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Family Separation and Incarceration: an Intersectional Analysis of the Carceral System

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FAMILY SEPARATION AND INCARCERATION:
AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE CARCERAL SYSTEM

by

Kayla Kuo

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

FAMILY SEPARATION AND INCARCERATION: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE CARCERAL SYSTEM

by

Kayla Kuo

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2020
Under the Supervision of Professor Anne Bonds, PhD

Through an intersectional, feminist, prison abolitionist framework, this thesis investigates the types of reentry services available to formerly incarcerated women-identifying people in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and the challenges they face during the reentry process, particularly as they relate to gender-based violence and family separation. Based on qualitative research methods, including discourse analysis and content analysis of 33 reentry service providers (RSPs) in the Milwaukee-area in addition to two interviews with formerly incarcerated cis-women and two Wisconsin Department of Corrections employees, key findings reveal how raced, gendered, and classed assumptions influence the type of reentry services available. I argue that the failure to include women-identifying people in reentry services is a form of gender-based violence that further expands the scope of the gendered and heteronormative carceral state (Shaylor & Miners, 2013).

This thesis concludes with a consideration of strategies to create, and build on, an abolitionist future in Milwaukee, WI, specifically through non-reformist reforms (Gilmore, 2017). By centering healing, community accountability, and transformative justice, we invest in practices that build the type of world we want to live in without relying on policing apparatuses and carceral regimes.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADFC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
CPS	Child Protective Services
BFT	Black Feminist Theory
BRT	Black Radical Tradition
DWD	Department of Workforce Development
LEAA	Law Enforcement Assistance Administration
MWCC	Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center
NPIC	Nonprofit Industrial Complex
OCCSSA	Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968
PIC	Prison Industrial Complex
PO	Probation or Parole Officer
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996
REECC	Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center
RSP	Reentry Service Providers
TAD	Treatment Alternatives and Diversion
TCI	Taycheedah Correctional Institution
TIS	Truth in Sentencing
TJ	Transforming Justice
VAWA	Violence Against Women Act
WI DHS	Wisconsin Department of Health Services
WI DOC	Wisconsin Department of Correction
WRNA	Women's Risk Needs Assessment
WWCS	Wisconsin Women's Correctional System
WWRC	Wisconsin Women's Resource Center

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Chapter 1. Introduction: The Intersections of Criminality, Family Separation, and Reentry Services

The prison is considered so “natural” that it is extremely hard to imagine life without them.
Angela Y. Davis (2003) *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, pg. 10

In her critique of the proliferation of prisons, Davis (2003) documents the normalization and justification of prisons within the United States. Our society’s reliance on prisons is sustained, in part, through narratives of crime prevention and public ‘safety’ and ‘protection’ that ostensibly justify that 2.3 million people are incarcerated in federal prisons, state prisons, local jails, immigration detention centers, and youth correctional facilities across the country (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019; Thuma, 2019). Yet, corrections and social control extend far beyond the walls of these penal institutions. There are an additional five million people on parole or probation (Thuma, 2019, p. 4), or nearly 1 in 38 adults under some form of correctional supervision (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018; Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). These widespread impacts reveal the extent and scope of carcerality¹ which encompasses more than the phenomena of mass incarceration, but also the normalized dynamics of mass criminalization² underpinning incarceration itself. Within a racial capitalist system, punitive punishment, intensifying forms of policing and surveillance, and ‘tough on crime’ legislation have come together to produce prisons as the “catch-all solutions to social problems” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 5).

While the sheer magnitude of prison expansion and the growth of prison populations are astonishing, an intersectional analysis of incarceration points to the disproportionate growth of people in women’s prisons³ – particularly low-income Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people –

¹ Carcerality goes beyond the critique of prisons and commonsense logic of incarceration to reveal the interconnected systems of oppression, social control, and surveillance that manifest in everyday life as part of the criminal legal system. Carcerality will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

² As Anne Bonds (2020) describes, mass incarceration generally refers to the number of prisons and prison populations while mass criminalization expands on this definition to include the interconnected networks and “wider logics and systems of carcerality and supervision” (p. 1) underpinning mass incarceration. Thus, mass criminalization includes the systems of policing, surveillance, and punitive punishment (see also Small, 2014).

³ As Sudbury (2011) argues, there is an essentialization of women within research and prison programming. The use of gender binaries becomes a form of violence, as referring to “women in prison” fails to acknowledge the

in state prisons and local jails (Bonds, 2018a; Gilmore, 2002; Gullapalli, 2019; Schiffer, 2014; Sudbury, 2002; Thuma, 2019). Since the 1970s, incarceration rates in women's prisons began to rise, disproportionately impacting Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities (Thuma, 2019), with women-identifying Black people being incarcerated nearly double the rate of women-identifying white people (Bronson & Carson, 2019). By the end of 2017, people in women's prisons made up a total of 7% of the total prison population (Bronson & Carson, 2019, p. 1). Yet, despite this rapid influx of people in women's prisons, research surrounding mass incarceration and criminalization continues to primarily focus on men's experiences with incarceration and reentry (Bonds, 2020), using an "add women and stir" philosophy which situates women-identifying peoples' experiences in opposition to the "norm" (Eichler, 1980; Sudbury, 2005). This "majority-rule" analysis of incarceration⁴ fails to understand the unique pathways of incarceration for women-identifying people (Bonds, 2020; M. Simmons, 2012, p. 72), such as the fact that more than half of incarcerated people in women's prisons are confined for drug trafficking (Bronson & Carson, 2019, p. 16).

Rather than protecting women-identifying people and their loved ones, prisons are increasingly disrupting and separating families with long-term, intergenerational effects (K. W. Crenshaw, 2012; Gilmore, 2002, 2007; Kilroy et al., 2013; Lawston & Meiners, 2014; McKittrick, 2011; Michalsen, 2019; D.

diversity of gender identity, including non-binary people, genderqueer, gender-nonconforming people, and transgender men who are housed in women's correctional facilities based on their assigned sex at birth (i.e. genitalia) rather than their self-defined gender identity. Similarly, such an essentialization of "woman" fails to include transgender women who are incarcerated in men's correctional facilities. These examples briefly illustrate the role of the state and their ability to "define and police gender categories" (Sudbury, 2011, p. 169).

While my goal is not to reproduce the bifurcation of gender, at times I use 'women' and 'men' in this research project to reflect the guiding framework of mass criminalization and the language of the WI Department of Corrections. Due to this, I acknowledge how this positionality reflects a particular form of institutional (re)production of the gender binary.

⁴ The "majority-rule" analysis of incarceration intentionally focuses on men and their experiences with incarceration because there are, proportionately, more people incarcerated in men's prisons compared to the number of people incarcerated in women's prisons. However, feminists reject this analysis of incarceration due to the rapid rise of population rates in women's prisons and the violent erasure of women-identifying people's experiences. By rejecting the "majority-rule" analysis of incarceration, this framework uses an intersectional analysis to better understand the pathways of criminalization.

E. Roberts, 2004; Sawyer, 2018; Shaylor & Meiners, 2013; Sudbury, 2002, 2005). As of 2009, more than 60% of incarcerated people in women's prisons had a child under the age of 18 (Glaze & Marucshak, 2009). This is particularly disturbing as nearly 75% of incarcerated people in women's prisons were the primary or sole care taker of their child(ren) prior to incarceration (Smyth, 2012, p. 35). When women-identifying people are entangled in the criminal legal system, their families are often separated, creating profound and far reaching outcomes particularly for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people and their children.

Since 1991, the number of children with an incarcerated mother in prison grew nearly 131%, compared to the 77% of children with an incarcerated father in prison (Glaze & Marucshak, 2009, p. 2).

The color lines of family separation reflect the pervasive racism within the criminal legal system as

Black children (6.7%) were seven and a half times more likely than white children (0.9%) to have a parent in prison. Hispanic children (2.4%) were more than two and a half times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison. (Glaze & Marucshak, 2009, p. 5)

These statistics demonstrate how family separation is an aspect of the ongoing effects of gendered, racialized violence and displacement of the carceral system, mainly affecting Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people, their families, and their communities (Bonds, 2020; K. W. Crenshaw, 2012; Gilmore, 2002; Lawston & Meiners, 2014; LeBaron & Roberts, 2010; McKittrick, 2011; Richie, 2015; Sudbury, 2000, 2002).

Once people from women's prisons and jails are released, their physical and social displacement continues because of the stigmatization and legal limitations of their "marked" criminal status (Pager, 2007). Traditional "majority-rule" analyses of incarceration and criminalization do not adequately address how the stigmatization of incarcerated women-identifying people becomes a significant barrier to access affordable housing and stable, living-wage employment, two basic necessities for women-identifying people to reunite with their children (Bonds, 2020). The erasure of women-identifying

people's experience of reentry is highly problematic given that an estimated "1 in 8 of all individuals released from state prisons, and more than 1 in 6 jail releases are women" (Sawyer, 2019). Given the number of people released from both women's state prisons and local jails, do formerly incarcerated women-identifying have adequate reentry services necessary to navigate the reentry process and to reunite with their family? Given this context, my thesis focuses on (a) women-identifying people's reentry needs in Milwaukee; (b) family separation via incarceration and criminalization in Milwaukee; and (c) carceral urbanism which constructed the infrastructure and material conditions for incarceration and criminalization to exist in the first place.

Purpose Statement: The Incarceration, Criminalization, and Reentry Process of Women-identifying People in Wisconsin

In order to demonstrate the urgency of this research, I begin with a brief illustration of the contours of women-identifying people's incarceration in the state of Wisconsin, which I expand upon in more detail in Chapter 2. Nearly 105,000 Wisconsin residents are entrapped in the criminal legal system via incarceration or systems of supervision such as parole and probation (A. Jones, 2018). Like many other states attempting to solve larger social and economic crises (Gilmore, 2002, 2007), Wisconsin relied on law and order politics and the imaginaries of effective crime control to expand the prison system and those contained in them (Bonds, 2020). The impacts of these punitive measures deeply affected women-identifying people living in Milwaukee County, where their criminalization led to drastic fluctuations in prison populations (see Figure 1).

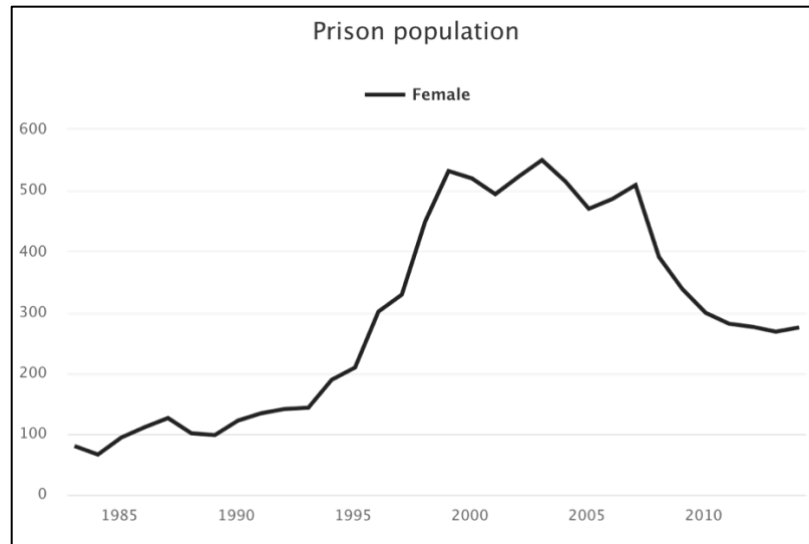


Figure 1. Women's Prison Population Count in Milwaukee County, WI
Source: Vera Institute

The burgeoning number of criminalized and incarcerated women-identifying people led to the new formation of the Wisconsin Women's Correctional System (WWCS) in 2005. WWCS consolidated three facilities, specifically Taycheedah Correctional Institution (TCI) in Fond du Lac, Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center (MWCC) in Milwaukee, and the Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center (REECC) in Union Grove,⁵ to all be supervised under one warden. The stated purpose of WWCS is to streamline gender-responsive care to incarcerated people in women's prisons via:

a safe and secure confinement in an environment which is gender responsive and which utilizes gender-specific guiding principles to assist in positive growth through treatment, education,

⁵ It is necessary to point out the meanings of these correctional facilities. While TCI is located in Fond du Lac, it has a close proximity to the Town of Taycheedah. In 1837, James Duane Doty "purchased" the land (S. Cooper, 2019, p. 5). According to the Wisconsin Historical Society (2017), Taycheedah was a camping ground for Native American/Indian American tribes; however, Doty named area Taycheedah to mean "our home" (S. Cooper, 2019, p. 5). The (re)naming of TCI reflects the historical and ongoing effects of colonialization, racial violence, and spatial displacement across time and land. The second correctional facility was also renamed after Robert E. Ellsworth due to his "illustrious 32-year career with the Department of Corrections" (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, n.d.). The renaming of these correctional facilities deepens the argument that prisons are places of reproductive violence.

appropriate supervision, thereby fostering a successful transition for their return to their families and communities. (S. Cooper, 2019, p. 3)

WWCS's engages with gender-responsive programs, which integrate women's criminogenic pathways of incarceration, such as abuse, trauma, and addiction, to more effectively meet women's unique needs in prison (Bloom, 1999; Chesney-Lind, 1989; S. S. Covington & Bloom, 2007). However, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, gender-responsive programs have been significantly critiqued by feminist and abolitionist scholars due to the reliance on, and expansion of, the existing criminal legal system.

As abolitionist understandings of incarceration and the prison system reveal, there is nothing fundamentally *safe* or *secure* about the violences of incarceration in a racist, misogynist, and heteropatriarchal society (A. Y. Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007; Richie, 2012). While the WWCS justifies the incarceration of people in women's prisons through commonsense ideas of "protection" and "safety," confinement is a form of violence encountered by incarcerated people in women's prisons, many of whom are convicted for acts of survival and who have experienced trauma and health issues prior to confinement (K. W. Crenshaw, 2012). WWCS reported an estimated 58 – 90% of people had a mild to serious mental health diagnosis (State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2020); yet, within the prison, most have minimal access to mental health care and treatment (Bakken & Visher, 2018; Forrester et al., 2014; Gonzalez & Connell, 2014). In addition, nearly 48% of women-identifying people support dependent children (State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2017, p. 6) in which most family support is provided via parenting classes instead of tangible ways to reunite families during incarceration and the post-release process.

Furthermore, like many correctional facilities in this era of mass criminalization, the living conditions within WWCS are extremely horrifying (see Hrodey, 2015; Pasque, 2018; Rigby, 2007; Schuldt, 2017). This is, in part, due to ongoing prison overcrowding despite the seemingly continuous construction of remote correctional facilities to incarcerate growing numbers of people in Wisconsin and

beyond (Bonds, 2015; Gilmore, 2007; Lawson et al., 2008). In Wisconsin, measuring a prison’s capacity takes into account:

- (a) the number of inmates that a correctional institution can house; or (b) an institution’s capacity to provide non-housing functions such as food service, medical care, recreation, visiting, inmate programs, segregation housing and facility administration. (Carmichael, 2017, p. 4)

Based on this definition, WWCS operates well-beyond its capacity (see

Table 1) where prison overcrowding means more than multiple people cramped into a cell, it also means an inability to provide basic needs and educational programming to people in women’s prisons.

Table 1. Wisconsin Women's Correctional System, Capacity vs. Actual

Wisconsin Women’s Correctional System (WWCS)	Year Opened	Number of Acres	Bed Capacity	06/28/2019 Incarcerated Population
Milwaukee Women’s Correctional Center (MWCC)	2003	1	109	105
Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center (REECC)	1989	40	376	471
Taycheedah Correctional Institution (TCI)	1921 ⁶	50	752	927

The consequences of prison overcapacity also fail to provide incarcerated people at WWCS with a “safe and secure confinement” (Pasque, 2018) due to the severe reduction in preparation and post-release planning. The latter is a particularly urgent need in Wisconsin given that an estimated 35,741

⁶ In 1912, the Wisconsin Industrial Home for Women opened in Fond du Lac. Nearly 10 years later, in 1931, construction began on the Wisconsin Prison for Women which was located kitty-corner to the Wisconsin Industrial Home. Even though these institutions both housed women on the same property, they operated separated until 1945 when the facilities consolidated as the Wisconsin Home for Women. The prison was officially named TCI in 1975 (DOC Taycheedah Correctional Institution, 2019).

people are released from women's prisons and jails each year (Sawyer, 2019) with limited and inadequate programming (Pasque, 2018). The marginalization of women-identifying people, including limited reentry services, is reflected in the media treatment of incarcerated people in women's prisons, which makes women-identifying people ancillary to the story of incarceration, rather than directly impacted. Therefore, I argue that reentry services in Milwaukee fail to provide women-identifying people with practical material support and resources for family reunification.

Research Questions, Methodology, and Positionality

Through an intersectional, feminist, prison abolitionist framework, this study investigates the types of reentry services available for women-identifying people and the challenges they face during the reentry process, particularly as they relate to gender-based violence and family separation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. With these goals in mind, the project is structured around the following research questions:

1. What are the specific challenges facing formerly incarcerated⁷ women-identifying people in Milwaukee, Wisconsin?
2. What types of reentry services are available to women-identifying people and their families in Milwaukee, Wisconsin?
3. In what ways do formerly incarcerated women-identifying people experience and respond to family separation resulting from incarceration?
4. How does an intersectional, feminist, prison abolitionist framework address the incarceration and criminalization of women-identifying people and its impacts on family separation?

⁷ My use of formerly incarcerated person reflects the terminology used by activists organizing for social change through both prison reform and prison abolition located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; however, I acknowledge that not all formerly incarcerated people identify with this term and political position.

In order to answer these questions, I conducted qualitative research between September 2019 and March 2020, using the specific methods of discourse and content analysis of 33 Milwaukee-area reentry service providers (RSPs) in addition to four semi-structured interviews. Through the discourse and content analysis, I examine the types of services made available by RSPs, how reentry organizations frame and deliver their services, and how women-identifying people and their children are represented (if at all) by reentry organizations, specifically focusing on discourse around gender, crime, criminalization, and the reentry process. In addition, I draw from interviews with two formerly incarcerated cis-women and two Wisconsin Department of Corrections officials whose work at the Wisconsin Women's Resource Center (WWRC) provides a critical transition between incarceration and the reentry process as they prepare people from WWRC for their release. Through these two interview groups, I draw out the contradictions of reentry services between state officials and women-identifying people with direct experience navigating the reentry process in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Ways of Knowing: Interrogating Power Dynamics and Complicating Positionality

Throughout this research process, I continue to grapple with my positionality, particularly as a Taiwanese American,⁸ cis-woman researcher who has not experienced incarceration or reentry. This has prompted reflexivity and engagement with complicated questions such as: (a) how might I be reproducing an oppressive structure within this research? (b) what power and authority do I have to research this topic? and, (c) what are the benefits and limitations of being an insider/outsider to this research? In what follows, I struggle in providing a definite answer; however, I am guided by post-structuralist feminist reflections which destabilize the insider/outsider binary and my positionality becomes grounded in relationality.

⁸ While I am a woman of color, it is clear that the system of mass incarceration and criminalization differently affects all woman of color, specifically targeting Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people. It is for this reason that I highlight my racial identity, and the ways in which my positionality and lived experiences have granted me certain privileges and power, aligning with white privilege.

My role as a graduate student researcher included writing interview questions, recruiting interviewees, scheduling interviews, analyzing data, and writing the key findings which was conducted under the guidance and mentorship of feminist geographer and prison abolitionist, Dr. Anne Bonds. However, this work was, in large part, inspired by the advocacy and activism efforts of prison abolitionists, including incarcerated people, formerly incarcerated activists, and allies in Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Their resistance significantly shaped my understandings of incarceration, specifically the racialized, gendered, and classed aspects of incarceration and criminalization and the failures of local, state, and federal policies premised on notions of “safety” that depend upon the caging of people. I say this because my positionality as a researcher is embodied by the activists around me, particularly those pushing for, and advancing, prison abolitionist practices. Yet, despite their grounded experiences with incarceration and resistance to it, traditional forms of knowledge frequently do not cite these organizers as valid producers of knowledge and expertise (Cruz, 2008; Pollack, 2019; Stone-Mediatore, 1998; Sturm & Tae, 2017). In following Mariolga Reyes Cruz’s (2008) call for the decolonization of knowledge, I also ask: why can I not cite individuals’ lived experiences and their embodiment of theoretical frameworks? Why are their voices absent and how might their stories and experiences be extracted and exploited for research?

This leads to my own questioning of knowledge, positionality, authority, and research. In order to challenge and decolonize knowledge production and power dynamics inherent to the research process, I bring feminist ethics, reflexivity, and lived experiences into this thesis project by centering on women’s experiences with the criminal legal system. The qualitative methods also provide a platform to listen to the voices of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people rather than trying to advance my own agenda as a researcher. This thesis also attempts to integrate a form of collaboration with formerly incarcerated women-identifying people by providing them with a chance to review and provide feedback on the interview transcription and empirical chapter. This not only holds me accountability as

a researcher to accurately represent the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people within this research project, it also provides space for dialogue between the participants and myself. As this project is grounded in prison abolitionist activism within Milwaukee, the purpose of this project is more than completing the academic rigors and 'proving' myself as a researcher; instead, I hope this research can be used to uplift the voices of formerly incarcerated people, to challenge hegemonic notions of knowledge, power, and expertise, and to provide material evidence to apply for grant funding and educational resources.

My research is governed by the UWM Institutional Review Board (IRB) where I am positioned as the "authoritative" researcher and knower of reentry services for formerly incarcerated women in Milwaukee (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010). However, I argue how this institutional approval and backing does not suddenly make me an "authoritative" researcher, nor do I want to be. Most notably, there are inherent power dynamics at play throughout this research process (M Alexander & Mohanty, 2010; Cruz, 2008; Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Mohammad, 2001; Spencer-Wood, 2016; Valentine, 2002). As mentioned above, I have not directly experienced incarceration or the reentry process. For these reasons, I follow bell hooks' (2014) and her resistance to the presented position of "authority" (p. 46). Instead, my goal is to contribute scholarship and work that is motivated by the voices of formerly incarcerated women and their valuable knowledge. hooks' (2014) notion of authority challenges the insider/outsider dualism; in aligning with poststructuralist scholars, this binary fails to situate the researcher's multifarious relationality with participants and larger politics of domination. For example, while I do not have 'insider' experience or authority to speak about the violence within the carceral system, I do have experience navigating the racism and sexism within everyday life. While this project focuses on women-identifying people's experience with incarceration and reentry, we all hold various identity categories, knowledges, and experiences that situate us within and between an insider and outsider status.

Overview of Theoretical Frameworks

The project's theoretical framework draws from the intellectual insights of critical carceral studies, feminist political economy, Black feminism, and abolitionist activism and scholarship. I combine and engage with these theories in order to interrogate the linkages between gender, racism, and carcerality, which I expand on in Chapter 2. I am guided by Black intellectuals and critical feminist scholars' rejection of the essentialization of women and the "majority-rule" analysis of criminalization (Bonds, 2020; Richie, 2001; M. Simmons, 2012) to build an intersectional analysis that takes seriously how, as Beth Richie (2001) asserts, gender is "important variable in reentry" (p. 368).

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality⁹ acknowledges and dismantles the interlocking forms of power that "(re)produce unjust social relations" (Chown & Malcoe, 2017, p. 447) by centering the lived experiences of an individual's social location and situated knowledge (Collins, 2000). This situated knowledge recognizes the differences between lived experiences based on the matrices of domination (Collins, 2000). Intersectionality, thus, sheds light on the "raced, gendered, heterosexist, and classed ideologies and practices" (Parker, 2011, p. 434) that shape both the discourse and embodiment of lived experiences. Similarly, as Bunjun (2010) highlights, "the contribution of intersectionality is that it centres the interaction between diverse positions of marginality and dominance as social processes while exposing how these processes become invoked within and across power relations" (p. 116). Based on this scholarship, an intersectional analysis is necessary to acknowledge the structures of oppression and domination (Collins, 2000; K. Crenshaw, 1991; Dhamoon, 2011; hooks, 2014) and to uncover the interpersonal and institutional processes of inequality, such as racism, misogyny, classism, and white supremacy¹⁰ rampant within the carceral system. In other words,

⁹ While intersectionality was coined as an analytic by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Black intellectuals have conceptualized the interlocking mechanisms of oppression based on their lived experiences (Combahee River Collective, 1982; Lorde, 1984).

¹⁰ The term 'white supremacy' is based on legal scholar Frances Lee Ansley's (1989) conceptualization in which it is defined as the "political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and

my framework is supported by an intersectional, feminist, prison abolitionist analytic that understands the interlocking racialized, gendered, and classed aspects that are secured through systems of carcerality, control, surveillance, and separation.

First, I draw from the insights of critical carceral studies and feminist political economy to better understand the ongoing racialized, gendered structures undergird carceral urban development in Milwaukee. The general public deems prisons places of rehabilitation, justified by principles of safety, protection, and social order; however, this rhetoric rests upon a “tough on crime” culture that obscures the social, political, and economic construction of crime and safety (Muhammad, 2010). In response, critical carceral studies grapples with the exploitation, physical and social dispossession, and surplus of racialized subjects for capital accumulation, while feminist political economy situates gendered surplus subjects in relation to social reproduction and the benefits to the market and the state.

Second, I situate my work within theories of abolition and Black feminism in which their scholarship challenges us to envision a world beyond prisons and carcerality. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore described in a *New York Times* article, prison abolition is:

both a long-term goal and a practical policy program, calling for government investment in jobs, education, housing, health care — all the elements that are required for a productive and violence-free life. Abolition means not just the closing of prisons but the presence, instead, of vital systems of support that many communities lack. (Kushner, 2019)

Understood this way, abolition is not only dismantling the interconnected web of surveillance and punishment that undergirds mass incarceration and criminalization (A. Y. Davis, 1998; M. Davis, 1995).

