CROSSING THE BORDER

Understanding the Re-entry Experiences of Women from Migrant Groups in Melbourne and New York City

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ABSTRACT

The recent increase in the number of incarcerated women from migrant groups in Australia and the United States prompted an investigation into women’s experiences of re-entry into the community after their release. Existing literature has identified that women from migrant groups go through different experiences when they are released from prison due to their diverse culture and language. The literature, however, does not detail these varied experiences. In addition, existing programs and policies designed to respond to post-release needs in Australia and the United States have been created to primarily cater to the mainstream prison population without considering the nuances of the needs of minority groups.

This thesis examines and compares the post-release re-entry experiences of women from migrant groups in Melbourne and New York City with a particular focus on the impact of post-release services on their re-entry experiences. Using a constructivist framework, the thesis highlights the subjective experiences of formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds in two research sites – Melbourne and New York City – through conducting narrative interviews with the women themselves. In addition, the thesis includes perspectives from post-release support workers to complement accounts obtained from formerly-incarcerated women. The cross-jurisdictional comparison affords an understanding of these experiences across two sites, and leads to a central argument of the thesis that current post-release programs in the two cities can be amalgamated to construct an ideal post-release space for women.

The research findings challenge existing assumptions about the prominence of cultural identity in relation to the women’s post-release problems. Amongst the multitude of identities the women embodied during their transition process, the most prevalent identity that affected their re-entry experience was their ex-offender identity. This important finding has significant implications for the current provision of gender- and/or culture-responsive policies and programs – particularly ones in Melbourne.
The research also identified two distinct service delivery models: the client-service model (CSM) and the re-entry community model (RCM). The CSM was observed in the practices of post-release support in Melbourne, and the RCM observed in New York City. While both service delivery models had similar objectives in the delivery of their post-release support, the ways in which they offered this support differed significantly. Based on experiences and insights of research participants, the RCM emerged as the ideal model that offered the women a more holistically supported transition into the community.
DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This is to certify that:

i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD;

ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;

iii) the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, footnotes, bibliography and appendices.

Signed: Sirhana Theerathitiwong

Date: 22 April 2017
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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Stuart Ross and Dr Natalia Hanley for their generous advice and continuous support throughout the duration of my candidature – in both my academic, professional and personal lives. Without their unwavering encouragement and motivational speeches, I would not be where I am today.

I would also like to show my sincerest gratitude to the women who allowed me into their lives, shared their stories, and gave me an opportunity to understand their experiences. I hope that I have done your experiences justice, and I hope that other women will benefit from more research being conducted in this field. I would also like to thank professional staff in the post-release service sector across both Melbourne and New York City, who gave up their time to be interviewed and to share their experiences of working with formerly-incarcerated people. A special thanks to the staff at the Prisoner Re-entry Institute for making me feel welcomed in New York City, and assisting me with all that I needed to do for my research.

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I would like to dedicate the thesis and all its efforts to my father.
# Table of Contents

**ABSTRACT** .................................................................................................................................................. ii

**DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE** ........................................................................................................ iv

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT** .................................................................................................................................. v

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................................ vi

List of Figures .................................................................................................................................................. xi

List of Acronyms ........................................................................................................................................... xii

**CHAPTER ONE** ........................................................................................................................................... 1

**RESEARCHING THE POST-RELEASE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN FROM MIGRANT GROUPS** ................. 1

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 1

Conceptual framework .................................................................................................................................. 4

Researcher’s background ............................................................................................................................... 9

Methodological overview ............................................................................................................................... 11

Contribution to Knowledge .......................................................................................................................... 13

Thesis Structure ........................................................................................................................................... 15

**CHAPTER TWO** ........................................................................................................................................... 17

**THE TALE OF TWO CITIES: MELBOURNE AND NEW YORK CITY** ......................................................... 17

Introduction ................................................................................................................................................ 17

Melbourne – the World’s Most Liveable City ............................................................................................... 18

  *Prisoner profile* .......................................................................................................................................... 19

  *Women from migrant groups in prison* ...................................................................................................... 21

  *Re-entry process* ..................................................................................................................................... 25

New York City – a Cultural Melting Pot ....................................................................................................... 28

  *Prison profile* ........................................................................................................................................... 32

  *Women from migrant groups in prison* .................................................................................................. 36

  *Re-entry process* .................................................................................................................................. 37

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................... 40
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER THREE</th>
<th>CONCEPTUALISING RE-ENTRY</th>
<th>42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner Re-entry</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desistance after imprisonment</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research on re-entry</td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to re-entry</td>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to the Re-entry of Women Offenders</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Cultural Differences</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Intersectionality</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER FOUR</th>
<th>RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</th>
<th>93</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Orientation and Interpretive Framework</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism</td>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Phenomenology</td>
<td></td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatekeepers and Recruitment</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formerly-Incarcerated Women Sample</td>
<td></td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The women's voices</td>
<td></td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining 'CALD'</td>
<td></td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Staff Sample</td>
<td></td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for the sample</td>
<td></td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formerly-incarcerated women</td>
<td></td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distrust</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive self-conceptions</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-release Redemption</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The 'old' self</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discovery of a new self</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Normativity</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Idealized Identity</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN</td>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The ‘Identity Project’</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Intersections of Identities</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural identity</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender identity</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The ex-offender identity</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Towards a Re-entry Community Model</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reported benefits of a re-entry community</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Re-entry Community Model (RCM) versus a Client-Service Model (CSM)</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cautions against the RCM</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER EIGHT</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rethinking Offender Re-entry</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A – Formerly-Incarcerated Participants – Summary of Key</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1 New York City: Median household income by borough.................... 30
Figure 2 New York City: Percentage of population living below the poverty line .......................................................................................................................... 31
Figure 3 Coding stages ................................................................................ 120
List of Acronyms

CALD  Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CSM   Client Service Model
IDV   Individualism Index
MAS   Masculinity Index
PDI   Power Distance Index
RCM   Re-entry Community Model
UAI   Uncertainty Avoidance Index

Victoria

ABS   Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW  Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AVAMP African Visitation and Mentoring Program
AVWA  Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association
ACOSS Australian Council of Social Services
CHRIP Center for the Human Rights of Imprisoned People
COAG  The Council of Australian Governments
CPT   Case Planning Transition
CV    Corrections Victoria
DHHS  Department of Health and Human Services
DoJ   Department of Justice (now known as Department of Justice and Regulation)
DPFC  Dame Phyllis Frost Centre
EOCV  Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria
FCLC  Federation of Community Legal Centres
MSO   Most Serious Offence
NMHCCF National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum
VACRO Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
VLO   Vietnamese Liaison Officer
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VCOSS</td>
<td>Victorian Council of Social Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJS</td>
<td>Bureau of Justice Statistics</td>
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<td>DOC</td>
<td>Department of Correction</td>
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<td>DOCCS</td>
<td>Department of Corrections and Community Supervision</td>
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<td>GOSO</td>
<td>Getting Out and Staying Out</td>
</tr>
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<td>ICE</td>
<td>Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement</td>
</tr>
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<td>PRI</td>
<td>Prisoner Re-entry Institute</td>
</tr>
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<td>WPA</td>
<td>Women’s Prison Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCS</td>
<td>Women’s Community Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCHING THE POST-RELEASE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN FROM MIGRANT GROUPS

Introduction

A little over forty years ago, the number of women in prison in the state of Victoria (and Australia generally) had declined to the point that the decarceration of women seemed possible (Harding, 1984). However, in the period since 1974, the number of women imprisoned has increased steadily with their rate of growth outpacing that of male prisoners. The most recently available data from December 2016 indicates that there are more than four hundred women in prison in Victoria, and over three thousand in Australia. The contrast is startling. These data evidence a female prison population increase from twenty-four women in Victorian prisons and one hundred and seventy-four women in Australian prisons in 1974 (ABS, 2016; Harding, 1984). Far from achieving the decarceration of women prisoners, we have witnessed a fifteen-fold increase in Victoria and almost a twenty-fold increase across Australia. Similarly, in the United States, the number of women incarcerated increased by more than seven-hundred per cent between 1980 and 2014 (Sentencing Project, 2015). While there is no single cause of this dramatic shift, the failure of re-entry supervision and support stands out as a key mechanism that drives rising female imprisonment rates (Minson et al., 2015).

Within this larger problem of female imprisonment and post-release failure lies a less visible issue, the over-representation of minority women in prison including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from migrant groups in Australia, and African-American women and Hispanic-
American women in the United States. This is most pertinent, for instance, in
the Vietnamese women group in Victoria. Although Vietnamese women
represent under two per cent of the general Victorian women population (as
per the latest 2011 population census data), they make up a staggering ten per
cent of the Victorian female prison population (Corrections Victoria, 2011). A
key point highlighted by this set of statistics is that women from migrant
backgrounds may be a small cohort in the prison population, but are
increasingly being over-imprisoned when compared to the general population.

In an attempt to address the issues raised by the increasing presence of
migrant women in prison, this thesis is specifically concerned with examining
and comparing the re-entry experiences of women from migrant groups in two
research sites; Melbourne and New York City. The term ‘migrant’ is used
throughout the thesis to refer to women who are first- or second-generation
migrants to Australia and the United States. Accordingly, while I recognise that
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are a minority group who are
over-represented in the prison system, they are not included in this research.
Similarly, African-American women were not included in the research if they
were not from migrant backgrounds. The detail of the formerly-incarcerated
women who are participants for this research is discussed in further detail in
Chapter Four.

Although women from migrant backgrounds have been recognised as
one of the most vulnerable groups in society (Easteal, 1992; Bird, 1995; Burley,
1995; Dao, 1995; Denton, 1995; Eastal, 1995; Gonzalez, 1995; Themal, 1995;
CHRIP, 2010; Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, 2010; Flat Out &
CHRIP, 2010; In-Touch, 2010; Kilroy, 2000; Kilroy, 2003; Allimant and
Ostapiej-Piatkowski, 2011; Bartels, 2011a; Bartels, 2011b), the ability to
understand their situation is hampered by a paucity of policy attention,
research and data. This lack of attention has largely been because this cohort of
prisoners are minorities in both mainstream society and within the prisoner population (CHRIP, 2010). While the rate of women from migrant groups in prison has dramatically increased, in real terms women from migrant groups are a minority group in within the whole prison population. If women prisoners are “correctional afterthoughts” (Ross and Fabiano, 1986), then women from migrant groups prisoners are doubly so.

Academic interest in the high proportion of imprisoned women from migrant backgrounds has peaked and waned several times since the 1990s. The available literature, critically presented in Chapter Three, reflects this pattern. However, prior to the 1990s, women prisoners from migrant groups were long ‘forgotten’ (Easteal, 1992) in policy and scholarly advances – which in turn extends the women’s marginalisation in society. The effect of being in a ‘forgotten’ group becomes evident when women from this group are released from prison and re-enter the community. The absence of policy and practice attention has resulted in gaps in service and support needed to support their effective integration.

The title of Jeremy Travis’s (2005) text ‘But They All Come Back’ is salient here. It reminds us that there is a tendency in our increasingly punitive society to forget about offenders once they are sentenced. Whilst many jurisdictions readily incarcerate in their bid to punish offenders for their crime and to provide safety to the community, very few invest their resources to support offenders during and beyond their imprisonment. Yet, the majority of these prisoners return to the community after their sentence expires, and require further assistance to help them integrate. As women from migrant backgrounds confront added vulnerabilities due to their offender status, the lack of “throughcare” or holistic and on-going approaches to post-release support aggravates their situation and furthers the women’s inability to successfully integrate into the community after their return. It was from this
standpoint that this research proceeded.

One of the key arguments that I will make in this thesis is that women from migrant backgrounds conceptualise the re-entry process as an identity transformation project. In order for them to integrate into society after release, women work towards achieving an identity that they (through incorporating both internal ideals and external influences) constructed as being normative. I then propose that the support provided to formerly-incarcerated women in the adjustment of their identity go a long way in assisting them towards this process. Within this key point that I make, I note that while each woman possesses multiple identities due to the complexities of their lives, some identities proved more prominent than others, and are in more urgent need of support. I then argue accordingly that post-release support service should focus their resources on the transformation of this identity.

The other key argument that emerged from this thesis is that, although post-release support in both Melbourne and New York City have aspects that are beneficial to the women’s re-entry journey, the Re-entry Community Model in New York City proved a more holistic and supportive model for women integrating into society post-prison. I therefore put to policymakers and the post-release support sector in Melbourne that a model similar to that in New York City be considered when designing post-release services for formerly-incarcerated women. This move would enable a better re-entry experience for women as they feel less isolated and more emotionally supported. These arguments are discussed in further detail later in the thesis (Chapter Seven).

**Conceptual framework**

Prisoner re-entry emerged in the last years of the 20th century as an area
of criminology concerned with the need to consider the social and economic disadvantages, the problems that arise from the prison experience, and the barriers to re-entry that incarcerated people face. It is also concerned with how these conditions impact on prisoners’ general well-being and their ability to integrate into society upon their release. Re-entry scholarship has consistently revealed that incarcerated offenders leave prisons with more exposed vulnerabilities (such as the lack of housing, difficulties in finding employment, or the challenge in maintaining physical and mental health care), and that in many cases these vulnerabilities diminish an ex-offender’s ability to function normatively in society (see: Maruna 2001, 2011; Petersilia 2001, 2003; Travis 2000, 2005). This may manifest in challenges securing employment or stable, safe accommodation or difficulties establishing healthy relationships. As a result, many former prisoners experience further involvement with the criminal justice system.

The initial conceptualisation of this research was based on three primary streams of criminological thought. The first stream emerged from the mass incarceration phenomenon in the United States and the rapidly rising imprisonment rate in Victoria. These phenomena provoked some key questions: What happens to the large number of ex-offenders that are released into the community? How does the state and the community respond to this influx of releases returning from prison? What are the consequences of their efforts to respond? How do ex-offenders feel about their prospects in the community? These questions steered the research towards understanding the general re-entry process from the perspectives of those who have experienced it and work in this sector.

The second stream of thought, reflected in the title of this thesis, Crossing the Border, is concerned with the physical, cultural and symbolic borders that exist between prisons and mainstream society. Rather than imagining the prison border as one that secures offenders within, I conceptualise the border
as one that keeps people out of mainstream community. Perceived in this way, mainstream society becomes an exclusive space that requires both the physical and symbolic act of crossing to enter in order to enter into and be a part of it. Moreover, due to barriers such as economic poverty and social segregation, having membership in mainstream society does not necessarily entail complete involvement (for instance, contributing to society through employment and subsequent tax payment); rather, membership focuses on the feeling of being included in a pro-social community.

The third stream of thought is concerned with understanding the particular re-entry experiences of women offenders. In identifying challenges ex-offenders face during their crossing of the border, much of the existing literature focuses on examining either specific re-entry issues – such as housing or employment barriers after release – where offenders are typically assumed to be males. While these approaches have been invaluable in increasing our understanding and theorising of the re-entry process, as well as in gathering empirical evidence about re-entry, they have had little to say about the distinctive nature of women’s experiences. In particular, the experiences of women from migrant backgrounds are often overlooked. In her work Forgotten Few: Overseas Born Female Inmates in Australia, Patricia Easteal (1992) revealed the particular disadvantages that women from migrant backgrounds face in prison. This included broadly the lack of culturally-appropriate services available for women in prison, the lack of cultural understanding by staff, and the negative experiences imprisoned women from migrant backgrounds had as a consequence (Easteal, 1992).

The findings by Easteal (1992) have been cited widely in subsequent publications identifying the unique experiences of women from this cohort in Victorian prisons (for example: Flat Out and CHRIIP, 2010). It is from this starting point that the present research takes shape. With the knowledge that
imprisoned women from migrant groups face unique challenges whilst incarcerated and that there are known challenges with current re-entry services that cause integration barriers, I questioned the ways in which these groups of women are supported to build resilience as they re-enter the community after their release. Moreover, I sought to question the extent that cultural backgrounds impact on the women’s re-entry experiences.

Being a woman from a migrant background myself, I was concerned with how this group of women experience the criminal justice system. In particular, I wished to investigate whether post-release support staff identified that there are distinct challenges facing women from migrant backgrounds when they re-enter to the community, and how staff responded to these challenges if they existed. In addition, I was interested in exploring whether the women themselves perceived that any re-entry challenges they face are influenced by their cultural identity. To understand the women’s re-entry challenges, moreover, I sought to explore the experiences from a comparative perspective. The benefits of thinking about experiences as embedded in different processes, institutions and systems were recognised, and I wanted to uncover the extent to which experiences were affected by these structural foundations.

To investigate the phenomenon of prisoner re-entry for women from migrant backgrounds, the thesis outlines the contexts within which the women were situated. This included both the social and cultural structures of the communities that the women were returning to (such as the cultural and economic demographics of the areas in which the women would be living), as well as the correctional structure the women were leaving (such as the demographics and profiles of the prison population in each city and the nature and availability of support services). Positioning the women within these contexts is important as they exert both direct and indirect influence over the
re-entry experience in Melbourne and New York City.

In understanding prisoner re-entry, the research employs several key conceptual principles. First the desistance principle was a primary theoretical lens through which findings from this research were analysed. The desistance principle focuses on factors and circumstances that signal the end of an individual’s criminal involvement. This principle is central to the thesis because the desire to desist from further offending was prevalent in participants’ narratives of re-entry. Consequently, the analyses of women’s re-entry experiences are framed in a way that represents a value that is important to them.

Another principle on which the research analysis was based was what Feeley and Simon (1992: 466) referred to as the ‘social aspects of criminology’. Specifically, in analysing participants’ narratives, discrepancies between what society expected of this cohort of offenders, what service providers thought were available to the women, what the women thought were accessible and achievable for them were identified. This allowed for any mismatches between the women’s individual motivation in desistance and integration and existing social opportunity structures to be highlighted (Feeley and Simon, 1992: 466). As the research was also concerned with the relationship between individuals and the normative expectations of the community, the social aspect of criminology provides a good foundation for understanding findings from the study.

Both principles cited above guided the overarching thesis structure. Applying the principle of desistance, participants’ narratives were viewed with an inward-looking perspective (into their interior lives). That is, the analysis focused on how women from migrant backgrounds understand and conceptualise their own re-entry experiences with an important focus on its
affective dimensions. Through this view of the *internal self*, the research identified that individuals’ self-esteem played a major role in helping one to achieve a core goal – self-redemption – as a way to move forward in their process of crossing the border. In contrast, Feeley and Simon’s focus on the social aspects of criminology guided an outward-looking perspective focusing on the women’s *exterior lives*. From this perspective, the analysis emphasised the ways in which the external environment and agents impact on the women’s re-entry experiences. As will be shown from Chapter Five onward, these interior and exterior lives are invariably interconnected.

The notion of exterior and interior lives was an important conceptual and analytical tool through the research analysis process. Conceptually, these two perspectives helped to categorise findings obtained from the interviews conducted, as well as to analyse the implications of both external and internal factors on the women’s re-entry journey. Moreover, separating the women’s interior and exterior lives gave me an opportunity to understand how these factors – in isolation or in combination – interacted to impact on the women’s re-entry experiences.

**Researcher’s background**

The following section describes how my lived experiences might illuminate the perspectives I am taking throughout this research process.

Born in Thailand, I was sent to a boarding school in Singapore at the age of twelve. Even though both these countries are in the same region in South East Asia, and are in many ways culturally similar, acculturation was still a necessary process for me during this transition to ‘fit in’. The challenge of having to navigate life at such a young age was exacerbated by my departure
from existing social networks, as family and friends did not migrate overseas with me.

At the age of sixteen, I moved again to Australia, and the cultural difference I was confronted with was even more significant; it felt like I was leaving one cultural extreme to another. Indeed, many of Hofstede’s dimensions reveal that cultural values of Singaporeans or Thais are generally opposing to those of Australians. Similarly to the first transition between Thailand and Singapore, there was a need for another acculturation process – which included establishing a completely new social network. Presently, although I feel that I have achieved a high level of integration, old values and beliefs often persist in many aspects of my life. These are so deeply embedded that the idea of obtaining full assimilation seems personally unattainable.

Coming from this background, I am sensitive to the challenges and nuances of migrant transition. In a significant way it informs my study’s initial assumption that formerly-incarcerated women from migrant groups have to negotiate between their cultured understandings of the world, and the reality of the patriarchal and Anglo-Saxon structures that are imposed upon them. Moreover, my experience of the data collection process might have been distinct because of my cultural background; particularly, participants may have either felt more comfortable with me (because I was also a migrant), or less comfortable to share their stories (because I came from a similar background to them) (see: Anderson et al, 1988; Edwards, 1990; Gibson and Abrams, 2003; Carter, 2004; Egharevba, 2011). Unless I was explicitly asked by participants, I attempted to remain neutral in my position by not revealing my personal background.
Methodological overview

This section will briefly set out the research aims, objectives and methods of data collection in order to prepare the reader for the subsequent literature-oriented chapters. A detailed exposition of the research design and process is offered later in Chapter Four.

Four overarching objectives framed this research:

1. To understand the re-entry experiences of women from migrant backgrounds; specifically, to explore women’s perceptions of their individual journey through post-release integration;
2. To compare the experiences of women in Melbourne and in New York City to illuminate the degree of similarities between their experiences, and to understand the extent to which their experiences are informed by the context of the women’s environment;
3. To investigate the role played by support services in the women’s re-entry experiences, and to explore how these services impact on the women’s journey through their re-entry process; and,
4. To present scholars, practitioners, and policymakers with an increased understanding of the women’s experiences through their own words.

In addition, the research aimed to redress the exclusion of this group of ex-offenders from policy and scholarly attention through representing the voices of formerly-incarcerated women from migrant groups who are routinely “silenced” and “forgotten” (Easteal, 1992; Kilroy, 2003), and through presenting scholars, practitioners, and policymakers with an increased understanding of the women’s experiences through the women’s own words. While this secondary objective did not directly inform the research questions posed, they critically guided the methodological decisions made in the study,
and influenced how the study was constructed as a whole.

In order to respond to these research objectives, the following research questions guided the research:

1. How do formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds conceptualise and experience their re-entry process?
2. What factors shape and influence re-entry experiences in Melbourne and New York City?
3. To what extent does the women’s ability to access services affect their transitional experiences? What support is available?

Responding to the key research questions enabled the study to encapsulate the re-entry phenomenon as experienced by this cohort of ex-offenders in the two cities, and to understand the women’s interaction with post-release services and its effects on their transitional process.

The research studied the experiences of formerly-incarcerated women in two jurisdictions: Melbourne, Australia, and New York City, the United States of America. The trend towards mass incarceration in the United States has been well documented, including its particular impact on people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The comparative aspect of the study provided me with the ability to examine how the prisoner re-entry process is produced or affected by different institutions, systems and communities.

To fulfil the objectives outlined above, accounts from formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds were central. For this reason, the women’s lived experiences of re-entry from both sites were obtained through narrative interviews. In addition, accounts from post-release support staff were gathered to provide another perspective on the nature and extent of
the women’s interaction with the support services that exist to help the women re-join society after their incarceration. As prisoner re-entry is experienced in myriad ways by different individuals, comparative phenomenology was used as the principal methodological approach for the research study.

**Contribution to Knowledge**

While the post-release experiences of ex-offenders have been explored by scholars in the field, the specific study of formerly-incarcerated women from migrant groups have received comparatively little attention and this is especially so for women from migrant backgrounds. Although this group is a minority in the criminal justice system overall, there is an over-representation of women from migrant groups in the criminal justice system. Yet the study of their experiences is invaluable as it reveals the extent to which neglect from mainstream policies and services can impact on their transitional journey. Moreover, despite the indication by scholars and policymakers that ex-offenders from this group experience re-entry differently from their mainstream counterparts, there is a lack of research conducted where the women themselves are the authors of their own advocacy. Thus, the research bridges this gap in the literature in order to counter the silence imposed on ex-offenders from this group throughout the policy consideration process. In addition, the research provides a platform for researchers, practitioners and policymakers to utilise its findings to advance the advocacy of women from migrant backgrounds in relation to post-imprisonment experiences. It is argued that results from these discussions can directly impact the women’s well-being and livelihood.

The cross-jurisdictional comparison conducted in this research also permits insight into the extent to which the women’s re-entry journeys are
impacted by their external environment. Namely, it is argued that similarities highlighted in the women’s experiences in the two cities indicate the common effects of imprisonment regardless of cultural or societal contexts. Similarly, differences in experiences can be attributed to, amongst other factors, the external environment influencing the women’s re-entry experiences. An understanding of the broader re-entry phenomenon, therefore, provides policymakers with a catalyst for more systemic or structural changes to post-release integration and facilitates the cross pollination of effective modes of re-entry support.

Another contribution to current knowledge in the field relates to the attention this research has given to the individual agency of formerly incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds. While recognising that women from migrant backgrounds are victimised by the system (see: Easteal, 1995; Kilroy, 2000; 2003; Flat Out & CHRP, 2010), the thesis argues that the women exercised their agency in determining and dictating their own re-entry journey. This allows the research to broaden existing knowledge, and encourages a more agency-oriented perspective from policymakers, practitioners and researchers when considering re-entry for women from migrant groups.

Finally, findings from the research encourages a new way of thinking about the relationship between ex-offenders and their post-release support workers. Drawing on existing practices in New York City, the research makes particular recommendations to practitioners and policymakers in Melbourne towards a more New York-like approach to post-release support. This contribution to knowledge emphasises the crucial role support services play in the women’s integration process, and encourages a revision of the ways in which support workers currently organise and deliver their services.
Thesis Structure

To begin this investigation, Chapter Two outlines the social and cultural structures of both mainstream society and the correctional space in Melbourne and in New York City. This chapter studies how incarceration and prisoner re-entry are perceived in the two cities, and establishes the socio-cultural context within which analyses of findings can be understood. Then, Chapter Two provides a brief summary of current post-release practices in the two cities, and identifies challenges that individuals from specific groups – mainly, women and women from migrant backgrounds – may face in accessing these services.

Chapter Three provides a theoretical foundation for the thesis by exploring and reviewing existing academic research on the issue of prisoner re-entry. Specifically, the chapter explores how re-entry is theorised – especially, in relation to women and women from migrant backgrounds. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology, including a brief discussion of the rationale for the study sample and for the data collection and analysis processes. The study’s limitations and ethical considerations are demonstrated in this chapter to clarify the scope of the research.

Using the women’s exterior and interior lives as conceptual and analytical tools, findings in relation to these two components are presented respectively in Chapter Five and Chapter Six. In order to enhance the contribution of knowledge, the women’s stories and accounts from support workers are infused with theoretical interpretations and implications throughout the two chapters. Chapter Seven synthesises findings from the preceding two chapters to construct a holistic image of the re-entry journey for women from migrant backgrounds. Broader theoretical implications are also
discussed alongside the presentation of integrated findings. Finally, Chapter Eight explores policy and practical implications that emerged from the findings of this research. It also offers some suggestions for future research, taking into account the limitations arising from this present study.
CHAPTER TWO

THE TALE OF TWO CITIES: MELBOURNE AND NEW YORK CITY

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the contexts in which re-entry occurs in Melbourne and New York City to provide the thesis with a foundation for making sense of the re-entry experience. First, the socio-cultural factors impacting on the re-entry process are outlined. This includes demographic profiles of the general geographical population, as well as the economic profiles of the population. Then, the chapter discusses some correctional contexts – focusing on the demographic and offending profiles of prisoners in each site. The chapter finally illustrates the current process of re-entry that a typical prisoner goes through in each city – with an emphasis on the ways in which incarcerated or formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds reportedly interact with existing support structures. The chapter is structured by city to encourage a deeper and more holistic understanding of the situation in each site.

While Chapter One shows that women from migrant groups are over-represented in the prison population in both sites, a closer inspection of the policy and services contexts highlights important distinctions between Melbourne and New York City. A key argument forwarded in this chapter is that the issue of over-representation is viewed differently across the two sites. In Victoria, the recent increase in the number of imprisoned women from migrant groups have captured the attention of Corrections Victoria, other policymakers, as well as support services and advocates (Department of Justice, 2005; CHRIP & Flat Out, 2010). The focus of their attention has been on the
barriers specific to this group of prisoners both during and after incarceration as mainstream correctional services were considered inadequate to address nuanced cultural or linguistic differences. Conversely, in New York City attention has focused on the general racial disparity experienced largely by African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans in the criminal justice system. This concern has not accounted for gendered differences in the involvement with or experience of criminal justice. Consequently, there has been a critical constraint in this site on the ability to understand the problems faced specifically by minority women in prison as neither research nor official statistics explicitly identify this group or have much to say about their issues. The effect of this for women and their support workers will be explored later in Chapters Five and Six.

Melbourne – the World’s Most Liveable City

Melbourne is the capital city of Victoria – a south eastern state in Australia – and is the second-most populous city in the country (ABS, 2011). According to the latest census collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the population of Melbourne is approximately 4 million people; of this, thirty-seven per cent are foreign-born, and fifty-eight per cent have at least one parent who was born overseas. The highest number of migrants entering Melbourne are from countries such as England, India, China, Italy and New Zealand (ABS, 2011). As such, many Melbournians (33.7%) speak a language other than English at home (ABS, 2011). The multicultural nature of Melbourne has a long history beginning from the Victorian Gold Rush in the 1850s, when there was an influx of migrants from all over the world. Cultural diversity in Melbourne has continued and is characterised by the range of origin countries.
Apart from the city centre, residents are generally dispersed throughout Melbourne, resulting in a low population density of 453 people per square kilometer (1,170 people per square mile) (ABS, 2011). This low population density impacts on the population in that welfare services are not always easily accessible by public transport and tend to be organised differently and in accordance with regional ‘hubs’. Proximity (or not) to a regional hub can result in large variations in the availability of, and access to support services and public amenities in general.

The latest population census published in 2011 recorded that the median household income in Melbourne is AU$1,333 per week, or AU$53,855 annually. According to a 2014 report gathered by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), fourteen per cent of the population in Melbourne live below the poverty line. The report also found that women are slightly more likely to experience poverty than men (14.7% compared to 13%), and that poverty is somewhat higher amongst adults born in countries where the main language is not English (18.8%) than amongst those born overseas in an English-speaking country (11.4%), or in Australia (11.6%) (ACOSS, 2014). Women from migrant backgrounds may therefore be one of the most financially disadvantaged groups in society. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain the most vulnerable to poverty, with nineteen per cent of the population living under the poverty line compared to twelve per cent of the total Australian population (ACOSS, 2014).

Prisoner profile

Statistical data concerning prisoners in Australia are categorised by state, as states are the primary provider of correctional services. In December 2016, there were 6,522 people incarcerated in the state of Victoria, an increase of five per cent from the prison population reported at the same time in 2015.
(ABS, 2016). The rate of imprisonment similarly increased, from 134 to 138 persons per 100,000 adult population in Victoria (ABS, 2016). This increase in the imprisonment rate may have been a result of multiple significant changes to the state’s justice and corrections systems. They include, but are not limited to, the abolition of suspended sentences in 2014 – resulting in imprisonment being used more often as a sentence – and the implementation of recommendations from the Callinan Review in relation to the adult parole system throughout 2014 and 2015 – which has resulted in heightened restrictions on parole eligibility and conditions (Callinan, 2013). According to the 2016 *Prisoners in Australia* report, the most common Most Serious Offence (MSO) charged in Victoria were acts intended to cause injury (18%), illicit drug offences (14%), and sexual assault and related offences (13%).

Females make up seven per cent of incarcerated adults in Victoria (an imprisonment rate of 18 per 100,000 adult population), which remains unchanged from the rate reported in 2015 (ABS, 2016). In Victoria, two female prisons exist: the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Prison. Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC) is a maximum security prison located in Deer Park, Victoria, and contains 398 prisoners in its 397-bed capacity estate (Corrections Victoria, 2017). A medium security facility also exists within DPFC for prisoners who do not pose a maximum security risk. Tarrengower prison is a minimum security prison with the 72 beds currently occupied at capacity (Corrections Victoria, 2017). Unlike the men’s prison, there are no specific facilities for female unsentenced prisoners (remandees) who are awaiting trial or sentencing; instead, women remanded into custody go directly to DPFC during their remand period.

Rehabilitative programs are provided to prisoners in Victoria. This includes programs aiming at offence-specific behaviour, drug and alcohol treatment programs, educational programs (including vocational programs),
psychological counselling, and family violence programs. The range and dosage of programs available vary between prisons. The majority of existing programs are voluntary; however, there are some programs offered in DPFC that require compulsory attendance by prisoners.

**Women from migrant groups in prison**

According to the ABS, Victoria has the highest proportion of overseas-born prisoners in Australia – making up twenty-five per cent of the overall Victorian prison population (ABS, 2016). Vietnamese prisoners (of both genders) make up the largest number of foreign-born prisoners in the state – accounting for twenty per cent of the overseas-born prisoner population for the past five years. In addition, Vietnamese prisoners are slightly over-represented in the Victorian prison population (six per cent of the prisoner population, but only five per cent of the general Victorian population) (Corrections Victoria, 2011). The over-representation is especially startling for the Vietnamese women population in prison. Although Vietnamese women represent under two per cent of the general Victorian women population (as per the latest 2011 population census data), they make up a staggering ten per cent of the Victorian female prison population (Corrections Victoria, 2011). Furthermore, according to the 2011 Statistical Profiles of Victorian Prisoners Report, approximately ten per cent of female prisoners in Victoria are of Vietnamese heritage, compared to five per cent of male prisoners. As Vietnamese prisoners represented the largest group of imprisoned people from migrant backgrounds, more direct attention has been given to them than to other migrant groups.

In a multicultural community such as that in Melbourne and in New

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1 The measure of over-representation is the ABS census data in 2011 (most updated) and the ABS prisoner statistics from 2011 (ABS, 2011).
York City, prisoners may be locally-born citizens and still be members of a migrant group. Therefore, it is important to note that statistics provided on ‘overseas-born’ or ‘foreign-born’ prisoners only account for imprisoned people who are born overseas, and do not account for those born locally and identify with a migrant group. Statistics on this group of prisoners, hence, understate the presence of women from migrant groups in the prison population.

A crucial distinction exists between male and female prisoners in relation to the offence for which they are convicted. ABS data show that non-indigenous female offenders in Australia are more likely to have been convicted for illicit drug offences than male offenders (26.1% compared to 16.8%) (ABS, 2016). Moreover, there is a difference in the patterns of MSO between the English-speaking prison population and the non-English speaking prison population: for instance, the most common MSO for prisoners from the top five non-English speaking countries of birth (with the exception of the Sudan) is illicit drug offences; whereas, others (from English-speaking countries, including Australia) have acts intended to cause injury as their most common MSO (ABS, 2016). These data were not broken down by State.

Official statistics largely aligned with the call by academic researchers for more attention to be directed towards the disadvantages that women from migrant groups experience during their incarceration and this has been noted over time. Easteal (1992) and Denton (1995), for instance, described the typical profile of female prisoners from migrant groups as having a low level of education, limited involvement in employment, poor access to economic resources, and high rates of being victims of physical or emotional abuse. Due to their disadvantaged status, many culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women – especially, those from South-East Asian backgrounds – are used as drug mules to traffic illicit drugs into Australia (Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010). Evidently, this trend is reflected in the disproportionate number of illicit drug
offences women from migrant backgrounds are charged with. In addition, upon their conviction, women from this group are more readily prepared to face incarceration than to implicate others out of concern for the safety of their children or other family members (Easteal, 1992; Denton, 1995). As a result, incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds are placed in a more vulnerable position than others from the very beginning of their interaction with the criminal justice system (Easteal, 1992; 1995; Burley, 1995; CHRIP 2010; Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010).

Recognising the disadvantages faced by imprisoned women – including those from migrant groups – Corrections Victoria introduced the Better Pathways Initiative. This initiative was a four-year strategy implemented from 2005 to 2009 to address the general increase in women’s offending and re-offending in Victoria. The final Better Pathways report specifically identified “the significant increase in the number of women prisoners from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, particularly Vietnamese-born women”, and suggested that the increase was driven by serious drug offences (Department of Justice, 2005: 8). In response to these reported issues, the Better Pathways Initiative broadly recommended that pathways to crime that have been identified as being specific to women from migrant groups – particularly those from Vietnamese background – were addressed, and that pre- and post-release support services offered to this group of women accommodate their cultural and linguistic needs.

To respond to this recommendation, the role of a Vietnamese Liaison Officer (VLO) was created to facilitate more accessibility to a range of services for imprisoned women. This role included the provision of case management, liaison of prisoners with case managers, facilitation of access for women to treatment services in prison, provision of support and welfare assistance, facilitation of links to family and community, development of culturally-
relevant programs, as well as the delivery of interpreter and translator services (CHRIP, 2010: 34). As such, the apparent range of services the VLO offered generated an expectation from Vietnamese women prisoners that the VLO would support them in various aspects of prison life (CHRIP, 2010: 34). However, the role of the VLO in recent years has been re-badged to ‘Multicultural Liaison Officer’, in an attempt to include prisoners from a greater variety of migrant backgrounds in its services (CHRIP, 2010: 34). In spite of this title change, the Centre for the Human Rights of Imprisoned People (CHRIP) insists that the Multicultural Liaison Officer continues to provide a disproportionate level of services to Vietnamese women as Vietnamese people remain the dominant migrant population in Victorian prisons (2010: footnote 106).

At around the same time, the 2005 *Request for a Systemic Review of Discrimination against Women in Victorian Prisons* submitted by the Federation of Community Legal Centres (FCLC) and the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) listed serious allegations of discrimination against women prisoners in Victoria. This included racist treatment by prison staff as well as by other prisoners, the lack of available health information provided in suitable languages, and the inability to observe religious requirements. The Request was presented to the Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria (EOCV), and especially highlighted the discrimination women from migrant groups face in prison because of their race and religion (CHRIP, 2010). A follow-up investigation conducted by CHRIP revealed that despite the acknowledgement of the discrimination allegations presented to the EOCV and the EOCV’s subsequent attempt to collaborate with Corrections Victoria to alleviate the level of discrimination women from migrant groups face in prison no substantial changes had been made (CHRIP, 2010). On the contrary, the 2010 CHRIP report indicated that situations in the prisons worsened as the institution became more “closed and secretive” after the Request was released.
(CHRIP, 2010: 2). As a result, CHRIP believed that discrimination was likely to continue within the prison and become more embedded and normalised than before (CHRIP, 2010: 2).

Re-entry process

The Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) Report on Government Services 2016 outlined that between 2012 and 2013 forty-four per cent of offenders return to prison within two years of their release. While recidivism statistics are not disaggregated for specific groups, it has been demonstrated by academic research that personal and systemic discrimination faced by women from migrant groups in prison has caused a reluctance to participate in mainstream programs that are designed to assist with women’s post-release integration (Easteal, 1992; Denton, 1995; Kilroy, 2000, Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010). Hence, this reluctance to participate in pre- or post-release transitional programs has a direct and significant effect on the women’s chance of successful integration after prison.

Dedicated pre-release services are available to prisoners in need of support. This includes areas such as housing, employment, education and training, living skills, mental health treatment, alcohol and drugs treatment, and family or community connectedness. Case Planning Transition (CPT) assessment is available to all unsentenced prisoners and to those serving sentences that are longer than eighteen months. In addition, targeted pre-release programs that provide “practical advice and tailored transitional support” are also available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners, women prisoners, as well as those serving longer sentences (Corrections Victoria, 2016). The key program, ReLink, is run by the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO), and is available in a group or an individual format for eligible prisoners up to twelve months before
their release (Corrections Victoria, 2016).

In addition, Corrections Victoria has funded a number of post-release programs through the Pip Wisdom Community Corrections Grant. Under this grant, three of the eight programs specifically target offenders from certain cultural or linguistic backgrounds: these are Muslim Connect, the African Visitation and Mentoring Program (AVAMP), and the Genesis Reintegration Program (services for Pacific Island and Maori prisoners). Moreover, two of the eight programs provide support exclusively to female offenders – the NOVO Recovery Program and the Prison Network Ministries Pre- and Post-release Support Program. All eight programs funded under this grant deliver both pre- and post-release support to their target group.

Outside of the Pip Wisdom Grant, Corrections Victoria funds pre- and post-release services to offenders including the Vietnamese Support Program provided by the Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association (AVWA), and other programs delivered by VACRO, including ReConnect, the Family Links Innovation Program, and the VACRO Women’s Mentoring Program\(^2\). Included in the listed programs are housing and employment support services, mentoring services – where prisoners are paired with volunteer mentors who provide them with emotional support before and after release – as well as family services, such as organised visits for family members and children whose parents are in prison. Of the existing services, AVWA’s Vietnamese Support Program remains the only pre- or post-release program in Victoria that provides targeted support for female prisoners from migrant backgrounds.

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\(^2\) At the time of data collection (2014), the Women’s Integrated Supported Program (WISP) was delivered by Jesuit Social Services (JSS), and was funded to service formerly-incarcerated women. From 2015 onwards, however, this program no longer existed, and any post-release support provided by JSS is now part of the ReConnect program that is coordinated by VACRO.
However, this still does not restrict formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds from accessing the general post-release services outlined above.

As noted earlier, despite the available post-release services provided by Corrections Victoria, the majority of women from migrant backgrounds often do not access these services (CHRIP, 2010). Scholars have offered three main rationales for this non-interaction with post-release support: linguistic barriers, cultural barriers, and structural barriers. Examples of cultural barriers cited include personal shame, fear of judgements from mainstream or ethnic communities, and the prohibition from accessing services imposed by family members (Kilroy, 2003; CHRIP, 2010; Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, 2010; Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010; In-Touch, 2010; Allimant and Ostapiej-Piatkowski, 2011). As the majority of post-release support services are provided in English, many also believe that women from migrant groups do not access mainstream services for this reason (Kilroy, 2003; CHRIP, 2010; Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, 2010; Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010; In-Touch, 2010; Allimant and Ostapiej-Piatkowski, 2011).

Structural barriers also exist. Firstly, it has been documented that there is an assumption by prison officers that women from ethnic backgrounds – especially, those from Asia – have family support available to them outside, and are less likely to need post-release support from services (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Kilroy, 2003; CHRIP, 2010); consequently, they are unlikely to be referred for support. Secondly, women from migrant backgrounds typically serve short sentences that are on average less than eighteen months and are therefore not eligible for the ReLink services. Thirdly, women on remand are often discharged without any warning; hence, any planning for release is difficult. Moreover, women from migrant backgrounds are commonly classified as ‘low-risk’ and are often transferred during their sentence to Tarrengower prison, where the range of available programs is narrow. The
limited access to services can result in women from migrant groups experiencing a transitional process that is more isolated and excluded from mainstream society (Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, 2010: 83).

Issues unique to women can also act as barriers to accessing support services post-release. For example, some women who exit prison have no choice but to return to violent and abusive partners or family members (Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010). Thus, the physical or emotional abuse can prevent women from accessing or benefiting from support during their integration. Moreover, Kilroy (2000; 2003) found that many women from migrant groups who are mothers are expected to return to motherhood immediately after incarceration, and hence have less time to organise or attend support services as they have to resume parenting responsibilities. On the other hand, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) typically requires that women have secure housing and have engaged in drug treatment before they can regain custody of their children.

**New York City – a Cultural Melting Pot**

Situated in the southern part of the state of New York, New York City is considered by many to be the ‘cultural capital of the world’ (for example, Schuessler, 2012). The metropolitan area that is New York City consists of five boroughs: the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island. In 2015, the United States Census Bureau estimated the population of New York City to be at approximately 8.5 million people – with a population density of 10,831.1 people per square kilometre (or 28,052.5 people per square mile), making New York City the most populous city in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2017). In contrast to the more dispersed layout of the population in Melbourne, services in New York City are more easily accessible
by public transport because of the higher population density in the city.

Historically, New York City has always been a major port of entry for migrants into the United States particularly in the early 1900s, when many emigrated from Europe to the United States through Ellis Island. Contemporary New York City continues to be a ‘cultural melting pot’, and is populated with first- and second-generation migrants from all around the world. Currently, the population of New York City is made up of forty-four per cent White-Americans, twenty-nine per cent Hispanic- or Latino-American (including those from Latin America), twenty-six per cent African-Americans (including those from Caribbean countries), thirteen per cent Asian-Americans, and one per cent Native-Americans (US Census Bureau, 2017). Foreign-born persons account for thirty-seven per cent of the population in New York City, and half of its residents speak a language other than English at home (US Census Bureau, 2017). These statistics reinforce the city’s status as the most ethnically diverse metropolitan city in the world (Gordon, et al., 2007).

In 2015, the median household income for New York City was US$52,737, which is A$70,040 (as at April, 2017) (US Census Bureau, 2017). The US Census Bureau also reported that an estimated sixteen per cent of the population in New York City was living below the poverty line. The city’s diverse population contributes to the large disparity in economic standing amongst residents. This disparity is more evident when statistics are analysed by boroughs, which is a useful method of analysis used to obtain an overall understanding of the population in New York City as there is substantial variation between demographics at a borough-level.

Out of the five boroughs of New York City, Queens consists of the most foreign-born population (47.8%), many of whom are Asian-Americans (US Census Bureau, 2017). This is followed by Brooklyn, the Bronx and
Manhattan, at thirty-eight per cent, thirty-four per cent, and twenty-nine per cent, respectively (US Census Bureau, 2017). Notably, a significantly higher proportion of African-Americans reside in the Bronx (43.5% of residents) and Brooklyn (35.2% of residents) than other boroughs (US Census Bureau, 2017). When income statistics are broken down by borough, those for the Bronx and Brooklyn reveal the two lowest median household income – both with lower than average median household incomes (US Census Bureau, 2017). Moreover, more residents in these two boroughs live below the poverty line than any other boroughs (US Census Bureau, 2017). These disparities are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1 New York City: Median household income by borough
The significance of these data emerges when one thinks about the types of communities ex-offenders are returning to. Put simply, if the majority of returning offenders are African-Americans or Hispanic-Americans, then they are likely returning to communities where African-Americans or Hispanic-Americans tend to reside. This hypothesis is supported by the article by Marks (2013), which outlined the top five neighbourhoods that supplies one-third of the New York City prisoners. These were South Bronx (the Bronx), Brownsville (Brooklyn), East New York (Brooklyn), Harlem (Manhattan) and Bedford-Stuyvesant (Brooklyn). As has been shown above, these communities are also ones within which poverty is rife.

The economic disparities demonstrated by the US Census Bureau are consistent with economic reports on the racial disparities in household income in the United States (Campbell and Kaufman, 2006; Lam, 2014). Namely, these reports illustrate how African-Americans, closely followed by Hispanic-
Americans, are more vulnerable to economic and social disadvantages than other racial groups (Campbell and Kaufman, 2006; Lam, 2014). Even though the data presented in these reports do not imply a direct causal link between race and economic advantage, there is a strong correlation between the two variables.

**Prison profile**

Correctional facilities in the United States are provided by state as well as federal governments. Depending on the type of crime an offender is sentenced for, they may be incarcerated in either a state or a federal facility. Under the management of the state, two distinct types of correctional facilities exist: jails and prisons. Prisoners who are on remand awaiting trial, or have been sentenced to incarceration for less than one year, are received by city jails. All others are sent to state prisons.

Statistics on the prison population in the state of New York are compiled by the state’s Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). According to their website, the Department manages a total of fifty-four correctional facilities – including prisons and drug treatment centres. Of these, three specifically accommodate female offenders: Albion Correctional Facilities (medium security), Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (maximum security), and Taconic Correctional Facility (medium security). In addition, two of the fifty-four correctional facilities in New York State contain both male and female prisoners: Lakeview Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility (minimum security), and the Willard Drug Treatment Campus – which acts as a drug treatment centre for incarcerated offenders.

The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) compiled a recent report on the prisoner population across US states, revealing a total number of
52,518 prisoners in the state of New York in the year 2014 (Carson and Anderson, 2015). In addition, the report outlines the imprisonment rate for New York State at 265 per 100,000 population – with the rate for males at 522 per 100,000, and for females at 23 per 100,000 population (Carson and Anderson, 2015). In the state of New York, female prisoners account for four per cent of the total state prisoner population (Carson and Anderson, 2015).

In New York City, correctional statistics are collected by the City of New York Department of Correction (DOC). DOC is responsible for the management of correctional facilities in the city and currently operates fourteen facilities in total. This includes jails, houses of detention, court penitentiaries, and two hospital prison wards (DOC, 2017). On an average day in 2017, the population of inmates in New York City is approximately ten thousand people (DOC, 2017). This consists of fifty-five per cent African-Americans; thirty-four per cent Hispanic-Americans; seven per cent White-Americans, and two per cent Asian-Americans (DOC, 2017). Similar to the statistics on prisoners in the United States in general, African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans are over-represented in the prison population.

