

Retorts, Runaways and Riots:

Patterns of Resistance in Canadian Reform Schools for Girls, 1930–60

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Abstract

This article examines female adolescents' experience of Canadian reform school for girls between 1930 and 1960. Myers and Sangster challenge the prevailing characterization of delinquent girls as submissive to authority and docile while in custody. A study of girls' individual and collective resistance, this article brings together research on Ontario and Quebec reform schools and reveals that girls engaged in a variety of rebellious activities including verbal retorts, passive resistance, running away, and rioting. Following girls through the juvenile justice system, the authors illustrate the key moments—from court appearance to parole—when girls were likely to rebel against authority. The authors argue that while these acts of resistance may appear to us as spontaneous and uncoordinated, girls' protests and violent behaviour were often clearly directed at being labelled "delinquent" and at being subjected to regimes that emphasized domestic labour, sexual purity and passive femininity.

Reform schools for girls, since their introduction in the latter part of the nineteenth century, have been experiments in transforming wayward girls, judged incorrigible, truant, and especially, sexually promiscuous, into 'proper' young women. In the twentieth century, the dominant characterization of such girls cast them as misguided products of broken homes or self-centred sexual delinquents; ¹ rarely have delinquent girls been incarcerated for, or even associated with, violent crimes. ² As one psychologist noted, incarcerated girls were "submissive rather than assertive, bashful rather than brazen...followers rather than leaders." ³ Despite this characterization, girls caught in the juvenile justice system retorted, ran away and committed extreme acts of violence in girls' reform schools. It is our aim to explore some of the sites and methods of girls' resistance to their designation as delinquent, and particularly to their incarceration in reform institutions. Girls engaged in a continuum of rebellious activities ranging from verbal retorts and disagreement with the authorities, to passive resistance, breaking the rules, running away, and in the most extreme, rioting. Defining resistance as either sporadic or the "sustained use of rituals, arguments or actions to oppose, alter or make tolerable one's circumstances," ⁴ we have located ample evidence to demonstrate that not all girls submissively acquiesced to the regimes of reform schools. Their methods of rebellion ran the gamut from individual rejection of treatment, attempts to salvage autonomy and self respect, to more organized, collective acts of violence.

These girls' attempts to redefine themselves and resist their sentences were unusual, indeed remarkable, given the intensity and effectiveness of the legal and penal disciplinary regimes they were up against. This is not to simply romanticize all forms of girls' resistance in reform schools, for some protests were violent or self defeating. Moreover, even the rebellious often eventually acquiesced, with degrees of adaptation to the institutions' rules and values, reflecting some girls' internalization of its moral teachings, and others' more calculating attempts to superficially conform in order to retrieve their freedom. Furthermore, we would concede that our evaluation of girls' resistance is itself compromised by its representation in the historical record. Though girls' actions and words are often relayed directly to us through these records, they are recounted by psychologists, penal workers, administrators and nuns whose preconceived expert knowledge about the nature of young women shaped their

reconstructions of delinquent girls' rebellions within a language of irrationality, incredulity and pathology.

Given the unusual nature of resistance in such carceral regimes, many historians have stressed processes of regulation over patterns of resistance in penal institutions.⁵ Despite the atypical nature of resistance, and the difficulties in deciphering its meaning and intent, the project of uncovering and comprehending [End Page 669] historical patterns of inmates' defiance remains of critical importance. Understanding the lineage of resistance and the contexts in which it flourishes has been central to feminist and materialist analyses of gender and class oppression, both of which were clearly deeply entrenched within the criminal justice and penal systems. The more recent turn to Foucault's writings has both enriched and complicated these analyses, suggesting a more 'decentralized,' paradigm of resistance—where there is power, there is resistance—and encouraging our investigation of the many sites and networks of resistance emanating from the exercise of power. Indeed, forms of resistance in girls' reform schools—often dispersed, highly divergent, spontaneous, unfocused, and encompassing both individual and group efforts—might seem at first glance to fit well with such theories.

At the same time, as feminist critics of Foucault argue, a theory of resistance must also grasp the systems, not merely capillaries of power characterizing domination, discerning politically **between** discourses and practices which do and do not challenge patriarchal and class oppression. As Linda Alcoff argues, Foucauldian theory tends to miss the causal relationship between subjugated knowledges of the marginalized and systems of domination and power, never allowing that resistance emerges from conscious, reflective agency: "[Foucault's] identification of subjugated discourses does not establish their politically emancipatory character nor does it help us understand where or how they arise and how, therefore, they might be abetted."⁶

Girls' retorts, rebellions and escapes from reform school assume coherent and comprehensible patterns when they are located within the social relations of class and race and constructions of female delinquency which had prompted their original criminalization and subsequent incarceration. Though guided by some Foucauldian insights, therefore, our examination of girls' resistance attempts to situate their rebellion in a feminist and materialist framework of historical causation, recognizing centralized systems of power based on class, race and gender, as well as the possibility of girls' subjective, even collective, consciousness of their oppression within an unjust and discriminatory juvenile justice system.

The Canadian Juvenile Justice System and 'Delinquent' Girls

The Canadian juvenile court system emerged in the wake of the federal 1908 Juvenile Delinquents Act, and by mid-twentieth century, reform schools which had their origins in the nineteenth century, were joined by 'training' schools⁷ across Canada. The provision and monitoring of juvenile justice facilities constituted a responsibility shared by provinces and municipalities, and this led to the creation of a diversity of institutions across the country. Adolescents were prosecuted under the federal act but could also be incarcerated under specific provincial legislation, such as the Ontario Training Schools Act (1927) and Quebec's Act respecting Juvenile Delinquents (1912).⁸

In Ontario, the Ontario Training School for Girls (OTSG), near Galt, was opened in 1933, as the first, and for this period the primary, state-run, non-denominational institution for delinquent girls, advertizing its mission as the treatment and education of wayward youth.⁹ By contrast, in Quebec, reform schools were state supported but administered by private agencies and were denominational **[End Page 670]** and therefore linguistically based:¹⁰ the largest girls' reform school in Montreal, the Maison de Lorette (established 1870), was run by a Catholic order, the Soeurs du Bon Pasteur; complementing the Maison de Lorette was the institution for non-Catholic girls, the Girls' Cottage School (established 1911), which was run by a philanthropic organization.

The majority of Canadian girls sent to reform institutions came from impoverished and working-class families, especially from large urban areas like Montreal and Toronto. Girls' average age of entry was fifteen, and the overwhelming majority were incarcerated for incorrigibility, immorality, truancy, desertion, and petty theft.¹¹ The majority of inmates at the Maison de Lorette were white, French-Canadian or Irish-Canadian and Catholic, while those held at the Girls' Cottage School were white, Anglo-Celtic, Protestant or daughters of European Jews. At the Ontario school, they were white, English-speaking, and Protestant. Only after World War II did an increasing number of Aboriginal girls slightly alter the cultural and racial composition of Ontario and Quebec reform schools.¹²

We begin our study in the 1930s, when legal and social work authorities worried that Depression conditions would foster increased delinquency. These anxieties escalated further at the onset of World War II, due to the perception that a youth problem was emerging on the home front. Any new-found independence that girls may have experienced was met with increasing regulation, either through probation or incarceration. Between 1939 and 1943, the number of girls appearing annually in Canadian courts increased by 45%,¹³ and over the decade the numbers incarcerated swelled too.¹⁴ During the war, many institutions also faced labour problems as war work lured away female workers in Quebec, and in Ontario, the reform school had to temporarily relocate to make room for a military barrack. As well, in 1942 the Quebec government expanded the juvenile court's jurisdiction to cover adolescents up to 18 (instead of 16), adding an older cohort of girls to reform schools.¹⁵

By the 1950s, mental health professionals were becoming increasingly involved in studying and treating delinquent girls; this therapeutic project resulted in prolific record taking, including the details of girls' acts of rebellion.¹⁶ By the postwar period, penal reform and social justice advocates were also voicing some criticisms of the juvenile justice system in Canada, so that adolescent girls who expressed their opposition to their seemingly endless sentences and unfair treatment found some support outside the reform school walls.

Throughout this entire period the women who dominated reform school work publicly rejected punishment models, claiming they provided kind, but firm maternal discipline and sound vocational training for their girls. The inculcation of sexual purity, training in appropriate domestic and wage labour, and a model of passive femininity characterized the reform agenda in these institutions. They also differed in important ways, however: the Maison de Lorette did not embrace the secular rehabilitation schemes common to training schools and instead favoured religious instruction and work discipline. The dormitory style of the convent-cum-reform school was in turn rejected by training school advocates who

promoted the cottage-style reformatory and individualism as key to rehabilitation. If the Catholic belief system endorsed faith, the secular one placed its faith in professionalized and 'scientific' means of setting the wayward girl straight. ¹⁷ [End Page 671]

Initial Objections

Early twentieth-century reformers intended juvenile and family courts to offer more treatment and less incarceration, as well as informal, private proceedings directed at locating the child's problem as much as cataloguing her official crimes. ¹⁸ Indeed, with the new juvenile and family court system came promises of a new, kinder, maternal justice, where judges and female court officials would create a homey atmosphere conducive to rehabilitating youth. ¹⁹ In Montreal this was not realized, as senior male judges presided over the Juvenile Delinquents' Court which resembled, in practice, the adversarial nature of adult courts. Similarly, in Ontario, despite the best intentions of reformers and the prospect of supervised probation, family and juvenile courts often became, in Dorothy Chunn's words "police courts in disguise." ²⁰

The culture of the courtroom was thus more likely to induce acquiescence and resignation, not rebuttals and open defiance: the legal language and process were intimidating, adults outnumbered children in court, parents who might have been allies often were responsible for daughters' court appearances, and the stories of adults—both parents and social workers—were usually valued more highly. ²¹ Moreover, girls realistically knew that this might be their last chance to stay out of reform school, and they acted accordingly.