Rather, at its core, prison abolition is about building and investing in the type of world we want to live in. I draw from these guiding frameworks and the knowledge that intersectional, feminist, prison

material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings” (p. 1024).

abolitionist scholars have developed about the intersectional, intergenerational impacts of incarceration. First, I draw from the insights of critical carceral studies and feminist political economy to better understand the ongoing racialized, gendered structures undergird carceral urban development in Milwaukee. Second, I situate my work within theories of abolition and Black feminist thought that are grounded in collective liberation to consider how we might develop the kinds of “vital systems of support” Gilmore describes to challenges systems of race, gender, and incarceration. Ultimately, this thesis itself is an embodied form of feminist, prison abolitionist praxis, as will be discussed throughout the chapters.

Organization of the Thesis

In what follows, I provide an overview of the thesis. Chapter 2 discusses my theoretical frameworks in more detail, specifically considering how scholars of critical carceral studies, feminist political economy, Black feminism, and prison abolition understand the linkages between racism, capitalism, carcerality, and the neoliberal city. These theories intentionally center feminist and anti-racist approaches which provide a foundational analytic to better understand the relationship between family separation and reentry services. Chapter 3 situates the location of this project by contextualizing the physical, social, cultural, economic, and historical aspects of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Drawing from critical urban theory, this chapter interrogates the connections between urban development and white supremacy in the making of Milwaukee’s racial and class segregation. I examine both power and wealth disparities as they shape the urban geography of Milwaukee. In addition, I consider whose stories are sensationalized and for what purposes as research about segregation, poverty, and crime in Milwaukee too often focus on Black men-identifying people’s experiences (Bonds, 2018a). These stories are important to understand the broader impact of mass incarceration, yet the dismissal of Black women-identifying people’s experiences with incarceration and reentry services is a form of gender-based violence.

After establishing my theoretical and methodological frameworks, Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the empirical aspects of the study. In Chapter 4, I discuss my discourse analysis and content analysis of reentry service providers (RSPs) located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In Chapter 5, I draw from and analyze the results of the semi-structured interviews with formerly incarcerated cis-women navigating the reentry process and with Wisconsin Department of Corrections (WI DOC) officials providing reentry services. I conclude this thesis by considering the development of abolitionist futures and solidarity as feminist scholars and community members.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Frameworks: Feminist Responses to Carcerality

In this chapter, I further develop my project and respond to my research question: how does an intersectional, feminist, and prison abolitionist framework address the criminalization of women-identifying people and its impacts on family separation? I begin with a brief history on the social constructions of crime, particularly as advanced by ideologies of traditional criminology which deftly expanded the scope and strength of the carceral state. In direct response, feminist bodies of scholarship emerged as an intervention to tackle the epistemic violence of traditional criminology and to engage in a feminist critique of the carceral state. These frameworks, namely critical carceral studies, feminist political economy, Black feminism, and prison abolition, illuminate the gendered and racialized impacts of incarceration, criminalization, and family separation. More importantly, they provide recommendations to eliminate structural barriers of harm and to advance gender justice, racial justice, and collective liberation.

The Social Construction of Crime: Traditional Criminology and the Feminist School of Criminology

An extensive, multidisciplinary body of scholarship examines the significance of mass incarceration and criminalization in the United States (Bonds, 2019; Camp, 2016; Carlton & Segrave, 2013; A. Y. Davis, 2003; Evans & Goldberg, 2009; Gilmore, 2007; Hinton, 2016; Kilgore, James, 2015; Loyd et al., 2012; Pager, 2007; Story, 2019; Sudbury, 2005; Thuma, 2019; Western, 2006). However, the social constructions of crime have been primarily grounded within the dominant ideology of traditional criminology. This scholarship is rooted in the methodological frameworks of sociology, psychology, and medicine which analyzes the relationship between the criminal legal system and their responses to crime (Clear & Frost, 2009). In doing so, traditional criminology reinforces the commonsense logic bound to the “natural” relationship between crime and penal system (Gilmore, 2007, p. 12) and does little to engage with intersectionality. Rather, traditional criminology tethers itself to white supremacy, an

infrastructure in which state agencies rely on, and reproduce, the carceral state (Brown & Schept, 2016; Morrison, 2004).

The expansion of the carceral state is most often seen through the influence of crime control policies and political commitments, where ‘safety’ and ‘accountability’ are sold to the public as “mandates of crime control” (Michelle Brown & Schept, 2017, p. 448; Richie & Martensen, 2019, p. 13). The pairing of ‘safety’ and crime control generated white anxiety and fear, often in relation to the racial “other,” which justified the use of mechanisms to “predict” crime (Perry, 2013). This form of predictive policing relied on “a set of high technologies aiding the police in solving past crimes and *preemptively fighting and preventing future ones* [emphasis mine]” (Yang, 2019), legitimating policing practices that disproportionately criminalized Black and Latinx individuals, families, and communities (see also Bishop, 2009; Loyd & Bonds, 2018). The prevalent discourse of traditional criminology and its material effects, including ‘crime prevention’ tactics, significantly shaped reentry services and the purpose of such programs. For instance, a majority of reentry services exist as a tool to reduce recidivism¹¹ (Petersilia, 2003; Visher et al., 2017) and to provide rehabilitative services (R. J. Miller, 2014; Western, 2008). Yet, given the close and uncritical relationship to the criminal legal system, most reentry services fail to recognize the racialized, classed, and gendered social constructions of crime and who is violently framed as ‘criminal.’

Traditional criminology fails to understand the importance of an intersectional, feminist analysis, as seen in their failure to situate gender and gender identity as fundamental analytics to better understand crime. As Covington and Bloom (2003) explain, traditional “criminology theory and research focus[es] on explaining male criminality, with males seen as the normal subjects of criminology” (p. 2). In other words, traditional criminology engages with an androcentric approach to generalize theories of

¹¹ The WI DOC (2016) defines recidivism as “a criminal offense that results in a new conviction and sentence to WI DOC custody or supervision” (p. 5).

crime from men onto women (Britton, 2000). This not only normalize men-identifying people's experiences (Cain, 1990) but uses an "add women and stir" method (Eichler, 1980; Sudbury, 2005) where women-identifying people are viewed as an afterthought (Chesney-Lind, 1989; K. Daly, 1995) and rendered invisible (Belknap, 2001).

In response to the multifaceted problems inherent to traditional criminology, the feminist school of criminology was born, in tandem with second wave feminism, to better understand how the personal and the political constructed new pathways of equality and justice (Flavin, 2001). Chesney-Lind and Morash (2013) attribute three characteristics to feminist criminology, namely that it "explicitly theorizes gender, requires a commitment to social justice, and [is] increasingly global in scope" (p. 287). By centering gender as an analytic, feminist criminologists differentiate how gendered social roles affect women-identifying people's various pathways to crime and incarceration (Belknap, 2001; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016), such as child and adult victimization (Kathleen Daly, 1992; Girshick, 1999; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009), acts of survival (Gilfus, 1992), and drug use as a coping mechanism (Belknap, 2001). However, while early feminist criminology made visible pathways to understand the criminalization of women-identifying people, their research sites exclusively focused on women's prisons, erasing the experiences of people in men's prisons who identify as "woman but were categorized at birth as male" (Sudbury, 2011, p. 172), underpinning the violence of gendered language within research.

Additionally, such an approach to end unequal treatment for women-identifying people led to the creation of "gender-responsive" approaches to programming and support in women's prisons (S. Covington & Bloom, 2002, 2003). While this approach may outwardly seem progressive, this framework reinforces gender binaries that work to "produc[e] and [to maintain] the gender binary in penal regimes" (Sudbury, 2011, p. 169). In other words, gender-responsive approaches reproduce gender-based violence. For example, rather than challenging how the criminal legal system has disproportionately criminalized low-income Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people,

gender-responsive policies and practices rely on the same violent system as a possible avenue for rehabilitation and justice. This approach also maintains the gender bifurcations of man/woman and their associated gender norms which rely on existing stereotypes about parenthood and employment, with a majority of reentry workforce development opportunities relating to housekeeping, cleaning, and caregiving for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people. The prioritization of gender not only reinforces biological difference, it also violently harms people who do not fit into the gender binary, including transgender, genderqueer, and gender-nonconforming people.

While the feminist school of criminology attempted to intervene traditional criminology, their approach expanded the gendered carceral system (Shaylor & Meiners, 2013) specifically through gender-responsive programming. As described, justice does not, and cannot, exist within the contemporary legal system, especially as the social constructions of crime justified the use of punitive policies and preventative measures which did not “correspond to *actual shifts* in what is considered ‘illegal behavior’” (Richie & Martensen, 2019, p. 12). In this way, the mass incarceration and criminalization of individuals were justified via criminological common sense, further marginalizing and stigmatizing low-income Black and Latinx people, to uphold the white supremacist carceral state.

Critical Carceral Studies and Racial Capitalism: Carceral Geographies and Social Control

In response to the both traditional criminology and the feminist school of criminology and their lack of engagement with abolitionist politics, scholars like Brown and Schept (2017) reveal how critical carceral studies critique asymmetrical power dynamics, processes of knowledge production, and social constructions of crime within an abolitionist framework. In challenging society’s unwavering trust and reliance on the criminal legal system, Coyle and Schept (2018) emphasize how “the historical and social production of ‘crime’ has fabricated a theory, a set of practices, and a dominant discourse that collectively is [understood] as the paradigm of ‘criminal justice’” (p. 319). Similarly, Loyd, Mitchelson, and Burrige (2012) illustrate how “the state is built and society is governed through crime legislation”

(p. 13). In other words, critical carceral scholars critically examine and challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions about incarceration, the centrality of prisons and policing in US society, and the reliance on the carceral state (Bonds, 2020; Gilmore, 2002; Loyd & Bonds, 2018; McKittrick, 2011; Shaylor & Meiners, 2013).

The carceral state is embedded within everyday life via systems of social control and surveillance, produced by capital, race, and state power (Derickson, 2016; Gilmore, 2007; McKittrick, 2014). Carcerality and carceral systems extend far beyond the physical spaces of jails and prisons. As geographer and prison abolitionist Brett Story (2019) explains,

the prison is more than just a building or the numbers of people inside the building, but rather, as many have established, a robust and extensive ‘industrial complex’ that is fully implicated in the functioning of the contemporary capitalist economy. (p. 5)

The nexus of carcerality is deeply intertwined with capital accumulation and the simultaneous displacement and dispossession of surplus individuals. The term ‘industrial complex’ underscores how carcerality is embedded within, and sustained through, a range of processes and dynamics including “finance, electoral politics, land use, racial ordering, labor deregulation, citizenship, gender governance, and urban restructuring, among other processes” (Story, 2019, p. 5). Through critical carceral studies, carcerality is situated within systems of oppression, social control, and surveillance which stabilize white supremacy within a capitalist, neoliberal¹² age through the guise of ‘safety’ and ‘protection.’

Carceral logics and systems are legitimated and reinforced through historically produced and racialized understandings of crime and safety (Muhammad, 2010), through deep investments in policing and surveillance (Jefferson, 2017; Loyd & Bonds, 2018), and through laws and order politics premised around “tough on crime” and punitive punishment (Sudbury, 2004). Though only 8% of the US prison

¹² In highlighting neoliberalism, I draw attention to the significant cuts in critical social programs where harm is unevenly distributed, particularly targeting low-income people of color. In addition, neoliberal austerity leads to the expansion of the carceral state by its increasing reliance in securitization.

population is incarcerated in private prisons (Gilmore, 2015), numerous private firms profit from incarcerated people via phone calls, emails, GPS monitors, and canteen items (Michelle Alexander, 2010; DuVernay, 2016; Evans & Goldberg, 2009). New technologies of surveillance and “smart on crime” practices, such as “hotspot” crime mapping and policing, are transforming and routinizing racialized practices of surveillance in cities (Jefferson, 2017).

Beyond the urban, critical carceral scholars document how prisons are being utilized as a form of rural economic development (Bonds, 2013; Gilmore, 2007; Story, 2019). In fact, scholarship increasingly focuses on the networked geographies of carceral circuitry, or the “connections between, around, within, and beyond carceral institutions” (N. Gill et al., 2018, p. 184). The carceral nexus is bound to broader systems of everyday life, blurring the boundaries between punitive and social services (Richie & Martensen, 2019), and more specifically, carcerality operates as a tentacle of the carceral state (L. Simmons, 2016).

Critical carceral studies seek to better understand carcerality and its relationship to the state. The carceral state is defined as “the mode of statecraft in which criminal justice apparatuses function as key mechanisms for managing negatively racialized fractions of surplus labor dislodged by deindustrialization and the disintegration of the Keynesian state” (Jefferson, 2017, p. 778). Through this commonsense logic, carceral state capacities heavily invest in mechanisms, practices, and technologies emphasizing crime control and population management (Bonds, 2019). For example, Bonds (2019) details how the state manages populations through the criminal legal system and race-making institutions, such as property ownership. Within the United States, property is not only based on the legal ability to own land, it also defined by the right to possess property, upheld by laws valuing whiteness and maintaining white supremacy. In other words, property and personhood are deeply entangled to the production of urban space, illustrating the physical and social relationships tied to ownership and exclusion (Dorries, 2017; Harris, 1993; Roy, 2017). Similarly, the carceral state has

manipulated “the ways that ideology, economic policy, and legal/legislative initiatives have supported the growth of legal apparatuses associated with punishment” (Richie & Martensen, 2019, p. 13). In this way, the normalization of punishment has led to a reliance on state power and punitive policies which maintain the racialized, gendered, and classed carceral state.

Prison abolitionists (A. Y. Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007; Wang, 2018) and feminist political economists (LeBaron & Roberts, 2010) reveal the pervasive relationship between capitalism and carcerality, where capital accumulation is bound to prison expansion. For example, Davis (2003) explains, for “[e]ach new prison spawn[s] yet another new prison. And as the U.S. prison system expand[s], so [does the] corporate involvement in construction, [the] provision of goods and services, and [the] use of prison labor” (A. Y. Davis, 2003, p. 12). This excerpt illuminates the ways in which capitalism, specifically corporations’ capital accumulation in construction, food, and health care, are inherently bound to the ‘industrial complex’ of carcerality (A. Y. Davis, 2003; Story, 2019).

Another central focus within critical carceral studies is the tethering of race and racism with capitalist economic and social relations. Building from the scholarship of Black radical tradition, Cedric Robinson (1983) argued how race and capitalism cannot be divorced from one another, but rather based on “the historical developments of capitalism and racism, [they are] inseparable” (W. Johnson, 2018). In addition, the racist and colonial past of racial capitalism led Pulido (2016) to remind scholars that “any analysis of racial capitalism requires attention to the past and how wealth, power, and poverty have historically been created” (p. 4). In other words, racial capitalism is historically and geographically produced through capitalist social and economic relations, including institutional policies and practices built on dispossession (W. Johnson, 2018), exploitation (Gilmore, 2007), social differentiation (Melamed, 2015), and the literal and physical bodies of enslaved and marginalized peoples (C. J. Johnson, 1983). Calling attention to the state’s role in sustaining racial capitalist systems that harm and exploit marginalized people, Gilmore (2007) (re)defined racism as “the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal

production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (p. 247). Based on this definition, the demarcations of racism are spatially mapped through the mass criminalization and supervision in the United States, where Black, Latinx, and Indigenous bodies are overrepresented in the criminal legal system. Furthermore, Pulido (2016) succinctly states, “it is no accident that US surplus populations are disproportionately nonwhite” (p. 1) since carcerality maintains apparatuses to secure capitalism, and thus the social constructions of race. In fact, racial capitalism enforces “a system of exploitation” (Story, 2019, p. 6), surplus violence (Melamed, 2015), and interlocking forms of racialized and gendered violence (A. Davis & Dent, 2001; A. Y. Davis, 1998; Lawston & Meiners, 2014).

Unlike traditional frameworks of scholarship which completely limit forms of knowledge and expertise, critical carceral studies is rooted within “movement-generated theories grounded in survivability” (Michelle Brown & Schept, 2017, p. 443). This movement shifts away from hegemonic ways of knowing and towards a “a growing interdisciplinary movement for engaged scholarly and activist production against the carceral state” (Michelle Brown & Schept, 2017, p. 440) to passionately envision and build the type of world we want to live in. In aligning with abolitionist praxis, critical carceral studies transforms the world via its investment towards collective liberation and community care, not the systems of policing, prisons, and punishment (Gilmore & Kilgore, 2019). Ultimately, critical carceral scholars challenge underlying assumptions about crime, criminality, and commonsense logic of policing. Instead, their scholarship carries out prison abolitionist strategies, such as engagement with non-reformist reforms. These are defined as “measures that reduce the power of an oppressive system while illuminating the system’s inability to solve the crises it creates” (Berger et al., 2017). In other words, non-reformist reforms bring attention to the problems encapsulated within the carceral state, and more importantly, they do not expand the carceral state in any capacity.

Through a critical carceral framework, scholars envision reentry services as both catering to address individual barriers to accessing reentry services as well as the simultaneous dismantling of

structural mechanisms that lead to the incarceration and criminalization of Black women in the first place. This means reentry services would engage in non-reformist reforms and work towards the elimination of carcerality, social control, and surveillance embedded in everyday life. For instance, reentry services would collectively invest in basic human rights, such as K-12 education, health care, public transportation, affordable housing, and childcare. By providing an infrastructure that contributes to a basic quality of life, this directly addresses root causes of incarceration and criminalization, in hopes that families would not be separated in the first place. This robust commitment to community investment destabilizes the subjugation of people based on social difference and weakens the relations of carcerality itself.

Feminist Political Economy and the Relations of Carcerality: Circuits of Power, Gendered Labor, Capital, and Surplus

While critical carceral studies is a poignant intervention to traditional criminology, feminist political economists contribute a vital critique of (western) labor markets and their relationship to neoliberalism, capitalism, and surplus. Political economy is defined as the study of “relationships between individuals and society and between the markets and the state” (Balaam & Veseth, 2014, n.p.), with particular emphasis on the political and economic factors. Their framework underscores how embodied difference, gendered labor structures, and socially reproductive activities (Venn, 2009) sustain the carceral state (Gilmore, 2007; Sudbury, 2005) and manifest capital through the flow of power, resources, and surplus bodies (N. Gill et al., 2018).

Harvey (1989), in particular, focuses on the circuitry of capital and capitalism through the temporal and spatial displacement of overaccumulation. Within the circuitry of capitalism, such overaccumulation is an effect of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ where wealth and power are built through the specific dispossession of people and their land. As Harvey (2009) illuminates, these effects are “omnipresent no matter what historical period and [pick] up strongly when crises of

overaccumulation occur in expanded reproduction” (p. 76). Connecting this concept directly to the crisis of the capitalist racial state, Gilmore (2007) demonstrates the United States’ reliance on the carceral system leads to dispossession via prison and prison expansions. For instance, California relied on prisons as the ‘natural’ solution to crime which displaced state crisis and absorbed surplus populations for capital accumulation (Gilmore, 2007). This example elucidates the spatiality of prisons and allowing capital to flow in and out of the prisons while incarcerated people remained in place and became surplus (Pulido, 2016, p. 5). However, surplus is necessary for capital accumulation as it is built around politics of difference, dispossession, and criminalization. In addition, the mutually constitutive relationships between prisons, the criminal legal system, social reproduction that shed light on the circuits of carcerality. For instance, LeBaron and Roberts (2010) point to the pervasiveness of gendered norms, operating in both private households and public spaces, which expect women-identifying people to participate in caregiving roles and has “contributed to the feminization of poverty and to an emerging crisis in social reproduction” (LeBaron & Roberts, 2010, p. 27). As LeBaron and Roberts (2010) argue, this gendered economic insecurity carefully constructed the criminalization of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people, bolstered by significant cuts to social services.

The rollback of welfare services heavily affected low-income Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people, implicating the connections between social services, race, gender, class, and punishment (Bumiller, 2013; Gilmore, 2007, 2017; Pulido, 2016; Sudbury, 2002). For instance, Bumiller (2013) demonstrates that “women who rely upon the state for protection or resources are increasingly subjected to punishment outside prison, in the form of greater surveillance and moral scrutiny” (p. 13). The state’s divestment from social services allows for the privatization of markets and services, which increase social control and surveillance and simultaneously expand state power and the carceral state. (Foucault, 1977; Lemke, 2001; Richie & Martensen, 2019). As Richie and Martensen (2019) explain,

[w]hen economic and ideological capital are directed toward punishment, surveillance, and control, then funding for health and mental health services, schools and other youth-oriented programs, transportation infrastructure, community-based service organizations, parks, and other public services decline in the communities that need them most. (p. 13)

Law and order politics invest in infrastructures of punishment regimes rather than provide basic necessities that provide equity and accessibility (Richie & Martensen, 2019). Similarly, Pulido (2016) describes how “infrastructure maintenance is a form of social investment” (p. 5). The decision to devote resources to punishment and carcerality is a violent act, illuminating who is considered disposable by such lack of community investments (Pulido, 2016). The entanglement between gender, race, social services, and punishment are a global issue (A. Davis & Dent, 2001; Loyd et al., 2012). More specifically, the pervasiveness of prisons and the mechanisms of carcerality reveal a transnational crisis (Loyd et al., 2012) where Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people “became the weapon of choice in dealing with the social problems caused by the globalization of capital” (Sudbury, 2002, p. 6). The pervasiveness of prisons and the mechanisms of carcerality around the globe point to a transnational crisis (Loyd et al., 2012).

Ultimately, feminist political economy provides the analytical tools to better understand the connections between racial capitalism, gendered labor, and surplus. Within capitalist societies that produce zero-sum markets, secure capitalist regimes, and wield coercive power, there is no space for transformative justice (Mingus, 2019b). Gendered labor continues to rely on women-identifying people for caregiving and domestic work, situating their labor and their bodies as mechanisms for extraction. At the same time, the rollback of welfare services and the rollout of privatization led to the criminalization of low-income Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people. It is through these understandings that explain the expansion of reentry services and the limited accommodations for women-identifying people in the reentry process. In situating reentry services within feminist political

economy, reentry services are unable to provide family unification efforts due to their gender-responsive parenting classes and scarce transitional housing accommodations that allow children. Reentry services are part of a larger gendered institution, and it is necessary that such crucial transitional and supportive services no longer reproduce gendered norms and labor (Bonds, 2019, 2020; Britton, 2000; Moore & Padavic, 2010; Venn, 2009, p. 208).

Towards Collective Liberation: Prison Abolition and Black Feminism

In carrying out Black feminist practices, Audre Lorde speaks to the importance of critical engagement and calling out racial and gender injustices. She states, “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. And I am not free as long as one person of Color remains chained. Nor is anyone of you” (Lorde, 1984, pp. 132–133). Lorde speaks to the power of collective liberation and forging pathways of freedom for all while simultaneously asking where and when we are complicit in systems of injustices. In following this poignant reminder, I discuss theories of prison abolition, rooted in Black feminism and collective liberation (A. Y. Davis, 1981, 2003; Gilmore, 2002; Gilmore & Kilgore, 2019; Wells, 1892).

Black feminism is grounded in collectiveness, conscious-raising, and accountability (Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 1982). As the Combahee River Collective (1982) famously stated, “[i]f Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (p. 18). Through the centering of Black women’s standpoints, their situated, lived experienced illuminate the multiple forms of oppression and injustices in everyday life. However, their resistance provides a dialectical relationship to imagine new ways of being, specifically ones in which dismantle such systems of domination by centering on ‘feminist ways of knowing,’ being, and doing (Collins, 2000; Messer-Davidow, 1985; Yee, 2009). As scholars point out, there is a dialectical relationship between oppression and activism within Black

feminism and prison abolition (Collins, 2000; A. Y. Davis, 2003; A. Y. Davis & Rodriguez, 2000; Gilmore, 2007; Gilmore & Kilgore, 2019; Sudbury, 2004).

Instead of perpetuating white supremacy, racial capitalism, and settler colonialism¹³ bound to the carceral state, prison abolition necessitates social change, transformation, and imagination. Scholars theorize abolition as a pedagogy, an organizing tool, and an inherently political project (A. Y. Davis & Rodriguez, 2000; Lawston & Meiners, 2014; Meiners, 2011; Richie, 2015; Shaylor, 2007; Shaylor & Meiners, 2013) that works to dismantle the carceral state and simultaneously transforms the ways we think about crime, justice, and safety. Yet, it is worth nothing that as abolition gains traction in scholarly and activist movements, critiques of abolitionist strategies (Eason, 2017; Lancaster, 2017) have continued to dismiss abolition as utopian and unrealistic. Additionally, abolition is increasingly being deployed in ways that obscure its roots in Black feminist theory and praxis. The following section examines abolitionist praxis in more detail. Following the framework outlined in *Abolition Now!* written by the CR10 Publications Collective,¹⁴ this section is broken into three components of abolition: dismantling, changing, and building.

