

‘I go out worse every time’

Connections and corruption in a female prison

Alana Piper

‘When they are all thrown together it is impossible to improve them’, declared turnkey Sarah Ann Nixon of the female prisoners at the Toowoomba Gaol during the 1887 inquiry into Queensland prisons. Nixon was articulating a paradox that authorities struggled with throughout the Victorian era. During the late nineteenth century, a variety of institutions were established to contain female disorderliness and effect the reform of criminal and immoral women. Yet in facilitating the development of relationships between women from the social margins, incarcerative settings threatened to act as breeding grounds, rather than repositories, of unruly women. An inquiry into Queensland prisons in 1887 revealed rebellious and subversive inmate subcultures in which women banded together to sing, dance, laugh, talk and tell each other stories; arrange the smuggling of supplies; defy authorities; and engage in emotional and sexual relationships with each other. These activities represented traditions and encompassed relationships imported from an external underclass community.

This article has been peer-reviewed.

In 1887 a Board of Inquiry established to investigate Queensland’s prisons concluded that, until women could be confined separately and prevented from communicating with each other, gaol would remain ‘little better than a manufactory of abandoned and criminal women’.¹ Responding enthusiastically to cues from interviewers, prisoners themselves had confirmed the worst fears of administrators haunted by

¹ ‘Report with Minutes of Evidence taken before the Board of Inquiry appointed to inquire into the general management of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups of the Colony of Queensland’, *Queensland Votes & Proceedings (QV&P)*, vol 1, Brisbane: Government Printer 1887, 1.

the spectre of the evil procuress, relating incidents that left the Board in no doubt that influence was 'brought to bear on less hardened females to abandon themselves to a career of immorality and crime'.² Inmate Sarah Mattie, who declared that she left gaol worse every time, affirmed that the 'old hands' used every available opportunity to tell young girls to 'go on the town'.³ Mattie claimed that on her own initial visit to gaol for drunkenness after her husband deserted her, she had been persuaded that it would be better to enter a brothel than return to prison because she was unable to support herself.

While contemporaries ascribed these efforts at corruption to malevolence and greed, it is possible that inmates honestly believed in the value of such advice, given the limited options available to impoverished women, and that prostitution was an alternative they themselves chose to pursue. Rather than being intentionally corruptive, conversations between female prisoners may simply have been coloured by the women's own experiences. Turnkey Sarah Ann Nixon suggested that dialogues between inmates acted insidiously, lessening their shame at being incarcerated. She told how a young girl brought in over some minor brawl 'will think she has been guilty of an awful crime and will be quite troubled about it', until having listened 'to others ten times worse than herself ... [she] finds she has done nothing at all wrong in their opinion'.⁴ While officials could only feel alarm at the prospect of women exchanging unsavoury histories, inmates seem to have found relief in unburdening themselves to each other. Nixon reported that it was impossible to prevent the women telling 'one another their lives'.⁵ This dissonance between how authorities understood relationships among women of the so-called 'criminal classes', and how women themselves may have experienced these connections, is apparent throughout the evidence presented to the Board, and forms the focus of this article.

Historians have produced a number of insightful post-Foucauldian analyses on how fears about moral contamination prompted ever more intense systems of classification and separation both within and between nineteenth century institutions.⁶ There has been less focus on the

² Ibid, I, 244, 246.

³ Ibid, 245–246.

⁴ Ibid, 249–250.

⁵ Ibid, 249.

⁶ Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans), 2nd ed, New York: Vintage Books 1995; Lucia Zedner *Women, Crime, and Custody in Victorian England* New York: Clarendon Press 1991; Raymond Evans 'The hidden colonists: deviance and social control in colonial Queensland', in Jill Roe (ed) *Social Policy in Australia: Some*

institutional subcultures to which these efforts were a response, and little research on relationships between female confinees in Australia outside of the convict period. This lacuna in academic scholarship is perhaps due to the scarcity of sources that deal with the nature of women's daily lives while incarcerated and the virtual absence of material from female inmates themselves. The inquiry into Queensland's prisons offers a rare exception, as on 29 June 1887 it collected testimony from the 33 women then interned at the Toowoomba Gaol, the facility used for the reception of female prisoners throughout southern Queensland. The evidence given by these women offers uniquely detailed insights into inmate subcultures that have only been sparingly examined in existing works on prisons and female crime.⁷ To authorities, the activities disclosed during the inquiry were threatening symbols of general female disorderliness; to the prisoners themselves they represented meaningful patterns of behaviour imported from external subcultures and, as such, embodied proclamations of belonging. This becomes apparent when such relationships are situated not in the vacuum of the institutional context, but within the framework of women's wider communities, with an analysis of the interviewees' former and subsequent lives demonstrating the high degree of connectedness between female offenders inside and outside of prison.

Although the possibility of moral corruption was a cause for concern among both male and female prisoners, it was considered especially likely within women's facilities. Women were regarded as both more impressionable,⁸ and, once contaminated, even more inclined to drag down others of their sex to 'their own wretched and wicked level'.⁹ The figure of the immoral and grasping procuress, sensationally exposed to world-wide condemnation by the publication in London of the 'Maiden Tribute' exposé on juvenile prostitution in 1885, loomed large in the public imagination.¹⁰ Disciplinary institutions offered a potential means to isolate and wean females away from the corruptive

Perspectives, 1901–1975, Sydney: Cassell Australia 1976, 74–100; Carole McCartney, Robyn Lincoln and Paul Wilson *Justice in the Deep North: A Historical Perspective on Crime and Punishment in Queensland*, Gold Coast: Bond University Press 2003.

⁷ Mark Finnane *Punishment in Australian Society*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press 1997, 58–59; Raymond Evans, "'Soiled doves': prostitution in colonial Queensland', in Kay Daniels (ed) *So Much Hard Work: Women and Prostitution in Australian History*, Sydney: Fontana Books 1984, 128–129.

⁸ Lucia Zedner 'Women, crime, and penal responses: a historical account', *Crime and Justice* 14, 1991, 323.

⁹ G P Merrick *Work Among the Fallen: As Seen in a Prison Cell*, London: Ward, Lock and Co 1890, 59.

