

Women's Leisure and Auto/Biography: Empowerment and Resistance in the Garden

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This exploratory paper addresses prevailing conceptualisations of women's agency in leisure. It focuses on the reproduction/resistance framework characteristic of much feminist work. Realising the role of leisure in reproducing oppressive gender relations and the various ways that leisure can also resist them is vital to the continual politicisation of leisure, however we explore whether this framework can always adequately realise the complexities of women's lived relations to engendered power. We specifically focus on the conceptual relationship between empowerment and resistance. Using the illustration of one woman's auto/biography lodged with the Mass Observation Archive, we question whether women's empowerment is derived from a contextual repositioning to gendered norms and an agency which neither resists nor straightforwardly reproduces gender relations.

KEYWORDS: *Women's leisure, gardens, auto/biography, empowerment, resistance.*

Introduction

Leisure as "reproduction" and "resistance" are consistent themes within feminist leisure studies (Currie, 2004; Deem, 1986; Shaw, 2001; Wimbush & Talbot, 1988), with the suggestion that women's empowerment is closely related to their resistance of oppressive gender relations (Brace-Govan, 2004; Shaw, 2001). This work creates much needed theoretical space in the continual politicisation of leisure by arguing that the separation of leisure from work may be impossible for some women and that time for leisure has to be continually fought for and (re)negotiated. Even so, as Wearing (1990, 1998) and others, drawing on Foucauldian-influenced poststructuralism, have argued, once "my space" and "my time" is carved out, leisure can become a source of empowered, self-determined identities with which women can resist and undermine constructions of traditional and normative femininity (Currie, 2004; Green, 1998; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). We approach women's leisure and the possibility of their empowered agency through our attempt

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to interpret one woman's auto/biography lodged at the Mass Observation Archives, (MOA) held at the University of Sussex, UK. Our use of this specific auto/biography (we have named it Joy's story) firmly locates our explorations in the site of the domestic garden. While gardens are still relatively neglected fields of leisure study, there is increasing awareness that gardens are political sites, created and maintained by gendered relations in the home (Bhatti, 2006; Bhatti & Church, 2001). Our original intention was to draw out the relations between the activities of gardening and those of home-making, yet our difficulty in interpreting Joy's agency (as expressed in her own story) as either the "reproduction" or "resistance" of gender relations has led us on a different but necessary tack. What we offer here is an illustration of our suggestion that "at-home" leisure and women's agency therein may have a more complex and negotiated nature than can be realised by reproduction/resistance frameworks. In this sense, we are offering Joy's story as a telling case (Sheridan, Street, & Bloome, 2000) to suggest that Joy's story can be read as her creative re-positioning to gendered norms. Here we draw upon Davies and Harré's (1990) concept of positioning, which embraces the psychosocial processes of identity and agency, to suggest that both necessarily involve negotiations and interactions with others within shifting power relations of social contexts and rhythms of the life course. This is useful in revealing the contextual, intersubjective and affective dimensions of agency that can be sometime neglected when agency is valued in terms of autonomy and independence (Wray, 2004).

This paper is in three sections: the first illustrates how recent accounts in feminist leisure studies assume a conceptual affinity between empowerment and resistance. By drawing on Wray's (2004) recent critique of empowerment we question whether there is conceptual merit in teasing out empowerment from resistance as means to approach the temporal and contextual nuances of gender relations. In the second section we illustrate our arguments through a life story drawn from the Mass Observation Archive. One woman's life story is presented through an auto/biographical narrative. It tells of the role of her garden and the (re)construction of her identity throughout her life course to the time of writing. The final section draws on positioning models of identity to argue that empowerment may stem from an active re-positioning to contextualised gender-norms that escapes any easy categorisation as resisting or reproducing gender relations.

Resistance and Empowerment in Feminist Leisure Research

Feminist analysis of leisure has successfully demonstrated that leisure spaces and experiences are sites where unequal and uneven gender relations are reproduced, maintained and resisted (Aitchinson, 2000; Shaw, 2001). These insights have focused critical attention on women's agency with particular emphasis on the ways women negotiate gendered constraints in order to access their leisure (Deem, 1986; Little, 2002). The emergence of Foucauldian-influenced poststructuralism, with its emphasis on meaning and

the micro-politics of everyday life, has further enabled feminist work to explore women's agency within leisure sites and experiences (Currie, 2004; Green, 1998; Raisborough, 2006; Tye & Powers, 1998). This has allowed research to focus on the ways women can harness the discursive possibilities within leisure to develop self-determined femininities with which to trouble or subvert normative gender relations (Currie, 2004; Wearing, 1998). For example, Brace-Govan's (2004) research into weight lifting suggests that women can construct "disciplined, different and empowered" identities based on their achievement of weight lifting goals, self-expression and the rewards of commitment (p. 503). Brace-Govan concludes that women's weight-lifting identities challenge ideals of feminine physicality and beauty and as such, offer the potential for the subversion of gender norms and relations. The emphasis of much gender analysis is therefore upon the opportunities within leisure for resistance through women's agency. Yet, as Shaw (2001) argues, the term resistance lacks some conceptual clarity. To provide this, Shaw outlines the features of resistance occurring across structural and cultural based theoretical frameworks. There are two aspects emerging from our reading of Shaw (2001) that we quickly outline here: the relationship of resistance to the reproduction of oppressive gender relations; and the conceptual alignment of empowerment with resistance.