Most who spoke (and many offered only monosyllabic answers), claimed they intended to change their ways or had learned their lesson. Quick to admit she made a mistake, Joanne appealed to the Montreal judge "in humility" asking for another chance as she had "learned a great deal" and had made up her mind to change her "self-pity into self-respect." ²² Another girl, after completing ten months of her three year sentence for incorrigibility and desertion, wrote to the judge that she "had learnt what it is...to be good, and obedient and [would] be grateful again to have a home and enjoy it," and would he not allow her to return home? ²³

Despite the dominant response of creating a 'pardon tale' ²⁴ to avoid incarceration, a small minority did openly challenge the judge, court officials and witnesses. In court, when girls protested their designation as delinquent, they often disputed the evidence parents and probation officers gave. One fifteen year old, who perhaps sensed how crucial a test of virginity was to her fate, tried to reassure the judge by claiming intercourse was never fully consummated: "I didn't let him put it in, only between my legs." ²⁵ The Montreal juvenile court heard girls explain to the court doctor that their hymens were ruptured as a result of bicycle accidents, Tampax, or indeed, gynecological exams. ²⁶ Others accepted their designation as bad girls, but tried to offer a rationale: "I don't get along at home...they pick on me," ²⁷ noted one. Or they argued that incarceration was a mistake: "I will come out [of reform school] ten times worse," a teen begged the judge, a fairly shrewd plea on her part. ²⁸

Rather than conciliatory explanations, some girls defied the right of the court to judge them. Disputing the court's attempts to regulate her sex life, one teen who had run away with an

older man declared that “he was not the first man in her life and he wouldn’t be the last.” ²⁹ Another young woman, under the care of the Toronto Big Sisters, lashed out at her Sister ‘guardian,’ putting her finger astutely on the contradictions at the heart of this organization: “I thought she [End Page 672] was going to help me, [not]...prosecute me,” ³⁰ she snapped angrily in court when the woman testified against her. Charged with escaping from the juvenile court’s detention home, a French Canadian girl prompted a judicial inquiry by accusing a male guard of soliciting sex in exchange for her freedom. ³¹

Many girls raged at family members who appeared in court with, or against them. Stepmothers and mothers were especially common targets. “If you had kept your trap shut I wouldn’t be here,” ³² said one angry daughter to her mother who filed the complaint, while another blamed her step mother, “that dirty cat,” ³³ for her estrangement from the family and conflicts with the law. In some cases, girls did have legitimate complaints against unfeeling or neglectful parents. One teen who ran away from her parents to her grandparents’ home, explained to the court her actions were justified by the beatings she received at the hands of her mother. The mother’s animosity toward the girl was well documented for the court, including an admission that she did not beat her child “unnecessarily.” ³⁴ Girls, too, advanced open threats: “I’ll put you in your bed for three weeks” said one girl to her nervous mother, who claimed her daughter had already threatened to kill her. ³⁵

Girls’ verbal retorts in court reveal an acknowledgement of, and frustration with, the sexual double standard they confronted daily. Because sexual impropriety dominated girls’ cases, they were often asked to explain their loss of virginity (even when the charge was unrelated, such as theft), which opened the door for girls to retaliate against those who had abused them. Their replies too frequently pointed to sexual abuse at the hands of older brothers, uncles, boarders, and fathers (including stepfathers and mothers’ boyfriends). Girls were at times extremely direct and forthcoming, accusing these men in court, with an expectation of justice. Typically, though, a girl’s involvement in these acts of abuse only strengthened the resolve of the court to send her to reform school. ³⁶ For example, when a Montreal probation officer found medical evidence that a girl had been “tampered with” and was claiming her father responsible, the court officer recommended “constant supervision” of the thirteen year old in a reform school. ³⁷

Objecting to Incarceration

Disagreements with their sentences did not evaporate once girls reached reform institutions. Those on good terms with parents occasionally persuaded them to write to the authorities, requesting early release, though usually to no avail. ³⁸ Insolence and sauciness to teachers and matrons were probably the most common forms of rebellion, especially in the early stages of incarceration, and the severity with which ‘talking back’ was treated—including time in detention—indicates the emphasis put on polite feminine demeanour and obedience to authority in the school. Indeed, “sauciness and defiance” could lead to a strapping, even though this older girl told her psychiatrist that such “punishment ‘did her no good’ and made her more resentful.” ³⁹ When detailing some of the most difficult girls sent for extra surveillance to a section of the women’s reformatory in the 1950s, the superintendent there listed insolence as the primary problem: “insolence 21 cases; escape 2; contraband 2; filthy

notes [1](#); refusing to work 1; profanity 3; resisting the matron, 1.” [40](#) As a direct affront to staff, insolence [End Page 673] was perhaps more difficult to get away with than some of these other forms of resistance, such as passing “filthy” notes since the latter could go undetected. In all these institutions, girls also rebelled with loud, public boasting about their sexual exploits and experiences (even if they expressed different views on sex to their psychiatrists or probation officers), which was particularly grating to penal workers, given their primary objective of reinscribing the girls’ conscience with sexual purity and modesty.

Girls’ verbal retorts were hurled at specific aspects of their incarceration experience, especially, in Quebec, religious retraining. In Catholic institutions, both nuns and their piety were models of the sexual repression, conformity and obedience demanded of the girls. In the Maison de Lorette proper demeanor for adolescent girls encompassed not only deference to the nuns’ authority but also to the Catholic faith and its symbols. The austere surroundings at the convent-turned-reform-school were intended to promote contemplation of religious vows; for example, if the girls wanted to talk during work hours, they were permitted endless repetitions of the rosary. At times girls sang, screamed and swore, hurling invectives at their religion. (French-Canadian swear words concern aspects of the Church and faith taken in vain; for example, ‘Christ’, ‘Chalice’ and ‘tabernacle’!) A perennial “problem” with one of the girls, claimed a nun, was that she “professait un haut mépris pour toutes choses de la religion [exhibits a deep contempt for all things religious].” [41](#)

Though some swore at, or argued with the superintendents or the matrons, it is revealing that in the OTSG many chose the psychiatric ‘confessional’ as the context in which to make a case for release, probably seeing doctors as more likely to believe they were misunderstood. As one psychiatrist described his interview: “‘Penny’ said she was not sexually delinquent, though she stayed out late at night and tried some beer...she keeps maintaining she should not have been sent here, and that her uncle ill used her.” [42](#) To these doctors, girls also recounted details of their lives, particularly sexual abuse, violence and unhappiness, which implicitly offered their own explanations for their behaviour, especially running away. This was true of incest victims, many of whom did not draw a direct connection between their delinquency and past abuse, but who, at a more subterranean level, knew the abuse had unsettled their lives quite profoundly. [43](#) Nuns at the Maison de Lorette were not willing to let secular experts usurp their power at the reform school, but rather each girl was interrogated by a probation officer before being incarcerated. [44](#)

The common arguments generally did not work. Even when psychiatrists and probation officers admitted girls should not be there, they did not advocate their immediate release. In both Ontario and Quebec, penal workers and medical experts generally believed girls had to go through a process in which they renounced immoral families and friends so their rebellious and nonconforming personalities could be tamed: “she needs to go through the stage of disillusionment with her past associates, then rebellion, then perhaps she will see the light,” commented one Ontario psychologist.

In order to facilitate this process, one reform school implemented a fortnight’s initial quarantine; [45](#) another had a three week ‘diagnostic and orientation’ period in a ‘reception’ centre. The common purpose of such isolation was to settle the inmates into emotional

sedation and acceptance of the rules; this was the first step [End Page 674] in stripping the girl of her previous character and associations. The more defiant girls tended to express their resistance to this “therapeutic” environment by destroying their rooms and their new uniforms. In most reform institutions, girls’ street clothes were replaced with uniforms, the donning of which as Michelle Cale has put it, became the “first act of obedience to the order of the institution,” and a daily reminder of the break with the past.⁴⁶ At the Maison de Lorette, the grey ankle-length dresses were often destroyed, the target of enraged recent arrivals.

A system of material and psychological rewards, along with the threat of punishment, meant that accommodation to the institutions’ rules was gradually embraced, at least superficially, by most inmates. But transforming their personalities did not come without an immense struggle, and perhaps not surprisingly so, since many girls were designated to begin with as unfeminine, non-conforming and rebellious: again and again, they were described negatively as too “boisterous, brash, loud, rambunctious.”⁴⁷ Inmates often understood the transformation being asked of them, and initially disavowed it. When a young Native teen was initially told at the OTSG that she must change her demeanour, her response was swift: “I am no lady,”⁴⁸ she replied angrily, and she may well have understood that the middle class persona she was expected to adopt bore little affinity to the reality of her life on the reserve.

Even individual acts could articulate statements of resistance, and these sometimes concerned rights we take for granted today. For example, girls were forced to undergo internal exams and regular venereal disease tests against their will. It’s not hard to imagine the girls felt violated when the courts ordered male doctors to perform what would for many be their first gynecological exam. One inmate returning from vacation, simply refused to submit to her VD smear and was sent to detention where she planned “how to accost the staff in a violent way, swore at the Superintendent and refused to do her scrubbing [of the floors] for two days.”⁴⁹

As well as arguing with the authorities, many girls also broke minor rules, for example, refusing to stand in line, leaving school work incomplete, spurning team work and the proper forms of recreation offered by the institution, ignoring their chores, smoking, stealing, arguing with other inmates, or creating irritating disturbances, as with the teen who “was singing an hour after lights out to keep the others distracted.”⁵⁰ Small indiscretions were met with ambivalence, such as when an inmate stole some wool; having turned it into a gift of mittens for a relative she managed to blur the line between appropriate productive feminine labour and delinquency.⁵¹ Minor infractions and arguments could also turn into major incidents; one girl who claimed she was pushed in line, had an argument with the supervising matron over this, and when the matron ignored her, she simply knocked her adversary to the ground, unconscious.⁵²

Passive Resistance and Alternative Cultures

Rather than direct argument, indirect, passive resistance often became the most popular strategy for girls who did not accept their banishment to reform school. As James Scott argues, mundane, muted “everyday” acts of resistance, including such tactics as silence, foot dragging, professed ignorance and gossiping, [End Page 675] which “avoid direct

confrontation with authority,” are often the principal means of rebellion when people face a repressive, powerful adversary. ⁵³ In reform school, there was a fine line, sometimes overlapping, between accommodation and resistance: some girls followed the rules with barely disguised reluctance, even contempt. Staff were highly sceptical of such superficial change, suspecting (perhaps correctly) that promotion through the institution’s program was not accompanied by a deep, inner metamorphosis. Aboriginal girls were especially suspect, as they were perceived through a racist lens as having a less developed moral awareness: “she is not real problem to the institution,” concluded the Superintendent of one Native teen, “but she has [acquired] no real value system, so she may be a problem in the community.” ⁵⁴