In the last forty years, incarceration in the United States has increased by five hundred per cent despite crimes rates decreasing nationally (Sentencing Project, 2016). This dramatic growth in the United States penal population has prompted researchers and scholars to focus their attention on the causes and consequences of what has become known as a ‘mass imprisonment’ phenomenon (Garland, 2001). While high rates of imprisonment are not a problem uniquely faced by the United States it leads the world in its incarceration rate, with a rate of 698 per 100,000 population (Walmsley, 2013). Moreover, although the population in the United States makes up only four
per cent of the world’s population, it houses twenty-two per cent of the world prison population (Walmsley, 2013).3

There is a consensus amongst legal and criminal justice scholars in the United States that the primary cause of mass incarceration has stemmed from the country’s responses to the War on Drugs (Leverentz, 2014; Sentencing Project, 2016; Travis, 2014). Specifically, the War on Drugs led to targeted policing in certain communities and punitive measures against those found guilty of drug-related offences. The tough sentencing laws introduced as a result of the War on Drugs – mandatory minimum sentencing, “three-strikes” laws, and truth-in-sentencing laws – caused a marked reliance on the criminal justice system, especially on correctional facilities. Additionally, many who would otherwise have been diverted out of the prison system through alternative forms of punishment received lengthy prison sentences as a result of these targeted policies. The Sentencing Project (2016) reported that these harsh sentencing laws have kept people in prison for a longer period of time, which has contributed significantly to the overall growth in the prison population.

Prisoner statistics from 2013 show that foreign-born prisoners make up approximately ten per cent of the total prison population in New York State, the majority of whom are illegal immigrants (38%) and legal permanent residents (32%) (Clark, 2013). Of these foreign-born prisoners, a large majority comes from the Caribbean (48%), followed by Central America (13%) and South America (13%) (Clark, 2013). The Dominican Republic and Jamaica remain the top two countries of birth for this group of prisoners, with the

3 There are limitations to these statistics – such as, the variation of the age range of people in prison, the frequency of data collection, what gets counted, and the level of reliability and honesty in the data collection methods. Though these statistics offer a good general sense of comparisons across countries, there often are significant gaps in the data.
prisoner population from these two countries at twenty per cent and fourteen per cent, respectively (Clark, 2015). Again, it is worth noting that the number of foreign-born prisoners understate the presence of women from migrant groups in the prison system.

All overseas-born prisoners in the state of New York who do not have a US citizenship (obtained either through their parents or the naturalisation process) are deported following their imprisonment. Depending on individual circumstances, they may serve their sentence entirely in a state correctional facility, or serve part of their sentence in a state facility and the remaining in a correctional facility operated by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). DOCCS reported that between 2003 and 2013 approximately fourteen thousand foreign-born prisoners were released for either immediate deportation or transfer to the custody of ICE or the United States Marshals Service (Clark, 2013). This process of managing foreign-born prisoners has subsequent effects on the participant sample as it limited the number of first-generation migrants available for the research. More importantly, the process of deportation or the transferring of prisoners to ICE facilities would undoubtedly have a drastic impact on the experience of re-entry for these prisoners. This has significant implications for the re-entry process which would take place away from the community women lived in prior to their incarceration.

The racial disparities found amongst the prisoner population in New York City are consistent with the overall incarceration trend in the United States. While the country’s mass incarceration phenomenon has affected the entire US population in various ways, scholars believe that the tougher sentencing policies enacted in the 1980s continue to disproportionally affect African-American communities (Leverentz, 2014; Travis, 2014). For instance, the BJS outlined that three per cent of all African-American men were
imprisoned at the time of data collection in 2014, in comparison to one per cent of Hispanic-American men and less than one per cent of White-American men (Carson and Anderson, 2015). Accordingly, the imprisonment rate (as at 31 December 2014) for African-American men at any age group was four to eleven times higher than that for White-American men (with variations across jurisdictions), and one to three times higher than the rate for Hispanic-American men (Carson and Anderson, 2015).

Women from migrant groups in prison

The above trend of racial inequality similarly continues where incarcerated female offenders are concerned. Data from the BJS in 2014 shows that African-American women are between two to four times more likely to be imprisoned than White-American women in any age group (Carson and Anderson, 2015). The examination of statistical trends for African-American prisoners is vital for this research as, in many jurisdictions, prisoners of African descent who are from countries such as those in the Caribbean are categorised as African-American for statistical purposes. The distinctions between these prisoners and those born in the United States are only made when country-of-birth data are provided.

Despite these statistical data presented above it is notable that no explicit calls have been made in New York City to provide race-specific support programs for incarcerated African-Americans or Hispanic-Americans. Unlike Melbourne, where the experiences of migrant groups during (and at times after) their imprisonment are of a major concern, the discourse in New York City focuses more on the general racial inequality seen in all aspects of social, economic and political life – of which the racial disparity in the criminal justice system is one symptom. For example, from 1992 to 2013, the median net worth of African-Americans with a tertiary-level education dropped nearly
fifty-six per cent (Cohen, 2015). By comparison, the median net worth of White-Americans with tertiary education rose by approximately eighty-six per cent over the same period (Cohen, 2015). In addition, Firebaugh and colleagues (2014) reported that African-Americans have a lower life expectancy than White-Americans due to medical diseases, homicide, as well as infant mortality. Criminal justice or correctional policies in New York City or New York State are not explicitly racialised and therefore the apparent racial inequality in the prison population remains unaddressed at policy, practice and programmatic levels. Furthermore, it is worth noting that while racial differences may be recognised in certain aspects of society, very little is said about cultural differences.

Re-entry process

The annual publication by the New York Public Library, Connections, is a comprehensive guide available to formerly-incarcerated people in New York City, and provides a catalogue of all support services that an ex-offender may need upon their return from prison. Listed in this guide are support services for housing, education, employment, financial assistance, health care, addictions treatment, legal assistance and counselling. In addition, services that are targeted at specific groups – including women, people with disability, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people – are also outlined. In a large majority of cases, ex-offenders are expected to seek out support for themselves with the resources that are available. This is in contrast to Melbourne where the identification of services forms part of pre-release planning.

Within this service catalogue, twenty-two organisations are listed as providing dedicated support to formerly-incarcerated people. This includes the Fortune Society, the Osborne Association, Getting Out and Staying Out (GOSO), Center for Community Alternatives, and the Coming Home
Program. These organisations deliver comprehensive support for housing, employment, education, substance abuse treatment, and family services. Typically, these organisations are the first entry point for post-release support for ex-offenders, and the majority of support is provided in-house by the organisations. The Fortune Society, for instance, is a well-known post-release organisation in New York City that offers family support, substance treatment programs, and employment services to formerly-incarcerated people. In addition, the Fortune Society’s Housing Program provides both emergency residential accommodation (the Fortune Academy and the Castle), as well as support services for non-residential clients (NYC Service, 2016).

Six out of the twenty-four female-oriented organisations listed in Connections deliver services specifically to women who are ex-offenders – the most well-known of which is the Women’s Prison Association (WPA). A range of services and referrals delivered to women by the WPA includes: family support services (such as visitations for children with incarcerated mothers); physical and mental health services; support for employment and housing; as well as support catered specifically to women experiencing family violence or domestic abuse. These services are offered throughout the women’s involvement with the criminal justice system, and can incorporate pre-release planning, re-entry support, and counselling. Similar to the Fortune Society, the WPA has two residential facilities – the Sarah Powell Huntington House and the Hopper House – for emergency housing.

The majority of pre- and post-release support services in New York City are run by community members or volunteers, and do not typically receive contractual funding from state or city governments. Although no ethnic- or race-specific post-release services exist in New York City, the Fortune Society is one amongst many stating that their staff have “cultural backgrounds and life experiences similar to those of [their] clients” (New York Public Library, 2015:
18). Notably, many post-release organisations in New York City are managed and staffed by African-Americans or Hispanic-Americans who are formerly-incarcerated themselves. For this reason, the level of cultural diversity evident in the correctional population in New York City has perhaps been normalised, and it may then follow that ethnic- or race-specific post-release services may not have been perceived as necessary. However, as racial disparity continues to be a concerning issue in American culture, the differential treatment of migrant offenders (if any) is worth delving into.

In New York City, the pre-release planning process varies for offenders depending on their individual needs, and the correctional facility from where they are being released. Unless they are mandated to post-release services (commonly for substance abuse treatment) as a part of their conditional release or parole, offenders typically have to be proactive in accessing pre- and post-release services themselves. As they approach their release dates, incarcerated offenders are provided with information on pre- and post-release support services that they can seek assistance from. For instance, an incarcerated offender can either speak to a post-release service representative directly during one of the representative’s regular visits to prisons, or write a letter to organisations requesting assistance upon their release. While some incarcerated offenders are provided with a caseworker to assist with their particular needs, this is not always the case. As a result, many incarcerated individuals do not access post-release services until they are out in the community.

Tartaro and Levy (2014) reported in their research that individuals who are incarcerated in city jails face a particularly challenging re-entry planning process. Firstly, the various ways in which one can be released from city jails – for example, through bail payment, or a reduction or dropping of charges – mean that jail staff members do not always know when an individual will leave (Tartaro and Levy, 2014: 130). Moreover, the brief amount of time that
inmates reside in city jails give programs limited opportunities to thoroughly address criminogenic needs, and offenders are also less likely to be able to participate in programs that would assist them with their re-entry prospects (Tartaro and Levy, 2014: 130). In addition, the limited funding that city jails usually receive can restrict the number of treatment programs that are available (Crayton et al., 2010).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the socio-cultural, correctional and post-release contexts of Melbourne and New York City, thereby laying down a foundation from which the analysis for research findings can be interpreted. Specifically, the multicultural nature of the two cities is shown – highlighting the similarities between the demographics of the population in Melbourne and New York City, and reaffirming the suitability of the sites for a cross-jurisdictional comparison to be conducted. Notably, it reveals a crucial distinction in the socio-economic divisions between the two cities: while minority groups from both cities experience more economic disadvantages relative to their mainstream counterparts, the ethnic or racial enclaves in New York City are more geographically and economically segregated. That is, communities in the Bronx and Brooklyn show a distinctive correlation between the number of racial and ethnic population, the relatively low level of household income and the high likelihood of families living in poverty. This, as a result, has significant implications for offenders returning to communities where poverty and crime may be rife.

The chapter has provided a context around imprisonment and re-entry in the two cities. While the extent of racial and ethnic disparities in imprisonment rates may vary across the cities and between groups, it is vital to
note that the disparities exist in both cities – where non-white adults are over-imprisoned in general, and extending disproportionally to women and minority groups in particular. This has demonstrated the continued disadvantages faced by minority groups during their interaction with the criminal justice system of cities that boast multiculturalism – showing that multiculturalism does not imply equality.

The chapter has also argued that the re-entry journeys of migrant groups may be further affected by their higher likelihood of returning to communities with higher levels of poverty. Details of the reported vulnerabilities ex-offenders face are outlined in the next chapter, alongside more theoretical conceptions of the re-entry phenomenon. While this chapter has armed the thesis with a contextual basis for understanding the correctional experiences of women in Melbourne and New York City, Chapter Three is focused on providing a theoretical basis from which re-entry in general, and the women’s experiences in particular, can be understood.
CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUALISING RE-ENTRY

Introduction

The central aim of this chapter is to examine prisoner re-entry to provide a theoretical basis from which the experience of prisoner re-entry can be understood. The chapter does this by amalgamating and reviewing academic and empirical literature to construct a critical overview of central themes in prisoner re-entry literature. As Chapter Two has alluded, the literature on prisoner re-entry is more developed in the United States than in Australia; consequently, a significant proportion of literature reviewed throughout Chapter Three is derived from studies and analyses conducted in North America.

Chapter Three begins by exploring the concept of prisoner re-entry. Specifically, it reviews the ways in which re-entry is commonly understood, and discusses why the term should be differentiated from others such as ‘reintegration’ and ‘resettlement’, which are frequently used. Moreover, the first section of the chapter crucially acknowledges that prisoner re-entry is a necessary process common to all released individuals. This emphasis is essential in understanding the concept of prisoner re-entry, as well as in understanding the findings of this study presented later in the thesis.

Next, the chapter reviews empirical research that has significantly contributed to the conceptualisation of prisoner re-entry in North America and in Australia. In doing so, it provides an overall picture of the typical ways in which studies on prisoner re-entry are conducted. Also highlighted throughout
the review of empirical research are the similarities between re-entry experiences across different participant groups in the two cities. The existence of these similarities, in turn, reinforces the far-reaching impacts of imprisonment on individuals regardless of their personal circumstances. While these universal elements in the experiences exist, they are nuanced by gender and ethnicity. These inadvertent consequences of incarceration (categorised as consequences on housing, employment, family relationships, health, and social capital), which translate into barriers for post-release integration, are also outlined in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter Three investigates the ways in which re-entry has been conceptualised for women and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Specifically, it presents debates arguing for and critiquing debates that approach gender or culture in isolation. Whilst these gender- or culture-responsive approaches can be helpful, the chapter offers intersectionality as an alternative theoretical framework useful for conceptualising the re-entry experiences of women from migrant backgrounds.

**Prisoner Re-entry**

In their review of prisoner re-entry, Visher and Travis (2003: 90) offered an explanation for the phenomenon as “the process of leaving prison and returning to free society”. The authors suggested that re-entry is experienced by all prisoners (albeit in different ways), regardless of their legal status or conditions of release (Visher and Travis, 2003: 90). For instance, ex-offenders who are released without conditions experience re-entry as the process whereby they immediately attempt to integrate into society, whereas those who are re-entering society with parole conditions go through a very different re-entry process due to the restrictions imposed upon them. The
authors concluded that re-entry can, therefore, be considered as both a process and a goal – namely that the goal of a successful re-entry can only be achieved once the process has been experienced (Visher and Travis, 2003: 91).

Miller (2014: 306) noted that the definition proposed by Visher and Travis is strategic as it helped direct the attention of policy makers onto the goals of ex-offenders in a way that seems politically neutral. The author highlighted further that ensuring a ‘successful’ re-entry is a political project involving multiple stakeholders, each with vested interests in how former prisoners are understood, how re-entry programs are subsequently implemented, and the outcomes of re-entering prisoners who participate in such programs (Miller, 2014: 306).

In post-release studies, the term re-entry is often used interchangeably with reintegration (see: Baldry et al., 2003; Graffam et al., 2005; Kinner, 2006; Graffam and Hardcastle, 2007; Willis, 2008; Willis and Moore, 2008; Shinkfield and Graffam, 2009; 2010) and resettlement (see: Moore, 2011; Cole et al., 2012; Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2012; Hucklesby and Hagley-Dickinson, 2012; Kemshall, 2012; Raynor, 2012; Williams et al., 2012) to depict the process of returning to the community once released. While the term resettlement was “the buzzword of choice” in the United Kingdom (Ward and Maruna, 2007: 4), re-entry became the “new buzzword for correctional reform” in North American literature (Maruna and LeBel, 2002: 158).

Although these terms seemingly signify the same process, there are noteworthy theoretical differences behind their conceptions. For example, unlike re-entry, the terms resettlement and reintegration refers not only to the process of being released into mainstream society post-incarceration, but also to the desired outcome of that release (Her Majesty’s Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation, 2001). In their analyses of the these latter terms, Moore (2011)
and Ramsbotham (2003) both agreed on the problematic nature of the presumption that individuals have previously been settled and integrated before their incarceration, and that they possess the capacity to re-settle and re-integrate after their release. Rather, Maruna and LeBel (2002: 160) pointed out that re-entry is an “intentionally vague, largely descriptive term that can imply different things to different listeners” (cited in Moore, 2011: 133). Indeed, Moore (2011: 136) clarified that, “whether it is integration (settled existence for the first time) or reintegration (returning to a former level of settled living) will depend on specific and antecedent circumstances”. Thus, re-entry is best conceptualised on a continuum rather than as a state of being, and an individual’s point on the re-entry continuum is not necessarily pre-determined.

Regardless of their usage and implications, the terminologies continue to highlight the exclusive nature of society that ex-offenders are confronted with. This exclusivity, moreover, reinforces the physical, social, and symbolic distinctions between the two opposing realms: prison and mainstream society. The distinctions are made apparent in Roger Moore’s (2011) conceptualisation of the three primary phases of re-entry, where he demonstrated the processes that formerly-incarcerated people must go through before they are able to be completely resettled or reintegrated. These three stages are: societal re-entry; re-entry as emergent social integration; and, re-entry as social integration or reintegration (Moore, 2011: 136). Differentiating integration and reintegration into two stages, Moore (2011) acknowledged that individuals may not have previously been settled or integrated prior to their incarceration. Furthermore, his conception of the three phases of re-entry emphasises that re-entry is a process, rather than an event that occurs at only one point in time.

Using Moore’s stages of re-entry framework, we can better understand the goals of re-entry according to where individuals may be in their re-entry process. In addition, using the stages of re-entry as a framework enables us to
recognise that an appropriate measure of re-entry success can vary depending on an individual’s stage of re-entry. For instance, in the first phase \textit{(societal re-entry)}, the primary objective of re-entry is to confront the initial challenges of psychologically and socially transitioning from the control of the prison to being autonomously responsible in mainstream society (Moore, 2011: 134). Hence, according to Moore, a measure of success at this first stage is the ability for ex-offenders to utilise their networks and resources to assist in their transition (2011: 135). The second phase \textit{(emergent social integration)}, in contrast, moves beyond the first, and focuses on an ex-offender’s ability to enhance their assimilation into the same social networks which will allow for further integration (Moore, 2011: 135). In the final phase \textit{(social integration or reintegration)}, Moore concluded that individuals should feel ‘integrated’ and ‘settled’, and feel a deeper sense of belonging and permanence in psychological, social and emotional relationships (2011: 135). After having gone through the three stages of re-entry, formerly-incarcerated individuals should feel “re-accepted as a fully-fledged member in and of the wider community” (Moore, 2011: 135).

As mentioned earlier, prisoner re-entry does not only include individuals who are unconditionally released into mainstream society, but also those who are being released with conditions imposed upon them. As such, it is important to note the implication of this incorporation: the re-entry process applies to both offenders who no longer have any ties to the criminal justice system, as well as those released with one foot still across the border (for example, when on parole). Thus, while this latter group may not physically be in prison, they are legally still considered as being under the care of Corrections. This complex status, coupled with the various stages of re-entry, hence, reinforce that prisoner re-entry can occur in a multitude of forms, and can differ quite drastically between individuals.
Over the years, desistance\(^4\) has become a central element in the works of many re-entry scholars (Burnett and Maruna, 2004; Farrall, 2004; Maruna et al., 2004; Farrall and Calverley, 2006). In *Making Good*, Shadd Maruna (2001: 22) outlined Shover’s (1996: 121) and Farrall and Bowling’s (1999) definitions of *desistance* as “the voluntary termination of serious criminal participation” or “the moment that a criminal career ends”. Maruna (2001) himself, then, demonstrated that these definitions do not accurately reflect the reality of desistance. Namely, he argued that the “termination” of crime does not occur at just one point in time; rather, it can take place “all of the time” (2001: 23). Using Farrington’s example (1986: 201), Maruna (2001: 23) went on to clarify that an individual can potentially go five or ten years without committing a crime, but that does not guarantee that offending has indeed terminated. As a result, Maruna offered an alternative definition of *desistance*:

“Desistance might more productively be defined as the long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who had previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending. The focus here is not on the transition or change, but rather on the maintenance of crime-free behaviour in the face of life’s obstacles and frustrations.” (2001: 26)

The author’s emphasis that desistance is a long-term *process* that needs to be maintained (rather than a once-off *termination* event) is echoed by other scholars (*see*: Laub and Sampson, 2001; Farrall and Calverley, 2006) who

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\(^4\) Although ‘desistance’ can apply to both those who have been imprisoned and those who were not sentenced to prison, it is used here for the purpose of the thesis to those who have been previously incarcerated.
underlined that distinctions need to be made between the process of achieving a “continued state of non-offending” (Maruna et al., 2004: 18) and the end state itself (termination) (Moore, 2011: 136). This distinction between viewing desistance as a process and as an outcome is a recurring theme in the literature.

Moore (2011: 137) outlined key factors associated with processes of desistance: primarily, maturation (growing out of crime); and social bonds such as, family ties, employment, and community involvement. In addition, Maruna (2001) suggested an essential component of desistance: the role of narrative identities and their transformation into redemption scripts. This “formation of personal narratives that restructure cognitive processes, identity and self-image” (Moore, 2011: 137) aligns with Farrall’s (2002) demonstrated distinction between objective changes in an offender’s life and the subjective interpretations assigned to these changes (cited in Moore, 2011: 137). Included in the subjective constructions is what Maruna and his colleagues (2004: 19) termed ‘secondary desistance’, whereby the individual increasingly sees themselves as moving away from an offender status, to a non-offender status – that is, becoming “a changed person”. The authors offered that, in secondary desistance, crime not only stops but a reorganisation based upon new roles will occur (Maruna et al., 2004: 19). Moore (2011: 138) further postulated that this cognitive restructuring of self-identity can either precede or follow on from a period of uninterrupted non-offending. He clarified, however, that neither of these processes are preconditions of the other – that is, desistance itself may occur without prior reorganisation of self-identity, and vice versa (Moore, 2011: 138).

Under the desistance framework, two key approaches have been identified in recommended responses to prisoner re-entry. Firstly, a strengths-based approach to desistance focuses on positive, individual assets that could beneficially influence an individual’s own re-entry process; this is in contrast to
a risk-oriented approach, where an individual’s criminogenic risks dominate the discourse through the administration of risk-assessment tools (Maruna and LeBel, 2002). Under the strengths-based desistance approach, an individual is viewed as someone with decision-making power, who has the necessary agency, motivation and sense of responsibility to utilise their own strengths (often with the help from support services) to desist from crime (Raynor, 2007). Therefore, while this approach does acknowledge the roles that social networks and communities play in an individual’s ability to desist, it highlights individual responsibility and determination as two central components of desistance. The value underlying this strengths-based approach is reminiscent of David Garland’s (1996: 452) responsibilisation strategy, where individuals – as “active citizens” – are expected to seek “help for self-help” in transforming their behaviours and in terminating undesirable habits. Community organisations are, therefore, relied upon to provide individuals with the necessary tools and support to desist from crime; however, individuals are ultimately responsible for acknowledging their own strengths and for utilising that to their benefit.

Underpinning the risk-oriented approach, on the other hand, is the assumption that ex-offenders pose a risk to themselves (risk of re-offending) and to the public (risk of harm). Hence, in contrary to the strengths-based approach, a risk-oriented approach to desistance concedes that individuals cannot manage their path to desistance on their own, and that government supervision is required (Moore, 2011: 138). This discourse, moreover, prioritises public safety over individual treatment needs (Silver and Miller, 2002); therefore, the approach is less concerned with responsibility, or intervention and treatment of the individual offender, but with “techniques to identify, classify, and manage groupings sorted by dangerousness” (Feeley and Simon, 1992: 452). As a result, individuals are necessarily classed into categories to enable the efficient management of their risks as a group.
While both approaches can be used to address prisoner re-entry, both are exposed to negative implications. For instance, while the strengths-based approach is founded on transformative and rehabilitative ideals, its reliance on individuals and communities to manage the desistance process takes accountability away from the state and its traditional role as the principal manager of social control and order (Garland, 1996). As a result, the measure of success for desistance is dependent on the effectiveness of community programs and/or the individual’s own capacity to desist, instead of being on the state’s ability to assist and support individuals through their post-release integration. Furthermore, as the state moves to outsource the management of desistance, the risk of a net-widening effect (Cohen, 1985) arises as the control of crime and disorder spills out into the community beyond the traditional carceral net.

Similarly, Silver and Miller (2002) posited two key challenges of a risk-oriented approach. Firstly, the aggregation of individuals into groups could work to further marginalise populations that are already at the fringes of the economic and political mainstream (Silver and Miller, 2002: 155). This is especially pertinent to those who are uneducated, illiterate, mentally ill, and are living in poverty – circumstances that highly correlate with criminal behaviour (Silver and Miller, 2002: 155). Additionally, the authors expressed that assessment tools used to identify individuals’ risk levels are usually difficult to challenge and resist by respondents (Silver and Miller, 2002: 155). Secondly, by characterising risks of harm in terms of group characteristics, a risk-oriented approach can inadvertently contribute to the generalisation of stigma onto the group itself, which can subsequently feed into the public’s prejudice and fear (Silver and Miller, 2002: 155). Thus, while the employment of the desistance framework is a normative and theoretical ideal, it may be challenging for post-release support providers to practically implement this framework without
causing inadvertent, long-term consequences for individuals or their communities.

Research on re-entry

Perhaps one of the largest and most well-known studies conducted on the post-release experiences is the longitudinal, multi-state study undertaken by the Urban Institute titled, *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Re-entry* (Visher et al., 2004b). Lasting from 2001 through to 2006, the study explored the pathways of prisoner re-entering into multiple metropolitan cities in the United States, and examined factors contributing to a successful, or an unsuccessful, re-entry experience. The *Returning Home* study provided a more comprehensive understanding of the re-entry experiences of released prisoners, as well as the experiences of their families and the communities they were returning to. To obtain these multi-dimensional perspectives, interviews were conducted with returning prisoners before and after their release from state correctional facilities, with family members of those returning prisoners, and with re-entry policymakers and practitioners in each state in the study. In addition, focus groups were organised for residents in neighbourhoods where most prisoners were returning.

Outcomes of the *Returning Home* study revealed the extent to which ex-offenders struggled through their re-entry process in ways that coincided with findings from other research. Notably, family, housing, employment and health circumstances were commonly found to have worsened after imprisonment, which, in turn, affected the chance of a successful integration. The study confirmed, moreover, the high likelihood of recidivism faced by released prisoners across the United States (Visher et al., 2010). However, the study also found that reoffending rates for released prisoners can vary dramatically between states. In Ohio and Texas, for instance, approximately fifteen per cent
of individuals reoffended within the first year of their release (Visher and Courtney, 2007; La Vigne et al., 2009); on the other hand nearly one in three individuals in Illinois return to incarceration within the first year of their release (La Vigne et al., 2004).

In addition, Returning Home provided a unique perspective to the re-entry literature when it explored the impacts of re-entry on communities that receive prisoners. The results particularly noted that a significant portion of returning prisoners was clustered in neighbourhoods with high levels of social and economic disadvantages (La Vigne et al., 2004; Visher et al., 2004; Visher and Courtney, 2007; Visher et al., 2010). This finding was further supported by various other re-entry studies which have reported that individuals returning to these neighbourhoods are often less able to desist from crime upon their return (For economic disadvantages see: Kubin and Stewart 2006; Raphael and Weiman, 2007; Sabol, 2007; Mears et al., 2008; Hipp et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2010; for social disadvantages see: Kirk 2009; 2012; Hipp et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2010; Stahler et al., 2013). The already challenging prospects of integration are therefore even more diminished by the lack of structural opportunities (such as employment) available in these communities.

The Vera Institute of Justice, where researchers followed forty-nine ex-offenders throughout their first month of release from New York City jails and state prisons in order to investigate the initial re-entry experiences (Nelson et al., 2011). The outcomes of the First Month Out (1999) report revealed similar factors that have a significant impact on ex-offenders’ re-entry experiences: health, housing, employment, and substance use. In particular, the researchers found that family and social network played a critical role in providing ex-offenders with employment and accommodation (Nelson et al., 2011). Without this source of support, the report outlined that the majority of ex-offenders would be unable to find new employment on their own, and were unable to
comply with parole conditions. In addition, the researchers highlighted that the first month out was a period where ex-offenders felt the most desire to transform their lives, but were not adequately supported or prepared for release. Unlike research that emphasised the challenges and hardship of the initial period of release, researchers from *First Month Out* called for support services to “take advantage of this considerable momentum” (Nelson et al., 2011: 1), and capitalise on the ex-offenders’ desire to turn their lives around. Crucially, this research also highlights the importance of viewing re-entry as a relational process – where outcomes are dependent on a network of social relations.

More recently, Andrea Leverentz (2014) undertook a longitudinal study over the course of a year to explore how forty-nine women adjust to life outside of prison when they transitioned into Mercy Home – a voluntary halfway house in Chicago for women. Leverentz’s research emphasised the benefits of narratives in understanding re-entry experiences. In particular, Leverentz found that her participants used narratives to both construct and express their identities, which were shaped by various personal factors such as their race, gender, age, and status as mothers (2014: 175). In addition, the author reported that these factors influenced the women’s post-release expectations for themselves, as well as the expectations others held for them. The outcomes of Leverentz’s research relates to the notion of desistance as explained by Maruna in that both processes involve the reconstruction of identities. Amongst her participants, Leverentz notably highlighted that conflicts can sometimes arise between the various sources of identity. Having to navigate these conflicts, can consequently be a challenging experience and can result in revised understandings of paths to desistance, revised narrative identities, or even recidivism (Leverentz, 2014: 175).

While in-depth studies on the post-release experiences of formerly-
incarcerated people exist in Australia, the number of these studies remains relatively small – and their scope narrow – compared to studies from North America. This is with the exception of a study conducted by McIvor and colleagues who interviewed 139 incarcerated women in Melbourne, Victoria and followed approximately half of them through their journeys between three to twelve months post-release (McIvor et al., 2009). Findings from this study revealed the large extent to which the women expected to rely on post-release services to assist them with their transition process, as well as the women’s recognition of risk factors such as lack of housing and the return to drug use (McIvor et al., 2009: 350). Overall, findings from this study aligned with international trends of barriers facing formerly-incarcerated women returning to the community.

It must be noted here that the large sample size the McIvor study contained was atypical of studies involving formerly-incarcerated women in Australia. An explanation that could be offered for this disparity is that the McIvor study commenced engaging participants whilst they were still incarcerated, which enabled contacts to be made with potential participants for the longitudinal study. On the other hand, the alternative process of recruiting women only after their release often poses a limitation in the ability for researchers to access formerly-incarcerated women in the community.

In another Victorian study, for example, Carlton and Segrave (2011) conducted qualitative research on the post-release experiences of Indigenous and Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander women in Victoria. Over the course of six months, the researchers interviewed fourteen formerly-incarcerated women, and sixteen advocates and/or support workers. Through narratives on the women’s experiences of criminalisation, imprisonment and post-incarceration, the study centers on the women’s experiences of trauma.
Findings from Carlton and Segrave’s study revealed the relationship between pre-existing trauma (both personal and institutional), and the effects and experiences associated with various forms of state intervention, social disadvantage and exclusion (Carlton and Segrave, 2011: 564). As a result of their findings, the authors conceived the prevalence of trauma within women’s lives – from childhood through to imprisonment, post-release and beyond – as a form of imprisonment (Carlton and Segrave, 2011: 564). The continuity of trauma, thus, highlighted the need to critically examine stated-funded programs that exist in post-release support, and to acknowledge that these intervention models can reproduce vulnerabilities caused by institutionalisation, criminalisation, as well as pre-existing trauma (Carlton and Segrave, 2011).

In a larger study, over the course of three years (between 2005 and 2007), Brown and Ross (2010) explored the effects of VACRO’s mentoring program on the post-release experiences of formerly-incarcerated women in Victoria. For this study, interviews were conducted with twenty-five pairs of mentees and mentors, an additional five women who returned to prison, as well as VACRO and institutional staff. From their research, the authors highlighted the significance of social capital – both of the mentors and of the mentees – on the post-release experiences of the women interviewed. In particular, Brown and Ross (2010) suggested that mentoring programs such as the one implemented by VACRO provided a platform from which the creation and retention of social capital can occur, and underlined the potential for social capital to be positive and transformative for the women’s post-release experiences. Similar results on the positive influences of social capital have also been recorded elsewhere (see: Farrall, 2004).

Importantly, Brown and Ross (2010) explored the specific impacts of mentoring and its benefits on social capital for women offenders. Focusing on the relational nature of women’s offending and re-offending, the authors
found that formerly-incarcerated women in general would actively sever relationships they had prior to their incarceration. As a result, this cohort of ex-offenders would commence their re-entry with a diminished level of social capital, which in turn affected their ability to integrate. The existence of mentoring programs, hence, provided women with substituted pro-social capital upon their return, and nudged the women into a more positive direction to rebuild their lives.

**Barriers to re-entry**

In contrast to re-entry literature in Australia – where the term ‘barriers’ is widely used to signify the challenges that offenders face post-incarceration – the use of the term ‘collateral consequences’ dominates North American re-entry literature (see: Petersilia, 2001; Taxman et al., 2002; Holzer et al., 2003a; 2003b; Spencer and Jones-Walker, 2004; Archer and Williams, 2006). This subtle difference in terminology illuminates the North American perspective that ex-offenders face more punishment, rather than mere disadvantages, when they are released from incarceration. Therefore, in opposition to the ‘just deserts’ principle invoked by Von Hirsch (1976; 1986) – that punishment should be proportional to the crime, and that the slate should be wiped clean after the offender has met the condition of punishment – collateral sanctions impose further punishment that holds ex-offenders back from integrating into the wider community. Furthermore, scholars reported that these collateral sanctions often have the most consequential impacts on minority groups because they compound minority groups’ existing marginalisation (Travis et al., 2001; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Holzer et al., 2003; Spencer and Jones-Walker, 2004; Archer and Williams, 2006; Travis and Christiansen, 2006).

Rukus and Lane (2014) identified four key barriers to re-entry that all ex-offenders routinely face when they exit prison – namely, housing,
employment, family support and health. While there may be slight variations in
findings, the majority of studies on prisoner re-entry largely agree that these are
four primary issues ex-offenders face upon release. The following sections
explore in more detail each of the common barriers identified by Rukus and
Lane (2014), with an additional discussion of the effects of imprisonment on
an ex-offender’s social capital – which has been added to incorporate the well-
reported influence of social networks (outside of the family) on an ex-
offender’s re-entry process. Even though each barrier is examined individually,
it is important to note that these barriers are often experienced simultaneously
by formerly-incarcerated people.

i. Housing

Housing is frequently reported by those returning to the community as
the most immediate challenge they face after incarceration (Petersilia, 2003;
Baer et al., 2006). While offenders are generally expected to organise housing
arrangements themselves, their ability to do so is often restricted during their
prison sentence – which results in a lack of accommodation to return to upon
release (Petersilia, 2003; Sheehan, 2014). In addition, the process of obtaining
housing is complicated by a host of factors – such as, the scarcity of available
and affordable housing, legal barriers and regulations, prejudices against
formerly-incarcerated tenants, and, in some cases, strict eligibility requirements
for federal or state subsidised housing (Petersilia, 2003; Baer et al., 2006).
These factors, hence, combine to hinder ex-offenders from securing safe,
affordable, and permanent housing after their release (Fontaine, 2013).

According to various North American re-entry research, a large
majority of formerly-incarcerated people are able to return to family homes, or
homes of a significant other or a close friend (Visher et al., 2003a; 2003b; La
Vigne et al., 2004; Roman and Travis, 2004; Hebert, 2005; Visher et al., 2006;
Visher and Courtney 2007). Notably, Mallik-Kane and Visher (2008) found that housing support provided by family members is a particularly viable option to male ex-offenders – who are more likely to return to family homes after their incarceration than female ex-offenders. This ability to rely on their social networks (especially, during the first few nights out of prison) allows ex-offenders time to settle back into the community, and to organise a more secure accommodation for themselves – consequently preventing ex-offenders from resorting to any form of homelessness.

For others, however, returning home to family members or friends is not a viable option. For instance, their involvement in crime may have caused a conflict that subsequently prevent family members from providing housing, based on past negative experiences with the returning prisoner (Roman and Travis, 2004). Alternatively, family members are simply not ready to welcome a violent individual back into their lives (Hebert, 2005). In addition, many released prisoners are subjected to parole conditions that may prohibit them from returning to the same neighbourhood, or from staying with family members or friends who may have also been involved in criminal activity (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008; Fontaine et al., 2012b). As a result of these consequences, ex-offenders may not have housing support, and are subsequently at an increased risk of homelessness once they re-enter society (Richie, 2001).

In some cases, ex-offenders themselves do not wish to return to houses of family members or those of their existing social networks. Much of the re-entry literature, for example, explicitly highlight that this decision is more prevalent for female ex-offenders – where they do not wish to return to their family members or intimate partners due to the fear of being further exposed to domestic violence (Kilroy 2000; 2003). This, therefore, demonstrates the heightened vulnerability that female ex-offenders face, which
could likely result in them ending up homeless. Moreover, research has found that prisoners who return to communities with concentrated levels of social and economic disadvantages are exposed to a higher likelihood of recidivism, as these communities are often destabilised by disproportional rates of offending and a lack of resources and opportunities (Rose and Clear, 1998; Rose et al., 2000; Clear et al. 2001; Lynch and Sabol, 2001; Richie 2001; Baumer, 2003; La Vigne and Kachnowski 2003; La Vigne and Mamalian 2003). Many ex-offenders, hence, choose to move away from their former neighbourhoods in order to distance themselves from criminogenic environments (Kirk, 2009; 2012).

While moving away from family members (whether by personal choice or by restrictions imposed) has its own implications and consequences, the effects on migrant individuals may be harsher than those on non-migrant ex-offenders. When migrant ex-offenders move away from their family members, they also move away from areas where they have ethnic community ties. Conceptualised this way, migrant ex-offenders then lose two sources of support at the same time. The effect of this is especially pertinent in cities where ethnic enclaves exist.

For these returning prisoners who do not wish to live with loved ones or with friends after their release, few other options are available. This includes community-based housing, transitional housing, state or federally-subsidised housing, homeless assistance supportive housing, or the private market (Roman and Travis, 2004; La Vigne and Cowan, 2005). Unfortunately, not all available options are easily accessible; due to the aforementioned legal, financial or social barriers, ex-offenders are typically unable to secure housing in the private market, or housing that are subsidised by the state (Baer et al., 2006). Consequently, many turn to transitional housing, halfway houses, or homeless shelters for accommodation (Riley, 2003; La Vigne et al., 2008).
As many of these temporary housing options encourage clients to achieve self-sufficiency (Roman and Travis, 2004), they do not typically support long-term stays for residents. However, the challenge to obtain permanent housing persists, and subsequently results in an increased level of residential mobility for ex-offenders (that is, the frequency at which individuals are forced to move around). A high level of residential mobility inevitably causes a change in routine, which can in turn disrupt an individual's ability to secure employment or to access substance treatment options (Richie, 2001). Moreover, shelters and transitional housing have been found to be unsafe as they are rife with incidences of drug abuse and theft, and are not a conducive environment for individuals to integrate (Hammett et al., 2001; Hebert, 2005). This environment can also feel unsafe to women, especially to single women and to women with children. Therefore, the exposure to crime, substance use and general instability in temporary types of housing can reduce an ex-offender's chance of a successful integration.

Not surprisingly then, the link between released prisoners and homelessness are well-recorded in re-entry literature. According to a number of studies that examine the demographics of the ex-prisoner population in the United States, there is a high correlation between individuals who are released from prison and their likelihood of becoming homeless (California Department of Corrections, 1997; Ditton, 1999; Rossman et al., 1999; Langan and Levin, 2002; Roman and Travis, 2004; Visher et al., 2004; Metraux et al., 2008; Fontaine et al., 2012a). This risk is further exacerbated if individuals have been homeless at some time in their lives prior to their imprisonment (Metraux and Culhane, 2004). Moreover, worries about homelessness can also force women to return to abusive partners or family members after their release. Regardless of their post-release accommodation, any lack of stability in housing can result in parole violations (Nelson et al., 1999; Roman and Travis,
2004), and recidivism (Nelson et al., 1999; Matraux and Culhane, 2004). This correlation, thus, reinforces the importance of stable and secure housing for ex-offenders, and demonstrates the extent to which the lack of it can impact on one’s chance of a successful re-entry.

**ii. Employment**

Rose and Clear (2002) posited that, upon return to the community, ex-offenders are limited to three financial pathways: secure employment, remain unemployed, or commit offences for financial gain. With these limited options, finding and maintaining legitimate employment after release is essential for ex-offenders, as not doing so can directly affect their ability to desist from further criminal activity (Harer 1994; Sampson and Laub 1997; Bernstein and Houston, 2000; Western and Pettit, 2000; Uggen 2000; Piehl, 2003; Vischer et al., 2004; Baer et al., 2006; Redcross et al., 2009). The correlation between employment and desistance is widely understood by ex-offenders, and there is an acceptance that having a job would ultimately help them stay out of prison (La Vigne and Lawrence 2002; La Vigne and Wolf 2004; La Vigne et al., 2004; Vischer, et al., 2004; La Vigne and Kachnowski, 2005; Roman et al., 2005; Vischer et al., 2006). In addition, having employment creates soft skills – such as positive interactions with pro-social groups (Miller, 2014; Halushka, 2016). Duneier (1999) further suggested that this then increases self-esteem for individuals transitioning back into the community, and keeps individuals tied to mainstream norms and values.

The ability to find and maintain a job after prison can, however, be challenging (La Vigne et al., 2004; La Vigne et al., 2009; Vischer and Courtney, 2007; Vischer et al., 2010). In a report produced by the Urban Institute, Mallik-Kane and Vischer (2008) found that this difficulty is especially pertinent to women, who show worse employment outcomes than men and typically work
for less amounts of time after their release. The result can perhaps be attributed to the common expectation from family members that women should fully embody the role of a mother and a caretaker, which allows female ex-offenders less time to organise employment for themselves\(^5\) (Kilroy, 2000; 2003). This, therefore, reinforces the critical impact of family and friends during the early periods of release in supporting an ex-offender’s perception of employment or their decision to gain employment in introducing them to potential employers, or in providing an alternative source of income if employment is not viable (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008).

There are various explanations offered for the known challenge of obtaining employment after prison. Firstly, many former prisoners enter prison with poor educational backgrounds and little work experience (Harlow, 2003; Visher et al., 2004; La Vigne and Kachnowski, 2005; Visher et al., 2006; Visher et al., 2003a; Visher et al., 2003b). Once they are incarcerated, they forfeit the opportunity to gain further experience, and often lose the skills and work contacts they initially possess (Sampson and Laub 1997; Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999; Western et al. 2001). This lack of prior experience can apply to migrant offenders, in particular, who may face linguistic barriers in gaining education or employment in Australia or the United States. In addition, although the duration of incarceration can be viewed as an opportunity to build skills and prepare for future jobs, only a small share of prisoners participate in such programs, and the effectiveness of these training programs in helping ex-offenders seek employment has been questioned by scholars who attempted to evaluate in-prison employment programs (Gates et al. 1999; Wilson et al. 1999; Bushway and Reuter 2001).

\(^5\) In Victoria, approximately one-half to two-thirds of imprisoned women are mothers with carer’s responsibility (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008; McIvor et al., 2009; Sheehan, 2010).
The loss of skills and experience is further exacerbated by the stigma of incarceration that are attached to ex-offenders (Petersilia, 2003; Visher et al., 2004). Many re-entry scholars have cited that employers are less likely to hire ex-prisoners compared with other disadvantaged groups (Holzer et al., 2003; Holzer et al., 2004; Solomon, et al., 2004). Moreover, in a study conducted by Holzer and his colleagues (2003), it was found that employers are typically reluctant to employ individuals with any criminal history regardless of the details of their crime. As the outlined statistics in the previous chapter have shown, female offenders from migrant groups typically do not commit violent crimes; however, it is reasonable to assume that their offence type is similarly unimportant in employer’s decision making. Thus, there is an overall stigma against ex-offenders in general that is applicable to all formerly-incarcerated individuals when they attempt to transition back into the community.

Additionally, discrimination against ex-offenders can manifest in subtler ways: for instance, while they may be able to obtain and maintain employment, scholars have stated that jobs available to ex-offenders tend to be low-paying and highly unstable (Rose and Clear, 2002). Piehl (2003) further expressed that it takes a “good” job to help someone feel sufficiently attached to the community, and to make meaningful changes to their lifestyle. However, these “good” jobs are difficult to come by for people with low skills, inconsistent work histories, and criminal records (Piehl, 2003). Furthermore, the author postulated that “good” jobs do not usually accommodate the reporting and other compliance requirements that are necessary for ex-offenders with parole conditions (Piehl, 2003; Bloom et al., 2007). This can make finding and maintaining employment seem insurmountable to those who are trying to organise various aspects of their lives simultaneously (Piehl, 2003).

Other reasons contributing to the difficulty in finding and maintaining employment include the lack of necessary identification or a stable address
required to apply for a job in the first place (La Vigne and Cowan, 2005). Moreover, many ex-offenders are legally prohibited from certain types of jobs, and are also faced with a decreasing availability of low-skill jobs (La Vigne and Cowan, 2005). All of the aforementioned factors combined with ex-offenders’ urgent financial needs, thus, confine formerly-incarcerated individuals to low-paying jobs that can limit their ability to develop professionally and personally in the long term (Hotz et al., 2002).

### iii. Family support

The importance of family support to an ex-offender’s transitional process is well-documented in the literature. In a broad sense, family members can play a crucial role in facilitating a crime-free life for ex-offenders, and in inhibiting any propensity to re-offend (Visher et al., 2004). Studies have shown that formerly-incarcerated individuals who successfully reunite with their families following release typically decrease their use of illegal drugs without additional treatment, have fewer new arrests, and show improved physical and mental health (National Academies, 2007). Accordingly, a significant proportion of prisoners themselves believe that family support is essential in helping them stay out of prison (La Vigne et al., 2004; Visher et al., 2004; Baer et al., 2006; Visher and Courtney, 2006).

In the presence of housing and employment barriers, family members can act as a stable pillar of support, and provide tangible assistance including food, clothing, money, personal items, transportation, and accommodation (La Vigne et al., 2004; Visher et al., 2004; Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2006; Visher and Courtney, 2007; La Vigne et al., 2009). Furthermore, other types of assistance offered to ex-offenders – such as medication management, crisis intervention, and feedback to probation and parole can be crucial during the early days of release (Family Justice, 2006). Similarly, emotional support
extended to ex-offenders by family members cannot be understated; aside from actively steering formerly-incarcerated individuals away from crime, close family relationships can improve employment and substance-abuse treatment outcomes for returning prisoners (Baer et al., 2006; La Vigne et al., 2008). Where appropriate, family members can directly help ex-offenders make up for their past actions and redeem themselves through their participation in restorative justice activities (Braithwaite, 2002; Hebert, 2005; Bonta et al., 2006; La Vigne et al., 2008) While this practice may not be very common, research on programs that exist has indicated that family involvement increases the likelihood that ex-offenders will follow through with the process, aids their ability to express their remorse, and instigates a successful rehabilitation (Hebert, 2005; Braithwaite, 2007). Therefore, both material and emotional support family members offer to formerly-incarcerated individuals have been shown to contribute to their social integration, and to help reduce the risk of re-offending (Sampson and Laub 1993; Sullivan et al., 2002; Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008; Sheehan, 2011).

For the reasons outlined above, research findings encourage formerly-incarcerated persons to remain in contact with their family members throughout their incarceration (Travis et al., 2005). Travis and his colleagues (2005), for instance, cited various research which have suggested that, overall, prisoners who have meaningful contacts with their families during their incarceration subsequently have a more positive post-release adjustment experience than those who do not (see: Hairston 1988; Bayse, et al., 1991; Hairston 1991; Sampson and Laub 1993). Accordingly, the authors offered that beneficial in-prison programs – such as one that enhances parenting skills – exist to help equip individuals with ways to interact with family members upon release (Gates et al., 1999; Travis et al., 2005).

However, offenders generally understood that maintaining a healthy
relationship with family members during incarceration can be a challenging task – especially if a healthy relationship did not exist to begin with (La Vigne and Cowan, 2005; Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008). As a result, research has found that many formerly-incarcerated people were surprised when they found that family members were more accommodating than they initially expected (La Vigne and Cowan, 2005; Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008). Various reasons account for this challenge. Firstly, when a parent is sent to prison, many dimensions of family functioning undergo significant changes, and family structures, financial relationships, income levels, emotional support systems, and living arrangements are often affected (Travis et al., 2005: 4). The changes can be particularly pertinent in situations where mothers are incarcerated. In addition to the financial pressure families of prisoners face due to the absence of a stable source of income, the subsequent post-release reliance on their support can exacerbate the existing strain on family members (Rose and Clear, 2002).

Secondly, the forced separation of spouses and other intimate partners can create an enormous strain on relationships, frequently ending those (Travis et al., 2005: 4). Similarly, relationships with children may be severed because many ex-offenders lose custody of their children during their imprisonment, and, when released, are confronted with complex legal processes for reunification (La Vigne and Cowan, 2005). Women, in particular, feel this effect as they are more likely to report that they were primary caregivers of children (Graham and Harris, 2013). Many incarcerated women are categorised as inadequate in their ability to care for their children during imprisonment, and are accordingly restricted in their decision-making power both during and after prison (Travis, 2003; Luther and Gregson, 2011). This restriction can manifest in various ways. For instance, Collica (2010) reported that women have fewer visits from their children than do men. When men are in prison, their female partners are likely to visit with their children; on the other hand, as
women are typically the primary caregiver, other female family members take over the caretaking role when the mother is incarcerated and visitations are rare (Collica, 2010). Travis (2003) further offered that, for many mothers in prison, the only aspect of their lives considered to be motivating and helpful is the resumption of motherhood. As a result, when they are unable to resume care of their children after release, their motivation of a successful integration can wither.

Furthermore, it is also conceivable that family members – including, children – do not wish to welcome ex-offenders back into their lives (Brown and Ross, 2002; Hebert, 2005). Situations where family members choose to end relationships with incarcerated individuals have frequently been reported for women offenders from migrant backgrounds in Victoria (CHRIP, 2010). Mostly, the decision by family to sever relationships comes from the shame that arrests and incarceration have brought to family units and the community (CHRIP, 2010). As a result, family members often do not wish to reunite which incarcerated women after their release (CHRIP, 2010).