Shaw's (2001) analysis of the ways "resistance" has materialised within gender analysis of leisure suggests that its prevailing conceptualisation is as a contiguous and continuous process that counters the reproduction of oppressive power relations. Structural frameworks conceptualise resistance as challenges to hegemonic ideologies into which we are interpellated and which aid the reproduction of institutionalised inequality. Poststructuralist frameworks attach more importance to resistance as personal, individual exercises of power as a means to deflect or subvert the numerous ways that normative discursive regimes are reproduced and maintained. While there are theoretical differences in the ways in which power is conceptualised across the different frameworks, it is clear that resistance is primarily read as the "flip side" (p. 188) or as a counter to power relations that aim to maintain, reproduce or repackage oppressive gender relations. Shaw leads us to the conclusion that critical attention on women's agency in leisure is framed by a politically motivated emphasis on resistance, and that resistance in turn, is largely conceptualised as in an ongoing antagonistic relationship to the reproduction of normative gender relations.

A central feature of this framing of women's agency is the close association of empowerment with resistance. This is evident across the literature with women's empowerment being related to, amongst other things, self-expression, self-esteem and self-determination (Freysinger & Flannery, 1992); increased physicality (Brace-Govan, 2004); decision-making processes (Harrington, Dawson, & Bolla, 1992); the acquisition and mastery of specific skills (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998); the organisation of 'own' time for leisure (Currie, 2004; Gillespie, Leffler, & Lerner, 2002); and the pleasure of defying gendered expectations about appropriate leisure pursuits (Auster, 2001).

Shaw (2001) states that empowerment is an integral aspect of resistance, arguing that it is both a positive outcome of resistance (women are empowered through their agency) and part of the process of resisting (women are empowered through the acquisition of skills, knowledge and vision that enables them to resist). While the terms "resistance" and "empowerment" are not interchangeable, we feel that they tend to form a conceptual "couplet" of political affinity: that is to say that in much of the literature resistance is also accompanied by empowerment. This affinity is illustrated by Wheaton and Tomlinson's (1998) study of women windsurfers. Defining empowerment as "freedom, confidence, independence and a sense of self procured through the (leisure) activity" (p. 263), Wheaton and Tomlinson argue that these subjective experiences are vital to the creation and negotiation of new, potentially subversive, femininities created within the leisure world of windsurfing. Similarly, Currie (2004) details how mothers of young children find participation in gym classes empowering, both through the negotiations needed to allow women the time to access that space (negotiations which unsettle normative expectations of a "good" mother), and through the physical and mental resources women can access through their participation (such as stress relief and general feelings of well-being). Furthermore, Shaw claims that empowerment is a central feature of resistance, stressing that empowerment is helpful in distinguishing "resistance" from other expressions of agency. She states that acts may be those of resistance "if they function to empower individuals in disadvantaged situations" (Shaw, 2001, p. 197). What emerges from our discussion so far is that women's agency is mainly approached in terms of models that conceptualise power as operating to reproduce or resist gender relations and secondly, that resistance is closely associated with women's empowerment.

Resistance and Empowerment in the Garden

These aspects of women's agency are similarly but slowly recognised in the spaces of gardens and in the activities associated with gardening (Bhatti & Church, 2000; Parry, Glover, & Shinew, 2005). Bhatti & Church (2000) claim that the garden should not be regarded simply as either a masculine or feminine place, but rather as "places shaped by the continual restructuring of gender relations" (p. 192). It is upon the continuous plays of engendered power that Parry et al (2005) recent exploration of community gardens focus. Drawing on Shaw's conceptualisation of resistance, they focus on the complexities of *living through* the relations of engendered power by studying women's everyday experiences of their participation in community gardens. By focusing on how labour is divided within community gardens and which leadership styles are developed and deployed, Parry et al (2005) demonstrate that forces of reproduction and resistance often work simultaneously and that, consequently, it may be difficult to define some expressions or conditions of agency as either that of "resistance" or "reproduction". For example, while many women argued that physical labour in the garden was

not divided on the basis of gender stereotypes but rather on physical ability, age and a participant's preference, it was clear that both men and women pulled upon notions of men's superior physical strength for certain tasks. However, when men took on physical labours, women maintained control over the overall planning of the garden: effectively directing men and their labours. Parry et al state that "women maintained their leadership roles despite some reproduction of traditional gender roles" (p. 189). They conclude "it would be a mistake to assume that because some forms of reproduction occurred, there was not *simultaneously* the presence of some forms of resistance" (p. 190 original emphasis).

