body and clique formation

If you have very short t-shirts or (...) very short shorts, those sorts of things. Then you can get the message from some people, like, “are you sure you’re not going to wear something a bit longer?” for example. Makeup and nail polish, there are a lot of chatter about that. **Not, in a way corrections, but like, “oh today you looked really great with that makeup** blah blah blah.” That is not my world at all, so it’s like, *groan*.

(Vega, NO)

Unfair treatment. Like that **fat people aren’t welcome in the exercise room**. Right? I think I’m pretty fair myself. So I don’t like those things. Because the 20-year-olds care about their bodies, that there is nothing a fat 30-year-old can do. (...) Some people who bother (name) (...) Then I get really annoyed. And you aren’t allowed to speak up to other inmates here.

(Trude, NO)

And what are those cliques about? Is it based on what type of crime, age, Norwegian versus foreign.

It’s more age, I think. **Very body-focused**, this and that. Yeah.

Body-focused in relation to exercise or food or weight?

All parts.

All parts. So you have a...

Gang who only eats this and that, exercises this and that, shouldn’t be any calories or anything.

(Trude, NO)

Social responses

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.
(Faith, E&W)



'It is not solitude that plagues the prisoners, but life en masse' (Sykes 1958:4)

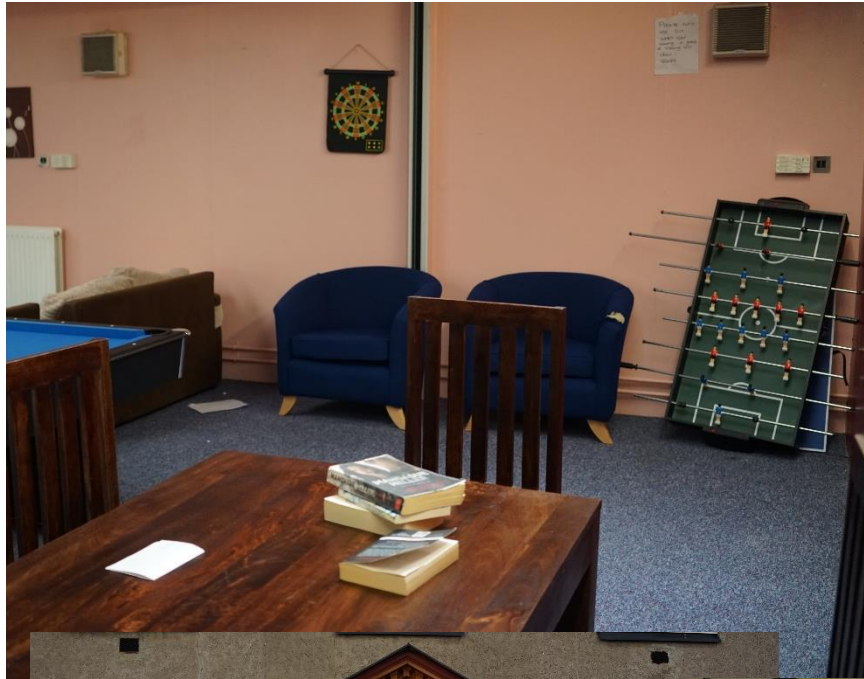
Control through intimacy

I think most of the girls in here just can't do jail without a bird on their arm, I think, you know, it doesn't matter like...it's mostly company and I think some people use people for canteens, you know, it's the majority I think really, some people don't even love them, they're just with them because they can't do jail without a bird on their arm, you know, yeah it is mad like coming to jail and watching all this with girls and that, it's...I don't get it personally, but...ha! They seem to enjoy it so let them crack on ain't it.

(Ivy, E&W)

I have a wall in front of me, I don't let people in and get close to me, because there is so much change here. That's why you create a wall in front of you so you don't get too involved.

(Harriet, NO)



4. Challenging gender dimensions

Is there an overarching gendered dimension at play that influences women's imprisonment in both countries?



It's more of that typical, not metaphorical, women are their own worst enemy - "**kvinner er kvinner verst**". That comes from, not so much from the staff, but more from the inmates (...) they can get stuck on the same thing for over a year, if you're unlucky. In a way it's never done. It goes in a circle.

(Vega, NO)

And do you think that prison kind of changes people's views of their own femininity or how they feel about themselves as women?

Yes.

In what ways do you think that's the case?

I just feel like gradually it's grinding me down and down.

So is that your personality?

Yes, just feel like you can't be yourself.

(Heidi, E&W)

Despite of the prison, not because of it/them. She feels like the working space for women is infantilising – staff tell prisoners ‘be careful not to spill’ (...) ‘it feels like being in Kindergarten.’
(field notes, Dahlia, NO)

The most difficult thing differs depending on what frame of mind I’m in. **But I suppose loneliness, not belonging.** (...) And I don’t belong in society either because that’s why I’m here, because I don’t belong in society.

(Lottie, E&W)

And like even when I walked to you, like looking outside them gates is just really scary for me, like and I think that’s a big thing that’s worrying me as well because **I know like out there it’s going to be so hard, and I haven’t really got any support out there,** so it is going to be difficult.

(Ivy, E&W)

5. 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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Differences

Norway	England & Wales
Tight, conscious, relational	Frail, distant, relationally charged
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Staff 'parenting' women- More trust from staff towards female prisoners- More social interventions (porous prison boundary)- More relational normalisation- Less charged overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Relationships further deteriorated with overly familial language- Access to family made more difficult- Less safety- More rigorous risk management- Race matters- More inconsistent