Abolition Geographies

Dismantling

As understood by abolitionists, the notion of ‘dismantling’ means the complete elimination of the mechanisms that uphold the carceral state which include both the physical destruction of penal institutions and disassembling the spatial borders of carcerality connected to gender, globalization and

¹³ Scholarship surrounding settler colonialism and racial capitalism demonstrate the spatialized and racialized violence against Indigenous peoples for the production of urban space (Dorries et al., 2019; Ramírez, 2019) and the maintenance of settler colonial cities (Hugill, 2017; Veracini, 2012). Consequently, settler colonialism is not a singular event, but rather has an ‘ongoing effect’ (Bonds & Inwood, 2015; Radcliffe, 2015). (For additional urban scholarship on the intersections of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and carcerality, see also Bonds, 2018a; Loyd & Bonds, 2018; Pulido, 2016)

¹⁴ As of 2008, the CR10 Publications Collective included Ben Goldstein, Beth Richie, Craig Gilmore, David Stein, Dylan Rodríguez, Isaac Ontiveros, Jodie Lawson, Julia Sudbury, Michele Welsing, Rachel Herzing, Rickie Solinger, and Yusef Omowale.

punishment (A. Davis & Dent, 2001). Abolition was born from grassroots organizing, with significant contributions from scholar activists and formerly incarcerated people within and outside prison walls. These various forms of participation and engagement with prison abolition “contends the hegemony of social science in producing knowledge about the prison” (A. Davis & Dent, 2001, p. 1237). Instead, all people – regardless of education – are viewed as valid producers of knowledge. This powerful reorientation of knowledge contributes to robust and innovative forms of resistance. For example, the Gender Responsive Strategies Commission, a branch of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations, proposed a “community-based alternatives to incarceration” that would send 4,500 people to a non-existent Female Rehabilitative Community Correction Center (FRCCC). In opposition of the expansion of California’s prison system, 3,300 people incarcerated in California women’s state prisons organized and signed a petition, in collaboration with Justice Now advocates (Shaylor & Meiners, 2013). The coordination between “free world” allies and people on the inside was successful; the FRCCC merely remained an idea. This example demonstrates how dismantling requires dialogue, collaboration, and activism for structural change.

Changing

In prison abolitionist praxis, change necessitates an undoing of the “dominant understandings of crime, law, punishment, safety and accountability, and justice” (Brown & Schept, 2017, p. 444). This means unlearning commonsense notions of ‘safety’ and ‘justice’ as well as disengaging from reformist reforms, or measures that strengthen the carceral state such as gender-responsive programs and carceral feminism.¹⁵ Instead, Berger, Kaba, and Stein (2017) welcome people’s involvement with non-

¹⁵ Carceral feminism was defined by Elizabeth Bernstein (2007). In analyzing the contemporary anti-trafficking movement, Bernstein (2007) described the unlikely alliance between evangelists and feminist anti-traffic supporters in which they advocated for all forms of sex work to be punished as sex trafficking. Through this example, Bernstein (2010) coins carceral feminism as the “drift from the welfare state to the carceral state as the enforcement apparatus for feminist goals” (p. 143). Carceral feminism relies on punishment and prison sentencing as justification to advance their ‘feminist’ goals.

reformist reforms, or “measures that reduce the power of an oppressive system while illuminating the system’s inability to solve the crises it creates.” In other words, non-reformist reforms not only address the systemic failure of the prison system, they also critique the racial and gender inequalities, differences, and dispossession required of the carceral system.

In order to participate in this crucial change, Critical Resistance and INCITE! (2001) jointly ask that we:

seek to build movements that not only end violence, but that create a society based on radical freedom, mutual accountability, and passionate reciprocity. In this society, safety and security will not be premised on violence or the threat of violence; it will be based on a collective commitment to guaranteeing the survival and care of all peoples. (p. 25)

Based on this call to action, non-reformist reforms work to address the interpersonal and structural violences of the criminal legal system (CR10 Publications Collective, 2008) in order to divorce themselves from the “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2004, p. 17). The forms of mutual accountability and passionate reciprocity can be seen in coalition building and cross-sectional movements for collective liberation. Abolition movements remain in solidarity with low-wage workers (Lloyd et al., 2012), queer people (Black & Pink, 2020; Mogul et al., 2011; Oparah, 2012; Stanley et al., 2012; Stanley & Smith, 2015), young people and adults (Kelly, 2019; Project Nia, 2020), and migrants and undocumented people (Cuauhtémoc & Hernández, 2017; Freedom for Immigrants, 2020; Hernández, 2011; Lloyd et al., 2012) to demand alternatives to detention and incarceration, the elimination of cash bail which disproportionately affects low-income people and people of color (Free the 350 Bail Fund, 2020), the decriminalization of acts of survival (#FreeChrystul, 2020; Survived & Punished, 2020), the eradication of gender violence (Critical Resistance & INCITE!, 2001; INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans people of Color Against Violence, 2010; Law, 2019b), and the resistance of prison expansion as an environmental justice (California Prison Moratorium Project,

2016) and racial justice issue (#CLOSEmsdf, 2020). Through these efforts of comradery and solidarity, communities are effectively working to reduce harm and participate in acts of mutual aid, all of which engage in community care, support, and accountability.

Building

Prison abolition is not solely about the destruction of prisons and “leaving nothing in its place” (Mansfield, 2018, para. 5); on the contrary, abolition is grounded in grassroots organizing and the radical envisioning “of possibilities for our dreams and demands for health and happiness – for what we want, not what we think we can get” (CR10 Publications Collective, 2008, p. xii). While this may seem like a naïve notion, prison abolitionists are actively (re)building a world that reduces harm and violence via transformative justice (TJ). TJ focuses on community-based participation and collective responsibility to prevent future violence and break the cycle of intergenerational violence (Critical Resistance & INCITE!, 2001; Law, 2019b; Law & TruthOut, 2020; Mingus, 2019b). Anti-violence organizers Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha define TJ as a “broad conglomerate of collectives, individuals and groups doing work from a Black and Brown feminist perspective that address abuse and harm without relying on the state” (Law & TruthOut, 2020). TJ is about the creation and reliance on community-based systems of support. In fact, Mia Mingus (2019b), a prominent scholar activist of TJ and community organizing, explains that TJ was designed by and for communities who cannot call the cops in fear of retaliation, including “deportation, harassment, state sanctioned violence, sexual violence, previous convictions or inaccessibility.” This quote makes clear the connections between racial violence and policing apparatuses, further revealing how policing is not a form of safety or justice. Most importantly, TJ attempts to “respond to violence *without creating more violence* and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence” (Mingus, 2019b). By extensively bringing attention to the impacts of carcerality, specifically for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people and their families, the goal is to engage both community activists and academics to collaboratively envision a new world of justice.

Chapter 3. The Logic of Carceral Urbanism: Urban Development and Carceral Expansion

Since the 1970s, the rates of incarceration in Wisconsin have increased ten-fold, with an unprecedented number of people held in correctional facilities (Silver, 2018). Today, an estimated 23,500 Wisconsin residents are incarcerated, with a surplus of 66,650 people under community supervision (Office of the Secretary Research and Policy Unit, 2019, p. 3; Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2020). Illustrating the extensive reach of the criminal legal system, these statistics outline the material impacts of common sense logics of criminalization and incarceration.

This purpose of this chapter is to interrogate how gendered erasures shape women-identifying people's experiences with reentry and the material effects of this structural violence. Through an intersectional, feminist, prison abolitionist framework, this chapter considers how racialized urban development has (re)produced segregation, creating a framework in which low-income Black and Latinx communities disproportionately experience extreme rates of poverty and unstable housing conditions; yet, the racialized and classed power and wealth disparities exist beyond the physical geography of the city. These grim conditions are bound in mass media where pathologizing narratives reproduce racialized inequality in the city (Loyd & Bonds, 2018), largely reflecting urban scholarship where research about urban issues reify understandings of poor neighborhoods of color as 'dead or dying' (McKittrick, 2011).

Scholarship about segregation, poverty, and crime not only reproduce racialized and classed violences, it can also reproduces androcentric approaches to incarceration. Within Milwaukee, discourse about incarceration heavily revolves around Black men given the state's extraordinarily high rates of incarceration in general and for Black men specifically (Bonds, 2020). For instance, according to a report by Pawasarat and Quinn (2013), nearly 1 in 8 Black men in Wisconsin end up in state prisons or in local

jails, more than double the national average of incarceration.¹⁶ Clearly, mass criminalization is a racial justice issue; however, the dominating focus of men-identifying people's incarceration in urban scholarship – particularly in Milwaukee (Desmond, 2016) – obscures the growing entanglement of women-identifying people in the criminal legal system. This erasure is consistent with the androcentric approach to urban scholarship writ large, which generally fails to account for women-identifying people's experiences within urban areas (Parker, 2011). Even as Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people are invisible in the city and in scholarship, these women-identifying people are criminalized within a gendered, raced, and classed urban landscape, constructing their pathways to crime and reentry service needs post-incarceration. As feminist geographers argue, normative urban politics fail to integrate gender relations even as these relations actively shape neoliberal urban policies and development (Parker, 2011; Peake, 2016); Milwaukee is no exception, as I discuss here.

Formerly incarcerated women-identifying people confront numerous barriers to reentering society, including the disparities between the types of reentry services offered and the types of resources identified (by formerly incarcerated women-identifying people) as necessary. The following section highlights the historical impacts of federal policies, particularly crime legislation, and its effects on Wisconsin. Following this discussion, I then focus on racialized, gendered urban development in Milwaukee. Drawing from scholars conceptualizing contemporary patterns of racialized urban development, surveillance, and crime is the theory of carceral urbanism. Defined as “the mutually constitutive relationship between neoliberalism, racialization, and urban governance” (Derickson, 2016, p. 1), carceral urbanism emphasizes the securitization of space and patterns of surveillance (Story, 2016, 2019). Similarly, Turner (2013) outlines how carceral urbanism takes seriously the “relational, fluid, contradictory and nuanced spaces of imprisonment” (p. 41), pointing to the complexities underpinning

¹⁶ According to Pawasarat and Quinn (2013), the average rate of incarceration for Black men was 12.8% while the national average was 6.7% (p. 2).

carceral urbanism. These frameworks support my argument that carcerality and racialized, gendered neoliberal governance constitutively shape the state of Wisconsin and the city of Milwaukee. As carceral urbanism is entwined in the prison system and plans of economic development, carceral urbanism maintains the criminalization of women-identifying people and family separation through state and local power.

Social Control through Public Policy, Policing, and the Prison System

As is well documented, politics play a crucial role in constructing public policy and in shaping public attitudes about the criminal legal system (Alexander, 2010; Beckett, 1997; Beckett & Sasson, 2004; Hinton, 2013, 2016; H. A. Thompson, 2010; H. A. Thompson & Murch, 2015) that consequently forge the social geography and political economies of racialized, gendered, and classed urban cities (Derickson, 2016, p. 3; Rothstein, 2014; Sugrue, 1996). For example, scholars have documented how President Lyndon Johnson stoked white fear and anxiety surrounding the War on Crime (Alexander, 2010; Hinton, 2016; H. A. Thompson, 2010) by creating a surge of punitive policies tied to federal government funding. Examples of these federal investments include the 1965 Law Enforcement Assistance Administration Act (LEAA) and the 1968 Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (OCCSSA) which led to the militarization of urban policing at local levels, the expansion of carceral infrastructures and capacities, an incentivization of partnerships between law enforcement and social services, and securitization of surveillance in Black and Latinx (Camp, 2016; Hinton, 2016). These federal policies focused on the administration of crime and punishment in order to restore ‘social control’ and contain social movement and racial uprising throughout U.S. metropolitan cities (Camp, 2016; Hinton, 2016; Loyd & Bonds, 2018). Throughout the 1960s, punishment was diffused into the everyday life through “the criminalization of urban space” (H. A. Thompson, 2010, p. 706), particularly in low-income Black neighborhoods (Hinton, 2016; Muhammad, 2010; H. A. Thompson, 2010; Heather Ann Thompson & Murch, 2015; Weaver, 2007).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, racialized, gendered, and classed inequalities were further compounded via the focus of crime control policy, confinement, and punitive measures to deter individual crime, disproportionately targeting Black youth and men in urban areas (Hinton, 2016; Muhammad, 2010; Weaver, 2007). Though police departments were ostensibly originally intended to respond to crime, police forces shifted to the prevention of future crime, where criminalization and incarceration were prescribed to manage public anxieties, to strengthen elected officials' tough on crime campaigns (Hinton, 2016; LeBaron & Roberts, 2010), and to justify the scrutinization and surveillance of "vulnerable" neighborhoods (Weaver, 2007). Altogether, these measures manufactured social constructions of crime for the securitization of white supremacy.

Social constructions of crime and criminality were deeply embedded in structural racism (Dixon, 2006; Dixon & Maddox, 2005; D. E. Roberts, 2004) and stereotypical tropes of Black youth, men, and women to justify punitive policies (Green et al., 2006; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2010). Illustrated by broken windows policing, this controversial model of policing and crime control argued the only way to prevent crime and neighborhood disorder was through aggressive law enforcement and 'neutral' data-driven practices (Herbert, 2001; Herbert & Brown, 2006; Jefferson, 2017; Loyd & Bonds, 2018). Yet, as Cacho (2012) demonstrates, "U.S. law targets their [Black and Latinx peoples'] being and their bodies, not their behavior" (p. 6). In other words, the presence of racialized bodies were enough evidence for such destructive and violent forms of policing (Derickson, 2016). The entanglement of broken windows discourse and the so-called War on Drugs led to racialization of drug laws, including zero tolerance policies, mandatory minimums for drug offenses, and the uneven regulation of urban space (Loyd & Bonds, 2018). As Ritchie (2017) argues, the "War on Drugs was a War on Black women" due to stop-and-frisk policies, profiling, and gendered forms of police violence and abuse. Despite drug-use and drug-selling occurring at similar rates across racial and gender lines, Ritchie explains how the rate of increase in Black women-identifying people's criminalization was bolstered through anti-drug laws. She explains:

[b]etween 1986 and 1991, the number of Black women in state prison for drug offenses nationwide increased by more than 800 percent. This was nearly double the increase for Black men and more than triple that of white women, making Black women the fastest-growing population of prisoners during this period. (Ritchie, 2017, p. 44)

It is clear that anti-drug laws did not affect women equally, as Black women-identifying people were subjugated as racialized, gendered, and classed surplus. During these periods of intense racialized, gendered, and classed sanctioning, anti-crime and anti-drug laws illustrate the connections between racial capitalism, confinement, and the production of the carceral state (Richardson, 1997).

Throughout the 1990s, white anxieties and fears about crime endured. Despite the intensification of policies designed to surveil, control, and confine Black and Latinx bodies, crime control discourse had a renewed focus on ‘tough’ of crime and the promotion of ‘justice’ (Chung et al., 2019; Gordon, 1990; Levine, 2012; Stevens & Morash, 2015; Vitiello, 1997). These sentiments gave rise to the controversial Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (1994 crime bill), and its Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which secured tough-on-crime policy with alleged feminist movements to protect women – including Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women-identifying people, immigrants and undocumented people, LGBTQ-identifying people, and disabled women-identifying people – from various forms of violence, namely rape and domestic violence (Meisel, 2016). While VAWA provided an increased funding for shelters for women-identifying people, these efforts strengthened carceral feminism as ideologies of justice were tethered to punishment and the carceral state itself (Meisel, 2016). The 1994 crime bill, then, funneled more federal, state, and local funds toward policing and prison expansions and dramatically increased the size of the carceral state (Chung et al., 2019; Hinton, 2016; Lynch & Sabol, 1997; Meisel, 2016) despite its ability to reduce actual crime rates (E. R. Jones, 1995; Lynch & Sabol, 1997).

Reflecting the punitive shift of the 1990s, Wisconsin also expanded its prison system, crime control legislation, and its deployment of surveillance, social control, and urban policing tactics which together contributed to the nexus of prisons embedded into everyday life. The same year the 1994 crime bill was enacted, Wisconsin Governor Thompson signed onto a “three strikes” law that imposed harsher sentences, specifically life in prison without parole, for those who commit repeat crimes. As is widely documented, the 1998 truth-in-sentencing (TIS) laws barred individuals from receiving parole and gave judges complete discretion to determine the length of incarceration and community supervision (Adelman, 2013; Bonds, 2015; O’Hear, 2017), ultimately leading to harsher sentences and an increased prison population rate (Silver, 2017, 2018). Wisconsin relied on “the prison fix” to solve social and economic crises (Gilmore, 2007), including joblessness and poverty resulting of deindustrialization. Even as the state built more prisons, overcrowding issues continued (Flaherty, 1997; Keyes, 2015; Kremer, 2018; State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2017). For example, as of March 10, 1999, the operating capacity of all state prisons were designed to hold 11,020 individuals, and yet there were roughly 18,374 incarcerated people, excluding the additional 3,421 incarcerated people transferred to out-of-state prisons in Tennessee and Oklahoma (A.B. 176, Wis. 1999). As tough on crime policies expanded definitions of crime, kept people in prison longer, and increased carceral investments, the state constructed 18 adult correctional facilities between 1990 and 2004 to contain its soaring prison population (State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2015). During this 14-year prison boom alone, the state built nearly *half of all Wisconsin adult correctional facilities*, as represented in Figure 2 (State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2015).

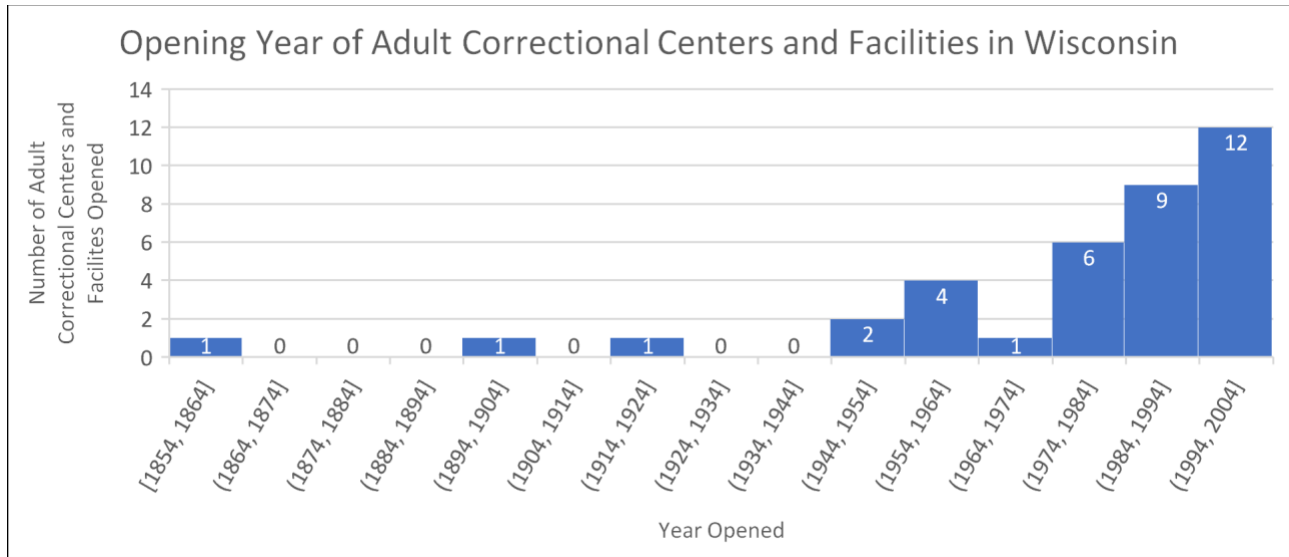


Figure 2. Adult WI Correctional Centers and Facilities

More recent studies indicate that Wisconsin ranks 12th in per capita police spending (*Wisconsin Ranks 12th in per Capita Local Police Spending, 2014*). This was not unique to Milwaukee or to Wisconsin. In fact, the Urban Institute (2017) reports that, between 1977-2016, state and local governments increased police and correction spending from \$59 billion to \$187 (Urban Institute, 2017).

The 1990s were characterized by law and order approaches to crime and punishment, intense neoliberal restructuring, and austerity approaches to social welfare (Brush, 2003; Pierson-Balik, 2003; Stryker & Wald, 2009). Perhaps most notoriously, federal ‘welfare reform’ implemented through this era, namely the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), drastically reworked Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), devolved welfare provision from the federal to the local level, and embedded disciplinary procedures into policies designed to support the poor (Ehrle et al., 2001). Wisconsin was at the leading edge of austerity policies and welfare reform (Mead, 2000; Szafir & Parrottino, 2017; Wiseman, 1996). In fact, Governor Tommy Thompson’s Wisconsin Works (W-2) program served as a model for federal welfare reform in its disciplinary requirements, including provisions requiring work for social welfare assistance (Corbett, 1996; Ehrle et al., 2001; Wiseman, 1996). As an extensive body of literature documents, these shifts towards workfare

participation led to the discretion and limitations of cash assistance, an emphasis on workforce participation, and a 60-month *lifetime* limit to receive such ‘assistance’ that disproportionately impacted low-income, single Black mothers (Brush, 2003; Gowens, 2000; Holtfreter et al., 2004). The criminalization of social policies, specifically welfare reforms, led to more low-income women-identifying people working, with the inability to escape poverty. Holtfreter et al. (2004) explain that:

women who have lost welfare benefits have been concentrated in traditionally female occupations with limited employment stability, little or no benefits (e.g. health insurance), and wages that are too low to move them out of poverty. (p. 188)

With women-identifying people bearing the financial burdens of welfare reform cutbacks, and an emphasis on individual responsibility and employment, these policies have only exacerbated poverty among low-income Black and Latinx women-identifying people with children, illuminating the state’s power and role in racialized, gendered, and classed violences. Given the significant cuts and discourse around self-sufficiency, women-identifying people – especially single Black and Latinx mothers – are more likely to face economic precarity, which some scholars have coined the “feminization of poverty” to call attention to the gendered nature of impoverishment (see (Heimer, 2000; Naffine & Gale, 1989; Steffensmeier, 1993).

Carceral Urbanism: The Entanglement of Urban Development and Urban Policing in

Milwaukee

Milwaukee’s social inequalities must be geographically, historically, and developmentally situated, as the city’s past discursively “informs contemporary patterns of (dis)investment that continue to cement racial and economic inequality” (Loyd & Bonds, 2018, p. 903). For example, Braithwaite (1975) noted that dense urban areas were perceived to ‘attract’ more crime due to dense, crowded, and racially diverse populations. Indeed, this is a key notion underpinning broken windows policing (Loyd & Bonds, 2018) which, as mentioned earlier, led to increased reliance on foot patrol, racialized stop and

frisk policing, and warrant sweeps in “vulnerable” areas to ‘prevent’ crime, upholding individual and community pathologies of crime and poverty. This discourse allowed “tough on crime” politicians to justify the deployment of predictive policing premised on surveillance and social control. And, despite the severe cutback of social services and the abandonment of low-income Black and Latinx communities (Bonds, 2018b; Gilmore, 2007), these same neighborhoods were met with heightened levels of policing and punishment (Derickson, 2016; Loyd & Bonds, 2018; R. J. Miller, 2014; Heather Ann Thompson & Murch, 2015).

Numerous scholars document how Milwaukee’s urban development has been (re)produced through urban racial and spatial frameworks (Bonds, 2018b; Hashimoto, 2020; Loyd & Bonds, 2018), embodied in public policy, politics, and the everyday lives of Black and Latinx residents. Housing, specifically, plays a powerful symbolic and material role in the making of Milwaukee. For instance, by the 1940s, 16 of 18 Milwaukee suburbs enforced more than 100 racially restrictive covenants (Bonds et al., 2016; Loyd & Bonds, 2018; Maternowski & Powers, 2017; Metropolitan Integration Research Center, 1979). As Loyd and Bonds (2018) argue, the city has been produced through these covenants in addition to “the racist practices of blockbusting, real estate agreements, exclusionary zoning practices, and massive suburban investments” (p. 906). The urban developments in Milwaukee, then, were tied to the violent productions of racialized space within everyday life, such as residential patterning. As Loyd and Bonds (2018) further explain the racial and spatial production of Milwaukee’s landscape:

the expansion of the city’s Black population was highly restricted to a narrow, northward trajectory, contained by the city’s urban boundary and surrounded by the almost exclusively white suburbs in the so-called WOW counties of Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington. (p. 906)

The discursive effects of race and racism within urban development were clear: while white residents were granted the financial and legal mobilities to relocate to the suburbs, the same policies limited Black mobility. Altogether, these housing policies and mechanisms facilitated the creation of the ‘inner core,’

where dominant media, policy makers, and residents associate Black spaces with poverty, crime, and violence, yet divorce these issues from the accumulative effects of racism and white supremacy that enforced segregation in the first place (P. D. Jones, 2009; Loyd & Bonds, 2018; Ramírez, 2019).

The role of housing was not limited to the racial spatialization of Black residents and communities but was also carried out in the fight for affordable housing. Led by Alderperson Vel Phillips, the first Black Alderwoman to serve on the Milwaukee Common Council, she introduced a number of open housing laws such as the eradication of discriminatory housing policies and the expansion of 300 low-cost housing units; yet, her policies were incessantly blocked by business developers and Mayor Henry Maier (Bonds, 2019; K. D. Smith, 2003). Instead of acknowledging the pervasive role of race and racism bound up in legislation, the city continued its colorblind redevelopment efforts alongside the expansion of law enforcement (Bonds, 2018a; Hashimoto, 2020; Loyd & Bonds, 2018). For instance, the Milwaukee Police Department (1965) announced their reasoning for a city budget increase, namely that, “[t]he department continues to recognize the invaluableness of ‘foot’ patrol in deterring crime and maintaining contact with the citizens and...requests additional manpower” (p. 8). In other words, the expansion of the MPD meant an intensification of policing in urban communities of color rather than addressing structural racism and the racialization of crime (Loyd & Bonds, 2018).

In an effort to highlight the structural and racial violence of housing discrimination and police brutality, (P. D. Jones, 2009), communities members organized a series of civil rights marches. The first march occurred on August 28, 1967, led by Father James Groppi and the Milwaukee National Association for the Advancement of Color People (NAACP) Youth Council where people marched from the predominantly Black North Side to Kosciuszko Park, a prominently white area on the South Side, to protest housing discrimination and to demand Alderperson Vel Phillips’ open housing ordinances (Bonds, 2018a; Gurda, 2006; K. D. Smith, 2003; Waxman, 2017). Since the first march, Father Groppi and the NAACP Youth Council held demonstrations for 200 consecutive days until March 14, 1968 (Waxman,

2017). Even though the city encountered robust forms of community activism and resistance, Milwaukee continued to experience high rates of foreclosure, property abandonment, and eviction in subsequent decades (Bonds, 2018b; Desmond, 2016). Together, this led to divestments in overwhelmingly Black and Latinx communities despite the simultaneous investment into white spaces such as suburbs and downtown regimes (Bonds, 2019).

