

Criminalised young people and the worlds we create for them: An exploration of discourse, power and subjectivity

By

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ABSTRACT

Since the Enlightenment era, the phenomenon of youth crime has received significant research attention and there exists an extensive body of literature relating to ‘youth crime’, ‘criminals’, and ‘crime control’. However, as argued within this thesis, dominant approaches seek to understand crime through positivist, quantitative and individualising frameworks and often produce and reify the discourses, logics and practices of the carceral society. Despite the scale of research on youth crime, there remains only a relatively small body of research that meaningfully privileges the voices, perspectives and stories of criminalised young people. A similarly small body of research seeks to turn the gaze away from the ‘criminal’, and what is deficient or deviant within them, and onto the world that society has created for these young people. As such, while criminalised young people are, arguably, over-researched, they remain under-represented and their voices and perspectives continue to be silenced in studies that focus *on* them.

Drawing from 40 narrative-based interviews with 16 criminalised young people, facilitated through a novel interviewing tool designed to amplify participant agency, this thesis explores the research question: ‘What can we learn from the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised children and young people?’. In adopting a broad research question, a post-structural, narrative methodology, and infusing aspects of co-design throughout, this project offers an original contribution to knowledge by identifying and challenging the dominant, individualising and silencing discourses that construct youth crime and criminalised young people. In its focus on the subjectifying effects of these discourses, this thesis enables a more nuanced, rich and textured picture of the often silenced subject to emerge.

Applying a Foucauldian lens, participant narratives are analysed with a particular focus on dominant discourses and the ways in which these shaped both the subjectivities and lived realities of research participants. Foucault’s notion of the carceral society, highlighting the pervasive culture of control that exists beyond prisons, is also central to this thesis. Thus, analysis of participant narratives highlights the carceral practices diffused throughout society including institutions — such as schools and health services — not normally considered ‘carceral’. As shown in this thesis, the carceral logic plays out most acutely across gendered, classed and raced lines, leaving certain young people particularly exposed to criminalisation and social, systemic, structural, and discursive violences.

The analysis of participant narratives is also influenced by Hearn et al.'s (2022a) notion of 'violence regimes', emphasising the violence that is woven into the fabric of the colonial, carceral society. This thesis argues that, in the lives of criminalised young people, violence is not simply physical or interpersonal but encompasses the material-discursive violences produced by dominant discourses of race, class, gender and deviance. This broader understanding of violence illuminates the practices of power that are embedded within the social, economic and political systems of the carceral, colonial society, and fundamentally shape the lives and subjectivities of criminalised young people. Thus, this thesis argues that in order to meaningfully address harm and create a safer, more equitable, society for all, we must begin naming, interrogating, challenging and transforming the material-discursive violences inherent within the colonial, carceral society.

This thesis, and the research translation project that accompanied it, strove to provide a safe space for criminalised young people, who have been so routinely silenced, pathologised and framed in the deficient, to exercise agency in the telling of their stories. Engaging with these stories edges us closer to an understanding of the complexity of their lives and the ways in which dominant discourses both constrain and silence criminalised young people and reinforce carceral practices as necessary and justified. Further, providing participants with opportunities to narrate their lives and experience themselves differently — often in ways they'd never been given permission to before — offers the potential for subtle, but profound, changes in the subjectivities and landscapes of self-understanding available to criminalised young people.

In its challenging of dominant discourses, knowledges and practices of power, I argue that this research constitutes an act of resistance. Such practices of resistance are important as dominant discourses inform how issues like crime, and those constructed as 'criminal', are understood and intervened against. When individualising discourses are allowed to dominate, carceral practices emerge as the logical solution. By harnessing the subjugated knowledges of young people, this thesis provides a critical foundation for alternate constructions — or counter discourses — of violence, crime and criminals. It is these counter-discourses that provide the potential for radically different interventions to emerge.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university
2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and
3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed..........

Date.....13/09/24.....