¹⁰ Lynette Finch *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin 1993, 77–78.

companions encountered in dangerous urban spaces, but only if a system of classification could be enforced. While this was the ideal of prison management, in Queensland as elsewhere its implementation had been constrained by budgetary considerations and the smallness of the female prison population.¹¹ The Toowoomba Gaol still operated on the associated system, with women sleeping in communal dormitories, the only classification being the separation of first offenders into one ward and all other inmates into another.¹² Greater recidivism among women meant the environment at Toowoomba was substantially different from that found in male prisons, and possibly more corruptive. In 1887, while 88 per cent of Queensland's male prisoners had been convicted only once and just three per cent had been convicted three or more times, only 30 per cent of women were first offenders and 23 per cent had three or more convictions against them.¹³ This figure was even higher in other years, with women who had committed at least three offences sometimes making up to 70 per cent of the female prison population.¹⁴

Although scholars now dispute the existence of 'criminal classes' as described by nineteenth century commentators,¹⁵ the majority of the women imprisoned at Toowoomba during the 1887 inquiry belonged to a definite social underclass, with 22 of the 33 inmates interviewed identified as prostitutes or vagrants.¹⁶ The most common offence women had been committed for was vagrancy, followed by other behavioural offences, including riotous conduct, obscene language, creating a disturbance, indecent exposure, drunkenness and destruction of property.¹⁷ Of more serious crimes, six had been convicted of some form of stealing, and one of murder. However, this profile does not give an accurate picture of the

¹¹ Finnane *Punishment in Australian Society*, 39–40.

¹² 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 258.

¹³ 'Sheriff's Report upon the Gaols of the Colony for the year 1887', *QV&P*, vol 1, Brisbane: Government printer 1888, 911.

¹⁴ 'Sheriff's Report upon the Gaols of the Colony for the year 1892', *QV&P*, vol 1, Brisbane: Government printer 1893, 440.

¹⁵ Douglas Hay 'Crime and justice in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England', *Crime and Justice* 2, 1980, 45–84; John Braithwaite 'The criminal class and the making and breaking of Australia', *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 24 (2), 1991, 99–104; Hamish Maxwell-Stewart 'The search for the convict voice', *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 6 (1), 1998, 75–89; A L Beier 'Identity, language, and resistance in the making of the Victorian 'criminal class': Mayhew's convict revisited', *Journal of British Studies* 44, July 2005, 499–515.

¹⁶ Index to Female Prisoners Admitted 1887–1891, Item ID 104857, Series 16289, Queensland State Archives (QSA), Brisbane; Index to Prisoners Admitted, 1895–1906, Item ID 104855, Series 16288, QSA; Register of Prisoner Descriptions, Valley Gaol, January 1902 – October 1903, Item ID 2948, Description book, Series 10837, QSA.

¹⁷ *Queensland Police Gazette*.

full extent of the women's criminal activities. While offences against good order comprised the bulk of their conviction histories, over the course of their lifetimes 14 of the women appeared before the courts charged with assault or related offences, and 17 were indicted for larceny, in some cases for shoplifting, but in most instances for stealing from men while soliciting for prostitution.

Most of the women in the Toowoomba Gaol during the inquiry thus ostensibly emerged from the same social milieu, and were probably likely to have known each other, with 27 of the 33 sentenced from the capital of Brisbane.¹⁸ Documented connections to at least one other inmate prior to 1887 exist for 18 interviewees. The common practice of prostitutes soliciting for custom in groups meant that over the years several had been picked up for disorderly conduct together;¹⁹ likewise, prisoners Sarah Johnston and Kate Mullins had a relationship that went back to 1870, when they were both working in the same Brisbane brothel.²⁰ Recreational habits associated with the women's lifestyle were also indulged in collectively, with other interviewees arrested together for drunkenness or in raids on opium dens.²¹ As most of the women were immigrants, all but one having been born outside Queensland, the absence of extended family ties, combined with the often transitory nature of their associations with men, presumably increased the importance placed upon female relationships within this environment.

Connections between women definitely took on a heightened significance in prison, with the 1887 inquiry unearthing a variety of pursuits that hint at a sense of community within and beyond the prison walls. Left largely unsupervised in their communal cell at night, women known for their riotous behaviour outside continued to behave uproariously, with guards and other inmates complaining of the cacophony of noise emitted from the repeat offenders' dormitory after lockdown.²² Women in this rambunctious cell confirmed that they would often while away their evenings with music, describing merry scenes of

¹⁸ For discussion of the public outcry in Toowoomba over this influx of disorderly women from the metropolis, see Kerry Wimbush 'Intersections in colonial and penal politics: the case of Queensland in the 1870s', *History Australia* 9 (2), 2012, 135–156.

¹⁹ *Brisbane Courier*, 5 January 1881, 3; *Brisbane Courier*, 30 August 1882, 2; *Brisbane Courier*, 22 October 1885, 2; *Brisbane Courier*, 17 June 1886, 6; *Brisbane Courier*, 16 December 1886, 6.

²⁰ *Brisbane Courier*, 8 August 1870, 2.

²¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 27 April 1881, 3; *Brisbane Courier*, 19 December 1882, 5; *Brisbane Courier*, 10 April 1883, 5; *Brisbane Courier*, 27 August 1883, 5; Sarah Mattie and Margaret Burke, 24 July 1891, Item ID 970993, Deposition and Minute Books Police Court, Series 6300, QSA.

²² 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 244, 246.

inmates singing and waltzing together.²³ The failure of the prison to act as an effective deterrent in the face of such conviviality was seemingly revealed by the statement of old offender Margaret Burke, who declared 'I have nothing to complain of. The women in the dormitory sing and enjoy themselves every night.'²⁴ The Board, disturbed by signs of a sociability that undermined the isolating and depressing intent of prison, urged not only separation but a more punitive and austere regime to discourage such jollification.²⁵

Women already sought to relieve the monotonous diet and tedium of their confinement by the sharing of smuggled luxuries. As well as demonstrating the tangible benefits of participation in the group culture, trafficking hints at emotional intimacy between inmates, as many of the goods smuggled into the prison were consumed communally. Surreptitious smoking was reportedly undertaken by groups huddled behind the laundry, who passed around a pipe that was kept hidden on the grounds and was stuffed with tobacco smuggled by newcomers, or failing that, with hoarded tea-leaves.²⁶ The Board, disgusted by this unfeminine behaviour, were even more horrified by rumours that some inmates had been seen intoxicated together, having allegedly managed to acquire liquor from the gaoler's household.²⁷ Alcohol use by women was often blamed during this period on the inducement of female friends;²⁸ in 1897 Mary Coleman was attacked by the de facto spouse of fellow interviewee Mary Burns, who explained in court that he objected to the pair's friendship because Coleman encouraged Burns to drink.²⁹ Smuggling of goods associated with female vice was thus disturbing not only as a symbol of collective disobedience, but as a symptom of moral contamination. Among women themselves, however, such activity may have been understood as a continuance of the prostitutes' custom of 'treating' each other or pooling resources, part of a system of reciprocity that provided a safeguard against the precarious nature of their existence.³⁰

Another item of potentially corruptive contraband women consumed together, one somewhat surprising given the traditional association

²³ Ibid, 247.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, xiii.