Illuminating the racialization of space through race-making institutions, Bonds (2019) argues how “property is reproduced through racialized and gendered social relations” (p. 577) which constitutively shape the carceral landscape, the racialization of property, and the entanglements with white supremacy. For example, Mayor Henry Maier led influential urban “renewal” efforts where, during the 1960s and 1970s, nearly “266 acres of Milwaukee (including intact neighborhoods and houses) were cleared for *new development* with federal urban renewal funds [emphasis mine]” (Parker, 2017, p. 63). These projects particularly displaced Black residents and neighborhoods, while perpetuating uneven racialized and gendered developments across the city. The federal urban renewal funds were used specifically to invest in the downtown area, such as building “downtown office space, high-rise, high-rent apartments [and] an indoor shopping mall [i.e. The Avenue]” (Parker, 2017, p. 64). The decision to invest solely in the downtown area failed to provide benefits to all Milwaukee residents, especially those pushed to the peripheries of the city. In other words, elected officials secured racial segregation via uneven investments in downtown property (Bonds, 2020; Hashimoto, 2020).

Similarly, Mayor John Norquist’s election was heavily influenced by business and development, as he stated, “the best role of the city is to create pro-urban zoning and otherwise get out of the way, letting the markets work to create the setting for an attractive urban life style” (quoted in (Parker, 2017, p. 44). This “attractive” urban lifestyle led to an investment in the Milwaukee Riverwalk, which Mayor Norquist characterized as “a connective public work, intended to bring people together” (Dries, 1996). The Riverwalk, then, became a symbol for generative profit and wealth which bolstered Milwaukee’s

economy, particularly through the developments of the convention and exhibition Wisconsin Center, Riverhouse Condominiums, River Bank Plaza, and Lakefront Brewery. In addition, private-public partnerships led the rebranding of contemporary landmarks, including the Milwaukee Brewers Stadium and the Wisconsin Electric Power plant, named after their private investors (Parker, 2017).

The construction of this “attractive” lifestyle, and a stable flow of capital through the downtown area, meant the disposal of certain bodies. As Richie and Martensen (2019) explain, the removal and dispossession of *some* bodies act as mechanism to expand the carceral state through the:

literal capture and metaphorical containment of black and other people of color, Indigenous peoples, transgender and gender-non-conforming-people, young people from poor communities, people with mental health issues, and other groups who are disadvantaged by institutionalized oppression. (p. 14)

As I noted at the outset of the chapter, Wisconsin heavily invested in prison expansion while simultaneously privatizing institutions and services. Unfortunately, the reliance on prison and punishment did not eliminate social issues, they only “disappear[ed] human beings” (A. Y. Davis, 1998), with a disproportionate number of Black and Latinx individuals entangled in the criminal legal system. Consequently, Milwaukee’s physical boundaries reinforced a white supremacist urban racial hierarchy via racist housing policy and state-sanctioned segregation, urban abandonment and (dis)investment, and uneven development in the 20th and 21st century (Bonds, 2019; Hashimoto, 2020). This severely limited Black economic, social, and physical mobility in the city, illuminating the cumulative effects of racism, segregation, and poverty in Milwaukee (see Appendix A).

Since the 1980s, racial poverty and segregation in Milwaukee has only intensified. While low-income Black residents have expanded to the northwest area of the city, low-income Hispanic¹⁷

¹⁷ Since MacDonald & Turner (2013) use Census data to map poverty, race, and place, “race is defined as White alone, Black/African American alone, Asian, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander alone, and Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race).”

populations are located south of the city with low-income white populations closer to the urban peripheries (MacDonald & Turner, 2013). This strategic dispossession and capital accumulation affected poverty, (un)employment, and incarceration rates in Milwaukee. For instance, a report by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Employment and Training Institute revealed that Wisconsin has one of the highest rates of Black male incarceration, specifically highlighting zip code 53206 (Pawasarat & Quinn, 2013, p. 2). Pawasarat and Quinn (2013) emphasized barriers to employment and training, specifically for those who had criminal records and DOT offenses, noting that “4,008 males (including 3,837 African Americans) were either presently or previously incarcerated in adult state correctional institutions” and that “[b]y 2012 nearly every residential block in the neighborhood had multiple numbers of ex-offenders with prison records” (p. 25). Through this report, Pawasarat and Quinn (2013) materialized the “majority-rule” analysis of incarceration; yet, this study simultaneously reinforced racist perceptions about race, crime, and poverty that focused on individual accountability rather than structural barriers.¹⁸

In response to the failure of situating racialization and carceral landscapes in conversation with each other, Loyd and Bonds (2018) articulate, “53206 has become a spatial euphemism for social and economic disadvantage in Milwaukee...for racialized crime and poverty” (p.906). Instead of pointing to the “racially uneven urban landscapes” (Ibid., p. 906) that were produced through overlapping structures of mass criminalization, policing, surveillance, and racism in *certain* parts of the city, the 2013 report widely recirculated Milwaukee’s image as a sharp, racially segregated city infested with crime and violence, specifically in Black communities. Similarly, the report failed to consider how these inequalities are relational: disinvestments in low-income Black communities have subsidized significant urban investments, but this relationships is obscured by studies of racialized poverty that focus only on the “problems” of the so-called inner-city (see also Brownhill, 2000; Woods, 2002). While racialized poverty

¹⁸ For poverty, see Kennedy (2015). In this article, they found, “the poverty rate in Milwaukee is 29%, a figure double that of the national poverty rate (14.8%) and more than double the statewide rate – a 30-year high – of 13%” (Kennedy, 2015).

is spatialized in particular neighborhoods, these patterns are not produced in isolation but rather in relation to other places (Loyd & Bonds, 2018). For instance, Smeeding and Thornton (2018) report the distinct poverty rates in Milwaukee County stating, “[w]hile the overall poverty rate in Wisconsin rose from 9.7 to 10.8 percent from 2015 to 2016, the comparable change in Milwaukee County was from 16.3 to 17.5 percent” (p. 1). The poverty rates in Milwaukee County are nearly double the state poverty rates, with a substantial uneven investment in the city. Contemporary Milwaukee continues to face severe lack of affordable housing, exacerbated with high-rise apartments and luxury condominiums, which activists have challenged for decades.

Strategies of economic development and capital accumulation shed light on the uneven impacts of carceral urbanism (Derickson, 2016). Highlighting the impacts of urban neoliberal austerity and disinvestment, Peake (2016) writes that “contemporary neoliberal urban realities are marked by disintegration of family and community, the displacement of the poor, regulatory (and increasingly securitized) infrastructure and violence” (p. 7). Unfortunately, Milwaukee continues to invest in carceral structures and practices, rather than addressing root causes of social issues. For example, the 2020 City of Milwaukee budget includes the allocation of \$297.4 million to the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD), accounting for nearly half of all city department funds (Dirr, 2019). MPD, and Milwaukee officials, are dedicated to commonsense logic revolving ‘safety’ and ‘justice.’ Thus, Milwaukee yet another example of city invested in carceral urbanism; another place where “the city and the prison [are] inextricably linked as a result of both urban society and the carceral state” (Burns, 2018, p. 6). Milwaukee's landscape continues to be shaped by racist tactics utilized by state and local government to fuel urban development efforts, influencing both discourse and public’s perspective on race, criminalization, and reentry services.

In her analysis of borders as an analytic, Ramírez (2019) demonstrates the intricate relationality between borders, state power, urban redevelopment, and carcerality, which can be applied to

understanding the internal structures of Milwaukee. Ramírez (2019) asserts that “borders are produced structurally, socially, and spatially in gentrifying cities and are policed by the same carceral geographies that patrol the margins of the nation-state” (p. 3). As I’ve argued, the borders of Milwaukee continue to be (re)produced through white supremacy, hierarchies of race, class, and gender, and criminalization, reflecting the past and present patterns of racial violence. However, the future provides hope since borders are fluid and can be transformed around safety and accountability by residents.

The logic of carceral urbanism heavily shapes the physical and imaginative geographies of Milwaukee and these conditions markedly shape formerly incarcerated women-identifying people’s experiences with reentry. It is integral to understand how Milwaukee’s racialized urban development and “majority-rule” analysis fails to understand the impacts of criminalization, incarceration, and reentry services for women-identifying people. It is clear that various stakeholders are invested in law enforcement and correctional facilities whether it is appearing hard on crime for (re)election, profiting from incarcerated people via phone calls, emails, GPS monitors, and canteen items, or ‘enforcing’ public safety (Jefferson, 2017). All of these mechanisms are ostensibly in place to “decrease” crime and ensure security, yet they are justified by racist assumptions about people and places and represent new “tentacles of carceral power” (Jefferson, 2017). Rather than viewing ‘safety’ via the provision of appropriate reentry services, goals for family reunification, and the decriminalization of women, Milwaukee continues to invest in its downtown urban regime (Hashimoto, 2020).

Chapter 4. Feminist Discourse and Content Analysis: Investigating Reentry Services Providers and the Unmet Needs of Formerly Incarcerated Cis-Women

As of 2019, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (WI DOC) operates 37 adult correctional facilities (see Appendix B) with an additional 66,248 people under parole, probation, or extended supervision, and another estimated 1,671 Division of Community Corrections (*Division of Community Corrections: 2019 A Year in Review*, 2019, p. 3). With an immense population under some form of community supervision, reentry services are crucial in providing urgent community-based resources and peer support to ease transition as well as attempt to reduce recidivism rates. The WI DOC (2016) defines recidivism as committing “a criminal offense that results in a new conviction and sentence to WI DOC custody or supervision” (p. 5), and found the average recidivism rates for people in women’s prisons during a three-year follow-up was 26.1% between 2000-2011 (State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2016, p. 7). Yet, an intersectional, feminist, prison abolitionist framework on recidivism understands that such ‘crimes’ are often acts of survival based on structural inequalities.

In this chapter, I draw from a discourse and content analysis of website contents of 33 Milwaukee-area reentry service providers (RSPs) to better understand the kinds of messages surrounding the issue of reentry and the sorts of services made available to women-identifying people experiencing reentry. I begin with a brief literature review to define reentry services, the importance of reentry services for women-identifying people, and the goals and success of such reentry services, namely to better support people through the process of reentry to limit new entanglements (or exposure) in the criminal legal system. My analysis reveals that most RSPs rely upon, and reproduce, racialized, gendered and classed understandings of incarceration, crime, and the criminalization of women-identifying people. By analyzing RSPs’ websites, including the text itself and visual photos and symbols, they continue to erase the voices and experiences of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people. The failure to engage in an intersectional approach to understand the constitutive power of

racism, sexism, and classism leads formerly incarcerated women-identifying people to further social and economic precarity, or premature death.

Understanding Reentry Services

Reentry service discourse reflects broader societal norms and ideologies of crime, incarceration, and justice (Travis, 2005; Travis & Visher, 2005), where they exist to provide successful reintegration (C. Gill & Wilson, 2017; Jonson & Cullen, 2015) and to reduce recidivism (Petersilia, 2003; Visher et al., 2017). However reentry service discourse fails to address root causes of crime and, instead, casts individual blame and responsibility for their successful reentry (Byrd, 2016; Visher et al., 2017). Perspectives emphasizing societal integration call attention to everyday life, such as supporting rehabilitative efforts (R. J. Miller, 2014; Western, 2008), reestablishing social bonds with family members, accessing health care and medications, and securing stable employment and housing (C. Gill & Wilson, 2017; Hallett, 2012; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005; Travis & Visher, 2005). With these sorts of aim in mind, reentry services may often take the form of educational programs, substance abuse treatment, vocational training, cognitive behavioral treatment, and crime-based governmental programs (Visher et al., 2017, p. 139). However, while most of the evaluation of the reentry services focus on experimental design and success, they fail to grapple with structural inequalities, such as gender, race and class (Hallett, 2012), where reentry services become fractured and divorced from the larger societal matrix of domination.

Reentry services are provided by an array of governmental agencies, humanitarian and community-based nonprofits, and faith-based institutions. Whittle (2018) notes how these reentry service providers (RSP) encompass a variety of organizations, including “[c]riminal justice system (CJS) actors such as probation and parole officers and social service-oriented actors such as drug treatment and mental health counselors, housing and employment specialists, and case managers” (p. 276). RSPs span across a variety of institutions and partnerships and, within this context, they are “socially

constructed site[s] of intervention...produced by and simultaneously produc[ing] the punishment system” (Byrd, 2016, p. 3). In this way, reentry services are in coordination with the carceral state where RSPs step-in to provide services in the absence of the state; yet, in doing so, they are also propping up the carceral state. Similarly, in calling attention to the ways RSP reinforce and support the carceral state, Miller (2014) defines this entanglement the “welfare state-criminal justice hybrid institution” (p. 307) where welfare and social services are tethered to the system that criminalized and incarcerated individuals in the first place. His analysis critiques the blurry boundaries between the criminal legal system and social service-oriented actors, illustrating how this assemblage of RSPs normalize the invisible web of extreme surveillance and social control.

For instance, the engagement of governmental agencies as RSPs has led to an increase in the technological monitoring and surveillance of formerly incarcerated people in their community (U.S. Department of Justice, 2018). These forms of surveillance extend into a formerly incarcerated person’s private life, potentially entangling their family in the criminal legal system and shifting power to local authorities. Miller (2014) describes contemporary RSPs as a part of the “carceral devolution,” which refers to “a set of interrelated policies that transfer carceral authority – in this case the authority to rehabilitate and supervise prisoners – from federal and state-based institutions to local ones” (R. J. Miller, 2014, p. 308). The increasing number of stakeholders involved in reentry services and programming leads to competition between punishment and social welfare actors, despite the original role of reentry services to ease the transitional process from prison to society (R. J. Miller, 2014; Whittle, 2018). In other words, reentry services are indistinguishable replications of further control, surveillance, and punishment, and as Richie and Martensen (2019) coin as “carceral services” (p. 14). Reentry services, then, work to expand the carceral state (Byrd, 2016, 2018; R. J. Miller, 2014; Richie & Martensen, 2019).

Similar to the critique of federal, state, and local government's provision of reentry services, Wolch (1990) and De Giorgi (2018) criticize the bolstered burden on public sector services, due to the neoliberal austerity, the privatization of social services and the severe elimination of welfare services.

Wolch (1990) defines this system as the "shadow-state," referring to a:

para-state apparatus with collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector, administered outside traditional democratic politics, but yet controlled in both formal and informal ways by the state (p. 201)

Regardless of who is providing services, a majority of RSPs are themselves funded or supported in some way by the state and are thoroughly entangled with the neoliberal logics of privatization, personal responsibility, self-help, welfare reform, and market-friendly solutions (Beckett & Sasson, 2004; De Giorgi, 2018; Hallett, 2012). Since reentry services largely cater to marginalized and often neglected populations – including Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people, low-income individuals, and queer individuals – understanding the role of reentry services and their accessibility are crucial (Hallett, 2012). As Beckett and Sasson (2004) point out, the reduction of welfare is actually a transition to exclusionary, punitive mechanisms to further regulate social control and social marginality (p. 46-47). Thus, while RSPs intended to originally ease transition into society and reduce the likeliness of a return to prison, the reentry process is more complicated via neoliberal logic and the carceral state.

Despite an intensified number of RSPs emerging around the country, few individuals "succeed" throughout the reentry process in a system that relies upon and reinforces the reach of the carceral state. As Richards and Jones (1997) describe, US carcerality is a "perpetual incarceration machine" (p. 15), where prison expansion leads to an institutional failure to prepare incarcerated individuals for release and transition into society (see also (Pager, 2007). Rather than invest in programming and dismantling structural barriers that lead to paths of criminalization, the carceral state continues to bolster its prison and policing apparatuses. This leads to a cyclical relationship of incarceration and

violence, described as “a revolving door that shuffles [incarcerated people] from one level of custody to another, from probation to prison, from prison to work release and parole, and from parole back to prison” (Richards & Jones, 1997, p. 15). Thus, the ability for formerly incarcerated individuals to succeed post-release becomes a battle of securing everyday essentials and overcoming structural inequalities and failures. For formerly incarcerated women-identifying people, they are not only subject to ongoing gender-based violence, such as the rollback of welfare assistance, formerly incarcerated women-identifying people are ironically made invisible during the reentry process.

Neoliberal logic has led to neoliberal neglect, particularly for formerly incarcerated people and specifically for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people (De Giorgi, 2018). While existing literature heavily focuses on lowering recidivism rates and increasing rehabilitative efforts (Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005; R. J. Miller, 2014; Visher et al., 2017), and these analyses are often grounded in assumptions about individual choice and behavioral changes as successful strategies rather than addressing structural dynamics within the community, such as poverty, racism, and segregation. For example, Lowenkamp and Latessa (2005) analyzed 38 halfway house programs and nearly 7,000 formerly incarcerated individuals and identified key reasons why reentry services are promising, namely their assimilation into the “natural environment,” ability to deal with consequences of incarceration, and to participate in better functioning lives (p. 72). With a large sample size to ensure validity and generalizability, the only “promising” aspect of these services was the further social control of formerly incarcerated people via individual behavior. Similarly, based on a multi-site evaluation of 12 reentry programs across 12 states, Visher, Lattimore, Barrick, and Tueller’s (2017) study investigated the impact of pre-release services and number of rearrests up to 56 months post-release for formerly incarcerated men-identifying people. Their study revealed that individual change was more beneficial than addressing practical needs (p. 154). Likewise, faith-based institutions continue to rely on individual responsibility and personal reformation, bolstered by the notion that religion and rehabilitation are

intimately connected (Flores & Cossyleon, 2016). For some, faith-based reentry services are empowering, and these individuals connect to “redemption scripts” that include paying good deeds forward, absolving themselves of previous participation in crime, and acting as models to prevent others from committing crimes. Based on 18 months of participant observation and interviews, Flores and Cossyleon (2016) documents that such attempts to reformation may include efforts to unlearning toxic masculinity while simultaneously reintegrating themselves in the household. However, this study continued to rely on personal reformation and a perpetuation of heteropatriarchy within the household. Critically analyzing such approaches to reentry is significant because, as De Giorgi (2018) argues, these RSPs mirror “the neoliberal ideology of personal responsibility, market competition, and self-help ultimately pervades every aspect of the reentry process” (p. 94). In this sense, RSP discourse reflects these societal values, where reentry success revolves around individual accountability, productivity, and reformation.

In summary, as I’ve noted above, scholarship on RSP indicates that reentry services encompass a broad array of activities and that providers understand and approach reentry a variety of ways. Yet, most of this literature emphasizes individual behavior and crime rather than the social conditions of the city that produce crime in the first place. Furthermore, there is no standard model or measure of “success” in evaluating RSPs, which means that we have a limited understanding of what specific types of reentry programs and services are actually useful (Visher et al., 2017). Finally, the bulk of this literature focuses solely on formerly incarcerated men-identifying people (Berghuis, 2018; R. J. Miller, 2014; Visher et al., 2017), reproducing the broader erasure of women-identifying peoples’ voices and experiences with incarceration and reentry. This erasure illustrates the ongoing gender-based violence and structural inequalities within reentry services and their discourse. I now turn my attention to Milwaukee-area RSPs, where my findings also support the invisibility of women-identifying people’s experiences with incarceration.

Methodology: A Feminist Way of Knowing and Doing Research

Informed by a feminist post-structural framework, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the discourse and content of 33 Milwaukee-area RSPs to better understand how formerly incarcerated women-identifying people are situated within the reentry process. As Dittmer (2010) notes, “[i]f a researcher is interested in the ways in which knowledge is formulated and validated by society as truth, then discourse analysis is likely an excellent methodology” (p. 275). Within this feminist framework of “doing research,” a large reason for a discourse analysis is to challenge and interrupt hegemonic narratives. Consequently, as Hall (2001) writes, discourse

constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about or reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of them. (p. 2)

Therefore, discourse allows for the analysis of knowledge, assumptions, and societal norms on a macro-scale. As Frost and Elichaooff (2014) describe, discourse analyses are integral ways to “observe cultural and societal influences on subjective experiences” (p. 46). For example, terminology affects the ways in which people are situated and categorized. Within the literature above, formerly incarcerated people were defined as prisoners/ex-prisoners/former prisoners (Mellow & Christian, 2008; R. J. Miller, 2014; Western, 2008), ex-felons/convicted felons (Petersilia, 2003; Whittle, 2018), offenders (C. Gill & Wilson, 2017; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005), people returning from prison (Whittle, 2018), and formerly incarcerated people (Whittle, 2018). Instead of using language that continues to criminalize and dehumanize people, I align my language with formerly incarcerated activists and allies in Milwaukee who intentionally use people-first language to disrupt larger discourses that assign formerly incarcerated people to second-class citizenship. It is not just challenging terminology and assumptions within discourse, it is calling attention to systems of oppression. Reentry services are not simply services; rather, they are sites of power, particularly “where the active construction of knowledge and

identity occurs” (Day & Keys, 2008, p. 5). Through the discourse analysis, this research uncovers the systems of power and knowledge that shape and mold reentry services. Similarly, as Lees (2004) explains, discourses “are not simply reflections or (mis)representations of ‘reality’; rather they create their own ‘regimes of truth’ – the acceptable formulation of problems and solutions to those problems” (p. 102-103). Therefore, discourse analysis works to uncover the ways in which knowledge is produced and normalized through power relations, bridging structural inequalities with the everyday life (Foucault, 1972, 1977; Lemke, 2001).

Throughout this research, I am guided by Fairclough (1992) who identifies three levels of analysis, namely the macro-, meso-, and micro-scales of discourse. The micro-scale involves close textual analysis, including rhetorical analysis on word choice, grammar, and the visual organization of the RSP websites. This step involved moving web content into Word documents to examine details like word choice and grammar. From a post-structuralist standpoint, word choice is important as I reject the essentialization and bifurcation of a range of dualities, including man/woman, public/private, deserving/undeserving, violent/nonviolent formerly incarcerated people, which heavily shaped the discourse of reentry services. In order to capture the context of the webpage, including the website layout and visual cues, I analyzed each Word document of website content alongside a second computer monitor displaying the website itself. This process informed me of the similar headings and categories of information, such as their mission, vision, program areas, and donation opportunities, despite the various website formatting. While this information was displayed and more accessible, I also analyzed what information was not present on RSP websites, such as what aspects of reentry are not discussed or explored. The meso-scale, as Fairclough (1992) notes, involves observing assumptions embedded in discourse. For example, in reading and analyzing RSP website content, it became apparent that many faith-based reentry services rely on “redemption scripts” and situate formerly incarcerated people in need of individual salvation and redemption. While meso-scale includes assumptions and rhetoric

embedded in local context, in this case in Milwaukee, macro-scale analysis explores how rhetoric is embedded within broader social undertakings. Therefore, I situate my discourse analysis of Milwaukee-area RSPs within wider social constructions of crime, recidivism, and reentry. As Dittmer (2010) notes, this wide-scale scope allows an opportunity to demonstrate the “macro-scale importance of language” (p. 275), underlying a political intervention and praxis to uncover deep-seeded oppression and inequality that reflect hegemonic values, beliefs, and assumptions that are normalized within our society (p. 285). Similarly, this discourse analysis acts as a “transformative quest” (Frost & Elichaooff, 2014, p. 50) to reshape existing power dynamics through social interventions.

The data collection process began by producing a list of reentry organizations in the Milwaukee-area, using key phrases such as “reentry services in Milwaukee” and “prisoner support in Milwaukee.”¹⁹ This list was generated over time through systematic searches with a total of 33 RSPs (see Appendix C for a list of organizations in the analysis); however, early data collection indicated that far fewer organizations offered support to women-identifying people and children compared to men-identifying people. After establishing a master list of Milwaukee-area reentry organizations, materials from each website were downloaded and saved for coding and analysis. My approach to coding is situated in iterative readings of the data where I documented common patterns, key words, and themes and made notes to connect themes between codes, referencing both individual and structural challenges to providing or accessing reentry services. Once I had a better grasp of the data collection, I analyzed and re-coded data to parse out specific patterns and representations of individuals, of the community, and of Milwaukee through both written discourse and visual symbolism. In addition to the discourse analysis, I engaged in a content analysis to better understand what types of reentry services were available for women-identifying people in Milwaukee.

¹⁹ As mentioned before, ‘prisoner’ is not a term I use in my research or my activism; however, since ‘prisoner’ is still a commonly used term within RSP discourse, it allowed me to identify existing RSPs in the Milwaukee-area.

Given that my approach is grounded in feminist methodologies, I recognize how my social location shaped my interpretation of RSP discourse and created several limitations within this analysis, specifically rooted in my power, privilege, and positionality. As bell hooks (2014) cautions, “[w]hen we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination” (p. 43). As a university-affiliated researcher who has not experienced incarceration or the reentry process, there are inherent uneven power dynamics that can easily make me complicit in the systems of domination. Based on my positionality, the way in which I researched reentry organizations was based on Google searches rather than direct experience or word-of-mouth referrals.²⁰ Therefore, I acknowledge this may be a partial list of reentry services available in Milwaukee, overlooking informal support groups and/or those engaging in mutual aid. The second limitation is the small sample size of RSPs limit generalizability; however, the purpose of this discourse analysis is not to generalize findings but to contextualize the social, cultural, and economic systems in Milwaukee and how these shape reentry services (un)available in the city for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people.