Passive resistance as a strategy could backfire when it became the justification for an extension of sentence: one Quebec girl who showed “no apparent progress” and who “did nothing unless forced,” found her original sentence of three years doubled. ⁵⁵ This reaction was an uncommon and extreme example; however, because the juvenile court had the power to make girls wards of the court until the age of majority (21), sentence extensions were not uncommon. Girls’ indifference to disciplinary measures was also duly noted by reform school workers and used against them. In another case, because “remontrances et punitions l’ont laissé...indifférente [remonstrance and punishment left her indifferent]” the Maison de Lorette administrator asked the juvenile court judge to send her to the Women’s Prison. ⁵⁶

One brand of passive resistance also encompassed self punishment: girls disobeyed rules intentionally to place themselves in detention, a form of solitary confinement. One fifteen year old, for example, disagreed with her sentence, claiming that running away with her boyfriend (which landed her in the OTSG) was her only way of dealing with a mother who hated her. As soon as she arrived, she made it clear she wanted to “live in detention,” and while placed there, she drew “macabre pictures of girls, with their heads cut off, an axe nearby, and the words ‘you did this.’” Two psychiatrists agreed she was more “neurotic than delinquent,” and when released, it was clear why: social workers were now forced to admit that they had misdiagnosed the home situation, while the girl had quite correctly assessed her mother’s feelings. ⁵⁷

When another OTSG girl repeatedly said she “preferred to be in detention,” the psychiatrist warned that any “child capable of accepting this isolation must be disturbed.” ⁵⁸ In part, this reflected the dominant psychiatric view by the late 1940s that delinquent girls were more emotionally disturbed and self destructive than boys, a diagnosis which seemed to be confirmed by some Ontario statistics showing detention was actually used more against girls than boys in training schools. ⁵⁹ The idea that girls masochistically sought out detention, however, avoided dealing with the possibility that detention itself produced ‘disturbed’ girls, perpetuating a cycle of anger and alienation—though occasionally, some medical experts did share this insight with unsympathetic matrons, to little effect.

While most forms of passive resistance were conspicuous to penal and medical workers, others were probably not. In the 1940s and 1950s, Aboriginal girls became more frequent inmates of OTSG, their slightly increasing numbers reflecting the incursion of colonialism into previously isolated areas, increased [End Page 676] material and social stresses on

Ontario reserves, and the systemic racism in policing involving Native peoples. Superintendents did not welcome their commitments, claiming these girls came from different cultural contexts and therefore “were unreachable.”⁶⁰ Some Native girls responded to the school regime with silence and complete withdrawal, so much so that they were designated “slow” and “lackadaisical.”⁶¹ Again and again, their examiners claimed they were unresponsive, “lowering their eyes staring at the floor, only answering in monosyllables.”⁶² Yet, subsequent research suggests that, in some Native cultures, this behaviour was also a form of passive resistance, a ‘conservation of energy’ in the face of a profoundly alienating situation over which they had little control.⁶³ The ‘counter culture’ that girls forged within the schools became another means of circumventing the authority and goals of the institution. Their alternative culture of emotion, loyalty and sex was neither a simple reflection of social relations on the outside, nor determined solely by the stress and denials of being on the ‘inside,’ but rather was a complex conjuncture of both worlds.⁶⁴ They countered authority figures, for instance, by establishing their own social structures, including groups resembling families. At the Girls’ Cottage School, girls grafted their own rules onto the otherwise insidious self-governance schemes which became popular in reform schools in the 1930s.⁶⁵ Though the institutions claimed a desire to foster leadership skills, the leaders of these alternative family groups were often weeded out for their “pernicious” influence over other girls.

Girls also rebuffed the authorities’ attempts to inculcate feminine heterosexuality by creating same-sex intimacies and networks, and it is not surprising that these intimacies often led to other rebellions, such as secret letter writing, carving (discussed below) and absences without leave. While documents before the 1950s occasionally noted these same sex relationships, they were more frequently discussed afterwards, in part due to the increased surveillance of, and use of the ‘confessional’ by girls in the OTSG, perhaps also because they became more frequent. In the 1960s the Girls’ Cottage School in Quebec refused to take “ring-leaders in homosexual practices” because they had proved to be “the most dangerous and disturbing influences to [the institution].”⁶⁶ And while the nuns at the Catholic reform schools were silent about such relationships, this likely resulted from their renunciation of sexual and physical expression rather than the complete absence of same-sex relations in these institutions.

It was one of the ironies of the reform school project that many girls were sent there for being ‘boy crazy,’ but once they arrived in the institution, they had to be prevented from becoming ‘girl crazy.’ Girls established ‘love lights,’ special intimate relationships with other girls representing love, loyalty, passion; these might develop into sexual relationships. In a letter seized by the matrons, one girl in detention wrote to her love light, distinguishing her from a sexual partner, but clearly pledging her devotion. She was also plotting to go awl with her:

“ask Miss B if you can do your two months up here [probably in detention], it will be long and boring, but at least you know you will be with me...I’m suggesting this because I care about you and want you in my plan...I love you chic, but don’t get the wrong idea, I mean like a sister and partner, I have been through that queer business and I know it is stupid once you get past the [first] stage I will **[End Page 677]** carve your name in my leg I could get money and clothes, and we could go up north to a cabin.”⁶⁷

These relationships were closely monitored both because they established bonds contrary to the authority structure of the institution, and because they were seen as potentially sexually unhealthy, creating future lesbians. ⁶⁸ School psychologists and psychiatrists were supposed to play a role in discouraging these sexual liaisons; they believed “a search for intimacy with others” ⁶⁹ in the school was understandable, but that sexual relations were potentially harmful, and they often assumed that one girl was the more aggressive ‘seducer,’ a young version of the butch role. Indeed, the dominant psychiatric view of women in prison settings in this period was that women’s emotional nature, and the absence of men, led to cravings for intimacy, but that only a minority were truly ‘disturbed’ or ‘pathological’ homosexuals. ⁷⁰

Love light connections, as the authorities feared, often led to other rebellions. As one Superintendent complained, “the institution is again demented with love light troubles. I don’t know how to discourage the formation of these attachments [but] movies will be suspended until the whole institution settles down.” She went on to detail the way in which they were to be curbed: staff had to report them immediately, she would take the list to the psychiatrist and see if he could “shed any light on it”, then she would take to the Review Board and girls’ promotions might be denied until the relations were “resolved.” As she noted, the intensity of love light relations also led to awls, and to a general “hostile, high” tone to the School. ⁷¹ Similarly, Ruth Alexander’s historical study argues that incarcerated girls’ homosexual relationships created “scandal and disapproval,” which were enjoyed by the girls, as it reinforced their sense of power and tested the sexual norms of society. ⁷² Nor should we lose sight of the fact that the institution may have offered some girls a positive opportunity to explore same-sex relations which the ‘outside’ heterosexist culture did not.

‘Running’

By far the most active form of resistance engaged in by girls was running away from the reform school, or awls (absences without leave); this is not surprising since many girls were incarcerated to begin with for running away. In Quebec, the Maison de Lorette girls’ reform school was colloquially called “the convent”; ⁷³ in Ontario judges and social workers pressuring parents to accede to reform school often claimed the school was open and without bars. Yet this belied the reality that, once sentenced, the girl was under the guardianship of the school, and leaving it resulted in punishment.

Girls often ran soon after incarceration, in direct response to their sentences: “her recent running...is a reaction to coming here...she feels her committal is unjustified, she has found no congenial girls...and does not want to be a domestic and feels doomed to this if she stays here,” concluded one psychiatrist examining a girl who ran as far as Montreal, but eventually gave herself up because she was lost and without money. ⁷⁴ Moreover, girls repeatedly ran away, sometimes only to a nearby town or into the woods, though in many cases directly home where they knew they might be caught. As girls’ reform schools [End Page 678] were located outside of major urban centres, girls were often caught making their way back to the city. The resolve and desperation of one group of Quebec girls from the Cottage School was revealed by the physical risks they took: they nearly drowned in a river trying to make their way back to Montreal. ⁷⁵

Running was spontaneous, quickly executed and ‘harmless,’ with the adolescent returning easily, but it could also be far more serious, long-term, and engender severe punishment if

girls resisted their capture and return to the institution. When Margaret ran away with two others from the OTSG, she “fought, kicked and scratched police” who tried to bring her back, resulting in a further incorrigibility charge in court.⁷⁶ Those in authority usually distinguished between two kinds of awls, much the same way they did the ‘good’ (reformable) and ‘bad’ (irretrievable) girls in the school: “there is a difference between the girl who runs away irked by authority or concern for her family, and one intent on immorality’Bonnie’ is the latter [as] she ran away from the school and lived with men in the carnival.”⁷⁷

Superintendents also knew that girls were more likely to run “on impulse to see their family,”⁷⁸ often after the family visited, or during stress times such as holidays: “all three detention cells,” wrote one superintendent one year, “are full of girls trying to take Easter holidays without permission.”⁷⁹ It was not only the escape that irked school officials, it was the fact that girls ran to families designated inadequate and immoral. In some cases, families hid the child from the police. Of the ten girls awl so far this year, the OTSG superintendent reminded the government in 1953, four were “harboured by their families.”⁸⁰ One, Gwen, ran away and went to a dance hall with her boyfriend, where she was spotted by police. They followed her home, and found her under a bed, but her uncle removed the back window so that she could escape again into the bush, while her father started a fight with the police. Extra reinforcements were brought in to make sure a “brawl was avoided.”⁸¹

Though few examples were this dramatic, awls were one of the most contentious issues argued over in Ontario by penal workers, medical experts and the government bureaucracy; the latter rejected recommendations by the superintendent that ‘harbouring’ families be charged in court, worried that the outcome would be bad public relations for the training school, and thus their government.⁸² Almost always, returning girls were placed in detention, also a contentious issue. Detention rooms had grilled or painted-over windows, and only mattresses and blankets on the floor. There was no mail allowed, limited reading material, outdoor exercise (such as gardening or snow shovelling) only in return for good behaviour; and continued defiance could result in a meal of only of milk and bread. Girls might remain in such conditions for days; one year, the average stay for detention was fifteen days, with one girl spending 67 days or 55% of her sentence there.⁸³ One of the goals was “to make the girls so thoroughly bored” that future awls would be discouraged. “They always glamourize and add to their adventures for the benefit of the girls...this puts ideas into the minds of other girls...but if they are isolated for a week or more, their escape loses some of its glamour,” concluded one superintendent.⁸⁴

The use of detention rooms was increasingly contested by the fifties, with penal workers, especially one very mean-spirited OTSG superintendent, arguing for the most punitive atmosphere, including less food, no reading material, **[End Page 679]** removal of clothes and furniture if they were damaged, and preventing any talking between cells. “After all,” she said, “for these ‘psychopaths’ detention can’t be [a] yaking ball.”⁸⁵ The psychiatrists and the bureaucrats were more lenient: the former arguing girls could not be treated under such conditions, the latter also anxious about public censure. And public criticism did come: when a new detention unit, Hood House, was built at OTSG in 1958, it met with outraged criticisms from Elizabeth Fry for its prison-like appearance and uses. The new unit revealed how serious girls’ awls and rebellion were seen to be: without segregation, it was feared, rebellious girls would “infect the rest of the school with riotous behaviour.”⁸⁶ At the same

time, the public outcry was facilitated by the very resistance of girls to the Hood House regime, as their complaints to parents sometimes made their way to public and reform officials.