Parry et al (2005) support Shaw's (2001) claim that empowerment is a central characteristic of resistance. Reading empowerment as women's "power to" create new opportunities and identities which are not automatically or uncritically prescribed by traditional gender norms, they argue that "women demonstrated their personal deployment of power and the ensuing freedom to develop new identities by establishing the garden as a site where roles and responsibilities were not automatically based on gender". (p. 188). The "power to" derived in no small part from women's pride in their gardening achievements, satisfaction with their involvement and a confidence stemming from their daily accomplishments. For some women, empowerment in the garden spurred the "power to" change constraining aspects in other areas of their lives. There is then a suggestion that empowerment has a transferable quality in its ability to provide women with the confidence, experience and skills to seek out new opportunities and identities outside the garden.

Troubling Resistance and Empowerment

We feel that the significance of Parry et al's (2005) work lies in the recognition of the complexity of power relations as realised through everyday realities (see also, Tye & Powers, 1998). Their critical recognition of simultaneous power relations goes a good way to dissuade against the temptation to view reproduction and resistance as polarised, discrete spaces and moments of agency. Yet, we question whether their aim to realise the "complex mosaics" (Mowl & Towner, 1995, p. 103) of engendered power may be hindered by an approach that still largely frames women's agency in terms of resistance and reproduction. To unsettle this prevailing approach, we aim to problematise the affinity between resistance and empowerment.

We focus on empowerment because, as we have demonstrated above, empowerment emerges in conceptual affinity with resistance across much of the literature of women's leisure and that of women's gardening more specifically. Furthermore, we are influenced by Wray's (2004) analysis of women's agency in the context of ageing. Wray argues that prevailing conceptualisations of agency are strongly shaped by Western neo-liberal discourses that privilege autonomy, self-determination and empowerment. The consequence is the construction of a dichotomy that positions and at times,

defines agency against disempowerment, dependency and passivity (“reproduction”). Wray’s concerns are two fold. Firstly, conceptualisations of agency and empowerment lack clarity and are applied in fixed and uncritical ways to women’s lives. Secondly, that the polarisation of empowerment and disempowerment, with its implicit assumption that agency is associated with the former, distorts the complexity of women’s lived realities. Not only, she argues, can women be simultaneously empowered and disempowered, but the existence of multitudinous power relations pulsating through various socio-cultural and spatial-temporal aspects of women’s lives create different and differing means, interpretations and experiences of both agency and empowerment. She concludes that any critical conceptualisation of agency has to be carefully attuned to the contextual- sensitivity of women’s lived practices and be alert to the relational and dynamic aspects of empowerment. For Wray, agency has to be re-thought as multi-dimensional with empowerment and disempowerment being at times conjoined.

Wray draws support from McNay’s (2000) wider argument relating to models of agency within feminist theory. That agency may be creative and unpredictable is struggling to find analytical voice she argues, because of a prevailing theoretical framework within feminism and the social sciences that proceeds from only a partial reading of Foucault, with the consequence that agency is mainly conceptualised in terms of the effects of domination and practices of freedom and liberation. McNay terms this a negative framework, one that can only capture agency as either emerging from constraint or as self-determined action and which places over-emphasis upon agency as resistance, subversion and dislocation. McNay’s concern is that the complexity of women’s lived relationships to the norms governing gender are distorted, or only partially realised, by the negative framework. The consequence is that expressions of women’s agency which do not immediately and straight forwardly reflect and reproduce gendered norms are read as resistance. If, she claims, we approach agency as emerging from dynamic, creative and temporal relations to norms, the credibility of “all agency as resistance” or that of regarding agency as either reproducing or resisting engendered power is eroded. This erosion is crucial if closer focus on the nuances of contextualised agency is to be achieved.

To our minds, Wray and McNay challenge the underpinnings of much gender analysis on leisure research, which as Shaw (2001) has demonstrated, is politically concerned with leisure as resistance. Their respective arguments suggest that approaching agency in terms of resistance and reproduction masks the complexity of lived relations of power and agency. To help realise these complexities we explore what can be achieved by “teasing out” empowerment from resistance. Destabilising the empowerment/resistance affinity involves regarding empowerment not simply as an accessory to, motivation for, or product of resistance but in terms of women’s differing, creative and context-dependent relations to gendered norms, as Wray (2004) suggests. Our “teasing out” may realise and validate different experiences of empowerment which struggle to be recognised in what McNay has termed the negative framework.