Findings and Analysis: Invisibility, Misrepresentation, and Resistance within Reentry Services

Based on a feminist post-structural framework, the discourse analysis of reentry services in the Milwaukee-area exposed several key themes related to uneven power, (in)visibility, and hegemonic understandings of incarceration and crime. Through micro-scale analyses of terminology and content analysis, RSPs situate formerly incarcerated individuals as less than, reinforcing the imaginary, yet materialized second-class citizenship and stigmatization in society through dehumanizing terminology. In addition, a majority of RSPs referred to men-identifying people, specifically Black men, or vague references to community members as their target population. Moreover, by focusing on the written and

²⁰ While I do not mean to say that having experienced incarceration would be a guarantee of finding all Milwaukee-area RSPs, I acknowledge that there may be other informal RSPs that provide material support to formerly incarcerated people and are not formally acknowledged.

contextualized information, it was also important to observe “what is not said” (Cameron, 2001, p. 128). In other words, the absence of women-identifying people from reentry service discourse and content is of critical importance given that most reentry services fail to adequately address the needs of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people or provide services that reinforce gender governance.

Ultimately, this discourse analysis revealed two main findings. First, I found an erasure of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people within the discourse itself and actual reentry services, as made evident by the content analysis. Reentry services not only focus primarily on men-identifying people, but the discourse perpetuates bifurcations of gender and gendered labor, specifically through parenting programs, which are strengthened under neoliberal, capitalist, gender governance. The second finding illustrates how societal ideologies such as religion, racism, and neoliberalism, influence the structure and logic of reentry programming.

Examining Racialized, Gendered, and Classed Representations of RSP Content

As previously mentioned, reentry services in the Milwaukee-area cater to men-identifying people, specifically Black men, bolstered by the carceral landscape of the city built on racial dispossession and white capital accumulation. Based on content analysis²¹ of the RSP websites, a majority of the photos center on Black men-identifying people, both as educators and models of successful reentry programming (ALMA Center, Project RETURN, and Community Advocates) and as formerly incarcerated people participating in reentry services (Genesis in Milwaukee, Inc., Community Advocates, Milwaukee Rescue Mission, Project RETURN, and Center for Self-Sufficiency). In addition, these photos are often situated in programs that eliminate cycles of violence, specifically domestic violence and abuse. While the visual representations depict the racialized and gendered impacts of the

²¹ While the content and discourse analysis meant analyzing the photos on their website, I want to be transparent and illuminate the difficulties in using socially constructed notions of race and gender. I do not want to assume peoples’ racial or gender identity, yet the context of the photos allude to Black men-identifying people. In addition, I want to illuminate the problem of colorism, and relying on assumptions about skin color, that continue to reproduce ideas about race, specifically Blackness and criminality.

carceral landscape in Milwaukee, these images are not coupled with a critical analysis that explain why incarceration disproportionately targets Black men-identifying people. If reentry services are invested in disrupting all forms of violence, including domestic violence, then they must take seriously the role of the carceral state and its' ongoing forms of racialized, gender-based violence within incarceration and criminalization of certain bodies.

An Invisible Population: Understanding the Unmet Needs of Formerly Incarcerated Women

While the majority of Milwaukee-area RSP organizations broadly acknowledged the ways in which women-identifying people are entangled in the criminal legal system, very few organizations provide tangible access and capacity to support formerly incarcerated women-identifying people. For instance, only one-third of RSPs (11) included 'women' in their reentry service discourse, illuminating the ongoing erasure of supporting formerly incarcerated women-identifying people in Milwaukee. If formerly incarcerated women-identifying people are not included in discourse, and thus reentry services, then they continue to be overlooked and erased. When women-identifying people are included in the RSPs' programming, most programs implement traditional "add women and stir" approaches that fall back onto normative heterosexual and patriarchal understandings of gender and family that lack engagement with the racialized, gendered, and classed aspects of criminalization and reentry service needs.

The ability to find safe and affordable housing as a low-income individual in Milwaukee is difficult to say the least, especially when most people with felonies are barred from receiving section-8 housing.²² Most of the RSPs speak to the importance of housing and the resounding relationship between homelessness and recidivism, yet very few provide specific information about their housing capacities. For instance, at Matt Talbot Recover Services and ATTIC, there are 8 designated beds for

²² In Milwaukee County, disqualifiers for the Section 8 Voucher Program include a member of the household being "convicted of a drug-related criminal activity for the production or manufacture of methamphetamine" and/or engaging "in drug-related criminal activity and violent criminal activity" {Citation}.

women compared to the 45 total beds for men; however, the remaining beds available are designed to keep families together. RSPs play a crucial role in their ability to keep families together through residential programs. In Milwaukee, there are only three facilities that allow women-identifying people and their children to stay together, namely Hope Street Ministry, Meta House, and the Milwaukee Women's Center. Altogether, there are an estimated 130 beds available for families where Meta House allows "up to 35 women and 15 children" in their residential program, the Milwaukee Women's Center provides 40 beds (including cribs for infants) in their Family Support Center Emergency Shelter, and Hope Street has become "home to about 40 men, women, and children." These programs make clear the importance of integrating family reunification efforts within the reentry service process, yet there are extremely limited transitional and long-term housing opportunities for women-identifying people and their children in the Milwaukee-area.

For programs that exist specifically to cater to formerly incarcerated women-identifying people, such as Meta House, Benedict Center, and the Wisconsin Women's Resource Center (WWRC), these RSPs dedicate themselves to gender-responsive programs which revolve around therapeutic self-governance (Shaylor & Meiners, 2013, p. 191). As my analysis shows, these gender-responsive reentry services revolve around anger management (Benedict Center, Meta House, WCS), self-esteem (Meta House, CRC, MRM), and mothering classes (WWCS). While gender-responsive programs attempt to address the layers of trauma formerly incarcerated women-identifying people experience, my analysis indicates that much of this programming relates to properly regulating women-identifying people's emotions, specifically Black women's emotions, rather than uncovering or treating the trauma itself. For instance, the Benedict Center describes their anger and stress management class as a way for women-identifying people to "learn more about how to control unhealthy emotions and become better equipped to avoid making impulsive decisions by responding more appropriately to stressors" (Benedict Center, 2020). Yet, next to their online class description is an image of a dark-skinned person, assumed

to be a woman-identifying person, with long kinky hair in a yellow tank top, resting their chin on their arm and looking into the distance. The use of this imagery, specifically a dark-skinned person in relation to anger management programs, are reminiscent of tropes that have long constructed Black women as angry Black women, as echoed by Black feminist scholars and intellectuals (Collins, 2000; B. Cooper, 2018; Lorde, 1984).

Further complicating the content and discourse of the Benedict Center, in eight of the ten program components are photos of young, darker-skinned (assumed) women while the remaining two photos reference young, light-skinned/white-passing women. This is critical as the photos with white-passing people are in relation to their “seeking safety” and “second chance” programs, further solidifying the connections between whiteness, safety, and situating some women-identifying people as ‘deserving’ while other programs, including “adult education, AODA treatment, and women’s sexuality,” reinforce women of color as uneducated and/or addicted and positioning them as ‘underserving.’ Even within RSP content, the Benedict Center implicitly reifies the violences of whiteness in their larger discourse.

While it is important to provide a cognitive-behavioral aspect to reentry services, I do not mean to diminish this focus; however, my analysis of reentry services indicate that organizations do not discuss the structural dynamics of race, gender, or poverty and how they connect to overlapping patterns of incarceration, criminalization, and reentry. I argue that if reentry services do not include an intersectional analysis, they effectively reinforce racialized, gender-based state violence and social marginalization of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people (Byrd, 2016, 2018). In order to better understand the structural barriers of incarceration and criminalization for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people, reentry services must address the social constructions of crime, often entangled in racialized, gendered, and classed assumptions.

Bifurcations of Gender and Gendered Parenting

Generally, RSPs reproduce bifurcated understandings of gender and parenting²³ where programs for men deploy pervasive ideologies of fatherhood and heteronormative, nuclear families, wrapped up in assumptions that men are incapable of parenting. Comparatively, there were drastically fewer parenting programs available for women-identifying people given their assumed gendered domestic role as a caregiver. For example, people incarcerated at the Milwaukee County House of Corrections (HOC) are offered a six-week program called the “Fatherhood Initiative” where participants meet three nights per week for two-and-a-half hours per session. This program dedicates nearly 45 hours of parental, cognitive-based programming for people in men’s prisons prior to their release. Once people from men’s prisons are released, there continue to be numerous parenting support initiatives at RSPs, such as the ALMA Center, the Center of Self-Sufficiency, Community Advocates, and Genesis in Milwaukee. The ALMA Center Restorative Fatherhood program was described as

focus[ing] on exploring personal experiences of fathering to learn compassion, forgiveness, and responsibility, and to build positive, trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate nurturing fathering and co-parenting values, attitudes, and skills.

In order to learn parenting techniques, this program teaches skills around emotional connection and development via nurturing language and co-parenting values. The emphasis on two-parenting households and marriage are embedded into the discourse as the Center of Self-Sufficiency’s New Pathways for Fathers and Families program offers:

fathers ongoing instruction on Responsible Parenting, Economic Stability and [a] Healthy Marriage, as well as case management that emphasizes coaching. This program aims to

²³ Instead of using an essentialized description of women, Meta House is understanding of gender fluidity, stating, “We pride ourselves on being a woman’s program, but we know gender isn’t binary. If you identify as a woman, we believe our program will be a good fit for you.”

strengthen father-child engagement and promote and improve employment and economic mobility opportunities.

In this way, parenting programs position men as unequipped with parental skills where they need “coaching” lessons. Similarly, such embedded assumptions demonstrated in these class descriptions focus on individualistic forms of behavioral changes rather than an emphasis on systemic change which can heavily influence families in the first place. The value of fatherhood is so engrained that Genesis in Milwaukee, Inc. blames crime on the number of absent fathers which they claim has “plagued the inner city and continues to decimate communities.” Evidently, these programs formulate a lot of assumptions of parenting, such as their provision to heteronormative, nuclear families.

Based on a meso-scale analysis, this discourse assumes that parents, incarcerated or not, have developed skills based on assumptions of gendered labor where women-identifying people disproportionately participate in (paid and unpaid) “natural” caregiver roles. For instance, a program administered by the Benedict Center, in alliance with the Wisconsin House of Corrections (WI HOC), provides a five-week Nurturing Parenting Class to people in a women’s jail. This program revolves around five skill areas described as:

age-appropriate expectations; empathy, bonding, and attachment; non-violent nurturing discipline; self-awareness and self-worth; empowerment, autonomy, and healthy independence
(Benedict Center)

Unlike fatherhood classes that focus on co-parenting and coaching, descriptions of motherhood classes revolved around regulating emotions, pointing to the ways that gendered assumptions and norms are ingrained in RSP parenting programs. This may be, in part, due to the professionalization of the nonprofit sector and its workforce, including the Benedict Center, where nonprofits are moving towards the expertise via higher education and away from informal, community-based knowledge (INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans people of Color Against Violence, 2017; Salamon, 2012). In

this sense, notions of womanhood and motherhood are represented by these professionalized stakeholders, including state and governmental funders, whose practices uphold white supremacy.

Together, a discourse and content analysis indicate how RSPs deploy definitions of gender and gender identify to contextualize their ideas of family. For example, embedded in the descriptions of fatherhood classes are assumptions that men-identifying people will raise their children with their partner in a heteronormative, nuclear family to repair the “broken home.” In contrast, descriptions of motherhood classes assumed that children will be raised in single-parent households with RSPs shifting their visual messaging with photos of single mothers holding their smiling children. Unfortunately, this research highlights the disparities in parenting programs available for women-identifying people, and thus, less capacity to support formerly incarcerated women and the family reunification process.

Representations of Religion, Racism, and Neoliberal Logic within RSP Discourse

Salvation, Hope, and Transformation from Faith-based Organizations

In Milwaukee, nearly half of the RSPs (14 of 33) are faith-based organizations that serve and support formerly incarcerated individuals regardless of their spirituality; however, this faith-based discourse may become exclusionary due to narratives and representations of formerly incarcerated individuals and the influence of religion on reentry services and expectations. Due to the interconnectedness with various religious congregations and denominations, faith-based RSPs have an extensive reach within their communities. For instance, Central City Churches, Inc. was founded by eight congregations from five Christian denominations, MICAHA is comprised of over 40 congregations of various religions, and WISDOM includes nearly 160 congregations with 19 different religious traditions. Faith-based RSPs are able to mobilize their congregations and their communities for a collective cause: providing reentry services for formerly incarcerated people. Faith-based RSPs provide a variety of necessary services, such as employment training and support groups, and these organizations position

their services as an extension of Samaritan actions and religious values, relying on narratives of salvation and redemption scripts.

Based on a micro-scale rhetorical analysis of faith-based RSPs, service provision to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals was granted through the love, care, hope, and joy of their creator. For instance, several organization's mission statements positioned themselves as existing to "glorify the Lord Jesus Christ," to share "God's love by caring," to watch "lives [be] transformed through Christ to hope, joy, and lasting productivity, and to "Be Jesus to their community" (Genesis in Milwaukee). Similar to Visher et al.'s (2017) findings, this rhetoric focused on affective emotions relating to empowerment, often paired with visual representations of stain glass doors, candles, and crosses all of which materially manifest within religious institutions. The inclusion of these visuals reinforces religious values like individual sacrifice, discipline, and repentance as ways to justify the use of faith outreach as a form of reentry service. The organizations situate healing and rehabilitation with a spiritual transformation and services often involve offering religious teachings and "hope" rather than tangible, material resources for individuals and for the community. Despite a survey conducted by the Benedict Center that found incarcerated women-identifying people to be the "most neglected segment of prisoners," formerly incarcerated women-identifying people's representation within reentry services were few to non-existent, with the exceptions of the Benedict Center, Hope Street Ministries, and Milwaukee Rescue Mission.

While my aim is not to diminish people's individual, situated experiences with religion, I would like to highlight the ways in which faith-based organizations represent the individuals and communities they passionately serve. The prevailing discourses that emerged from my analysis can be sorted into two categories, namely brokenness and rebuilding. For some RSPs, their terminology failed to shed light on humanity and instead spoke of individuals as forgotten and neglected, in need, and broken. The following excerpts call attention to this language:

We endeavor to offer hope and change lives one household at a time... (Community Warehouse)

We are dedicated to bringing comfort, strength, mercy and hope to the families of the incarcerated, helping them realize that they are not alone, and that God has not forgotten them... (Bienaventurados Ministry)

Inspired by Christ's call to serve, our mission is to provide service to those in need... (Catholic Charities)

We help broken men, women, and children cultivate hope... (Hope Street)

This rhetoric is important because it illuminates the ways in which RSPs view those they are serving, or more specifically helping and saving. Rather than taking seriously the ways in which such language impacts public knowledge and representation of formerly incarcerated people, faith-based RSPs reinforce harmful images and ideas of who is formerly incarcerated and why defining individuals – rather than the system of our unequal society – to be broken. The use of brokenness orients formerly incarcerated people as lacking and as in need of improvement, echoing colonial civilizing narratives that justified extraordinary acts of violence through the rhetoric of salvation and redemption.

According to my analysis, drawing heavily on redemption scripts, these faith-based organizations prioritize personal redemption and only after this transformation takes place can formerly incarcerated individuals find opportunities to rebuild their life and their community. This analysis supports existing scholarship that examines the relationship between religion, reentry services, and rehabilitation (Flores & Cossyleon, 2016; Visher et al., 2017). As Flores and Cossyleon (2016) note, redemption scripts have multiple purposes, such as participating in Samaritan deeds, forgiving themselves of participation in crime, and acting as model to prevent others from committing crime.

While faith-based RSPs rely on individual responsibility as reformation, they also position this (re)building as a community effort:

Partners in Hope (PIH) seeks to rebuild homes, rebuild lives and rebuild families by developing faith, nurturing hope, and modeling love in life and work. (Community Warehouse)

The CRC is a faith-based, community service, non-profit organization that provides ancillary support for men and women rebuilding their lives after trauma... (Convergence Resource Center).

We are inviting members of all congregations and the general public to become part of rebuilding strong community relationships... (MICAH)

Women and children will find not only safe shelter at Joy House, but the resources and encouragement to help them rebuild their lives. (Milwaukee Rescue Mission)

Rebuilding includes man (in God's presence), family (restoration), and neighborhood (healthy environment). (Genesis in Milwaukee).

This rebuilding is paired with imagery that focuses on renewal and individual transformation, such as a butterfly, lighthouse, sunrise, and an arrow. These four symbols represent hope through personal growth and transformation, overcoming barriers and navigating the world by a guided light, new beginnings, and the continuous cycles of growth. Often, red accents within the symbols are used to represent the love and energy from God as well as the fierce strength and determination of individual change. This discourse of inner transformation reflects neoliberal logic, where individual accountability (and blame) are the sole factors of reentry success. At the same time, a focus on personal responsibility shifts energy and organizing from the “collective process of political struggle” (Byrd, 2016, p. 6), rather

than addressing the structural inequalities that perpetuate poverty, housing, employment, and incarceration in the first place.

Challenging Racialization and Carceral Landscapes: Representations of 53206

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the carceral landscape of Milwaukee was shaped by dominant discourse reflecting racism, “tough on crime” rhetoric, and social constructions of crime. Unfortunately, zip code 53206 came to symbolize these cumulative effects of uneven racialized development, such as broken homes and uncaring Black communities (Loyd & Bonds, 2018), bolstered by Pawasarat and Quinn’s (2013) workforce report that found high rates of incarceration among Black men living in zip code 53206. While Pawasarat and Quinn (2013) attempted to highlight the racialization of space in the city, their report did not emphasize the structural factors that led to the “racially unequal urban landscape” (Loyd & Bonds, 2018, p. 906) in the first place, namely racial and wealth segregation, cutbacks to public schools, social welfare reform, and the expansion of carceral capacities. Unfortunately, these narratives of 53206 permeate RSP discourse, specifically through MICA’s 53206 initiative which:

provide[s] an organized effort to combat...mass incarceration[’s] racial disparities and to reduce imprisonment entry rates in the community with the worst incarceration rate for African American males. (MICA)

While I do not mean to diminish efforts aimed at racial justice, the MICA discourse continues to perpetuate a racialized, male-centered perspective of 53206 without considering the effects of racial capitalism and the racialization of space on women.

On the other hand, Hope Street Ministry critiques these narratives and, instead, embrace and reclaim their neighborhood. They are in the process of building a new community center, named Shechem, in part to increase their current capacity and programming abilities, and more importantly, to

invest in their community. With a decision to build the community center in zip code 53206, Hope Street explained:

53206 zip code is often overlooked, passed through and seen as less than worthy. All of this has left a community wrought with terrible statistical trends and at the top of undesirable lists. We are building a new, beautiful community center here because we trust our community. We trust that given the opportunity beauty can come from brokenness, that a narrative can be disrupted by growth and change. Put simply: we are building it because our community is worth investing in.

While Hope Street still refers to “brokenness,” they directly critique the narratives that pathologize individuals and their communities. Instead, they intervene through rhetoric of collective solidarity and transformation such as “we,” “trust,” “growth,” and “change.” The community center, then, becomes a physical and symbolic investment in their community, eliminating the “brokenness” of the neighborhood.

Neoliberal Logic via the “welfare state-criminal justice hybrid institution” : Individuality as Success

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the entanglement of reentry services, welfare services, and the criminal legal system that Miller (2014) describes as the “welfare state-criminal justice hybrid institution,” can hinder reentry success due to the blurred boundaries between the state and nonprofit reentry organizations. This can be seen in the direct partnerships between humanitarian-based nonprofits and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. However, these partnerships are in place primarily for funding, and cash-strapped nonprofits increasingly rely upon state financial supports.

The [Sisters] program is an innovative community-police partnership and is gaining recognition as a more effective way to improve the health and safety of women and communities. (Benedict Center)

ATTIC receives funding, in part, from the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, United States District Courts, Minnesota Department of Corrections, various Wisconsin counties, and certified clinic insurance and private pay arrangements. (ATTIC)

Partnering with Employ Milwaukee and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, we provide cognitive skills-based education to individuals releasing from Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility or Racine Correctional Institution to the Milwaukee area. (Center for Self-Sufficiency, Inc.)

The program is a collaborative effort of the Department of Corrections and the Department of Health Services. (OARS)

While these short-term partnership programs provide practical skills and support to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, these programs are part of what Ruth Gilmore has termed a “reformist reform.” As Gilmore and Kilgore (2019) explain, reformist reforms increase the scope of carceral control and supervision, often justified by dominant notions of justice and punishment. Since these reentry services partner with the carceral state itself, namely the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and community-policing partnerships, these services increase the scope and capacity of the punishment, as Richie and Martensen (2019) term “carceral services.” In addition, an increasing number of RSPs are controlled by the state, where reentry services rely on neoliberal logic (Beckett & Sasson, 2004; De Giorgi, 2018; Hallett, 2012).

As De Giorgi (2018) describes, this neoliberal neglect is based on the reduction of welfare programs and a dramatic shift from government accountability to humanitarian and community-based nonprofit responsibility. For instance, the Word of Hope Ministries succinctly states, “Because the

government is becoming increasingly limited in providing various services, *the church is becoming more of a resource for the needs of the community*" [emphasis mine]. Thus, as this quote demonstrates, nonprofits fill the disparity between privately-funded resources and public social services. As Gilmore (2017) explains, nonprofits increasingly promote ideas of "responsibility for persons who are in the throes of abandonment rather than responsibility for persons progressing toward full incorporation into the body politic." That is, instead of holding private corporations and the state accountable for their withdrawal, nonprofits step in to fulfill the role of the state and become quasi-arms of the state through funding. When RSPs rely upon funds from the Wisconsin Department of Corrections to deliver services and programs to formerly incarcerated people, this strengthens and expands the carceral state's reach (Gilmore & Kilgore, 2019) and further marginalizes individuals (Beckett & Sasson, 2004). As formerly incarcerated women have fewer material resources and reentry services available to them in Milwaukee, the reentry services that are available become indistinguishable from punitive-based reentry services. For example, the Benedict Center's Sisters program may seem progressive at first glance, yet its community-based policing initiatives only expand the scope of law enforcement with women who are in precarious social locations. In other words, there will be no justice and care in reentry services that secure and strengthen the carceral state.

Conclusion: Reentry Service Discourse and the Politics of Abolition

The findings of my discourse and content analysis of 33 Milwaukee-area RSPs revealed the ways in which discourse, knowledge, and power shape reentry services, understandings of incarceration, and their relationships to family separation. Reentry services often focus on individual transformation, reformation, and second chances. While this discourse may be empowering for formerly incarcerated people, it fails to challenge the structural inequalities that prevent people from fully thriving after reentry. Through content analysis of the services available, I argue that RSPs employ a "majority-analysis" approach, where most programming caters towards men-identifying peoples' experiences of

incarceration and their post-release needs. Put more simply: women-identifying people have access to fewer resources and reentry rhetoric continues to emphasize men-identifying people's incarceration in ways that reinforce this pattern. In this sense, the larger discourse of Milwaukee-area RSPs illustrate their complicity in gender-based violence demonstrated by the lack of short-term, transitional and long-term affordable housing, a basic necessity for people, period.

In addition, a majority of reentry services cater towards men, revealing reentry services to be deeply embedded in the expansion of "a gendered and heteronormative carceral state" (Shaylor & Meiners, 2013, p. 188), as seen in the reinforcement of gender-responsive programs within the reentry process. Most of the reentry services available for women-identifying people focus on limited transitional housing and gendered parenting programs, which focus on reuniting men-identifying people with their children through parenting programs. Assumptions about parenting and parenthood classes are rooted in discourse associated with who is incarcerated. Since most of the RSPs employ a "majority-analysis" of reentry services, women-identifying people are assumed not to be incarcerated and are viewed in heteronormative and patriarchal relationships to men-identifying people, such as mothers, aunts, sisters, and wives. At the same time, these parenting programs assume that parents will be able to see their children right away. However, since formerly incarcerated women-identifying people are the primary caretakers for their children prior to incarceration, there is a greater chance that the children are involved with family members or the child welfare system. Thus, RSPs should not only provide parenting programs for all parents, but also engage in tangible ways and plans to reunite families separated via mass incarceration that do not further entangle women in the criminal legal system (Byrd, 2016). Moreover, RSP discourse fails to represent the urgent needs of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people which could be one factor for the unstable recidivism rates among people in women's prisons.

At the same time that RSPs are uncritical about the recidivism rates and reentry services for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people, the discourse also fails to consider the reasons why formerly incarcerated women-identifying people end up in prison, and this is a problem. RSPs become reactive to mass incarceration and criminalization rather than proactive and dismantling systems that lead to such incarceration. This, in part, is due to those who are considered knowledge producers and “experts” within the reentry process. While most of the nonprofit and WI DOC staff do not have direct experience with incarceration, they are the ones designing, implementing, and evaluating the reentry services instead of asking formerly incarcerated women-identifying people who hold the situated knowledge and lived experience about the reentry process. If RSPs were to include such insights, they would be better able to address the unmet needs of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people.

The few RSPs that used the term “formerly incarcerated” are primarily staffed by formerly incarcerated men-identifying people, which reflects the importance of positionality. Due to their situated lived experiences, formerly incarcerated men-identifying people understand the importance of labels and pave the way for self-definition. For instance, Project RETURN states,

Our experienced staff members—most of whom are formerly incarcerated individuals—work one-on-one with clients, helping them to navigate through the crisis moment and then to look beyond that situation to “next steps.”

This approach not only eliminates inherent power dynamics between formerly incarcerated and non-incarcerated people, it also provides a basis of understanding and shared success and liberation to dismantle the carceral state and systems of oppression. The failure to engage in an intersectional approach to understand the constitutive power of racism, sexism, and classism, leads formerly incarcerated women-identifying people to further social and economic precarity, towards premature death.