²⁶ Ibid, 243–244, 246, 254.

²⁷ Ibid, 244–245.

²⁸ Alana Piper, "A growing vice": the *Truth* about Brisbane girls and drunkenness in the early twentieth century', *Journal of Australian Studies* 34 (4), 2010, 489.

²⁹ *Brisbane Courier*, 24 March 1897, 3.

³⁰ Piper "A growing vice", 492.

between crime and lack of education, was reading material. While devotional literature was distributed to women by religious visitors, the inquiry revealed more titillating works had also made their way into the gaol.³¹ These unauthorised texts included newspapers abstracted from the gaoler's house; a copy of the British periodical *Every Week*, which comprised the sort of penny dreadful reading some religionists blamed for the perversion of modern women's morals; and an English translation of Alexandre Dumas' *Camille*, the story of a Parisian courtesan some inmates perhaps related to.³² According to prisoners Louisa Berlin and Polly Arnold, the novel, which had allegedly been smuggled in by an inmate and left behind for the other women's enjoyment, was read out loud in turns, enabling them to get through a chapter or two a night.³³ Berlin quickly assured inquisitive authorities that the stories contained 'nothing bad'. While the women's free acknowledgement of the existence of the books – later confiscated – implies they treated reading as an innocent source of shared amusement, officials viewed this mutual indulgence in suggestive material as another instance of women's tendency to debase each other, particularly in regards to sexual morality.

Frank attitudes to sexuality were a feature of disorderly female sub-cultures both inside and outside the prison, offering institutionalised women another way to bond or affirm their status within the group. Attempting communication with men was a popular pastime at Toowoomba, inmates smuggling their own literary efforts to prisoners in the male section by the simple expedient of throwing letters over the dividing wall, the men sometimes attaching gifts of tobacco to their notes in reply.³⁴ Women seem to have encouraged each other in these flirtations. When a love letter was discovered in the grounds its authorship was soon attributed to Louisa Berlin, who had apparently discussed its composition with other inmates.³⁵ Combined church services had previously been stopped in Queensland gaols because it was found that, egged on by their companions, the women would spend their time 'winking at the men and that sort of thing'.³⁶ As pert and improper as authorities found such behaviour, however, it could at least be ascribed to what were considered normative sexual feelings.

³¹ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 243–244, 253.

³² Ibid, 244, 245–246.

³³ Ibid, 244, 247.

³⁴ Ibid, li–lii, 244–245, 251, 257.

³⁵ Ibid, 244.

³⁶ Ibid, 187.

The aspect of inmate subculture authorities found most disturbing was the intimation that homosexual practices took place among women during their night-time carousing. Several inmates alluded to 'bad' and 'disgraceful practices' between women in the cells at night, or asserted they had overheard conversations between other women about sleeping together.³⁷ Kate Mullins told the Board that she had seen 'young girls badly used by the old hands in the dormitory'.³⁸ In line with overseas research and observations about sexual relationships among convict women, this suggests that prison sexuality may have been built around differences in status or power.³⁹ Erotic associations between inmates may also have represented a continuance of a transgressive sexuality practised by women outside the prison walls. When the brothel where Kate Mullins and Sarah Johnston worked was raided in 1873, Mullins revealed that it was not unusual for two or more women to engage in intercourse with a client at the same time, or to share a bed within the brothel.⁴⁰ Shared housing and sleeping arrangements provided a potential cover for homosexual attachments among underclass women; contemporary criminologists certainly believed that lesbianism was common among prostitutes, encouraged by the brutality they often suffered at the hands of men.⁴¹

Although it is impossible to gauge the precise nature of intimate relationships within the penal context, the rumoured existence of lesbian interactions at the Toowoomba Gaol reinforces the close nature of attachments among institutionalised females. This may have contrasted sharply for some women to their volatile relationships with men. The conditions of their lifestyle meant that several interviewees were victims of male violence: Annie Lawlor was assaulted by a known 'bludger' (pimp) who tried to extort money from her;⁴² Kate Kelly was attacked by a man with a glass bottle while sleeping on the ground at North Quay;⁴³

³⁷ Ibid, 244, 244–245.

³⁸ Ibid, 246.

³⁹ Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 28–29; Joy Damousi *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997, 48–49.

⁴⁰ Regina v. Jane Dunlop, September 1873, Item ID 95670, Information, Depositions and Associated Papers in Criminal Cases Heard in Sittings in Brisbane, Series 15536, QSA.

⁴¹ Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute and the Normal Woman*, Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson (trans), Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2004, 178; Richard von Krafft-Ebing *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Franklin S Klaf (trans), New York: Arcade Publishing 1965, 406.

⁴² *Brisbane Courier*, 1 October 1884, 6.

⁴³ *Brisbane Courier*, 23 December 1895, 3.

Sarah Johnston was struck by the man she was living with after she remonstrated with him for stealing from her.⁴⁴ Others had histories of violence *against* men: Lizzie Power had previously been incarcerated for stabbing her husband after he tracked her down to the brothel where she had sought refuge after leaving him.⁴⁵ Shared adverse experiences with men may have contributed to strong emotional connections among women at Toowoomba.