Structural barriers – such as, the distant location of the prison – can further aggravate the situation as family members are not able to frequently visit offenders (Baer et al., 2006). The geographical barrier is also more prevalent to women as many women’s correctional facilities are more limited and located in more rural areas. In addition, while some scholars pointed to the benefits of relevant in-prison or pre-release programs, these programs are not widely available to all prisoners (Lynch and Sabol, 2001; Travis et al., 2005). Without a healthy relationship with family members, Eckholm (2006) stated that the consequences can be detrimental as ex-offenders are more likely to seek out former friends and associates – many of whom are involved in illegal activities – exposing themselves to a heightened likelihood of parole violations and recidivism.
iv. Health

Reports on the effects of incarceration on offenders’ mental and physical health are widespread in re-entry literature. Even prior to incarceration, it is generally accepted that prisoners as a population suffer from mental disorders and chronic and infectious diseases at greater rates than the general population (National Commission on Correctional Health Care, 2002; La Vigne et al., 2004; Visher et al., 2004; La Vigne and Kachnowski, 2005; Visher and Courtney, 2007; La Vigne et al., 2009). Mental health disorders commonly found amongst prisoners include schizophrenia, psychosis, depression, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Ditton, 1999). Notably, incarcerated women are found to experience more mental health problems than their male counterparts, and these mental health problems are often more severe (James and Glaze, 2006). In addition, many prisoners experience physical disabilities such as, learning or speech impairment, and hearing or vision problems (Maruschak and Beck, 2001). Infectious diseases – predominantly, sexually-transmitted diseases – are also prevalent among the prison population, posing a health risk to their family members, intimate partners, and communities when they return (La Vigne and Cowan, 2005).

Although access to preventative, standard, and emergency health services are available to some extent in prison, there is usually a lack of proper discharge planning and preparation addressing health care needs, making continuity of care difficult (Maruschak and Beck, 2001; Hammett et al., 2001; Visher et al., 2004; Baer et al., 2006; Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008). Particularly, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2015) revealed that, amongst Australian adults in their 20s and 30s, around thirty-two per cent of those with a psychiatric illness had been arrested during a ten-year period, and the first arrest often occurred before first contact with mental
health services (see: Morgan et al., 2013). This report highlighted the lack of mental health services in the community for individuals both before and after prison.

In addition, the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF) report in 2014 underlined that individuals from migrant backgrounds are susceptible to missing out on mental health services due to language barriers, different cultural understanding of mental health, cultural stigma, unfamiliarity with the Western health systems, and the overall lack of culturally-sensitive health services. As a result, people from migrant backgrounds typically have a significantly lower level of access to mental health care and support in the wider community (NMHCCF, 2014).

Overall, offenders are typically exposed to a disproportionate level of collateral problems once they are released (La Vigne and Cowan, 2005). In their study, Mallik-Kane and Visher (2008), for example, reported that returning prisoners with physical health conditions are less likely than others to be able to organise accommodation in advance prior to their release. Moreover, once housing is found, these offenders with physical health conditions are more likely to struggle to maintain the accommodation, and tend to move around more often than others (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008). Furthermore, the authors found in their study that those with mental health conditions face more housing challenges than any other returning prisoners (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008). As this group of releasees are typically unable to depend on their family members and friends for housing, they are more exposed than other prisoners to homelessness after their release (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008). With more mental health issues reported amongst incarcerated women, therefore, women ex-offenders may be particularly vulnerable.
Scholars have also noted the impacts of physical and mental health conditions faced by returning prisoners on their ability to secure employment (La Vigne and Cowan, 2005; Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008). Despite having similar employment histories before their incarceration, those with mental health conditions fare worse than others when seeking and maintaining employment (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008). Mallik-Kane and Visher (2008) also concluded that physical health conditions can be severe or debilitating enough to restrict ex-offenders’ ability to gain and maintain regular employment. Thus, whilst formerly-incarcerated individuals re-enter the community with the same barriers as others, those with health issues experience a double-disadvantage in their attempt to transition into the community (Visher et al., 2004). Moreover, it is evident that barriers to re-entry for individuals are closely tied together, and are more often experienced simultaneously.

v. Social capital

In their discussion of social capital, various scholars have attempted to define the term in order to clarify the scope of the discourse (see: Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993; 2000; Portes, 1998; Rose and Clear, 2002; Brown and Ross, 2010). For example, a description provided by Brown and Ross (2010: 41) encompasses an overarching network of relationships. Specifically, the authors defined social capital as “the web of social relations within which we all live, including relationships with family, informal social networks, relationships established through work, and so on” (Brown and Ross, 2010: 41). Wolff and Draine (2004: 459) similarly opted for a flexible definition of social capital, referring to it as “the asset of social relations” that are characterised by varying breadth, depth, and qualities. According to the authors, these personal connections can be called upon for assistance in times of need – a “storehouse of goodwill” that has the potential to connect
individuals to the wider community (Wolff and Draine, 2004: 459).

While there is no general consensus on the exact definition, there are common features upon which scholars have agreed: primarily, a network of relationships and positive contributions towards an individual’s life. In other words, social capital typically refers to the network of relationships that positively contributes to an individual’s and a community’s overall quality of life (Rose and Clear, 2002). The perspective of the social capital discourse, however, varies amongst authors: some focused on the ways in which individuals benefit from social capital (see: Portes, 1998; Brown and Ross, 2010); and others on the gains social capital brings to communities (see: Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993; 2000; Rose and Clear, 2002).

Moreover, some authors underlined that the benefits to individuals and to communities are not mutually exclusive. For instance, in their identification of the eight domains of social capital, Forrest and Kearns (2001) highlighted the interconnectedness of individual social capital and community social capital. Particularly, the authors discussed the ways in which individual social capital can contribute to the collective goals of the community, which in turn impact on the social capital of the community itself. Rose and Clear (2002) offered further that, while the level of social capital in the environment (that is, in communities) influences the amount of individual-level social capital considerably (and vice versa), these two levels of social capital need not be the same. Highlighting the interaction between individual-level social capital and community-level social capital, the authors clarified:

“One can imagine an individual living in a neighbourhood rich in social capital who, because of relative social isolation, has comparatively low levels of social capital personally. Alternatively, an individual
with abundant social capital might reside in an area with few such reserves. In the former case, the individual benefits from the community’s potential for collective action even if he does not contribute anything; in the latter he is less capable of making a significant change in the community even though he has the personal resources, because the collective supplies of capital are missing. Thus, regardless of their individual level of social capital, individuals are influenced by the community-level social capital in which they live.” (Rose and Clear, 2002: 185)

The effects of imprisonment on social capital are similar to that of those on family relationships; however, effects on social capital extend to wider networks, especially including the community individuals are returning to. This is specifically due to the ways in which imprisonment weakens social bonds between individuals and the community – through, for example, the infrequent and monitored contacts between those involved in social relationships, the isolation from the wider community, and the segregation of those within the prison who often feel forced to abide by prison culture to survive (Wolff and Draine, 2004). These factors, hence, result in a detrimental effect on social relationships and an inadvertent impact on an ex-offender’s re-entry process as they lose previous ties and connections that could potentially assist with their integration. In other words, a diminished social capital signifies less accessible channels through which ex-offenders are able to obtain transitional assistance. In relation to criminal behaviour, Farrall (2004) extended that, from various research conducted on the relationships between social capital and violent crime (see: Rosenfeld et al., n.d.; Hagan et al., 1995; Sampson et al., 1997; Kennedy et al., 1998; Moser and Lister, 1999), individuals with lower levels of social capital are more likely to be involved in violent crime.
Responding to the Re-entry of Women Offenders

In response to empirical research differentiating women’s patterns of and reasons for offending from those of the men (Daly, 1992; 1994; Richie, 1996; Steffenmeier and Allan, 1996; Covington, 2000; Bloom et al., 2003; Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 2004; Reisig et al., 2006; Belknap, 2007), feminist theorists offered two key perspectives in understanding female offending: a pathways perspective and a relational perspective. Firstly, the pathways perspective argues that female offending behaviour is typically initiated by living with families or being in intimate relationships that are characterised by violence and abuse; thus, early encounters with the criminal justice system are commonly the result of attempts to escape these traumatic conditions through drug use, prostitution or property crime (Bloom et al., 2003: 53). Furthermore, the resulting disconnection from family and social institutions reinforces women’s economic and social marginality, and increases their likelihood of homelessness, addiction and further abuse (Belknap, 2007). Pathways theorists, hence, concluded that early victimisation and its consequences are crucial predictors of female criminal behaviour and of subsequent mental and physical health problems for women offenders (Messina et al., 2010).

Relational theorists, on the other hand, argued that women’s psychological development and social circumstances combine to exacerbate their likelihood of offending. While relational theorists acknowledge the significance of trauma as a key driver of women’s offending, they highlight its impact on the women’s tendency to consequently disconnect from relationships, instead of to foster growth in them (Bloom et al., 2003: 55). Drawing on the work of Jean Baker Miller (1976), relational theorists further stipulated that a woman’s path to maturity commonly involves the
development of a sense of self and a sense of self-worth through connections with others. Women who are involved in the criminal justice system typically lack childhood experiences of healthy relationships; therefore, as adults, they re-enact their own histories of loss, neglect, and abuse through criminal behaviour (Covington, 2007).

Although studies of female recidivism consistently identify many of the same predictors as those identified for men (such as, antisocial personality, peers, or attitudes; a lack of education or employment; and substance abuse), they fail to account for the observed gender differences in the nature, frequency, and longevity of offending (Ross, 2016). In response to this gap, contemporary treatment approaches for women offenders aim to be “gender responsive” applying the principles derived from theoretical analyses about women's offending to the design of treatment interventions (Grella, 2008). Guided by existing perspectives on women's offending, Stephanie Covington, Barbara Bloom and Barbara Owen (2003) developed an established gender-responsive treatment approach for women offenders, which sets out a variety of guidelines, principles and model programs. Primarily, the overarching aim of a gender-responsive treatment model is to cater to the identified differences in women's pathways to offending.

While this approach has been widely implemented, it is still mainly limited to in-prison programs (see: Messina et al., 2010; Sacks et al., 2012; Kissin et al., 2014; Saxena et al., 2014). Scholars have suggested, instead, that prison staff should begin working with the community as soon as possible to ensure that women receive continued wraparound, gender-responsive services once they are released (Covington and Bloom, 2006). Furthermore, it is argued that there should be more gender-responsive programs available post-release as women suffer from distinct risk factors from those of male offenders (see: Dodge and Pogrebin, 2001; O’Brien, 2001; Richie, 2001; Cobbina, 2009; 2010;
Huebner et al., 2010). Without appropriate treatment programs catered to their needs throughout the re-entry process, women are often unprepared to confront challenging situations, and are at an increased risk for reoffending (Wright et al., 2012: 1626).

In their critique of gender-responsive practices, Carlton and Segrave (2016: 283) argued that gender-sensitive practices are applied in ways that ignore the role that other determinants, such as race and class, play in women’s experiences of institutionalisation. This argument is supported by other scholars, who posited that gender-responsive policies wrongly focus on individual factors that blame and pathologise women, and that these policies inadvertently diminish the contribution that social and structural contexts have to women’s criminalisation (Carlen and Tombs, 2006; Maidment, 2006; Hubbard and Matthews, 2008: 232; Hannah-Moffat, 2009: 215; Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat, 2009; Baldry, 2010). Instead, correctional policies have shifted towards a renewed intensification of intervention in the lives of criminalised women – resulting in a heightened level of transcarceral control, which unintentionally compounds cycles of state intervention (Shaylor, 2009; Hannah-Moffat, 2010; Pollack, 2011; Carlton and Segrave, 2013; 2016). Structurally, the over-emphasis on micro-level factors can have a systemic impact as social problems are reframed as individual problems while structural barriers women face remain invisible (Hannah-Moffat, 2005; Russell and Carlton, 2013). The result is a difficult balance between the much-needed transitional support to offenders by the state and the need to limit state intrusion into individuals’ lives.

An example of the problematic intervention is the use of risk assessment tools that are inappropriate for women offenders (Hannah-Moffat, 1999; Hubbard and Matthews, 2008). Hannah-Moffat (1999) explained that these risk-assessment tools are designed using White male samples, and are
therefore ‘gendered’ and ‘racialised’ as they do not reflect factors that are specific to women offenders (Hubbard and Matthews, 2008). Thus, gender-responsive frameworks and practices assume that better outcomes will result from adapting existing models and systems in place for male offenders to suit women (Carlton and Segrave, 2016: 283). In addition, scholars found that women’s ‘needs’ are often conflated with ‘risks’, and hence women who have high criminogenic needs can be wrongly categorised into a high-risk group (Covington and Bloom, 2000; Covington and Bloom, 2003; Hannah-Moffat and Shaw, 2003). The inappropriate categorisation of women using risk assessment tools can intensify some of the existing problems that led them to criminal behaviours in the first place (see: Holtfreter and Morash, 2003).

Finally, gender-responsive policies have an unintended consequence in essentialising gender into a uniform category of difference based on sex alone (Carlton and Segrave, 2006). Razack (1998) explained that the process of essentialising involves making factors – such as, race, gender or class – appear ‘natural’, rather than as a product of relationships of domination (Russell and Carlton, 2013: 480). It “assumes that the experience of being a member of a particular group, such as women, is a stable one with a clear meaning that is ‘constant through time, space, and different historical, social, political, and personal contexts’” (Grillo, 1995: 19, cited in Russell and Carlton, 2013: 480). Consequentially, women who are racialised, live in poverty, lack education, are unemployed, or have mental health needs, are potentially disadvantaged by risk assessment tools that do not take these factors into account (Russell and Carlton, 2013: 477).

**Understanding Cultural Differences**

The notion of *culture* is a broad one. In order to understand the
differences between the ways in which individuals from culturally distinct backgrounds respond to post-release re-entry, it is important to explore how individuals in these cultures perceive the various components of incarceration and release. Specifically, I wanted to investigate the way that members of minority culture respond to the stigma of incarceration, to fronting the community upon their return, and to the post-release services that are offered. Whilst it is not possible to provide a definite prediction of re-entry experiences based on ethnic culture, some progress may be gained by attempting to understand the variations between cultural perceptions. The work of Geert Hofstede on culture and different cultural perceptions can offer some assistance in this endeavour.

Between 1967 and 1973, Geert Hofstede conducted an extensive survey study of IBM employees from seventy countries in order to measure national value differences, the results of which he used to quantitatively theorise the observed differences between cultures. From this study, Hofstede developed four primary cultural dimensions: power distance (PDI), individualism (IDV), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), and masculinity (MAS) (Hofstede, 1980). Subsequent studies undertaken by other scholars then led Hofstede to add two further dimensions to his original four: long-term orientation (LTO), and indulgence-restraints (IR) (Hofstede 1991; 2010). Whilst each of these dimensions contribute to the understanding of culture in various ways. The first two are particularly useful for understanding cultural differences in relation to post-release re-entry.

In his 1991 book, *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind*, Hofstede defined ‘culture’ as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (1991: 9). This was differentiated from ‘personality’, as ‘personality’ was stated as being “his or her unique set of mental programs that needn’t be shared with
any other human being” (Hofstede, 1991: 10). The author offered further that
culture involves attitudes, behaviours and values that one acquires early in life
through family and school, and that these learnt attitudes, behaviours and
values differ from culture to culture (Hofstede, 1991: 10). According to
Hofstede and his colleagues (1980, 1991, 2010), the cultural dimensions help in
explaining the differences in cultural values across nations.

First, power distance index (PDI), is defined as “the extent to which
the less powerful members or organisations and institutions accept and expect
that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, et al., 2010: 61). Institutions
include various parts of society such as the family, the school, and the
community (Hofstede, et al., 2010: 61). As the index measurement is based on
the value system of the less powerful members of society, countries with a
higher PDI show that inequalities among people are expected and desired; that
the less powerful should be dependent on those more powerful; and that
general obedience and respect are expected from the less powerful members of
society (Hofstede, et al., 2010: 72). Specifically, his studies found a higher PDI
for most Asian countries (such as Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines), for
Eastern European countries (such as Slovakia and Russia), for Latin countries
(especially, in Latin America), for Arabic-speaking countries, and for African
countries (Hofstede, et al., 2010: 60). On the other hand, a lower PDI was
recorded for countries such as the United States, the Great Britain and the
white parts of its former empire (Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and Canada),
the Netherlands, the German-speaking countries, the Nordic countries, and the
Baltic States (Hofstede, et al., 2010: 60).

Using PDI, the research can conceptualise how women from migrant
backgrounds view their relationship with authority figures – such as, prison
officers, pre-release workers, and post-release support workers. According to
Hofstede’s work, those from low PDI countries can especially feel as if they
are expected to show respect and obedience by not challenging authority even though they may feel some injustice or discomfort in the way they are treated. Moreover, the difference in PDI can perhaps explain the reluctance that exists amongst women from migrant groups in approaching pre- or post-release services. In these cases, the women may view support workers as having similar authoritative power over them as the state does, and hence feel like they are unable to vocalise the types of help they really need to improve their situation. In addition, women from migrant groups may not at all expect the state to support their re-entry or to improve their well-being because that is not their understanding of the role of the state; rather, women from migrant backgrounds see the state more as a punishing authority than as a welfare authority.

Along a similar vein, Hofstede’s power distance dimension can clarify the expectation that states such as Australia and the United States have of women from migrant backgrounds. Specifically, being from high PDI countries, staff from government authorities or organisations may expect that services are accessible to all ex-offenders, and that nothing is stopping individuals from accessing these services as long as they are offered. Furthermore, support staff may not understand their power position and how that position influences the level of engagement from ex-offenders. These discrepancies explained by the power distance index, thus, helped me conceptualise the post-release problem facing women from migrant backgrounds, and how relationships between authority figures and the women can play a part in their experiences.

The second dimension measures levels of individualism (IDV); individualist (higher IDV) pertains to “societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family” (Hofstede, et al., 2010: 92). This contrasts with
societies that are collectivist (lower IDV), which are “societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede, et al., 2010: 92). Key characteristics of an individualist society includes universal standards that are supposed to be applied equally to everyone, and that a transgression of these standards can lead to guilt and loss of self-respect; the belief that speaking one’s mind demonstrates honesty; a valued independence of self; and that self-actualisation by every individual is society’s ultimate goal (Hofstede, et al., 2010).

In contrast, collectivist societies have exclusionist value standards – where values differ for in-groups and for out-groups – and a transgression of these values lead to shame and loss of face for the self and the group; the belief that harmony should always be maintained, and direct confrontations avoided over speaking one’s mind; a valued interdependence of self; and that harmony and consensus is society’s ultimate goal (Hofstede, et al., 2010). Under this index, the authors found a strong positive correlation between a country’s national wealth and the degree of individualism in its culture (Hofstede, et al., 2010: 94). That is, nearly all wealthy countries score higher on IDV, while nearly all poor countries score lower (Hofstede et al., 2010: 94). The authors suggested that this is likely because national wealth causes individualism; when a country’s wealth increases, its citizens have access to more resources that allow them greater autonomy (Hofstede et al., 2010: 132). Subsequently, collective life is replaced by individual life (Hofstede et al., 2010: 133).

Hofstede’s work on cultural dimensions must first be studied in the context of the transition between two cultures (migration) to maximise its relevance to this present study. In relation to migration and crime, Alex Piquero’s (2016) recent research with his colleagues on the correlation between migration and crime challenged the longstanding misconception that first-
generation migrants commit more crime than second-generation migrants or native populations. In their work, the researchers examined the correlation between immigrant generational differences and crime – specifically in relation to legal socialisation (Piquero et al., 2016).

According to Piquero and colleagues (2016: 1405), ‘legal socialisation’ referred to the internalisation of law, rules, and agreements among members of society, as well as the perceived legitimacy of authority to deal fairly with citizens who contravene society’s rules. Findings from their research revealed that first-generation migrants reported more social costs associated with punishment, more legitimacy attributed to law enforcement, and less cynicism towards the law (Piquero et al., 2016: 1417). Thus, while her review of the literature acknowledged that migrants may have challenges in integrating into their new culture, the researchers demonstrated that the effects of legal socialisation resulted in first-generation migrants being involved in less criminal activities on average than second-generation migrants or their native counterparts (Piquero et al., 2016).

These findings are consistent with Hofstede’s explanation of cultural dimensions when Australia and the United States are taken to be host countries for migration. Generally, groups who migrate into these two countries are from countries that are relative collectivists with relatively lower PDI than Australia and the United States. The differences in cultural dimensions as explained by Hofstede would then amplify the effects of legal socialisation that new migrants typically go through. That is, migrants from more collectivist cultures are more likely to abide by society’s rules and laws, and those from lower PDI countries are more likely to legitimise authority figures. This, then, adds to Piquero’s effect of legal socialisation and points to a lesser likelihood of new migrants being involved in criminal behaviour.
The individualist/collectivist distinction also furthers our understanding of the ways in which culture influences post-release experiences. Specifically, this is in relation to reports by CHRIIP and Flat Out (2010) that communities can hinder a woman’s access to post-release services. Applying Hofstede’s theory, women from migrant groups feel more pressures from their ethnic communities that affect in the ways they behave, think and perceive of themselves, their incarceration and their return to the community. This is consistent with the finding by CHRIIP and Flat Out (2010) that communities can hinder a woman’s access to post-release services. Furthermore, decisions made by women from migrant groups throughout their interaction with the criminal justice system may not necessarily be for their own individual good, but for the good of their communities. Once again, the effect of cultural communities on formerly-incarcerated women may not be adequately understood by workers or policymakers from individualistic societies.

Accordingly, Hofstede’s theory emphasises the social nature of culture; in other words, culture is a social product formed, nurtured, and shared by a group (Signorini et al., 2009). As it is a social product, there can be as many cultures as there are social groups or systems – meaning that, at an individual level, a person is likely to have different cultures, at least as many as the number of social groups to which they belong (Signorini et al., 2009). Moreover, because culture is a social product, culture can subsequently affect our cognitive processes, the way we process information, and the way we act (Signorini et al., 2009). This interpretation of Hofstede’s work is particularly useful for the present research as it anticipates the complexities of the participants’ multiple and intersectional identities.

In the context of migration, Hofstede and his colleagues theorised from their studies that migrants who move into a new culture may take more than one generation to completely assimilate because values need time to
change (Hofstede et al., 2010: 45). The inability to assimilate subsequently results in social and economical disadvantages often felt by migrating persons – disadvantages that may last beyond the first few generations of migrants (Koser, 2007: 97). Heath and his colleagues, for instance, undertook an extensive international analysis to identify the causes and extent of ‘ethnic penalty’ – that is, disadvantages that ethnic minorities experience in comparison to other ethnic groups (Heath and Cheung, 2006; Heath and Brinbaum, 2007; Heath and Cheung, 2007; Heath et al., 2008). The result of these studies supports that, in all countries under study, second generation migrants experience a substantial level of residual ethnic penalty (Heath and Cheung, 2006; Heath and Brinbaum, 2007; Heath and Cheung, 2007; Heath et al., 2008).

It is important to highlight that there are two distinct levels of ‘migration’ at play here. Firstly, in this research there is the migration of individuals from other ethnic cultural backgrounds into Australia and the United States. In these cases, Hofstede and other authors underlined the challenges that migrants go through when they enter into a new culture, and the length of time (or the amount of generations) that it may take before these individuals no longer experience any ethnic penalty. In addition, another level of migrational challenges also applies: the migration from prison culture to mainstream culture. While this migration refers to a different realm of transition, the challenges posed to ex-offenders may still be the same. That is, they require time and support before they are properly assimilated (and, no longer experiencing structural and social disadvantages) into mainstream culture. Conceptualised in this way, ex-offenders from migrant backgrounds may therefore be migrating twice when they transition back into society post-release, and may then be doubly disadvantaged as a result.

While Hofstede’s theory has been taken up in the field of psychology
and management studies, Baskerville (2003) notes that it has not found a place in anthropology or sociology. The reason for this, she attributed, is the theoretical differences underpinning these fields (Baskerville, 2003). Specifically, in social sciences, studies in which the nation state is treated as a unit of analysis are primarily concerned with the ways in which variations in social institutions correspond to national characteristics (see: Kohn, 1996: 30). Hofstede’s work, in contrast, is concerned with national characteristics as a variable in the analysis of organisational behaviour (Baskerville, 2003).

Aside from methodological critiques of Hofstede’s theory\(^6\) which in sum note that it may be inappropriate for the field of social science, theoretical criticisms have also been raised by scholars. Firstly, Signorini and her colleagues (2009) postulated that, although Hofstede’s theory acknowledges that one can possess multiple ‘cultural layers’, the breakdown of each layer implies that individuals have clear and independent value sets for each group they belong to. As an alternative, the authors appealed to an explanation of culture provided by Spencer-Oatey (2000: 4), whereby culture is more of a “fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural conventions and basic assumptions and values”, and that group members are unlikely to share identical sets of attitudes and beliefs because of the complexities in their lives. From this basis, Signorini and her colleagues contested that Hofstede’s concept of culture does not allow for an overlap between one’s different cultural sets, and is accordingly “ontologically static” (2009: 258).

\(^6\) For limitations of sample, see: Javidan and House, 2002; House et al., 2004; Moussetes, 2007; Ailon, 2008; Witte, 2012. For method of data collection, see: Clifford and Marcus, 1986; D'Iribarne, 1997; Boje, 2001; Schwartz, 1999; Baskerville, 2003; Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Czarniawska, 2004; Dansereau and Yammarino, 2006; Hanges and Dickson, 2006; Hofstede, 2006; Javidan et al., 2006; Soin and Scheytt, 2006; Jones, 2007; Van de Vijver et al, 2008; Witte, 2012. For design limitations, see: Osland and Bird, 2000; Clegg et al., 2006; Javidan et al., 2006; Yeganeh and Su, 2006; Witte, 2012.
This critique is further advanced by McSweeney (2013: 489), who faulted Hofstede’s approach to cultural analysis, stating that social phenomena are complex, not only because they are almost always the outcome of multiple influences, but also because those influences combine in various ways and at different times. He then posited that this level of complex interaction means that any attempt to identify social causation, or prediction, is highly challenging and is usually beyond the capability of a unilevel analysis – such as one produced by Hofstede (McSweeney, 2013: 489).

Another major theoretical critique of Hofstede’s work evolves around his alleged assumption that the population is a homogeneous whole, and that an understanding of the values of this population can equate to an understanding of national culture (Baskerville, 2003; Jones, 2007). Witte (2012: 149) stated in her criticism that societies cannot be “satisfactorily portrayed” as being ‘national’ as people in a nation do not make up of a homogeneous ethnic, linguistic, or religious group. Rather, nations comprise groups of ethnic units that are varied and diverse (Nasif et al., 1991; Redpath, 1997; Jones, 2007). Other scholars, additionally, contributed that Hofstede’s theory underestimates the importance of communities within a nation, and the impacts of these communities on an individual’s values (Dorfman and Howell, 1988; Lindell and Arvonen, 1996; Smith, 1998; Jones, 2007).

While Hofstede’s cultural dimensions still offer a valuable insight into the study of culture (Ang and Dyne, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; D’Iribarne, 2009) – particularly, in determining the relative differences between nation states’ overall cultural values (Williamson, 2002), the underpinning ontology may have problematic implications. Underlying Hofstede’s cultural dimensions is the key assumption that an individual’s culture can predict their values and behaviours – an assumption which also forms the basis of culture-responsive policies. Scholars such as Russell and Carlton (2013: 481) observed that culture-
sensitive practices position culture as pre-given and, subsequently, as a marker of inferiority. This discourse, moreover, directs attention onto the ‘cultured’ individual, instead of on those who perpetuate sites of domination and structural discrimination (Russell and Carlton, 2013). For instance, in their critique of the Better Pathways initiative, Russell and Carlton (2013) postulated that the criminal justice system essentialises Vietnamese women offenders through its generalisation of the pathways through which this group of offenders end up in crime. In doing so, it racialises the crime involved, and contributes to the dominant ideas that link race with criminality (Russell and Carlton, 2013: 482). This can further reinforce the marginalisation of women’s identities and experiences, as any strategy that is based on the experiences of women who do not share the same race backgrounds will be of limited help to racialised women (Crenshaw, 1995 in Russell and Carlton, 2013: 480). Therefore, the focus of policies and responses to re-entry on cultural differences or the ‘cultured’ individual can perhaps isolate women from migrant groups further, and takes attention away from existing structural issues that need to be addressed. Although Hofstede’s cultural dimensions model may be useful for the study in its analysis of the differences between individuals across culture, the model must be used with careful considerations.

**Theory of Intersectionality**

Drawing on early feminist theories and critical race theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to refer to an approach to analysing the complex origins of multiple sources of women’s oppression (Bastia, 2014: 237). Since then, the theory of intersectionality has been heralded as the “most important contribution that women’s studies has made so far” (McCall, 2005: 1771), and feminist scholars from a range of disciplines have welcomed intersectional perspectives as a necessary approach to their fields.
(Davis, 2011: 43). Although scholars in criminology and criminal justice are finally following this trend, Barak and his colleagues (2015) expressed that they have been slow to embrace the idea of intersectionalities. In particular, the authors posited that researchers in criminology and criminal justice have a tendency to focus on one social dimension at a time and independent of others – instead of embracing that the theory applies simultaneously to all groups of people (Barak et al., 2015). For instance, Barak and his co-authors observed that many criminologists assume that gender is relevant only when discussing women, race is relevant only when discussing people of colour, and class is relevant only when discussing those on the economic extremes of society (Barak et al., 2015: 152). The theory of intersectionality, on the contrary, emphasises that everyone is a member of a social class and an ethnic/racial group, and that all people also bring their sexuality and gender construction to the ways that they present themselves in everyday reality (Barak et al., 2015: 152). It is crucial, therefore, that these identity categories are studied and understood concurrently.

The theory of intersectionality pertains to the examination of race, gender, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012: 57). It aims to address “the most central theoretical and normative concerns within feminist scholarship”, namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women (Lutz et al., 2011: 2). Underlying the theoretical basis for intersectionality is the ontology that, within groups that are seemingly homogeneous, there are attitudinal differences amongst members (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012: 61). For example, when race is explored, one sees that many people within a race are divided along socio-economic, political, religious, sexual orientation, and national origin lines – each of which generates intersectional individuals (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012: 61). Thus, identity categories – such as, race, class, and gender – need to be understood in terms
of their mutual interactions as they are most often experienced simultaneously (Combahee River Collect, 1981; Lutz et al., 2011).

In her work on race, class, gender, and sexuality, Lynn Weber (2010: 91) offered five conceptual frameworks to understanding intersectionality. Firstly, she posited that identity categories should be understood in their historical and geographical contexts (Weber, 2010: 91). That is, analyses of these categories should be focused on specific times and places, in order to avoid the generalised meanings of race, class, gender, and sexuality that apply to all times and places (Weber, 2010: 91). This then follows onto the second framework: race, class, gender, and sexuality are social constructs, and hence their meanings can and do change over time and in different social contexts (Weber, 2010: 91). Thirdly, identity categories reflect power relationships of dominance and subordination, and are based in the exploitation of subordinate groups by dominant groups for a greater share of society’s resources (Weber, 2010: 91). Weber (2010: 91) argued that any societal changes that are made, consequently, are done so because oppressed groups struggle to gain rights, opportunities, and resources against dominant groups who seek to maintain their position of control and status quo (Weber, 2010: 91).

Additionally, Weber (2010: 91) explained that the power relationships between these two groups are embedded in society’s macro social institutions, as well as in the micro face-to-face interactions that constitute the everyday lives of individuals; this then further reinforces the connection between the two levels in relation to race, class, gender, and sexuality analysis (Gopaldas, 2013: 91). Finally, Weber (2010: 91) contended that these identity categories operate simultaneously; that is, at a societal level, these systems of social hierarchies are linked with each other and are embedded in all social institutions, and at the individual level, individuals experience their lives based on their positions along all dimensions of their identities. It is, therefore, likely
that individuals occupy positions of dominance and subordination at the same time (Weber, 2010: 91).

The five conceptual frameworks advanced by Weber allude to the underlying assumption of intersectionality theorists that systemic oppression in society exists, and that it is experienced more frequently by those who are on the margins of society in multiple aspects of their lives (Crenshaw, 1991; Parent et al., 2013). Specifically, Weber (2010: 34) suggested that there are three primary domains within which marginalised people experience oppression: ideological, political and economic. According to Weber (2010: 34), “each of these domains and the institutions associated with them are organised to reinforce and reproduce the prevailing social hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality” through the production and dissemination of ideas, as well as to justify these inequalities, the concentration of government power and social control mechanisms among dominant groups, and the unequal distribution of resources. Against this backdrop, the theory’s central focus on the intersections of identity categories enables scholars to view social inequalities or privileges as interrelated and interacting (Phoenix, 2006: 187; Barak, 2015: 152; Bastia, 2014: 238).

The identification of existing “interlocking systems of oppression” (Collins, 1990) allows intersectional theorists an opportunity to reverse any systemic disadvantages already experienced by marginalised groups. In particular, Delgado and Stefancic (2012: 61) argued that the ways in which scholars frame categories and subgroups can determine who has power, voice, and representation, and who does not. Unlike classical liberals who strive for universalism, intersectional theorists instead seek to respond to those whose situation and experience differ from the norm – especially, those who are considered as “double minorities”, whose lives are “twice removed” from the experiences of mainstream population (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012: 64).
Furthermore, the theory of intersectionality follows a post-structuralist view in that it avoids essentialising race, gender, class, or sexuality – acknowledging that the goals or characteristics of a ‘unified’ group may not reflect exactly those of certain factions within it (Lutz, et al., 2011; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). While this overarching objective to individualise all experiences is a noble one, many scholars warned against a rigid, individualised focus as it could compromise larger group benefits, as well as patterns of class, race, and gender privilege and oppression that are present (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Barak et al., 2015). In the application of this theory then, it is necessary to balance the need to individualise experiences with the observation of patterns of behaviour within the cohort.

Conclusion

Chapter Three has outlined the broader theoretical concept of prisoner re-entry, and has provided the thesis with a foundation to better understand the findings of this research. Firstly, through a critical analysis of the terminologies commonly used in this field, the chapter has justified my preference for the terms re-entry or integration, over others such as reintegration or resettlement. Specifically, I underline that the thesis does not assume participants’ prior levels of integration into mainstream community before their incarceration – thus, avoiding the presumption that re-integration is a relatively easy process where ex-offenders can just ‘pick up where they left off’. Rather, this chapter has demonstrated through Moore’s (2011) stages of re-entry that re-entry is a complex process with multiple phases that individuals must go through before complete integration is achieved. This emphasis on re-entry as a process, moreover, subsequently informs the ways in which findings from this study are analysed and understood.
Furthermore, Chapter Three has presented a discussion of the desistance framework for understanding re-entry – specifically, what it means to desist from crime, different factors commonly associated with desistance, and the approaches through which desistance can be achieved. Through a critical analysis, the chapter concludes that, while the employment of the desistance framework is normative and theoretically ideal, its practical implementation can cause a responsibilising effect (as individuals and communities become primarily responsible for the social control of crime), as well as a further stigmatisation to the ex-offender population (as they are grouped into risk categories with no individual characteristics to mitigate the level of ‘dangerousness’ imposed on them).

Chapter Three has also presented previous empirical research which are conducted within a similar context and with the same population group as this present study. What has emerged through this literature review is the importance of qualitative research methodologies in understanding the experiences of ex-offenders. This has, as a result, informed my decision in pursuing a phenomenological method of inquiry by conducting narrative interviews with formerly-incarcerated women, and semi-structured interviews with service providers.

A catalogue of barriers to re-entry is then illustrated in this chapter to provide the research with a comparative understanding of participants’ personal experiences. That is, similarities and differences of the interviewed women’s experiences can be analysed against those found typically amongst the general ex-offender population to elicit the extent to which the experiences of women from migrant backgrounds are unique.

To address several key characteristics of the participant group, Chapter Three also outlines debates surrounding re-entry policies that are sensitive to
the gender or cultural aspects of an individual’s identity. It demonstrates that, while these gender- or culture-responsive policies cater to important aspects of these individuals’ lives, the categorisation of individuals into one group or another ultimately ignores other parts of their identities that may be of importance. For instance, although Hofstede’s *cultural dimensions* model may be useful for the study in its analysis of the differences between individuals across culture, it does not acknowledge a range of other possible perspectives within the culture (such as, variations between gender, economic backgrounds, and educational backgrounds) – hence, the model must be used with careful considerations. In order to mitigate this effect, the theory of intersectionality is offered as an alternative perspective for the thesis to recognise and appreciate the multitude of identities that crucially inform the experiences of the women interviewed.

The first three chapters have equipped the thesis with a theoretical understanding of the concept of prisoner re-entry, the socio-cultural contexts of prisoner re-entry in Melbourne and New York City, as well as the rationale for further investigation of the experiences of re-entry for a complex population – in particular, women from migrant backgrounds. Armed with this knowledge and understanding, the thesis introduces in Chapter Four the methodological approaches undertaken in this study to investigate the re-entry experiences of women from migrant groups. Furthermore, Chapter Four presents details of the sample groups, the data collection process, as well as the data analysis process. Following on from the theoretical and contextual backgrounds offered in the first three chapters of the thesis, Chapter Four provides a methodological understanding of the approach taken to conduct this research; this is done in preparation for the discussion of findings to follow in later chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The central aim of this chapter is to describe critically how the research was conceived, approached, conducted, and analysed. The study’s theoretical, ontological, and epistemological assumptions all emphasise subjectivity, and underline the significance of recognising a multitude of lived experiences. Moreover, the chapter highlights the ways in which these subjectivities are derived from constructed realities that are affected by power-relations in society. This emphasis consequently drives the primary aim of the research to explore the lived experiences of ex-offenders during their transition back to the community, and to understand how they interact with existing systems of post-release services.

Following this discussion, this chapter justifies how a comparative phenomenological approach aligns with both the research objectives and philosophical orientation. It then focuses on the selection of the study participants, and addresses the ways in which the study findings are gathered. Research limitations as well as ethical considerations involved in this study are also discussed.

Philosophical Orientation and Interpretive Framework

A description provided by Creswell (2013: 16) defines ‘philosophical
orientation’ as “the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research”. In contention with other scholars (such as, Kidder and Fine, 1998), Creswell (2013) observed that researchers have a responsibility to position themselves in relation to their studies and their data, and to recognise the philosophical assumptions that inform the data collection and analysis processes. Through this acknowledgement, readers are then presented with the perspective(s) that inform the research, and with the ways in which the researcher’s personal, cultural and historical experiences shape their study. By acknowledging the researcher’s own perspective and by using different frameworks to contextualise and conceptualise different aspects of the world, we are then able to understand the multiple realities expressed by research participants (Ivanoff and Hultberg, 2006: 130).

The need for researchers to take a reflexive stance on the analysis of their findings have been well-documented by scholars such as Charmaz (2014). In her encouragement of reflexivity, Charmaz (2014) urged that researchers acknowledge their values, and how these values shape what they do, or do not, see in their research conception and analysis. Specifically, she emphasises the importance of being aware of “how, when, and to what extent, the studied experience is embedded in larger, and, often, hidden structures, networks, situations, and relationships” (Charmaz, 2014: 240). Moreover, Davis and Harre (1990: 58) advised that, in taking a post-structuralist view, researchers should not claim neutrality, but should admit that the ways in which they have been constituted influence how they listen and what they hear. This reflexivity, hence, aligns with the pluralistic and post-structural ontological and epistemological position that the research is taking.
Having lived among multiple cultures\textsuperscript{7}, I reject the assumption that there is one, single, objective reality. Rather, I take a post-structuralist view that realities are multiple and subjective, and must be understood in their own context. Drawing on the work of Foucault, post-structuralists identified that identities are historically constituted discourses, and that “an individual emerges through the process of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate” (Davies and Harre, 1994: 46, cited in Popoviciu et al., 2006: 404). Post-structuralist methodology, thus, allows researchers to recognise the range of subjectivities that enmesh how we locate and identify research participants (Popoviciu et al., 2006: 404).

Accordingly, this research builds on a constructivist framework – emphasising the perspective that reality is \textit{socially constructed}, rather than \textit{imprinted} on individuals, and is influenced by one’s position in society (Creswell, 2013; Bachman and Schutt, 2014). Within this concept, Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 13) acknowledged the possibility of shared social constructions – underlining that subjectivity does not necessarily equate to individuality. Notably, as constructivists assume that realities are essentially products of different contexts and perspectives, they do not hold the ability to replicate these realities as central to their argument (Mir and Watson, 2001: 1172). Resnick and Wolff (1987: 2) further suggested an alternative outlook, stating that theories that are derived from constructivist studies are determined by each and every other process so that they cannot be superficially replicated.

Furthermore, constructivism rejects the traditional or classical view of

\textsuperscript{7} The researcher’s background has been outlined in Chapter One.
knowledge as a “justified true belief”; instead, it has a firm reliance on subjective personal experience (Boghossian, 2012: 75). For this reason, knowledge then consists of an individual’s “private experiential ‘world’ and its episodes” (von Glasersfeld, 1981 cited in Boghossian, 2012: 75). In relation to this research, the epistemological goal is to understand the meanings this group of ex-offenders give to their socially-constructed reality, and to appreciate these personal, complex views. Hence, data collected primarily observes participants’ perceptions of the situations that they are in, their interpretation of these situations to make sense of their realities, and their interactions with the established structures in society to negotiate and manage their environment.

Comparative Phenomenology

Prior to exploring the chosen methodological approach, it is helpful to revisit the three primary questions the research is tasked with responding:

1. How do formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds conceptualise and experience their re-entry process?
2. Is there a common phenomenon of re-entry experienced by formerly-incarcerated women in Melbourne and New York City?
3. To what extent does the women’s ability to access services affect their transitional experiences?

Phenomenology as a philosophical movement was conceptualised by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century. According to Husserl (1983), phenomenology “is a form of inquiry that holistically describes the research participants’ lived experience of meaning-making and informs us [researchers] about their perception of the focal object or phenomenon” (cited in Koopman, 2015: 4). In other words, it constitutes thinking about how
individuals perceive or understand the world. In his work, Heidegger (1967) clarified that the \textit{dasein} (or, the essence of being) involves the search for understanding about understanding. Hence, the approach focuses on the “lived world experiences” or the “lived through experiences” of individuals under study, and how these experiences must be rendered in their own words (Koopman, 2015: 5).

Orbe (2009) offered several key assumptions behind this methodological approach. Firstly, phenomenology rejects the concept of objective research for an objective truth. Secondly, it believes that the analysis of human behaviour can open a window into a greater understanding of nature and the social world (Orbe, 2009). In addition, phenomenology posits that individuals’ behaviours, attitudes and values can be understood through the unique ways in which they reflect the society they live in; hence, individual experiences should be explored if researchers wish to understand a social phenomenon (Orbe, 2009).

According to Lester (1999: 1), phenomenological approaches are “particularly effective” at revealing the experiences and perceptions of individuals, as well as at challenging structural or normative assumptions. Moreover, the theoretical assumption underpinning phenomenology aligns well with that underlying a constructivist epistemology, an epistemology which is in turn complementary to the methodological approach itself (Kordes, 2016). As the research is tasked with exploring the individual post-release experiences of formerly-incarcerated women, the selected phenomenological approach offers a dynamic method that permits these subjective and intersectional interactions to be brought to the fore. In addition, phenomenology allows for an identification of patterns of experiences amongst participant groups, which then illuminates how prisoner re-entry as a phenomenon is understood and constructed by participants.
In addition to traditional phenomenology, the study draws on comparative research methods in its design. According to Bierne and Nelken (1997), comparative research “involves the systematic and theoretically informed comparison of outcomes in two or more countries, cultures or places” (cited in Fay-Ramirez, 2015: 519). Fay-Ramirez (2015: 519) offered further that, although comparisons can be difficult due to differences in context and measurement, comparative research in criminology has a benefit in enhancing both policy and theoretical development, and in allowing for an understanding of the limits and assumptions of patterns of behaviour as they relate to different cultural contexts. Specifically, through an in-depth understanding of how the criminal justice system operates in different jurisdictions, we are able to propose effective “linkages” among these systems for a more effective control of crime (Bennett, 2004: 9). Comparative research, moreover, enables us to collect an inventory of “best practices” that allows for improvements to be made in local jurisdictions (Bennett, 2004: 9). Thus, the comparative aspect of this research provides an opportunity for reflection on relevant policies relating to prisoner re-entry in one or both of the jurisdictions under examination.

Gatekeepers and Recruitment

The study sought the recruit the following sample groups:

(a) Formerly-incarcerated women in Melbourne;
(b) Support workers in Melbourne;
(c) Formerly-incarcerated women in New York City;
(d) Support workers in New York City
Organisations in Melbourne were shortlisted from an online search for those that are involved with the post-release support of formerly-incarcerated people, and were then contacted by phone. Following a brief introduction to the study, I was directed to a relevant person to approach (often someone in a management position) to discuss the details of the study and the ways in which an organisation might participate in the research. After this initial face-to-face discussion, staff from each organisation were then recruited. Of the eight organisations with which there was an initial meeting about the research, five organisations in Melbourne agreed to participate in the study.

In New York City, the recruitment of post-release workers occurred differently. A key contact in one of the largest post-release organisations in the city, once he was informed of the study and its recruitment needs, contacted management teams from relevant organisations in order to facilitate discussion. These organisations were then directly contacted to request their participation in the study. Similar to workers in Melbourne, staff in New York City were generally enthusiastic about their involvement in the study. The sample sought for both sites were formerly-incarcerated women from migrant groups, as well as staff who support these groups of women during their post-release transition into the community.

The recruitment process for formerly-incarcerated women was typical of those seeking access to this group of individuals in Australia. As formerly-incarcerated individuals are a hard-to-reach population for researchers, initial contacts with post-release services were necessary (Liebling and Maruna, 2005; Westervelt and Cook, 2012; Carlton and Segrave, 2016). In addition, ex-offenders fall into a category of vulnerable populations that are sometimes considered as over-researched (Clark, 2008); hence, support services act as gatekeepers and attempt to protect ex-offenders against a potential exploitation. Accordingly, it was pivotal for me to obtain workers’ trust before
workers would agree to assist with the recruitment of formerly-incarcerated women for the research.

Consequently, fourteen formerly-incarcerated women were recruited through post-release organisations across both Melbourne and New York City using a purposive sampling approach (Neuman, 1997). As will be discussed later in this chapter, the women selected were from migrant groups – that is, they were either first- or second-generation migrants. Although eight organisations in Melbourne were approached for the recruitment of formerly-incarcerated participants, only two subsequently facilitated the introduction of participants to the research. The reason cited by workers for this gap was that there was a general lack of migrant clients in their organisations. While this sentiment from workers varied significantly from official reports and publications – which outlined the elevated number of women from migrant groups entering and leaving the Victorian prison system (Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010; CHRIP, 2010; ABS, 2016) – it is important to note that the number of women from migrant groups in the criminal justice system is still relatively small.

Professional staff from the two organisations in Melbourne that assisted with the recruitment process made the first contact with the women to outline the research and particularly the ways in which the women could potentially be involved in the study. Once the women agreed to be contacted, I phoned them directly to introduce myself and the project. The women were also offered face-to-face meetings to discuss more detailed information regarding the study and their involvement. Of the five women interviewed in Melbourne, only two took up this offer of an initial meeting; three others stated that they preferred only to meet once for the interview. Formerly-incarcerated participants involved in this research were compensated with an AUD$50 Coles Myer voucher, in accordance with common qualitative
research practices involving vulnerable populations (Head, 2009).

The participant recruitment process in New York City differed slightly from that in Melbourne. In New York City, my visit was supported by the Prisoner Re-entry Institute (PRI) – a research, policy and advocacy institute. The support of PRI helped the recruitment process tremendously as post-release organisations were familiar with PRI and frequently collaborated with them. Hence, the trust needed from service organisations to conduct the research had already been established. In contrast to the process in Melbourne, detailed discussions on the recruitment process took place over the phone; workers were content with this, and agreed to assist in recruitment immediately. Of the four organisations approached for the recruitment of formerly-incarcerated women, three organisations eventually directed participants to the research.

Women in New York City were recruited in distinct ways depending on the organisation they were recruited from. For example, one organisation requested from me a draft email outlining the details of the study, what participation would involve, and any compensation for participation. This email was then sent by the Director of the organisation to all clients who subscribed to the mailing list. Though five individuals responded to the email, only one respondent was eligible to participate; others did not meet the criteria of participation (outlined below).

Another organisation, in contrast, pre-selected a number of potential participants for the study from their client group, and requested that I visit their office to conduct these interviews. For two days, I was allocated a closed office in the organisation where six interviews would be conducted. Finally, for the last organisation that helped recruit women for the study, I was invited to speak at the end of a substance treatment program session and participants
were recruited immediately. Notably, this last method inevitably meant that women recruited this way did not have a choice to keep their substance use history private. Nonetheless, two women were interviewed as a result, and the interviews were conducted in an office provided by the organisation’s management staff. All formerly-incarcerated women who participated in the research in New York City were compensated with USD$30.