Based on this discourse analysis, a majority of the reentry services act as a soft extension of the prison (Thompkins et al., 2010), literally and figuratively represented in the partnerships with the WI DOC to fund reentry services, to expand the carceral state. This is particularly unnerving as reentry services are:

charged with social control responsibilities and given unique tools of surveillance and interference in the daily lives of former prisoners and their families, these institutions exercise a kind of super-authority, allowing for the continued recommitment of released prisoners to the custody of the prison industry and/or continued post-prison supervision. (Thompkins et al., 2010, p. 428)

Despite the purpose of reentry services to 'integrate' and 'transition' people into society, Thompkins et al. (2010) illustrate how the state still does not want formerly incarcerated people to fully participate in political and social life. As Byrd (2016) argues, contemporary reform efforts are mutually constitutive with punishment, naming reform as "punishment's twin." In other words, while reentry services have the ability to dismantle structures of oppression, they continue to rely on the punitive criminal legal system that further marginalizes people, specifically formerly incarcerated women-identifying people and their children.

For these reasons, I argue that RSPs engage with abolitionist frameworks and question how their approaches reinforce the carceral state and racialized and gendered assumptions about crime and incarceration. Following the work and praxis of Mariame Kaba, I argue that "prisons are not feminist" and challenge reentry services to stop further criminalizing women and maintaining gender-based violence. Calling for the transformation of the prison and punishment system means investing in material resources in communities of color, such as health care, K-12 education, grocery stores, public transportation, and housing (Berger et al., 2017; Byrd, 2016; A. Y. Davis & Rodriguez, 2000; Gilmore & Kilgore, 2019; Kushner, 2019; Michalsen, 2019; Richie & Martensen, 2019). This transformation will also

require an ethics of care and community accountability, both of which are grounded in Black Feminist Thought and our relationality to others.

As Hill Collins (1989) outlines in her article, a characteristic of Black Feminist Thought is an ethics of care, or an alternative epistemology to the Eurocentric masculinist knowledge-production process. In order to challenge dominant notions of who holds and produces knowledge, we must participate in an ethics of caring where “personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge-validation process” (Collins, 1989, p. 766). Through participating in an ethics of care, we understand the importance of building relationship, the necessity of collaboration instead of individual competition, and ability to forge a new relationship between notions of care and justice. For instance, Held (2006) writes, “understanding the values involved in care, and how its standards reject violence and domination, are possible with the ethics of care” (p. 3). Within a care of ethics, justice does not equate to the criminalization and confinement of any person. Instead, we can demonstrate a care of ethics by addressing violence within our communities and building community accountability.

As will be discussed in more detail in the last chapter, community accountability is about producing community-based responses to violence, ones that do not cause or perpetuate additional forms of harm, and instead go beyond punishment (Mingus, 2019a). In order to begin cultivating a culture of accountability, Mingus (2019a) explains we must begin small with our own social networks, and describes:

every time you are apologizing, use it as an opportunity to build a culture of accountability in your relationship whether with your friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, dates, or partners.

Use it as an opportunity to build accountability as the norm in your relationships.

In engaging in community-accountability in our own networks, it not only creates a model of accountability, it provides an opportunity to rethink ideas of justice, particularly when we have hurt someone or have been hurt by someone. Instead of relying on the punishment system, which is really

the only form of justice within America, community accountability provides a path for a prison abolitionist future.

Chapter 5. The Production of Knowledge within the Reentry Services: Interviews with Formerly Incarcerated Women and Reentry Service Providers (RSPs)

In this chapter, I draw from interviews with two formerly incarcerated cis-women and two Wisconsin Department of Corrections (WI DOC) officials at the Wisconsin Women’s Resource Center (WWRC), to examine the challenges of the reentry process. Interviews ranged from 33 – 47 minutes, with an average interview length of 40 minutes. While the sample size for this study is small, the goal is not to generalize findings, but to shed light on the situated, partial knowledge of formerly incarcerated cis-women and RSPs in Milwaukee, WI. I begin by contextualizing my interviews with findings in the literature about the individual and institutional barriers incarcerated parents in women’s prisons encounter, focusing particularly on stigmatization, identity, family separation, and the problems of gender-responsive programming. Following the literature review, I highlight the substantial challenges to reentry services faced by formerly incarcerated women-identifying people, including the ability to access reentry services, the lack of appropriate and practical reentry services necessary for “success,” and the gender disparities within existing reentry services. Based on these findings, I argue that the lack of reentry services in Milwaukee for women-identifying people in general, and parents in particular, are the result of racialized, gendered, and classed discourses and criminalization efforts at the local, state, and federal level.

Racialized, Gendered, and Classed Violence in Reentry Services and the Failure of Family Reunification

The incarceration of parents in women’s prisons has rapidly increased since the 1990s (Harrison & Beck, 2006; Mumola, 2000). While research has typically focused on the social, emotional, behavioral, and educational impacts of such incarceration on adolescent children (Cho, 2010; Poehlmann, 2005, 2009; Trice & Brewster, 2004; Wildeman & Turney, 2014), contemporary scholars are increasingly studying the social impacts of incarcerating women-identifying people. Currently, nearly 1 out of every

109 women-identifying people are under a form of community supervision (Holtfreter et al., 2004, p. 186). In response to this massive influx of incarcerated people in women's prisons and jails, carceral feminists advocate for gender-responsive programming. This strategy is designed to administer gender-specific care to incarcerated women by "creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of women's lives and addresses the issues of the participants" (S. Covington & Bloom, 2002). Although this gender-responsive approach is designed to better accommodate women, it does not question the problem of incarcerating women and separating families in the first place. This programming exists within an age of mass criminalization which is a "well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner similar to Jim Crow" (Alexander, 2012, p. 4). Similarly, Davis (1981) theorizes how social constructions of race and gender become normalized, which can influence discourse and impact reentry services, such as bifurcations of gender that naturalize socially constructed differences associated with biological sex. As iterated in previous chapters, the criminal legal system – including emerging gender-responsive programming designed specifically for women – is produced through and reflects gender binaries that destructively conflate sex and gender.²⁴ Therefore, gender is a crucial analytic through which to examine reentry services and the ways in which these services do, or do not, accommodate women-identifying people and parents.

Feminist scholars argue that discourses surrounding reentry services illustrate the intersection of state protection, colonial logic, and the subjection of women. Whalley and Hackett (2017) note that state protection is promised as a reward for victim cooperation, when in reality this assimilation does not protect victims, but instead ensures their subjugation within the systems (p. 463)...[in which] proponents of gender-responsiveness discuss ways in which carceral systems of control,

²⁴ As mentioned in the beginning of this project, states define and perpetuate gender binaries where individuals are incarcerated based on their assigned sex at birth, not their gender identity (Sudbury, 2011).

monitoring, captivity, and surveillance can be transformed to become more like 'helping' institutions for (cis-) women. (p. 465)

This analysis illuminates the ways in which gender-responsive programming resituates women-identifying people as (surveilled) subjects and working bodies at the hands of the state, where the success of their reentry process relies on the same systems of oppression that initially incarcerated them. The carceral state relies upon gender binaries that reinforce the subjugation of women-identifying people. It is for these reasons that abolitionist feminist scholars understand prisons as institutions of state-sanctioned gender-based violence that harm women-identifying adults and young people in specific ways (Bonds, 2019, 2020; A. Davis & Dent, 2001; A. Y. Davis, 1998; Gilmore, 2002; Loyd et al., 2012; Sudbury, 2002, 2005).

It is widely understood that parenting, particularly resuming motherhood, is an important aspect of reentry for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people; however, reentry creates conditions of what Bonds (2020) calls "carceral precarity," where financially- and housing- insecure women-identifying people are responsible for meeting family reunification prerequisites while simultaneously persuading state agencies they are able to resume their roles as mothers (see also Marilyn Brown & Bloom, 2009; Gurusami, 2019). Gurusami (2019) refers to these parenting contradictions as the "paradox of mothering" (p. 140) which highlight the effects of (ongoing) state violence, or the production and maintenance of structural inequalities like the criminalization, social control, and surveillance of Black women. For example, through participant observation of 35 Black mothers, Gurusami (2019) demonstrates how state violence shaped the mothers' parenting styles and how state agencies determined whether mothers are "fit" to have custody of their children. They explain:

the labor of navigating the state structures that put their children at risk often placed these women in conflict with the state. This paradox suggests the state criminalizes the maternal labor

of formerly incarcerated Black women and that these state logics are used to justify state intervention in Black women's post-incarceration parenting. (p. 128)

Gurusami (2019) finds that the state's parenting decisions are steeped in racial stereotypes in ways that re-criminalize Black women-identifying people, either for their parenting strategies or their positions as Black women-identifying people with a marked record (p. 134). For formerly incarcerated Black mothers, such reentry services represented another mechanism of racialized, gendered systems of inequality. Through this intersectional framework, Cooper (2015a, 2015b, 2017), Gurusami (2019), and Law (2019a) point to the specific ways Black women-identifying fight against controlling images as Black women-identifying people and as Black mothers. This study illustrates how reentry services impact family reunification, as well as the lack thereof, in relation to both individual support and structural barriers. Paradoxically, at the same time, the lack of reentry services for women and mothers severely hinder family reunification.

Such an approach might begin by examining parenting resources available for incarcerated women and how these resources create opportunities and challenges for family separation/reunification. During their period of incarceration, women-identifying people may have an opportunity to attend parenting classes; however, a study by Marilyn Brown and Barbara Bloom (2009) points to the cultural alienation and unrealistic conditions of life during reentry (p. 329). The 25 in-depth interviews they conducted with mothers on parole, their stories highlight the structural failures of programs made available to women during incarceration and reentry. For example, when one mother was asked about the parenting classes and their efficacy in preparing to reunite with her children, they laughed and said that parenting classes in prison reflected the "white man's way of thinking" (Marilyn Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 329). While parenting classes and reentry services alike are designed to ease transition into society, teach social skills and share community resources, existing reentry services fail to

incorporate incarcerated women-identifying peoples' feedback into the design and implementation of such services.

Whittle's (2018) examination of reentry, which draws from interviews of service providers, site observations, and job shadowing at pre- and post-release reentry assistance programs and service organizations, reveals the additional role of service providers in their ability to influence reentry services. Their analysis describes the widespread scope of reentry services, which includes "criminal justice system actors such as probation and parole officers and social service-oriented actors such as drug treatment and mental health counselors, housing and employment specialists, and case managers" (Whittle, 2018, p. 276). The different professionalized roles and identities of RSPs often create competing goals between the RSPs and formerly incarcerated women-identifying people seeking treatment and/or social and financial support. Likewise, Bowman and Travis (2012) identify common themes emerging from 12 focus groups with formerly incarcerated people and RSPs to analyze the current reentry system and its opportunities for improvement. They find that "[t]he criminal justice system was described by all groups as yielding enormous influence through the development and enforcement of policies, and a deliberately reinforced cycle of incarceration, ultimately inhibiting their chance for success" (p. 12). These studies uncover the ways in which RSPs and the criminal legal system hinder access to resources, and success, to the reentry process. Compounding the limited parenting support and programs offered to people in women's prison and in the community, the literature indicates that reentry services have limited impact in supporting successful integration into society and efforts towards family reunification (Arditti & Few, 2006, 2008; Law, 2019a).

The structural factors shaping women-identifying people's pathway to incarceration, including poverty (Scroggins & Malley, 2010), racism (Law, 2019a), gender-based violence (Critical Resistance & INCITE!, 2001; Richie, 2015; Thuma, 2019), and social marginalization (Robison & Miller, 2016), are only exacerbated post-incarceration. Thus, reentry services are essential in supporting women-identifying

people through multifarious strategies. As Brown (2004) finds, after interviewing 74 parole officers to identify the key needs of formerly incarcerated individuals the first 90 days after release, key reentry services include:

(1) basic supplies (including food, clothing, child care, transportation, etc.), (2) life skills, (3) education and employment, (4) correction programs, (5) insight into problems, (6) preparation for community supervision (including understanding parole rules, motivation to change, and realistic community plan), and (7) structure. (p. 101)

However, as with many other studies, Brown's analysis comes from those who primarily provide the resources rather than those seeking them out. This approach fails to integrate the experiences of those receiving the services and whether they meet the needs of current people in transition. Given the high stakes of reentry services, centering on, and learning from, women-identifying peoples' lived experiences navigating the reentry process can provide vital information about the challenges of reentry. However, few studies have engaged with this from of insider knowledge. The exceptions are feminist scholars including Patricia O'Brien (2001), Julia Sudbury (2011), Beth Richie (2001), Jodie Lawston and Ashley Lucas (2011), Anne Bonds (2015, 2018, 2019, 2020), and Erica Meiners (2014). Their feminist analyses employ qualitative methodology, particularly open-ended interviews and life narratives, to analyze formerly incarcerated women-identifying peoples' needs from those experiencing reentry themselves.

In addition, Arditti and Few (2006, 2008) conceptualize reentry as a long-term process rather than a singular event. Similarly, Richie (2001) argues the urgency to understand "the co-occurrence of multiple demands" (p. 380) formerly incarcerated women-identifying people face while returning to their communities. Instead of reentry services occurring in an isolated vacuum, they must take seriously the necessity of multiple variables based on formerly incarcerated women's social location and how they are constitutive of each other. During a woman-identifying person's reentry process, it is a

practicality for reentry services to provide comprehensive and holistic support in the everyday life for reentry to be considered successful.

While research on RSPs describe the significance of reentry programs, a standard definition or measurement of reentry success has not been established. Berghuis (2018), for example, measures successful reintegration through the assessment of reentry services. The Institute of Child and Family Well-Being (n.d.) explains that successful reentry:

requires a comprehensive approach to community integration that addresses the *root causes of crime and recidivism*. Extreme poverty, limited educational opportunities, unstable household and community environments, and severe trauma often characterize ex-offenders' lives before and after periods of incarceration [emphasis mine]. (p. 1)

In my analysis, I take seriously the root causes of crime and draw from Miller's (2014) conceptualization of 'successful' reentry as "a political project involving multiple stakeholders, each with vested interests in how former prisoners are understood, how reentry programs are subsequently implemented, and the outcomes of reentering prisoners who participate in such programs" (p. 306-307). Thus, it is not just the deployment of direct services that ensures 'success' in reentry; rather it is "an interactive process and a social institution" (R. J. Miller, 2014, p. 307). Similarly, Bowman (2012) defines the challenges of reentry as "a system of persistent and oppressive structures operating before, during, and after discharge" (p. 16). These challenges pervade all aspects of daily life, reiterating how crucial reentry services are for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people.

Through public policies, states have the ability to determine the relative success rates of the reentry process. In a two-year longitudinal study of public policies on employment, drug treatment, housing, and healthcare, Freudenberg, Daniels, Crum, Perkins, and Richie (2005) randomly interviewed 476 adult people leaving New York City women's jails to identify the major problems they expect to face after release (p. 1727). Based on this sample, people from women's jails notably identified these

barriers as “housing, substance abuse, inadequate income, unemployment, education, and family problems with their children” (Freudenberg et al., 2005, p. 1727). Their findings illuminate the multiple demands and needs of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people. These findings demonstrate the failure of reentry services to prioritize the basic necessities of life, such as affordable housing and stable, living-wage employment (Bonds, 2020; Brown & Bloom, 2009; McGrath, 2012; Scroggins & Malley, 2010).

Indeed, employment is necessary for survival and self-sufficiency following incarceration; however, finding employment is often seen as “out-of-reach”(Bowman & Travis Jr., 2012, p. 13). After incarceration, finding and securing a employment is more difficult with the mark of the criminal record (Pager, 2007). In semi-structured interviews with 25 mothers on parole in Hawai’i, Brown and Bloom (2009) underscore the particular burdens of finding employment and maintaining financial stability following incarceration. People on parole are required to hold jobs equivalent to full-time work (or 40 hours per week), yet given the gendered workforce, women are likely to work multiple part-time low-wage positions in the service sector to meet the states’ demands (p. 321). Moreover, working full-time is not the same as being paid a living-wage. In addition, these positions do not provide flexibility or benefits, which has the potential to lead to job instability, financial insecurity, and even underemployment (De Giorgi, 2018). Similarly, even if formerly incarcerated people are eligible, Bowman and Travis (2012) find that “job skills acquired in prison were often inconsistent with needed skill-sets in the community, even within the same field or trade” (p. 13) This demonstrates a shift from employment to employability (R. J. Miller, 2014). Instead of RSPS creating societal change surrounding employment opportunities, they focus on things they can change such as individual qualities. As Miller (2014) states:

Reentry organizations do not seek to remove the barriers ex-offenders face in the labor, housing, and educational markets. They instead seek to enhance the soft skills and personal

characteristics of former prisoners, transforming them into the kinds of people that will make informed, rational decisions when faced with a dilemma. (p. 317)

Instead of addressing root causes of unemployment, housing, and poverty, RSPs are framed around individual change and “personal responsibility” (Burch, 2017). This approach places accountability on the individual, where people not securing a job is their fault rather than RSPs emphasizing job markets and structural inequalities embedded in the system. Since formerly incarcerated women are expected to make work full-time, either to make ends meet and/or to meet parole or probation requirements, childcare is a necessity. Nonetheless, an examination of 155 reentry programs in the ten largest metropolitan areas in the United States discovered that “childcare is the least frequently provided rehab service in every metro area” (Scroggins & Malley, 2010, p. 154).²⁵ In this situation, mothers are forced to choose between employment and imperative income or staying home and taking care of her children. Bonds (2020) points to the adverse relationship of the carceral system and the child welfare system. These studies stress the importance of reentry services being non-disciplining agencies that are both culturally appropriate and helpful to children for family reunification, not just beneficial for women-identifying people (Marilyn Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 330).

Another barrier for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people during the reentry process is the ability to find housing due to the lack of affordable options, exclusionary rental screening, and gendered application criteria (Greene, 2019; LeBel, 2017; Thacher, 2008). To put succinctly, Greene (2019) states, “housing can mean the difference between setting up a new life and reincarceration” (p. 548). Unfortunately, the process of securing housing relies on gendered criteria in order to access these types of reentry services. Greene (2019) illustrates how gender-segregated housing programs rely on

²⁵ Based on the population data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2007), this study recognized the 10 largest metropolitan areas as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia, Houston, Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, Washington, DC, Atlanta, and Boston. In their study, Philadelphia was the exception to providing adequate childcare.

biology-based definitions of gender, producing a categorical exclusion of “woman.” This creates violent erasure for transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming people whose identities are delegitimized through these socially constructed narrow definitions of gender (Stanley & Smith, 2015; Sudbury, 2011). While gender sanctioning efforts attempt to provide equality and safety, this can reproduce inequality. As the National Coalition for the Homelessness (2016) describes, there is a mutual reinforcement between incarceration and homelessness due to the increasing criminalization of homelessness. Since only a small select group of formerly incarcerated individuals are able to apply to pre-release programs and halfway houses, Roman (2004) states that, “we have a prison reentry system that is disconnected from the housing and homeless services systems and from the neighborhoods to which prisoners return” (p. 162). All of these urgent demands create a largely invisible and unspoken emotional toll on formerly incarcerated women-identifying people throughout the reentry process (Bowman & Travis Jr., 2012). This includes the “changes in everyday society, family and children, a job, housing, and prior reentry failures” (p. 15), where navigating the reentry system focuses on survival.

This literature review substantiates that successful family reunification efforts rely on stable housing, employment and income, which may be difficult for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people to secure both because of their criminal record and because of their education and access to information. Once women-identifying people do begin the family reunification process, the number of reentry services that cater to both women-identifying people and their children are few and far between. In order to increase the chances of family reunification, researchers suggest reentry services include physical and mental health services (Arditti & Few, 2008), increase social support (Arditti & Few, 2006; Marilyn Brown & Bloom, 2009), and coordination with other reentry agencies and organizations (Marilyn Brown & Bloom, 2009; McGrath, 2012; Scroggins & Malley, 2010). More radical scholars argue for the destruction of helping systems, such as the child welfare system, as they are punitive in nature (Law, 2019a). I now turn to my own research, drawing from Black Feminism, to argue that formerly

incarcerated Black and Latinx women-identifying people continue to experience gender-based violence due to the lack of reentry services to fit their diverse and cooccurring needs.

Methodology: Situating Power, Positionality, and Privilege within the Knowledge Production

Process

My research engages with feminist methods such as expanding on the process of knowledge production by centering the lived experiences of individuals. As Gorman-Murray et al. (2010) state, “when all research contexts are thought about in spatial terms as circuits of social power, then the researcher becomes alert to the relational processes in which the interconnections and interactions between individuals are made” (p. 112). It is for this reason that I chose to focus the research design on qualitative methods, specifically open-ended, semi-structured interviews with two formerly incarcerated cis-women and two employees at the Wisconsin Women’s Resource Center (WWRC), managed by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (WI DHS) and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (WI DOC).²⁶ These narratives illustrate the contradictions in understanding reentry services, specifically as state officials view success as lowering recidivism rates while women-identifying people directly navigating the reentry process demand more support and visibility in reentry services necessary for survival.

During this research process, I was able to continuously reflect on the circuits of social power and how this shaped my research. There were two reasons for conducting semi-structured, open-ended interviews. First, these interviews allowed formerly incarcerated cis-women and WI DOC service

²⁶ Services provided by WWRC officials are structured different than reentry services. First, the primary people they serve are incarcerated women referred from the WWCS based on their mental health symptoms. Second, since WWRC is a direct part of the Wisconsin carceral system, their model of success often reflects recidivism rates and pathologizing reasons for incarceration and criminalization rather than critiquing the structural inequalities. Third, while the goal of the WWRC is to ‘rehabilitate’ and stabilize women to send them back to their original institution, more women are being released directly from WWRC. In this way, WWRC becomes a crucial bridge for women transitioning from prison back to society.

providers to define and explain their understanding and experience of the reentry process. This also created the opportunity for me to collaboratively produce knowledge and ‘cocreate’ meaning (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 203) with interview participants, and to, more importantly, provide space for self-definition. Black feminist, poet, and civil rights activists, Audre Lorde (1984) expressed the power of reclaiming our narratives:

I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. (p. 120-121)

This quote critically highlights how aspects of people’s identity cannot be compartmentalized or separated from their being, but rather, how identity is mutually constitutive with the ways people experience the world. For example, the interview participants represented more than the single category of ‘formerly incarcerated cis-woman.’ Therefore, the semi-structured interviews allowed interview participants to explain their situated roles as mothers, as organizers, and as Black and Latina cis-women navigating the racialized, gendered, and classed landscape of Milwaukee. The second goal of the interviews were to center the voices and experiences of formerly incarcerated ciswomen and the WI DOC service providers. These two interview participant groups generally held contested narratives about reentry services and material support leading to unmet needs for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people. The interviews illuminated the discrepancies between existing reentry services (as identified by RSPs) and nonexistent, yet necessary reentry services (as identified by formerly incarcerated cis-women).

As a researcher who has not experienced incarceration or the reentry process, I consistently reflected on uneven power dynamics. I am particularly guided by Black feminist scholar and activist bell hooks (2014), who argues that “when we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination” (p. 43). While my intentions for this thesis research are to shift discourse about formerly incarcerated people and reentry services, I cannot assume there will be no harm given existing power structures. Yet, as someone invested in disseminating power, I engage with Paulo Freire’s (1970) concept of problem-posing where all participants are considered teachers and students, regardless of credentials, title, and educational experience. Freire (1970) explains,

The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (p. 80)

The problem-posing concept directly challenges the process of knowledge production while simultaneously valuing reflexivity and continuous learning.

In order to participate in the interviews, there were three requirements: (a) identifying as a formerly incarcerated woman or as an RSP employee; (b) being 18 years and older and; (c) speaking English. Due to the two categories of interviewees, recruitment became a two-tier process. To recruit formerly incarcerated women-identifying, flyers were distributed among community boards in nonprofit organizations and community centers, especially institutions whose mission and services focused on women-identifying people in Milwaukee (see Appendix D). To recruit reentry service employees, I researched RSPs located in Milwaukee and gathered staffing information. Based on the organization and job title, I then determined which staff member to reach out to, specifically employees whose work revolved around formerly incarcerated women-identifying people. For the RSP organizations that did not include staff members, the default interviewee was the CEO/President. All RSP employees were

recruited via email and phone call, with up to two attempts made to schedule an interview; however, the recruitment process included several challenges, such as a limited research timeframe and a small interview sample size.

In total, there were four completed interviews, three of which occurred over the phone while one occurred in-person. For the in-person interview, it was important that the interviewee choose an interview location where they feel most safe and comfortable. As Gorman-Murray et al. (2010) explain, interviews become a spatially situated interaction because “how and where the stories [are] told...[positions] me differently within the spaces of the project” (p. 102). For example, inviting interviewees into my office on campus may create an alienating environment, with power dynamics playing into my favor. The place of the interview, and the participant’s relationship to that place matters, as the space becomes a location where knowledge is co-produced.

The interviews followed protocols outlined by the IRB to support interviewees where all interview participants remain anonymous and confidential for their safety and protection (see Appendix E, Appendix F, and Appendix G). Data for in-depth interviews were collected between January 2020 – February 2020. Two interviews included formerly incarcerated cis-women: W and J. W is a self-identified Latina woman in her late 40’s, currently serving probation and has one adult daughter. J is a self-identified Black woman in her mid-50s with four adult children who have all come into contact with the criminal legal system. The other two interviews included Wisconsin Women’s Resource Center (WWRC) employees: WWRC Employee D and WWRC Employee T, employed for two years and 21 years, respectively. The WWRC is managed by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (WI DHS) and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (WI DOC). WWRC is a designated treatment center that specializes in mental health services, where incarcerated people are referred from their ‘home’ correctional facility. While the goal of WWRC is to treat and discharge incarcerated people back to the general population of their correctional facility, there is a shift to prepare people at WWRC for release. It is for these reasons

that the goal of the interviews with the WWRC employees were to learn what programs they offered in prison, what needs incarcerated people have, and what resources/support is provided during the pre-release planning process.