Interestingly, the style of incarceration facility was related to the frequency of escapes. In the more cloistered Catholic facilities, escapes were less common, though the result may have been increased pent up violence, described in the section on riots below. The English-language training school in Quebec, the Girls' Cottage School, was upheld by juvenile justice authorities as a model of "progressive" rehabilitation in contrast to the Catholic Maison de Lorette. The GCS directors embraced the key elements of the modern training school, including hiring professional social workers as administrators and creating a "home-like" environment to inspire a transformation in the girls' attitudes and behaviour in order to turn them into marriageable young women. Ironically, in resocializing the girls, the staff implemented a program that provided opportunity and motivation for girls to escape the institution. This program involved incremental increases in trust placed in the inmates. For example, girls were not locked in their rooms at night, rather, an alarm would ring in the matron's room if a girl's door opened; this system worked until the girls learned how to disconnect the alarm bells.⁸⁷ Further, the staff arranged chaperoned bi-monthly visits to a nearby town for those who had earned it. This would prove costly in the mid-1940s, as, according to the press, dancing, caressing and alcohol became part of these Saturday visits and subsequently keys went missing and girls repeatedly escaped after lights out. In late spring, 1946, five girls escaped from the institution and went on a drinking binge with local boys whom they had met previously.⁸⁸

While the girls were eventually apprehended by provincial police the institution drew considerable criticism for allowing girls to pursue their "immoral" desires. The leniency of the GCS, though, was not the sole cause of the escapes. During the Second World War this reform institution suffered repeated staffing problems as professional women were in high demand in Montreal and refused to live in Sweetburg (about 90 miles from the city) on mediocre salaries. Staffing problems then led to discipline problems. As the press followed the capture of the girls from barns, sawmills and cottages, Judge Nicholson of the juvenile court visited the GCS, ordered the institution closed, and sent all non-Catholic girls to the Maison de Lorette. In 1951 it would reopen in a different location as a cottage-style reform school, in which girls were separated according to the seriousness of their 'bad' behaviour and those considered to have mental health difficulties were isolated. In the 1950s a new "therapeutic milieu" emerged at the cottage school in which girls were encouraged to "express feelings of anger and hate" and where a minimum of rules and regulations were in place.⁸⁹ Running [End Page 680] away was accepted by the administrators as "natural" in this context, part of the maturing process that was overseen by therapists.⁹⁰

The Ontario institution faced similar dilemmas. Eschewing jail-like facilities for a school image meant that escape into the nearby woods was fairly common, though girls were often quickly apprehended.⁹¹ When the OTSG was relocated during the war years, its proximity to a major highway made escape compelling; but it was also easy for police to pick up hitchhiking escapees. This may explain why official numbers of awls peaked during the 1940s.⁹² The institution's progressive program of integrating girls into local social activities, also provided the irresistible temptation to go awl. In 1952, the girls attended a YWCA-

sponsored variety show, which the Superintendent complained incited the girls with an act including some “almost nude” men from a local YMCA. So tempted, a rash of notes quickly passed hands in the lobby, and a number of runaways resulted, with a “gang of boys from Brantford [Ontario] promising to hide the girls.” Even a demure OTSG “ballet dancer” in the variety show seized the opportunity to take off.⁹³

Sexual temptation aside, escapes were so common primarily because girls were young, homesick and unhappy. In Quebec, it was not unusual for sentences to be two or three years in length and an inmate could not be released or paroled until she had served 18 months of her sentence.⁹⁴ This duration must have felt like a lifetime for adolescent girls. Running was also incorporated into school culture as a means of gaining acceptance, integrating into a social group, and establishing one’s role as a leader.⁹⁵ Ironically, school officials spoke positively about girls’ leadership qualities, but thoroughly disliked them when they resulted in awls.

Awls, in fact, did not end when the girl left the institution. After they were promoted, they were sent out ‘on placement’ or parole. In Ontario, most were boarded out, working either as domestics or in factories, or by the 1950s, in service jobs; only a minority were sent home, in keeping with the idea that the reform school experience should represent a clear break with the girls’ past. In both provinces, after release, probation or field workers oversaw the girls’ social and sexual lives, work habits and leisure pursuits, and in turn reported to the juvenile court or the Training School Board. If the girl was deemed promiscuous, became pregnant, or could not keep a job, she could be returned to the reform school. Nonetheless, girls used their partial freedom to ignore rules about reading material (books not crime comics), suggested clothing purchases (sensible, not flamboyant), friends and hangouts (respectable not wild) and of course, sex.⁹⁶

The temptation to slip away from this continued supervision was extremely strong, though it was difficult as placement officers sometimes displayed the skills of private detectives in their quest for their charges (and were sometimes aided by the girls’ families.) However, girls did manage to escape into anonymity, and some used sympathetic familial and peer networks to cover their tracks. Others were blessed in their search for autonomy by the prejudices of the placement officer. When one Native woman disappeared, for example, the officer visited all the “local Indian care hangouts” with the police, noting that “[the girl] is good at hiding and [anyway I really] could not tell her apart from any other Indian squaw.”⁹⁷

Those who were most successful tended to blend into street cultures of petty **[End Page 681]** crime and prostitution. Jane eluded her field worker three times, the last time when she deserted Bethany House, Montreal’s home for pregnant, single, Protestant girls.⁹⁸ Another girl who had been paroled from the Girls’ Cottage School in the 1940s, whose pregnancy was also discovered by a field worker eager to “manage” her condition, took the ultimate escape route: marriage. The worker advised vigorously against the wedding but once the young woman had taken the step she crossed the threshold out of adolescence, and therefore out of the juvenile justice system’s reach.⁹⁹

Riots and Violence

In reform schools girls resorted to both individual and collective acts of violence. The most disturbing to the authorities were the riots of the 1940s and 1950s. In the autumn of 1945, French-Canadian adolescent girls shocked their superiors with a riot at the Maison de Lorette reform school for girls. For more than an hour a small group of inmates barricaded themselves in a dormitory room and destroyed furniture and bed linen, and shattered windows. Unable to regain control of the situation, the nuns who administered the institution called in the Surêté du Québec (Provincial Police); it would take ten officers to suppress the riot. Eleven young women, aged sixteen to twenty, were escorted to police cells in their blood-soaked night shirts with their bodies bound in strait jackets.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, only five years earlier another serious riot, emerging from a failed escape plan, had occurred at the Maison de Lorette.

Over a decade later, five girls from OTSG temporarily placed in detention in an adult women's reformatory, went on a ten minute rampage, damaging the library, bookcases, typewriters and also slashing their own faces and knees. Male guards eventually broke down the library door and quelled the teens, who were armed with scissors, and according to the Superintendent, had also broken some windows and "seemed pleased to drip blood."¹⁰¹ Worried about the frequency of such incidents, she reminded the Ministry of Reform Institutions of the most recent ones, detailing assaults on the staff, in which matrons were pushed down stairs, stabbed with forks, and thrust into cells.¹⁰²

Unlike boys, girls were rarely arrested in groups but were accused of forming gangs once incarcerated. Historically, court and social workers were reluctant to see girls as members of delinquent peer groups, stressing instead their rebellion against familial control, their social insolation and sexual delinquency.¹⁰³ Girls sometimes self-identified as gang members; at other times the gang moniker was conferred upon them by reform school administrations as a way to make their actions seem even more serious. Gangs could be long standing social organizations or spontaneously created in reaction to particularly egregious circumstances (bad food, new rules or unfair treatment).

While it is difficult to isolate a single cause for the riots, there are a number of factors that undoubtedly led to girls' frustration and violence. In the Quebec case, there are some clues in the changing environment at the reform school during the war. The population at the Maison de Lorette increased dramatically during the war years¹⁰⁴ and there has been some suggestion that during the war girls were brought to court more readily and for more minor infractions than they had been during the Depression.¹⁰⁵ It is also instructive that the girls involved **[End Page 682]** in the 1945 riot were between 16 and 20 years of age, for the juvenile court had only recently gained jurisdiction over girls between 16 and 18. Older adolescents could have perceived reform school as more confined and unjust, particularly if they were experiencing more freedom during the war as mothers worked and fathers served overseas.

Age, institutional factors and contact with other incarcerated women may also have contributed to what appears to be increasing numbers of violent outbreaks in Ontario in the 1950s. The 'older girls' of 17 and 18 were always seen as dangerously experienced and bold by the authorities, and in contrast to the Depression decade when they were expected to be earning their keep by sixteen, they may have been kept longer in a training school which

everyone admitted was now overcrowded. Moreover, the girls cannot have been completely unaware of riots at the Mercer Reformatory for Women—one of which involved ninety women and made front page news in 1948. ¹⁰⁶

It is important to note that girls were sometimes very strategic. They executed riots within the school over specific grievances or to aggrandize their own power within the school population. A gang called the “Big Five,” complained one staff member, were purposely planning trouble, trying to fulfil their roles as “bad girls” in the school. ¹⁰⁷ Their rebellions could also be strategies to gain transfer to another institution perceived to be less restrictive. Some girls “expressed satisfaction” at being transferred to an adult facility after their participation in the violent episode at Maison de Lorette. The “ringleaders” of the 1945 Maison de Lorette riot pleaded not to be sent back but transferred to the Women’s Prison; indeed, the nuns told the juvenile court judge that the girls understood that in the Prison des femmes their sentences would be lighter and the routine easier. According to the Mother superior, the multiple riots of the 1940s shared the same modus operandi: transfer out of the reform school. ¹⁰⁸ In this example girls were explicitly protesting their designation as delinquent—indeed their adolescence—preferring to be treated as adults in the women’s prison.