The size of the study sample (n=14) was somewhat restricted by recruitment challenges. Challenges presented to me in recruiting formerly-incarcerated individuals was more prevalent in Melbourne than in New York City; in fact, the sample size in New York City was kept to a limited number to allow for a meaningful comparison between participants across the two sites. Nonetheless, small samples such as this are appropriate for phenomenological studies – as the focus of the research is on the quality of the data, rather than on the quantity of participants (Morse, 2000; Polit and Beck, 2010). Moreover, the size of the study sample was determined according to the concept of saturation – the point at which no new themes or categories emerged from the data being collected (Guest et al., 2006). Once the sample size reached its saturation point, I ceased seeking more participants for the study.

**Formerly-Incarcerated Women Sample**

*The women’s voices*

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8 The decision to offer the women cash, instead of a store voucher, was suggested by the then-Director of Research at the Prisoner Institute. The advice was given because stores that offer vouchers are typically not present across all five boroughs – especially, in those where participants were likely to be residing. In addition, vouchers sold at these stores offered only a pre-determined amount, and did not equate to the amount of compensation that is equivalent to AUD$50 (according to the exchange rate in March, 2015).
Feminist perspectives were drawn upon to inform much of the methodological approaches as participants’ gender is central to the study. Traditionally, a main goal of feminist movement in research is to ‘give voices’ to women (DeVault, 1999: 173), in order to enable an understanding of the gendered nature of social relations, institutions and processes (Grant, 2006: 184). While the exploration of gendered relationships is a recommended method to give voices to women, it is not sufficient. Indeed, I acknowledge that individual women have intersections of identities that inevitably influence their interactions with the world, and these other voices (impacted by their race, class, or status) must also be incorporated.

While it is true that formerly-incarcerated women from migrant groups are neglected to a large extent by the criminal justice system – mostly due to their relatively small number in the population – I am critical of the notion that women needed to be given a voice. The act of giving assumes an extreme vulnerability of this group of ex-offenders, and implies that a level of rescuing is required. Moreover, it wrongly implies that researchers are the only ones able to give the women their voices – mistakenly believing that the women would otherwise be muted. Adopting this assumption of the need to rescue, thus, ignores the women’s individual sense of agency, and can inadvertently perpetuate the vulnerabilities that the women are already facing.

Instead, I aimed to bear the women’s voices, and to present them as such; I believed that the women already possessed a voice, but they had not been listened to. The study, therefore, attempted to listen and to understand how the women experienced re-entry, rather than to offer them a voice to speak. In doing so, it represented the women’s own views and own ideas of the ways in which they would prefer to construct and present their ‘self’ (Ashby, 2011). Despite approaching the sample with a different perspective, the research importantly preserved the feminist tradition of upholding the rights of
women to be heard and represented (Britzman, 1989).

Defining ‘CALD’

In order to ensure a consistency in the research process across the two sites, it was essential that key characteristics of each sample population were clearly defined so that similar groups of participants were recruited.

For instance, a crucial component of an eligible participant’s identity is their ‘formerly-incarcerated’ status. While this seems straightforward, merely having been incarcerated in a correctional facility was insufficient. Incarceration can serve either as the punishment for a convicted crime, or as the detention of individuals awaiting their trial or sentencing. Although individuals in this latter group are also contained within correctional facilities, they may be sent to a separate facility that only houses unsentenced prisoners, and may only be incarcerated in this facility for a relatively short amount of time. Therefore, a crucial distinction was made during the recruitment of this study: being ‘formerly-incarcerated’ must entail having been sentenced to imprisonment as a punishment for a convicted crime. All ex-offender participants for this research, thus, have been found guilty of a crime they committed, and were sent to prison (or jail, for New York City) as a result. Once this pre-requisite was met, the length and location of their imprisonment did not affect the women’s eligibility to participate in this study.

Another important specification for the study sample was the condition that participants can justifiably be classified as ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’. While some scholars have contested the use of the term, arguing that it trivialises a complex population (see: Russell and Carlton, 2013), I believed that it was a practical terminology to employ. This was especially helpful during participant recruitment stages, when those assisting with the
process needed to know the exact characteristics of ex-offenders who would be eligible. Defining this term was, however, difficult. Although the use of ‘CALD’ is widespread in official publications in Melbourne (such as, the *Better Pathways* and other Corrections Victoria reports), there lacks any sophisticated definition clarifying what it includes; for the most part, CALD is simply used to refer to those who are culturally and linguistically diverse from mainstream population. While this definition provided some parameters for the sample, the boundaries remained vague and unclear. To make matters more challenging, researchers and practitioners in New York City do not use this term or any similar ones to refer to this cohort of offenders. It was, therefore, imperative to clearly outline what the term ‘CALD’ actually entailed.

In the literal sense of the term, CALD participants must be from a background that is culturally and/or linguistically diverse from the mainstream – that is, they are from cultures that are not Anglo-Australian/American, and/or do not speak English as their first language. In addition, when used, the term typically does not refer to the Australian Indigenous population even when this population literally meets the cultural and linguistic diversity criteria. Employing this literal and broad definition, therefore, results in a level of obscurity that inevitably requires clarification.

This is especially salient when the concept of ‘diversity’ is involved; a concept that is more appropriately measured along a continuum in degrees, rather than as a dichotomy. Categorising individuals as being of a ‘diverse culture’ was particularly difficult in both Melbourne and New York City – metropolitans that already consist of a myriad of multicultural individuals. This challenge was compounded during the recruitment process in New York City, when it was discovered that New Yorkers do not commonly identify themselves by their ‘culture’ or ‘ethnicity’. Rather, they do so by race: White-American, African-American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American or Native-
American. The discrepancies between the two cities reinforced the need to clarify the participant group in more detail.

As the impracticality of adopting one single term to describe a complex population surfaced, it became necessary to succinctly define and repeatedly communicate who constituted the ideal participant group. Following the review of the literature on generations of migrants who retain strong cultural ties (see: Heath and Cheung, 2006; Heath and Brinbaum, 2007; Heath and Cheung, 2007; Koser, 2007; Heath et al., 2008; Hofstede et al., 2010), it was decided that the study would recruit those who were themselves born outside Australia or the United States, or whose parents were born outside Australia or the United States. In essence, the research ultimately seeks to capture the re-entry experiences of first- or second-generation migrants.

This revised criteria for selecting potential participants, consequently, altered the eligibility of those to be recruited; for instance, under the new definition, individuals whose first language was English could be included in the study if they or their parents were born overseas. In addition, individuals who were first- or second-generation migrants from countries such as, Canada, New Zealand, or the United Kingdom could potentially be included in the study, as long as their ethnic group still constituted the minority in both mainstream and correctional population. Although these cultures are in many aspects similar to that of mainstream Australia and America, it is recognised that migration may have had an impact on them (albeit to different degrees). For the most part, however, this potential issue of cultural ambiguity did not present during the recruitment process due to my conscious attempt not to include individuals from these countries in the study. This revised definition proved to be more easily understood for both participants and support workers across the two cities.
**Key characteristics**

**i. Involvement with the criminal justice system**

Overall, fourteen formerly-incarcerated women were interviewed across the two jurisdictions: five from Melbourne; and nine from New York City. Although the women were not asked about their past encounters with the correctional system, twelve out of fourteen volunteered this information. Notably, none of the women interviewed in Melbourne had previously been incarcerated, while five New Yorkers declared that they were incarcerated at least once before.

In their most recent incarceration, the duration of their prison sentence – which can inevitably affect their post-release transition – ranged from four months to seventeen years. The variation in the length of time served, as well as time since release, was more pertinent amongst the participant group in New York City. This was primarily because relationships between support workers and formerly-incarcerated individuals interviewed were typically shorter in Melbourne than in New York City – where individuals remain more involved in the re-entry space. Even though some ex-offenders in Melbourne do have prolonged relationships with their post-release services, the workers interviewed acknowledged that this was rare.

**ii. Ethnic background**

Formerly-incarcerated women from Melbourne who participated in the study were from Malaysia, Vietnam, Chile, Brazil and Yugoslavia, In New York City:

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9 A summary of the key characteristics of formerly-incarcerated participants is available in Appendix A. A brief profile for each participant is also provided in Appendix B.
City, participants were from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ireland, Guyana and Puerto Rico. It is important to note that women recruited for the study across both New York City and Melbourne were from countries that were of a higher power-distance index (PDI) and of a lower individuality index (IDV) than both Australia and the United States (as discussed in Chapter Three). The implications of this are revealed in the findings chapters (Chapters Five and Six).

To ensure a diversity of experiences within the interview cohort, both first- and second-generation migrants were recruited for the study. As mentioned previously in Chapter Two, the United States deports all non-US citizens who are convicted of a crime after their prison sentence. Consequently, this condition severely restricted the ability for the research to recruit first-generation migrants in New York City; presently, only one New Yorker (Salma) interviewed was born outside of the United States. The deportation condition contrasts with that in Melbourne, where a criminal conviction only warrants a possibility of deportation if offenders are permanent residents of the country.

It is believed that the women’s migrant status, coupled with the length of time in their resided countries, inevitably influence the level of social integration prior to their incarceration. In addition, the women were asked about the presence of family members residing in the same country in order to contextualise the extent of support networks available during and after their imprisonment. Not surprisingly, the majority of the women who were second-generation migrants (born in Australia or the United States) had an extensive family network with them in the same country. In contrast, those who themselves migrated typically had only their immediate family members with them.
iii. *Motherhood*

Half of the women interviewed across the two cities were mothers, and the majority were also primary carers for their children before and after their incarceration. Some of the women had adult children, and were therefore not their primary carers. During their imprisonment, the women who were mothers left their children in the care of their partners or – more commonly – with senior family members (such as, the women’s parents or aunts). Once release, the women would then attempt to resume custody. In these situations, it was evident that those with an extensive network of family members benefited from being able to have someone care for their children.

iv. *Substance abuse history*

Without being prompted, eight of the women admitted their history of substance abuse, and its role in their convicted crime. The types of substance reported ranged from alcohol, marijuana and heroin. This trend of substance abuse was especially widespread amongst the participant group in New York City, where many of the women were mandated to complete substance treatment programs as a condition of their release. The one Melbourne woman who admitted to a history of substance abuse, on the other hand, connected with post-release support services on her own accord. While those on parole in Melbourne are usually subjected to meetings with parole officers as part of their release condition, mandates to post-release support programs are generally reserved for individuals who are assessed as having a high risk of re-offending. As none of the interviewed women in Melbourne were assessed as being high-risk at the time of their release (possibly due to their limited substance use history and limited history of previous involvement with the criminal justice system), they were not mandated to post-release support programs.
v. Mental health issues

Finally, half of the women self-reported mental health problems. Typical mental health concerns reported by the interviewed women included depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and bipolar disorder. Four of the women also admitted that their mental health issues were connected to the most recent crime that they were convicted for, especially if substance use was involved.

Support Staff Sample

Conversations with support staff were expected to provide the research with a more detailed understanding of the services that were available to the women, and another perspective on the experiences of the women in accessing these services. Support staff for this study comprised those in community organisations who provided post-release support services to formerly-incarcerated women. In contrast to the challenges faced in precisely defining and identifying the formerly-incarcerated population, participating staff’s clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities alleviated this problem. While a prerequisite for participation was a current or previous involvement in the provision of post-release support, this need not be the central focus of their role. Similarly, support staff were still recruited even if their target client group was not specifically women or people from migrant backgrounds. It is also worth noting that, although some Corrections staff are involved in assisting with pre-release or post-release support, they were not recruited for this
Rationale for the sample

The inclusion of twenty-two support staff contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the level of availability and accessibility of services offered to this cohort of ex-offenders. Aside from gaining knowledge of the range of support services available, accounts from workers illuminated similarities and discrepancies between the staff’s and the women’s perspectives of the overall re-entry experience. This is essential as staff’s responses and narratives are a window into the experiences of many more women (albeit, indirectly), who were not reachable due to the limited scope of the research. Perspectives from staff can thereby offer broader policy implications.

Key characteristics

The final sample of support workers consisted of twenty-two support staff from nine different organisations interviewed across both Melbourne and New York City. The sample size was (unintentionally) divided equally between the two sites – eleven workers from five organisations in Melbourne, and eleven workers from four organisations in New York City. For both cities, there were more organisations approached during recruitment than the number that eventuated into interviews

10 Typically, corrections staff are only involved in the support while the women were still incarcerated and I am interested in speaking to workers who are involved in the support both during and after their incarceration.

11 A summary of the key characteristics of support workers participants is available in Appendix C. A brief profile of each of the participating organisations is also provided in Appendix D.
i. **Programs offered**

The types of support offered by services ranged between general post-release support and more specific post-release support. Of the five services interviewed in Melbourne, three specialised in providing support to women, while two others had no gender-specific focus. With regards to ethnic groups, all but one support staff in Melbourne were involved in programs that cater to specific ethnic groups. In addition, although the majority of organisations interviewed technically offered a throughcare service – that is, one beginning from pre-release through to post-release – all reported that they devoted the majority of their efforts and resources to pre-release support\(^{12}\).

Similarly, although two of the organisations interviewed in New York City had a gender-specific focus, none of them catered especially to certain ethnic or racial groups. In contrast to Melbourne, the emphasis of treatment and support in New York City appeared to be in the post-release space – with very little (if any) pre-release involvement. Additionally, organisations in New York City had a widespread appreciation for the educational attainment of formerly-incarcerated people, and offered specific support to individuals to access college education and to maintain a successful study life. Although some in-prison educational programs are available in Melbourne, this was not a focus of post-release support.

ii. **Roles and responsibilities**

Staff interviewed across both Melbourne and New York City had roles ranging from frontline work to policy or program design responsibilities. At the time of their interviews, fourteen out of twenty-two workers dealt with

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\(^{12}\) The implications of this are examined in the following three chapters.
clients directly upon entry into programs; those who did not presently support with clients had previous experiences of direct client contact. The depth and length of experience varied between one week and twenty-six years in the field.

iii. Previous incarceration

Five workers from New York City divulged during interviews that they had been formerly-incarcerated themselves. Having formerly-incarcerated individuals working in post-release services is not an uncommon phenomenon in New York City, and I was informed that many individuals accessing support services were being trained to be facilitators or mentors. This typical characteristic of workers in New York City had significant implications for the women’s re-entry experiences. These implications are explored in the following chapters.

Interviews

The data collection process for this study was semi-structured and narrative interviews conducted to seek to understand participants’ experiences (for the women, their experiences of post-release transition; for the staff, their experiences of providing support). Specifically, the data collection process sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds conceptualise and experience their re-entry process?
2. What factors shape and influence re-entry experiences in Melbourne and New York City?
3. To what extent does the women’s ability to access services affect their transitional experiences? What support is available?
Responding to the key research questions enabled the study to encapsulate the re-entry phenomenon as experienced by this cohort of ex-offenders in the two cities, and to understand the women’s interaction with post-release services and its effects on their transitional process.

The overarching interview process was similar for both sample groups. With permission interviews were recorded. Observational notes were taken during and immediately following all interviews in order to capture body language, tone, manner of expression, and displays of emotions. As Schwandt (2015) advised, field notes are intended to be read by researchers as evidence to produce meaning and an understanding of the social situation, or the phenomenon being studied. Moreover, Tessier (2012: 447) postulated that, as the interviews themselves are not reproducible, researchers can rely on these “representations of the events” (Green, et al., 1997) to supplement their interview data. These notes were also specifically beneficial in the analysis of the women’s narratives, as the notes offered some emotional contexts to quotes when recalled, and provided another level of depth to the analysis.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were given a detailed explanation of the study, and a description of the confidentiality and anonymity considerations. To supplement this verbal information, participants were also presented with formal documentation – that is, a customised Plain Language Statement (Appendices E and F) and Consent Form (Appendices G and H). All materials were provided in English. Before commencing each interview, participants were encouraged to raise any questions or concerns about their participation and were given monetary compensation for their involvement.
Formerly-incarcerated women

The study sought to understand formerly-incarcerated women’s experiences of post-release transition. The method chosen for this group of participants reflected the acknowledgement that their experiences are complex and multi-faceted. Accordingly, a narrative story-telling interview method is used to respond to the primary objectives of the research. The underlying presupposition for the selected method is that the interviewee’s perspective is best revealed when they are able to use their own “spontaneous language” in the narration of events (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 4). Jack (2010: 5) further suggested that story-telling is “one of the richest approaches to data collection”, as it allows the researcher to obtain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of a personal event, and of the factors surrounding that event. Importantly, narrative interviews also enabled the women’s experiences to be placed in the context of their social environment.

Interview schedules consisting of guided questions for formerly-incarcerated participants were designed to elicit stories of their re-entry experiences (see: Appendix I). The structure of the interview schedules began with the basic facts of release, such as the length of time the women have been released for, and the duration of their most recent incarceration. The conversation then transitioned towards the women’s initial re-entry experience, whereby they were asked to speak about their anticipation of release, and to contrast that with the actual experience on the day of the release. Afterwards, the conversation veered towards the women’s transition experiences so far in their journey. Finally, the interview closed with a personal reflection of their current lives, and how that differed from the first day of their release. This prepared structure for the conversation allowed for participants to share their stories with minimum interruptions so that “culturally embedded normative explanations” of events and behaviours might surface (Miller, 2012: 51).
Moreover, the continuity of their story-telling provided the women with time to collect their thoughts, and enabled more elaborate memory retrieval (Powell and Murray, 2012).

At the end of the first two interviews (which occurred in Melbourne), the women were also asked a last question: “What does it mean to be a [Vietnamese, Chinese, etc.] going through this experience? Did it have any effects on your experience? Did it make it harder or easier?” However, these questions were removed because I realised that they had guided participants’ conception of culture too explicitly; instead, the study was interested in if and how the women would conceptualise culture actively on their own.

As the nature of narrative interviews emphasise participants’ experiences, my influence was minimal in this data collection process. Participants directed the conversation themselves, and the interview schedules prepared were only used as a guide for the conversation if it was required (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 4). This method of data collection has also previously been employed successfully by other researchers who studied experiences of formerly- or currently-incarcerated women (see: Easteal, 1992; Galbraith, 1998; Richie, 2001; Baldry et al., 2008; Hunter and Greer, 2011).

The fourteen formerly-incarcerated women were all interviewed individually and in person for an average of one hour per session. Interviews occurred at various locations determined by the women: in Melbourne, all interviews were conducted in public spaces such as cafés, restaurants, university common areas and food courts; and, in New York City, interviews took place in offices of support organisations, or in an office provided by PRI. For the women in New York City, these locations were convenient as they were often attending programs or classes at the support agencies on the day of their interviews.
Support workers

Accounts from support workers were collected via semi-structured interviews. Unlike the interviews conducted with formerly-incarcerated women, questions for support staff were more directed, and were targeted at specific areas of prisoner re-entry (Appendix J). Prior to the commencement of each interview, participants were asked to briefly discuss their roles and responsibilities within the organisation, as well as the length of time they had been in that role.

The semi-structured nature of each interview provided participants with opportunities to discuss their organisational agenda, as well as to state their personal opinions and experiences on the issue. I acknowledged that participants’ responses might have been affected by the interview type (individual or group) conducted. Notably, many support staff chose to be interviewed with their colleagues if given the choice because they believed this was the most time-efficient method. According to Milena and colleagues (2008), group interviews are beneficial as they generate valuable information and permit participants to identify perceptions, thoughts and impressions regarding the topic (Kairuz, et al., 2007). However, they can also be limiting as some participants could dominate conversations and influence others with their opinions.

With support staff, the overall structure of interviews flowed from a broad overview of their organisation and the types of services that it provided, to questions on any specific services offered to women in general or to women from migrant groups specifically. Once the conversation turned towards formerly-incarcerated women from migrant groups, support workers were asked to reflect on any noticeable barriers to accessing post-release services.
experienced by this group of clients. Relatedly, staff were then encouraged to think about any barriers they themselves experienced in providing services to this group of clients. Each interview finally concluded with workers’ personal reflections or their overall impression on government policies, and how they thought these policies impact the experiences of formerly-incarcerated individuals and influence the larger post-release service realm.

Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Once data was collected from participants, all recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. These transcripts were then categorised into four main sets:

(a) Formerly-incarcerated women in Melbourne;
(b) Support workers in Melbourne;
(c) Formerly-incarcerated women in New York City;
(d) Support workers in New York City

In the initial planning for the data analysis process, sets (a) and (c) were originally planned to be analysed together – that is, the experiences of formerly-incarcerated women across two cities directly compared – and, sets (b) and (d) to be analysed together for the experiences of support workers across the two cities. However, after careful considerations, it was decided that the overall experience of re-entry can be better derived through an analysis of all experiences. In order to do this, the analysis commenced with an overview of the re-entry experiences in Melbourne (sets (a) and (b)), followed by an overview of the re-entry experiences in New York City (sets (c) and (d)). In using this process of analysis, I was able to contextualise the experiences to a large extent. That is, accounts from the women and support workers from one
city would largely have been influenced by the social and cultural contexts within which they were situated.

The approach to the analysis of data collected for this research was thematic, and broadly involved three phases: a direct observation of themes emerging from interpreted data; a disentanglement (or “pulling apart”) of these thematic interpretations; and, a meaningful reassembling of these interpretations (Bachman and Schutt, 2014: 263). At the micro level, the analysis process followed a combination of guidelines recommended by authors such as Strauss and Corbin (1998), Saldana (2012), and Creswell (2013). Due to the complexities and multifaceted nature of the data collected, these authors advocated for a multi-level analysis approach that would enable the study to critically engage with the available materials. This analytical process is summarised below in Figure 3.

The first stage of coding is shown in Figure 3 in the categorisation column. In this ‘open coding’ stage (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), interview transcripts from each set were first examined together, and categories of information were identified across the sets. Subsequently, instances that represent similar categories were “saturated” (Creswell, 2013: 195). Emerging categories from set (a), for example, included such things as ‘coming out’, ‘family’, ‘job’, ‘social networks’, and ‘reflection’. Following on, interview transcripts within each set were then examined individually in further detail, in order to ensure that all emerging categories were noted. During this process, subcategories were also created to represent multiple perspectives within a category (Creswell, 2013: 195).
**Figure 3 Coding stages**

**Stage One – Open Coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998)**

- Examine all interview transcripts **across all sets**
  - Identify categories of information
- Examine all interview transcripts **within each set**
  - Identify **subcategories** of information within relevant categories

**RESULTS:**

(C) Categories  
(D) Subcategories

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**Stage Two – Axial Coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998)**

- Focus on each category (A) **within each set**
  - Identify all codes (parts of interview transcripts) that fall into the categories being examined
- Review all categories (A) and subcategories (B) **across all sets**
  - Hypothesise themes

**RESULTS:**

(B) Proposed themes

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**Stage Three – Selective Coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998)**

- Produce statements describing each theme (C) in order to connect all relevant categories and subcategories **across all sets**
- Identify **overarching themes** from existing themes (D)

**RESULTS:**

(A) Overarching themes with statements connecting them to all relevant categories (A) and subcategories (B)
The second stage of coding focused on each individual category that surfaced within a set, and involved a review of all interview transcripts in the set to identify all codes that might fall into relevant categories. Creswell (2013: 196) suggested that this process can include codes that relate to strategies for addressing the category under focus, the context and intervening conditions that shape these strategies, and the consequences of undertaking these strategies. From this ‘axial coding’ stage (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), themes that relate previously-established subcategories to each other were hypothesised. Once these themes were identified, statements describing each theme were then produced to connect the theme to relevant categories and subcategories. This process was termed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as the ‘selective coding’ stage.

Data that are analysed are presented in themes in subsequent chapters. Recognising that responses from participants varied depending on their social and cultural contexts, the interpreted data are provided in context where possible (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Dunbar et al., 2003; Larkins et al., 2006; Tinker and Armstrong, 2008). This included, for example, whether participants were from Melbourne or New York City, and the ways in which their residing cities might have impacted on their perception of the re-entry experience. Additionally, it was also acknowledged that the location and timing of each interview were influential to responses such that some women might focus more on their access to post-release services if their interview took place within the organisation in the middle of their day-long rehabilitation program.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of imprisonment, the women were not asked about their offending or about their experiences in prison (although,
some did volunteer this information). As accounts provided by formerly-incarcerated individuals involved their personal lived experiences, I made sure that participants only responded to questions that they felt comfortable discussing. During interviews, I expected that some questions or discussions raised would trigger emotional responses in the women. This was the case for the majority of participants, and it was important to ensure that – when some participants were needed a break during their story-telling – I paused to let the women proceed with the discussion (or not) in their own time. In addition, in order to ensure that support staff were available to assist the women after each interview if needed, all staff were advised of when each interview was going to take place. Similarly, the women were encouraged to contact staff after their interviews if they felt they needed support or had any concerns.

Other measures to protect their confidentiality – such as the use of pseudonyms and the safekeeping of digital and transcribed data – were undertaken as advised by the guidelines of the Human Research Ethics Committee. For this research, an ethics approval was granted by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee prior to its commencement\(^\text{13}\). The approval included the drafted Plain Language Statements (Appendices E and F) and Consent Forms (Appendices G and H) provided to both groups of participants.

Due to the small sample size for both participant groups, there is an inevitable risk that participants may be identifiable. This is especially pertinent for support workers across both cities as re-entry services in these cities are limited and staff can work collaboratively across organisations. The Plain Language Statement clearly outlined the potential for this risk in order to ensure that all participants are aware of the risk before they agreed to be

\(^{13}\) Approval ID number: 1442264
involved in the research.

**Limitations in Recruitment and Study Sample**

The challenge to recruit women who were recent migrants, or those who did not have a proficient level of English, presented in both cities. As the recruitment process was conducted through support organisations, it bypassed those who might have language barriers and chose not to access these English-speaking services. Therefore, this method of recruitment may have failed to engage with women who had a high degree of cultural or linguistic diversity from the mainstream, and can limit a deeper understanding of the cohort experience.

Secondly, there was a discrepancy between the two jurisdictions on the level of accessibility to participant groups. While the study was often met with enthusiasm in New York City, and access to formerly-incarcerated individuals was relatively easy to gain, the recruitment process in Melbourne was more challenging. Seemingly, formerly-incarcerated individuals in general were more hidden in Melbourne. This discrepancy resulted in a disparity in the sample size between Melbourne and New York City, which may subsequently impact research findings and their generalisability.

Finally, the chosen method of recruitment meant that the women who participated in this study already had existing relationships with support services. This then inadvertently excluded the experiences of women who had trouble accessing post-release support. Moreover, as services assisted in the recruitment of their clients, they might have selected certain ‘types’ of clients – namely, those who are seen as being ‘success stories’. Therefore, the experiences of the participant group in this research may not reflect those of
the larger women from migrant groups integrating after prison.

Despite these limitations, the research responds to its key objectives of understanding the interactions of formerly-incarcerated women with post-release services, as well as of understanding the overall re-entry experiences of these women. While not all formerly-incarcerated women from migrant groups can be reached, perspectives from support workers assisted in gaining insight into the overall experiences of this cohort of ex-offenders. In addition, it is important to highlight the experiences of women who has accessed post-release services as these experiences could unearth further understanding of the effectiveness of post-release services for ex-offenders of this group.

Conclusion

In line with the prominent call for reflexivity in qualitative studies, this chapter has acknowledged that my personal background inevitably influences the ways in which this study has been constructed and conducted. Specifically, having lived in several countries with varied sets of cultural values and beliefs highlighted the subjectivity of experiences – both in relation to the formation of experiences and the interpretation of experiences. Accordingly, the post-structuralist and constructivist view led me to believe that the re-entry experiences of formerly-incarcerated women are varied and are informed by the context of their environment. This assumption, thus, reinforced the need for the thesis to first set out relevant contexts before delving into the presentation of findings.

Although I sought after subjective journeys of re-entry, she recognised the need to identify patterns of experiences that may be common to this group of formerly-incarcerated individuals. In order to reveal any emerging patterns,
it was therefore necessary for me to recruit similar groups of participants across the two sites to conduct a meaningful comparison. As demonstrated in the chapter, even though the ex-offender sample was limited to those who accessed post-release services, this limitation applied equally to Melbourne and New York City. Therefore, any comparisons made henceforth are able to be conducted based on the same sample across both cities.

Chapter Four has also described the participant recruitment and data collection processes for the two participant groups in Melbourne and New York City. The challenges that emerged in recruitment – particularly for formerly-incarcerated individuals – underscored the uniqueness of researching individuals who are, in many ways, on the margins of mainstream society. In order to appreciate the value of their experiences, narratives from these individuals must, therefore, be reported in their own words. Furthermore, participants’ interactions with mainstream society, and how these interactions affect their individual experiences, must not be understated. In conducting this study, the processes and challenges in and of themselves are notably imperative to our understanding of how this group of incarcerated individuals confronts the prisoner re-entry phenomenon.

The final three chapters of the thesis will discuss in detail findings from the research. This discussion begins with a thorough presentation of how re-entry impacted on the women’s exterior lives – including, the ways in which the socio-cultural contexts the women were surrounded by acted on the women’s transition journeys. Chapter Six then investigates how these exterior factors impacted on the women’s internal lives. Chapter Seven investigates the implications of these experiences on the post-release service sector, as well as on our understanding of prisoner re-entry in theory, in policies, and in practice.
CHAPTER FIVE

ON EXTERIOR LIVES

Introduction

The following chapter is the first of two chapters where findings from the interviews conducted for this research are presented. This chapter aims to address the following research questions: What factors shape and influence re-entry experiences in Melbourne and New York City? To what extent does the women’s ability to access services affect their transitional experiences? What support is available?

To do this, the chapter is divided into three sections which are broadly connected to the meta-theme ‘exterior lives’. ‘Exterior lives’ refers to external factors that had an impact on the women during their re-entry transition – such as their ability to find housing, their personal relationships, as well as their relationships with their communities. This can be contrasted with the interior lives of participants, which includes the ways in which they perceived their identity and esteem, as well as the ways in which they went through the process of self-redemption. Within the realm of exterior lives, the chapter will broadly discuss how women from migrant backgrounds navigated through three kinds of relationships: environmental, cultural and social. As will be demonstrated throughout the chapter, these external factors not only combined to shape the women’s experiences, but the women also reacted to the factors in unique and personal ways.

Chapter Five first begins by exploring physical environments that are largely outside of the women’s control, but can have significant impacts on the women’s experiences of re-entry. From participants’ accounts, these environmental factors predominantly involve secure long-term
accommodation for formerly-incarcerated women. In particular, participants revealed that women from migrant backgrounds not only looked for stable accommodation after their release, but also for specific locations where they would feel safe and secure. Notably, their idea of ‘safety’ also included safety from the opportunity to re-offend.

The chapter then proceeds to study two prominent cultures that were involved in women’s exterior lives: ethnic culture and prison culture. Firstly, the discourse on ethnic culture is based around the extent to which women’s ethnic backgrounds and ethnic communities affected their experiences of re-entry. Secondly, the chapter delves into the influence of prison culture on women’s lives after incarceration. An important finding that emerged from participants’ narratives in relation to these cultural relationships was the discrepancy between the women’s and the workers’ perception of re-entry. Specifically, whilst workers emphasised the impact of ethnic culture on women’s experiences, the women’s accounts really underlined the significant influence of their prison culture on their post-release lives. This distinction inevitably raised questions about how we understand the re-entry experience for women from migrant groups.

Finally, Chapter Five ends with an analysis of social relationships – focusing on existing, potential and lost relationships between formerly-incarcerated women and their friends or family members. Notably, participants’ narratives revealed the extent that women exercise their individual agency when managing these social relationships – choosing in some instances to maintain relationships, and in other cases not to. Moreover, the nature of the relationship between formerly-incarcerated women and their post-release workers was examined, and it was found that the majority of women tended to view their post-release workers as friends; however, many workers (especially, those in Melbourne) had an alternative, professional view.
Environmental Relationships

For the purpose of this analysis, an environmental relationship is defined as women’s connection with their surrounding physical environment. This includes the availability and accessibility of their accommodation, the conditions of their accommodation, as well as the environment of the neighbourhood that women were residing in. Although the choice/nature of the physical environment was largely out of women’s control, narratives below show that women still exercised their agency – particularly, in choosing where they lived. For women who were recently released from custody, this relationship with their environment could significantly dictate how they experienced the re-entry process. Accounts from participants universally revealed a strong correlation between the women’s ability to return to family homes and positive re-entry experiences. That is, the majority of those who did not have to find their own housing because they were able to return to family homes overwhelmingly reported better re-entry experiences than those who had to find housing themselves.

The search for housing

The search for housing for formerly-incarcerated women can be a challenging experience. Often, women are unable to live in safe and stable accommodation post-release, and are subjected to stays in transitional housing or crisis housing as a temporary measure. In addition, formerly-incarcerated women might find that – upon their re-entry – their expectation of the level of service that post-release services can offer do not line up with the reality of what these services do offer. Moreover, whilst some women are able to return to family homes after their incarceration, this return to family homes may be
forced by circumstance and not actually desired by the women themselves. The following section explores these findings.

It is well-documented within re-entry literature that having one's basic physical and material needs met upon release is one of the most critical foundations of a successful re-entry experience (Rutter, 1987; Hahn, 1991; Travis et al., 2001; Petersilia, 2003; Seiter and Kadela, 2003; Holzer et al., 2004; Cromwell et al., 2005; La Vigne and Parthasarathy, 2005; Travis, 2005; Jucovy, 2006; Listwan, 2009; Spjeldnes and Goodkind, 2009; Makarios et al., 2010; Sheehan, 2011; Denney et al., 2014). For people returning to the community from prison, housing concern is listed by scholars as particularly salient; and this was indeed the case for participants interviewed in Melbourne.

To find housing, the women in Melbourne typically sought assistance from post-release services. Service providers themselves recognised this evident need, as all but two interviewed across both Melbourne and New York City underlined that housing was “the biggest issue” for women coming home (Nadia14). For the Melbourne workers, in particular, much of their already limited resources were necessarily directed towards finding accommodation for their clients, which some claimed took away the ability to concentrate their efforts on other aspects of service provision. Mary, for example, explained that she and her colleagues did not “get to have that intensive support with [their clients]” when “ideally... we’re meant to provide a lot of holistic sort of support”. This sentiment ultimately revealed the conflict that workers in Melbourne felt between what they thought their clients needed and what they were able to actually provide.

14 Names of all participants have been changed to pseudonyms. Support workers from Melbourne have been given pseudonyms beginning with the letter ‘M’, and support workers from New York City have been given pseudonyms beginning with the letter ‘N’. No formerly-incarcerated women interviewed have been given pseudonyms beginning with these letters.
Nonetheless, there was a widespread belief amongst workers across both Melbourne and New York City that women would not be able to function well without having stable and secure housing as a foundation of integration; hence, it was necessary to direct their focus and resources on this issue. The assumption was reiterated by Nicole who voiced that women can end up trapped in a “revolving door” if they re-entered the community without safe housing. In many regards, this concern from workers is aligned with Laub and Sampson’s (2001) principle that certain physical and material needs are fundamental to an individual’s ability to desist after prison. Thus, workers interviewed appeared to have a well-founded and reasonable belief in directing their attention to housing needs. Moreover, the said connection between the lack of fundamental needs (such as housing) and the ability to desist was reflected by some of the women interviewed. Hua, for instance, expressed that she did “not have anything” to return to when released in her early 60s; she further explained:

_Some of [the other incarcerated women] say they purposely do that to go into jail again because, in jail, they have everything that is provided for them free-of-charge… a roof over their head… warm shower… warm bed… clothing… if it weren’t because of my dad… I don’t mind being in there… better in there than out here because we’re fed… it’s not… not bad inside the jail. It’s not bad._

This preference was also echoed by Anna in New York City, who felt that returning to jail at least provided her with her basic needs – such as a warm bed and food. Without these basic provisions, Anna admitted to resorting to crime multiple times after her previous jail sentences because she did not have anything to motivate her away from it.
Not having a home to return to is often a direct result of either having lost their rental or private properties during their incarceration, or having severed their relationship with family members. Four of the five women in Melbourne, for example, did not have a home to return to because they either did not want to or could not return to family homes. Of these four women, three were able to organise temporary housing whilst still in prison. This was not possible for Dejana, however, and she came out of custody “not knowing where she would be sleeping that night”. Her only option at the time was to immediately seek assistance from a post-release housing service, who paid for her stay in a motel as an emergency measure. Due to the unavailability of housing (both temporary and long-term), the need to resort to emergency support is not uncommon for women returning to the community.

While the ideal situation for individuals released from custody was to have housing ready before their release date, so that they were able to move into somewhere secure immediately after prison, this situation was not always possible due to a housing shortage in both cities. In Melbourne, particularly, it was not uncommon for women to move from prison into transitional or crisis accommodation while they waited for a more stable housing option (Sheehan, 2014). Amongst the women interviewed, for instance, those who were placed in transitional properties were sometimes permitted to stay until they found long-term housing – typically, in the form of public housing or a subsidised rental accommodation. Accordingly, participants’ duration of stay in transitional housing varied from two weeks to as long as ten years. This variation depended on the discretion of the transitional property owner; in some cases, these owners are post-release support services themselves. Decisions about who the property should be leased to, and how long tenants are permitted to stay, are made based on a range of factors. Michelle, for example, provided an insight into “ideal” characteristics of a tenant for her transitional property:
… we’ve had a lot to do with [this client] inside and out... got a very good support network around her... Look, it’s far always easier to work with a white collar. Persons who've done white collar crime. She’s a white collar. She’s a very capable person, and you’re half-way there.

Michelle contrasted this “ideal case” with clients who have drug or alcohol abuse issues, and those who “socially only connects with other drug users”. She clarified that these latter types of clients were generally more challenging to assist, and that she was less likely to entrust her property to them. Essentially, Michelle alluded to some factors that these discretionary decisions were based on: the workers’ level of trust in the women, the level of the women’s needs, as well as the workers’ perception of the women’s sense of responsibility.

In contrast, others who were transferred into crisis accommodation after their release were not usually afforded the luxury of being able to stay until they found a more secure property. Due to the high demand for crisis accommodation, those who were seen as having more urgent needs are prioritised. A single woman who has been released from prison for a few months, for example, may be expected to leave so that a spot is available for families fleeing domestic violence. Additionally, even though crisis accommodation is largely more preferable than homelessness, there can be an issue as they are sometimes deemed as unsafe for women. Kate, for instance, recalled her time in crisis accommodation:

[It] reminded me more of jail... they’re numbered just like in prison... there’s a lot of long-term homeless people that are there. That was a bit scarier... I didn’t feel safe. My biggest fear was seeing other girls from prison... in a non-regulated environment.
This insight into Kate’s perception of her physical surroundings highlights the contrast that Kate had expected between crisis accommodation and prison. However, in addition to Kate’s expectation not having been met, she seemed to feel less secure because she was used to a certain level of security after her release from prison.

Even though support workers agreed that one of their primary aims was to house women who were being released from custody and to ensure that women do not face homelessness, some women felt that this aim can manifest in a superficial manner. For example, on the one hand, some support workers in Melbourne said that there are services that considered women simply being housed as a success, and felt that they could “tick the box” that the women were supported because a “roof over their head is better than nothing” (Michelle). On the other hand, some of the women’s perspectives challenged this simplistic view of housing success as the women cited that the types of accommodation that they were provided with were inadequate because they lacked stability and security.

This disagreement about what was considered acceptable was evident in Dejana’s circumstances. For the past ten years since her release, Dejana had been living in transitional housing. This made her feel inferior to her neighbours because she was considered “lower on the rung of acceptance... on the rung of the ladders” to them, and was considered to be an “absolute scum”. As far as Dejana’s support workers were concerned, however, her housing issue had been resolved. In this case, discrepancy existed between what the workers considered as ‘satisfactorily housed’ and what Dejana would consider as ‘satisfactorily housed’. For the staff, the measure was against homelessness, whereas the women considered security and stability as the primary measures.
The measure of successfully finding accommodation was not the only point at which support workers’ and women’s accounts differed. There was also a discrepancy in the level of housing support the women expected from workers and the level of service workers expected to provide to women. Regardless of where the women first made contact with their workers, those in Melbourne expected support services to reliably provide assistance with accommodation because they understood that to be a large part of the workers’ role. This was demonstrated in Dejana’s insistence that, even though she was isolated in a management unit for the last few weeks of her incarceration and was not contactable, her housing should have been organised for her because her support worker “knew the date of [her] release”, and because the role of the post-release service was to “find accommodation and organise that for [her]”. Therefore, from Dejana’s perspective, the onus of responsibility lay entirely with the workers.

While the women assumed that staff would be able to assist them extensively with housing, workers themselves reported that they were largely restrained by the limited resources outside of their control. Many workers, in fact, emphasised in the interviews that they were not a housing service, and that this lack of resources and capability contradicted with the core needs of the women they were trying to assist. Furthermore, the women’s heightened expectation of extensive support might have been influenced by a bias for their own case. This subjective sense of urgency was, however, constantly experienced by staff as staff were often trying to prevent homelessness for multiple clients at the same time.

The gap between the women’s expectations from service providers and the reality of the service received can cause some disappointment in the women’s experience of their interaction with post-release support. Dejana, for
example, vocalised her dissatisfaction that her support workers did not deliver what they promised on their “pink, fluffy website”. This level of expectation of dependence was, however, understandable. For those with limited networks of support – such as formerly-incarcerated individuals returning to the community – the offer of help from workers might have been all that they received (as was the case with Dejana). Thus, there was a consequential reliance on that sole source of support, which was compounded by a sense of hope that workers would be able to assist them with fundamental necessities given their expertise, knowledge and connections.

Nonetheless, the disparity between the expectations of formerly-incarcerated people, and the reality of their re-entry experience is not novel. Studies such as those undertaken by Souza and her colleagues (2015), Vishe and her co-authors (2004), as well as that by Naser and La Vigne (2006) measured the disparity between ex-offenders’ expectations of re-entry and the reality of their experiences. Results from all three studies showed that formerly-incarcerated people are frequently overly-optimistic about most aspects of their re-entry process, and consequently find the experience more challenging than predicted. This research, therefore, extends these findings to the Australian context, and contributes to the existing weight of evidence that formerly-incarcerated individuals – including women from migrant groups – tend to have unrealistic expectations of the re-entry process.

The prevalent narratives surrounding housing that emerged from participants in New York City were quite distinct. Namely, the majority of the New York participants had a place to return to when they were released – making their experience of finding housing much more positive. As a result of having this option to return to family homes (and having this preference at least for the earlier stages of their transition process), the women in New York City had little or no expectations that their post-release workers would assist
them with their housing situation. Women interviewed in New York City instead insisted that they themselves were responsible for arranging and organising their own accommodation whenever they were ready to move out of family homes. Perhaps reflecting the women's needs and expectations, support services interviewed in New York City did not at all elaborate on the type of housing services that they provided (if any).

While this outcome was unexpected given the narratives in Melbourne, it aligned with existing findings from North American literature which found that formerly-incarcerated individuals are generally able to rely on their family members for assistance, particularly in providing them with a place to live (Nelson et al., 1999; Visher et al., 2004; Hebert, 2005; La Vigne et al., 2008). Furthermore, this finding supported Naser and La Vigne’s study (2006) which found that despite ex-offenders being over-optimistic in most areas of their lives, they often find that the level of support they receive from family members is generally more than they had anticipated.

Despite the offer of housing support from family members, this was not always a desirable option for ex-offenders. Many of the women in New York City, for instance, conceded that they would not necessarily have preferred to return to family homes immediately after their incarceration because of the challenges that often presented with family members during a reunion. However, the women admitted that they had little choice in the matter, and that they thought the best option was to return to family homes until they could find their own accommodation. Salma, for example, recognised that there was an existing tension in her relationship with her mother because her mother did not approve of Salma’s relationship with her new husband (who was her criminal accomplice). The relationship between Salma and her mother was further strained because of Salma’s conviction and subsequent incarceration – during which Salma’s mother took ownership of
her house without consulting her. Although Salma acknowledged the “stresses” brought on by living with her mother after her release, she was resigned to these stresses and accepted her mother’s offer to let her stay in the family home.

'It kind of worked out that, okay, she came home, but I gotta go to work. I’m not home. But on the weekends, I’m pretty much upstairs to myself in my apartment... I’m just gonna leave it alone right now ’cause I just can’t stress about every part of this... I didn’t really have much of a say in anything right now, so I kinda left it alone.'

(Salma)

Many re-entry scholars underscored this predicament formerly-incarcerated individuals find themselves in when making a decision to return to family homes (Hebert, 2005; Brookes et al., 2008; La Vigne et al., 2009).

The ability to return to family homes – in addition to offering security for many women – allows them to focus their efforts on rebuilding other parts of their lives and to remain desisted. This is especially crucial in the early days of release, when ex-offenders are most vulnerable to recidivism (Matraux and Culhand, 2004; Roman and Travis, 2004). If women do not have a safe space to return to, they would be more likely to struggle to integrate because they have to manage multiple aspects of their lives simultaneously. The correlation between safe housing and re-entry experience is evident when comparing the narratives of participants who returned to family homes with the narratives of those who did not. The women who returned to family homes seemed able to focus their efforts on other aspects of their lives, such as finding employment, attending substance abuse treatment programs, and reconnecting with their children. Those that had no family homes to return to, on the other hand, had
to negotiate their search for safe and stable housing before they could commence rebuilding other parts of their lives.

Housing location

Although the search for housing is a prominent feature in the lives of formerly-incarcerated women during the periods after their release, there is a consensus amongst all participants regarding the selectiveness of housing location. For many, housing location can mean the difference between being able to desist and to integrate into mainstream communities and the inability to move away from crime. The ways in which the selection of housing location plays out in the lives of formerly-incarcerated women are explored in this section.

Of the three women in New York City who did not return to their family homes, two stated that they did not do so because they did not feel safe in their old neighbourhoods. Anna, for example, acknowledged that going back to her old neighbourhood in New Jersey after release was something she had tried before, and that this option did not work for her:

Whenever I was in Jersey, I was in trouble. In and out of jail, for like the last few years I was there – always in and out of jail all the time... I knew that the only way I would completely be able to start my life over, and get it going in the direction that I needed to be would be in a place like New York.

Likewise, Chelsea realised when she was incarcerated for the second time that she needed to “change everything” because her first re-entry experience ended with her returning to prison. The shift in geographical location was an instrumental change for Chelsea, who recalled that she “didn’t [want to] go
back to Long Island” because of the “drug world” that existed in her old neighbourhood, and that she needed “to try something new and fresh”. Eight years after her release, Chelsea recognised the importance of that relocation, and reflected that she did not know “where [she] would be, honestly” if she had stayed in her old neighbourhood.

Veronica also expressed a similar sentiment about moving away from her old neighbourhood in the Bronx, emphasising that her personal achievement would not have been possible without the move. Even though she initially returned to her family home after incarceration, she repeatedly “begged” her mother to move them away because she was aware of the risk of re-offending that she was exposed to in that neighbourhood.

*But every time I came out, I said, ’I’m not gonna be using. I’m not gonna use’... I didn’t want to be in the same environment... every time that was my worry: going back to the same neighbourhood. Going back to the same atmosphere. You go back to the same thing, you know?* (Veronica)

This inadvertent impact of the external environment on an ex-offender’s ability to desist from crime – particularly if their old neighbourhoods are situated in crime ‘hot spots’ – is documented throughout existing literature (Farrall, 2002; Warr, 2002; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Mears et al., 2008). One frequently-cited work is that of Laub and Sampson; in their 2003 longitudinal study on juvenile offenders, the authors posited that a pivotal contribution to desistance for high-risk youths is the ability for them to ‘knife off’ from their environment. Farrall (2002) and Warr (2002) extended this to the adult context, and contended that a necessary part of desistance is the ability to distance oneself away from proximate or physical environments that
had led to criminal activities in the first place. Although none of these women reported that they felt exposed to physical danger in their old neighbourhoods, Anna, Chelsea and Veronica all recognised that they would more likely re-offend if they returned; this then became a major factor that determined the women’s decision to relocate. For them, the ability to move away and start again was an essential part of the process of rebuilding their lives and transforming their interior narratives. The women’s agency to ‘knife off’, therefore, challenges the existing assumption of community abandonment cited by some re-entry literature (Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010).

These accounts, moreover, raise a question about the concept of responsibilisation (as discussed in Chapter Three). While workers expected participants to self-manage their desistance process to a large extent, the women interviewed demonstrated some passivity in the management of their desistance. Workers interviewed across the two cities reported that they expected their clients to autonomously take ownership of the process; however, the women themselves were still reliant on external changes to alter their circumstances before they felt they could desist. This discrepancy revealed that workers possibly understated the psychological process needed before the women could commence their desistance. Thus, for the women interviewed, the responsibilised, accountable offender narrative was not breaking through the paternal and infantilising experience of imprisonment.