Table 2. Interview Information

Interview Date	Interview Length	Interviewee Information
January 21, 2020	40 minutes	W
January 31, 2020	41 minutes	WWRC Employee D
January 31, 2020	34 minutes	WWRC Employee T
February 3, 2020	47 minutes	J

As Table 2 demonstrates, interviews ranged from 33 – 47 minutes (averaging 40 minutes). In grounding my praxis in the coproduction of knowledge, W and J were given the opportunity to review my interpretations of their statements and provide feedback to accurately reflect their situated experiences.

My analysis of interview data was based on an iterative coding process. In other words, the codes that emerged aligned with the theoretical and political commitments of feminist, prison abolitionist frameworks. In drawing from Rubin and Rubin (2005)'s two-part data analysis process, the first phase included transcribing the interview and writing marginal notes to identify core patterns, concepts, and themes that emerged from the data. Within an intersectional, feminist, prison abolitionist framework, key patterns that appeared from interviews with formerly incarcerated cis-women included feelings of erasure within the reentry process while simultaneously advocating for themselves and formerly incarcerated women-identifying people. The second phase meant categorizing the data, or coding the data, based on the developing themes which included gender, challenges to reentry services, and family separation via the criminal legal system.

Since reentry is not a singular event (Arditti & Few, 2006, 2008), success during the reentry process cannot, and should not, be measured by recidivism rates that only provide a snapshot of 'crime' that is "divorced from the social forces that constitute" crime and criminalization itself (Jefferson, 2017,

p. 780). Instead, in drawing from my theoretical frameworks that critically think about carcerality and justice, I define 'success' in the reentry process when formerly incarcerated people can thrive because their basic social and economic needs are met. Furthermore, rather than 'success' falling onto the shoulders of one person, notions of 'success' should be shared among a network of people where systems are in place to hold individuals and organizations accountable. This means RSPs actively disrupt the stigmatization of a "marked status" (Pager, 2007) in everyday life, including employment, housing, education, and voting. Lastly, 'success' in the reentry process means there are systems, resources, and support in place to interrupt cycles of harm and violence (Cox, 2020). In complicating the notions of 'success' in the reentry process, I draw from abolitionist frameworks which work to envision the type of world we want to live in while actively chipping away at the carceral state.

A major limitation of my project is its small interview sample size. While one aspect is due to the formal IRB approval process and the amount of time spent on revising and clarifying the purpose of this research, a larger reason for this small sample size is due to the precarity of formerly incarcerated women's social locations. Many formerly incarcerated women-identifying people are actively navigating the reentry process and, understandably, participating in this research study was not considered a priority. In addition, some felt hesitation to participate in a study associated with the university. Due to the small sample size, I cannot generalize these findings with existing literature or compare them with other metropolitan cities. Yet, these in-depth interviews resonate with wider themes in the literature and shine a light on the particular challenges and needs faced by formerly incarcerated women-identifying people in Milwaukee.

Findings and Analysis: The Challenges of Reentry in Milwaukee

My interviews reflect existing findings in the literature and highlight the disparity of reentry services for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people related to employment, housing, mental health and untreated trauma, social support, and family reunification. I focus on two key themes that

reflect the ongoing erasure and invisibility of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people with respect to reentry services. The first theme I explore is the “paradox of mothering” (Gurusami, 2019). The interviews with formerly incarcerated cis-women powerfully illustrate the challenges of parenting behind bars with inadequate services as well as the paradox of mothering during the reentry process. Interviewees emphasized the lack of effective parenting support – both inside of prison and outside in reentry services – as a means to understand the catastrophic cycles of incarceration and family separation. The second theme emerging from my interviews is the disparities between perceived availability – and efficacy – of reentry services from WWRC officials and the actual reentry services available for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people. For example, service providers at the WWRC mention their success in bridging women-identifying people with reentry services in their community, yet the interviews with formerly incarcerated cis-women explain the lack of support during their reentry process.²⁷

The Paradox of Mothering and the Cycle of Incarceration

The discrepancies in parenting resources and support as perceived to be available to formerly incarcerated women-identifying people by WWRC staff, versus the actual resources as identified by the situated and lived experiences of formerly incarcerated cis-women, emphasize how prevailing understandings obscure the lack of support available to incarcerated Black and Latinx parents in women’s prisons once they are released. With increasing awareness of the emotional, mental, and physical effects of family separation, services offered by the WWRC include parenting classes, longer visitation hours, scheduled visits, phone calls, and homestead visits (at Taycheedah Correctional Institution) designed to provide incarcerated women more opportunities to parent behind bars. For

²⁷ It is important to note an important distinction between the interviewees and lived experiences. While the WI DOC staff members related their experience to reentry services based on their paid and stable job at WWRC, the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated women touched on several aspects of their daily life, including employment, housing, and mental health.

instance, during incarceration at WWRC, people are given the opportunity to participate in parenting classes. These classes are modeled after WI DOC programs in order to meet Assessment and Evaluation (A&E) standards. WWRC Employee D stated:

The parenting class, I think, is something that is really essential for the female offenders especially as they're generally the primary caregivers for their children. Clearly we know the bond between a mother and a child is huge and that's incredibly important in the lives of most everybody so I think that is a cool thing we're able to put that program in place. (personal communication, January 31, 2020)

Due to this 'incredibly important' bond, the WWRC attempted to eliminate barriers to family visits, such as the visitation hours. For example, WWRC Employee T lauded their newfound efforts:

We've expanded our visiting room hours. Our visiting room hours for many years were pretty restricted and when I say restricted it's not like we *intentionally* were making it difficult for people to visit. It was just that's how they were set up and we didn't really realize – we didn't think there was a better way *until it dawned on us* "yes we should make a greater window for people that'll come and visit." (personal interview January 31, 2020)

This quote shows an astounding lack of awareness and reflexivity on the part of WWRC employees, who seem unable to understand how prisons separate the incarcerated from loved ones. While the expansion of visitation room hours is welcome, most of the parenting opportunities offered to women in prison revolve around physical visits, failing to account for the fact that poverty, transportation, and distance of correctional facilities present significant barriers for loved ones to visit. Even phone calls are costly, particularly for those on fixed incomes, presenting yet another challenge for families during incarceration. Yet, WWRC service providers lack of understanding of the systemic and individual barriers to parenting behind bars, highlighting how Black and Latinx parents incarcerated at WWRC experiences relate to the paradox of mothering.

While the formerly incarcerated cis-women I spoke with were willing to do whatever it took to care for their children, they encountered little material and social support from reentry services, with the length of reentry services being a significant factor. For example, during our interview, W noted that:

[in] whatever services are available, the time frame is not long enough. We have a lot of reentry services that last 3 months or 6 months. Well guess what, I could be a whole year later and still need those services or need that support. You may be, as my caseworker, the only support system that I have. You know, you may be the only person I have to talk to. (personal interview, January 21, 2020)

Successfully navigating reentry and reuniting with children is made more difficult by the lack of services available to women-identifying people, extending the impact of the criminal legal system through generations of family. The formerly incarcerated women-identifying parents I interviewed noted that lack of support heavily affected their ability to provide emotional and physical resources to their children. In fact, both of the interviewed cis-women's children have been caught up in the carceral system. While some of their children are currently navigating through the reentry process, others have been reincarcerated due to the lack of accessible and adequate services in Milwaukee. As existing studies find, children of incarcerated parents often come into contact with the criminal legal system and that as with their parents, children may encounter the challenge of reentry (Foster & Hagan, 2015; Soto, 2015; Turney, 2014).

Disparities in Reentry Services: Conflicting Goals and Lived Experience

Once people from women's prisons were released, their ability to participate in reentry services were limited due to unrealistic release planning, knowledge of existing resources in their community, and the gendered assumptions that shaped reentry services available to women-identifying people. As discussed in the literature review stated, reentry is a long-term process, yet organizations act as if

providing disparate services are the solution to deep-seeded issues of poverty, trauma, justice, and community investment. Instead of viewing the reentry process as defined by sector (i.e. employment, housing, mental health, etc.), RSPs must do a better job understanding the constitutive role of reentry services, with unmet needs compounding with additional unmet needs. The formerly incarcerated cis-women I spoke with faced several challenges to finding employment that paid a living wage and to finding long-term stable, affordable housing. While halfway houses provide short-term housing opportunities, these are not sustainable due to the limited capacity and time restrictions. The mark of a criminal record limits access to long-term affordable housing programs, including Section 8 AND Section 42 housing, may deny such applications (Tenant Resource Center, 2018), pointing to the structural barriers of finding housing following incarceration.

In this section of the chapter, I focus on the discrepancies between what constitutes ‘successful’ reentry, and more specifically the failure of WWRC to provide effective programs and services to women-identifying people about to transition into the reentry process. I argue that WWRC service providers emphasize personal responsibility and blame for women-identifying peoples’ challenges in accessing reentry services, acting as a direct and punitive extension of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. While the WWCS engages in skill development to increase the likeliness of post-release employment for formerly incarcerated women, the skills learned in the programs do not necessarily reflect the skills of the contemporary workforce. This skills disparity occurs as a consequence of raced, gendered, and classed assumptions about work and in program planning that limit women’s access to those programs associated with “proper” femininity, such as domestic labor and cleaning, cosmetology, and secretarial work. The types of jobs available at one of the correctional facilities centered on custodial jobs, including cleaning units and doing laundry (WWRC Employee D, personal interview, January 31, 2020). At Taycheedah Correctional Institution, their vocational programs are intentionally centered around gender-responsive programming, including cosmetology, office software applications,

and dental laboratory technician. A much heralded and newly funded construction program (*DOC Taycheedah Correctional Institution, 2019*) apparently seeks to address the narrow focus of other sorts of training. The correctional facilities justify the little-to-no-wage for labor inside the prisons by couching these activists as ‘skills development.’ If the WI DOC does provide temporary employment for incarcerated people in women’s prison to bolster their work experience, the job lasts 90-days, paid at minimum wage. J described the impossibility of this temporary job to provide long-term stability. She stated:

[T]he minimum wage is \$7.25 so 90-days went really fast. So, when it came to reentry for me, it was really me having to fend for myself. Because if you do employment for 90 days that goes so fast and doing employment for \$7.25 wage, how in the world am I going to pay rent and a security deposit? Buy a bed? You know, get the essentials. So it was really a dead-end for me. (J, personal interview, February 1, 2020)

Thus, the employment programs and incentives offered during incarceration do very little to increase the likeliness of stable employment. However, it is not just the skills that become a crucial barrier to securing employment, it is also the stigmatization of having a criminal record and navigating the employment applications. For J, these applications became overwhelming, as she states:

I’m a smart girl, but when it comes to applications, it’s like all that I know is out the window, and I struggle with it, with remembering the dates and who the boss was. So because of the intimidation of the application, I didn’t do it. (personal interview, February 1, 2020)

Navigating paperwork and remembering what information to fill out an application becomes an obstacle to finding employment. Unstable employment, or no employment, viciously leads to unstable and unsafe housing conditions.

Release planning is an exceptionally urgent issue in Milwaukee, as it is one of the foundational tenants of successful reentry. In Milwaukee, both of the formerly incarcerated cis-women I interviewed

revealed that there are only two transitional housing opportunities for women-identifying people *and* their children, specifically Meta House and Hope Street Ministry.²⁸ Since there is a high demand for transitional housing, particularly halfway houses that allow families to stay together, women-identifying people may regularly be turned away and released to the same neighborhoods – and even the same homes – where they were criminalized. For example, J mentioned how she was incarcerated five times, in part, because “most of the time, I just came back out and went to the same environment” (personal interview, February 1, 2020). The structural environments of the city do not change, and RSPs fail to understand these systems of inequality. As W demonstrates, these systems add stress to women-identifying people who are already navigating reentry and the paradox of mothering. She says:

if you have a woman who is having housing issues, that adds stress for her, who already has an existing addiction or mental health issue, you know, you’re actually compounding those issues. (personal interview, January 21, 2020).

The ripple effects of employment, housing, trauma, and mental health are not addressed for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people in reentry services, leading back to their own incarceration or their families’ connection to the broader criminal legal system. Similarly, J goes on to explain:

it’s [the reentry process] a vicious cycle, and it’s like, ‘how do you expect someone to get ahead or even just get their feet planted if you don’t have anything to plant with? You know, you have to have something to plant with, not just tough on crime. (personal interview, February 1, 2020)

If formerly incarcerated women-identifying people are only met with ‘tough on crime’ politics, it is increasingly difficult, and nearly impossible, to secure basic necessities, meet probation/parole requirements, and stabilize mental health issues. Instead, individuals are expected to return back to

²⁸ As previously mentioned, Hope Street Ministry is “home to about 40 men, women, and children” (*About Us*, 2020) while Meta House can accommodate “up to 35 women and 15 children in its residential program” and “up to 50 women in the outpatient program and can house 27 families in its transitional facilities” (*Meta House*, 2020).

their environment with abuse, violence, and trauma and take individual ‘accountability’ for their actions.

For example, WWRC Employee D plainly states:

I think the biggest thing is not that they [formerly incarcerated women-identifying people] don’t have access to them [reentry services]. I think it’s that they don’t know *how to* access them. A lot of times there’s programs and opportunities for women that they just don’t know about....A lot of times, like I said, we release the women back to the community where they offended and it’s kind of like – I hear a lot of women say, “I wish I could just release to somewhere else. I’m going back to where I came from and that’s where I got in trouble.” *But that’s just kind of how our system works is they need to be accountable for their actions in that county.* (personal interview, January 31, 2020)

WWRC’s reliance on the existing system is a reliance on the gendered, heteronormative carceral state.

In addition, this harmful perspective fails to account for structural systems, such as racism, classism, and sexism, that impact formerly incarcerated women-identifying people’s ability to access reentry services.

As J expresses:

their [reentry organizations] motto is ‘bridge to reentry’ but they don’t have a bridge. You know, they don’t even have a bridge, it’s just something that looks nice but when you come into that building, there’s actually nothing for you. You gotta come in with your own plan, basically...they [reentry organizations] are not providing anything for you to change your circumstances. (personal interview, February 1, 2020)

Based on the interviews, formerly incarcerated cis-women reveal the lack of employment, housing, and mental health resources within reentry services. While reentry itself is a long-term process, reentry services do little to challenge the structural inequalities related to poverty, trauma, and neoliberal gender governance, hindering the success of reentry services and perpetuating formerly incarcerated women’s precarious social locations. The interactive connections between social institutions, reentry

service discourse, and the root causes of crime are absent for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people.

As much as formerly incarcerated women-identifying people try to individually achieve success, RSPs in Milwaukee must interrogate the language, terminology, and positioning of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women-identifying people in such discourse. For example, WWRC employees used the term ‘offender’ which reinforced notions of inferiority and further created power dynamics in the offender/rehabilitator binary. Through the interviews, WWRC Employee D and WWRC Employee T positioned themselves as experts, stressed not only by their ‘authoritative’ job titles, but also their length of employment at WWRC, their prior experience, and their academic credentials. This authoritative positionality affected their program design and implementation, often modeled after the WI DOC programs, with no opportunity for feedback or evaluation about the WWRC programs and ways they could better cater to women-identifying people, specifically family reunification support and planning. As noted in my RSP discourse analysis in Chapter 4, there are hardly any opportunities for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals to share their situated, lived experiences. Instead, WWRC providers relied on hegemonic discourse about crime, punishment, and individual responsibility when discussing how reentry services operate in Wisconsin. WWRC Employee T believes that Governor Evers will institute changes both in the prison system and in the community. WWRC Employee T states:

I think our state makes a very honest effort to try to meet those needs with the resources we have. Where I think we’re going in a promising direction is this – I think the new administration that we have in the state really embraces that and has selected specific leader in their administration that have the kind of background and the willingness to understand how these systems work and to really put the resources forward that are necessary to meet the needs that exist. Not only in the prison system but also in the community. (personal interview, January 31, 2020)

While Governor Evers may have the resources to implement avenues for social justice, his positionality and inherent power continues to decenter formerly incarcerated individuals from participating in such crucial conversations. The reentry services, and their perceived successes, revolved around those providing the services, not those receiving, or attempting to receive, the reentry services. On the other hand, the two interviewed formerly incarcerated cis-women resisted the criminalizing labels and defined themselves *as* formerly incarcerated women-identifying people, implementing social action and mutual support with each other in addition to the limited reentry services.

Uses of Anger: Formerly Incarcerated Women Responding to Racism (and Sexism and Classism)

While discourse analysis is useful to understand and challenge societal norms, legislation can also redefine crime and criminalization (see Conrad & Schneider, 1992); however, elected officials in Milwaukee, and the state of Wisconsin have done very little to dismantle the carceral state, as their campaigns often draw on and benefit from racialized, gendered, and classed tropes about crime and public safety. The lack of actions by elected officials was a significant source of anger for the women that I interviewed. J describes:

You know, and we are the largest city and county in the state, and it is predominantly Black and Brown. And they [the politicians] have no regards for us. And then everybody wants to talk about the violence and the crime. Yeah, because what are you offering? You won't even raise the minimum wage! (personal interview, February 1, 2020)

Despite the lack of reentry services available for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people, in addition to the compounding issues of poverty, unemployment, and prohibitive housing, the city of Milwaukee continues to heavily fund and invest in carceral systems as solutions to these problems (Loyd & Bonds, 2018). For instance, J frustratedly states:

Nobody [reentry service providers, elected officials] has the resources, they only thing they have is the Milwaukee police. That's the only answer they have to everything that's going on, is the

Milwaukee police and the county jail. That's the only answer, and prison. That's the only answers they have. (personal interview, February 3, 2020)

The reliance on Milwaukee police, jails, and prisons demonstrate the city's reliance on the 'prison-fix' (Gilmore, 2007). If the only available resources are police and prisons, the cycles of trauma, violence, and punishment persist for formerly incarcerated women-identifying people. The pervasive racism, both within the city and the criminal legal system, are reflected in the resources that are unavailable to women and their families.

Moreover "majority-rule" analyses of incarceration emphasizing exclusively male patterns of incarceration leads to material impacts within reentry services, where a majority of programs cater to exclusively to men. For example, W stated, "one of the huge problems is that, every time we have these discussions about incarceration, we're only talking about men. We're not having these conversations about women." In resisting this androcentric discourse, W and J advocate for the centering of formerly incarcerated women's experiences of incarceration, criminalization, and reentry in Milwaukee. As J strongly states, "not without us!" This political standpoint resonates with Lorde's essay, "Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism." She expresses,

Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. (Lorde, 1984, p. 127)

The validated anger of W and J is precisely channeled to respond not only to racism, but to the sexism and classism within reentry service discourse and conversations about mass criminalization in Milwaukee.

While the formerly incarcerated cis-women I spoke with were frustrated and outraged by the general erasure of providing reentry services for women-identifying people, the two interviewees were directly involved in advocacy and activism efforts, specifically to (re)center on directly impacted women

and including their voices in pertinent decisions. Their efforts show how anger is a useful and productive tool. For instance, Lorde (1984) states, “anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification” (p. 127). This is reflected in W’s demands. She states, “we as women, need to make sure that we’re at the table when we talk about incarceration” (personal communication, January 21, 2020). Their collective resistance to erasure is urgent, as J states, “It’s so needed because when a person hears prison, it automatically connects it to a man. So, we are even though we’re considered in the back, [organizing] allows us to be up front” (personal interview, February 1, 2020). These poignant statements remind reentry service providers that conversations should center women-identifying people and their situated experiences with the criminal legal system. When incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women-identifying people are in control of their narratives, their organizing efforts resemble horizontal power, rather than traditional vertical power structures. For instance, J asserts:

The women that’s at the table are directly impacted so that makes it much easier, it’s a much more comfortable space knowing you’re not the only one that’s been to prison, on parole, or extended supervision. That makes the dynamics totally different. (personal communication, February 1, 2020)

Based on their shared positionality, women-identifying people feel more comfortable and safe speaking because they have had similar experiences and can provide each other with emotional and material support and resources. Similarly, they do not have to fear additional judgement or stigmatization because they share a similar status.

Conclusion: Formerly Incarcerated Women as Knowledge Producers

My interviews with formerly incarcerated cis-women who have experienced reentry indicate that few resources for transitional housing, employment, and childcare services are made available to formerly incarcerated women, making it nearly impossible to both successfully reenter society and

reunite with their families. This mothering paradox is particularly experienced by Black and Brown formerly incarcerated women-identifying parents, for whom the challenges of reentry are further exacerbated by racialized, gendered inequalities and access to services. RSPs and policymakers should engage with directly impacted women-identifying people to evaluate the programs and ask for consistent feedback to better understand the barriers to successful reentry. Yet, as my interviews with WWRC employees illustrate, officials invested in the carceral state have no interest in lived experiences or structural inequalities, underpinned by the lack of evaluation and implementation of programs based on women's situated knowledge. Rather WWRC employees position themselves "authorities" of reentry based on their credentials, years of experience, and WI DOC titles while devolving responsibility for reentry to formerly incarcerated people themselves.

In addition, there is not a clear or concise understanding of 'success' within the reentry process. Based on my definition and indicators of 'success,' formerly incarcerated peoples' basic social and economic needs are met and they have the ability to thrive. Yet, based on the situated experiences of interviewees, they demonstrate the ongoing disparities between perceived availability and accessibility of reentry services (by WWRC officials) and the actual reentry services that are available and lacking (defined by formerly incarcerated cis-women).

An abolitionist framework for analyzing reentry services pushes beyond discourses of personal responsibility to instead focus on the systems that lead to incarceration and criminalization in the first place. As Byrd (2016) suggests,

In order to genuinely transform the conditions of mass imprisonment's emergence, it is necessary to ground reentry work in a politics of abolition that is attentive to the inherent violence of the state and the imbrication of the prison with neoliberal globalization, heteronormativity, gendered relations of ruling, and longer histories of enslavement and colonialism. (p. 7)

Therefore, reentry services grounded in prison abolitionist praxis not only emphasize the racialized, gendered, and classed violences of the carceral system, but also the historical relationship of state power, oppression, and violence across time and space. Within Milwaukee, this calls for a reevaluation of available reentry services to better understand who is benefitted and who is further marginalized, as well as attention to how such services can be improved by harm reduction strategies. As Russo and Spatz (2007) remind us, we must create strategies to end all forms of violence and systems that perpetuate it, including the reentry service sector. This requires deep individual, community, and organizational engagement with reflexivity and relationality activism, as will be detailed in the following chapter. Yet, this engagement must begin with a transformation of knowledge production that centers the experiences of those directly impacted (see Appendix H for methodological reflections on this empirical chapter).

Chapter 6. Creating Prison Abolitionist Futures in Milwaukee, WI

The purpose of this thesis was to engage in an intersectional, feminist, prison abolitionist framework to better understand formerly incarcerated women-identifying people's relationship to carcerality and criminalization, reentry services, and family separation. In Chapter 2, I highlight the theoretical frameworks guiding this project, namely critical carceral studies, feminist political economy, Black feminism, and abolition, which underscore the scope of the carceral system, entangled in everyday life and embedded in broader systems of power and oppression. Together, these frameworks accentuate the scope of the carceral state and argue how prisons are sites of racialized, gendered, and classed violence (Berger et al., 2017; A. Y. Davis, 1998; Sudbury, 2005) used to displace U.S. social and economic crises (Gilmore, 2007). These theoretical frameworks grounded my research on the landscape of reentry services for formerly incarcerated women in Milwaukee.

In Chapter 3, I sought to provide a historical, social, and economic overview of the city of Milwaukee and to link the effects of local, state, and federal crime policies tethered with urban development efforts to highlight connections between racialized urban development and practices of urban securitization. These systems heavily affect the conditions of reentry services in Milwaukee, where the uneven financial investment in neighborhoods shape life chances and practices of criminalization to displace of Black and Latinx residents to prison across the state. Yet the dominant conversations about Milwaukee's high incarceration rates rest upon "majority-analysis" approaches that fail to consider the impacts of incarceration and criminalization on women-identifying people and their children. It is for this reason that my research highlights and uplift the voices of formerly incarcerated women-identifying people and their specific, situated knowledge.

Chapter 4 and 5 focused on the empirical aspects of the study. In Chapter 4, the discourse and content analysis of 33 Milwaukee-area RSPs examined how, and in what ways women-identifying people's experiences with incarceration and reentry were represented. Through my research, I found

that when women were included in RSP discourse, they were done so in ways that relied upon raced, gendered, and classed assumptions and that echoed the language of “gendered responsiveness” and reinforced ideas about reentry services as “gendered institutions.” (Venn, 2009). My analysis draws from research documenting how the growth of RSPs has led to a conglomeration of government entities, nonprofit organizations, and faith-based institutions in which reform and punishment become mutually constitutive (Shaylor, 2007). In this way, reentry services, thus, act as an extension of the prison system (Thompkins et al., 2010), creating yet another context in which formerly incarcerated women must navigate a system of gender-based violence.

In Chapter 5, I draw from interviews with two formerly incarcerated cis-women and two Wisconsin Department of Corrections officials employed at the Wisconsin Women’s Resource Center (WWRC) to better understand and contrast their understandings about the challenges of reentry. The interviews with the WI Department of Corrections officials did not question the existing structure of system of incarceration and criminalization, rather they continued to pathologize individuals for their behavior. In contrast, the views of reentry with people actually experiencing it highlight the impossibilities of successful reentry. Key findings reveal how reentry services are based on the “expertise” and “authority” of WI Department of Corrections officials rather than centering on the situated knowledge of formerly incarcerated women. This traditional knowledge production erases women within reentry, leading to a gap in necessary reentry services and women navigating their unmet needs alone in the reentry process.