As our questioning of women's agency in leisure emerged from our attempts to interpret a story held by the Mass Observations Archive, it is fitting to use this as an illustration. We offer a reading of Joy's story as one of resistance and then attempt to make sense of her gardening-life through an examination of her empowerment through different and active relations to contextual norms. Our intention is to generate debate in support of Shaw's (2001) call for greater clarity in the conceptualisation of women's agency.

Mass Observation and Auto/Biography

Joy's story is drawn from the Mass Observation Archive (MOA), a writing project about everyday life based at the University of Sussex, UK. The MOA started life in the 1930s with a recruitment of volunteers who wrote about their everyday lives in Britain; some described their life in stories, others used diaries to form a collection of "ordinary" people's experiences of events such as the Second World War. The MOA closed down in 1950, but was revived in 1981 when Dorothy Sheridan started the new project based at the University of Sussex. This second phase of the MOA involves a panel of volunteers who respond to "directives" (sets of questions or prompts) which are issued two or three times a year on a range of themes, for example: "the gulf war"; "well-being"; and "birthdays" (<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/massobs/>). There has been considerable debate about the methodological and epistemological nature of the MOA, which have revolved around the status of auto/biographical accounts in generating sociological theory; their representative status; and more generally their accuracy and relevance (Busby, 2000; Sheridan, 1993). Certainly the MOA is not a conventional (positivistic) survey and there are limitations: the opened ended nature of the questions and prompts, not all of which are usually answered; partial answers; and the skewed sample of the volunteers, who tend to be mainly drawn from middle class, older women living in the South East and Midlands of England.

There are also ethical issues; these relate primarily to the identification of the respondent and matters of privacy. The MOA takes several steps to engage with these ethical concerns not least because the Archive has to operate within the British legal framework of data protection and copyright laws. First, the identity of the respondent is protected; each writer is allocated a number and only the minimum detail relating to their personal circumstances is available to researchers. Thus, age, gender, occupation and place of residence is all researchers may know about the respondents. As researchers we are not able to communicate with respondents outside the structure of the MOA. Second, privacy is protected not just by anonymity, but respondents sign a form to assign copyright to the MOA or they can retain their own rights. In the former and more usual case, the Trustees of the MOA give their permission for researchers to use archive material in publications. In the latter case (which is rare) a red sheet warning that the material may not be used without the express permission of the respondent is placed on the material relating to that person. Throughout, respondents are made

aware that the material is likely to be used by researchers and could appear in print or other media. Indeed, one reason most respondents give for wanting to write is to allow their voices to be heard, and the MOA manages to achieve this whilst protecting the writers' identity and privacy (Sheridan et al., 2000).

The individual stories and memories held in the MOA offer a rich and textured insight into the everyday lives of "ordinary" people as expressed in their own words (Purvis, 1994; Sheridan, 1993; Stanley, 1988). Although inevitably subjective and partial, the individuality of these life accounts can speak beyond themselves (Plummer, 1995; Purvis, 1994). Burkitt (2005), for example, argues that as individuals live and retell their lives "within social contexts not entirely of their own making" (p. 95) it is possible to examine aspects of the social in the ways that events and experiences are selected and framed. Indeed, awareness of wider and specific contexts is hard to avoid in auto/biographies as they are necessarily full of times, places and relations with others; as Stanley (1988) argues we are all "social beings through and through" (p. 19). Attention to context is vital, Burkitt argues, if we are to avoid over-exaggerating the transformative power of individual agency, and focus instead on the daily creative negotiations in social contexts and conditions that lie outside of individual control. Such negotiations can be examined in stories of everyday life; further adding to the awareness that everyday life is not "inevitable" or "natural" but complex and processual (Gardiner, 2000 p.19). It is not uncommon to offer auto/biographies as illustrations of these everyday processes (Burkitt, 2005; Stanley, 1988) and we do so here to add to Shaw's (2001) call for further clarity in the ways that women's agency in leisure is conceptualised.

Just as auto/biographies are located in the contexts of the authors' everyday lives, their interpretations are located in the interpretative frameworks and intellectual biographies of those who analyse them. We use Stanley's (1992) term "auto/biography" throughout to denote the relationship between the researcher and researched, and to highlight that Joy's story is mediated, inevitably so, through our own interpretative frameworks. Auto/biographies and other MOA material are not then, regarded as raw and static data speaking of "truth" (Gilmore, 1994), but are recognised and valued because of their inevitable subjectivity and meaning(s) that are mediated and reshaped through re-telling: "no account is final" (Purvis, 1994, p. 184).