These connections, and the various diversions they encouraged, undoubtedly offered a respite from the harsh nature of nineteenth century incarceration.⁴⁶ However, not all inmates were included in this companionable subculture. Testimony during the inquiry intimates that women who did not belong to, or were not confirmed participants in, the external milieu occupied a subordinate position within the prison hierarchy. Such outsiders were excluded from the benefits the subculture afforded. They risked missing out on the distribution of goods trafficked into the prison and shared amongst the 'old hands', and were less likely to be 'well-attended' if they fell ill while in prison.⁴⁷ Unconnected women also risked more direct forms of victimisation. Given that many repeat offenders brought with them a history of violence and verbal altercations, the bulk of which were committed against other women, it is unsurprising that concerned officials noted that quarrelling was another common pastime of female inmates allowed to mingle freely.⁴⁸

Violence was apparently used to imbue younger initiates with a respect for the existing order. Minnie Galvin, at 23 a relatively youthful inmate given that the average age of interviewees was 34, stated that whenever the 'old hands' got 'fed up' with life they would amuse themselves by fighting with 'new chums'.⁴⁹ Galvin reported that an old hand spat in the face of 'quiet girl' Sarah Mattie, but was able to escape punishment because loyalty among repeat offenders meant they invariably contrived to shield each other from blame.⁵⁰ The 25-year-old Mattie explained that soon after she came into the gaol an old hand had accused her of walking out with her 'fancy man' in Brisbane and, despite Mattie's denials,

⁴⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 16 July 1870, 5.

⁴⁵ *Regina v. Lizzie Power*, May 1882, Item ID 96125, Information, Depositions and Associated Papers in Criminal Cases Heard in Sittings in Brisbane, Series 15536, QSA.

⁴⁶ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', xiv.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 244–245.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, lxvii.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 244–245.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

became violent, alleging that Mattie had 'taken her man'.⁵¹ While officials doubtless considered such affrays the antithesis of appropriate female behaviour, inmate onlookers treated the affair as a matter of female honour, one prisoner telling Mattie after she had been knocked to the floor that 'If you are a woman you will get up.' Galvin similarly claimed to have been a victim of the old hands' notions of sexual integrity on a previous prison stay, when they had intimated the baby she was carrying had been 'made' in the prison, possibly suspecting that she had been granting sexual favours to the male guards.⁵² The kicks they delivered to her stomach provoked a miscarriage. The sexual taboos of the inmate subculture, including loyalty to other women and not sleeping with the 'enemy', thus seem to have offered an excuse for attacks by old hands against women who were relatively recent additions to their milieu and who, according to research by Judith Allen, were likely to have been resented as younger, more economically empowered competitors.⁵³

Naturally, newcomers often went on to become old hands: Galvin and Mattie, who despite their protestations of victimisation by more hardened offenders each had several previous convictions, would both make repeat appearances as guests of Her Majesty's Government in the following years.⁵⁴ Various markers that differentiated repeat offenders from outsiders were rooted in participation in the inmate subculture, and could be acquired over time. Some of these included external manifestations, such as tattooing. Interviewee Mary Ann Sullivan, 29 years old and clean-skinned in 1887, gradually acquired an array of decorations, sporting the initials 'A.T.', the year 1877, the word 'Brisbane', a male figure, a cross and a chain by 1903.⁵⁵ More importantly, aspects of women's behaviour denoted their membership of the 'vicious classes'. The Board was shocked by the speech of many female inmates, reporting that they indulged in the 'foulest possible'

⁵¹ Ibid, 245–246.

⁵² Ibid, 244–245.

⁵³ Judith A Allen *Sex and Secrets: Crimes Involving Australian Women Since 1880*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press 1990, 22–23; Raelene Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007, 153.

⁵⁴ Minnie Galvin, 9 February 1888, Item ID 104857, Index to Female Prisoners Admitted 1887–1891, Series 16289; 2 March 1888; 20 June 1888, QSA; 3 September 1888; 7 February 1889; 24 May 1889; 12 June 1889; 28 May 1889; 12 June 1889; 30 December 1889; 20 August 1889; 30 May 1890; 3 December 1890; Sarah Galvin, 18 February 1888, Item ID 104857, Index to female prisoners admitted 1887–1891, Series 16289; 14 April 1888, 6 June 1888, 18 January 1889, 16 February 1889, 31 May 1889, 2 July 1889, 3 October 1889, 16 October 1889, 16 January 1890, 16 August 1890, 22 January 1891, QSA.

⁵⁵ Register of Prisoner Descriptions Valley Gaol, January 1902 – October 1903, Item ID 2948, Description book, Series 10837, QSA.

language.⁵⁶ Over the course of their lifetimes 22 of the 33 inmates amassed convictions for obscene language, which was often used by women to convey contempt for the culture of officialdom and provoke humour among their compeers. The magistrate rebuked court attendees for laughing when interviewee Annie Bolton swore at him in 1891, stating that she must have been reduced to her present condition and educated in such language by ‘intercourse with men’.⁵⁷ The 1887 prison inquiry suggested it was the speech of women themselves that was likely to have a lowering effect on inmates, who may well have felt pressured to conform to the institutional subculture by embracing its vocabulary. Galvin and 24-year-old Annie Lawlor both agreed that the prison’s bad language had made them ‘worse’.⁵⁸ In the following years each accrued a number of convictions for obscene language, demonstrating the effect participation in institutional networks could have on ensnaring women into the judicial framework.⁵⁹

While women who had recently entered the subculture of petty crime could be drawn further into it by prison stays, other women came from – and remained in – situations completely outside its parameters. Women imprisoned for crimes of impulse, rather than membership of the criminal sorority, often gained reputations for good behaviour, with prison authorities informing the Board that some of the long-sentence women were among the best conducted in the gaol.⁶⁰ Unlike other prisoners who appeared eager to share details of their lives during the interviews, these women displayed their tractability, and possibly shame over their position, by keeping their responses brief. Among those who simply docilely reported that they had ‘nothing to complain of’ was Sarah Cooper, a servant gaoled for stealing from her employer, and Mary Newman, a working-class housewife who had been charged with infanticide but convicted of the lesser offence of concealment of birth.⁶¹ Such women were likely to remain passive in their dealings with other inmates, with some prisoners trying to hold aloof from their fellows by turning their face to the wall as soon as they entered the

⁵⁶ ‘Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups’, lxvii.

⁵⁷ *Brisbane Courier*, 11 March 1891, 3.

⁵⁸ ‘Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups’, 244–245.