Beyond the collective violence of riots, there were also singular incidents of violence. In most cases of violence, girls combined destruction of property with aggression against humans; they simply vented their rage on what and whoever was closest to them. Their strength often astounded the staff; in the intake “cells” where new girls were ‘oriented,’ they “ripped radiators out of the walls with their bare hands, smashed marble partitions, and set fire to mattresses.” ¹⁰⁹ While girls picked fights with other inmates they often saved their fury for the matrons and nuns who oversaw them. In one case, the Children’s Bureau of Montreal took Emma from her father’s house because of neglect and abuse and placed her with a foster family. When she deserted this family, the organization caught up with her and had her incarcerated. She threatened the probation officer with physical violence, and at meals she lashed out, “I don’t want any of your dirty food!” As a result she was placed in isolation where her anger exploded into a “violent temper tantrum” in which she attempted to kick down the door and smash the windows. ¹¹⁰

It would be simplistic to see all girls who rejected reform school rules as heroines in the struggle against oppression. Many girls’ attempts to rebel focussed violence on themselves. Suicide remained one means of rebellion, as girls tried to call attention to their misery, by attempting to strangle themselves with pyjamas, **[End Page 683]** or drink poisonous substances. On the second morning of her term of incarceration one Cottage School girl was found with her bed clothes in tatters and a string tied around her neck. She refused to speak for two days. ¹¹¹ Another desperate OTSG girl claimed to have consumed some Drano, but was not seriously injured; her letters home about this, however, did bring her to the attention of a well-to-do benefactor (for whom her mother cleaned house) who then lobbied for her release by drawing on her social and political connections to government officials. ¹¹² While such lobbying was unusual, it was common for penal workers to look at girls’ suicide attempts rather sceptically, but in the very few cases they thought serious, they tried to transfer the girls to mental institutions, fearing they could not oversee them

properly. Girls' suicide attempts, did, therefore, sometimes win them reprieve from the school, though the alternative was not always better.

Far more common was the practice of self mutilation, especially 'carving' into one's skin. ¹¹³ Girls commonly carved the names of their love lights, friends, or boyfriends; one even carved the name of the OTSG Superintendent, seeking, it was claimed, her attention. Carving was part of the culture of the institution, marking initiation into the group, and probably linked to the creation of 'blood sister' groups—much like the one depicted in *Foxfire*. ¹¹⁴ The authorities, however, interpreted carving as pathological, a sign of girls' masochism. But carving may have been simply a vent for anger and frustration, a self-punishing, but also visible means of rebelling against their imprisonment and renouncing the code of femininity which the school attempted to encourage. If girls' anger was supposedly turned inward, it was also turned outward, exhibited upon their bodies. The fact that psychologists trying to stop it in the 1960s found the most success with peer counselling and dissuasion indicates that it was adopted in opposition to adults, parents and school workers, and could not be curbed with rules set by them. ¹¹⁵

While both penal and medical workers began to see carving as somewhat commonplace, they were far less likely to see violence directed towards others as normal. When one girl repeatedly articulated her desire to kill someone, these "homicidal tendencies" were dismissed as unlikely by the investigating psychiatrist. ¹¹⁶ Contemporary psychiatric and social work journals emphasized girls' 'sado-masochistic' tendencies: one study for example, argued delinquent girls were notable for their "yearn[ing] for punishment," a consequence of their distorted upbringing. ¹¹⁷ Although medical experts occasionally argued girl delinquents were as "aggressive as boys," girls were thought to express their aggression in more "subtle" ¹¹⁸ ways, a theory not dissimilar to Otto Pollack's theories about hidden and "devious" female crime. ¹¹⁹

A major aim of reform schools was to teach girls to control their anger, although penal workers mused that venting one's anger was actually therapeutic. One Superintendent observed that "girls who were troublemakers sometimes make the best adjustments to normal life...they work out their frustrations at school by kicking things, breaking furniture, going on hunger strikes, writing obscenities on the wall, cursing staff." ¹²⁰ A close reading of the files of girls characterized as violent, including some considered so dangerous they had to be removed to a women's reformatory cell, ¹²¹ might shed some light on such violence. Though there was no one predictable pattern of violence—the fact **[End Page 684]** of individual personality, experience and mental health is granted—there were underlying, repeated motifs and occurrences. For one thing, reform schools in general included many girls for whom familial or community violence had been part of their daily life, and a significant minority were victims of physical and sexual abuse. Parents often utilized physical discipline in the home, and a few girls had themselves resorted to violence in the home, in self defence, or acting out towards siblings and mothers. One teen who had witnessed her parents' physical battles and been the focus of extreme physical punishment, tried to "stab her mother in the throat," even after her release from training school. ¹²²

By the time these girls reached adolescence the majority had experienced diverse family settings due to death of a parent, subsequent remarriage and blended families, as well as

considerable transiency. While it is important not to pathologize single-parent households or blended families as psychologists have traditionally done, girls' conflicts with new family members, they claimed, could result in physical and sexual abuse. As well, a significant minority of inmates had been institutionalized or were foster children, some of whom had encountered violence or emotional abuse from surrogate parents. Aboriginal girls—though few in number—had often endured severe corporal punishment in residential schools: one Native girl, for instance, told of being “strapped for putting curlers in her hair, then locked in a sewing room” when she was sent to “Indian School.” ¹²³

The economic marginality of girls' families was sometimes linked to their experience of violence; their impoverished mothers, for instance, might remain with violent partners, unable to find any aid from the courts. Girls' resentments, though often portrayed as excessive, almost unreasonable, were clearly grounded in material, social and emotional alienation. Although the level of poverty varied considerably over this time period, with misery far higher in the Depression, the existence of an ‘underclass’ of poor families remained a constant over three decades. In the more affluent 1940s, one girl, taken from the streets of a small Ontario city where she lived with her destitute mother, told of past, severe “ill treatment” by her father, but her “fantastic” stories were disbelieved. One of her awl plans involved attempts to “assault and tie up a matron.” “She feels her father let her down and the only way to get anything is to take it by force,” was the psychiatrist's assessment; there may have been more logic to her reasoning, than staff were willing to concede. ¹²⁴

Girls also reacted violently to crisis points, such as their initial incarceration, or especially their re-incarceration. In one instance, a girl who had a baby when under the school's care, refused to allow his adoption, and once out on placement, she continued to visit her fostered-out child. She was re-incarcerated, however, after being arrested with some men who were drunk, and immediately threw the washstand through the window and then slashed her wrists. ¹²⁵ Similarly, an incest victim who had given birth to her father's child, went awl to her mother's home in the North, but was caught and sent back. After “causing a disturbance [with police] on the train,” she was placed in detention, and in the process, assaulted the assistant superintendent and broke thirteen panes of glass. ¹²⁶ The definition of a crisis, of course, had much to do with the girl's state of mind, and it is possible that they ‘snapped’ at times incomprehensible to the staff and medical experts.

It is likely that some violence was simply a cumulative product of one's history. **[End Page 685]** One OTSG riot of girls sent to the (adult) Mercer Reformatory for Females in nearby Toronto, for instance, was devised and led by “Kate” who the authorities claimed “planned to murder Mrs A. the sewing instructor” with the help of four others. One of the five pretended to have a problem with her machine and when Mrs A. bent over, they drew her dress over her head, tried to “strangle her, then stabbed her with scissors. They damaged machines, broke windows and kicked holes in the wall” and subsequently, slashed themselves. ¹²⁷ Kate was not originally committed, however, for violent crimes: she was sent to OTSG after repeatedly running away from home and living with a boy when she was sixteen. Her training school reports conceded that she had been excessively physically disciplined at home, and that her mother was mentally ill, evidenced in part by the wildly paranoid accusations, threats and denunciations in her letters to Kate. Her parents

continually demanded her release from reform school, though their motives were largely material: they clearly wanted her wages.

Kate found the training school alienating, and her claims that her housemother disliked her were dismissed as irrational, possibly adding to her sense of injustice. But she 'graduated' and was sent out on placement, only to go awl after she lost her job for bad behaviour, and she soon found herself re-incarcerated. Like many older girls, she became more resistant to the rules, but why she suddenly decided to initiate a plan to kill her sewing instructor may not be explained by what happened that day, or even that week; it may be explained by what happened to her since she was born.

As in this riot led by Kate, violence against others was often coupled with, or followed by, self-directed violence, especially slashing. Medical and social work experts reared on a diet of Freudian thought naturally interpreted this as 'masochism,' but perhaps this designation implied too little reflective thought or agency on the girls' part. It is quite possible that these girls did come to feel remorse for their violence against others, which is why slashing so often followed it. Others may have hoped self mutilation would secure them more sympathetic attention afterwards. And some clearly did explain it as a desperate act, born of one's desire to be free of their entrapment in the institution.

Finally, the school regime itself could encourage violent behaviour. The use of strapping and solitary confinement prompted more disobedience and fury in some girls. Although the Ontario Training School Advisory Board generally denied or downplayed the use of physical punishment, strapping was used, well into the 1940s; similarly in Quebec, corporal punishment was not permissible, however, the state's arms' length relationship to its institutions left wide discretion to their administrators and workers. And even though the medical experts working for the Ontario schools said the detention unit should be used to help inculcate discipline (separate and cool down difficult girls who were hurting others), the staff and girls knew it was really a means of punishment. Not only this, but a scandal in the 1940s unearthed charges by an investigative report that the Superintendent was "flogging girls for minor offenses and locking them in cupboards." ¹²⁸ Though the training school board denied the charges, the superintendent in question was removed.