A similar need to geographically remove oneself from one’s old neighbourhood was echoed by support staff in Melbourne, who unveiled that many clients from migrant groups requested to “go to the other side of the city” because the women “couldn’t show their face” due to the shame of facing

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15 This will be discussed further in Chapter Six.
old community members (Martha). Martha illustrated this with an example: one of her Vietnamese clients was regularly abused by her ex-husband’s family whenever they visited her children in her home. Hence, her client’s goal was to try to remove herself from the proximity of her ex-husband’s family members. In order to respond to this need, workers like Martha were then required to take into account location preferences when organising housing for their clients – limiting the already-restricted housing availability in these cities. In addition to the housing availability issues presented to formerly-incarcerated women, therefore, the nature and the location of housing also posed a hindrance to integration for some women during their re-entry process, revealing the direct influence the women’s exterior lives had on their interior lives.

Notably, staff in Melbourne explicitly expressed that the need to remove oneself as a result of the shame imposed by family members as well as community members was particularly unique to women from ethnic groups. Austin (2004) attested to this, explaining that communities do not need to be tightly-knit in order for any information on arrest, conviction and incarceration to travel. Indeed, she advanced that many urban neighbourhoods are densely-populated enough for one’s “business” to be “in the street” (Austin, 2004: 177). This phenomenon was distinct from that of the three New York City cases described above as the reluctance to return to old neighbourhoods was due to the anticipated shaming by acquaintances, rather than anticipated recidivism.

While others geographically removed themselves from their old neighbourhoods in order to desist from crime, or to depart from old acquaintances, Andrea was willing to return to her home knowing that her neighbourhood in the Bronx was surrounded by drug-related crimes. Though she noticed and acknowledged the impact that this neighbourhood might have
on her, Andrea insisted that she could isolate herself from illegal substances and transactions.

_There’ll always be challenges because no matter where you go, there’s drugs everywhere. And you’re gonna run into people that do drugs with you, or used to sell drugs... to you. But now they know. They see me... I don’t do drugs no more. And I let them know._

(Andrea)

Even though Andrea assured herself that she was strong enough mentally to resist, being able to predict where substances were available could be interpreted as a way for her to cope with the enforced abstinence.

Except for Andrea’s unique account, the aforementioned cases demonstrate the extent to which environmental factors governed the women’s responses to their re-entry process, as well as their experiences of it. The emerged narrative of self-removal from old communities (for various reasons) again offered a counterpoint to the existing abandonment narrative in the literature, which emphasised instead the disconnections imposed on formerly-incarcerated individuals by communities (Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010). For many of the women interviewed, moreover, the decision to knife off from peers highlighted the exercise of agency that has been understated in current literature; rather than being victims of abandonment, the women were instead active agents in their own lives.

The women’s desire to move away from their old neighbourhood was quite imminent, and manifested negatively in some cases. Some women, for
example, accepted that they would have resorted to sleeping in a shelter if they were unsuccessful in their search for housing. Chelsea, for instance, “wrote to a couple of places about housing”, and attended an interview as part of her application process for a subsidised rental. She recalled that she “was ready to go into a shelter” if unsuccessful, because she would rather make these changes in her life than go back to her old neighbourhood. Anna had a similar attitude, and in fact did resort to “[sleeping] in Penn Station” for her first two nights in New York City, and then in a shelter for several weeks before she was able to find accommodation in a three-quarter way house.

While there was an acknowledgement that environmental factors significantly affected the women’s ability to desist (either through the provision of a safe place to live, or through the provision of a safe space to desist from crime), having these positive environmental influences alone did not necessarily result in a successful integration. Using Moore’s (2011) stages of re-entry, for example, environmental factors could support the women through their initial re-entry into society and steer them towards feelings of normalisation; however, they would not be sufficient in supporting the women through the entire process of assimilation and enhancement of their social networks, or in completely helping the women feel ‘integrated’ or ‘settled’ (Moore, 2011: 135). In the overarching process of prisoner re-entry, other impacts – such as social or cultural factors – must not be understated.

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16 This level of independence, and its connection to the cultural significance of individualism in the USA is discussed later in Chapter Seven.
17 A three-quarter way house is similar to a halfway house in that it is designed to support recovering addicts with staying sober while in the community. A three-quarter way house, however, provides participants with more time in sobriety, and have more liberties (including, more flexible curfews imposed).
18 As outlined in Chapter Three
Cultural Relationships

Cultural relationships refer to the women’s connection with a group of individuals who share “a set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 3). Memberships in cultural groups are dictated to a large extent by the various ways in which the women are organised in society (through many different and cross-cutting criteria) (Avruch, 1998: 17). For example, the organisation of the population can be by kinship; by language, race, or ethnic groups; by socio-economic characteristics into social classes; by geographical region into political interest groups; or by occupation or institutional memberships (Avruch, 1998: 17). As a result, the social and cultural typologies of relationships are, in fact, not mutually exclusive, but are closely interconnected.

In its conception, the research was primarily concerned with one type of cultural relationship: that is, ethnic culture. Particularly, it was conceived that the relationship between formerly-incarcerated women and their ethnic culture (be it with the values, traditions, or with people within their cultural groups) would greatly influence the women’s experiences of re-entry. Narratives from participants, however, revealed a second cultural influence that needed to be addressed: the influence of prison culture. Accordingly, the following sections discuss the ways in which the women navigated the transition between these two cultures in their ‘crossing of the border’, and explore an interim space of transition between these two cultures that New York City seemed to provide for formerly-incarcerated women.

Ethnic cultural influence

As outlined in the introduction of the thesis, there has recently been a
widespread call for differential treatment for migrant groups in the Victorian justice system in response to reports highlighting their presumed unique needs and experiences (Easteal, 1995; Kilroy, 2000; 2003; Flat Out & CHRIP, 2010). The strategic urge for a specialised treatment for this group has been made from both within and without the criminal justice system, and official reports are found in governmental and organisational publications in Melbourne; a prominent example of which is the Better Pathways initiative. Findings from these publications particularly underlined that migrant individuals experience the criminal justice system differently from others; as a result, the re-entry experiences of formerly-incarcerated women are similarly assumed to be impacted by ethnic cultural backgrounds.

Throughout their narratives, the women in Melbourne substantiated this assumption by occasionally reflecting that parts of their experiences were unique specifically because of their ethnic culture. In conceptualising this correlation, some women, for instance, attributed to ethnic culture the idea of “losing [one’s] face”, which was ultimately “the most important” concern if one was “from [an] Asian background” (Hua). Aside from the general shame and embarrassment brought on by the ordeal of being a formerly-incarcerated person, these emotions were reportedly aggravated by ethnic culture. Notably, while the women were not explicitly asked about their ethnic culture, their minimal reflection surprised me as it was to a smaller degree than I had anticipated. In addition, none of the women interviewed in New York City volunteered any indication that ethnic culture had impacted their re-entry experience. These findings were also unexpected due to the widespread reports of added hindrances especially faced by minority groups during their re-entry journey (for example: Petersilia, 2003; Mears et al., 2008).

Certainly, the minimal discussion on ethnic cultural influence did not necessarily signify its objective absence; rather, there might have been
intersections of multiple identities at play (Stryker, 1994). That is, for the women interviewed, their ex-offender identity was perceived as more influential than their migrant status, and the women did not feel that ethnic culture contributed to their experience in a noteworthy way. In addition, the women might not have perceived that ethnic culture was separable from other ‘causes’ of their experience.

Furthermore, although a few of the women contended that ethnic cultural influence existed in their re-entry process, the majority were more concerned about not being type-casted for their ethnic cultural groups. Anh, for example, recollected to being “shocked” by the amount of Vietnamese women she met upon entering prison, and to being confronted by her discovery of “lifestyle” choices that other Vietnamese women made. She then explicitly tried to distance herself from other Vietnamese women in prison on the basis that she was fundamentally different because she did not have a substance abuse history.

Along a similar vein, Dejana conveyed her desire to disassociate from the rest of the female prison population because of her distinct cultural background. While there was a recognition that her cultural background was the cause of her feeling “hugely embarrass[ed]” about her circumstance, Dejana also justified that her culture gave her a sense of superiority over other women. In contrast to Anh, who was adamant to distinguish herself from other Vietnamese women, Dejana used her cultural background to differentiate herself from the entire female prison population.

I was so different to a lot of the other women, and my personal name for them was ‘feral fucksluts’. I absolutely hated them. They were... they weren’t the kind of women that I would normally associate with, but I had to... I was forced in a
situation where I was with them... Having European parents, you know, it sounds awful, but even the way I would look down on the feral fucksluts.

(Dejana)

Even though there was an alignment (albeit to varying degrees) between the women’s own experiences and the reported stereotypical experiences of those from their own ethnic cultures, the women still strongly maintained that they should be individually considered. For instance, Anh’s personal experience with family neglect after her conviction reflected a typical experience of Vietnamese women offenders as reported by workers in Melbourne; however, she focused instead on the differences between her and “other” Vietnamese women, and chose to distance herself from them.

The women’s desire to be taken individually may also be the reason for the absence of any ethnic cultural discussion amongst women interviewed in New York City. Using Sommer and Osmond’s (1961) concept of deindividuation – where one’s sense of individuality is stripped away as a result of incarceration – perhaps the women were attempting to regain their individuality by departing from ethnic stereotypes. In essence, the women are trying to reindividuate – that is, re-establishing their individuality. Therefore, in spite of the known benefits attached to ethnic inclusion – such as, developing a sense of comfort and belonging through being with others who speak the same language and are from the same culture – the women preferred not to be pigeonholed into one facet of their complex lives and experiences. This concern reinforces how taking an intersectional approach is imperative to addressing the women’s re-entry challenges, and illuminates the possibility that approaches which are solely centralised around gender-responsive, or culture-responsive, may not be as beneficial as they appear to be.
Nevertheless, many support workers in Melbourne advocated for a more culture-sensitive model based on the prediction that women from migrant backgrounds would have a better re-entry experience if, for example, workers themselves were also from similar ethnic backgrounds:

*I think we need more faces. I found it interesting... I worked for a crisis service not long ago – women’s crisis service – that were on the front line that did all the accommodation for family violence. I’d have to say that ninety per cent of the calls that we took were from CALD women, and we were constantly getting interpreters constantly. And we were all middle-class white females that worked there. So, for me, that’s always an issue – that, ‘why aren’t we getting more...?’*

(Marjorie)

Some support staff considered Australian society to be Anglo-centric, and identified that women from diverse ethnic backgrounds inevitably experience society in a different way compared to ‘White’ women. In contrast, other workers appealed for a more gender-sensitive model in order to respond to the needs of incarcerated women both before and after release. Support workers in this latter camp generally reflected that women as a group – regardless of their race, ethnicity or cultural background – had more or less comparable needs, which should be specifically catered to within a predominantly patriarchal society. The call for a gender-responsive model was particularly popular amongst many of the workers in New York City (perhaps because of the lower salience of culture).

An observation worth exploring is the Melbourne workers’ emphasis on ethnic culture, which contrasted with the women’s minimal discussion of it. This is also in recognition of the fact that workers have interacted with more
formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds than the number of women involved in the study. Ethnic culture was commonly cited by Melbourne workers as a fundamental barrier to accessing post-release support services, with many workers suggesting that the women might “not understand the support” that was offered owing to the presumption that the services provided were “quite foreign” or “too mainstream” for them.

If you are either born or lived in Australia for a long time, you might have some sort of understanding of the community service sector – what a worker is, and what that means, and everything. Overseas, it’s very different.  
(Maggie)

They don’t talk about emotions and stuff like we do, and we have to ask all these direct questions to them, and they might not be comfortable with that.  
(Megan)

In addition, there was a general consensus amongst staff that women whose ethnic cultural attachment was relatively weak were more likely to approach mainstream post-release services that their organisations provided. This was said to be because “they are more integrated into our society” [emphasis added], and that they were “not so much hanging onto their cultural heritage”. As participants were recruited through their support services, this explanation provided by workers in Melbourne illuminated why some of the interviewed women did not think ethnicity played a significant role in their post-release transition process. Michelle expanded that, due to a myriad of obstacles women from migrant groups faced in accessing support, those who were “not a little bit Australian” would be reluctant to approach mainstream organisations.
The ready acceptance of the cultural obstacles faced by women from migrant groups can inadvertently normalise and reinforce the legitimacy of mainstream services. In this sense, women from migrant backgrounds were expected to mould into the implicit criteria of being more “Australian” in order to be effectively supported by mainstream service providers. This expectation, in turn, fortifies the existing structural barriers that the women may have already been facing because of their complex identities that consisted of multiple intersections of minority statuses.

For those whose ethnic cultural attachment was deemed too strong to access or to benefit from mainstream post-release services (this was especially pertinent for women with a lower level of English proficiency), workers in both cities observed and speculated that this cohort of women would likely prefer to access services provided by their local, ethnic communities. These ethnic services included those that operate in the women’s own language, by their own local communities, and those that were presumably able to understand and respond to linguistic and cultural nuances. The same rationalisation was also offered as the reason why mainstream services did not frequently see clients from migrant backgrounds.

In New York City, Norma explained that “many of those people don’t come through [the organisation’s] doors because they’ve been deported”. Hence, those “with papers” that would present to services were actually women who had been residing in the United States for long enough to obtain citizenship, and thus might have been more integrated to American culture than those who were without “papers” (Norma). Nevertheless, Natasha acknowledged that there was still a large number of women “with papers” who did not present to her organisation, and similarly justified that this was because the women would prefer to access community-run services.
They have somebody that’s an upstanding citizen in their community. They act as a go-to person for them... and that’s where they’ll go. That’s where they’ll go... They speak their language. They speak different languages. So you wanna go where you’ll feel comfortable – where you fit in...

(Natasha)

Norma supported this:

Many cultures stick to their own culture. Culture supports culture. Some cultures have their own agencies too that they help out.

Workers’ narratives were, however, contradictory on this issue – indicating a lack of clarity on the needs of women from migrant groups. On the one hand, they suggested that this cohort of women preferred to access (ethnic) community-run services; on the other hand, workers explained the majority of their clients from this cohort clearly voiced their reluctance, hesitation, and non-preference to approach their local ethnic communities. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, many of the women reportedly vocalised to their support workers that they would rather move away from their communities due to the perceived shame and rejection that resulted from their criminal conviction and imprisonment. Hence, it was evident that (ethnic) community-run services are only beneficial to a small minority of strongly-bonded individuals from this group, and that those more ‘integrated’ into mainstream society do not benefit from these services in the same way.

During her interview, for example, Mary communicated that many of her clients from migrant groups were “scared” to approach services provided
by their cultural communities because they were afraid that someone from the same community might know their family members, and that “word [would] spread”. In a counter-statement, however, Mary then proposed that women might actually prefer to access community-run services than to approach mainstream services provided by organisations such as hers.

_In terms of support, they might do it independently or go with their family. Or receive support from some... you know, their community – the cultural community – instead of asking for an external person that’s not from their culture to suddenly step in and be so intensively interacting with them, and driving them place to place. They might not be comfortable._

(Mary)

This apparent contradiction presents a challenge in the design, implementation and delivery of policies relating to post-release support for this cohort of women. Community-run (ethnic) programs based on the model of cultural responsiveness are predicated on the assumption that women from migrant groups would opt to access their services. On the other hand, workers from mainstream services reported that this was not what the women actually wanted. Moreover, contrary to their own proposal, workers rationalised that they were not seeing a proportionate amount of migrant clients because the women were accessing these supposedly unwanted community-run services. This contradiction revealed a lack of proper assessment of the needs of their clients in the delivery of these services. Ultimately, women from minority backgrounds are neither present in mainstream nor community-run services; the reasons for this are still unknown. The gap that the women found themselves falling through is evident in the discrepancy between the numbers of their cohort being released from prison, and those that actually access post-release support.
The absence of consultations with formerly-incarcerated women during policy design and program development compounds this disparity, as it results in the lack of substantive knowledge on the women’s own preference. Additionally, women are often considered as a collective group, rather than considered individually – which fails to take into account the nuances of their complex identities and experiences. According to the narratives gathered from this study, the centrality assigned to ethnic culture by policy makers (in Melbourne especially) appears exaggerated, and women would instead prefer to be treated on an individual basis just like ex-offenders from any other group.

The above proposal is in line with Russell and Carlton’s (2003) notion of ‘essentialising’ culture. The authors argued that the focus on culture – without taking into account the intersectionality of women’s experiences and the assumption that women from a certain ethnic group would benefit from the same program in the same way – is ultimately essentialising. That is, it trivialises a complex circumstance down to certain selected aspects. This misdirection can distract workers away from the women’s primary cultural transition: one between prison culture and mainstream culture (explored in the next section). The misguided perception can also endanger women further, as workers choose to label their transitional hurdles as cultural (ethnic), and inadvertently reinforce the marginalisation of this group.

This reinforcement has subsequent implications on the ways in which post-release support is provided. On the one hand, workers see transitional barriers faced by formerly-incarcerated women from dominant groups as barriers in integration between prison and mainstream society, and endeavour to address those obstacles as such. On the other hand, post-release workers attribute hindrances faced by migrant clients as ‘cultural’, and subsequently feel restrained in their ability to assist because they themselves are not from the
appropriate migrant background.

The Australian women... women that straight up just said, you know, ‘You’ve done fuck all’. You’re not gonna hear that coming the mouth of others. It’s almost like they’re programmed that they have to be grateful no matter what... that they have no right to have some sort of complaint about something... they feel like they’re indebted to us in some ways...

(Maggie)

I think, too, a lot is that some of these women of culture will go to service, but I think they get... I know when I’ve got close to some of them that they talk about how frustrating it is having to explain their culture because we don’t understand... we haven’t got... not that we don’t want to... I would love to know... but I don’t want a white person standing up there telling me how an African person... what their culture is. I think we need to be more... we do need to be more educated about their culture.

(Marjorie)

Once again, the lack of services and support available to migrant groups are justified and excused.

I then question the legitimacy of the centrality placed on ethnic culture – seen largely amongst policymakers and post-release service providers in Melbourne. It can be argued that culture-responsive programs may only serve as a symbolic gesture for these women, and do not meaningfully address or respond to the underlying structural barriers confronting migrant groups. In addition, the existence of ethnic community programs – rare as they are – can also function as an excuse for mainstream services to overlook the objective
gaps between the needs of these women and the services that are currently available including any barriers to access. The imposition of culture-responsive models within the existing structures, moreover, implies a complete acceptance of the structure itself, which can reinforce the marginalisation that formerly-incarcerated individuals from this group have already experienced\(^\text{19}\).

While workers in New York City did not emphasise the influence of ethnic culture during their discussion of their clients’ re-entry experience, the omission of this concept in itself is worth exploring. For example, after being questioned about any unique needs faced by women from different ethnic backgrounds, Natasha admitted that “their needs are the same” regardless of their ethnicity. In contrast, when asked about the needs between women and men, Natasha responded that the needs between those two gender groups are “absolutely” distinct. The lack of recognition, thus, raises the question as to whether workers were being unperceptive to the nuances of migrant experiences, or whether ethnic culture was indeed irrelevant to the re-entry experience. Hence, in contrast to staff in Melbourne who might have exaggerated the effects of ethnic culture, staff in New York City might have undermined these effects. It is conceivable that women from migrant groups who were not completely integrated into mainstream society in the first place (pre-incarceration) now experienced a double disadvantage in that they had to acculturate from their migrant status as well as their ex-offender status.

*Crossing the cultural border*

While the women’s ethnic culture spoke to their re-entry experiences to some extent, there was one other cultural aspect that resonated with

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\(^{19}\) This point is further discussed in Chapter Seven.
participants to a much larger level than their ethnic culture: the prison culture that women were exposed to. Similar to other types of culture, prison culture refers to the value and belief systems that exist in prisons, and the ways in which these systems translate into attitudes and behaviours of those within it. Due to the strict rules and routines that exist in prisons, prison culture is seen to be drastically different from mainstream culture; as a result, prisoners often find themselves having to first adjust into the culture of their prison, then readjust to mainstream culture once they are released (Haney, 2003).

In examining this transition between prison culture and mainstream culture during re-entry, the research aligns with a concept forwarded by Ross and Richards (2009: 188): when ex-offenders re-enter the community, they undergo a comparable ordeal to that experienced by new migrants establishing themselves in new country. The study, therefore, evokes the metaphor of formerly-incarcerated women crossing a border when they are released from prison into mainstream community. The ‘border’ in this case is interpreted firstly as the physical line separating prisons and mainstream society – specifically noting the geographical distance between prison facilities and mainstream metropolitan areas; and, secondly, as the symbolic line that separates prison culture from mainstream culture. While both interpretations can be examined and explored independently, these physical and symbolic borders act together to exacerbate the impact of physical and psychological isolation for those who are detained.

The ordeal of transitioning between prison culture and mainstream culture can manifest in various ways. For instance, as the structure and routine of prison life are designed to closely monitor both the prisoner’s time and movement during incarceration (Matthews, 2009), formerly-incarcerated individuals reported feeling disoriented when they are released (Haney, 2003: 40). From participants’ narratives, both Kate and Hua recalled that they felt
“disoriented physically”, and with “no sense of direction”, when they were released from prison. Even though the two women were chiefly focused on the physical disorientation that they experienced, its presence can cause or aggravate an existing emotional disorientation and the feeling of being “alone” upon release.

Jayla, for example, felt this nexus of physical and emotional disorientation during the early period of her return to the community. After seventeen years in state prison, Jayla recalled that “the world changed” during her incarceration, causing her to experience a high level of physical disorientation and anxiety when attempting to navigate the space outside. In this sense, even if Jayla was prepared emotionally and mentally for her re-entry, she might not have anticipated the level of physical disorientation that she subsequently experienced when she crossed the border. This surprising and unpredictable element that emerged during her transition, subsequently caused Jayla further anxiety and exacerbated her already volatile emotional health.

_I just get on a bus and wind up some place else on the other side of town. I used to get so frustrated; I used to stand right there on [inaudible] Street, and cried like a little baby... But I’m learning, I’m learning, I’m learning. Because this is gonna make you or break you. You have to have a strong will to wanna make it, you know what I’m saying. ’Cos everybody can’t make it._

(Jayla)

In addition, the women also noticed that they had to commence their acculturation process by re-learning even the seemingly simplest things when crossing the border between prison and mainstream society:
I literally felt like a baby learning to walk again. Literally. Because, for eighteen months, I knew my steps. The steps inside the jail were all your life. So, you step from here to there. You step from here to there. It’s all, like, you’ve done it a million times. And all of a sudden, it’s like this space, and you’re like... There’s too much space! All different people and spaces...

(Kate)

This disconnected sense of space also impacted Jayla on her release because of “all that little space you got” in prison. Similar to Kate, Jayla perceived the amount of people around her to be overwhelming, and would get “nervous” or “angry”, and be “hyperventilating” as a result. Thus, for the women interviewed, a challenging paradox occurred when they crossed the border: on the one hand, the women wanted to feel connected to their new environment so that they were able to start the integration process; on the other, the women to an extent preferred to be disconnected from mainstream society because of the overwhelming nature of the transition that they were confronted with.

Despite their best efforts to re-familiarise themselves with these “steps” to fit into their new mainstream culture, it was a challenge for many of the women to depart from their old prison culture because it felt familiar, safe and learnt. On the contrary, mainstream culture was viewed as a new space where one could get “lost” (Hua). As a result, compared to mainstream culture, prison culture offered a sense of familiarity and safety that was inviting to the women. As a result, some women might find that their attitudes, values or behaviours still reflect those of prison culture rather than those of mainstream culture – at the very least during the early stages of their re-entry.

This struggle to depart from prison culture was especially true for the women in Melbourne. Kate, for instance, recalled that in prison she felt like
she was “under a magnifying glass all the time”. This perception of being constantly watched aligns with the Foucauldian (1975) principle of ‘the authoritative gaze’ – where the prisoner’s assumption that they are being observed is so ingrained and internalised that it develops them into a self-disciplinary and self-regulating prisoner who is socialised to monitor their own body even after release. Kate noticed, for example, that after her release she continued to retain a physical expression of remorse – “a shameful way of walking” – that she created whilst in prison. Similarly, Hua and Anh observed that they initially “looked down” while walking in public due to the residual submissiveness to other prisoners or to prison guards – an attitude common amongst women in prison (Easteal, 2001).

It is, therefore, evident that many formerly-incarcerated women found themselves not being able to effortlessly shrug off their prison culture immediately after stepping out of the facility. On the contrary, some were confronted with the full impact of their incarceration only when they were released, and in order to move on they had to accept that the prison culture was perpetually tied to them in some ways. Indeed, an acceptance of this perpetual status was not always negative – some women, such as the ones interviewed in New York City, managed to extract productive elements from their ex-offender status, and used these elements as capital for their integration process.

The re-entry community

In New York City, the reported challenges of transitioning from prison culture into mainstream culture was alleviated by the existence of a re-entry community containing accessible networks of re-entry services in New York City. The re-entry community offered formerly-incarcerated individuals interim liminal space to adjust before fully moving on to mainstream society. This
buffer space was essential for the women interviewed in New York City, as they were able to re-familiarise themselves with aspects of mainstream society without having to completely let go of one culture and without being immediately plunged into another culture that is drastically different.

Scattered throughout New York City were services for formerly-incarcerated individuals (and their family members) – including pre- and post-release support, drug and alcohol treatment programs, employment support, and educational support. Notably, the majority of these services were delivered by individuals who had also been formerly incarcerated. These existing services and people within them formed a network of support that could be conceptualised as a community, which provided an extensive range of care for people who were newly-released. Aside from being able to access a variety of services embedded within the re-entry community, formerly-incarcerated people were able to use it as a potential networking site; this was because individuals and organisations that formed the community frequently met to share ideas and to present solutions to common concerns relating to prisoner re-entry. In addition, those who worked within the re-entry community were able to direct a newly-released person to appropriate individuals and organisations outside of the community for more specialised assistance.

There were two main ways through which a formerly-incarcerated individual could enter the re-entry community: voluntarily accessing post-release services, or being mandated to one by a judge. Upon contact with the re-entry community, ex-offenders were likely to meet someone who was also formerly-incarcerated: half of the post-release workers interviewed in New York City, for example, had themselves been incarcerated prior to working in the field; likewise, four out of the nine women interviewed in New York City were working in post-release services after their own incarceration. Kiara represented the opinions of the women interviewed when she said that the
ability to have someone they “can relate” to was an essential element for women. This was because women immediately felt “comfortable”, and started to feel like they “belonged” in this community. A sense of belonging, thus, was seen as easier to achieve when there are other people women can apparently relate to. In this sense, it was evident that support workers with experience of incarceration were seen by the women as having more credibility to assist newly-released individuals, as they better understood the challenges that present during prisoner re-entry.

[The facilitators] explained to us that they were once in our position... the staff and facilitators have done time themselves...

Once she said that in the orientation, and then begin to explain her story, I felt comfortable... I was just honest. I’ve never been so honest about everything I’ve been through... the comfortability [sic] of being surrounded by people who were in the position, even though they were men.

(Kiara)

Based on a therapeutic model, ex-offenders were encouraged to share their experiences as a way of letting go of the negative parts of their lives. This framework of treatment in the re-entry community is similar to those of Alcoholic Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous programs, where values that are promoted include verbal honesty, the admission of defects, reparations for past wrongs, as well as striving for an improved relationship with others (Swora, 2004; Leverentz, 2014). The ability for women to access others’ stories also meant that they were able to view others’ paths before them – allowing women to visualise the possibilities in their own lives if they remain desisted.

As sharing was a core element of this process, having peers who had gone through the same experience told their story, and demonstrated how far
they had come, encouraged the women to open up and to share their own stories themselves. The women felt safe, and were not concerned with being judged by people within this community. In addition, Kiara expressed that, having gone through the same experience, the women could “lean on each other”. Jayla similarly described her relationship with her peer mentor as “both of our hurt just helping each other”. Chelsea also recalled her experience when she first entered the re-entry community:

I was able to sit there [with her case manager], and I got that crazy, insane stuff that was in my head for all those years that I couldn’t tell anybody. I was able to tell her. And we cried. She cried with me. She laughed with me. She hugged me. And she said, ‘Let’s go from here. Where do we go from here’...

Although the statement by Chelsea revealed the extent to which her internal self was affected, the important thing to note here was how it was significantly influenced by the support of her case manager.

The benefits of having peer mentors was acknowledged by Nicholas, and indeed he actively recruited formerly-incarcerated students to become peer mentors themselves

Once they’re enrolled, they’re mentored for their first two semesters. And we try to build the expectation that at the end of those first two semesters, they will turn around and do the training to become a mentor, and really support the next group of students coming through – which has been successful...

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20 The organisation that Nicholas was employed at provided college admission advice to his clients; hence, all clients were referred to as ‘student’s.”
Definitely the expectation is that the more independent and self-sufficient you get as a community member, the more you should be looking to give back and help students who are in the early stage of the process.

Therefore, for Nicholas and for most other workers interviewed in New York City, there was an expectation that formerly-incarcerated individuals would start to assist others once they themselves felt more stable in their own integration. This widespread expectation of workers in New York City underlined the recognised value of having a community of peers, and of continually being actively involved in the re-entry community in order to ‘pay it forward’. Furthermore, the evolving network of formerly-incarcerated people ensured that newly-released persons did not feel isolated during their re-entry process, and were always able to find help when they needed it.

In various ways, the re-entry community acted as a buffer that existed between prison and mainstream community, and provided a supported ‘borderland’ or an ‘immigration zone’ to those crossing the border. It integrated two cultures: one of the outside world or mainstream society, and one of the prison. Hence, the re-entry community culture that the women were initially transitioning into was a space where changes from one culture to the other were not as drastic, and were more manageable. Moreover, much-needed advice and guidance during trying times were consistently available in the re-entry community, giving women an opportunity for a thoroughly supported transition process. Once again, there was an apparent interaction between the women’s exterior environment and the ways in which the women internally responded to this environment.

21 The value of this is discussed further in Chapter Seven.
In the short term, the re-entry community was seen as beneficial as it helped women transition into mainstream society – both through desisting from crime as well as through propelling them towards complete integration. There are, however, some concerns. For instance, while the integration facilitated by the community is invaluable, the level of reliance and dependence placed on others (including, support services, peers and mentors) during the transitional process might be too high. If so, it can continue to foster a systematic dependency that had its beginning in imprisonment, and can result in women’s inability to function on the same level once they depart (if ever) from the re-entry community.

Alternatively, women may be perpetually known as ‘formerly-incarcerated’, or are constantly reminded of their ex-offender status if they choose not to leave the re-entry community (as evident by some of the research participants). This perpetuity of an ex-offender status aligns with Cohen’s (1985) conception of a denser net – whereby the impact of the criminal justice system remains intensely felt outside of prison. Although this decision to stay in the re-entry community inevitably affected their overall identity, the women’s choice might be a rational one given that they ultimately could not return to a ‘pre-prisoner’ identity regardless of their current or future paths (Ebauch, 1988; Maruna, 2011).

The self-sustaining nature of a re-entry community can also cause the state to be complacent, and can strip away any motivation to alleviate the overarching incarceration problem because those released are somehow able to fend for themselves. This again points to Garland’s theory of responsibilisation – specifically questioning whose responsibility the prevention of recidivism should actually fall on. Furthermore, the re-entry community’s self-sustaining

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22 The implication of this notion is discussed later in Chapter Seven.
nature can result in a neglect of real structural issues that need to be addressed; Chapter Seven will explore these implications in more detail.

Nevertheless, many of the New York women interviewed found that the solace and comfort the re-entry community offers trumped any disadvantages they might experience. For example, being surrounded by people who have gone through the same experience meant that the women were able to “see the light at the end of the tunnel” during dark times, which was a sense of hopefulness that was missing in the Melbourne women’s experiences (Gabriela). In addition, for some women, like Chelsea, Kiara and Salma, embracing their ex-offender identities was worth doing because they were able to use their experiences to help others through their integration process. Perhaps, then, the obligation that this group of women felt towards the re-entry community superseded their desire to leave their ex-offender status behind.

In spite of the disadvantages of not having a re-entry community, a corresponding re-entry community may be difficult to replicate – particularly in a city like Melbourne, where the incarceration population is relatively low, and the population density much more dispersed. It is highly plausible that the context of the incarceration situation in New York City was specifically ideal for the re-entry community to organically form and evolve. Nonetheless, it is still foreseeable that a more communicative, cooperative, and holistic approach to post-release services in Melbourne can potentially support a smaller version of the re-entry community that would benefit releasees in their transition back to society.23

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23 This option will be explored later in Chapter Seven.
Social Relationships

Unlike cultural relationships, social relationships are not dictated by the ways in which individuals are organised in society (Avruch, 1998); rather, it is largely based on individual choices. Therefore, in social relationships women have more agency in the determination of their social group, and are no longer merely actors reacting to the imposition of cultural influences. It is, however, important to note that the ability to self-determine a social group may still be influenced by cultural relationships that the women are bound to. Having successful social relationships can ultimately contribute to the women’s level of social capital, which can significantly impact integration (as outlined in Chapter Three).

This positive correlation between supportive social networks, especially from family members, and a successful integration into the community has been extensively presented in existing re-entry literature (Ohlin, 1954; Glaser, 1964; Holt and Miller, 1972; Ekland-Olson et al., 1983; Hairston, 2002; Klein et al., 2002; Visher et al., 2004; Visher and Courtney, 2006). Additionally, there is a mountain of evidence supporting the adverse effects of incarceration on social bonds, causing those incarcerated a loss of valuable social capital (Western et al., 2001; Reisig et al., 2002; Rose and Clear, 2003; Wolff and Draine, 2004; Rose and Clear, 2006). Offenders, therefore, are confronted with a major challenge to maintain these evidently crucial supportive networks.

The following sections explore the ways in which women navigated their interactions with their social relationships. In some cases, the women’s conviction and incarceration resulted in the abandonment by their social networks, which restricted women’s ability to pro-actively dictate the nature and extent of these abandoned relationships. Moreover, having to confront the abandonment imposed by their social networks meant that women were once
again reacting to decisions made by other people for them. In other cases, however, women chose to ‘knife off’ from their social networks on their own. Unlike situations where they were abandoned by their social networks, the women interviewed especially felt that they were in control of their social relationships and their lives. Finally, the specific interaction between formerly-incarcerated women and their support workers is also discussed within the context of social relationships. In particular, the section delves into the similarities or differences between the women’s and support workers’ perception of the relationship.

**Abandonment**

Some scholars, such as Sullivan and her colleagues (2002), as well as Naser and La Vigne (2006), have contended that the absence or loss of established social capital is usually attributable to family and friends no longer being able to cope with the emotional and/or financial stress that comes with supporting those incarcerated. This was echoed amongst the women interviewed where, for some, family and friends severed ties because they did not wish to be “associated with [someone] with a criminal record” (Hua). When asked about some of her old friends, for example, Chelsea confided that she had lost contact with them because they could not “handle it”. Similarly, Kiara acknowledged that it is not surprising for family and friends to “stay away” from those incarcerated because “you constantly make the same mistake”, resulting in offenders “burn[ing] so many bridges or hurt[ing] them so many times”.

For two of the women interviewed, family and friends did not wait for them to make this mistake “many times”; instead, the women were abandoned after their first offence. Anh, for example, lost all support from her family and friends after the conviction for her first and only offence, and had no one to
turn to when she left prison. Hua experienced a similar abandonment from her two adult sons after her first offence. Explaining her children’s decision, Hua expressed that “they were angry [about] what happened”, and hence stopped all communication with her. Although Hua felt that her children were “punishing” her, she “accept[ed]” their decision, even going so far as to rationalise their action:

_I brought them up well. I brought them up well, and they know right from wrong._

Looking at Hua’s and Anh’s family abandonment, one common feature between the two women (and not between any others interviewed) was their Asian background. If this was indeed a key factor that could be ascribed to their experience, it would support Geert Hofstede’s work with his colleagues (2010) which outlined that people from this region are more susceptible to punishing family members for having shamed the family name. This hypothesis would also coincide with Melbourne workers’ observation that female offenders from Asian cultures are more likely to be completely abandoned by their family or friends as a result of their crime. However, it is important to note that this is a tentative hypothesis because of the small study sample of this research.

The experience of family abandonment was a unique one amongst some of the women interviewed. More commonly, family and friends of women across both sites continued to offer emotional and financial support to the women before, during, and after their incarceration. Kiara’s parents, for instance, accompanied her to every court hearing from her very first trial. Gabriela’s mother and brothers, as well as Dejana’s parents, continued to visit them in prison despite the travel distance. In addition, the majority of the women in New York City received financial support from their family
members towards their prison commissary accounts throughout their imprisonment. Family connections also provided Chloe and Kamila with their first employment directly after their release from prison.

**Knifing off**

Using Laub and Sampson’s term ‘knifing off’, this section discusses the women’s ability to distance themselves away from proximate or physical environments that initially led them to criminal activities (Farrall, 2002; Warr, 2002). While the women’s net social capital was likely reduced as a result of their incarceration, this was not necessarily because their networks had abandoned them; instead, the women themselves had dismissed their old acquaintances (this was mostly applicable to friends, rather than to family members). The decision to knife off from social relationships was made for a myriad of reasons. For example, some like Hua knifed off because she felt “very ashamed and embarrassed to be facing [her friends]”. The feeling of shame contrasted with Kate’s sense of pride and a desire to prove herself, which were her main reasons for knifing off from her mother.

*I didn’t even tell her that I went to jail... I didn’t want anyone to find me... I didn’t want her to send me money or anything. I just wanted to do it on my own.*

(Kate)

For others, going back to the same group of friends was thought to be a direct path back to criminal behaviour. This was the case for Anna and Chelsea who knifed off simultaneously from their acquaintances and their neighbourhoods in recognition of the connection between the two.

While the women in the study emphasised the control they had over
their social network, in some cases it was unclear whether knifing off was a proactive decision, or if it was done in response to their friends’ abandonment. For example, when Hua underlined that she did not “want to be associated with too many people now”, and was only going to contact her old friends when she was “ready”, she also admitted that the same group of friends did not wish to be associated with her because of her criminal record. Thus, it was ambiguous as to whether the decision to leave her group of friends was a proactive or a reactive one.

Nonetheless, the women’s narratives point to an understated focus in existing literature on the women’s agency and autonomy in relation to their social network choice; this is with the exception of Maruna and Roy’s work in 2007, which gave insight into the ability and motivation for ex-offenders to pro-actively knife off from their peers. Despite having limited control over their own lives in many aspects, the women were able to determine their social network groups, and to dictate who they would allow to be part of their new beginnings. This decision to knife off also manifested in the women’s choice to live in a new residential location (as discussed earlier) in order to be removed from their past situations (Sampson and Laub, 2005: 17). The act of knifing off therefore created new situations that provided an opportunity for the women to commence on their identity transformation, and allowed for a mechanism the women could use to achieve their underlying desire to desist from crime (Sampson and Laub, 2005: 17). In other words, changes imposed on the women’s exterior lives directly impacted on the women’s ability to internally transform.

Beside the family members and friends who continued to occupy a space in the women’s social circle, the women also explored potential new relationships so as to expand their social networks. As a worker in New York City, Nicholas noticed this proactive search particularly amongst his female
I think our female students are much more likely to have an intuitive understanding of what we refer to as social capital development. That much more likely to develop support networks in a new environment.

Challenges also arose for women from migrant backgrounds in particular. As the women interviewed were either first- or second-generation migrants, the social capital they had prior to their incarceration might have already been lower than that of their mainstream counterparts. Many interviewed reported, for instance, that they only had immediate family members with them in their residing city, or even country. The absence of an extensive family network in the residing city limited the overall availability of support, and meant that the women were not able to receive as much practical help from their family members as they needed. Hua and Anna, for example, both received continuous emotional support from their siblings who were respectively overseas and intestate, but this was insufficient as the women often required practical day-to-day support once they were released. As a result, both ended up with very few people to turn to when they were released. It is therefore important to note that, for those released with few family members or friends to support them practically, the reconstruction of social capital varied quite significantly as they had very little to start with.

Workers’ influence

The influence of workers’ perceptions and advice on the women’s social capital emerged in the narratives of participants. Specifically, the relationship between workers and women themselves raised an important question: is the role of workers to professionally support the women and to be friends with
the women? From narratives, it appeared that there was a slight disagreement in the perception of friendship between some of the women and their support workers. This was pertinent especially in Melbourne. Nonetheless, narratives that emerged from women who received an offer of friendship from workers revealed that this friendship was invaluable during their initial integration attempt.

In their post-release journey to rebuild their social capital, many women turned to their post-release workers for a source of support – specifically, the sort of support that was perhaps beyond a professional one. This manifested amongst the women interviewed, for example, where there was a widespread consensus that the relationship between the women and their support workers was indeed a type of friendship. However, the women’s perception of friendship was not always reciprocated by staff, some of whom strictly saw the women as ‘clients’.

This discrepancy in judgement of friendship was observed especially in the Melbourne narratives. Gabriela, for instance, considered her support worker “as a friend more than anything else”. The one-sided projection of friendship on the women’s relationship with their workers was perhaps due to the women’s limited social network – especially in the case of those in Melbourne, where all of the women interviewed said they did not openly discuss their incarceration history with others. As a result, when someone – such as their support worker – was privy to the women’s confidences, and continued to support them despite that knowledge, the women would understandably place their trust, and a label of friendship on them.

The Melbourne support staff, in contrast, did not perceive their relationship with the women in the same way, and only saw the establishment of trust as a necessary part of their role. The nature of the worker-client
relationship in Melbourne, moreover, seemed more hierarchical and professional; this manifested in the ways in which all workers in Melbourne consistently referred to the women as their ‘clients’, and used official terminologies when speaking about the provision of support to the women. Additionally, support staff in Melbourne were much less concerned, if at all, with their clients’ social relationships. Strictly speaking, they saw their role as that of a service provider, who was there to assist women with their (often basic and material) needs. This was evident in all of the workers’ disproportionate description of material services over emotional support provided. For most of the workers in Melbourne, social networking was not seen as being within the scope of their role.

This misconception on the part of the women contributed again to the list of discrepancies between the women’s expectation of post-release (experience and services) and workers’ expectation of post-release services. In particular, the discrepancy in the social role of their relationship highlighted the women’s reliance on post-release workers to perhaps provide them with support in all aspects of their re-entry process. Furthermore, it revealed a gap in the post-release support system in Melbourne that could be fulfilled by the presence of a re-entry community. Specifically, women in Melbourne were wholly dependent on their support workers as a sole source of support – whereas women in New York City had many more sources in the re-entry community they could draw support from.

As alluded, the relationship between support staff and formerly-incarcerated women in New York City was much less hierarchical, and less dependent. Staff saw themselves mostly as mentors who were there to guide the women onto the right path. They did not distinguish themselves as ‘workers’, and the women they assisted as ‘clients’. As the Director of a post-release service in New York City, Nicholas explicitly discouraged this from his
staff:

*We very self-consciously speak of ourselves as a community – not a service organisation. People aren’t coming to us to get a set of services; they’re coming to us to join a community of students...*

In this organisation, the women were referred to as ‘students’, and staff as ‘advisors’ – thereby taking away the stigma of the ‘ex-offender’ label and the dependent nature of the ‘client’ label. Moreover, in contrast to the staff in Melbourne, support staff in New York City readily referred to women by their real names during interviews conducted for this research. Again, this was perhaps done to erase the structural barrier between workers and clients, and was perhaps done quite naturally given that many workers were themselves incarcerated before. The sense of belonging that was achieved from ridding this barrier and being more inclusive was reinforced by Nicholas, who encouraged his students to contact others in the community to expand their social network. Norma attested to this attitude when she said that workers and formerly-incarcerated people in New York City were really a part of “an extended family”.

Accordingly, staff in New York City saw it as a principal part of their role to introduce women to others who were once in the same position, and to those who would be able to provide them with advice and guidance on desistance and integration. The social relationship constructed between workers and women in New York City was invaluable for the women – especially considering that workers were often the first point of contact for the women after their return. Thus, the ability to build a social relationship with the very first people they met when coming out meant that subsequent relationships with other people could potentially snowball out of the first ones.
The contrast in service delivery between Melbourne workers and New York workers warranted further exploration. When examining the nature of the relationship between workers and clients, many scholars such as Dietz and Thomson (2004) voiced their concerns over appropriate relationship boundaries that could affect the power differential between the two parties. Kagel and Giebelhausen (1994) expanded that workers and clients have a ‘fiduciary relationship’, which is one based on unequal power and unequal responsibility. In this relationship, clients are required to place confidence and trust in workers in order to express their needs and achieve their personal goals; this interaction, hence, should have clear professional boundaries set up, in order to allow for a safe expression of needs by clients (Peterson, 1992; Bonosky, 1994; Kagel and Giebelhausen, 1994). However, these scholars might have understated the beneficial impacts of trust-forming relationships through the mutual sharing of past personal experiences, and the advantages of self-disclosures that are reciprocated. The implications of the two distinct service delivery models are explored further in Chapter Seven.

Conclusion

Chapter Five has explored external factors that had an impact on the re-entry experiences of the women interviewed. Notably, narratives from both formerly-incarcerated women and support staff revealed the extent to which women’s re-entry experiences were affected by their search for appropriate accommodation after their release. The appropriateness of housing location was particularly noted: while it was consistently reported that the women had urgent housing needs, these needs were superseded by the women’s perception of security (from external harms and from the inability to desist) in the neighbourhood.
This self-determination and agency that the women exercised manifested again in their decision to knife off from their old social groups. Although the women were aware that doing so would lower their already-diminished level of social capital, they believed that to be a necessary step in integration, and accepted the consequences of doing so. This notion of dismissal, however, contrasted with many women’s experiences of abandonment from their friends and family. The simultaneously contrasting experiences of dismissal and abandonment raise an interesting question about how the women would have been feeling during these social encounters. That is, when the women were released into the community, they were confronted with having to come to terms with completely severed relationships (some of which would have been helpful for the women to keep, and the lost relationships were surely not desirable by the women), as well as having to make decisions on which remaining relationships the women might have liked to maintain. When the process of release itself was already an isolating experience, the women were either forced to or had to make an active decision to further isolate themselves. This point warrants a detailed investigation of the women’s interior feelings and values during this process. This is discussed in the next chapter.

The influence of the women’s exterior lives on their internal self was evident again in the women’s emphasis on individuality – that is, the women desire to be treated as individual people as opposed to being treated as merely being ‘Vietnamese’ or ‘CALD’ – which echoed through narratives from the women across both Melbourne and New York City. The women’s desire for individuality raises doubts about the effectiveness of policies that are culturally-sensitive but do not necessarily take into account other aspects of the women’s complex, intersectional lives. Thus, the assumption that culture-responsivity is the optimal option for service delivery (which is a position that Corrections Victoria and some post-release organisations in Melbourne has taken) has
inadvertent implications for the women’s experiences, and will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

The chapter has also introduced the re-entry community – a community-type network of re-entry organisations that exists in New York City. The investigation of the women’s post-release experiences revealed the similarities in transitional barriers across the two cities; however, it is highlighted that their experiences differed drastically due to their external environments. In particular, the characteristics of the re-entry community significantly alleviated many negative impacts of re-entry for the women in New York City. The consequential variations in internal lives, as well as the overall implications of these different service delivery models are explored in the next two chapters.
CHAPTER SIX

ON INTERIOR LIVES

Introduction

When women are confronted with external challenges to their re-entry process, their reactions to these challenges are made up of changes in their attitudes, values and behaviours. In making sense of the women's reactions, the chapter responds to the research question of how formerly-incarcerated women from migrant groups conceptualise and experience the re-entry process.

For the purpose of this research, these attitudes, values and behaviours are understood as being a part of the women's interior lives which contribute to their sense of identity and self-esteem. This chapter will discuss the ways in which the women perceived their own identity and esteem during their re-entry process, and contrast these perceptions with the women’s idealised identities. A key finding is that while the women were released with a lowered level of self-esteem, they worked to rebuild it to the level that they idealised. To explore these internalised views and to build on the discussion presented in the preceding chapter, Chapter Six elaborates on the women’s re-entry stories from this interior perspective – focusing on the ways in which the women worked to manage their sense of self throughout their re-entry process. While the analysis of the women’s interior lives provided an important insight into understanding their re-entry process, it must be remembered that the women’s interior lives interacted with their exterior environment to create the experiences that the women had.

The chapter is structured according to the three primary themes that
emerged from the analysis of participants’ interior lives: ‘self-conception’; ‘post-release redemption’, and ‘idealised identity’. It begins by firstly exploring the theme of ‘self-conception’, which refers to the ways in which formerly-incarcerated women conceived of themselves and their identity after their release from prison. Due to the complexities in the women’s lives, both positive and negative self-conceptions were produced during the course of their transition. The discussion uses a comparison point – being the point to which the women compared themselves – in order to frame our understanding of the variation in self-conception.

Next, and drawing on the framework of Maruna’s (2001) concept of post-release redemption, the second theme explores the women’s internal experience of changing their identities after leaving prison. It does so by investigating the two distinct ways in which the women interviewed chose to redeem themselves after they crossed the physical and symbolic border between prison and mainstream society. For some women, a method of redemption was to revert to their ‘old self’ in order to appeal to their ‘essential core of normalcy’ – a classic notion conceptualised by Lofland in 1969 (p. 214). Alternatively, the women attempted to redeem themselves by focusing their narratives on the discovery of their ‘new self’ – a strategy which brought the women closer to a normative identity. Typically, the women simultaneously went through multiple methods of redemption during the course of their re-entry process. Regardless of the method used, the overarching objective for the women remained consistent: to distance themselves away from criminality – both explicitly (through desistance) and implicitly (through the transformation of their identities).