⁵⁹ *Brisbane Courier*, 21 September 1889, 3; 31 October 1889, 3; 2 November 1889, 3; 4 March 1891, 3; 27 August 1891, 3; 30 September 1893, 3; 2 November 1893, 3; 1 May 1894, 3; 16 June 1894, 3; 18 February 1896, 3.

⁶⁰ ‘Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups’, 261.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 243.

ward for the night, or refusing to take notice of anything happening around them.⁶²

Women unused to the criminal milieu probably were genuinely horrified by the behaviour of other inmates. In 1889 an ex-prisoner taken on as a servant by a member of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union told her mistress that the conversation in the cells was 'dreadful' and 'the worst part of the punishment'.⁶³ Some of the women in the first-time offenders' ward similarly complained to the Board about 'indecent' or 'rowdy' behaviour they had witnessed.⁶⁴ Repeat offenders, however, sought to defend their disorderly subculture, engaging in confrontations with those who tried to restrain its tenets. Mary Ann Wynn, whose commitment for vagrancy from regional Queensland rendered her an outsider to the dominant faction of Brisbane prostitutes, told the 1887 inquiry that when she had tried to 'check' women who used 'filthy' language, they had responded by striking her.⁶⁵ Informing on women for bad behaviour was also likely to draw the wrath of the inner circle. Outsider Sarah Ann Kennedy, imprisoned from Mackay for cattle-stealing, explained in reply to queries about smuggling that 'you do not like to report them because they will get on to you'.⁶⁶ She further remarked that inmates were afraid to stop the women who engaged in 'bad practices' in the cells at night, knowing it would only end in trouble for themselves. By throwing the values of the core subculture into relief, the existence of an excluded minority probably served to strengthen the central grouping, and made it incumbent upon inmates to perform acts that reinforced their own belonging.

Inmate culture was also performed and defined against that of authorities, the challenging of whom constituted another token of group membership.⁶⁷ The verbosity of some interviewees may have been part of this defiance. Women were able to disconcert officials by their testimony; the disclosures of female homosexual behaviour were so alien to the understandings of some government figures that they refused to accept the evidence of it.⁶⁸ As Joy Damousi suggests, revel-making, smuggling,

⁶² Ibid, 246, 247.

⁶³ Visiting Justice re Mrs Dutton, 12 April 1889, Item ID 847307, 1889–3363, Inwards Correspondence of Colonial Secretary's Department, Series 5253, QSA.

⁶⁴ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 244, 246.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 247.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 244.

⁶⁷ Anna Clark 'Wild workhouse girls and the liberal imperial state in mid-nineteenth century Ireland', *Journal of Social History* 39 (2), Winter 2005, 392–393.

⁶⁸ Ian Lincoln, *The Punishment of Crime in Queensland 1860–1890*, Honours thesis, University of Queensland 1966, 182–183.

even fighting can all be understood as part of a collective defiance of authority and the restraining spirit of imprisonment.⁶⁹ More direct signs of insubordination, such as disobeying orders, the destruction of property, the use of abusive language to officials and physical attacks against them, also occurred on a wide scale at the Toowoomba Gaol, with the monthly punishment registers detailing regular acts of rebellion.⁷⁰ This unruliness represented a potential means to fortify one's position within the group.

Although these actions were mostly perpetrated individually, they were intended for public consumption, not just by the authorities but by fellow inmates. The shouting of abuse by women would have reverberated throughout the institution. The destruction of property was doubtless witnessed – and in the case of graffiti read – by other inmates.⁷¹ Using the destruction of property to signal contempt was a common practice among underclass women outside as well as inside the prison, with at least seven inmates appearing before the courts for such behaviour. The breaking of windows at pubs where they were refused service was especially common.⁷² Other anti-authority displays were also imported from the external subculture.⁷³ Several interviewees were arrested for flashing police officers or members of the public, sometimes with an accompanying invitation to kiss their behinds.⁷⁴ The Board discovered it was similarly a running joke among old hands to 'pull up their clothes and race around the yard'.⁷⁵ Using gestures that would

⁶⁹ Damousi *Depraved and Disorderly*, 60.

⁷⁰ Inwards Correspondence of Colonial Secretary's Department, Monthly Reports on Toowoomba Gaol and Punishment Registers, Series 5253, QSA.

⁷¹ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', lxii.

⁷² *Brisbane Courier*, 3 July 1888, 6; *Brisbane Courier*, 1 January 1890, 3; *Brisbane Courier*, 3 February 1894, 3.

⁷³ Angela R Gover, Deanna M Pérez and Wesley G Jennings 'Gender differences in factors contributing to institutional misconduct', *The Prison Journal* 88 (3), September 2008, 378–403. In terms of the ongoing debate in correctional sociology as to whether prison behaviour can be explained by 'deprivation theory' ('inmate codes' develop as a way of coping with the 'pains of imprisonment') versus 'importation theory' (codes of behaviour are brought into prison from pre-existing environments), this provides support for research that shows importation plays a particularly important role in female institutionalisation, as well as intimating a level of mutual exacerbation between institutional and imported behaviours.

⁷⁴ Mary Prudence, 4 January 1881, Item ID 970947, Deposition and Minute Books Police Court, Series 6300, QSA; Margaret Burke, 21 March 1889, Item ID 970983, Series 6300 Deposition and Minute Books Police Court, QSA; Minnie Galvin, 2 December 1890, Item ID 971000, Deposition and Minute Books Police Court, Series 6300, QSA; Minnie Galvin, 1 March 1893, Series 6300, Deposition and Minute Books Police Court, QSA.

⁷⁵ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 244–245.

have resonated with other women in specific ways, institutionalised women thus bonded over shocking the sensibilities of those who sought to reform them.