The impact of the humiliation and ridicule girls faced upon entering reform schools should not be underestimated as a source of their anger and violence. In **[End Page 686]** Quebec, girls who took part in the violent episodes in the 1940s claimed the nuns committed egregious acts against them. Punishment by ridicule included being forced to wear paper tongues for having spoken when told not to, and having half their hair cut above one ear. In the riot of October 1945, girls at the Maison de Lorette claimed they were protesting the use of solitary confinement, strait jackets, and general poor treatment. ¹²⁹ This they shared with girls incarcerated at other reform schools where riots were staged in reaction to poor conditions. ¹³⁰

For Aboriginal girls, the racism that shaped their initial incarceration and their treatment in the school could stimulate an escalating cycle of violence towards themselves and others. As First Nations author Patricia Monture argues, there is a violence done to the spirit through persistent denigration and alienation that are also extremely destructive. ¹³¹ Not all Native girls reacted violently to incarceration, but their added alienation, shaped by cultural and

language differences, could lead to tragic consequences. One eleven year old, Jane, was sent to the OTSG from the North due to her own and her mother's 'sexual immorality' and poverty. Jane tried to escape from OTSG, and induce others to run with her: when she was not "awful, she was in detention," complained the superintendent.¹³² She soon began to react violently to the staff, and slashed herself. The superintendent wanted her certified as mentally ill and when the psychiatrist refused, she called for the use of tranquillizing drugs, including by intramuscular injection. For a number of 'difficult' cases in the 1950s, drugs became a new administrative panacea. Jane's desperation led to a cycle of escapes, violence, and medication, yet when she was sent home once, she threatened her sister with a knife, leading to reincarceration. When she was finally paroled home after a stint in the section of the Mercer reformatory for 'dangerous' OTSG wards, she became once again embroiled in family conflicts, tried to commit suicide, and spent time in jail. When she turned seventeen, her mother would only say that Jane had run away to Winnipeg.

The Training School Superintendent claimed Jane was a "murderess in the making, consumed by violence."¹³³ If she was the latter, it was clearly encouraged by her incarceration, stimulated by repeated detentions, perhaps by drug treatment as well. However unhappy her own family life, however impoverished and troubled, it was clear that institutionalization did not help, and instead sent her into escalating spirals of self destruction and violence. Her youth, and the extremes of her case were atypical, but her case is nonetheless a dramatic example of the potentially fatal effects of incarceration on troubled adolescents, especially those marginalized by racism.

Conclusion

Although open and repeated rebellion was not the dominant practice in reform and training schools of Ontario and Quebec, some girls did embrace individual and collective resistance as a means of protecting their autonomy, coping with alien circumstances, or even protesting their loss of freedom. From the outset, girls confronted by the Canadian juvenile justice system resisted their designation as delinquent. In court, girls resorted to verbal protests of evidence held against them, and when subsequently incarcerated they resorted **[End Page 687]** to passive resistance, or created alternative cultures within the institution. Not infrequently, girls ran away; some also formed gangs, rioted, and resorted to violence.

In both provinces, girls employed similar methods of resistance to regimes which had comparable goals of rehabilitation stressing 'honest' working-class labour, sexual purity and passive femininity. Nonetheless, some differences in the institutional culture existed between the Maison de Lorette and the OTSG. In Quebec, the nuns who ran the reform school did not embrace the modern training school ethic of rehabilitation but rather focused on redeeming the girls through religious retraining and hard work. Girls' lashing out or quiet resistance often related to the religious aspect of the reform school's regime. Quebec's reluctance to intrude in the realm of reform schools and the insularity of religious orders from public scrutiny might have meant harsher experiences for inmates which only reached the public in extreme cases such as the riots of the 1940s. This perhaps explains why the adolescent québécoises at the Maison Lorette took desperate measures in the hopes of a transfer to the women's jail. In Ontario, where public accountability was more evident, girls' protests were often quite visible, which in turn might have produced less severe regimes.

At first glance, girls' retorts, escapes and rebellions may appear to have been spontaneous, diffuse, uncoordinated, simply reflex reactions to the exertion of power. At the time, girls' resistance, especially physical violence, was portrayed as 'masochistic' or 'irrational' by the authorities. Yet girls' protests and anger were clearly directed towards their stigmatization as 'bad' girls, the subservient work roles they were expected to cheerfully embrace, and the schools' attempts to reshape their sexuality and femininity into the dominant norms of passivity and purity. Some were also still angry at families which had aided their incarceration, or denied them material or emotional sustenance. Violent actions were often linked to specific aggressive strategies of escape, or were responses to crisis situations. Girls' early immersion in a culture of violence, their deep feelings of alienation and abandonment, and last, but not least, the simple fact of their adolescent stage of life ¹³⁴ all combined to create explosions of violence or to the cumulative effect of alienation and abuse.

In this disciplinary regime, power was not dispersed: it was highly centralized, and quite consciously exerted downward by a hierarchy of authorities bent on creating a new female subjectivity in these young women. Girls' unhappiness and resistance to this project were certainly often muted, individual and sporadic, yet they could also assume forms which were coordinated, conscious, fuelled by a sense of injustice (however vague) and with a clear end in mind: retaliation, protest, or freedom from surveillance and incarceration. While it would be wrong to see girls' resistance as some proto feminist statement, with a political purpose, it is also wrong to see it as simply undirected, with no purpose at all.

Power and resistance thus always operated in reciprocal reaction to each other, but there was no equilibrium here: girls' resistance rarely succeeded in securing either the attention, freedom or the justice in life they craved. Most girls eventually found that exterior accommodation, not rebellion, was a quicker path to freedom. Many, for example, quickly married, securing release from surveillance as the schools breathed a sigh of relief at this sign of sexual containment. Whether this 'solution' brought happiness, and whether reform school girls actually **[End Page 688]** internalized the school's moral lessons, however, is debatable. Even if the majority did not become adult offenders, they may have become part of an adult world that functioned in contradiction to dominant social norms.

In contrast to current, popular attempts to claim women are 'just like men' in their use of, and subjection to violence, or to previous (also simplistic) views of penal workers that female violence was pathological and abnormal, we need to analyse girls' aggressive attempts to resist within the context of their previous lives, their criminalization, and their experience of these particular carceral regimes. The exact personal brew that could explode into sustained and unrequited rebellion was to some extent individual and unique, but we perhaps need to read each instance in which a girl is designated 'out of control' and ask ourselves: would we become angry and violent under these conditions? Our answer is often, yes.

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Acknowledgment

This paper is part of two larger, separate studies of girls' and women's experiences of the juvenile and criminal justice systems in Ontario and Quebec respectively. These studies examine the wider ideological construction of juvenile delinquency, the relationship of delinquency to family, class and ethnic identity, the treatment of delinquents by the court system, and girls' incarceration.

Footnotes

1. Tadeusz Grygier, "Social Adjustment, Personality and Behaviour in Training Schools in Ontario," research report prepared by University of Toronto Professor and Director of Research, Dept. of Reform Institutions, 1965, 60. For earlier views, see Margaret Reeves, *Training Schools for Girls* (New York, 1929); Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Five Hundred Delinquent Girls* (New York, 1934); Paul Tappan, *Delinquent Girls in Court* (New York, 1947). For a popular view from a Canadian female Magistrate see Margaret Patterson, "Bad Girl," *Chatelaine* (October 1935): 61.

2. The scholarly literature on delinquent girls reflects this assertion. See Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Policing and Protecting Female Sexuality in the United States, 1880–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1995) and Ruth Alexander, *The Girl Problem: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900–1930* (Ithaca, 1995). The official Canadian statistics from mid-century suggest that very few girls were brought to court for crimes against the person. During the war years the number of girls coming before the courts grew dramatically, but, for instance, in 1944 only two girls in Quebec and seven in Ontario were charged with common or aggravated assault. In the proceeding decades this tendency did not change: in all of Canada only seventeen girls were charged with common assault in 1955 (of 1000 girls who came before the courts); in 1960, thirty-two of 1872 girls were charged with crimes against the person. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Juvenile Delinquents* (1944, 1955, 1960).

3. National Archives of Canada [NA], Girls' Cottage School, MG 28, I 404, Vol. 1, File 20, Professor J.W. Bridges, "A Study of Delinquent Girls," 1926.

4. Marge Reitsma-Street, "Girls Learn to Care; Girls Policed to Care," in Carol Baines, et al, eds., *Women Caring: Feminist Perspectives on Social Welfare* (Toronto, 1991), 128.

5. Many excellent historical studies dealing with prisons have had difficulty locating prisoners' resistance and responses. See, for example, Estelle Freedman, *Their Sisters Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830–1930* (Ann Arbor, 1981) and Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women in State Prisons, 1800–1935* (Boston, 1990); Barbara Brenzel, *Daughters of the State: A Social Portrait of the First Reform School for Girls in North America, 1830–1930* (Cambridge, 1983). One exception is Ruth Alexander's study, *The Girl Problem*, chap.3, and girls' initial response to the juvenile court is discussed in Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*. For a discussion of 19th century accommodation and resistance see Kerry Wilmhurst, "Control and Resistance: Reformatory Girls in Late Nineteenth Century South Australia," *Journal of Social History* 18 (Winter, 1984): 273–287; for the discussion of early twentieth regulation in a reform school see Susan Cahn, "Spirited Youth or Fiends Incarnate: The Samarcand Arson Case and Female Adolescence in the American South," *Journal of Women's History* 9:4 (Winter 1998): 152–80. Contemporary discussions of resistance are more common. See, for example, Karlene Faith, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement and Resistance* (Vancouver, 1993) or Marge Reitsma-Street, "Girls Learn to Care," 106–37.

6. Linda Alcoff, "Feminist Politics and Foucault: The Limits to Collaboration," in Arleen Dallery, et al., eds. *Crises in Continental Philosophy* (New York, 1990), 74.

7. Canadian adolescents who committed infractions of federal, provincial, or municipal laws had been sent to youth-specific facilities such as the industrial or reform schools since the mid nineteenth century. Although the nomenclature changed over the twentieth century with the introduction of training schools, the institutions were basically the same. We usually refer to them as 'reform schools' in this paper.

8. Under Ontario legislation, a child could originally be sent to Training School under recommendation of the Minister responsible, thus allowing local Children's Aid Societies, for instance, to bypass the courts. This was in keeping with the rationale that Training Schools might be used for the severely neglected as well as incorrigible child. In Quebec incarcerating children was covered by the 1869 Act respecting Reform and Industrial Schools.

On the federal legislation see Jean Trépanier, "Origins of the Juvenile Delinquents Act of 1908," in Russell Smandych, Gordon Dodds, and Alvin Esau, eds., *Dimensions of Childhood: Essays on the History of Children and Youth in Canada* (Winnipeg, 1991); and Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus* (Toronto, 1976).