Finally, Chapter Six outlines the last theme that emerged from the women’s narratives on their interior lives: namely, the women’s emphasis on achieving their idealised identities or their ‘new selves’; further, the chapter
explores the magnitude of importance the women placed upon the pursuit of this identity. Importantly, narratives showed that the women’s perceptions were commonly relational – that is, they were determined by the women’s inter-personal relationships with their close social networks. For the women interviewed, being able to embody the (multiple) standardised roles they set for themselves symbolised a marked integration into mainstream society, as well as reaffirmed their legitimate position on the normative side of the border.

In the discourse of the women’s interior lives, the chapter also attempts to highlight the complexities of the women’s lives by illustrating the interplay between external and internal factors that combined to intensify the women’s re-entry journey.

**Self-Conception**

The notion of self-conception is borrowed from Maruna’s (2001) discussion on ex-offenders’ post-release narratives – that is, focusing on the ways in which ex-offenders define their own identity or tell their story after incarceration. Specifically, this research employs the term ‘self-conception’ to depict the women’s internal perception of themselves, which subsequently informed the narratives they constructed for their identity and their overall re-entry process. Although self-conception is an interior element of a woman’s re-entry process, it is invariably connected to their exterior environment – meaning that the environment women are in influences their conception of themselves, and vice versa.

The perception of oneself is fluid, and varies depending on the environment one is in at a given time. This idea of the dynamic perception of self is explored in Goffman’s (1959) work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. 
In his work, Goffman proposed that individuals are actors who adjust their behaviours according to a variety of situations – constantly making a conscious decision to reveal certain aspects of the self and to conceal others. To respond to this reported variation in the perceptions of their identities, the women were asked during interviews to recall their experiences at three specific points of their re-entry process so that the changes or development of their experiences over time can be encapsulated. These were the period immediately after release, at the time of the interview, as well as the period in between the first two. Due to some significant variations between times since release amongst participants, the analysis of their narratives was undertaken within the context of the individual’s stage of re-entry.

Across both Melbourne and New York City, the women interviewed went through a significant shift in self-conception when they crossed the border between prison and mainstream society. This drastic change was mainly attributable to the cultural shift that occurred between the two spaces during their transition (as discussed earlier in Chapter Five). In addition, the changes in the women’s comparison points crucially affected their self-conception. The notion of a comparison point is used here to refer to the point to which the women compared themselves. That is, while the women were incarcerated, they would compare themselves to other women in prison; however, since their release, the women’s comparison point shifted to others in their new community. Accordingly, the extent of discrepancies in self-conception depended on the nature of the community the women were transitioning into. For the women in Melbourne, for example, crossing directly into mainstream society meant that they were comparing themselves to others in that society – the majority of whom the women assumed did not have any criminal convictions. The women in New York City, on the other hand, crossed into a re-entry community – where they were surrounded by ex-offenders who were themselves at varying stages of the re-entry process.
While relational theorists (Bloom et al., 2003; Covington, 2007) largely focused their work on the effects of social relationships on women’s pathways to offending, analysis on participants’ narratives demonstrated that their re-entry experiences too were determined by their interactions and connections with others. For the women interviewed, in particular, this began with the impact of their surrounding comparison points on their self-conception. For example, the increased level of negative self-conception experienced by Melbourne women was often a result of them comparing their own situations with those of others in the general community. In a similar way, any self-conceptions that arose from the New York women’s narratives occurred as they compared their situations with others’ in the re-entry community. Narratives from the women, therefore, verified the effects of comparison points on their re-entry experiences.

This then leads us to the two typologies of self-conception that emerged from the women’s narratives: positive self-conception and negative self-conception. While the ways in which the women conceptualised their re-entry process were not always stagnant throughout their journeys, the pattern from those interviewed showed that women in New York City tended to have a positive self-conception, and women in Melbourne tended to have a negative self-conception. This tendency for a negative self-conception in Melbourne was due to the presence of a large gap in identity and status between formerly incarcerated women themselves and those of their points of comparison. The impacts of these disparity in comparison points were also aggravated by the relatively isolated experiences felt amongst the Melbourne women.

*Isolation*

When recalling their lives immediately after release many women across
the two cities recounted that they commonly felt “depressed”, “lonely”, and “scared” – sentiments that were in line with findings from existing re-entry literature (Kilroy, 2003; CHRIP, 2010). The experience of sadness and isolation then led the women to feel a sense of hopelessness for their future, which Gabriela summed up as them ultimately lacking the ability to “see the light at the end of the tunnel”. Moreover, this widespread sentiment hinted at the women’s conceptualisation of a dark abyss that awaited them, and underlined the women’s perception that they were “on this journey alone” (Anh).

*Like, even I can’t get paid employment, you know, just offer... volunteer work... er... it means... I have to get out of the house, you know. And if I don’t have to go out I’ll be spending the whole day in the house... I’m talking about winter time, you know. Winter time if I don’t go out, I will be... urm... I can go back into depression, you know, easily. But if... because I’m volunteering, I have to get to work. The responsibility is there. So, you just have to get up and go, you know. And then the day passes by quicker.*

(Hua)

Predictably, the feeling of hopelessness and isolation was prominent amongst the women who did not have as much external (environmental, cultural and social) support. This is especially relevant in Melbourne, where the lack of a re-entry community meant that there was no interim space to buffer the drastic transition between prison culture and mainstream culture. As formerly-incarcerated women typically rely on the support of positive interpersonal relationships to guide them through this isolating time (Bloom et al., 2003; Covington, 2007), the absence of a re-entry community consequently forced some of the women interviewed to seek needed support elsewhere. Mostly, the women reached out to familiar sources of support which came
from communities where they previously had some membership – in this case being either the prison community or mainstream community. However, this search for support was not a straightforward one, and the challenges the women faced in socialising themselves into a new mainstream culture, coupled with their reluctance to return to the old prison culture, left the women in a space with little inter-personal support.

Workers in Melbourne were acutely aware of this isolating experience, and the ways in which it affected their clients’ transition process. This awareness was evident when they reiterated that a lot of women – particularly those from migrant groups – came out of prison “with nothing” (Michelle). Here, women from migrant groups were singled out as frequently having been abandoned by their family members and friends. Despite workers’ recognition of the women’s isolation, however, workers admitted that they did not have the resources or the capacity to provide the level of intensive support that they felt their clients needed. An example was given by Mary, who revealed that each of her clients was allocated a certain amount of time per session, and that these allocated time slots were enforced strictly. These restrained time slots, in turn, prevented her clients from exploring deeper into their emotions. The implication of Mary’s statement was also that, with sufficient time provided for each client, workers would be able to assist women in a more emotionally-meaningful way.

This sentiment echoed the broader challenges faced by the Melbourne workers interviewed. Specifically, staff were often conflicted between their desire to deliver intensive support to their clients and their obligation to meet organisational priorities and targets. As the latter obligation was more explicitly measurable, it commonly got prioritised by workers, as well as support organisations themselves. Moreover, the nature of tendering for post-release service contracts in Victoria also meant that organisations competed against
each other based on their ability to deliver services efficiently, at times circumventing intensive, comprehensive, or meaningful service delivery.

… not only we’re dealing with what we’re dealing on the front line, but our agencies are scrambling for funding. We’re tendering against each other. So there’s this competitive – we’re in the marketplace, you know. Agencies are at risk. Some agencies are becoming businesses.
(Meredith)

… will put in tenders that say, ‘we can do xxxxx for only this much money’. And we’ll try to undercut each other. It’s all very well for a CEO or an executive officer to make those decisions around funding. But for workers on the ground, they’re expected to do more with less time...
(Martha)

As a result, staff appeared to be resigned to the restricted assistance they were able to provide to their clients, and accepted that they were unable to significantly alleviate the sense of isolation their clients experienced. In such situations where priorities needed to be made, it is worthy to note the type of assistance (most commonly, material ones) that staff chose to focus their limited resources on.

In comparison, the women in New York City were less likely to feel “lonely” because they had various sources of support through their families, or through their interactions with other formerly-incarcerated people. Furthermore, the existence of the re-entry community invariably relieved

24 This point is further explored in Chapter Seven.
pressure from support services to singularly provide intensive assistance. Instead, the women in New York City were able to seek support from multiple channels: case managers, their peers in the re-entry community, or facilitators or mentors in their treatment programs. This then meant that support staff in New York City were not as relied upon to deliver all aspects of post-release services. Additionally, while the Melbourne women were reluctant to share their “secrets” (of being previously-incarcerated) with others, the women in New York were formally encouraged to do so as part of their involvement in transitional programs. Hence, the constant interactions with others in the re-entry community, coupled with the common experience of having revealed one’s “secret”, encouraged the women’s interpersonal relationships within this community to foster.

Through her work on investigating re-entry experiences of female ex-offenders, Andrea Leverentz (2014) found that group membership and empowerment play a significant role in shaping women’s ability to transform their post-incarceration identity. Drawing on other scholars’ work, Leverentz further explained that the shared aspects of a stigmatised identity fosters amongst the group a kind of cognitive restructuring, whereby the ways in which individuals understand and process the stigma of their imprisonment alter because they are no longer isolated (see: Goffman, 1963; Cain, 1991; Katz, 1993; Archibald, 2007). Through group identity and group involvement, thus, ex-offenders feel more empowered, and are able to regain a sense of self-efficacy that had been missing (Archibald, 2007). This effect is evident in the experiences of the women in New York City, on whom the shared experiences of having been incarcerated actually encouraged further development and integration into mainstream society. A re-entry community, hence, can be conceptualised as a kind of a pre-acclimation space that fosters positive post-release behaviour with the aim of successfully moving people through to mainstream communities.
Following a framework that encourages group identity and involvement, post-release services in New York City delivered a multitude of group treatment and programs, where opportunities were present for women to interact with others in the same situation. As one worker in New York City put forward:

*This [is] a safe space for women. They're a time to connect. They're a time to... leave the stigma at the door and feel free to talk about what it is the barriers are, and leverage the networking and the resources of the room. Because, really, the group is its best resources and we try to remind them of that all the time.*

(Nara)

In this sense, workers in New York city believed that the benefit gained from sharing outweighed any disadvantages, and workers capitalised on this benefit by emphasising the importance that *everyone* – including workers themselves – share stories of their own re-entry journey. This emphasis on sharing mirrored components incorporated in Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous group treatments, whereby confession is seen as an important and necessary step to recovery. As a result, group confessions engineered communication and trust amongst the women interviewed and their cohort, and created another system of support for the women.

Workers’ attitudes towards sharing their own stories also nurtured the women’s self-conception. When workers chose to reveal their ex-offender status or details of their own re-entry journey to the women, the symbolic barrier that separated the women and their workers – a barrier which also signified the separation between prison and mainstream society – was lifted. As
a result, women no longer felt that they had to be on either side of the border, but understood that there was an option where both of their identities could amalgamate. This was the case in New York City, where women’s acceptance of integrated identities emerged after having heard others’ re-entry stories.

Even though the workers interviewed in Melbourne did not have their own re-entry stories to share, the experience of re-entry could still have been normalised by workers speaking about other clients’ journeys. However, due to strict confidentiality rules, workers in Melbourne often did not partake in this disclosure. In this sense, their reluctance to share stories of other clients’ re-entry journey, while upholding confidentiality, might undermine the power of the collective in helping the women to overcome their own “overwhelming” experience (Hua). Additionally, there appeared to be a reliance in Melbourne on pro-social modelling from people who have never been in conflict with the law. While this model supports pro-social relationships, it can however create a negative comparison point for the women as they focused on the differences between them and their mentors.

Shame

Upon release, the women across both cities also reported feeling “ashamed” and “embarrassed” about their conviction and subsequent incarceration – which Kiara suggested “came from within”. In her case, specifically, Kiara reflected:

You – as a female, as a mum, as a daughter, as a sister, as a niece – you’re ashamed because I’m in prison and not one of my twelve brothers ever been to prison. I’m so disappointing to my mum over and over when I know I can be so much better. I’m hurting my dad ‘cause his baby girl can’t be helped.
This statement from Kiara hinted at her feeling of being ‘doubly-deviant’ because she was a female ex-offender (Heidensohn, 1987). This notion of ‘double-deviance’ was developed by Frances Heidensohn (1987), who postulated that the experiences of, and reactions to, women who offend are shaped by their assumed gendered role. Unlike men, women’s offending is considered to have transgressed both gender and legal norms; and, as a result, women are punished twice – first, as an offender and, second, as a woman (Heidensohn, 2006: 2). While Heidensohn’s concept of double-deviance refers primarily to society’s expectation of women, and their reactions towards female offenders, narratives from the women interviewed showed that these social expectations were indeed internalised, and that women themselves perceived that they had transgressed both gender and legal norms. These internalised social expectations and pressures, moreover, reiterated the relational nature of women’s experiences of re-entry.

Kiara, for example, demonstrated in the above quote that her offending was out of the ordinary because of all her social roles as a female. This was contrasted with her “twelve brothers”, who might not have incited as much surprise if they had been involved in criminal behaviour. In her experience as a post-release support worker in Melbourne, Melissa similarly observed this trend amongst her female clients:

*The stigma for women is huge... they’ll be doing all the same things [as men], but they’re not visible [as needing help]. They’re not visible to the community... they are highly stigmatised compared to the men, which just means that they have very little support and they’re very isolated.*

Melbourne workers, in particular, pointed to the prevalence of shame
in migrant communities. Martha, for instance, expressed her opinion that the shame was “just so evident that there’s a problem” amongst women from migrant backgrounds. She ultimately attributed this to “a cultural thing”. Further, Maggie offered that women from ethnic backgrounds who offended were seen as “[bringing] shame into the family”, and as a result were often treated as “the black sheep”. Certainly, within the Melbourne context, the majority of the women interviewed verified these accounts provided by workers, and confirmed that they believed their ethnic culture had played a part in their profound sense of shame. Hence, although the exterior lives of formerly-incarcerated women from migrant groups might not have been greatly affected by their ethnic culture, they reported that their interior lives were severely impacted due to the shame brought on by their incarceration. Using Heidensohn’s (1987; 2006) notion of double-deviance, perhaps the criminal conviction of formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds is considered by members of their ethnic groups as triple-deviant – where the women have transgressed legal, gender, and cultural norms.

In addition, the profound sense of shame attributed to women from migrant groups by participants in Melbourne can also be explained using Hofstede’s IDV index. According to Hofstede and his colleagues (2010: 92), persons from countries with a lower IDV index often feel shame and a loss of face when they transgressed social or cultural norms. In relation to this research, all formerly-incarcerated women interviewed in Melbourne were from countries that have a lower IDV than that of Australia, where a transgression of social norms can result in personal guilt rather than shame (Hofstede et al., 2010: 92). Moreover, the majority of workers also spoke of formerly-incarcerated women from lower IDV countries – such as, Vietnam or other South-East Asian countries. The difference between feeling shame and feeling guilt is highlighted accordingly: the feeling of shame being more relational (to others in the community) than a personal sense of guilt that is
only individually-reflected.

Moreover, Kiara’s comment that the shame “came from within” applied to many of the women interviewed, which was apparent in the women feeling this shame even though no one had explicitly confronted them about it. Kamila, for example, confessed:

*I know what I did was wrong – I was selling drugs. I was embarrassed... oh, you’re making money like that instead of getting a job... so young, healthy, with children. I felt embarrassed... instead of getting a job, you’re making easy money... you have three kids.*

However, when prompted on whether anyone had directly accused her of “making easy money”, she conceded that they did not have to because “the whole world” knew about her arrest when the police “raided [her] apartment”, and that she was certain that this was her neighbours’ opinion of her. Kamila’s perception of herself, therefore, was greatly shaped by the ways in which she perceived others viewed her – once more underlining the women’s tendency to internalise their external environments.

In addition, as workers were often regarded as an essential part of the women’s exterior environment, the internalised shame felt by the women could have been exacerbated during times when they had to discuss their past.

*One of the women I’m working with is a Vietnamese woman, and the shame factor... she started opening up about a few things – and they’re huge things. And I tried to get her some help around that, but I’ve noticed she’s pulled right back now. And, also, the other two Vietnamese women I work with, they’re*
like... ‘Everything’s fine. Everything’s perfect’, and you know it can’t be. But, you know, they find it so hard to open up...

(Martha)

Hence, while workers – particularly those in Melbourne – attributed the women’s hesitation to discuss their stories to their ethnic culture, the women’s reluctance could have been a result of the power differential between workers and themselves. Again, centering attention on ethnic cultural barriers could potentially misdirect workers from addressing objective issues faced by ex-offenders.

Notably, the women’s feeling of shame was closely intertwined with a sense of guilt – not particularly for having committed a crime, but for the “hurt” that they knew they caused. The guilt was experienced by Anh, who confided that, one year on from her release, she was still attempting to amend the relationship with her children through family therapy. Chelsea also summarised many women’s experiences when she said that “hurting” her family was “a big regret”, and that she would “take all that back” if she could. In their scholarly work, relational theorists such as Barbara Bloom and her colleagues (2003) observed the significance of the disconnection and violation of relationships as a driver of female offending. At the same time, this disconnection of relationships was also a consequence of the women’s crime, and the women interviewed acknowledged that they must address or rectify this relationship breakdown before they were able to integrate to society properly. Thus, while the crimes committed by the majority of the women interviewed were ‘victimless’ (in the sense that there were no direct victims), the women actually perceived that their family members were their principal victims because of the negative effects of incarceration on their relationships.
Self-esteem

It is well-documented within existing re-entry literature that formerly-incarcerated individuals re-enter the community with a diminished sense of self-worth and a lower level of self-esteem, which can in turn hinder any cognitive or behavioural changes necessary for desistance (Leverentz, 2014). This adverse effect of incarceration was widespread amongst the women interviewed across the two cities, the majority of whom echoed Kate’s personal opinion that her own self-esteem “was in the toilet” when she came out. Upon reflection, Jayla suggested a reason for this lowered sense of self-worth:

When you go to jail, it takes away your dignity. It takes away your pride. It takes away a lot from being a woman.

In this last sentence, Jayla was referring to the strip searches that she had to endure during her seventeen years of incarceration. Dejana similarly recalled this “traumatic” experience, which she said still affected her emotionally and psychologically ten years on. Hence, while the existing re-entry discourse concentrates on the expectations that society imposes on women in the criminal justice system, it does not sufficiently address the women’s own expectations. Particularly, women like Jayla and Dejana expected to be treated with respect, and not to be forced to go through the level of trauma they had experienced when being strip-searched in prison. To both these women, therefore, the punishment they received also violated their female identities.

The diminished sense of self-worth, coupled with the shame and guilt that the women felt, resulted in the women’s inability to forgive themselves. Findings from the women’s narratives highlighted Harber and Wenberg’s (2005) warning that this inability to forgive oneself could hold individuals back from moving forward in their integration. Chelsea, for example, demonstrated
her experience with this hindrance when she recalled that her lowered self-esteem and her heightened shame prevented her from discovering her true potential because she was “too scared to find out who [she] was”. Gabriela had a comparable experience, and remembered that, when she was first released, “other people [had] more belief in her [about what she could achieve]” than she did in herself. Both Gabriela’s and Chelsea’s levels of self-esteem were only raised once they had actually accomplished what they initially thought was impossible: obtaining tertiary qualifications and full-time employment. The benefits derived from having an outside source of empowerment were evident for both these women, as they were initially unable to motivate themselves internally. This sequence of events, thus, stressed the importance of external affirmations on the women’s internalised self-perceptions.

This “lost self-esteem” (Chelsea), however, propelled some women towards recidivism, and away from desistance. After her first prison experience, for example, Chelsea admitted that the primary reason for her recidivism was that “the drug world... accepted her”, which directed her onto a path she felt was “easier” to manage. Similarly, Anna’s sense of self-worth was so low at one point during her previous attempts at re-entry that she thought nothing “really mattered”, and that she no longer “cared” about what happened to her because she was so “desperate” to survive. In her experience of supporting formerly-incarcerated women, Maggie attested to this stating that “there’s only so much that they can bear” before they decided to re-offend. Similar to the acceptance of relapse during abstinence attempts (Velasquez et al., 2015), Maggie’s statement illuminated an acknowledgment that re-offending was not entirely inevitable for women during their post-release transition, because desistance was a challenging process given existing transitional barriers.

In their 2004 paper, Christopher Uggen and his colleagues proposed
that ex-offenders feel markedly separated from their fellow citizens, and indeed feel “less than the average citizen” after their release from prison (Uggen et al., 2000). Like many life-course theorists, the authors’ conclusion largely stemmed from observations on the lives of formerly-incarcerated men (in this case, mostly young men). Notably, narratives derived from this present study similarly demonstrated that formerly-incarcerated women also felt the disparity in social status after their release. Moreover, as the women did not value themselves as much as they valued others in society, they felt that they “could not mix with” other people because they “just came out” (Hua). For Dejana, the disparity in social status manifested in her key concern that she would never be able to have a meaningful intimate relationship with “a decent guy”, because she felt that they “wouldn’t want to have anything to do with [her]” if they knew that she had been to prison.

I don’t see that I’ve got a choice. I’m either on my own, or I’m with, like, a loser – a dropkick – someone I wouldn’t normally be with because I don’t feel I have a choice. I don’t feel like I can be in a normal relationship with a decent person.

(Dejana)

In expressing their sentiment, Hua and Dejana both conceived of themselves as being fundamentally different after prison (with Dejana explicitly expressed that she was “tainted” with her prison identity), and were as a result less deserving than others in society. In The New Jim Crow (2010), Michelle Alexander highlighted that ex-offenders (typically, African-Americans) are relegated by society to a permanent second-class citizen status. For some of the women interviewed, this relegation to a lowered social status was mostly internalised so that – in addition to how others in society saw them – the women themselves felt like second-class citizens who were undeserving of success and happiness. This feeling of inferiority then subsequently contributed
to their diminishing sense of self-worth, which in turn further exacerbated the vicious cycle of a lowered sense of self.

Distrust

Another common self-conception amongst the women interviewed was their distrust of others, which was rooted in the women’s assumption that they were the ones people only “pretended” to like or care about (Jayla). Despite being explicitly told otherwise, the majority of the women interviewed were convinced that “people’s demeanour changed... the minute you say you [have been] in prison” (Chelsea). Kamila attested to this, observing in her experience that others would “look at [her] differently” after she revealed her incarceration past. Jayla’s own story about her first time on the subway after her release illustrated the extent of the women’s conviction that others were judging them.

The first time I got outta jail, I saw this lady. She was talking, she was talking out loud. I thought she was talking about me, and I started getting mad. I started getting mad. And I’m talking to myself, I said, ‘Damn, that bitch gonna talk about me, and she don’t even know who I am. I just got out of jail, and they already talking about me’. This is before I knew about the phones... the mouthpiece.

As Jayla was incarcerated for seventeen years, she was not aware of recent technological advancements – such as, a wireless mouthpiece for mobile phones. Hence, when Jayla saw the woman speaking whilst looking in her direction, she thought that the woman was talking to or talking about her in a negative manner. This resulted in Jayla feeling judged about her incarceration, even though the woman on the subway could not have known she was
previously incarcerated.

This common misconception – along with their distrust of others and their belief that there were “no real friends out in this world” (Kamila) – gave the women a justification to perpetuate their refusal to connect with others, which further aggravated the isolation of their re-entry experience. Moreover, the distrust led the women to conceptualise their relationship with society as adversarial, and saw themselves on the opposite side to those they considered “normal” and “decent”; this then exacerbated the women’s already lowered sense of self.

The workers in Melbourne substantiated that formerly-incarcerated clients from migrant groups, in particular, were more susceptible to distrust – especially against those who are seen to be in positions of authority.

*And there’s also the thing about – in some cultures – the violence that goes with government. So, a lot of people when they come [to seek support services], they’re terrified. That’s what’s interesting about the Vietnamese community. There’s such a fear of authority...* 

(Marjorie)

Although there was a general consensus amongst workers that gaining trust was a necessary step in order to engage with all of their clients, most workers in Melbourne specifically attributed any distrust from clients to their clients’ cultural backgrounds. This is in line with the work of Geert Hofstede and his colleagues (2010: 79), who found that women from Asian cultures in particular revert to subordination when facing people (especially men) in positions of authority, and that this subordination towards authority figures was coupled with a sense of distrust. Mark substantiated this when he stated that the
distrust amongst his clients from migrant groups often intensified when they found out that his organisation was a part of the state government, and that decisions made by him could potentially affect their Centrelink payments. As many of the post-release support services commenced in prison, or were imposed as a parole condition, it was conceivable that the women viewed transitional support as an extension of the criminal justice system – particularly, as a part of the same institution that was responsible for their conviction and incarceration in the first place. This in turn impacted on the women’s motivation and readiness to share their stories to support workers, and subsequently impeded on workers’ ability to assist the women during integration.

Positive self-conceptions

Positive self-conceptions were also produced by the women interviewed (albeit less commonly), and were especially prevalent amongst the women in New York City. In this site, many contended that having hit “rock bottom” (Andrea; Kiara) had a positive impact, as it gave them the necessary motivation to transform their lives. Some, such as Anna, reported being “grateful” for their incarceration experience because it “taught [them] a lesson”. The perception of their incarceration as transformative was a rare conception amongst the women interviewed, and was typically found amongst women who had multiple involvements with the criminal justice system throughout their lives. Andrea, Anna and Chelsea, for instance, all had desires to transform after asking themselves these questions: “What has my life become?”; “Why am I here (in prison)?”; and “Why did I do this?”. Upon reflection, Anna confessed that she was “tired of... being in and out of jail [her] whole life”, and decided that she could no longer live that way.

A positive self-conception allowed the women to view their
incarceration as a “wake-up call” (Kamila), and to take it as an opportunity to change. Gabriela took this opportunity to change seriously, and started the process by enrolling into academic and technical courses whilst in prison, in order to arm herself with the necessary experience and knowledge needed for finding employment on release. As a result, Gabriela reported that her self-esteem was not as impacted because she was able to secure employment almost immediately after she came out. Kamila, who similarly found employment straight after release, admitted that the “distraction” of starting a new job also helped her with her self-esteem issues. In these instances, it was unclear whether positive self-conception (or self-esteem) instigated the women’s motivation to transform their lives (as their objectives were now seen as attainable), or whether being forced to transform had fostered positive self-conceptions. Nonetheless, there was a clear correlation between positive feelings about themselves, and their ability to succeed in the integration process.

Another important factor that directed the women in New York City towards a positive self-conception was the ability to see that, in comparison, their situation was “not as bad as” others’ in the re-entry community (Kamila). Many women expressed, for example, that talking to others who reported that they had gone through a more difficult journey and still managed to integrate successfully into society had inspired them to work towards achieving the same outcome. Additionally, the women would see that their goal was realistic and achievable, because someone else in a worse position had done it before. This positive comparison point then encouraged the women further towards their integration objective.

Similar to workers in New York City, some organisations in Melbourne recognised the benefits of having positive ties to the community, and instituted mentoring programs for formerly-incarcerated women as a result. The
selection of mentors and the timing of these programs, however, differed between the two cities. In New York City, women could access mentors immediately after they made contact with post-release services. This approach to mentoring was grounded on the theory that, if women were to experience any negative self-conceptions, it would usually surface in the periods immediately after release. Richards and Jones (2004: 203) explained that during these periods of crossing over the border, ex-offenders experience a disjuncture between two different structures of time and space (between prison and mainstream society), which has a destabilising effect on their lives. In this sense, the impacts of incarceration are forcefully felt during this time because of the drastic differences between the two spaces.

For the women interviewed, however, there was no apparent correlation between time since release and the nature of their self-conceptions. For example, Anna, Kiara, Andrea and Veronica, who had all been released for less than two years at the time of the interview, had a relatively positive perception of themselves. Dejana, on the other hand, had been released for ten years, and still had the most negative self-conception out of all those interviewed across both cities. Therefore, the emerging trend from the interviews remarkably revealed that the women’s comparison points influenced their self-conception more so than their period since release.

With regards to the appropriate point at which mentoring support should intervene, the majority of workers in Melbourne did not agree with the New York model of immediate post-release mentoring service; instead, they observed that the period immediately after release was actually the “worst time” to intervene with mentoring support.

What do you prioritise when you’re just about to be released...

priorities are different [and are mostly concentrated on basic
material needs)... you’re probably not thinking about a mentor. ‘Cause a mentor can’t drive you to parole appointments. They can’t find you accommodation, whereas some of the workers in different justice programs can.

(Melissa)

The apparent distinction was likely to have been because of Melbourne women’s relatively urgent need for material aid during the periods immediately after release. This resulted then in an impediment on emotional support, as priorities were given to their material needs.

Similarly, the method of mentor selection from communities differed between the two sites. In New York City, mentors selected were those who had themselves been through the process of incarceration and integration. Moreover, the selection process was natural and unstructured, whereby women could choose their mentors from a pool of people in the re-entry community with whom they had good relationships. In contrast, Melbourne workers formally recruited and assigned mentors to their clients; and even though women were typically consulted on the kinds of mentors they would prefer, the final decision was made by post-release staff. Importantly, this structural difference had notable implications on women’s sense of self-determination, as well as demonstrated the level of self-determination workers entrusted to women. Understandably, women may be reluctant to trust someone assigned to them with personal “secrets”. This, moreover, could impact on the already low level of trust women had in workers, because the trust that the women expected from workers was not reciprocated.

In addition, mentors in Melbourne were specifically recruited from those who have no incarceration history based on the belief that these mentors would still be able to provide women with pro-social connections to the
community even though they have no incarceration experience. While this model in Melbourne was theoretically sound, its potential benefits were hindered by practical concerns. Firstly, workers in Melbourne were concerned with ensuring a clear professional boundary between mentors and clients. For example, Miriam, who was a mentoring coordinator for a pre- and post-release service in Melbourne, confessed that mentors were discouraged from sharing their own stories:

[They are discouraged from] personal self-disclosure because... you wanna disclose what’s relevant, but not your whole life story ‘cos it’s not about you. And you also don’t want to be taking over the conversation with your own problem, or bringing your own thing into it.

Despite urging that her mentors still be “human”, and not “be completely shut off”, the practice still undermined the advantages that can be derived from mutual experiences of challenges and ways to overcome them.

Secondly, workers in Melbourne were also concerned with issues of confidentiality and trust. This was especially important for Melissa, who admitted that many of her clients were hesitant to access mentoring services because their previous mentors had breached confidentiality by discussing their stories with people in the community. Accordingly, these confidentiality concerns invariably restricted the ability for women to use their mentors to create networks within a community.

In contrast, mentoring transactions and relationships in New York City were less formalised and systematic. The women, thus, reported that the ability to share stories with limited restrictions was beneficial, as they were able to use the confession as a foundation for positive inter-personal relationships with
their social networks. Moreover, mutual sharing of criminal justice experiences contributed to the normalisation of the stigma of being an ex-offender, which benefited the women during their integration process.

**Post-release Redemption**

Through the narratives provided by participants, one of the ways in which formerly-incarcerated individuals manage their interior lives during the re-entry process is through an attempt to redeem their identities. In his 2001 book, Maruna proposed that this redemption of oneself, whereby ex-offenders distance themselves from criminality through the separation of their ‘core self’ or their ‘real self’ from the person who committed the crime, is a necessary process of post-release integration. Sociologist Ralph Turner (1976) classically described this notion of the ‘real self’ as an individual’s subjective understanding of her true nature – a nature that includes inner feelings and impulses that are unsocialised or uninstitutionalised. The process of post-release redemption, hence, pertains to an ex-offender’s way of establishing or conveying ‘an essential core of normalcy’ in order to distance herself away from her criminal past, and to categorise herself with others (who are not ex-offenders) in society (Lofland, 1969: 214). In other words, ex-offenders search their past for some redeeming values that they can focus on during their redemption.

There were two primary ways in which the women interviewed went through this process of post-release redemption. Firstly, some reminisced about their ‘old self’ – someone who was law-abiding, who would choose a legitimate path to earn their living, and would participate in society. During their narratives, this group of women generally concentrated their discussion on the details of their lives prior to their involvement with the criminal justice
system, and elaborated on how those lives could have led them on a law-abiding path. In contrast, other women chose to focus their discussion on the discovery of their ‘new self’, and on the various ways in which they had foreseen or noticed that certain specific actions they had taken after incarceration could lead them towards a new identity. Unlike the former group of women, women who directed their narratives to the discovery of their new self typically did not want to return to the lives they had before their incarceration; this was for a variety of reasons, including not wanting to be reminded of their past interactions with the criminal justice system, not wanting to be reminded of times when they were substance-affected, or not wanting to revisit past emotional trauma. It is also important to note that many women interviewed did not fall into a discrete category of post-release redemption; rather, they would reminisce about parts of their old self that they would like to retain or revisit, and at the same time would plan ways in which they could use those parts to propel them towards a successful new self.

The ‘old’ self

For women whose attention was directed towards the re-establishment of their old self, their narratives largely centered on their childhood, or on other times in their lives when they saw themselves as “normal” (Kate). Both Erving Goffman (1963) and Patrick Biernacki (1986) discussed in their renowned work the idea that ex-offenders revert to an ‘unspoiled identity’ as a way of desisting from crime. According to Rotenberg (1987), this occurs when ex-offenders revisit early experiences to search for their old self; that is, the self they had prior to any negative socialisations. This idea of reverting to an ‘unspoiled’ self appealed to many of the women interviewed. Anna, for example, recalled how she used to actively participate and succeed in high school before being involved in a criminal lifestyle. She recounted that she was “on the right track” during those years, but “fumbled” after the death of her
father. Since then, Anna encapsulated that her life had “always been complicated”, and that she was continuously institutionalised. As at the time of the interview, Anna was attempting to integrate by pursuing trade studies, and was comforted by the memory of her high school success which encouraged her to keep moving forward. This search for parts of their old self to revisit during their attempts at integration contrasted with existing literature on the “pathways” perspective of offending, which focuses on an individual’s lack of previous positive elements due to a long history of institutionalisation. Despite some of the women’s past contact with the criminal justice system, many were still able to select tenets of their old self that they would like to return to.

When reminiscing about their old self, some of the women interviewed identified specific points in their lives when things turned for them. Similar to Anna’s start to criminal involvement, Andrea and Kiara pinpointed to a traumatic event – the death of a loved one – that caused them to be involved in criminal behaviour.

*I didn’t know how to grieve [his death]. I didn’t know where to place the pain, or the... whatever. I didn’t know what to call it, whatever it was. The depression I was feelin’... I didn’t understand that was something traumatic that happened in my life that caused me to be depressed. I self-medicated myself by smoking weed.*  
(Kiara)

This link between a traumatic event and criminal behaviour was also recognized by the women interviewed in Melbourne. Hua, for example, reasoned that her criminal involvement was triggered by the depression that she felt after a relationship breakdown. In all these cases, the women attributed their criminal behaviour to the feeling of being “broken” (Kiara) from a
tragedy in their lives. In terms of their post-release redemption, the women’s attribution of their criminal behaviour to a specific event that occurred implied that they saw their lives as otherwise being free from crime. That is, if it was not for the tragedy that caused their criminal behaviour (commonly, trauma that subsequently leads to substance abuse: Kassebaum, 1999; Langan and Pelissier, 2001; Sonne et al., 2003; Fazel, Bains and Doll, 2006), the women would not have become involved with the criminal justice system. Conceptualised this way, it became apparent why this group of women were seeking out parts of their old self to hold on to.

Even if the women had been incarcerated several times previously, they were not hindered from the search for parts of their old self; rather, the women would typically choose to emphasise their narratives on the periods between their criminal involvement or their institutionalisation. In this sense, the women looked back on their lives as ones with continuous conformity to society’s rules and laws, with the exception of some ‘rare’ periods when they were involved in criminal behaviour. Essentially, the women saw any involvement in the criminal justice system as a “mistake” that had little to do with their core personality, but more to do with their circumstance or environment at the time. Notably, the term ‘mistake’ was repeatedly assigned by Hua, Anh, Dejana, Kamila and Andrea to describe their criminal behaviour. Andrea, for instance, admitted that she was “not perfect”, and that she had “made mistakes”, but the most important thing for her was that she was “correcting [these] mistakes”.

This common reflection, therefore, illustrated the women’s preference to revert to their unspoiled selves, and their tendency to appeal to their core normalcy. According to the women’s perception, these times of adherence fundamentally made up the backgrounds of their lives – the principal image. Times of criminal involvement, in contrast, were foregrounded fragments that
surfaced only when circumstances led them to. Essentially, regardless of the extent of the women’s criminal history, those interviewed believed that they had somewhere an unspoiled core that they could reach into.

**Discovery of a new self**

For other women, revisiting their old self was not an ideal option because they did not like who they were before their incarceration. This notion that some of the women interviewed did not want to revisit their old self was orthogonal to their belief in a core normalcy; while they did not want to return to their old self, all women interviewed believed that they had an unspoiled core they could build on. For instance, when Chelsea compared her old self to her current self, she found that in the past she “never knew where [she] belonged”. It was only after her interactions with post-release mentors that she was able to “explore” who she could be without substance dependency. Additionally, Chelsea expressed that she used to be an “insecure” person who did “not like [herself]”, but was now someone who had “grown”, and had “challenged” herself to new experiences. She confessed that this was who she was “meant to be”, signalling an inevitable return to her unspoiled core.

Another way in which many of the women felt was a necessary process of redemption was to emotionally experience “reality” (Chelsea). This was especially salient amongst women who had resorted to substances as a way to cope with past traumas, who recognised the need to manage personal thoughts and behaviours without the help of substances. This approach reflects one taken by many substance addiction recovery programs – such as, the SMART (Self-Management and Recovery Training) program – whereby it is noted that the ability to manage life’s circumstances soberly is an integral step to recovery. Women in this situation identified that having to “deal with [their] emotions” (Kiara) without medication was an essential part of being a normative citizen,
because they believed that those ‘normal’ in society did not turn to substance use when confronted with life’s challenges. The notion of normativity and identity is discussed later in this chapter, but it is important to note how the women felt they could finally identify with normative groups in society once they had dealt with life’s challenges soberly. This logic, hence, further highlighted the ways in which the women’s imagined normative figure became the marker by which they measured their own transitional progress.

Prioritising their own needs before others’ was one more way in which the women embraced the discovery of their new self. Amongst those interviewed, many indicated that throughout their lives they had always put others’ needs before their own, and that they no longer wanted to keep doing so. This was echoed by the women across both cities as an essential part of self-discovery. Salma, for instance, explained that she had always taken care of her three children, and had supported them through their college education. Ever since her incarceration, however, she had decided to pursue her own dream of obtaining a college degree in order to enhance her level of employability. More broadly, Andrea spoke about shifting her effort into caring for herself instead of others in her life:

*I don’t have time for [men]. They’re not good. I look after myself. I have to take care of me first before I take care of anybody else.*

Andrea’s decision to prioritise herself over commencing an intimate relationship was common amongst the women interviewed – with six women stating explicitly that they were not interested in pursuing an intimate relationship. Leverentz (2014) confirmed that many women go through this ‘relationship avoidance’ stage post-incarceration in order to prioritise their own re-entry process and their own lives. The author stated further that, as
women’s needs often conflict with the needs of others in their lives, their pursuit of normativity in one area can lead to a dysfunction in another (Leverentz, 2014). This compromise was known to some of the women interviewed who made choices accordingly.

In the women’s narratives on the discovery of their new self, the women contended that “you gotta want your story to be different” (Kiara) before changes can be implemented. This statement speaks to the women’s understanding that redemption must largely come from “within” (Chelsea), rather than from any external pressure. Hence, the women believed that transformations necessarily involved sorting through, managing, and overcoming personal – and often negative – parts of their lives. Chelsea, for instance, emphasised that it was “hard” but essential for her to “dig deep down inside” in order to move forward. Jayla, likewise, responded:

> It’s all about me now. I gotta find out who I am. And in order for me to find out who I am, I have to dig down in my hurt bag.

Kate similarly “made a conscious decision” to “change [her] life”:

> Because I’ve been through these crises a few times in my life. And it’s been crisis, get up, try again, crisis, get up, try again, crisis, get up... and this is like, you know, the ultimate one, to end up in there. So, the ultimate one really made me go, ‘you need to get your shit together, man’... ‘you need to get your shit together and give it a proper go this time’, you know... and stop, like, shorthanding yourself of what you could have.

The similarities in the women’s decision to transform themselves internally before making other changes in their lives could be attributed to the
support that the women were receiving post-release. That is, it was possible that the women were encouraged by workers to “dig down in [their] hurt bag” as an initial and crucial step before they were able to move forward. This assumption aligned with the widespread attitude presented by workers in New York City, who strongly supported the idea of self-motivation and confirmed that it was also their expectation of the women. Nelly specifically stated that, while workers were able to provide the women with some emotional support, they were not going to “fix [the problem]”, and that women had to be “extremely motivated” to do so themselves. She further explained that “this was all about self-determination, and a woman’s or a person’s – individual’s – ability to make their own choices” to change. Therefore, although the women expressed that their trigger to change originated within themselves, external sources of support were still needed to ensure that the environment in which they were changing was safe and would foster the transformation. It is, therefore, essential for workers to recognise that, even though they could not be the sources of change, they could still provide a safe and supportive environment for the change to occur.

For the women, a common outlet for expressing what they uncovered in their “hurt bag” was through story-telling or sharing. As explored in Chapter Five, it was seemingly easier for the women in New York City to do so because they were situated in a re-entry community where the practice was encouraged. The women in Melbourne, in contrast, had limited channels to confess. Being able to be “honest” about their past enabled the women to feel “released” (Kiara; Chelsea) from their criminal self, and to get rid of the negative shell that prevented them from moving forward. Chelsea described this gradual process of accepting and admitting her past as “throwing up”.

I never really told anybody what was really, really, really going on. How I really, really, really felt. And all the shame, and
guilt, and embarrassment that I had 'cos in all that time I did a lot of crazy, insane stuff... I threw up. I threw everything up.
And I was ready to take on the world, girl. I was ready. I was ready.

(Chelsea)

Chelsea’s reiteration that “throwing up” was a precursor to her being able to “take on the world” alluded to the possibility of a perpetual identity if the precursor was not achieved. According to workers’ accounts, the presence of distrust posed as a challenge for clients to “throw up”, and many women who could not bring themselves to do so could perpetually be kept in their criminal identity. Even with mentoring programs implemented, trust and respect were not easily or automatically incited. Workers in Melbourne, in particular, reported that the recruitment of mentors with appropriate “life experiences” posed as a challenge. This concern was affirmed by Kate, who admitted that having an appropriate “life experience” was a pre-requisite to gaining her respect and trust:

My corrections worker was, I swear, was about twenty years old. And she was really pretty and really princess-y. And that was hard because... you would expect... I would expect to have someone older and wiser to be able to help me. Also, to be bigger part of me starting out a new life. Not just being a cop there who takes your signature so you can go away and do whatever... and some of the things she did and said, it was like she was like... it was like she just got out of high school or something... wow, you’re an idiot. You’re a complete idiot. And then going back there every time to see her, and she was in charge of my freedom, you know. Are you kidding me? I was like... it was so bad. So bad.
Kate’s statement again emphasised the significance of having a safe and appropriate environment for the women to confide their “secrets” in. This, moreover, underlined the women’s reliance on their exterior environments (particularly, on inter-personal relationships) to influence their internal attitudes, values and behaviours.

In the women’s discovery of their new self, the women acknowledged – but did not dwell on – their past shortcomings. For the women, the main purpose of acknowledging the negative parts of their lives was to then be able to appreciate how far they had come in their journey. Not surprisingly, the general appreciation of achievements was felt more among those who had been released for a relatively longer period, and among those who had had a chance to implement multiple changes to improve their lives. Women who were recently released, on the other hand, were often not in a position to appreciate their achievements to the same level because they could not yet see a significant gap between their incarceration and their current life.

From interviews collected, workers across both cities did not explicitly conceptualise one post-release redemption typology they felt their clients belonged to. Rather, the workers went through an implicit process of categorisation, which then informed the ways in which they chose to assist their clients. For example, if a woman’s goal was to return to their old self, workers would attempt to identify and address events that led to their criminal involvement (such as, responding to issues of trauma, mental health, or substance use); on the other hand, if a woman’s goal was to transform their lives completely, workers would then seek out ways in which this could be achieved (such as, directing them to employment services or to college education counsellors). This approach to service response falls under the broad framework of Risk-Needs-Responsivity theory (Andrews and Bonta, 1990).
Specifically, static risks (such as, past trauma or mental health issues) and dynamic risks (such as, substance use or anti-social peers) are incorporated alongside the women’s needs so that a responsive treatment plan can be created accordingly. It is also important to note that, as women do not necessarily fall into one discrete typology of redemption, workers’ responses could involve addressing both past issues in the women’s lives, as well as addressing ways to move forward in their new life.

**Normativity**

Regardless of whether the women’s central re-entry narrative was on the discovery of a new self or on the re-establishment of their old self, all interviewees alluded to an overarching method of redemption: having the ability to convince themselves and others of their normalcy. The idea of normativity for the women originated from both explicit and implicit societal expectations – all of which were internalised by the women. Explicitly, both the society and the state expect ex-offenders to end any criminal behaviour after they are released; this was understood and accepted by the women interviewed and the women worked towards this goal accordingly. Additionally, while specific normative behaviours are not outlined by society, they are implicitly communicated to the women. This includes things such as, having full-time employment, having secure and stable housing, and having healthy relationships with pro-social peers. Having possession of the qualities listed can significantly present the women as being associated with normative groups in society. Moreover, as the women internalised these implicit objectives as their own, they can appear to have autonomously determined these goals for themselves. However, it must be noted that this self-
determination was influenced by structural pressures to a large degree.

In addition, drawing on the notion of a symbolic border between prison and mainstream culture, the women understood that being on one side of the border (the prison) was clearly not ‘normal’; hence, their post-release transition centered on their attempts to move from being on the ‘wrong’ side to the ‘right’ side. A major challenge during this transition for the women, however, was being confronted with the barriers that prevented them from pursuing a normative identity – such as, having their criminal history hindered their ability to find employment, accommodation, or meaningful connections with their social networks.

For the women interviewed, choosing to anchor their narratives on parts of them that were accepted by mainstream society allowed for an association with those on the ‘right’ side of the border – specifically, with individuals who did not have any criminal convictions. Accordingly, fundamental similarities between the women and law-abiding citizens were highlighted in the women’s narratives. Differences, on the other hand, were attributed by the women to extraordinary (or traumatic) events in their lives that triggered criminal involvement. Dejana, for example, revealed this reasoning when she recalled how she “used to look down” on her younger brother (who was regularly institutionalised), and how her opinion did not change until she realised that external circumstances could place someone on the ‘wrong’ side of the border. After her incarceration, Kamila similarly emphasised her association with the normative side of the border when she expressed that “everybody makes mistakes [emphasis added]”, and that her criminal involvement was “a mistake that [she] did”.

Further discussion on the influence of structural pressure on individual agency is provided in Chapter Seven.
On this, Maruna (2001) discussed in his work that, when individuals distance themselves from their criminal behaviour, they ultimately contradict one of the fundamental tenets of rehabilitation practice – which is the need for one to ‘own up’ to their past. Indeed, Maruna drew on scholars such as Samenow (1984), who famously argued that offenders who distance themselves from their crime suffer from a cognitive error because they deny what they have done. For the women interviewed, nonetheless, their reiteration of normalcy was a way of redeeming their identity. Moreover, it encouraged them to move forward because they felt that achieving a state of normalcy was attainable, as they knew they had been in that position before. Therefore, rather than the dichotomous implication of either denying or embracing their crime, the women just did not focus on that aspect of their lives. Contradictory to Samenow’s judgment, the intentional shift in focus was a necessary part of the redemptive process for the women interviewed.

Furthermore, the need for the women to convince themselves of their normalcy reflected their tendency to internalise social expectations. When the women internally believed that they had a core of normalcy to build on, they were able to manage social expectations according to this sense of normalcy. The women’s desire to convince others of their normativity, additionally, underscored the relational impacts of exterior agents on their lives. That is, once they could convince others to believe that they were essentially normal, they were able to then foster inter-personal relationships, which in turn propelled them closer towards complete integration.

As mentioned earlier, one of the women’s main objectives is to distance themselves away from the self that committed the crime, or from any characteristics that would constitute a stereotypical ‘criminal’. The techniques used to do this varied between the women. For some, such as Dejana, Anh and
Kate, explicitly verbalising their dismissal of, and distinction from, other incarcerated women was a way to condemn the criminal identity. Dejana, for instance, did this when she called other female inmates “feral fucksluts”, and vocalised that she “wanted nothing to do with them”. To Dejana, she was physically and intellectually different to other female offenders:

*I do have hassles or whatever, and trauma and all that, but a lot of the women... this is in general I’m talking... But a lot of the women, they might have drug issues or other issues... some of their teeth might be missing. They're emaciated. Skin doesn’t look the best. They don’t take care of their hair and their make-up. They certainly don’t look nice. They don’t present nice with their clothing... they’ve got a certain way of talking... because I was articulate, a bit more intelligent, and I was making an effort with what I wear and how I presented myself...*

Beyond that, Dejana took further actions to distance herself from the criminal identity by actively “fighting to prove [her] innocence”, and to have her criminal conviction converted. If successful, Dejana believed that she would be closer to having a legitimate position on the normative side of the border.