Refusal to reform was, in itself, an act of defiance. To prevent the return of women to the criminal milieu, the Toowoomba administration mirrored other institutional authorities who increasingly sought to replace the influence of corruptive associates with that of good women, allowing females from religious organisations to visit the prisoners in the hope they would exert a moral influence.⁷⁶ Testimony that inmates were especially fond of pulling up their clothes 'before women ... better than themselves' suggests these efforts were not successful.⁷⁷ Charitable visits were treated as merely another diversion by prisoners, who told the Board they used these occasions to have long talks with girls from the other ward.⁷⁸ This disinterest was explained as stemming from the detached attitude of the visitors, who Sarah Mattie contended 'never speak to us ... only read books of devotion to us'.⁷⁹ Turnkey Nixon was similarly unsuccessful in her admonitions, telling the Board that while she urged inmates to find respectable positions in rural service, most returned to Brisbane where they soon met girls they knew in the streets who drew them back to their former life.⁸⁰ In the following years church groups continued to opine that despite offers of refuge, many women preferred to 'mingle with their old associates, and drift in the paths of evil-living and crime'.⁸¹

A by-product of institutionalisation was that reformers had to worry not only about women rejoining old acquaintances, but about new ones encountered inside. Sarah Mattie related that having persuaded her of the benefits of prostitution in prison, two girls met her at the Brisbane railway station after her release to take her to an Albert Street brothel.⁸² A continued life of prostitution meant her acquaintance with other underclass women persisted; after 1887 Mattie appeared in court on various occasions alongside at least five other interviewees. Fourteen

⁷⁶ Lucia Zedner 'Wayward sisters: the prison for women', in Norval Morris and David J Rothman (eds) *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, New York: Oxford University Press 1998, 299–300; Sean O'Toole *The History of Australian Corrections*, Sydney: UNSW Press 2006, 115.

⁷⁷ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 244.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 245–246.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 245–246.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 249–250.

⁸¹ *Church Chronicle*, 1 February 1899, 87.

⁸² 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 245–246.

of the women were arrested with one or more fellow inmates across the subsequent decade. Limited resources following release may have encouraged discharged women to group together. Sarah Johnston's pitiful cry 'My things, my things, who will take care of my things?' during her arrest in 1873 indicates the physical losses imprisonment could generate among women who lived in rented premises.⁸³ Loss of support from respectable society and potential alienation from family and friends could also constrict women's ability to re-establish themselves. An arrest for vagrancy in 1890 suggests that former servant Sarah Cooper found it difficult to obtain work following her release.⁸⁴ Turnkey Nixon, in another instance of officialdom's characterisation of female relations as spiteful and malicious, also asserted that she had known girls to lose respectable jobs after 'old hands' had 'come to them half drunk and ... exposed them'.⁸⁵ The isolating nature of institutionalisation, as much as the companionships found there, could thus compel the return of women to criminal subcultures, by transforming them into social pariahs.

It seems many women had few options but to return to their shared, suspect environment. Annie Lawlor conveyed a sense of inescapable geographic destiny in her explanation that 'I have never had a chance of doing anything, but to return to my old life in Albert-street'.⁸⁶ Women who did not return to the brothels of Frogs Hollow or Fortitude Valley sometimes found homes in the same locations among men of other races,⁸⁷ associations that kept them in close proximity to other women similarly circumstanced. Interviewees Margaret McEvaney and Kate Kelly were arrested for vagrancy together in 1895 after they were found occupying a room with two Pacific Islander men;⁸⁸ Mary Burns and Annie Bolton were similarly charged in 1892, though both claimed to be living respectably with their Chinese paramours.⁸⁹ Less fortunate interviewees found camping out around the city may have welcomed

⁸³ *Brisbane Courier*, 20 October 1873, 3.

⁸⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 21 December 1889, 6.

⁸⁵ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 250.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 244.

⁸⁷ Rod Fisher, 'Old Frogs Hollow: devoid of interest, or a den of iniquity?' in Rod Fisher (ed) *Brisbane in 1888: The Historical Perspective*, Brisbane: Brisbane History Group, 1988, 40; Christopher Dawson, *Intemperance and the Train of Evils: A Life on the Wrong Side of the Tracks in Colonial Brisbane*, Brisbane: Inside History, 2008, 22-23.

⁸⁸ Kate Kelly and Margaret McEvaney, 25 February 1895, Item ID 971007, Deposition and Minute Books Police Court, Series 6300, QSA.

⁸⁹ *Brisbane Courier*, 24 March 1892, 3.



Figure 1. Brisbane women cast a sly glance at each other as they solicit together in the notorious Frogs Hollow precinct

Source: *Queensland Figaro*, 20 January 1883, 37.

re-arrest. When Margaret McEvaney and two other homeless women were found loitering in Wickham Terrace in 1889, the magistrate sentenced them to a three-month stretch as the 'best thing' he could do for them during the winter months.⁹⁰ Elizabeth Noy and another woman recently out of gaol voluntarily gave themselves up as vagrants in 1895, telling police at the watch-house that they had 'nowhere to go and nothing to eat'.⁹¹

Returns to prison naturally brought women into further association with the inmate subculture and other disorderly females. Of the 33 women interviewed in 1887, 27 returned to prison at least once; of these women, all were incarcerated at some stage alongside one or more of

⁹⁰ *Brisbane Courier*, 3 July 1889, 3.

⁹¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 21 October 1895, 3.

their fellow interviewees.⁹² The Queensland Sheriff was not overstating the case when he lamented that many dissolute women appeared to 'live almost entirely in the gaol'.⁹³ Kate Mullins, who told interviewers she had been 'backwards and forwards for fifteen years – thirty-three times',⁹⁴ eventually died in prison in October 1888.⁹⁵ In several instances women had less than 24 hours between release and re-arrest.⁹⁶ Targeting by officers looking for easy convictions may have contributed to these frequent confinements: Margaret Burke alleged she had been standing quietly when police arrested her for disorderly conduct in 1888;⁹⁷ Sarah Johnston complained in 1873 that the police 'would not leave her alone'.⁹⁸ Louisa Berlin attempted suicide at the Brisbane lockup in 1891 after she was arrested having only just left Toowoomba, and attributed the attempt to feelings of persecution.⁹⁹ Other women adopted a blasé attitude to the prospect of imprisonment, such shows of bravado likely a performance staged not just for authorities but for associates. During her obscene language hearing in 1891, interviewee Annie Bolton's pronouncement 'I don't care if you hang me' was met with laughter by others in court.¹⁰⁰ Matilda Johnson responded to the ruling against her in 1886 with the customary avowal she would be able to do the sentence 'on her head'.¹⁰¹ Margaret McEvaney challenged the judge to give her seven years in 1898.¹⁰² For such women, the familiarity and appeal of the inmate subculture perhaps served to nullify the threat of imprisonment.