9. The Training School accompanied a growing emphasis in the family court system on informal justice, and on the 'treatment' rather than 'punishment' of problems linked to the working-class family. See Dorothy Chunn, *From Punishment to Doing Good: Family Courts and Socialized Justice in Ontario, 1880–1940* (Toronto, 1992). The previous Alexandra Industrial School for Girls was inspected and funded largely by the province, but was overseen by a philanthropic board. It was closed in 1936.

10. The reform institutions were either Catholic or "non-Catholic". In the Catholic institutions inmates were overwhelmingly francophone, although a minority of Irish Catholics whose mother-tongue was English were also present. The non-Catholic institutions were English-speaking and mostly Protestant in orientation, although they embraced an interdenominational notion of reform. Jewish girls, who made up a significant minority of inmates, were sent to the Girls' Cottage School.

11. For an analysis of the backgrounds of girls sent to reform and training schools in the early twentieth century see Indian Matters, "Sinners or Sinned Against?: Historical Aspects of Female Juvenile Delinquency in British Columbia," in Barbara Latham and Roberta Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (Victoria, 1984); Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880–1930* (Toronto, 1995) and Tamara Myers, "The Voluntary Delinquent: Parents, Daughters, and the Montreal Juvenile Delinquents' Court in 1918," *Canadian Historical Review* (June 1999): 242–68. For the later period see Joan Sangster, "Girls in Conflict with the Law: The Construction of Female 'Delinquency' in Ontario," *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* (Spring, 1999). On predominant offences see also Dorothy Chunn, "Boys Will be Men, Girls Will be Mothers: The Legal Regulation of Childhood in Toronto and Vancouver," *Sociological Studies of Child Development* 3 (1990): 87–110.

12. The numbers of Aboriginal girls in the OTSG remained small, though the increase in the number sent to the school increased dramatically. Some may have been sent to the one other Ontario Training School, St. Mary's, which was Catholic. There were very few African-Canadian girls in these reform schools in this time period, although small numbers were present in the GCS in the 1950s. Our primary focus, therefore, is with ethnic and religious differences between a predominantly Protestant, Anglo-Celtic Ontario and a predominantly French, Roman Catholic Quebec.

13. Jeffrey Keshen, "Wartime Jitters over Juveniles: Canada's Delinquency Scare and Its Consequences, 1939–1945," in Jeffrey Keshen, ed., *Age of Contention: Readings in Canadian Social History, 1900–1945* (Toronto, 1997): 364–86, at 367.

14. The population in Quebec's reform schools for girls reflect this dramatic rise: the number of girls at the Maison de Lorette reform school on 31 December 1938 was 175; by 1943 this had swelled to 249. 1943 represented a wartime high, with the population fluctuating for the rest of the decade between 100 and 200. A decade later, in 1953, the number was 320. In Ontario, the numbers for the Ontario Training School for Girls were smaller, though they reflect a similar escalation in the 1940s: in 1938, the number of girls admitted was 46; this increased to 91 in 1943 and a decade later it persisted at around 90. Quebec, *Statistical Yearbook, "Statistics of Reform Schools of the Province of Quebec, 1946," 1938–1953*; and Ontario, *Report on Training Schools (1935–59)*.

15. On the impact of public policies on Quebec reform schools see Prue Rains and Eli Teram, *Normal Bad Boys: Public Policies, Institutions, and the Politics of Client Recruitment* (Montreal, 1993).

16. Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto, 1997).

17. Not until the 1960s did the Quebec ministry responsible for "youth protection" construct a provincial system of "cliniques psycho-sociales."

- [18.](#) On the creation of family and juvenile courts see Dorothy Chunn, *From Punishment to Doing Good*.
- [19.](#) Elizabeth Clapp, *Mothers of All Children: Women Reformers and the Rise of the Juvenile Court in the Progressive Era* (Philadelphia, 1998). Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*, Chapter 5.
- [20.](#) Chunn, *From Punishment to Doing Good*, 167.
- [21.](#) For a 1960s study of the Toronto Juvenile Court which emphasized the intimidating nature of the court for children and working-class parents see Bernard Green, "The Determination of Delinquency in the Juvenile Court of Metro Toronto," SJD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1968.
- [22.](#) All names have been changed in accordance with the Young Offenders Act. MJDC, 5 June 1940, #1098, Letter to Juge Laramée, 1 September 1940.
- [23.](#) MJDC, 17 June 1940, #1184, letter to Juge Robillard 10 April 1941.
- [24.](#) Joan Sangster, "'Pardon Tales' from Magistrate's Court: Women, Crime and the Court in Peterborough County, 1920–50," *Canadian Historical Review* 74:2 (June 1993): 161–97.
- [25.](#) AO, OTSG case file 170.
- [26.](#) MJDC, 2 June 1942, #1323; 17 January 1944, #5693.
- [27.](#) AO, OTSG case file 2000.
- [28.](#) AO, OTSG case file, G1455.
- [29.](#) National Archives of Canada, (NA) Canadian Council on Social Development Papers (formerly Canadian Welfare Council now CCSD), MG 28, I 10, vol. 86, file, 'Juvenile Courts,' judgement of Judge Wood in case vs. George Gorlich, 26 Jan. 1938.
- [30.](#) AO, OTSG case file 780.
- [31.](#) Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, Dépt. du Procureur-général, 1920, E17, file 3838.
- [32.](#) AO, OTSG case file 71.
- [33.](#) AO, RG York Family Court Records, transfer 80–531, Box 1594, D file.
- [34.](#) MJDC, 28 January 1942, #237.
- [35.](#) AO, transfer 80–531, York Family Court Records, Box 1513, W file.
- [36.](#) Tamara Myers, "Qui t'a débauchée?: Female Adolescent Sexuality and the Montreal Juvenile Delinquents' Court," in Lori Chambers and Edgar-Andre Montigny, eds., *Family Matters: Papers in Post-Confederation Family History* (Toronto, 1998):377–94 ; on incest in the American context see Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics of Family Violences* (New York, 1988).
- [37.](#) MJDC, 19 June 1928, #2023.
- [38.](#) Parents obliged for a number of reasons. Some never understood the 'indefinite' nature of the sentence to begin with; some needed their daughters' wages or aid; and for some, their daughters' incarceration offended their sense of respectability, as with the parent who pleaded for release on the basis of her "British" citizenship. AO, OTSG case file G 3.

- [39.](#) AO, OTSG, case file G95. Words in single quotes appear to be the girl's own words.
- [40.](#) AO, RG 20-01-26-7 Container J 37, 'Galt' file, Report, March 1955. We do not know exactly how many girls this involved, but very few were sent to the Reformatory (for women). There are problems with relying on such statistics as accurate measures of resistance: superintendents had reason to under-report (to stress their own competence) but also to over-report (to get more resources).
- [41.](#) MJDC, 27 January 1938, #142. Depositions from nuns at the Maison Ste Domitille (industrial school), Asile Ste Darie (Women's Prison) and Maison de Lorette (18 April 1940).
- [42.](#) AO, OTSG case file 165.
- [43.](#) See Tamara Myers "Qui t'a débauchée?" and Joan Sangster, "Incarcerating 'Bad' Girls: The Regulation of Sexuality through the Female Refuges Act in Ontario, 1920-45," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7:2 (1996): 239-75.
- [44.](#) Generally, only girls suspected of mental deficiencies were sent for interrogation by a psychiatrist before being approved for incarceration at the Maison de Lorette. At the non-Catholic Girls' Cottage (Industrial) School, workers from Montreal's Mental Hygiene Institute regularly tested these anglophone girls.
- [45.](#) Girls' Cottage School, *Annual Report*, 1926, 121.
- [46.](#) Michelle Cale, "Girls and the Perception of Sexual Danger in the Victorian Reformatory System," *History* 78:253 (June 1993): 201-217 at 208. Note the similarities in Ruth Alexander's chap.3.
- [47.](#) AO, OTSG case files 225, 245. These are common words used to criticize the girls.
- [48.](#) AO, OTSG case file 2328.
- [49.](#) AO, OTSG case file T80.
- [50.](#) AO, OTSG case file 95.
- [51.](#) NA, GCS, Vol.2, File 15, Superintendent's Monthly Reports, January 1936.
- [52.](#) AO, OTSG case file 95.
- [53.](#) James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985), xvi.
- [54.](#) AO, OTSG case file 2084.
- [55.](#) NA, Girls' Cottage School, MG 28, I 404, Vol. 1, File 26, Case files, 1941-42; MJDC, 27 June 1940, #1196.
- [56.](#) MJDC, 27 January 1938, #142.
- [57.](#) AO, OTSG case file 1495.
- [58.](#) AO, Grandview case file 1840.
- [59.](#) AO, RG 20, Container J 47, 'Galt' file. One study of OTSG in 1957 showed 85 detentions in a four month period, involving 53 girls, with an average of 15 days per person, while at the boys' Training School, there was an average of 2.53 days detention per person.
- [60.](#) AO, OTSG case file 1647.

[61.](#) AO, OTSG case file 1521.

[62.](#) AO, OTSG case file 2272.

[63.](#) Rupert Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality* (Markham, 1992); Kjikep- tin Alex Denny, "Beyond the Marshall Inquiry: An Alternative Mi-kmaq Worldview and Justice System," in Joy Mannette, ed., *Elusive Justice: Beyond the Marshall Inquiry* (Halifax, 1992); Joan Sangster, "Criminalizing the Colonized: Ontario Native Women Confront the Criminal Justice System, 1920–60," *Canadian Historical Review* 80:1 (March 1999): 32–60.

[64.](#) Rose Giallonbardo, *The Social World of Imprisoned Girls* (New York, 1974), 5.

[65.](#) NA, GCS, Vol. 1, File 6.

[66.](#) NA, GCS, Vol., File 2–8, "Quebec. Province of. Correspondence with Provincial Govt, 1942–71." Letter to M. Gilles Lafrance from Margaret Campbell, Executive Director GCS, 5 January 1965.

[67.](#) AO, OTSG case file 1572.

[68.](#) The attitude towards same sex relationships appears to have varied in federal and provincial prisons and training schools, at least after the 1960s. Robin Brownlie argues that reformatories were far more actively proscriptive, perhaps due to the shorter length of sentence. The attempts to redirect girls' affection in the Training School was undoubtedly linked to their age, and the worry that, once contaminated, they might lose their heterosexual way in the world. On the different approaches in Canadian prisons see Robin Brownlie, "Crimes of Passion: Lesbians and Lesbianism in Canadian Prisons, 1960–94," paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association, Ottawa, 1998.