Comparably, Kate distinguished herself from other formerly-incarcerated women by appealing to a physiological difference. When speaking about her decision to cease contact with those she considered “friends” in prison, Kate expressed that it was because the women wanted to re-offend as they “obviously” had “something wrong with their brains and just [couldn’t] help themselves”. In expressing their sentiment, both Dejana and Kate fortified their position as someone who was fundamentally on the normative side of the border, but was temporarily placed on the ‘wrong’ side because of their circumstance.
One other technique conducted by the women in way of distancing themselves from other prisoners or ex-prisoners was through minimising. Hoyk and Hersey (2008: 68) discussed in their work on the notion of ‘minimisation’. The authors stated that minimising allows for individuals to admit their wrongdoing but at the same time to present their transgression as seeming smaller (Hoyk and Hersey, 2008: 68). In doing so, individuals can reduce their feelings of guilt and hopelessness resulting from their transgression (Hoyk and Hersey, 2008: 68).

For the women, there was a pattern of categorising their offences as being at a lower level of criminal severity. Even though the majority of the women fully accepted their wrongdoing, they defended that their criminal behaviour was not as severe as that of the other women in prison. Kiara, for example, thought that what she did was “not that bad” because it was only a charge of marijuana use. She said of her attendance to a drug treatment program:

\[ I\text{’}ma \text{ be in here with people with all kinds of drugs. All I did was smoke weed. } \]

In the same vein as Dejana differentiating herself from others in prison, Anh emphasised that she was not similar to others because she did not have a substance abuse history. Here, the women conceptualised multiple levels of criminal severity, and identified themselves on a less serious level. In essence, they perceived themselves as being closer to society’s normalcy than criminality. Having a history of substance dependency was, in particular, seen by the women interviewed as more criminally severe than those without – and, within that, those with a heroin addiction was seen as worse than those with a marijuana dependency.
As discussed earlier, many of the women interviewed in New York City were working in post-release services where their past experiences were utilised to assist others’ re-entry process. This group of women, therefore, distanced themselves away from their criminality to the extent that they were now officially known to be on the normative side of the border. Without denying their criminal past, these women’s ‘redemption scripts’ (Maruna, 2001) manifested through their official position as someone on the ‘right’ side. In fact, the women not only accepted their past, this past was needed for them to be in their current position.

*Idealised Identity*

Before their release from prison, the women formulated an ideal identity that they wanted to pursue upon their return to the community. In his work, Peter J. Burke (2006: 82) postulated that individuals develop ‘identity standards’ that prescribe their expectations for how they should behave in a particular social role. For the women, their perception of acceptable behaviours in specific social roles resulted from the internalisation of society’s expectations of these roles. Once the women visualised an identity they perceived as ideal, or as something that symbolised marked integration into mainstream society, they instigated work towards embodying this idealised standard. Therefore, for many, a measure of re-entry success was the extent to which they realised these perceived sets of ideals.

For some (like Gabriela, Kamila and Chelsea), this realisation manifested in them having full-time employment. This was the women’s primary concern when they were about to be released from prison, and was the first thing they focused their energy on upon their release. Other women were more concerned with rebuilding relationships; Andrea and Kiara, for example,
wanted to focus on their relationship with their children after they were released. To them, being a "good mother" was something that symbolised a positive change in their lifestyles. On the contrary, those like Salma and Anna focused their re-entry efforts on returning to study so that they can obtain further qualifications.

While each woman emphasised different aspects of their lives during their re-entry process, it is important to note that the majority of them were attempting to address all aspects at the same time. That is, the complexities of the women’s lives involved the negotiation and management of multiple and simultaneous roles. Moreover, these roles and identities were always dynamic, as they shifted and developed according to the women’s social influences and their interactions with others in society (Cohen, 1965; Thornberry, 1987; Matsueda, 1992; Matsueda and Heimer, 1997; Uggen et al., 2004). Uggen and his colleagues (2004: 262) stated that despite these variety, formerly-incarcerated persons’ commitment to social relationships becomes strengthened as these roles are repeated over time, and that this commitment then contributes to a higher likelihood of desistance.

For the women interviewed their idealised roles included being a ‘good’ mother, sister, daughter, aunt, friend, girlfriend, employee, student, and ex-offender. This meant to the women such things as having the ability to be there to “take care” of family members and friends; being able to develop meaningful inter-personal relationships with others; having the ability to conduct themselves well in a workplace, and without letting their incarceration history intervene with their ability to work; and being able to be compliant to their parole orders. Many of these characteristics the women used as a benchmark for being ‘good’ were again derived from their internalisation of social expectations.
In addition, as the women were often embodying multiple roles simultaneously, some roles were adversely impacted or compromised (Leverentz, 2014). Many of the women’s narratives around the need to focus on themselves, or that “it’s all about [them] now”, indicated an acceptance by the women that the achievement of a goal in one aspect of their lives hindered progress in another aspect. As a result, they felt that it was necessary for them to target their efforts if they were to be successful.

One of Salma’s post-release objectives, for instance, was to become a good mother. However, she was concerned about being able to achieve this role because her eldest daughter “wasn’t very supportive” of her and made no contact while she was incarcerated. Additionally, she admitted that her youngest daughter also “wasn’t thrilled about everything, but she was willing to talk to [her]”. Despite the relationships with her daughters being adversely impacted by her incarceration, Salma expressed that these relationships had somewhat improved since her release; that is, Salma observed that the treatment from her daughters towards her was now neutral, rather than negative. Here, Salma was content with the current state of the relationship, and revealed that, because her family was always “kinda dysfunctional”, she was satisfied with the way things were and would not pursue anything further. She admitted that she “can’t worry about that right now”, and the priority was instead to direct her efforts towards other aspects of her life. In this sense, the women’s idealised standard or their notion of being ‘good’ was a subjective concept that varied in degree between the women. Salma’s pursuit of redemption (through prioritising her own interests), for example, could be seen as compromising her ability to further pursue the standard of ‘goodness’ that other women might measure themselves by.

Broadly, the women interviewed felt a conflict between wanting to develop themselves and wanting to rectify mistakes they had made in their
relationships. Salma, for instance, focused her efforts on the former objective—recognising that if she worked towards the latter objective, she would compromise the ability to develop herself. Whereas Chelsea, in contrast, wanted to prioritise rectifying the mistakes that she made with her family members. This was illustrated when she alluded that her standard of ‘goodness’ was met once she noticed that her relationships with her mother and sisters were “stronger than ever”. For her, the idealised roles of being a good daughter and sister had been achieved because the relationships had gone beyond just simply being neutral—in a way, she felt she had made it up to them. Once these connections were rectified, Chelsea was then comfortable with moving towards developing herself.

In contrast, if the women’s relationships with those they considered their victims were severed, the women’s transition process towards embodying their idealised roles then remained stagnant. This was the case with Hua, whose estranged relationship with her sons significantly prevented any steps towards a complete personal transformation.

"The main sadness with me is not being accepted by my children...
Both my children this year became parents. So, I’m a grandparent. And, I can’t... I can’t even hold my grandchildren.
(Hua)"

What Hua needed from her sons was essentially for them to allow her to rectify the relationship breakdown caused by her criminal conviction and incarceration. Without accomplishing this, Hua’s “sadness” hindered her movement towards her idealised identity as she was constantly reminded of the failure in this aspect of her life.
In this way, the degree of possible reconciliation depended on various factors – such as engagement from all parties involved, the women’s own commitment towards reparation, the ways in which the women chose to pursue the reconciliation, as well as the length of time since the crime was committed, or since their release from prison. For instance, as with Hua and Salma, whilst some of the women were interested in pursuing a reconciliation with family members, family members may not feel the same way. In their research, La Vigne and Cowan (2005) explained that this disinterest on the part of family members may be attributed to their discomfort with the criminal conviction and incarceration. In addition, while some of the women interviewed could reach out to family members once they were released, they chose to wait for a reunion only after they felt their lives were stable enough for them to be ready. As such, the women interviewed were at varying stages of this reconciliation process, and consequently at varying stages of their transition towards personifying an idealised identity. This, in turn, dictated the level of support they needed from post-release services.

While some women’s paths to embodying their idealised roles involved addressing and overcoming the harm they had inflicted upon their relationships, others prioritised compensating for what they thought was missing prior to their incarceration. Anna, for instance, wanted to get “a good job” and “a place” so that her younger brother could return to New York City (from interstate), where there would be a concrete foundation for her to look after him. When questioned on whether she felt obligated to provide this support to her brother, Anna responded:

*It’s on me... not just obligated... I feel bad because I just feel like throughout the years being in and out of jail and not being stable. I just feel like I wasn’t there for him in ways that I shoulda been, you know what I mean? As a big sister. As the*
one that he looked up to for so long. I feel like, I really let him
down, and so... I just wanna be able to be a big sister. I want to
be able to be an aunt to my niece.

Andrea was in a similar situation when she explained that she was
waiting for her son – who was incarcerated at the time – to come home where
she would be “welcoming him with open arms”. She explained that she wanted
to take care of him because she was unable to do so when she herself was in
prison. For this group of women, correcting the relationship mistakes they
made was a necessary step for development. Moreover, despite many women’s
definitive intention to prioritise themselves over others, this typically excluded
the responsibility the women felt they had towards their family members –
who seemed to be the women’s chosen priority regardless of their
circumstances. Workers’ accounts from both cities supported the contention
that women were specifically “the ones taking care of the families, trying to
keep the families together, and trying to rebuild families when they are
released” (Nelly). Nicole further stated:

The women is the nucleus of the family. She’s the provider... men
are a little bit better supported by women when they’re inside.
And women are not normally supported as much by male
partners... women when they get out they not only trying to just
find a place to live – where sometimes you can find a man that
can easily move back with the woman. The women try [sic] to
find a place for herself and her children.

In this way, even though formerly-incarcerated women are released
with a diminished level of social capital and hence need to put the most basic
forms of security in place for themselves (such as safe and stable
accommodation), they still feel that they need to manage other people or other
responsibilities in their lives. On the topic of responsibility, workers in Melbourne further observed that women from migrant groups were especially susceptible to this pattern of familial obligation. Miriam expressed from her experience:

_The responsibilities to family and family members can be massive [for women from migrant groups]... They have more of an obligation to look after [their] parents than what there is in the mainstream Anglo culture. So, the parents will look after the children while mum’s away, but then when mum gets out it’s her responsibility to look after the parents. And that, I can only imagine, would take up quite a bit of time as well._

Although all formerly-incarcerated women appeared to have a common desire to improve their inter-personal relationships, women from migrant backgrounds felt especially expected or obliged to do so. The obligation on the women imposed from their family members, as well as the members of their cultural group in some cases, highlighted that women from migrant backgrounds had a relatively lower level of self-determination on decisions regarding familial circumstances.

Another aspect of ‘being good’ that some of the women aspired to was the desire to be a good ex-offender – primarily through being compliant. In order to achieve this status of being a good ex-offender, Kiara for example ensured that she attended all her treatment classes, and that she passed all the required drug tests. Leverentz (2014) explained that the women’s desire to be a good ex-offender is often implicitly shaped or moulded by post-release service staff during their interaction; therefore, formerly-incarcerated women who wanted to be a good ex-offender must adhere to these standards. Throughout
interviews with staff, for example, many expressed their preference towards formerly-incarcerated women who were “motivated”, were ready to share their stories (so that staff were able to assist), and were open and honest. Additionally, staff interviewed appreciated those who proactively took steps towards addressing their substance dependency; who reciprocated the help by becoming a mentor for others; who were not so culturally ethnic; or, those who took the initiatives to engineer social relationships without much intervention. According to these implicit preferences, clients who did not possess these idealised characteristics were then considered as “challenging” to assist. This illustrated the contribution workers had to the larger social expectations of women, and the women’s internalisation of these expectations, which in turn informed their perception of an idealised identity.

The women’s simultaneous embodiment in multiple social roles also meant that, for some, the prisoner identity still existed and would occasionally emerge. Hence, the women were trapped in a paradox – where, on the one hand, they required more support with their identity transformation, and therefore were in frequent contact with support services; and, on the other hand, by accessing these services, the women were constantly reminded of their prisoner status or identity, which could impede on their attempt at transformation. Miriam cited this as a possible reason for the often brief relationship between workers and clients in Melbourne:

*If there’s no more parole or other contact with Corrections, then they can see [accessing post-release services] as a reminder of that time and they’d want to move on.*

Miriam’s opinion was consistent with the explanation offered in the previous section of this chapter: that women ultimately wanted to move away from their criminality. For many of the women interviewed, therefore, the only time that
they had embraced their ex-offender status was when they knew that they were officially on the normative side of the border – that is, through becoming post-release workers themselves. Paradoxically, being on the normative side of the border, in this case, involved the retention of their past identity because it was a currency for credibility with their clients. This, hence, continued to perpetuate the cycle of their past identity resurfacing in their lives, which raised doubts about whether the women really crossed over to the normative side of the border in the first place\textsuperscript{26}.

Some formerly-incarcerated women accepted the role that their ex-offender status continued to play, and were resigned to the perpetuity of it. This was seen in both Dejana and Chelsea, who had been released for ten and fifteen years, respectively. Dejana, for instance, offered her thoughts on the perpetuity of being an ex-offender:

\begin{quote}
I kind of felt – and I still feel – kind of tainted, if you know what I mean. I don’t feel the same. I feel as if my being in prison – it was a huge embarrassment. I feel like it’s a stain. I feel like it’s something I can never be rid of no matter what I do.
\end{quote}

Chelsea, similarly, came to terms with the fact that she would always be someone who had once had a drug dependency. She said, “You are never cured. You’re not. You’re not. Like, I would never say that”. The perpetuity of this identity, thus, was in many ways already embedded in the women’s lives.

Therefore, for both Chelsea and Dejana, the embodiment of their idealised identities was infused with their old identities that they could not

\textsuperscript{26} The question about the reality of the crossing of the border is explored later in Chapter Eight within the framework of Wacquant’s “myth of re-entry”.

leave behind. Dejana admitted then that, as a consequence of this inability to
discard her prison identity, she had resorted to living “a double life”, where
very few in her social circles knew about her complete self.

And that’s when I think normal people around me don’t understand why I’m like this – why I’m a bit more on edge.
And I don’t explain it to them ’cause I wanna keep it hidden.
So, it’s kind of like... they think I’m weird. They don’t understand why. And I just accept the fact that they think I’m weird because I don’t want to explain to them why. Because the danger in explaining to them why I act in certain ways or why I do certain things or whatever, would mean that maybe they would judge me or maybe they’d make the situation worse for me so I keep quiet.
(Dejana)

The fact that Dejana still saw herself as being on the ‘wrong’ side of the border underlined her opinion that she did not belong on the ‘right’ side with “normal people”. Dejana’s thoughts then hindered her progress towards her idealised identity as her level of self-efficacy and motivation was reduced. As a result, while using normativity as a yardstick could be beneficial for the women in that they had set goals to move towards, it could also act as a detriment to their progress because these normative goals failed to consider the context of the women’s struggles.

Conclusion

Having a thorough understanding of the women’s interior lives is imperative to obtaining an overview of how they experience re-entry. For the
most part, the interviewed women’s narratives were consistent with those reported in existing literature. This included things such as, the women’s reduced levels of self-conception due to the shame, guilt and distrust that they felt; the women’s desire to redeem their lives through revisiting to reverting to an unspoiled self; and, the women’s objectives of achieving an idealised identity.

There are, however, elements of the findings from this research that should be highlighted. Firstly, the chapter has described the notion of a comparison point, and how it affected the women’s self-conception. Remarkably, certain comparison points can lead to the women’s heightened levels of self-conception. This was especially pertinent in the case of a re-entry community, whereby the women in it reported feeling better about their situation after having heard what other ex-offenders were going through. The power of a positive self-conception cannot be understated as it assisted the women to believe in themselves, and to believe that they could attain an integrated status if they followed the right path. Understanding the notion of a comparison point, thus, provided a powerful insight into understanding the women’s interior lives during their re-entry process.

Secondly, the chapter underlines the women’s belief in their core normalcy. Despite some having been institutionalised multiple times in their lives, all of the women interviewed believed that they had a core normalcy they could return to. This finding has an important implication for post-release support offered to the women – as it shows that, in spite of their low self-esteem or confidence, the women essentially believed that they were as ‘good’ or as ‘normal’ as others in society at some points in their lives. Assisting the women to reach into a core normalcy, therefore, could be a crucial step towards their transformation into a functioning member of society.
Chapter Six, moreover, offers an understanding of the women’s internalisation of a normative identity. In doing so, it illuminates the degree that structural influences had on the women’s agency during their construction of their identity. Importantly, although the women’s self-determination and self-efficacy should be noted, structural factors that had an impact on the women’s re-entry process should not be ignored. The balance of addressing both structural and individual factors is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Finally, the chapter underscores the women’s desire to distance themselves from their criminal status, and their goal to move towards a normative status. Notably, the women’s narratives illustrated that the dichotomy of criminality and normativity should be conceptualised as a continuum, rather than as an opposing binary. In this sense, the women’s integration should also be understood as such; that is, the women were not either successfully integrated into society, or not. Instead, they were on varying points on the integration continuum depending on their internal and external circumstances. Similar to desistance, thus, post-release integration is a process, rather than an event.
CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This final chapter draws on the re-entry experiences of formerly-incarcerated women that have been presented in preceding chapters, and discusses the broader practical and policy implications of these experiences in relation to prisoner re-entry. While many facets of the women’s integration journey have been explored in this study, this chapter pulls out the integral elements of transition that were widely experienced by the women interviewed, as well as by those whose experiences the workers represented.

Chapter Seven begins with a discussion on the emerging narrative on identity transformation within the framework of the overall post-release integration and desistance process. Throughout this research, identity transformation was an essential component of prisoner re-entry that had significant influence on the degree and experiences of integration. The importance assigned to identity transformation must not be overlooked if we are to understand and aim to improve the experiences of re-entry for formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds.

The chapter then moves on to challenge the existing assumption that gender- or culture-sensitive responses are the ultimate solution to addressing re-entry barriers faced by specific groups such as, women or women from migrant backgrounds. While this assumption is based on sound theoretical bases, the practical implementation of gender- or culture-responsive policies has not reflected what was originally conceptualised. Moreover, findings from
this research showed that – amongst the intersection of identities that the women experienced – their ex-offender identity emerged as most prominent during their re-entry process, and that the implication of this identity must be taken into consideration. This not to say, however, that the framework within which gender- or culture-responsive policies operate is not useful. Rather, caution must be taken when implementing such policies that can ultimately isolate an already marginalised population.

Chapter Five revealed two distinct post-release service delivery models that were identified from the findings of this research. In this present chapter, Melbourne’s Client Service Model (CSM) and New York City’s Re-entry Community Model (RCM) are explored and compared in order to provide some basis for choosing the preferred model. It is argued that whilst the RCM is a more effective model for assisting formerly-incarcerated women, there are some components of the CSM that should still be employed to maximise the assistance we provide to women. From this analysis, it is argued that individualised approaches to post-release support should be provided to formerly-incarcerated persons under a re-entry community-like model.

The ‘Identity Project’

In the women’s narratives from both Melbourne and New York City, the transformation of identity emerged as central to the women’s integration process. Tara Opsal’s 2012 paper referred to this transformation of identity as an ex-offender’s ‘identity project’. For the women interviewed, the identity project manifested in the pursuit of what the women considered to be a normality or an idealised identity. While existing research that reported on identity transformations amongst the re-entry population have largely been conducted on male ex-offenders, findings from this research have contributed
the perspectives of women from migrant backgrounds in relation to their identity transformations.

The women’s identity project is consistent with Maruna’s work on the cognitive transformation that ex-offenders go through post-release. Specifically, Maruna (1997) explained that the culturally-shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience. That is, when the women voiced their idealised identities in the narratives of their experiences, the women eventually became the autobiographical narratives by which they ‘tell about’ (Maruna, 1997). Hence, having an identity project in itself can help instigate the change.

While the initiation of an identity project demonstrated the women’s agency in changing their lives, it must be acknowledged that the women’s desire to change, or the nature of the changes they would like to make, were highly influenced by external pressures. This manifested largely in the women’s internalisation of society’s expectations of women’s attitudes and behaviours. Specifically, the women were influenced by what those around them perceived as ‘good’ or ‘normal’, and worked to strive for those qualities. A clear example of this was when Kiara expressed her desire to embody the ideal ex-offender in the eyes of authority figures – such as her support workers and her sentencing judge. Accordingly, Kiara’s perception of what these authority figures saw as ‘ideal’ were internalised as behaviours to be replicated by her.

Therefore, the women’s agency to pursue their identity project was actually infused with structural pressures that imposed on their perceptions of what an ideal identity should look like. In other words, the women’s understanding of what constituted appropriate and acceptable attitudes and behaviours had been framed by societal pressures. While the influence of
societal values on personal identities is not necessarily unique to formerly-incarcerated women, it is important to highlight that interactions between the women and their surroundings (especially their social networks – including their support workers) impacted on the women’s perception of their identities. This then means that, although women from both cities described going through a similar experience, the ways in which those experiences manifested was likely to vary in different contexts. Additionally, while some women thought that their experiences were alike to those within similar ethnic groups (Hua, for example, stated that parts of her experience would be typical of that of Asian women), the sample for this study is insufficient to conclude a trend.

For support staff, the implication resulting from this infusion of structural interaction with the perception of the idealised self is then that workers should be aware that their interactions with formerly-incarcerated women not only assist the women with material or emotional needs, but can also inform the women’s perception of what it means to be ‘good’.

Emerging from the women’s narratives of their identity projects was the belief that there existed an ‘essential core of normacy’ – which was evident in the women’s typical concession that their criminal behaviour was a “mistake”. That is, the women perceived any transgressions as foregrounded fragments – caused by challenging circumstances – on their otherwise law-abiding lives. Notably, there was a reference to a core normacy by all the women interviewed, as well as by interviewed workers’ accounts of their clients. This widespread reference offers an insight into the women’s confidence in their fundamental good, and in doing so provides re-entry practitioners and policymakers with a core belief from which post-release support could draw. Furthermore, services to assist formerly-incarcerated women could transform this belief into a re-entry goal (that is, for example, the goal of reverting to one’s core good) or into a source of inspiration (for
instance, reminding formerly-incarcerated women that they *know* they can be ‘good’).

Although the notion of an identity project was a helpful framework from which to analyse the women’s narratives, some scholars were sceptical and cautioned against the reliance on identity transformation as an essential step during the integration process (*see* Irwin, 1970; Abbott, 2001; Laub and Sampson, 2003). This scepticism amongst scholars stemmed from findings that ex-offenders typically have an unrealistic sense of optimism about their re-entry, and are only confronted by the full effect of its challenges after they are released (Irwin, 1970 in Leverentz, 2014: 176). In addition, Abbott (2001) argued that, rather than consciously embarking on an identity project, ex-offenders actually recognise turning points in their identity transformation only in retrospect, and attributed that to be part of a conscious or proactive goal that they had since the start of their re-entry process.

On the contrary, findings from this research revealed that the women went through a realistic and proactive change process. Firstly, whether or not the recognition of transformation occurred retrospectively, the women interviewed explicitly recalled that they had to make “conscious” decisions to change their lives, and to work towards their ideal identity. Without crediting these decisions to the women themselves, Abbott (2001) inadvertently took away the level of agency ex-offenders have in their pursuit of a normative identity. Secondly, having an internal sense of optimism was crucial for the women interviewed as it directly contributed to the women’s positive self-conception, which in turn influenced the women’s ability to move forward in their lives. Therefore, having identity transformation as an explicit project of re-entry was, in many ways, beneficial for the women as the desire to achieve
this goal of normativity continuously propelled them forward\textsuperscript{27}.

Despite these benefits of an identity project, Dejana’s specific circumstance (that is, her perception of being caught in a “double life” indefinitely) alluded to a potential risk that the pursuit of normality can pose for the women’s interior and exterior lives. Legal sociologist Mariana Valverde (2010) warned of the illusion of a binary conception: the assumption that there are exclusively two distinct notions within a concept. Valverde (2010: 219) explained this illusion specifically in relation to the binary between inclusion and exclusion – stating that, the ways in which we unquestionably perceive inclusion and exclusion as binary notions are a result of social and political constructions that falsely reassure group membership. For the women interviewed, for instance, this binary illusion reflected the discourse of their identity projects. In particular, while the women’s perception of a contrast between an identity that is criminal against one that is conventional was a useful principle for their identity projects, the binary conception can aggravate their isolation from communities and can diminish their sense of self. Furthermore, the binary misconception contributes towards an impression of offenders as different, alien or in opposition to others in society. In reality, however, the boundaries between offenders and non-offenders are perhaps much more fluid and less deterministic than what has been perceived by the women themselves, as well as by support staff and policymakers.

\textsuperscript{27} As stated in other parts of the thesis, while I recognise that the women had agency to direct their transformation, I also acknowledge the structural constraints that prevent the women from being able to completely exercise this agency. Therefore, the two concepts (structure and agency) are indeed not mutually exclusive and can exist together in the same realm of experience.
The Intersections of Identities

Even though the research acknowledged that a multitude of identities exist in the lives of formerly-incarcerated women, narratives of interviewed participants revealed three primary identities that formerly-incarcerated women or support workers referred to: the (ethnic) cultural identity; the gender identity; and, the ex-offender identity (noting that the ex-offender identity emerged more prevalent than others in the participants’ narratives). Consequently, these three primary identities should be dissected in order understand how each played a part in a woman’s experience in re-entry. This discussion follows below.

Nonetheless, it is important to underline that these identities understandably intersected and combined to influence the women’s re-entry process. Therefore, for services to be responsive, they need not only consider culture, gender or the ex-offender status, but rather be concerned with how these dimensions interact.

Cultural identity

Given that cultural responsivity has become a service benchmark for women and diverse groups in the Victorian correctional realm, it was assumed that participants’ narratives would reflect this starting point. Throughout both the narratives of women in Melbourne and in New York City, however, ethnic culture featured very sparingly. When references to ethnic culture were made, it was mostly done by post-release support workers from Melbourne, who highlighted the plights of women from migrant backgrounds in the correctional system.

Accounts from Melbourne workers, however, revealed some gaps.
Firstly, in their reasoning for the low number of migrant clients seen in their services, workers in Melbourne perceived that a certain level of cultural integration (into Australian culture) was needed from the women in order for them to access mainstream services. Bluntly put, the women had to be “a little bit Australian” to engage with re-entry support. Consequently, workers themselves might not have serviced those who were ‘less Australian’ or ‘less integrated’, and those whose re-entry journeys might have been more significantly impacted by ethnic culture.

This idea that the women who were seen were integrated to a certain (acceptable) degree was a notable departure from the reasoning behind the introduction and eventual implementation of culture-responsive services and policies. In other words, narratives from interview participants raised the question of whether – concerning the post-release service delivery of women from migrant backgrounds – the principles of responsivity (that is, having practices that correspond directly to the needs of the women) were actually being translated into practice. From participants’ narratives, it was evident that women were still expected to fit into the current mould of mainstream services that were being offered, and that those who did not fit into the mould were not approaching these services in the first place.

Notably, when asked whether they thought that culture-responsive initiatives were necessary for their female clients, workers’ responses varied somewhat between the two cities. In New York City, where no such culture-specific programs exist, workers expressed that they did not think implementing such programs was necessary because all ex-offenders’ concerns are essentially the same. Similarly, even though all of the workers interviewed in Melbourne noted that ethnic culture highly influenced the women’s re-entry experience, less than half felt that culturally-responsive programs were necessary. In particular, staff in this group proposed that formerly-incarcerated
women from migrant groups would be better serviced through programs that catered specifically to their cultures – an assumption that likely had its foundation in the (ill-defined) Better Pathways initiative. Particularly, these workers expressed that current services offered to women were “too mainstream”, and that women from migrant backgrounds would not necessarily “understand the support” that were currently available. This was then the evidence provided for their proposal of more specific culturally-sensitive support.

The sentiment that formerly-incarcerated women required services that catered specifically to women’s cultural needs normalised and reinforced the legitimacy of existing mainstream services as it does not encourage revisions to how mainstream services currently operate. Furthermore, it advanced the expectation that women should continue to fit into the mould of these services and not vice versa. The sentiment also justified workers’ acceptance that women from migrant backgrounds did not access mainstream services because of cultural disparities, and that the women would prefer to access culturally-appropriate services run by ethnic communities. However, this position was problematic given the lack of adequate (ethnic) cultural services actually available to formerly-incarcerated women.

In addition, Russell and Carlton’s (2004) disagreement with existing models of culture-responsive programs in Victoria was based on their argument that these initiatives essentialised culture, and ultimately only served as a symbolic solution to the re-entry problem without meaningfully addressing or responding to the underlying structural barriers applicable to this group of ex-offenders. This research demonstrated the ways in which Russell and Carlton’s (2004) argument manifested in accounts provided by participants. For instance, policymakers’ intention for participants to access existing post-release services was not being realised because many women from migrant
groups were not “integrated” enough or “[did] not understand the service”. In addition, some workers in Melbourne felt that they were unable to really assist formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds because they felt they lacked the necessary cultural credibility to provide advice.

Findings from this research, therefore, revealed the disparity between the theoretical conception of culturally-responsive programs and their practical implementation. It is underlined that principles conceptualised for culture-responsivity did not get translated into practice.

*Gender identity*

In a remarkable contrast to their opinions towards culturally-responsive policies or programs, gender-responsive initiatives were popular amongst workers in both Melbourne and New York City. These workers advocated that gender-sensitive responses could address specific post-release barriers faced by formerly-incarcerated women, and that these responses could improve the women’s overall re-entry experiences. Notably, staff in both cities cited that gender-responsive initiatives would be beneficial for their female clients because of the recognised similarities amongst formerly-incarcerated women.

Much like the criticism against culture-responsivity that it narrowly focuses on culture as a single source of disadvantages, the argument presented above from Russell and Carlton (2004) can similarly be applied to gender-responsivity (*see*: Covington, et al., 2003). For instance, on the one hand, formerly-incarcerated women are found to be unsuitable for gender-neutral, mainstream services because services are typically designed for men, and are generally inappropriate for women. On the other hand, the scarcity of female-oriented post-release support means that women who want to access these services are left with little choice. Although there is a different level of
inadequacy between female-oriented services and culture-oriented services (largely, because gender cohort experiences are more recognised, and the number of the female offender population as a whole is more justifiable for the creation of a specialised service), the issue still remains that there is a broad acceptance of the existing structure under which these policies operate.

Furthermore, scholars warned against the inadvertent essentialising side-effect of implementing gender-oriented, or culture-oriented initiatives (Hannah-Moffat, 2003; Russell and Carlton, 2004) – a concern that also surfaced in the findings from this research. Specifically, Hannah-Moffat (2003) posited that gender-responsive approaches create a false illusion of individuality, but actually operate within the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) framework under which women are continually categorised into groups. According to the author, the common characteristics women presenting to the criminal justice system have as a group are not only regarded as needs to be addressed, but are also treated as risk factors to be avoided (Hannah-Moffat, 2003). Consequently, this results in a tendency to construct women with high needs as ‘risky’ because of a lack of understanding of the complexities and the nuances of their circumstances (Hannah-Moffat, 2003; Sheehan, 2014).

The tendency to conflate risk and needs factors was evident amongst some of the workers interviewed, who explicitly stated that women who had substance dependencies were “challenging” to support. While this was acknowledged as a factor that required treatment, it was also regarded as a risk factor – which manifested when women in this group were consequently not considered for transitional housing because they were deemed too high-risk. Hence, while gender-responsive policies are initially designed to respond to women's specific needs, those whose needs are also seen as risk factors are considered as requiring the prioritisation of the management of risks over the responses to their individual needs. The conflation of ‘risks’ and ‘needs’ could
then unintentionally lead post-release services to a more punitive than therapeutic path when supporting women, and could end up diverting attention away from the real needs of the women that should be responded to.

*The ex-offender identity*

In the interviews conducted, the majority of participants explicitly attributed the (negative) experiences of their re-entry process to their ex-offender identity – not their gender or cultural identities. For the participants, the ex-offender identity came with challenges (such as, housing, employment, relationships, or self-esteem issues) that were the hardest to overcome. Consequently, participants expected extensive assistance on ways to confront difficulties imposed by their ex-offender identity. To them, this was the role of post-release services.

On the contrary, the identity discourse that emerged amongst support workers revealed a noticeable difference between the ways in which workers in Melbourne and those in New York City conceptualised re-entry identities. Namely, workers in Melbourne underlined gender identity and cultural identity to a much larger extent that the New York workers did. In doing so, however, Melbourne workers tended to direct their attention away from the women’s ex-offender identity, which was emphasised as most concerning by workers in New York City as well as formerly-incarcerated participants across both Melbourne and New York City. As a result, Melbourne workers’ attempt to cater more specifically to gender or cultural differences may indeed actually take their attention away from the crux of their clients’ problems: that is, having an ex-offender identity that needed to be addressed.\(^{28}\)

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\(^{28}\) This was likely a product of the organisational/service framework that the staff were situated
This is not an argument against gender- or culture-responsive initiatives altogether. The lesson to be learnt here is perhaps that, with each focus on one aspect of an ex-offender’s complex identity, services can compromise on other aspects of the ex-offender’s identity. From the women’s perspectives, it was evident that they felt the ex-offender identity was the strongest reason for the challenges that they had been facing. As a result, in relation to supporting formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds, the principle of intersectionality should be used as a framework from which to approach post-release services – but the ex-offender identity of releasees should be highlighted.

Towards a Re-entry Community Model

_Reported benefits of a re-entry community_

When comparing the experiences of formerly-incarcerated women from Melbourne to those of the women from New York City, the research findings clearly demonstrated the practical advantages of having a re-entry community as a buffer zone for women transitioning from prison out into mainstream community. According to the women interviewed in New York City, the presence of a community-type network provided an emotionally-supportive and a safe environment for them to integrate into after prison. In particular, being around like peers within the community gave the women positive comparison points as they were told stories of others’ re-entry journeys. This then contributed to the increased level of positive self-perception for the women that, in turn, encouraged them to move forward in.
with their own transition process.

The New York women’s presence in the re-entry community, moreover, appeared to have significantly improved other aspects of their interior lives after release. Aside from providing the women with positive comparison points, the structure of the re-entry community also fostered the women’s inter-personal relationships through a constant involvement in group treatment, internship opportunities, and other extra-curricular activities. These inter-personal relationships were further enhanced by the open culture of the community, where formerly-incarcerated people were encouraged to share their life experiences in order to help each other overcome any negative elements, and advance any positive achievements.

The outlined benefits of the re-entry community also applied to the women’s exterior needs. Firstly, the ability to transition immediately into such a community after prison meant that the women were quickly provided with a structured opportunity to enhance their diminished social capital. Even without the support of family members or prior friends, the women could create a support system through the existing networks in the re-entry community. Secondly, the women would receive advice regarding housing – and, where appropriate, were actually provided with transitional accommodation – and employment, which included information and direction to internship opportunities. This advice assisted the women with fulfilling their basic needs, and encouraged a level of independence as the women could attend to their needs autonomously. In addition, the re-entry community provided the women with a community culture to transition into that was not drastically different from either prison culture or mainstream culture. Being in mainstream society, but with peers who had gone through the same justice experiences, enabled the women to adjust without altering too many aspects of their lives at once.
The situation in Melbourne contrasted with the one in New York City in a fundamental way. Without a re-entry community, formerly-incarcerated women released in Melbourne had a relatively isolated re-entry journey, where they felt segregated from both mainstream society as well as from their prison identity. Importantly, the women were unable to clearly visualise the necessary pathways towards their idealised identities, and did not feel that they received concrete advice on where or how to begin that journey. Although post-release support was available to the women, it largely focused on basic exterior needs, such as accommodation. Hence, factors that could propel the women towards their normative identities – such as employment or pro-social relationships – remained ideals that were seen as less of a priority within the constraints of working with women that were noted by staff. Moreover, while individualised support benefited the women as they were given tailored transitional plans, the lack of a collective identity meant that the women’s sense of isolation did not improve. This resulted inevitably in a heightened perception of stigma relating to their criminal identity, and a reduction in the women’s already diminished sense of self. In consequence, the women’s integration was hindered as they were consistently confronted with structural barriers they could not tackle alone. Findings from this research, therefore, align with those supported by relational theorists on the benefits women can derive from having positive surrounding relationships, and those which have a particular character (for example, relationships which are meaningful where the women and their challenges are understood). Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of the collective in propelling the women positively along their identity projects.

A Re-entry Community Model (RCM) versus a Client-Service Model (CSM)

As demonstrated through the findings of this research, the models of
post-release services for the two cities were fundamentally distinct. Whilst New York had a community-like model, Melbourne operated under a more conventional client/service type model. Under what will now be referred to as the Client-Service Model (CSM), the majority of post-release support services were, to varying degrees, funded by the Victorian Department of Justice\(^29\). In order to be contracted by the state, and thus provided with funding, post-release organisations had to compete in a tendering process for these contracts. The allocation of funding was, moreover, typically decided based on the number of individuals expected to access these services – not on the nature of the service itself. Hence, the ways in which funding was allocated and used invariably affected service structure and planning. For example, some workers in Melbourne revealed in their accounts that they were allowed a limited number of hours per client per week, and that clients were not permitted to be seen outside of these hours. While the blame was placed on the funding allocated to the organisation, it has to be noted that – during the tendering process – organisations chose to cost client work in a certain way (as a result of the competitive service delivery). Nevertheless, it was evident that the structure of the programs set up in response to funding allocations severely limited the ability for workers to thoroughly assist clients in a more meaningful way.

In addition, having to compete for state funding meant that services had to demonstrate particular types of measurable outcomes in relation to the efficiency and effectiveness of their transitional programs. This potentially conflicted with findings obtained from this research about the factors that were considered priorities for assisting formerly-incarcerated women (such as emotional support and assistance with social capital enhancement). That is, while findings from the research highlighted the importance of interior support for women, the priority for this sort of support might have been low because

\(^29\) Now known as the Department of Justice and Regulation
improvements in interior lives were much less measurable. Some exterior factors (such as housing), in contrast, could more easily indicate effectiveness or efficiency in performance, which meant that support services would direct their resources accordingly to address these factors. As reported by the women interviewed, however, responding to these exterior factors alone was insufficient to assist their overall transition into the community.

Contrastingly, the model of post-release service in New York City – which I will now refer to as the Re-entry Community Model (RCM) – was fundamentally different. While the RCM similarly relied on state funding (albeit to a smaller extent as the majority of their funds come from community-based organisations and donors), the structure of the RCM itself allowed for a more holistic source of support – primarily because it did not solely depend on individual workers to deliver all aspects of support comprehensively. Instead, the support offered by the RCM essentially came from various sources such as peers, peer mentors, or others in mainstream society who were involved in the RCM. Notably, post-release organisations in New York City did not necessarily emphasise directing their resources to the women’s interior lives; rather it utilised individuals within the community that could provide this type of support for free. Therefore, it was not certain if the support for improving the women’s interior lives would indeed be prioritised if these extra resources were not available. Nevertheless, this multitude of sources of support relieved the pressure imposed on services themselves to cater to the women’s complex needs of re-entry, and workers would instead refer women onto others in the RCM who had the capacity to assist the women in other aspects of their lives.

Moreover, the culture of the RCM was fundamentally different from that of the CSM. Under the RCM, for instance, women were expected to be independent and self-motivated. Although there was available support for the women to access, the overall expectation was that they would do so pro-
actively and independently. This culture was perhaps a reflection of the broader individualistic attitude in the United States, and the general belief that it is one’s responsibility to utilise available services to help in the achievement of one’s goal. Additionally, the pattern of independence and autonomy from state intervention that is prevalent in the United States – specifically in relation to the provision of welfare – supported the RCM’s departure from structural or systemic dependence. Instead, the responsibility to provide welfare services (including, post-release support) lies mostly with communities and community organisations.

The values underpinning the CSM, on the other hand, centred on the expectation of continued dependence on the state and on post-release organisations to provide support throughout and after the women’s involvement with the criminal justice system. The predominant reliance on state funding meant that the state could dictate compliance requirements from both the post-release organisations themselves, as well as from formerly-incarcerated individuals – specifically, mandating them to pre- and post-release transition programs. This naturally led services under the CSM to be more compliance-focused, which contrasted with those under the RCM who were more welfare-focused and more therapeutic.

In addition to the high level of reliance on the existing formal structures of support, there was a discrepancy in the type of support agencies were expected to provide. Namely, services attempted to cater to the women’s basic needs during their re-entry, but the women themselves needed more support around their social and interior lives. This disjuncture caused some disappointment amongst the women as they felt as if they were not being sufficiently assisted. In other words, the onus of responsibility to offer comprehensive support was perceived to be on services, who often lacked adequate resources to assist the women with all aspects of their complex lives.
Furthermore, the extensive level of responsibility expected of and assumed by post-release workers in a CSM meant that the women were in turn afforded a low level of self-determination, which subsequently affected their self-confidence and impeded their ability to self-actualise. Using Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs to illustrate this point, it can be said that the CSM largely aims to assist women with physiological and (to varying extents) safety needs. The RCM, in contrast, aims to tackle the top three needs of belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualisation. Hence, contrary to much of the existing US research (see: Travis, 2000; 2005; Uggen, 2000), the study found that while services in New York City did pay attention to the women’s basic needs they prioritised the top three needs of Maslow’s hierarchy. This therefore was a point of difference between the RCM and the CSM in relation to the support provided to the women.

In an effort to understand the overarching benefits of the RCM identified in this research, we can draw on fundamental community justice principles that have been presented in existing literature (Sampson and Wilson, 1995; Karp and Clear, 2000; Bazemore and Erbe, 2004; Radcliffe and Hunter, 2015). Specifically, scholars advocating for community justice principles called for a move beyond an offender-focused treatment to a broader focus on ‘community-level perspectives’ (Sampson and Wilson, 1995: 54), so that the community is involved in all levels of offender management – broadly categorised as social support and social control. The contribution of the community to offender management – through the connection between social support and social control – was demonstrated in the findings of this research, where the support provided by the RCM vitally contributed to essential qualities (such as, the support of social networks) that helped direct ex-offenders away from crime.
As community involvement equipped the RCM with a unique feature that worked to alleviate the women’s negative re-entry experiences, a replication of the RCM in cities like Melbourne can greatly benefit formerly-incarcerated women during their post-release transition. In order to maximise the benefits that an RCM-like model can bring, different parts of the community (such as, housing organisations, employment organisations, peer volunteers and community leaders from migrant groups) should be expected to contribute to the social support and social control of ex-offenders. Consequently, the contribution can offer a more holistic continuity of care for ex-offenders, whereby transitional support is provided from pre-release through to post-release in a more intensive and comprehensive manner. This longitudinal model of care is targeted to respond to the research findings that women’s re-entry journey was an ongoing process that required support throughout. As it is, the structure of the RCM was more capable of providing long-term care as it sourced support from various components of the community that the women could access even after their interaction with post-release services ended; this in turn meant that the different sources of support were more likely to be continually and thoroughly involved in the women’s lives. The CSM, on the other hand, focused more on turning over clients, which meant that it was a system that inevitably did not allow for the long-term care of formerly-incarcerated women.

As we move towards a community-oriented approach to post-release support, Karp and Clear (2000) suggested that a central focus of the support should also be community-level outcomes, thereby shifting the emphasis from individual incidents and needs, to systemic patterns and the common good (that being, for example, more desistance; less recidivism; and, more frequent transformations of ex-offenders into contributing community members). This objective was readily achievable within the RCM, as the model was cultivated from a collective cohort experience. In addition, the model armed re-entry
advocates with a structured foundation from which they could gather information and support in order to collaborate to improve current services. Accordingly, while the RCM promoted values of individualism, its presence as a collective group established a platform from which further improvements on the broader post-release structure and system could be launched.

The delicate balance required to manage the benefits gained from having a sense of collectiveness against the women’s desire for individuality reiterated the level of complexity in the needs of transitioning women. In order to extract positive elements from both community-oriented and individual-focused approaches, it is necessary to consider a model whereby individualised support is offered within a community-like structure. The aim to duplicate the RCM in a jurisdiction such as Melbourne, then, must include the condition that individuals are still treated as such. Such a model would, moreover, allow for a gender- or culture-responsive framework to post-release services within the broader community structure.

The Women’s Community Services (WCS) in the United Kingdom provides a good example of such a community. Similar to the RCM, the WCS is a ‘one-stop shop’, integrated service for women serving community sentences (Radcliffe and Hunter, 2015). Within the WCS, women are provided with an intensive, one-on-one tailored-plan support, as well as support through social and peer support groups. Thus, the WCS combined the individualised elements of the CSM, with the collective elements of the RCM, to offer women a gender-oriented, tailored support within a larger community structure.

The role of ethnic communities in post-release support, however, remains less clear. Even though ethnic communities can meaningfully contribute to the RCM to ensure that policies and procedures continue to be
culturally-sensitive, they should not be solely responsible for the support of transitioning offenders. To do so would put a significant amount of pressure on organisations that largely lack the resources to provide the intensive and comprehensive level of support needed. Furthermore, relying on ethnic community groups to solely assist formerly-incarcerated individuals would segregate ex-offenders from this background further from mainstream services, where the large majority of resources is often allocated. More importantly, narratives from the majority of participants in this research still underlined that women from migrant groups generally preferred to access mainstream services for their post-release support.

*Cautions against the RCM*

1. *Net-widening effects*

In spite of the apparent advantages brought to the women’s exterior and interior lives, caution must be taken when duplicating or perpetuating the RCM. Firstly, the implementation of an RCM can result in a net-widening effect of the criminal justice system. That is, the proposed involvement of the community through an RCM can fortify some presence of the criminal justice system within a community setting as it strengthens and expands the systematic structure of post-release services. For formerly-incarcerated women, this may then facilitate the perpetuity of their criminal identity as they are not able to escape the net. Moreover, the extensiveness of services provided within an RCM can result in, not only a wider net of the criminal justice system cast beyond the prison, but also a *denser* net – that is, the intensity of the intervention that permeates various aspects of the women’s lives (Cohen, 1985).

While this effect of the net being widened or being denser is a concern,
research participants in New York City did not perceive the re-entry community to be punitive; instead, it was evident that the re-entry community was a supportive and nurturing one for the women. Therefore, even though it can be said that the re-entry community was a result of the widening of the net of the criminal justice system, the impact of this net was arguably more positive and beneficial than Cohen had anticipated when he conceptualised the theory. Importantly, then, if the RCM was to be duplicated, the central focus of support provision should prevail over any urge to monitor or police participants within the community. Moreover, the structural continuity that follows an RCM may be necessary to offer much-needed systematic support to ex-offenders after they are released, and to also prevent a drastic acculturation process when crossing the prison border. Without a re-entry community, women are released into mainstream society without adequate preparations, resulting in a more challenging re-entry journey that could potentially lead to recidivism or other negative consequences. While improvements made on existing pre- and post-release support are beneficial, the holistic impact of the RCM itself should not be underestimated.

ii. “The myth of prisoner re-entry”

As a consequence of the net-widening effect, the line between prisons and the community can inevitably be blurred when an RCM is implemented. Legal theorist Loïc Wacquant (2010a: 616) attributed this blurring of the line to “the myth of prisoner re-entry”, where he argued that existing re-entry programs are not an antidote to, but an extension of, the state’s strategy to contain and manage problem categories within an allocated space – the space, in this case, being a re-entry community. Although the RCM was not built from a specific government policy, it expanded over time to fill in the gaps that were present in the existing post-release structure. Taking Wacquant’s argument into consideration, a primary concern for formalising the RCM
would be that states will feel more comfortable in ignoring structural issues underlying offender re-entry, as the RCM can sustain itself and can – to a large extent – provide individual ex-offenders with the assistance they needed to integrate.

In addition, Wacquant (2010a: 612) stated that as a result of “the myth of prisoner re-entry” ex-offenders are misled into believing that they have entered into a new space when they are released, whereas in reality they are still enmeshed in “a carceral lattice” that extends beyond the prison system (2010a: 612). Diana Johns’ (2013) interpretation of the concept of ‘liminality’, in addition, support this thesis – namely, despite physically crossing the border into a new space, many ex-offenders still mentally and systemically exist in the carceral lattice. This was particularly evident for many of the women interviewed in New York City, who believed that they had reached their ideal conventional identity because they were now functioning on the normative side of the re-entry community. However, their continued membership in the re-entry community itself signalled a retention of some parts of their old identity; and, ultimately, the women’s desire to completely belong to mainstream society may never be attainable if they choose to remain in the re-entry community.