Anxiety about this complacency and the corruptive nature of the prison environment increased as a result of the 1887 inquiry. When interviewee Mary Dillon appeared before the court again in September of that year, the magistrate expressed his reluctance to return her to Toowoomba, announcing that the 'awful' nature of the evidence amassed seemed to

⁹² Index to Female Prisoners Admitted 1887–1891, Item ID 104857, Series 16289, QSA; Index to Prisoners Admitted, 1895–1906, Item ID 104855, Series 16288, QSA.

⁹³ 'Sherriff's report on gaols for the year 1883', QV&P, vol 1, Brisbane: Government Printer, 1884, 535.

⁹⁴ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 246.

⁹⁵ In-letter 88-9400, 27 October 1888, Item ID 847294, Inwards Correspondence of Colonial Secretary's Department, Series 5253, QSA.

⁹⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 20 September 1886, 6; *Brisbane Courier*, 21 December 1888, 3.

⁹⁷ *Brisbane Courier*, 31 May 1888, 4.

⁹⁸ *Brisbane Courier*, 20 October 1873, 3.

⁹⁹ *Brisbane Courier*, 18 September 189, 21.

¹⁰⁰ *Brisbane Courier*, 11 March 1891, 3.

¹⁰¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 30 November 1886, 4.

¹⁰² Margaret McEvaney, 23 May 1898, Item ID 971021, Deposition and Minute Books Police Court, Series 6300, QSA.

indicate he was 'doing more harm than good in sending women there'.¹⁰³ During Louisa Berlin's hearing in 1890 the magistrate likewise stated that although he did not suppose 'gaol would have any effect in reforming her', he had no option but to return her to prison.¹⁰⁴ In fact, several alternative means of dealing with disorderly females were formulated during the 1880s and 1890s as reformers, in recognition of the limitations of internal classification, sought not only to classify offenders within the prison, but to separate them out to other institutions. The diversion of delinquent girls from prison into an industrial school established adjacent to the Toowoomba Gaol in 1881 was one of the few areas of penal administration that drew praise during the inquiry, some urging an extension of the use of this system.¹⁰⁵ The opening of a number of charitable establishments during this period likewise enabled the courts to keep older women from the prison system and further demoralisation, with several interviewees accepting placements in such refuges in preference to another prison sentence.¹⁰⁶ The appearances of some women on drunkenness charges were also used by magistrates to urge the establishment of an inebriates' institution. The magistrate at Mary Ann Sullivan's hearing in 1890 observed that the imprisonment of drunken women only confirmed them in their bad habits by association with similar females.¹⁰⁷ At one of Sarah Mattie's appearances the magistrate similarly described sending inebriates to gaol – where they simply dried out before being released for another spree – as a 'farce'.¹⁰⁸ As a result, the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum was eventually gazetted as an inebriates' institute in 1897.¹⁰⁹

Although the purpose behind the mass of institutions that sprang up during the late nineteenth century was to segregate and classify women into different facilities with a view to effecting their reformation, in reality it appears merely to have increased the number of establishments women moved between. In addition to their repeated prison terms, many of the inmates interviewed during the 1887 inquiry spent time in the Magdalen Asylum, Salvation Army home, Dunwich Benevolent Asylum

¹⁰³ *Brisbane Courier*, 22 September 1887, 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 23 April 1890, 2.

¹⁰⁵ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 123.

¹⁰⁶ Minnie Galvin, 1 March 1893, Item ID 971000, Deposition and Minute Books Police Court, Series 6300, QSA; *Brisbane Courier*, 24 March 1888, 3; *Brisbane Courier*, 29 May 1891, 3; *Brisbane Courier*, 9 October 1891, 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Brisbane Courier*, 2 July 1890, 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Brisbane Courier*, 3 July 1889, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Joseph B Goodall, *Whom Nobody Owns: The Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, an Institutional Biography 1866–1946*, PhD thesis, University of Queensland 1992, 84–85.

or Brisbane lock hospital, where prostitutes suffering venereal disease could be forcibly detained under the 1868 *Contagious Diseases Act*. Sarah Johnston, who had spent much of the previous 26 years passing in and out of prison, revealed a convoluted institutional history in a petition written from the Fortitude Valley lockup in 1892 asking for a compassionate discharge to the Magdalen Asylum.¹¹⁰ The petition related that she had previously spent several months in the Magdalen, and before that in the Salvation Army home, but had had to leave there for a term in the lock hospital. Johnston asserted she had meant to return to the Magdalen after her last three-month stretch in Toowoomba, but that an old friend tempted her to have a drink the day of her release, leading to her re-arrest.

This perpetual movement between institutions meant that far from segregating women from their criminal acquaintances, inmates were likely to meet again as they entered different facilities. Little more than a month after they were interviewed, Annie Keats and Polly Arnold, both up on charges yet again, were remanded to the Salvation Army home within a day of each other.¹¹¹ Elements of the inmate subculture identified during the prisons inquiry also manifested in other institutions: alcohol was smuggled into the lock and Dunwich;¹¹² uproarious behaviour and obscene language were reported at these establishments as well as the refuges and industrial school;¹¹³ girls at the school and women at the lock contrived to communicate with men,¹¹⁴ as well as effect frequent joint escapes from these less secure locations;¹¹⁵ and other troublesome behaviours led to several interviewees being returned to gaol from Dunwich or the lock.¹¹⁶ In response to this female intractability many

¹¹⁰ Superintendent re application by Sarah Johnston, 8 March 1892, Item ID 847421, 1892/3032, Inwards Correspondence of Colonial Secretary's Department, Series 5253, QSA.

¹¹¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 6 August 1887, 4.

¹¹² Report of Sergeant James Taylor, 8 August 1891, Item ID 86535, Police Correspondence and Reports, Series 14812, QSA; Goodall 'Whom nobody owns', 134–137.

¹¹³ Matters in re Lock Ward, 9 May 1885, Item ID 18140, Special batches, Series 8400, QSA; re Kate Scrivener, 30 October 1889, Item ID 847330, 1889–8636, Inwards Correspondence of Colonial Secretary's Department, Series 5253, QSA; 'Twenty Third Annual Report of the Brisbane Industrial Home for the year ending 30th June 1906', 7.

¹¹⁴ Salvation Army re Bridget Power, Item ID 847574, 1899–10741, Inwards Correspondence of Colonial Secretary's Department, Series 5253, QSA; Report of Sergeant James Taylor, 28 July 1891, Item ID 86535, Police Correspondence and Reports, Series 14812, QSA.