[69.](#) AO, OTSG case file T9.

[70.](#) Robin Brownlie, "Crimes of Passion," and Estelle Freedman, "The Prison Lesbian: Race, Class and the Construction of the Aggressive Female Homosexual, 1915–65," *Feminist Studies* 22/2 (Summer, 1996). For this view in relation to Training Schools see Tadeusz Grygier, "Social Adjustment, Personality and Behaviour in Training Schools in Ontario," 37. In 1942 Dr. Baruch Silverman, director of the Mental Hygiene Institute in Montreal, told the Girls Cottage School Board of Directors that "Homo-sexual activities were sometimes present in groups of adolescents but by and large this was usually an expression of interest in or want of affection." NA, GCS, MG 28, I 404, Vol 3, File 3–15, 1 April 1942.

[71.](#) AO, RG 20, Container 43, Galt file, Memo of 4 July 1956 to A. Virgin, Director of Training Schools.

[72.](#) Ruth Alexander, *The Girl Problem*, 95–6.

[73.](#) In the late 1940s the Quebec government reorganized its administration of facilities relating to child welfare and delinquent youth, creating a new ministry of Bien-être social et de la Jeunesse (Social Welfare and Youth). Reform schools were then renamed "centres d'accueil" (reception centres), though the name change was largely symbolic.

[74.](#) AO, OTSG case file 165.

[75.](#) MJDC, 3 January 1944, #5601, Report to the Juvenile Court from GCS.

[76.](#) AO, OTSG case file 95.

[77.](#) AO, OTSG case file 989.

- [78.](#) AO, RG 20-16-22, Dept. of Reform Institutions, Container J15, 'Galt' file.
- [79.](#) AO, OTSG case file 1010.
- [80.](#) AO, RG 20-16-2-723, Container J 15, 'Galt' file, Isobel MacNeil to Deputy Minister, Hedly Basher, 9 Nov. 1953.
- [81.](#) Ibid.
- [82.](#) AO, RG 20-16-2-723, 'Galt' file, Hedly Basher to Isobel Macneil, 19 Nov., 1953.
- [83.](#) AO, RG 20-16-2 Container J47, 'Galt Inmates,' 1957.
- [84.](#) AO, RG 20-16-2, Container J21, 'Galt Inmates,' 1952–53.
- [85.](#) AO, RG 20 J 47 'Galt' File, Ruth Bentley to A. Virgin, 25 Nov, 1957.
- [86.](#) AO, RG 20, Container 47, Galt file, Bentley to Virgin, 25 Nov. 1957.
- [87.](#) Girls' Cottage School, Brief Presented to the Prime Minister of the Province of Quebec (Duplessis), January 1949, 5.
- [88.](#) *Montreal Gazette* 6 June 1946. NA, GCS, Vol. 1, File 10, "Report of the Board of Directors, 1946."
- [89.](#) Emily M. Hickey, "How it Operates: Girls' Cottage School," *Montreal Gazette*, 17 May 1958.
- [90.](#) Ibid.
- [91.](#) When sentencing girls, judges sometimes tried to sweeten the bitter pill by telling them they were not going to jail. In the 1930s, one Judge told a girl she would be getting the "advantages of boarding school." AO, OTSG case file 6. The claim it was a school misled some girls (and parents) into thinking they could leave whenever they wanted.
- [92.](#) Ontario, *Report on Training Schools* (1935–59). These reports show that awls rose to an all time high in the 1940s, with as many as 35 per year, when the school housed about 100 girls. The same statistics show awls falling in the 1950s to a few a year. However, the case and administration files do not support this. Perhaps the official report redefined 'awl' in the 1950s to mean complete escape. For example in the year that the Superintendent noted '10 awls so far this year,' official statistics showed only three.
- [93.](#) AO, RG 20-16-2-56, 'Galt, 1952–53.'
- [94.](#) Revised Statutes of the Province of Quebec, 1925, Ch. 160, Section 41.
- [95.](#) At times when "group disapproval" of running increases, notes the Superintendent, the practice lessens considerably. AO, RG 20, 16 2 Container J 9 Galt file.
- [96.](#) A whole paper could be written on resistance during the period of placement, as parole gave the girls partial freedom to do as they pleased. However, we have used only a few examples, concentrating instead on the experience inside the institution.
- [97.](#) AO, OTSG case file 525.
- [98.](#) MJDC, 5 June 1940, #1098.

[99.](#) MJDC, 3 January 1944, #480.

[100.](#) *La Presse* (Montreal), 8 octobre 1945, 3; and 9 octobre 1945, 3.

[101.](#) Archives of Ontario (AO), RG 20 (Dept. of Reform Institutions), Container 45, 'Mercer Reformatory' file, Superintendent Jean Burrows to Deputy Minister, 20 Feb. 1957.

[102.](#) AO, RG 20, Container 47, Burrows to Deputy Minister, 2 July, 1958.

[103.](#) Anne Campbell, "On the Invisibility of the Female Delinquent Peer Group," *Women and Criminal Justice* 2:1 (1990): 41–62. On the tendency of earlier courts to stereotype girl gang members as 'viragoes or molls' see Andrew Davies, "'These Viragoes are no less cruel than the lads': Young Women, Gangs and Violence in Late Victorian Manchester and Salford," *British Journal of Criminology* 39:1 (1999): 72–89.

[104.](#) In the last prewar year, 1938 the number of girls present on 31 December was 175; from 1930 to 1944 the number remained above 200. Quebec, *Statistical Yearbook, 1938–1944*.

[105.](#) Keshen, 367.

[106.](#) *Globe and Mail*, 26 June 1948. In 1949, Ontario legislation was altered to make the upper limit of juvenile incarceration 18 rather than 21. However, girls could be transferred to a reformatory at that point. There is some evidence from the administrative records that temporarily placing difficult OTS girls in the women's reformatory (even if they were supposedly segregated) increased their contact with older women from both the Mercer and the local Don Jail.

[107.](#) AO, OTSG case file G820.

[108.](#) *La Presse* (Montréal), 9 October 1945, 3.

[109.](#) June Callwood, "The Most Heartbreaking Job in Canada." At the Girls' Cottage School, one girl broke locks and doors and tried to set fire to the institution. NA, GSC, Vol. 1, File 17, "Superintendent's Reports," October 1935.

[110.](#) MJDC, 24 January 1934, #111.

[111.](#) NA, GCS, MG 28, I 404, Vol 2, file 15, Superintendent's Monthly Reports, November 1928.

[112.](#) AO, OTSG case file 775. Parents also occasionally tried to use political pressure to get daughters released. If they were well connected, astute and well educated, they might succeed, though only rarely.

[113.](#) Various forms of self mutilation have been described in the history of women's prisons. See Russell P. Dobash, R. Emerson Dobash and Sue Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women* (Oxford, 1986), 83.

[114.](#) Joyce Carol Oates, *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang* (New York, 1993).

[115.](#) Cambridge City Archives, Clipping Files, Grandview A988.1007.198, John O'Keefe, "Last Chance School for Girls," *Canadian Weekly* circa 1967.

[116.](#) AO, OTSG case file 2179.

[117.](#) Lydia Jackson, "A Study of Sado-Masochistic Attitudes in a Group of Delinquent Girls by Means of a Specially Designed Projection Test," *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 22 (1949): 53. For the emphasis on girls' sexual delinquency, including their unconscious incest fantasies see Otto Pollack and A. Friedman, eds., *Family Dynamics and Female Sexual Delinquency* (Palo Alto, California, 1969).

[118.](#) S. Harvard Kaufman, "Aggression in the Girl Delinquent," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 15/1 (Jan. 1945): 167–71.

[119.](#) Shelley Gavigan, "Women's Crime: New Perspectives and Old Theories," in Ellen Adelberg and C. Currie, eds., *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law* (Vancouver, 1987) 47–66. Similar theories were in this period also considered by reformers. J.A. Edmison, "The Problem of the Criminal Female," *Saturday Night* 75, June, 1960. It is possible that because violence was seen as abnormal, its manifestations were also exaggerated in the descriptions of these girls. Today, writers like Patricia Pearson depict female violence as evidence of gender role conflation, growing youth crime, or even proof that feminist criminology has fallaciously claimed women as "helpless" victims, ignoring the "preferential treatment" they receive in the criminal justice system. Yet, feminist analyses have not simply "explained [women's violence] away," as she claims, but rather tried to situate it within familial and social relations. Patricia Pearson, *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence* (New York, 1997), 25, 56, 61.

[120.](#) Isobel Macneil quoted in Callwood.

[121.](#) Girls from Training Schools could be transferred to Reformatories under section 27 of the federal Prisons and Reformatories Act. In Ontario, a 1949 Order in Council set up a Girls Training School within the bounds of the provincial reformatory. This segregated area become one strategy for dealing with troublesome girls until Hood House was constructed. Girls were sent there for repeated awls, sometimes if they were considered sexually promiscuous (or 'predatory') or if they were violent.

[122.](#) AO, OTSG case file 1167.

[123.](#) AO, OTSG case file 525.

[124.](#) AO, OTSG case file 934.

[125.](#) AO, OTSG case file T3.

[126.](#) AO, OTSG case file T5.

[127.](#) AO, OTSG case file T75. In fact though, the sewing instructor was out of hospital far sooner than one of the girls, who followed their attack by slashing her arms with glass.

[128.](#) Callwood, "The Most Heartbreaking Job in Canada," 12–13.

[129.](#) *Montreal Gazette*, 9 October 1945.

[130.](#) Peter Quinn, "'We ask for bread and are given stone': The Girls Industrial School, Parramatta, 1941–1961," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 75, 2 (1989): 158–172.

[131.](#) Patricia Monture-Okanee, "The Violence We Women Do: A First Nations View," in Constance Backhouse and David Flaherty, eds., *Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States* (Toronto, 1992), 193–204.

[132.](#) AO, OTSG case file 1572.

[133.](#) Ibid.

[134.](#) As one investigation astutely recognized, "revolt, the first and commonest complaint by staff [of a reform school] against the girls, is probably the most signal characteristic of adolescence." Margaret Gildea, "Psychiatric Problems in Training Schools for Delinquent Girls," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (Jan. 1944): 132.