However, returning to the argument made by Karp and Clear (2000), perhaps it is an important step towards the evolution of post-release services that communities are more involved in the provision of support and that there is less reliance on the state to provide funding. This way, the state could focus the majority of their resources on providing support to prevent individuals from entering the criminal justice system in the first place, and leave the care of ex-offenders largely in the hands of the community. Moreover, having the community as the primary source of post-release support could have a more positive effect on formerly-incarcerated individuals as they feel less division
between them and those from whom they are receiving support.

iii. Governance responsibilities

In his work, David Garland (1996) argued that in its management of deviance states redefine roles and responsibilities in order to adapt to the increasing pressures on the criminal justice system. In relation to offender re-entry, specifically, those involved in the RCM – including workers, communities and individuals – were assigned crime control governance (through preventing re-offending and encouraging desistance). States, on the other hand, were no longer expected to be involved, and hence were not motivated to intervene or to help. As mentioned previously, having the responsibility for social support and control dispersed and shared within the community may be more preferable to the responsibility being solely on the state (which could result in increasing pressures on limited resources), or being solely on the individual – who often lacks the resources necessary to tackle this complex issue alone.

Remarkably, the women themselves readily took on the governance of their responsibility when they are compelled into this framework during their participation of post-release programs. Although desistance was a common motivation for many women, there was no expectations from the New York women that external agents (even their post-release workers) would directly help them desist from crime. In contrast, they believed that the desire to change must come “from within”, and that others around them were there only to support them through that process. In doing so, the women reinforced the individualistic culture present in other aspects of American life, and took ownership of their own re-entry journey. Additionally, the principle of reciprocity valued by the women and workers in New York City meant that the governance of responsibilities had extended beyond the women’s ownership of
their personal desistance process. Namely, the women also felt compelled to contribute to the larger movement of reducing recidivism amongst others within the re-entry community. As such, the broader control of others’ criminal behaviour was also perceived as the women’s individual responsibility to a certain degree.

Contrastingly, it is arguable that formally implementing an RCM will actually take away responsibility from the community as more state intervention filters into the model. In their advocacy for strengthening community involvement, Clear and Karp (1999) argued that having a formalised system of social control could weaken community nets that were historically strong, and undercut the role of community groups, neighbourhood institutions and citizens (in Bazemore and Erbe, 2004). Furthermore, the authors posited that formalising control will continue to decrease the level of community responsibility, as community groups find it less necessary to be involved in functions that are being performed by the state (Clear and Karp, 1999: 38).

Even though the complexities of women’s re-entry journey called for a balance between the roles of community groups, government agencies, as well as the individuals themselves, the participation of community organisations should not be compromised over state intervention. Findings from this research has shown that there was a preference for the post-release management to be undertaken by peer mentors rather than official agents of the state. While participants from Melbourne were not exposed to a re-entry community, they similarly voiced that formerly-incarcerated women tended to shy away from government authorities. In order to ensure that effective post-release support is provided, therefore, the role of the state needed to be minimised.
iv. ‘Ghettoisation’

The implementation of a formalised RCM raises a final concern: the systemic segregation of this group of ex-offenders from mainstream society. Drawing on Wacquant’s concept of *ghettoisation*, where he stated that prisons have served as a new ‘ghetto’ due to the mass incarceration of people from marginalised communities (2000; 2008b; 2009), I argue that a re-entry community has the potential to extend the ‘ghettoisation’ beyond prison and back into the community. For the purpose of his argument, Wacquant defined ‘ghettos’ as “an ethnically homogeneous enclave that contains all members of a subordinate category and their institutions, and prevents them from fanning into the city” (2008b: 114). From this definition, Wacquant listed four essential components of a ghetto: a population perceived to be “tarnished” by dominant groups in society (*stigma*); an external imposition of segregation through elective self-seclusion based on class, culture or lifestyles (*constraints*); being assigned to an area by force, and the area is also specifically assigned to stigmatised people (*spatial assignations*); and the development of a network of institutions that duplicate and substitute for the institutions in mainstream society from which stigmatised people have been rejected (*institutional parallelism*).

According to the definition and the core characteristics of a ghetto outlined by Wacquant, a re-entry community arguably has the potential to be categorised in this way. Firstly, the re-entry community in New York City, while not entirely “ethnically homogeneous”, mainly consisted of people from migrant groups – that is, Hispanic-Americans and African-Americans. Secondly, it is possible to visualise that those within the re-entry community faced some form of stigmatisation by others in conventional society due to their criminal history (enabled systematically in New York City by the ability to check anyone’s criminal record online). The level of stigmatisation faced in
New York City, however, might be lower than that facing other cities due to a degree of normalisation of imprisonment; nonetheless, the presence of stigmatisation persisted – as was reported by participants interviewed. This leads then to the third point: that stigmatisation invariably resulted in an exclusion of sorts imposed by mainstream society, as well as in a self-imposed exile – where individuals isolated themselves in order avoid dealing or being confronted with the potential stigma attached to their criminal background.

Moreover, institutions that made up the re-entry community were to an extent spatially segregated, as they were principally located in areas of New York City with a relatively high level of poverty (for instance, near community housing), and in areas which largely comprised migrant populations (such as, certain parts of the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn). Notably, however, the segregation was less physical or geographical than what Wacquant had described, but more of a symbolic marginalisation – in particular, the subtle exclusion from various types of employment or college education. Finally, the re-entry community consisted of a network of institutions parallel to those in mainstream society, created and maintained primarily to cater to individuals within the re-entry community who could not access these services outside. This mostly manifested in relation to employment, where individuals who were rejected from gaining employment in mainstream society could obtain employment within the re-entry community itself.

While Wacquant’s use of the term ‘ghettoisation’ may be useful in characterising the re-entry community, it implies a negative connotation that does not necessarily apply to the re-entry community. For instance, a key contradiction emerged from the findings of this research against Wacquant’s assertion that individuals in these marginalised societies commonly feel a “collective indignity” about their status (2008b: 116). Although this assertion can be applied to the lowered sense of self initially felt by formerly-incarcerated
women when they are released, the women interviewed demonstrated that there was also a collective dignity that they shared as a group. This shared sense of dignity mostly stemmed from their collective ability to assist each other to overcome both structural and personal barriers to re-entry. In other words, the women felt that they were able to support each other, and ultimately felt a sense of belonging towards their cohort.

Additionally, this collective sense of dignity can be used to push against any external experiences of stigmatisation that comes the women’s way. From the findings of this research in particular, I argue that the women would experience stigmatisation against their criminal history regardless of whether or not a re-entry community exists. With the presence and support of the re-entry community, however, the women were able to push back against this external stigmatisation collectively and helped each other integrate back into mainstream society. The collective dignity experienced by the women, moreover, possibly contributed to their choice to remain within the re-entry community, in order to assist other formerly-incarcerated individuals integrate into society. As a result of the mutual understanding and support provided and received within the community, the women felt a collective sense of pride towards their cohort.

Furthermore, even though the re-entry community potentially reinforced the isolation the women experienced from mainstream society, a certain level of separation may be necessary for women transitioning from prison to the community. In this way, the re-entry community provided a valuable space where the false binary between criminality and normativity was lifted (as women were able to assume an identity that infused both their criminal and conventional identities).
Conclusion

This thesis has offered a framework for understanding both the interior and exterior needs associated with re-entry. Governing both aspects of needs were the formerly-incarcerated women’s interests in transforming their identity towards one that they had constructed as being normative. Accordingly, the women made adjustments to their exterior and interior lives in order to progress with their identity projects. Whilst identity transformation was a helpful overarching goal for the women, however, there was a misconception in the existence of a binary between being an ex-offender and of being a normative member of society. This research argues, on the contrary, that the boundaries between these two identities are fluid and less deterministic than the women had conceptualised.

Also included in these identity projects was the intersection of identities that the women embodied during their transition process. While participants discussed formerly-incarcerated women’s gender and cultural identities, the identity that the women expressed as being the most prevalent and concerning was their ex-offender identity. Findings from this research, therefore, challenge the existing assumption that formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds require gender- or culture-responsive policies and programs to successfully navigate their integration. In contrast, a key finding from the thesis reveals that the ex-offender identity superseded all others, and that formerly-incarcerated individuals in this cohort could benefit from mainstream services if delivered properly. That is not to say, however, that women, and women from migrant backgrounds in particular, do not require tailored support. Rather, I argue that focusing too much effort on gender- and culture-sensitive programs may inadvertently legitimise existing mainstream services especially excusing them from being able to potentially maximise the benefits they can offer for this group of ex-offenders. Moreover, attempts to
create specialised support for this cohort of ex-offenders can further segregate an already marginalised group.

The thesis has also identified two re-entry service models: the client-service model (CSM) and the re-entry community model (RCM). Specifically, the CSM was observed in the practices of post-release support in Melbourne, and the RCM observed in New York City. Although both service delivery models had similar objectives in the delivery of their post-release support, the ways in which they offered this support differed significantly. Based on the experiences of participants alone, it was evident that the RCM offered a more supportive cohort experience; this was in contrast to the isolation that the women in Melbourne felt. Importantly, the RCM offered formerly-incarcerated women an interim space within which they could transition from one culture to another. In this space, the women were able to gradually make minor adjustments in their transition and did not have to cross from one contrasting culture to the next. For the women crossing the border, therefore, the presence of the RCM improved their re-entry experiences.

It is then the argument of the thesis that an RCM should be considered when designing post-release services for formerly-incarcerated people. Even though the experiences of formerly-incarcerated women from migrant backgrounds varied somewhat to those of the mainstream ex-offender population, the prevalence of the ex-offender identity calls for a service structure that could directly respond to this aspect of their intersectional identities. I argue that the experiences of New York participants demonstrated that the RCM is a good model to respond to this particular issue. Even if practitioners were to conduct service delivery from a gender- or culture-responsive approach, I argue that this should be done under the framework of a RCM.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Rethinking Offender Re-entry

Offender re-entry is a complex area of criminology that requires multiple levels of collaboration between the state and different parts of the community in order to achieve positive outcomes (Miller, 2014: 306). From the state’s perspective, this objective is primarily to ensure that ex-offenders integrate to society successfully and not re-offend. A successful integration is similarly crucial from the perspective of the ex-offender themselves – the further along they are able to progress on their integration, the sooner they are able to rebuild their lives.

Findings from this research have indicated that positive re-entry experiences can impact on an ex-offender’s ability to integrate into society. Importantly, therefore, the thesis expands Jeremy Travis’ statement: not only do “they all come back”, how they all come back is of significant concern to policymakers and practitioners. In comparing the experiences of formerly-incarcerated women from both Melbourne and New York City, I recommend that a Re-entry Community Model be instituted in places like Melbourne where such a model does not exist. This model, I argue, is the best model to support offender re-entry and to support an offender’s identity project that occurs during the transitioning back into society.

However, it is recognised that merely implementing an RCM may not be enough to effectively marry the complexities of the criminal justice system and the complexities of human experiences of prisoner re-entry, and that other
changes must occur alongside the implementation of an RCM for it to reach its potential. For instance, workers need to move beyond providing basic, material support if they were to assist women to successfully transition towards their normative identity. The RCM addressed the gaps and issues arising from the CSM to a large extent, the identified concerns surrounding the implementation of an RCM underlined the importance of investigating both structural and individual levels of policies when responding to offender re-entry. Otherwise, any efforts towards individual transitional support may not sufficiently alter the existing structural barriers acting against re-entry to meaningfully assist those returning to the community. It is therefore necessary for policymakers or practitioners to conduct a scoping review to investigate the desirability and feasibility of implementing an RCM in Melbourne. This exercise will also address the concern that service delivery models can rarely be transferred simply from one place to another, and that an appreciation of context is needed to adjust a model appropriately into the site (see: Bierne and Nelken, 1997).

While individual-level concerns can be addressed through the development or improvement of appropriate policies that correspond to an ex-offender’s exterior and interior lives, structural concerns require a stronger recognition and commitment from major stakeholders – including, relevant government departments, community groups, and the post-release service sector. The current correctional and political climate in both Melbourne and New York City, however, presents a significant challenge to the imposition of any meaningful structural changes. Using Bernard Harcourt’s (2012) comparison of the criminal justice system in the United States to its capitalist economic principles, I propose that both Melbourne and New York City face a similar “paradox of laissez-faire and mass incarceration”.

In New York City, for example, policymakers promote certain crime
prevention ideals and improved strategies to reduce crime rates across the city. These ideals then lead to punitive crime prevention and punishment policies that invariably result in over-incarceration, and in dire consequences for post-release integration. Meanwhile states do little to intervene in the challenges transitioning ex-offenders face once they are released, leaving the re-entry community and organisations within it to address these complex issues. Hence, while justifications are being made for punitive sanctions as a means to reduce crime rates at the front-end of the criminal justice system, little is done to prevent ex-offenders from re-offending after they are released. The outcome of this contradiction is clearly evident in the elevated number of prisoners in New York City who are returned to prison from the back-end – that is, for re-offending, or for breach of parole conditions.

The paradox in Melbourne exists where policymakers, in contrast, are seemingly committed to the success of offender integration as they set out or direct the specific ways in which offenders should be supported by post-release organisations through tenders and contracts. Despite this apparent commitment, states still operate a punitive basis against those who offend and re-offend. For instance, since this research was conducted, there have been policy developments within the parole system in Victoria that have had significant implications for offenders. In response to a series of high-profile murders committed by offenders on parole, the state’s Callinan Review recommended that the Adult Parole Board shift its deliberations to prioritise community safety. This subsequently resulted in stricter parole conditions and stricter punishment for breaches of parole. While ex-offenders should still be provided with better support during their re-entry process regardless of re-offending rates, if the state was really invested in the integration of offenders, these ‘tough-on-crime’ policies should be reconsidered so that unnecessary imprisonments can be prevented in the first place. This, therefore, questions the level of state commitment to the success of offender integration, and
points instead to the laissez-faire attitude of policymakers in actually dealing with issues of recidivism and crime prevention.

Furthermore, Wacquant’s (2010) explanation of the contradiction between upstream and downstream policies can be applied to the issue of prisoner re-entry. Here, Wacquant’s (2010: 615) ‘upstream’ refers to a broader set of policies that states deploy on domains such as education, housing, labour, welfare and health care. ‘Downstream’ policies, in contrast, pertain to those that address specific issues – in this context, re-entry policies that deal directly with formerly-incarcerated people. The author’s central argument is that the contradiction between upstream and downstream policies means that downstream policies are constantly undermined by upstream policies, resulting in an ineffective tackling of the issue at hand.

To formerly-incarcerated women across the two cities, this conflict between upstream and downstream policies can directly affect their identity project. Federal, state and local policies – such as, those that prevent formerly-incarcerated people from access to public housing; access to tertiary education (including the restrictions of the Federal Pell Grant in New York City that prevent formerly-incarcerated people from receiving student loans); access to employment (through the availability criminal record details); and, policies in the United States that prevent those convicted with a federal offence from voting – create a significant structural barrier against ex-offenders transitioning towards their ideal identities. These upstream policies, additionally, continue to present a challenge for the broader re-entry community, and can make services providing post-release support seem like an inadequate solution to more embedded systematic problems.

As such, post-release services are currently operating within an existing structure that does not support the overarching value of ensuring a successful
integration for all offenders. Being overwhelmed with day-to-day operations, re-entry services do not have the capacity to address these structural concerns; this can subsequently facilitate an ongoing acceptance of existing structures and can allow them to perpetuate. Consequently, the “bureaucratic charade” of prisoner re-entry continues to contribute to, what Wacquant (2010a: 616) termed, “the prisonfare” – where the criminal justice system reaches to control the disorders in the community that the state itself has created or aggravated through their upstream policies. Although a few of the staff interviewed were reluctant to comment on the (mis)alignment between their organisational goals and those of the state department, those that expressed their opinions largely pointed to a conflict between the two – thereby confirming the contradiction between upstream and downstream policies in their jurisdictions.

In conclusion, it is crucial for researchers, policymakers and practitioners alike to rethink the overarching objectives of offender re-entry if we are to comprehensively address issues of offender integration and crime control. Firstly, when policymakers and practitioners consider policies and practices that invariably affect an ex-offender’s life, the re-entry experiences of formerly-incarcerated people should be viewed as central. Secondly, an ex-offender’s personal identity project must be at the forefront of post-release service delivery, and it must be ensured that relevant policies made are beneficial to these identity projects. Thirdly, while gender- or culture-responsive treatment should be considered when delivering post-release support, this should only be employed under the broader framework of a re-entry community model. Under this model, individualised treatment and support should also be maintained through the provision of one-on-one support. Finally, there needs to be an extensive and comprehensive collaboration between states and community agencies to meaningfully resolve structural and individual challenges of re-entry, and to ensure that formerly-incarcerated individuals are able to function normatively after they are released.
Future Research

Firstly, this research study has attempted to elicit an understanding of the re-entry experiences of women from migrant backgrounds. Although findings from this study provide a unique insight into the re-entry experiences of women from migrant groups, the absence of comparison groups restricted the ability for the study to ascertain that the experiences described in this thesis were unique to women from migrant backgrounds only. In order to confirm and/or extend the findings presented in this research, future studies should look to compare the experiences of this cohort of ex-offenders to those outside of this cohort. For example, the re-entry experiences of formerly-incarcerated men can help us understand how the narratives that emerged from this research are unique to women. Research studies on the experiences of women from mainstream backgrounds can also illuminate a further understanding of the extent to which ethnic culture influences an individual’s re-entry journey. Importantly, the re-entry experiences of other minority groups not studied in this present research (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners and African-American prisoners) should also be compared with the experiences of migrant groups to review if minority groups experience re-entry in similar ways.

As the research has illustrated the importance of the interaction between exterior and interior lives, factors that may influence narratives must, therefore, be examined if a comparative study was to be conducted. Studies such as the ones suggested would also reveal the extent to which the ex-offender identity feature in prisoner re-entry.

Secondly, as the narratives obtained in this study came from women
who have chosen to engage with support services, it did not include women who did not access post-release services at all; hence, the re-entry experiences of the latter group remain undocumented. Future research studies can be directed at understanding the re-entry experiences of individuals who did not access post-release services, who may more embedded in their ethnic culture than the women interviewed for this research. Understandably, the practical difficulty in the recruitment process for this cohort of participants may hinder any progress made in this area. There is, however, the possibility of accessing this cohort of participants through an in-prison recruitment process. Through this process, researchers would be able to speak to women from migrant backgrounds who may not access formalised support once they are released, and compare the experiences of women who access services to those that do not.

Thirdly, an in-prison recruitment process may be necessary to conduct a longitudinal study on the re-entry experiences of women from migrant backgrounds. It is recommended that a longitudinal study is conducted, as it allows scholars to better understand the process of integration and desistance, and identify more clearly if different barriers present to ex-offenders at different stages of their re-entry. Longitudinal studies on the re-entry experiences of this group of ex-offenders would also reveal the nuances of the re-entry journey that are perhaps only able to be alluded to in other types of studies.

Moreover, I acknowledge that migrant women as a group comprise women from backgrounds that are varied. While having categorised them as a group assisted in the understanding of the experiences of the women as a group, the study was not able to discern whether the experiences described were unique to women from certain migrant backgrounds. Although I recognise that this question warrants further investigation, I must also note that even if one
migrant group was selected for a study, there would still be other characteristics of the women’s intersectional identities that would prevent a complete understanding of one group’s experience.

Finally, one of the key findings of this research is the benefits women derived from being in a community-like network, such as the re-entry community in New York City. In order to obtain a better understanding of the re-entry community, future research studies could investigate this community-like network in more detail. In addition, scholars will benefit from a specific and targeted comparison of the experiences of those who are within a re-entry community against those who are outside of it. Therefore, the specific impacts of the re-entry community itself can be thoroughly closely examined.

While this thesis has documented the disproportionate imprisonment of women from diverse cultural backgrounds as well as the significant barriers to achieving a successful return to the community, there are also pockets of resistance and resilience which offer a fruitful way forward for women from migrant groups. Services were able to reach some of these women and successfully provide some forms of support in Melbourne. The re-entry community in New York City was a source of advice, support and inspiration for the women in New York City. It is important to note that improving re-entry at the back end of the process will not impact on the drivers for criminalisation that lead women into contact with the criminal justice system, and these drivers must themselves be addressed. Yet, there is cause for cautious optimism as a result of the positive experiences and narratives that have been presented by the women, and workers, in this research.
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APPENDIX A – Formerly-Incarcerated Participants – Summary of Key Characteristics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Time served§</th>
<th>Prev. Incarc.</th>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Time in AUS/US</th>
<th>Family in AUS/US</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Drug/alcohol dependencies</th>
<th>Mental health issues</th>
<th>Domestic abuse history</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Employment</th>
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<td>Early 60s</td>
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<td>18m</td>
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<td>1yr</td>
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<td>Mother, siblings</td>
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<td>3m</td>
<td>18m</td>
<td>Np</td>
<td>Chile</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not declared</td>
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<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
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<td>5-6m</td>
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<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>Not declared</td>
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<td>3yrs</td>
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<td>Immediate and extended family</td>
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<td>Not declared</td>
<td>Private rental</td>
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<td>Location</td>
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<td>Duration</td>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Immediate and Extended Family</td>
<td>Work Status</td>
<td>Housing Status</td>
<td>Industry Status</td>
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APPENDIX B – Formerly-Incarcerated Participants – Brief

Profiles
The Melbourne Women

Anh

Anh is a Vietnamese woman in her early 40’s. She was incarcerated on a fraud charge. At the time of the interview, she lives in a transitional townhouse in a western suburb of Melbourne. Anh said that she has a good relationship with her neighbours, but they do not know that she had been in prison.

Anh has two young children with her ex-husband. She was forbidden by her husband to see her children during the eighteen months of her incarceration. The children were told that she went to work somewhere far away for that period. As a result of her imprisonment, her marriage also broke down. Anh confided that her husband had always been verbally and physically abusive towards her.

Anh has since told her children the truth about her incarceration, and they have been going to family counselling for the past year. Her children still live primarily with their father. Anh said that sometimes they stay with her, and sometimes she visits them at her husband’s family home. There, she would be physically and verbally abused by her husband’s family also.

Anh is struggling to find work – even volunteered ones; she said that no one is hiring her because of her criminal record.

Dejana

Dejana moved to Melbourne from the former Yugoslavia with her family when she was very young. She is in her early 40s, and has been released for ten years. She was incarcerated for twelve months.

For the past ten years, Dejana has been living in a transitional unit that her support workers found for her. Dejana is concerned that she cannot move on to a private rental or government community housing because of her ongoing contact with police. Dejana also has a hoarding problem, and continues to have ongoing disputes with her neighbours because of it.

Dejana’s parents are elderly and live in a small country town. She visits them occasionally, but does not like to do so because everyone in the town knows about her incarceration. Her parents also visited her in prison, despite her objecting to this because of the long distance. Dejana said that she could return home to live with her parents if she needed to, but would prefer not to because of the stigma.

As a result of her incarceration, Dejana has developed agoraphobia and does not like to leave her house. She obtained a casual employment as a telemarketer and is able to
do this work from her home. She said that she has developed some friendships since her released, but no one knows that she has been in prison. She confided that she is currently in a relationship with a drug user, though she herself does not use. Dejana also regularly visits the soup kitchen for her meals.

**Gabriela**

Gabriela is from Brazil. She is in her early 30’s and was in prison for eighteen months. She moved to Australia twenty-four years ago with her mother and older brothers. Prior to prison, Gabriela lived with her ex-partner; she has since disassociated herself away from him and is now living with her mother in her family home.

When she was first convicted, the relationship with one of her brothers was severed. However, during her incarceration, Gabriela kept trying to contact him and to reconnect with him. She eventually succeeded and her brother came to visit her in prison. She said that she was fortunate that her family continued to give her unwavering support in spite of her mistakes.

In prison, Gabriela took Open Universities online classes to keep herself busy. She also got diplomas in a few other courses in prison. From this, she was able to obtain paid employment straight after her release. As Gabriela was her mother's primary carer, she was allowed to visit her mother once every month. When she was on the outside, she would help her mother run errands. She said that, as a result, her transition did not feel as challenging because she was able to experience the outside while serving her sentence.

**Hua**

Hua moved to Melbourne from Malaysia with her family around thirty years ago. She is a woman in her early 60’s. Due to a relationship breakdown, she started mixing in with the wrong group of friends and her conviction was related to a gambling problem. She was incarcerated for eighteen months.

Hua has two sons, who are both married. When her children found out about her conviction, they decided to sever their relationship with her. At the time of the interview, Hua had been released for almost one year, and lived in transitional housing. The relationship with both her children continued to be severed. When Hua heard that she became a grandmother, she tried to contact her son to congratulate him. She did not receive any response.

Hua has no other family in Australia. She has sisters who know about her incarceration and would try to help her as much as they could. It is difficult, however, because they are in Malaysia. Hua also has an elderly father in Malaysia, who did not know that she was in prison. When she was in prison, Hua said that she would call her sister first so that the prison automated message gets heard by her sister, and then the
phone would be passed onto her father.

Hua is volunteering at a few places relating to her church group. She has given up on finding a job – both because of her age and her criminal record.

**Martina**

Martina is a Chilean woman in her early 30’s. She moved here from Chile with her mother when she was in primary school. At the time of the interview, she was living in transitional housing after being released for three months.

Martina said that she was addicted to alcohol prior to incarceration, and her conviction was because of a behaviour that resulted from the addiction. She was incarcerated for eighteen months, and did not tell her mother (who is her only family in Melbourne) about her conviction. Her mother soon found out and started visiting her.

Upon her release, she went into crisis accommodation for women where she felt extremely unsafe. She said that it was mostly because there were other women she recognised from prison in the crisis accommodation, and she was afraid about what they would do without the security and regulations that existed in prison.

Martina confided that she does not have any social network in the community. She discontinued relationships with friends she had prior to her incarceration. She also had a turbulent relationship with her mother – something that she is trying to mend. For this reason, she refused to return to her mother’s home.

In prison, she was able to have access to mental health treatment, and is trying to continue seeing her counsellor since her release. She is unsure how easy or difficult it will be for her to find paid employment, but is hoping that she will be able to start something soon.

**The New York Women**

**Andrea**

Andrea is in her mid 50’s and is of a Puerto Rican descent. She has been incarcerated twice in her life, both times for using heroin. Her last incarceration was for a period of eight months. That was three and a half weeks prior to the time of the interview.

Andrea said that she went for more than a decade without touching heroine; however, when her sister died, she was so depressed that she got back onto it again. Her drug addiction has also resulted in her contracting HIV.
Andrea is caring for both her elderly mother and her son. While she was incarcerated, Andrea's son himself was convicted and imprisoned. Fortunately, Andrea did not lose her accommodation when she went into prison, and was able to return to her own home when she was released. She admitted that she knew where she could access drugs, but she does not feel like she needs to because she has her mentor from Narcotics Anonymous to support her. Andrea said that the emotional breakdown was what caused her drug dependence in the first place.

Andrea's son is due to be released soon and she is preparing her house to welcome him home.

Anna

Most recently, Anna was imprisoned in one of the city jails in New Jersey for a period of six months. She had been released for two and a half years. Since her father passed away when she was eleven years old, Anna started having trouble with the law. She has been in and out of incarceration ever since. Anna is twenty-seven years old.

It was the start of winter when Anna was released from jail, and she had nowhere to go. A friend of hers picked her up and gave her some warm clothes, because Anna lost most of her possessions in Hurricane Sandy. She lived with her friend for a few weeks, but had to leave because she recognised that her friends was a bad influence on her. She said that she would surely return to prison if she stayed.

Anna left to go to New York City, where she met her ex-girlfriend. Together, they slept in a car, at the train station, and in a crisis accommodation. Anna then enrolled herself into a drug treatment inpatient facility, where she met others in the same situation as well as her mentor who has been supporting her release. At the time of the interview, she is close to finishing a construction course, and has applied for a construction job. Anna currently resides in a three-quarter way house.

Anna does not know her ethnic origin because she was adopted. Her adopted parents were from Western Europe. She said that she understands she may have African or Spanish origins from the mix of her appearance. Both her parents have died, and she has no other family except for her younger brother who lives interstate.

Chloe

Chloe is an Irish woman who was born in the United States. She was in her mid 50's, and was a former public servant. At the time of the interview, Chloe had been out of prison for almost nine years. She was convicted of fraud charges. She said that the biggest struggle for her was losing the job that she loved and had for almost all her adult life.
Chloe said that she was fortunate enough to have an extremely supportive family. They were supportive of her throughout her incarceration, and would frequently visit. Her father also found her a job straight after she was released, and this helped secure her financially. Chloe recently joined the workforce at a post-release service because she wanted to help those who struggle post-imprisonment.

**Jayla**

Jayla is a woman in her mid 60’s who was incarcerated for seventeen years. She was originally from Guyana. At the time of the interview, it has been almost two years since her release. Jayla suffered from mental health issues prior to and as a result of her imprisonment. During her imprisonment, Jayla also developed vitamin deficiencies from being unable to consume the food that was provided. She confided that she could no longer taste most food.

As Jayla was incarcerated for such a long time, she experienced a shock when she was released because the world had changed so much. She also did not have any support network because both her parents died while she was in prison, and her children no longer speak to her.

Fortunately for Jayla, she was eligible for re-entry support – which meant that there was an apartment waiting for her on the day she was released. At this point, Jayla’s main source of emotional support comes from a friend that she had met in the rehabilitation program.

Jayla is determined to complete the mandated treatment program so that she can have her life back again.

**Kamila**

Kamila is a Puerto Rican woman in her mid 50’s. She was incarcerated for two years, fifteen years ago. The conviction was for a drug-related charge. She has two children, who were still quite young when she was imprisoned. Her children lived with her aunt during her incarceration.

Kamila said that she was fortunate enough to have the support of a friend when she was released. Her friend helped get her full-time employment at a pharmacy after she was released. As her charges were related to drugs, Kamila did not disclose her criminal conviction to her employer for fear that she would not have received that job. She said that eventually her employer found out, but gave her a chance because she had been working there for a while by that time, and was trusted with the store.

Kamila lost her job after working at the pharmacy for eight years, and connected with
a post-release service because she was afraid that she would return to selling drugs again. She went through an employment search program with the organisation, but ended up working for the organisation itself.

Kamila admitted that having stable employment straight after prison was what distracted her away from returning to old habits.

**Kiara**

Kiara is an African-American woman whose parents were from Guyana. She has been incarcerated twice in her life – the latest for four and a half months. Her last conviction was in relation to her marijuana use, and she is currently mandated to a drug treatment program for six months. If she does not complete this program, she will have to return to prison to serve the rest of her sentence inside.

Kiara has a son who was looked after by her parents when she was incarcerated. She said that her relationship with her son has improved since she started the treatment program. The program has also helped her realise that she has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder ever since her uncle died when she was a teenager. She said that she turned to marijuana to medicate away her pain.

Kiara is currently unemployed, but said that this was not a problem for her because she was receiving financial assistance from the Human Resource Administration (HRA). Additionally, she also received support from her family members. Her goal was to focus on herself with the programs, and worked towards being a case manager to help others in the same situation. On the day of the interview, she was going to facilitate a treatment session for the very first time. She was hopeful that she would receive a job offer once she has completed her treatment program within the organisation where she has been a client.

**Mia**

Mia has been incarcerated twice in her life – the most recent time being eight years ago for a period of two and a half years. Mia is in her early 50’s and she is from a Puerto Rican descent. Most of her family moved here to the United States before she was born. Mia said that she has had mental health and personal issues all her life, and those issues were what led her to using marijuana. When she was arrested, she was also selling marijuana in her neighbourhood.

Mia was released from prison once before, but returned to her family home and soon got into the same bad habits. For the most recent time, however, she was adamant not to return to the same neighbourhood, and applied to stay in a crisis accommodation provided by a post-release service. That was where she stayed for two years before she
moved into a private rental place of her own. In her place, she initially lived with her ex-boyfriend, but now lives alone with her dog.

Since her last release, she has been heavily involved in activities and programs run by her support organisation, and was soon hired to work in the organisation after she completed her own treatment program. She has been working there for eight years now and said that it has given her both much-needed emotional and financial support.

**Salma**

Salma moved with her parents to the United States from Egypt when she was at a very young age. She has three adult children with her ex-husband, and currently lives with her youngest daughter and her mother in their family home.

Salma was incarcerated for eighteen months, and was released one year before the interview. She said that her incarceration has caused a lot of tension in her family because her co-defendant is her husband, and her mother does not approve of this relationship. During her incarceration, Salma only maintained contact with her son, and did not speak to her two daughters because they refused to visit her. Her son also had to take legal ownership of her property, as well as to take legal guardianship of her youngest daughter. During this time, Salma felt that she was not at all involved in her youngest daughter’s life.

As Salma’s relationship with her mother and youngest daughter was turbulent, she did not wish to return to her family home after her release but felt that she did not have a choice. At the time of the interview, Salma is also still debating whether or not she should contact her husband, who is still in prison.

Salma is focused on getting her own life back together by applying for college and maintaining the job that she got at the post-release support service where she was initially a client. She said that the focus on her life is taking up most of her time and effort, and she does not have the time to mend her family relationships right now.

**Veronica**

Veronica is in her early 50’s. Her family moved to the United States from Cuba when she was young. Veronica spent eight months in prison because of a drug-related offence. She was addicted to heroin. In her experience, it has been relatively easy for her to obtain employment because she does not declare that she has got a criminal conviction. She expressed that she was not guilty of the crime she was convicted for and was just doing the required treatment to get the court order fulfilled.
APPENDIX C – Support Staff Participants – Summary of Key Characteristics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Time in current role</th>
<th>Position title</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Interview type</th>
<th>Past experience</th>
<th>Focus†</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>18yrs</td>
<td>Senior support worker</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>3yrs</td>
<td>Employment consultant</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>4-5mths</td>
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<td>Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
<td>3mths</td>
<td>Resource development and quality accreditation</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
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<td>Women's support coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meredith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>13yrs</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
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<td>Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
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<td>Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
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<td>Group</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nelly</td>
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<td>Director of Programs</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<td>Position</td>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nara</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D – Support Organisations – Brief Profiles
Organisations in Melbourne

African Visitation and Mentoring Program (AVAMP)

AVAMP is an initiative provided by the Jesuit Social Services (JSS) that delivers mentoring support to formerly-incarcerated people from an African background. The service provided is both before and after a person’s release, and aims to establish a close, supportive relationship between mentors and mentees that will ease their transition into the community. AVAMP provides culturally-sensitive training to mentors, and matches participants to them on the basis of several factors – including, relevant experience, skills and shared interests. Mentors visit their mentees on a fortnightly or a monthly basis, and are given ongoing support by the AVAMP Project Officer.  

Flat Out

Flat Out is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation that offers a state-wide advocacy and homelessness support service for women who have had contact with the criminal justice and/or corrections system in Victoria. However, it does not have housing. Flat Out works directly with women who have experienced criminalisation and/or incarceration to improve their rights and conditions. It also works to prevent women from going to prison, and to keep them out of prison once they are released.

Prison Network Ministries

Prison Network Ministries provides support to women who are, or have been, in the Victorian prison system. The support is provided to both the women and their families. Prison Network Ministries offers the following programs to women prisoners at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Prison:

- Fun with Mum – transport assistance and activities provided to children when they visit their mothers in prison
- Craft and Cooking – interactive and practical sessions to teach and reinforce life skills
- Housing Support – assisted transitional accommodation for women exiting prison through the provision of secure housing, advocacy, referrals, friendship, material needs, living skills development, mentoring and encouragement
- Talk It Out – discussion of emotional regulation and individual differences. The focus is on managing relationships, skill development, reinforcement of

---

30 Information obtained from the JSS website at: https://jss.org.au/can-you-help/.
31 Information obtained from the Flat Out website at: www.flatout.org.au.
living skills and building resilience

Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO)

VACRO works with individuals, families and communities at the time of a person’s arrest, through their court process, in the prison system, and as they transition back into the community. It runs the RELINK pre-release program for imprisoned men and women to help them prepare for a successful reintegration into the community. The assistance is provided through intensive group and individual workshops.

VACRO also runs the RECONNECt program that provides post-release assistance to formerly-incarcerated individuals to prevent them from returning to prison. Participants are given a post-release worker who assists them with their goals. To be eligible for this program, the individual must have a higher-than-normal risk of re-offending. Individuals are referred to the program by a Corrections Victoria assessment worker located in each prison.

RELINK and RECONNECt commenced in 2015 (after the interviews were conducted).

Aside from RELINK and RECONNECt, VACRO continues to run the Women’s Mentoring Program to assist women integrate back into the community through the provision of support by voluntary female mentors.

WISE employment

WISE employment provides disability employment, training, work advice and employment support for individuals who struggle to find employment for a range of reasons – including having a previous criminal history. An employment officer works one-on-one with job seekers to help them find jobs that they enjoy so that they are likely to stay employed for longer.

Women Integrated Support Program (WISP)

WISP was an initiative of the Department of Justice Better Pathways Strategy that was implemented as an integrated response to women’s offending and re-offending. WISP offered intensive case management support pre- and post-release to women exiting Victorian prisons. Women were assessed early in their sentence (within the first two

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32 Information obtained from Prison Network Ministries website (prisonnetwork.org.au) and the Corrections Victoria Transition Programs page at: www.corrections.vic.gov.au/home/release/transition+programs/
33 Information obtained from the VACRO website at: www.vacro.org.au
weeks) to establish suitability and willingness to participate in the program. The initial intake assessment identified their needs in relation to their release and resettlement; once the woman was allocated to a caseworker, a further detailed assessment was undertaken to establish a goal plan. At the time of writing, WISP was no longer being offered.

Organisations in New York City

College and Community Fellowship (CCF)
CCF is dedicated to assisting women achieve college and graduate school degrees after their release from prison as a critical step in their transition to fully-contributing members of society. CCF offers academic assistance, leadership opportunities, peer and community support to women. CCF assists women to maximise their potential through education, and to negotiate post-release issues of family reunification, employment, permanent housing and schooling.

College Initiative (CI)
College Initiative is a re-entry program linking formerly-incarcerated men and women with college programs, primarily at the City University of New York. CI guides and supports formerly-incarcerated individuals through planning, preparing for, applying to, and financing a college education. CI also assists students with other aspects of re-entry, such as employment, housing, physical and mental health, and family needs. It helps stabilise formerly-incarcerated individuals become contributors to their communities.

Fortune Society
The Fortune Society is a non-profit social service and advocacy organisation. The aim of the organisation is to support successful re-entry from prison and to promote alternatives to incarceration. This is done through a holistic, one-stop model of service provision that includes: Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI), drop-in services, employment services, education, family services, health services, housing services, substance abuse treatment, transitional services, recreation, and lifetime aftercare. Fortune Society also provides crisis accommodation to released individuals at the Fortune Academy (also known as “the Castle”) and Castle Gardens in West Harlem.

36 Information obtained from NYC Service at www.nycservice.org.
37 Information obtained from NYC Service at www.nycservice.org.
38 Information obtained from NYC Service at www.nycservice.org.
Osborne Association

The Osborne Association operates a broad range of treatment, educational, and vocational services for people involved in the criminal justice system – including incarcerated and formerly-incarcerated people, their children, and other family members. Osborne provides employment and family services, chemical dependency treatment, access to HIV/health care, and constructive and supervised alternatives to incarceration.\(^{39}\)

Women’s Prison Association (WPA)

WPA works with women at all stages of criminal justice involvement. It promotes alternatives to incarceration, and help women living in the community to avoid arrest or incarceration by making positive changes in their lives. WPA provides pre-release support to women to help them plan for their release, and provides post-release support to help formerly-incarcerated women and their families in the community. Services include housing support, employment support, support in the reunification with families, compliance with criminal justice mandates support, access to addiction, health and mental health services, peer support from other women, and budgeting and skills support for daily life.\(^{40}\)

\(^{39}\) Information obtained from NYC Service at www.nycservice.org.

\(^{40}\) Information obtained from WPA website at: www.wpaonline.org.
APPENDIX E – Plain Language Statement – Formerly-Incarcerated Participants
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

“Researching reintegration experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse women”

This letter is to introduce myself and explain what I'm doing. It is also to invite you to participate in an interview with me.

My name is Sitthana Theerathitiwong. I am a PhD student at the University of Melbourne, where I am doing a research degree in criminology. I have a supervisor for my study, Dr Stuart Ross, who is a research fellow at the university (his contact details are included below).

My research is looking at the post-release experiences of women from backgrounds that are diverse from the main Australian population. This includes women from different cultures, and those whose native language is not English. I will be comparing post-release theories in the literature that I have studied, with the real-life experiences of women who have been in prison and recently released. I'm interested in finding out what it feels like to get out, how being in prison shapes women's experiences outside, what helps women transition back into the community, what kinds of difficulties women face after coming out of prison, and if women's cultural backgrounds influence these experiences. I am aiming to explore these experiences with women in Melbourne, as well as women in New York City to compare experiences.

If you decide to participate, I will sit down with you and listen to your story. I'll ask you about what happened when you were released from prison, and how it's been for you since then. I will also ask about any support you have received and how they have helped you, if at all. We can then talk about the
problems that you may have faced coming out of prison, and if you think this has anything to do with your background.

The interview will take approximately one to one and a half hours. After that, if you feel you have more that you want to say, we could arrange to meet for a second interview. The interview will be recorded using a digital recorder so that I can understand your stories in your own words.

Anything you say in your interview will be kept private, within the limits of Australian law. If you happen to reveal information about specific criminal activity, I will not use that information. If you tell me something in an interview and then later you want to take it back, you can let me know and I won't use that information. I will not use your name in the research and in any publications. Information will be presented in such a way that will not identify you.

After the interview, all interview notes and recordings will be kept in a password-protected computer for a maximum period of five years – then they will be destroyed. I am the only person who will have the password to access this information.

Your decision whether to participate in this research is entirely up to you. There will be no penalty or discrimination against you if you decide not to participate. Also, if you change your mind, you can withdraw your consent at any time.

This research project has received clearance from the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee. If at any stage you are concerned about the conduct of the research project, you can contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne on 03 8344 2073.
If you have any concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me on 04 237 14937 or by email sthe@student.unimelb.edu.au. You can also contact my supervisor Dr Stuart Ross on 03 8344 3445.
APPENDIX F – Plain Language Statement – Support Staff

Participants
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

"Researching reintegration experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse women"

You are invited to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Dr Stuart Ross (supervisor) and Miss Sitthana Theerathitiwong (PhD student) of the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. This project will form part of Miss Theerathitiwong's PhD thesis, and has been approved by the Human Ethics Research Committee of the University of Melbourne.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to explore the post-release experiences of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It aims to examine how these experiences are influenced by the availability and accessibility of current support services, as well as by the cultural background of each woman. The study will be conducted in both Melbourne, Australia and New York City, the United States of America in order to compare the experiences of women in the two cities. The findings of this research will be useful in contributing to knowledge and education in the area of post-release reintegration, and the wider well-being of formerly-incarcerated women from minority backgrounds. The study's main source of data are the views of women themselves, as well as the views of support workers who have experiences in providing post-release support to these groups of women from both cities.

Participation

The study seeks to interview formerly incarcerated women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Melbourne and New York City.
It seeks to also interview support workers who have experience in assisting in post-release support to these groups of women. Should you agree to participate, the interview will take approximately one hour, at a time convenient to you. With your permission, the interview will be digitally-recorded to ensure what you say is accurately recorded.

Please be advised your participation in this project is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw your consent at any time by suspending the interview or withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so; and the information you have provided will be destroyed. The data to be analysed will be kept securely in the School of Social and Political Sciences, and then will be destroyed after five years after the thesis report is complete (This is the minimum retention period for research data and records of the work of the research as stated in the University of Melbourne Code of Conduct for research). Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be sent to you at your request.

Confidentiality of Participants

All the information you give us will be strictly confidential. We will be reporting on the information given to us, but that information will not be linked specifically to you. We intend to protect anonymity and the confidentiality of your response to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of Australian law. In the final thesis report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. However, support workers participants should note that it is possible that someone may still be able to identify you due to the limited number of support organisations interviewed. Access to data is restricted to the project supervisor and the student researcher.

Contacts for Further Information

If you would like to participate, please indicate you have read and
understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and responding by emailing Sitthana at sthe@student.unimelb.edu.au. Sitthana will contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time for you to be interviewed.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either Dr Stuart Ross: 03 8344 3445 or Sitthana: 0423 714 937. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, University of Melbourne on 03 8344 2073.
APPENDIX G – Consent Form – Formerly-Incarcerated Participants
CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Researching Reintegration Experiences of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women
Researcher: Miss Sitthana Theerathitiwong
Supervisor: Dr Stuart Ross

Your signature below shows that:

• You consent to participate in this research and have read and understood the details from your copy of the Plain Language Statement
• You understand that this form will be kept by the researcher
• You understand that your participation will involve an interview and some observations, and you agree that the researcher may use the results as outlined in the Plain Language Statement
• You acknowledge that the possible effects of participating have been explained to you
• You have been informed that you are free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or penalty against you
• You have been informed about the confidentiality of the project – that your name will not be used and you will not be identified in any publications of the research – within the limits of Australian law
• You have been informed that the interview will be digitally-recorded with your consent, and will be stored at the University of Melbourne and destroyed after five years
• You can request for a copy of the research outcomes after your participation

Do you consent to the interview being digitally recorded? □ yes □ no
(please tick)
Do you wish to receive a copy of the project summary? □ yes □ no
(please tick)

Signature: ______________________________________________

(Please PRINT name) _______________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________

**Acknowledgement of Receipt of $50 Voucher**

Yes, I have received a $50 Coles voucher from Sitthana Theerathitiwong for participating in her research project, entitled “Researching Reintegration Experiences of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women”

Signature: ______________________________________________

Date: _________________
APPENDIX H – Consent Form – Support Staff Participants
Consent form for persons participating in a research project
School of Social and Political Sciences

PROJECT TITLE:
Researching Reintegration Experiences of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women

Name of participant:

Name of investigators: Dr Stuart Ross and Miss Sitthana Theerathitiwong

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.

2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form, it will be retained by the researcher.

3. I understand that my participation will involve an interview and observation and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.

4. I acknowledge that:
   (a) The possible effects of participating in the interview and observation have been explained to my satisfaction;
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
   (c) The project is for the purpose of research;
(d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be a safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

(e) I have been informed that with my consent the interview will be digitally-recorded and I understand that digital recordings will be stored at the University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after five years;

(f) My name will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;

(g) I have been informed that a copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I agree to this.

I consent to this interview being digitally-recorded □ yes □ no

(please tick)

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings □ yes □ no

(please tick)

Participant signature: ____________________________ Date:
APPENDIX I – Interview Schedule – Formerly-Incarcerated Participants
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Post-release women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

How long has it been since you were released from prison?

Prior to being released

1. When did you first start thinking about the day you will be released? What was that like?
2. What kinds of things were you worried about?
3. Did you go through parole?

Immediately after release

1. On the day of your release, what was it like?
2. Where were you living?
3. Had you made contact with your family? What was that like?
4. Did you have a post-release support worker? Where were they from?
5. What did the support workers do to help you? How much did you have to do for yourself?
6. What happened to the things that you were worried about before you were released?

Current situation

1. What is your life like now?
2. Do you still make contact with your support worker?
3. What does it mean to be [a Vietnamese, Chinese, etc.] going through this experience? Did it bear any effects on your experiences? Was it harder or easier?
APPENDIX J – Interview Schedule – Support Staff Participants
Sample Interview Questions for Service Providers

- Can you give me a general overview of your organisation?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your role within the organisation?
- How long have you been in this role?

1. What programs do you currently offer in your organisation?
2. Can you tell me about the kinds of clients that you see?
3. What is the extent of collaboration you have with other agencies in providing these services?
4. Can you talk about how these programs you offer fit with your client groups, or how your client groups fit within these programs? Is there a need for any adaptation to suit certain people?
5. Do you see a lot of clients who are women from ethnic or non-English speaking backgrounds?
6. Do you think that the existing programs need to be adapted to CALD women? (in terms of usefulness and practicality)
7. Can you tell me about any distinctive or unique features in your programs that are used to cater to these groups of women?
8. In your experience, what kinds of barriers do you think exist for CALD women in accessing your services? Can you give a particular example?
9. From a support point of view, what kinds of challenges do you face that is unique to assisting CALD groups?
10. What has your experience been in trying to sustain an ongoing relationship with your clients? Can you give a particular example?
11. In providing services to this client group, can you tell me a bit about the specific training you may have had, or any policies, practice guidelines or practice manuals by which you are following? Where did these resources come from?
12. In your opinion, in what service areas, or the top 3 areas, where there is a gap between the needs of clients and what is currently available to them?
13. What is your perception on how your organisation and what you do fit within the overall framework of Corrections Victoria?
14. How far do you think the recent proposal to expand pre- and post-release services by Corrections Victoria would go in benefiting your clients?
Author/s: Theerathitiwong, Sithana

Title: Crossing the border: understanding the re-entry experiences of women from migrant groups in Melbourne and New York City

Date: 2017

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/191668

File Description: Crossing the border: Understanding the Re-entry Experiences of Women from Migrant Groups in Melbourne and New York City

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