In 1998 the MOA issued a directive entitled "The Garden and Gardening" to 354 people on the panel. The directive asked respondents to write about key personal themes that related to their gardens including childhood memories; the personal significance of certain plants; and differences in terms of gardening tasks and how these may be changing. Replies ranged from a single page to some over thirty pages with photographs and drawings. Not everyone wrote a life story as such, indeed little snippets of information about the garden were the norm; but several respondents linked their biography and life course very closely with homes and gardens they had lived, played and worked in. "Joy" (she is number M1201 in the Archive) re-

sponded to the directive in the form of a conventional auto/biography; she produced a linear narrative starting from her earliest memories of the garden towards the present of her writing. At the time of her writing Joy was 35 years old, based in the North East of England. She suffered from a number of health problems and described herself as "housewife" and "unpublished writer". Her story is approximately 2,000 words long.

In the process of reading Joy's story we were struck not by its typicality or its similarity with other cases, but that it seemed to us to be a "telling case" (Sheridan et al, 2000). Joy's story is a "telling case" because the way it is told (in the form of an auto/biography with the garden as a central organising theme) offers a reading of the analytical relationships of social lives. Thus we were better able to grasp the complex theoretical connections between empowerment and resistance in her story, rather than in others. In this sense, our method is not inductive, but theoretically driven from the start. We were first attracted to Joy's story because, on first reading, it offered, via the optic of Foucauldian-inspired poststructuralism, a story of subtle and mundane "resistance", but working from the critiques within McNay (2000) and Wray's (2004) work, Joy's story "revealed" a more problematised relationship between empowerment and resistance. It is then as a "telling case" that we use our account of Joy's story here to suggest that conceptually teasing out empowerment from resistance can promise a different reading of her agency, one that may better realise the nuances of contextual agency than afforded by the resistance/reproduction frameworks. We offer our reading here as a prompt for empirical work and discussion.

Joy's Gardening Story

Joy responded to the Directive in the form of conventional auto/biography, that is she starts with her earliest memories of the houses and gardens she has lived in and works towards the "now". Towards the end of her account, she writes in the form of a diary capturing key events as they unfolded between April and July in 1998. This gives the life story an ongoing feel; there is a futurity and still many things unresolved in Joy's life. However, we want to start towards the end of her story to emphasise the importance of the garden in her adult life. Joy says,

I may have been a trifle over ambitious when I announced to my family that I intended throwing a party, a garden party for my wedding anniversary. It will show off the new garden, and the new terrace, and the new conservatory.

Joy's garden represents something special; it is inextricably linked to her self identity, it symbolizes her life history up to now, and shows us how strongly the garden is embedded in her family life. But it was not always so. To go back to the beginning, the garden did not figure strongly in Joy's childhood: "In the first house I remember, we had no garden", then "when I was five years old we moved to a New Town, to a brand new house . . . with a brand new garden". But Joy was only there for three months and moved to another

new house on the same estate. Her memories of this garden are sketchy, and after two years the family moved again to a new house on the same estate. Here they settled and Joy writes of her childhood memories:

In the alcove we planted lilacs, a purple one in the left hand corner for my sister, and a white one in the right hand corner for me. We were told they were ours and we must look after them.

Joy doesn't remember doing gardening very much, but she says, "years later I met the woman who moved into the house after we moved out, the white lilac was still doing very well, and was visible above the wall". In many ways her childhood was still "alive". Indeed several other respondents also mentioned the ways in which certain plants had helped them to connect back to their childhood (Bhatti & Church, 2001). During this time Joy's mother was the gardener, but

She was full of can'ts and don'ts, and that won't work. . . . we never got to do any of the fun stuff like planting or putting seeds or deadheading or what ever. I don't think she was at all adventurous about the garden.

As we shall see later, Joy turned out to be more adventurous in her garden in adult life. In contrast to other stories where interest in the garden was often sparked at a young age by grandparents or parents, Joy concludes "I had no interest in gardening". At the age of twelve a traumatic event (where she stuck a fork through her toe) further reduced her interest in the garden. The near absence of the garden in Joy's childhood is in sharp contrast to other stories we have examined elsewhere; for some respondents childhood memories are strongly linked to first house and garden they can remember (Bhatti & Church, 2001).

Joy then moves quickly onto her adult life and after getting married, moves into a bungalow with large gardens front and rear. Joy says, "I still had no interest in gardening, but I tended what was there. . . . and [my husband] dug over the vegetable patch and planted all sorts of things". It seems that often in traditional households the man took over the garden, and it becomes his space (Bhatti & Church, 2000). Nevertheless, they moved to their current house in 1984 just before the birth of a daughter and neglected the garden somewhat. The change in Joy's life, her self-identity and the central role of the garden in her creation and recreation of home came in 1990:

Then at the turn of the decade I had a change of heart. I decided I wanted to do something about the garden, but I didn't want to be continually compromising. I said to my husband, I'll do the work, you don't have to do anything; but that means I get to decide everything. It'll be my garden. And he agreed. I set to.