¹¹⁵ re Sergeant Stubbs report, 15 October 1897, Item ID 86535, Police Correspondence and Reports, Series 14812, QSA; 22 June 1885, Item ID 104864, Letterbook of the Superintendent, Toowoomba Reformatory and Industrial School 13 April 1881 – 6 December 1893, QSA; 30 December 1887; 14 February 1892; 27 December 1892.

¹¹⁶ 'Report ... of the gaols, penal establishments, and lockups', 244; re Elizabeth Dove, 18 October 1909, Item ID 2910, Letterbooks of the Superintendent, HM Prison, Brisbane,

non-penitentiary institutions sought to implement ever more stringent systems of classifications among inmates.

Following the tabling of the 1887 report there was also ongoing pressure for a dedicated, purpose-built female prison with separate cell accommodation. Lack of classification among women at Toowoomba continued to be deplored during the 1890s, especially as the economic depression saw greater numbers of young female offenders sent to prison.¹¹⁷ Although the termination of the associated system became official policy under the 1890 *Prisons Act*, financial considerations and government inertia meant Queensland's female prisoners were not relocated to a new facility at South Brisbane's Boggo Road Gaol until 1903.¹¹⁸ While administrators welcomed this step, it was reported that the women themselves – 'having been used for so many years to the associated system' – did not.¹¹⁹ The absence of a communal dormitory effectually ended the more raucous forms of 'jollification' uncovered during the 1887 inquiry; nevertheless, routine acts of insubordination perpetrated by individuals or small groups remained a feature of the new institution.¹²⁰ In 1909 the Inspector-General announced with dismay that most female inmates were obstinately determined to pursue their downward careers.¹²¹ However, the successive decade brought vindication of institutional reform; the decreasing female prison population was heralded as a long-term effect of better classification in 1914, although other factors, particularly the increased use of sentencing alternatives such as fines and changes to the liquor laws that discouraged female drinking, played a role in this decline.¹²² Dwindling numbers forced the closure of the Boggo Road women's section in 1921.¹²³

04/09/1909 – 06/07/1910, Series 10825, QSA; Annie Lawler, 19 January 1885, Item ID 970965, Deposition and Minute Books Police Court, Series 6300, QSA.

¹¹⁷ 'Sheriff's Report upon the Gaols of the Colony for the year 1889', *QV&P*, vol 1, Brisbane: Government Printer 1890, 938; 'Comptroller-General of Prisons' Report upon the Gaols of the Colony for the year 1895', *QV&P*, vol 1, Brisbane: Government Printer 1896, 796.

¹¹⁸ Lincoln, *The Punishment of Crime in Queensland 1860–1890*, 190.

¹¹⁹ 'Report of the Comptroller-General of Prisons for 1903', *QPP*, vol 2, Brisbane: Government Printer 1905, 28.

¹²⁰ 27 November 1903, Item ID 2918, Principal Gaoler's journals HM Gaol Brisbane 30 June 1883 to 5 January 1904, Series 10827, QSA.

¹²¹ 'Report of the Comptroller-General of Prisons for 1909', *QPP*, vol 2, Brisbane: Government Printer 1910, 2.

¹²² 'Report of the Comptroller-General of Prisons for the year 1914', *QPP*, vol 2, Brisbane: Government Printer 1916, 1.

¹²³ Christopher Dawson and Frank Wood *Last Prison Standing: A Short History of Boggo Road's No. 2 Division 1903–1989*, Fairfield: Boggo Road Gaol Historical Society 2005, 18.

As an area of female life largely outside masculine control, women's interpersonal relationships have historically been viewed with suspicion or contempt.¹²⁴ Denying the significance of such relations, or depicting them as sources of danger to be discouraged, has enabled men to discursively reassert their authority over this shadowy realm of female experience. The Victorian era in particular witnessed the proliferation of a number of discourses that promoted distrust of female relationships by proclaiming fallen women not only passive carriers of moral contamination, but active and malicious agents of this disease among other women. Such anxiety manifested itself in moral panics over procuring and white slavery, as well as in discussions of the corruption engendered within a variety of public, private and incarcerative spaces. Analysis of the evidence and lives of the women interviewed during the 1887 prisons inquiry suggests commentators were to some extent justified in their concerns about relationships among women undermining the reformatory value of incarceration. However, these connections, while enmeshing women within the matrix of petty offenders as authorities feared, also offered women a sense of community. The strong inmate subculture that existed at the Toowoomba Gaol confirms the importance of such sites for cementing the bonds between female participants in urban disorderly subcultures, and shows that the 'rough culture' identified by Kay Daniels among convict women persisted into the colonial period.¹²⁵

For the core group of recidivist women who participated in this subculture, separating themselves from the values of both officials and other inmates, the shared activities and continuance of practices common to their communities outside disciplinary settings probably served to normalise and ameliorate the prison experience. In this way incarceration heightened intimacy between women as they faced estrangement from other loved ones, though prior and continuing connections among inmates reveal that women's relationships with each other were a significant feature of their lives both inside and out of prison. The volubility and seeming eagerness of many inmates in giving evidence about the corrosive nature of prison and their own degradation is perhaps a reflection of this subaltern identification. Fervent declarations that

¹²⁴ Janice G Raymond *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*, Melbourne: Spinifex Press 2001, 11; Marc Brodie and Barbara Caine 'Class, sex, and friendship: the long nineteenth century', in Barbara Caine (ed) *Friendship: A History*, London: Equinox 2009, 228.

¹²⁵ Kay Daniels *Convict Women*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin 1998, 141.

they left prison worse every time, heard by authorities as a condemnation of the system, can thus alternatively be understood as being offered by women as a badge of belonging.

About the author

Alana Piper is a PhD candidate at the University of Queensland, where she is researching the significance of relationships between women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century criminal subcultures of Brisbane and Melbourne. In 2009 Alana received the Dennis J Murphy Scholarship for academic excellence, in 2010 she was awarded a University medal for her honours thesis and in 2011 she took out the postgraduate category of the John Barrett award for Australian studies for her article on alcohol use among young girls in early twentieth century Brisbane. She has published several articles on aspects of Queensland and Australian women's history.

Correspondence to Alana Piper: alana.piper@uqconnect.edu.au