Through these empirical chapters, I demonstrate the failure of reentry services in both keeping families together as well as the inability to challenge discourse for racial and gender justice which calls for the orientation of prison abolitionist politics within reentry services and beyond.

Non-reformist Reforms and Prison Abolitionist Praxis

In this conclusion, I again call attention to the overlapping systems of racialized, gendered, and classed violence within the histories of capitalism and neoliberal globalizations that disproportionately harm Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people. Yet, as I finish the final stages of drafting my thesis, the world has been dramatically upended by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This global virus has deeply affected everyone; yet it is clearly a racialized, gendered, and classed crisis, unevenly impacting those already made vulnerable by systems of oppression and organized state abandonment. For instance, people in prison, jails, and detention centers are the most vulnerable to COVID-19 due to the impossibility of social distancing practices and the rationing of hygiene products in which they are essentially left to die. And despite these uncertain times, individuals and communities are banding together and engaging in new forms of activism to develop networks of support and care. Therefore, as this thesis was fostered within prison abolition, this thesis encapsulates the importance of activism and activist scholarship as necessary forms of engagement between the academy and social justice movements (Nagar, 2014, p. 4; Subury & Okazawa-Rey, 2009; Visweswaran, 2011).

During times of uncertainty and crisis, scholar-activist Ruth Wilson Gilmore points to the possibilities of a paradigm shift, specifically one in which aligns with prison abolition. Gilmore (2002) explains that:

at the most general level...we know that structures change under conditions of power redistribution – i.e. during times of crisis. In times of crisis, dynamics are peculiarly apparent, and insofar as we can catch historical or contemporary shifts on the fly, we might recognize something powerful about race and freedom. (Gilmore, 2002, p. 17)

As COVID-19 has destabilized capitalist markets, illuminated the exploitation of devalued workers, and highlighted the neglect of critical social and health infrastructures, we are in a position to challenge existing structures in an effort to redistribute power and justice within our society. While alternatives to

prisons might be one way to resituate this power, Mariame Kaba reminds us that these alternatives fail to bring about justice because they continue to center on the punishing system (Rice & Smith, 2020). In a podcast with *The Appeal*, Kaba states, “what I mean by that is when you think of an alternative in this moment and you’re thinking about prison, you just think of transposing all of the things we currently consider crimes into that new world” (Rice & Smith, 2020). Abolitionists understand that the carceral system only perpetuates harm and violence. It is not a broken system, it is operating with intent to target LGBTQ+ young people and adults, low-income people, and Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples. Thus, we cannot end violence by in a world that continues to center the carceral system and its perpetual of harm.

In an effort to resist all forms of violence, and particularly racial and gendered violence, this requires a feminist, anti-racist, abolitionist framework that centers community building and restorative practices of accountability, that supports mutual aid projects, and that centers healing. Healing is an essential part of rethinking notions of what justice means. In fact, Sudbury (2008) maintains that healing is a central part of abolitionist work. She states:

this work doesn’t have to be individualistic or separate from movement work; we can include it in all our movement spaces and make it a collective activity, just like the community recovery movement. But a movement against a violent and violating phenomenon...cannot be successful if we don’t directly address and heal the effects of that violence. (CR10 Publications Collective, 2008, p. 8)

Thus, rather than having a separate movement to address healing, Sudbury (2008) argues that healing and harm must be addressed in tandem as they guide our notions of justice. It is necessary to rethink what justice means and feels like, as our only sense of justice is associated with punishment and the carceral system. For example, a Black & Pink – Milwaukee organizer raises the question, “how do we heal when the only idea of justice we are presented with is the prison system?” (Planned Parenthood

Advocates of Wisconsin & Black & Pink - Milwaukee Chapter, 2020). There is no healing or justice when we rely prisons, nor does it provide incentives for us to be held accountable for the harm we have caused friends and family. In fact, holding ourselves accountable might cause us to end up in the carceral system, as our only notion of justice is tethered to punishment and confinement, creating cycles of harm (Rice & Smith, 2020). Instead, Dove and Fisher (2019b) explain how “justice requires attention to both care and rights. The tension between right and compassion can, therefore, be reconciled by a relational approach based on shared human experience.” In order to transform our notion of justice, we must be cognizant of care for each other and with each other.

Kaba calls on abolitionists and anti-violence organizers to engage in transformative justice which are *voluntary* acts focused on harm reduction and bringing about systemic change via community accountability and mutual aid (Scahill, 2020). Community accountability is a pedagogical strategy in which we address the violence occurring *within* our communities (Durazo, 2010). For example, INCITE! (2010) explains “instead of calling the cops, community accountability asks, ‘how do we create strategies to address violence within our communities, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and child abuse, that doesn’t rely on police or prisons?’” (p. 69). This requires individuals come together and build trust to co-create community-based responses to violence, instead of relying on the carceral system (Mingus, 2016). This focus on coming together, this brings awareness of relationality and the importance of personal relationships, organizing, and action. It is through this form of relational activism that change is possible, as “resurgence cannot occur in isolation” (Simpson, 2011, p. 69).

For instance, as the COVID-19 crisis unfolds in Milwaukee, groups like *SURJ MKE (Showing Up for Racial Justice)* and *Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOC)* are encouraging community accountability by uncovering anti-Asian racism within pandemic discourse, providing resources for undocumented communities, and demanding Governor Evers release incarcerated people (Forum for Understanding Prisons, 2020). These activities engage in harm reduction on a community level, but also

on a very personal level in which we resist violences in the everyday (Dove & Fisher, 2019a). As Kaba discusses on an *Intercepted* podcast episode, “[t]hrough those relationships that get built, we’re creating new social relations that we’re going to need into the future to disrupt the structural violences and oppression in the systems” (Scahill, 2020). These local efforts are about reducing immediate harm, but they also illustrate the ways in which Milwaukee communities are mobilizing and reimagining what justice and safety look like by providing cooperation, support, and mutual aid for each other with each other (Scahill, 2020).

Mutual aid rests on the premise that, as human beings, we are interdependent. In order to survive, we must organize for systemic and structural change (Scahill, 2020). Times of crisis underscore the centrality of our relations and interdependency with one another. As COVID-19 shuts public and private schools, restaurants, bars, businesses, and most public spaces (Maybin, 2020), its material impacts are exacerbating the marginalization of poor and low-income individuals and people of color and disproportionately harming nonwhite communities, homeless people, people with disabilities, immigrants, service industry workers, and incarcerated people. These times are devastating, yet neoliberal notions of individualism and competition will not create a system of care and compassion. Instead, Milwaukee community members are turning to neighbors to develop systems of support and skill-sharing (Dikanovic, 2020; Maybin, 2020; YES!, 2020).²⁹ For instance, Kimberly Bayer created a mutual aid society in her Milwaukee neighborhood, explaining “[t]here's so many negative things going on right now, but maybe one of the positive things is small communities come together block by block” (Maybin, 2020). This coming together, the care and support taking place in neighborhoods, redistributes power

²⁹ For access to the Milwaukee, WI – Community Care Support Request | Solicitud de Apoyo Comunitario, please visit: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfdD24iina3Xcam-WJpRRG5oLpjUoJnf4LA0QZFntbY-XDDrg/viewform>

and resources to directly meet the needs of people, including things like child care, assisting elderly people with medication refills and groceries, and monetary aid for individuals (Dikanovic, 2020).

Mutual aid is not just for those within close proximity, like neighborhoods. In fact, Milwaukee prison abolitionists advocate for mutual aid to support the needs of incarcerated people across the state since prisons and jails are “incubators and amplifiers of infectious diseases” (Kauffman, 2020). Governor Tony Evers (2020) issued a “safer at home” policy to minimize the spread of Covid-19 and attempt to “flatten the curve” (S. Roberts, 2020), yet he fails to understand the impact of the virus on incarcerated people (Forum for Understanding Prisons, 2020). Even though washing hands is the most common way to protect people from COVID-19 (CDC, 2020), the WI DOC does not provide people with soap to wash their hands on a daily basis (Forum for Understanding Prisons, 2020). In order to combat this critical public health issue, Black & Pink – Milwaukee started a mutual aid commissary drive to support incarcerated Black & Pink members access hygiene and prevention supplies (see Appendix I). While the initial fundraising goal was \$500, within 8 days, the commissary drive raised \$1,370, or enough redistributive funds to send \$15 to nearly 70 Black & Pink members to purchase hygiene products. This organizing highlights the urgent work and solidarity of “free world allies” with incarcerated people.

While these mutual aid projects disperse community resources to vulnerable people in prisons, these organizing efforts critique the structure and use of prisons themselves. Ultimately, abolitionists ask, if it is impossible to socially distance within prisons (Gross, 2020; Law, 2020), why do we not free people? The Forum for Understanding Prisons (2020) created a list of demands to Governor Evers, DOC Secretary Carr, and the Parole Commission Chair John Tate to take action now. An essential demand is the release of as many people as possible to reduce the severe overcrowding issue and spread of COVID-19 within prisons. However, with the release of people, it is clear that the contemporary reentry system does not effectively support formerly incarcerated people. Guided by abolitionist praxis, contemporary reentry services must drastically transform their structure by dismantling their relationship with the

carceral system, changing their notions of justice and safety, and building a system of community accountability and mutual aid.

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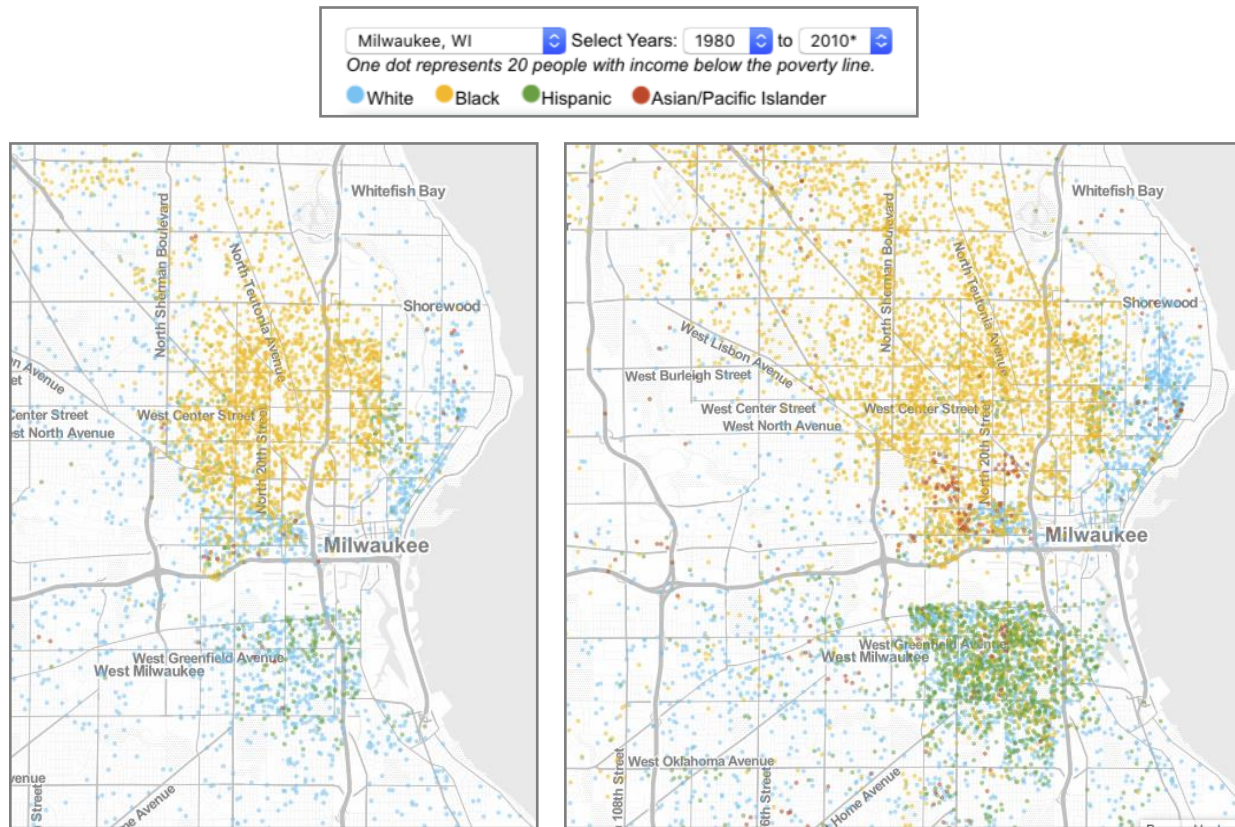
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: 1980 Poverty Rates vs. 2010 Poverty Rates in Milwaukee, WI



Source: The Urban Institute Analysis of 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census data and 2007-11 American Community Survey (ACS) data

APPENDIX B: Adult Correctional Centers and Facilities in Wisconsin (Alphabetical)

Adult Institution Correctional Facility	Construction/Opening	City
Black River Correctional Center	1962	Black River Falls
Chippewa Valley Correctional Treatment Facility (CVCTF)	2004	Chippewa Falls
Columbia Correctional Institution (CCI)	1986	Portage
Dodge Correctional Institution (DCI)	1978	Waupun
Drug Abuse Correctional Center	1977	Winnebago
Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center	2000	Milwaukee
Flambeau Correctional Center	1954	Hawkins
Fox Lake Correctional Institution (FLCI)	1962	Fox Lake
Gordon Correctional Center	1950	Gordon
Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI)	1897/1898	Green Bay
Jackson Correctional Institution (JCI)	1996	Black River Falls
John C. Burke Correctional Center	1990	Waupun
Kenosha Correctional Center	1990	Kenosha
Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution (KMCI)	1962	Plymouth
Marshall E. Sherrer Correctional Center	1981	Milwaukee
McNaughton Correctional Center	1956	Lake Tomahawk
Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF)	2001	Milwaukee
Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center (MWCC)	2003	Milwaukee
New Lisbon Correctional Institution (NLCI)	2002/2004	New Lisbon
Oakhill Correctional Institution (OCI)	1976	Oregon
Oregon Correctional Center	1992	Oregon
Oshkosh Correctional Institution (OSCI)	1986	Oshkosh
Prairie du Chien Correctional Institution (PDCI)	1997	Prairie du Chien
Racine Correctional Institution (RCI)	1991	Sturtevant
Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Institution (RYOCF)	1998	Racine
Redgranite Correctional Institution (RGCI)	1999/2001	Redgranite
Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center (REECC)	1989	Milwaukee
Sanger B. Powers Correctional Center	1982	Oneida
St. Croix Correctional Center	1991	New Richmond
Stanley Correctional Institution (SCI)	1998/2001	Stanley
Sturtevant Transitional Facility (STF)	2003	Sturtevant
Taycheedah Correctional Institution (TCI)	1921	Fond du Lac
Thompson Correctional Center	1993	Deerfield
Waupun Correctional Institution (WCI)	1851/1854	Waupun
Winnebago Correctional Center	1974	Winnebago
Wisconsin Resource Center (WCS)	1983	Winnebago
Wisconsin Secure Program Facility (WSPF)	1999	Boscobel

APPENDIX C: Organizations included in Discourse and Content Analysis

ALMA Center
ATTIC (Alternative to Traditional Incarceration of Citizens) Correctional Services, Inc.
Benedict Center
Bienaventurados Ministry
Catholic Prison Ministry
Catholic Charities
Center for Self-Sufficiency, Inc.
Central City Churches (CCC)
Community Advocates
Community Warehouse
Convergence Resource Center (CRC)
Employ Milwaukee
Genesis in Milwaukee, Inc.
Hope Street Ministry
James Place - Support Services (through Elmbrook Church)
JusticePoint
Legal Action of WI
Matt Talbot Recovery Services, Inc.
Meta House, Inc.
MICAHA
Milwaukee County House of Corrections (HOC)
Milwaukee Rescue Mission (MRM)
Northcott Neighborhood House (NHHHC)
OARS (Opening Avenues to Reentry Success)
Project Return
ROC Wisconsin
Social Development Commission
St. Charles Youth and Family Services, Inc.
Table of the Saints
Wisconsin Community Services
Wisconsin Resource Center
WISDOM
Word of Hope Ministries

APPENDIX E: Interview Questions for Formerly Incarcerated Women-Identifying People

1. How old are you?
2. How do you racially identify?
3. Can you tell me more about how you experienced/are experiencing re-entry?
4. What are the biggest challenges you have faced while navigating re-entry? Are there challenges to reentry that you think are specific to women?
5. Do you feel as though you've had adequate support during reentry? If not, what kinds of services would you like to see made available?
6. How do you think your own identity (with respect to gender and race) has shaped your experiences following incarceration?
7. Can you explain how incarceration has impacted your family, especially your children?
 - a. Based on the dynamic of the conversation and the nonverbal body language of the participant, this question may or may not be asked. Has your family come in contact with the child welfare system? If yes, can you detail how this contact with the child welfare system has affected you and your family?
8. If you do not have children, how has incarceration impacted your family (chosen or biological), and more broadly your community?
9. How do you see incarceration as connected to issues like domestic violence?
10. How do you see incarceration as connected to community violence?
11. Are there any additional questions or points you would like to include/that you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX F: Interview Questions for Reentry Service Provider (RSP) Employees

1. Can you share how you got involved with [name of organization], and what brings you to this work?
2. What kind of work do you do here? How did you become involved in reentry services?
3. Can you tell me about the clients that you serve? What brings them to you?
4. What are their biggest challenges as they navigate reentry? How does your organization offer support?
5. What are the biggest challenges your organization encounters in supporting people who have experienced incarceration?
6. Do you work with other organizations or groups in the city?
7. How are challenges people face in reentry connected to our broader criminal justice system?
8. In your experience, can you describe how incarceration impacts family relations?
9. As a person who works directly with formerly incarcerated people, how do you see incarceration as connected to interpersonal violence? As connected to community violence?
10. What are the issues and challenges that women specifically face during re-entry?
11. Are there particular services that you think women need that you don't currently offer?
12. What are the biggest challenges to developing and/or maintaining a support system for formerly incarcerated women?
13. Are there any additional questions or points you would like to include/that you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX G: List of Milwaukee County Community Resources*

Domestic or Sexual Violence Resources

If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

Community Advocates | 414-449-4777

Aurora Healing Center at Aurora West Allis Medical Center | 414-219-5938 | 24-Hour Hotline 414-219-5555

UMOS Latina Resource Center | 414-389-6500

Hmong American Women's Association Sexual Assault Support and Advocacy Services | 24-Hour WI

Hmong Family Strengthening Helpline 1-877-740-4292

Nevermore Batterers Treatment Program | 414-828-5190

Mental Health Services

Milwaukee County BHD 24/7 Crisis Line | 414-257-7222 | Hearing Impaired 9-711

Milwaukee County BHD Community Access to Recovery Services | 414-257-8095

Milwaukee County Access Clinic | 414-257-7665

Wraparound Milwaukee (for Youth and Families) | Resource & Referral Line 414-257-7607

Milwaukee County Mobile Urgent Treatment Team (MUTT) for Children & Adolescents | 414-257-7621

Milwaukee County Geriatric Crisis Services | 414-257-7440

NAMI Greater Milwaukee | 414-344-0447

Mental Health America of Wisconsin | 414-276-3122 or 866-948-6483

Mental Health America of Wisconsin 2017-2018 Mental Health & Wellness Resource Guide for Milwaukee County

General Healthcare & Medical Prevention

Agape Community Center | 414-464-4440

Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin | 414-272-0064

Gerald L. Ignace Indian Health Center | 414-383-9526

Silver Spring Neighborhood Center | 414-463-7950

Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers | 414-672-1353

Referrals to Emergency Shelters, Substance Abuse Treatment, Emergency Food Benefits, and Other Resources

Impact 2-1-1 | 2-1-1

*Compiled based on resources provided by Community Advocates, Milwaukee County Resource Guide

APPENDIX H: Methodological Reflections and an Academic Recommendation

The thought-provoking words of Daphne Patai serve as an imperative reminder between researcher and participants. Patai (1991) asks, “is it possible – not in theory but in the actual conditions of the real world today – to write about the oppressed without becoming one of the oppressors?” (p. 138). While designing the research interview questions and ways to “collect” data, I experienced significant hesitation approaching this topic given the emotional, traumatic, and lasting effects of the impacts of incarceration for formerly incarcerated women and their families. I did not want to further oppress formerly incarcerated women, and yet I felt it necessary to include, and center, their voices within this research.

Reflecting on the methodology, specifically on the interviewee recruitment process and interview questions. While I knew it would be difficult to recruit formerly incarcerated women to participate in an academic research project, given their priorities and weariness of exploitative university-associated research, I failed to consider how much this project would create more difficult boundaries within my personal activist circles. For instance, I consider myself an abolitionist ally and attend monthly meeting with formerly incarcerated women. In this spaces, women share their struggles with ‘marked’ status in addition to on-the-ground organizing for political and social action. While I try to take up as little space as possible during these meetings, this happened to become a recruitment site in which I made clear my relationship with the university and my research. It felt awkward, and I later hoped that this other aspect of my life would not interfere with future activist work with this campaign.

Unfortunately, recruitment for this project was substantially more difficult than I had anticipated. In hindsight, I did not build any shared trust with these women, outside of our monthly campaign meetings which made it difficult for women to trust this research process. Additionally, the IRB process significantly slowed down the application process and limited the time to recruit, interview, and transcribe interviews. For this reason, I was only able to interview two formerly incarcerated

women. While this small sample may affect the validity of this research, my goal was not to generalize these narratives, but rather to glean insights based on the specific and situated social locations of formerly incarcerated women living in Milwaukee, WI.

The richness of these interviews provided affective experiences specific to the historical, social, and economic conditions of Milwaukee that I did not, and would not, receive from secondary sources. These interviews also provided me with a new sense of relationality, not only signaled between the interviewees but with myself and the interviewees. For instance, one of the formerly incarcerated women completed the interview while driving in her car with google maps occasionally interrupting the interview. Based on this, the research was an important place to share her story yet was not given complete priority given the business of her day. At the same time, formerly incarcerated women were vulnerable and open about their trauma, incarceration, and the effects on their family, speaking with me as two people engaging in a conversation, opposed to the formalities of a 'professional' interview. Through these interviews, formerly incarcerated women also resisted hegemonic ideas by reclaiming their narratives. As hooks (2014) states, "oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, [and] telling their story" (p. 43). I feel incredibly grateful to have learned and listened from these two incredible women who share their stories as an opportunity to discuss ongoing gender inequalities and advocate for inclusion and social change. It is through these interviews that I was able to better understand the failure of incarceration and reentry services in everyday life and in relation to systemic inequalities and commonsense logic. As Hill Collins (1998) notes, violence exists within the power relations of race and gender, reinforcing the necessity for an intersectional analysis of systems of domination, including the carceral system.

In order to dismantle these systems of oppression, I am guided by Brittany Cooper's (2018) "homegirl" intervention in which we use our social location and "get our people" to engage in social change. Within this thesis, I use my graduate student positionality and activist scholarship to align with Andrea Smith's (2009) decolonization of knowledge within the academy. She expresses:

The point is that if we are going to challenge the individualist system, we need to engage in collective action through relationships built on mutual responsibility and accountability. The system can handle thousands of 'oppositional' academics who do work on their own; it is not until these thousands begin to act collectively that the system can be challenged. (A. Smith, 2009, p. 41)

Through collaborative, mutual responsible scholarship, this not only dismantles the neoliberal notions of competition and individuality, it provides the tools to breakdown such structures, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

APPENDIX I: Mutual Aid Commissary Drive by Black & Pink–Milwaukee

Description:

Governor Evers has called for the closure of all public and private K-12 schools, bars and restaurants, and enacted a statewide ban limiting social gatherings to groups of 10 people or less due to the public health pandemic. However, Gov. Evers neglects to care for those incarcerated across the state of Wisconsin.

As the Abolitionist Mutual Aid Fund states, this is both a public health and human rights crisis, where incarcerated people are at severe risk of contracting and transmitting Covid-19. As health experts state, handwashing is the best way to minimize the spread of coronavirus, yet incarcerated people do not have the means to protect themselves. While the DOC distributes soap to incarcerated people labeled indigent, they barely have enough soap to wash their hands. Masks and wipes are considered contraband and are forbidden. The ability of family and other outside support networks to mitigate the DOC's callousness and negligence is constrained by inordinately restrictive policies and costly prison vendors. Additionally, [socially distancing is nearly impossible within prisons and jails.](#)

[In a VOX article illuminating the danger of mass incarceration and the spread of Covid-19](#), German Lopez writes, "People in jail or prison also have less access to things we might take for granted in the free world that help prevent the spread of infection."

In aligning with prison abolition and engaging in mutual aid support, we ask that you consider donating money for incarcerated people to access basic hygiene products, such as soap. We will distribute the funds to individuals connected to Black and Pink Milwaukee.

PayPal Fundraiser Link:

https://www.paypal.com/pools/c/8nwZDIZJSW?fbclid=IwAR2hvYGXVeeiMQW8Bj_AZWgEBDqMD-m61uqyQotw8BBnBXmFlglusSphCCo

COMMISSARY DRIVE FOR INCARCERATED PEOPLE IN WI

WHY A COMMISSARY DRIVE?

Handwashing is the most effective way to reduce the spread of COVID-19. However, incarcerated people do not have access to hygiene products, like bars of soap.



WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

DONATE \$\$\$

We ask that you consider donating money for incarcerated people to access basic hygiene products.

We will distribute the funds to individuals connected to Black & Pink Milwaukee.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

With your generous support and sharing, we are able to distribute commissary funds to nearly...

60 people!