Here there is gap; what made her focus on the garden in such a fanatical way? How and why did she challenge her husband? This perhaps shows us the limits of MOA material as we cannot ask her what happened around this time that made her want to put all her energies into her garden. We cannot even guess, as Joy does not reveal any information about what happened "at

the turn of the decade". Joy then describes the incredible amount of work she did to sort out her garden:

I looked at the rectangle of lawn and decided I wanted less formality, fewer corners, not so much straight edge. I looked at all the ground cover plants that were useless against the couch grass, and I pulled them up. I took a spade and fork and I dug and turned and riddled it. . . . I ended up with enough stones for my friends to take away in carloads to use as hard core for their new driveway. And still there were more stones, and more. My brother in law—started a gardening business—he gave me a greenhouse on the cheap, and I planted my own seeds and raised my own plants and had a ball.

Joy makes the garden her own by working in it, by "mixing with the earth", and putting her emotion and labour into the soil and plants. By doing this work she clearly feels she now has control over what goes in the garden, the design and what to plant. One of the problems that most people encounter when they start gardening is developing their knowledge of "how to garden" and what to plant. Some of this knowledge is passed down amongst families, and around in local neighbourhoods. But mostly it now comes from the media, as Joy says,

I watched programs on TV, not one or two, but all of them, on every side and listened to what they said. I learned a lot. Then one day I realised that I had my own opinions about what ever subject was occupying their time that week. I began to argue with the TV or radio. I don't see why I should plant pastel-coloured flowers because the man from the BBC doesn't like gaudiness. I like gaudy colours. I like bright orange lilies.

Joy now begins to challenge the accepted gardening canon and upsets the expert-lay person relationship. This self confidence emerges out of Joy's work in the garden, her practical knowledge and her independence begins to grow. Moreover, she begins to appreciate "being" in the garden:

I had a drift of peach violas catching the sun and twisting and turning their delicate petals in the wind. I spend a whole afternoon spellbound by them sitting on the backstop, gazing at them, perfectly content.

But crucially this re-creation of her self is within a social context, for she says, "I had a glorious cranesbill of which I gave cuttings to all my friends and now I can see my plants in almost every garden I visit". The social aspects underpinning gardening are important to emphasise, as quite often gardening is presented as an individualised activity. In contrast, we want to suggest that the domestic garden and gardening is embedded in (gendered) social relations, which often comes out in the way people talk about their gardens; it is usually in relation to family members, neighbours and the wider community.

The important role of the garden in Joy's family life is best summed up by her story of Tree:

In the lawn, to the left and near the back, a small tree grew, or rather it didn't grow. For the first 6 years we lived there the tree was less than my own height (and I am a very short person), but when I began to look after the garden, I started to look after the tree. I cleared the choking grass around it, refreshed

the soil, I poured in bucket after bucket of water, I fed it, fed it and it began to grow. It shot away after its own strange nature. It is a willow tree called Tortousa "tortured willow". Somehow its meandering bole and freely growing branches suit our family perfectly. We've had to trim it, to constrain it a little, and we may have to lose it eventually, but we are holding onto it as long as we can. It's family and is never referred to as the tree but simply as Tree.

The emotionality in the passage above is immense; the hard work in the garden (through the body) and rescuing of the tree symbolizes the "making" of home, both materially and through memory. In some senses Joy starts with negotiating her garden space literally and metaphorically, but she then also reaches reconciliation with her partner:

My husband is more interested in the garden these days, and more willing to do the work, which is good thing because I can do much less, now the garden isn't mine but ours in a way it hasn't been before, and it doesn't have the air of compromise that so often accompanies the interior decoration of the house.

The negotiated settlement ("our garden") may have been reached from the basis of Joy's challenge. Even though there are still battles to be fought (over the interior decoration) the garden at least represents the negotiated order that gender relations can often encompass. Joy seems to sum up the importance of her garden to her family life:

The garden has been used, the children have played on it, sunbathed in it. We've had parties and barbecues and they've had the paddling pool on it. The girls have had their own plants, or their own patches to throw seeds into to see what came up.

Just as Joy's memories are materialized in her garden and plants, her own children will come in time to remember this garden, they too will have childhood memories of this house, the garden, Tree, and their mother's accomplishment in creating a garden for them to play in. During the period that Joy is writing in response to the directive (April-July), a conservatory and terrace is being built, "oh my poor garden" she remarks. The building works almost destroy her garden, but she does not give up:

But I have plans. I have troughs to fill with lilies and trailing flowers . . . I have friends taking cuttings and splitting plants and putting them aside for me to bring home . . . despite the bareness, the emptiness and all the hard work to come, 1998 is going to be an exciting time in the garden.

Joy's garden is a triumph for her personally as it represents her struggle, not just against the elements (the stones, the weather), but her position as a "housewife". We started with Joy announcing to her family that she was going to have a party for her wedding anniversary. So what of Joy's garden party? Well, there is no happy ending: "The garden party didn't happen, not because the garden wasn't presentable—it was green and tidy—but because there hasn't been any summer at all". It seems the weather won, but Joy is happy in her garden, "I've found a place to sit, hidden from those in the

house, able to look at my garden from a new perspective . . . It's a lovely place, a lovely feeling".

A Story of Resistance or Reproduction?

Is Joy's story one of resistance? There are discrete moments and intentions of resistance within Joy's narration of her life. Her claim for a space of her own, her control of that space ("I get to decide everything"), and her later rejection of the "expert" views of the BBC can all be read as resistance. Her declaration that she "didn't want to be continually compromising" suggests a powerful challenge to her position in the household order especially as it related to the garden. That the price of control was sole responsibility for the physical work of the garden also provided moments of resistance to wider gendered norms. As she "dug and turned and riddled", digging up masses of stones, Joy, through her physicality and the "doing" of gardening, challenged the gendered scripts that nurture traditional gendered divisions of labour. One also suspects from Joy's story that the physical labour played no small part in enabling Joy's authority to control and enjoy the space she creates. As empowerment is closely aligned with resistance we can also read Joy's story as one of her empowerment. She developed self-confidence, mastery of knowledge and skills that were recognised and affirmed in her local community ("I gave cuttings to all my friends and now I see my plants in almost every garden I visit"); the "power to" assert control over her space, a feature that is recognised in the literature as integral to women's self-determination and self-affirmation (Gillespie et al, 2002; Parry et al, 2005); and the physical and emotional well-being, pride and contentment that came from her creativity and accomplishments.

However, this may be a partial reading as Joy's story is also an account of how her garden and her activities within it are embedded within the narratives of her family, marriage and "home-making". This can be demonstrated by Tree, the tree as a family member, who mirrors in the garden the biography of the family not only through its "meandering bole and freely growing branches" but also in the work and nurturing for its survival ("I poured in bucket after bucket of water, I fed it, fed it and it began to grow"). Similarly, Joy's garden is also a space for her children, who in contrast with her own childhood, have freedom to plant, experiment and relax within the space that Joy has created. Joy's garden is a space that not only demonstrates and celebrates her own gardening accomplishments but those of her marriage and family. It is significant that the garden is to change so that Joy may publicly celebrate her wedding anniversary and that the garden in later years has become "our space" (shared with her husband) but in ways that do not involve the compromise of the past. It is this last point that most strongly suggests that these aspects of Joy's story cannot be simply read as evidence of her "reproduction" of oppressive gender relations. We may conclude that our difficulty in interpreting Joy's agency as either resistance or reproduction

lends support to Parry et al's (2002) insight that resistance and reproduction are not always discrete and observable and may operate simultaneously.

A Different Reading?

We suggest that Joy's story can also be read as a demonstration of her creative *positioning* to traditional gender norms. The concept of positioning usefully recognises identity as complex, uneven, psychosocial processes through which individuals locate themselves within existing (and shifting) identities (Davies & Harrè, 1990; Phoenix, 2005). Odith (1999, p. 13) explains; "men and women actively exercise power in positioning themselves within, or finding their own location among competing discourses, rather than being merely positioned by them". Positioning has the advantage of not only recognising identities as external impositions but of the ways that these are taken-up and lived through. Davies & Harrè (1990) argue that by pulling on temporal and culturally specific discursive resources, individuals can manoeuvre (position) themselves within the possibilities and restraints created and imposed by others; identities can then, be refused, resisted or more commonly, negotiated and tailored (Court & Court, 1998) as individuals try to "become who/what they envisage themselves to be" (Phoenix, 2005, p. 106).

However, positioning does not imply a voluntarism whereby identities are taken up by the neutral exercise of choice (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2003), manoeuvrability is shaped by hegemonic ideals that render some positions more socially intelligible and attractive than others: "It is not a choice of being liberated and being oppressed. Rather it is a choice between being "OK" or "normal" or "weird" between being on the margins or in the centre, albeit the marginalized centres reserved for women". (Jones, 1993, p. 162) The positions of "wife" and "mother", for example, are saturated with discursive regulatory regimes aiming to define the "good" and "respectable" from the "other" (Currie, 2004) and, as Phoenix (2005) demonstrates, our positioning is shaped by emotional investments and attachments to ways of being and the social recognition and approval of others. Harrington (2002) adds, through Judith Butler's notion of the psychic life of power, that there is an empowered pleasure in "living out an authoritatively recognised identity. It is the pleasure of being somebody and escaping not-being" (p. 110).

While there is a coercive attraction to live out the normative identities of "wife" and "mother", the concept of positioning dissuades against reading Joy's life solely as passive reproduction of traditional gender relations or to define her agency in terms of her abilities and actions to liberate herself from them. Instead we are encouraged to regard her garden as the site and source of her creative positioning to the normative. Sparked by an undisclosed cause of her "change of heart" at the "turn of the decade", Joy's garden becomes the means of her negotiation of space, time and relations with her family. Her story speaks of a dynamic and physical agency involved in "doing" the garden and in so doing, creating more self-determined relations with her partner and others. What is clear to us is that Joy's agency is

performed, experienced, expressed, recognised and (re) presented as auto/biography, within the possibilities of social intelligibility of her social world. The garden is not a site for her rejection, subversion and dislocation of her existing social world, nor of her passive acceptance of it, but acts to provide a means for her to better relate to it and its various demands.

This raises the question of whether Joy's positioning agency can be regarded as empowering. We demonstrated above that empowerment is constructed as in conceptual affinity with notions of resistance in women's leisure literature and questioned if the nuances of gendered relations might be better realised if this affinity was dislocated. Reading empowerment when we cannot easily read resistance should not suggest that Joy's story is not one of her empowerment. Rather than view empowerment as a product or motivation of resisting agency, we argue that Joy's story of her creative positioning is also one of her empowerment. The garden becomes a site and source of her empowered agency as demonstrated through her self-expression; rewards of commitment and discipline; pleasure; control of space and time; and, importantly a *social recognition* as she takes up *her* position to the socially intelligible identities of gardener, wife, mother and neighbour. The "power to" act and create is a major theme of Joy's story. Following McNay's (2000) suggestion to seek agency in creative dynamic relations to norms, we read a creativity in Joy's negotiations and (re)positioning, which while crucially context dependent and subject to the temporal fluctuations of Joy's wider biography, may be experienced at times as empowering through her active choices and decisions and those aspects of "doing" and being. Joy creates opportunities for self-affirmation, public recognition and the personal satisfaction drawn from her own crafted relations to gendered norms. There is space, then, within Joy's story to rethink the relationship of empowerment to resistance. Wray (2004) argues that notions of empowerment have become distorted by Western neo-liberal ideal of autonomy and independence. Releasing empowerment from conceptualisations of resistance as we have done here suggests that there are different textures and sources of empowerment, some of which are derived from different inter-dependent and intersubjective relations with significant others (partner, family, "home" and community) and from rewarding and personally satisfying locations within traditional discourses of femininity. Joy cannot be simply defined in terms of her independence and autonomy as secured through her resistant agency, rather we are mindful of her self-determination, choice and active creation of self that stem from her re-positioning to social norms and to significant others. We feel that this is best illustrated by Joy's concluding comments: "I've found a place to sit, hidden from those in the house, able to look at my garden from a new perspective . . . It's a lovely place, a lovely feeling."

Conclusion

Valentine (1999) argues that the use of personal narratives offers a way "of escaping the false certainties of categorical approaches" (p. 495), certainly, Stanley (1988) has used auto/biographies to escape the heavy con-

ceptual burden of defining leisure as distinct from work. Stanley argues that approaching leisure in the round of women's "actual everyday lives" (p. 18), that is within the rhythms of their socio-cultural contexts, better realises the complexities of the everyday that shape leisure opportunities, experiences and give leisure "relevance and meaning" (p. 29). That the MOA and auto/biography speak of "everyday" experiences and meanings of leisure helps shift our vision past static and de-contextualised researcher-defined classifications of agency, at least in part, to reveal differing and different relations to the normative.

We have re-presented Joy's story here to explore the possibilities of realising women's agency within the "round" of the everyday. Our reading of Joy's story aimed to illustrate the conceptual merit of "teasing out" empowerment from its prevailing affinity with resistance in order to "escape" the readings afforded by the resistance/reproduction framework. While Joy's story can be read as story of resistance or of reproduction this denies the changing complexities of her life course as situated within wider and intersecting contexts and relations with others. Furthermore, it struggles to realise nuances of agency that are not recognised through the optic of what McNay (2000) identifies as the negative framework. Our reading lends support to Parry et al's (2005) recent insight into the simultaneous nature of engendered power. However, the resistance/reproduction framework can be further disrupted by dislocating empowerment from its equation. Reading Joy's story as one of positioning has enabled us to "tease out" expressions of empowerment from "resistance" as it has focused our attention on the emotional attachments and personal investments made in certain (in this case, normative) identity locations, but rather than read this as "reproduction" of the normative, we have been encouraged to read the ways that Joy re-fashions their meaning and significance and her relationship to them. From this we read Joy's story as one of empowerment through her creative and self-determined position to traditional gendered norms and thereby follow Wray's (2004) argument that conceptualising empowerment in terms of Western values of autonomy, liberation and independence masks the lived experiences of women's everyday realities. We conclude that the garden, like other leisure sites, is a politically charged place. Yet it is a space where women can creatively forge not only their "own space" of agency, but also find those characteristics of empowerment which allow a (re) positioning within their active and confident relations with others, and from this, their active relation to socially recognisable gendered norms.

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