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The phenomena of ‘youth crime’, ‘criminals’ and ‘crime control’¹ have received significant research attention since the Enlightenment era when the human subject, and thus human deviance and penology, was first studied in a systematic way. Consequently, over many decades, and as prison populations have grown globally, researchers have produced an extensive body of literature *on* youth crime, criminals, and crime control. However, whilst vast in scope, this body of literature is epistemologically narrow — with dominant approaches often adopting positivist, quantitative and individualising frameworks which seek to identify, assess and classify the various risk factors and/or traits believed to be located within, or distinctive to, the ‘criminal’ (Cunneen & White 2011). While presented as neutral and objective, in their failure to consider the material-discursive contexts of criminalised young people’s lives, positivist approaches have been critiqued for producing racist, ableist, classist and liberal understandings of youth crime (Alexander 2018; Cunneen 2020; Henne & Troshynski 2019; Shaw & Hannah-Moffat 2013). This PhD research interrogates the ways that such studies draw on and reinforce dominant individualising and damaged-centred discourses of crime/criminals, positioning individuals as the source of the problem and the primary site of change. Such a framing leaves the broader relations of power — like the violences produced by dominant discourses of race, class, gender, and deviance explored in this PhD — uninterrogated and intact. Despite the scale of research on youth crime, there exists only a relatively small body of qualitative work meaningfully privileging the perspectives of children and young people who have lived, and are often still living, through criminalisation. Instead, ‘silencing methods’ — those that draw from secondary data or rigid, pre-determined surveys — are widely adopted (Deckert 2016; Tauri 2012). This practice of power sees the voices of those with embodied knowledge and lived experience of criminalisation marginalised and, at times, excluded altogether, with positivist research, instead, privileging the world views of academics, or “symbolic elites” (Deckert 2016, p. 48), occupying radically different social positions.

¹ In writing these words for the first time within this thesis, I have included scare quotes to demonstrate a critical engagement. The phrases ‘crime’, ‘criminal’, ‘deviance’, ‘race’, ‘normal’ etc. are, as I argue within this thesis, not objective or neutral terms. Rather, from a post-structuralist stance, they are social constructions and practices of power which this thesis seeks to challenge. However, for the purposes of grammatical clarity, from this point onwards, I will not couch such terms in scare quotes, but a critical engagement can be assumed.

This thesis is underpinned by the assumption that, far from objective, neutral and unsullied by broader practices of power, social research is deeply enmeshed with the dominant discourses, social norms and power dynamics of a society. As such, this thesis is influenced by Michel Foucault's theorisings on societal practices of power, born of the Enlightenment, that inform which knowledges and whose voices are amplified and legitimised as the 'truth' on a given topic (Foucault 1979, 1981). Across history, and still to a large degree contemporarily, the ivory towers of universities exist, both materially and epistemologically, as sites exclusionary to those with lived and embodied understandings of social phenomena like criminalisation (Foucault 1979). Dominant criminological research practices draw a clear distinction between who is the 'knower' and who is the 'known', who is the 'expert' and who is the 'object' (DeCat & Stardust 2020; Rabinow & Rose 2006). The confinement and relegation of criminalised children/young people to the margins, thus, occurs not only in physical spaces, like children's prisons² and the resource-starved communities they are often born into (Barnert et al. 2015), but also in the discursive realm, through knowledge generating activities like social research. This thesis will argue that so long as dominant research approaches continue to construct 'criminal' behaviour as deviance, the product of free will, individual traits and/or internal deficits, the harmful, individualising practices of criminalisation will continue. To make meaningful change, towards a safer, more equal society, possible, this thesis will argue that the violences inherent within the colonial, carceral society can no longer be ignored in conversations, research and interventions relating to criminalised young people.

1.2 This project

A qualitative, post-structural framework, underpinned by practices of co-design, is adopted in this project in order to unsettle the power effects of Enlightenment knowledges and positivist research. It seeks to examine how carceral logics and practices permeate both society and the lives of criminalised young people — shaping their material realities and subjectivities in violent ways. This project is underpinned by an understanding of knowledge as "located, not transcendent", as "engaged, not abstracted" and as "forged from solidarity with, not separation

² Throughout this thesis, I intentionally use the term 'child/youth prison' instead of 'youth detention centre', 'training centre', 'secure care', 'therapeutic centre' etc. as, as explained by the National Network of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls (2024, p. 6), "[u]sing terms like Youth Prisons or Children's Prisons ... is more accurate because it acknowledges the reality that these facilities function in the same way as adult prisons, subjecting children to carceral environments. Referring to them as detention centres downplays the severity of the conditions and experiences within these institutions, obscuring the fact that they essentially operate as prisons for children".

from” (Conquergood 2002, p. 149). Drawing from 40 narrative-based interviews with 16 criminalised young people, facilitated through a novel interviewing tool designed to amplify participant agency, this project explored the research question:

What can we learn from the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised children and young people?

This PhD deployed an intentionally broad research question to provide participants with the freedom and agency to actively shape the research direction — allowing a more nuanced, rich and textured picture of the often silenced ‘subject’ to emerge (Deckert 2016; Ezzy 2019). The specific aims of the research included:

- Explore young people’s lived experiences and the issues, events and ideas important to them; and
- Explore the role of discourse, power relations and carceral logics in shaping the subject positions and lived experiences of criminalised young people.

In engaging with the narratives offered up by research participants, this project draws heavily on Foucault’s theorising of power, knowledge, discourse, subjectivity and the ‘carceral society’ (Foucault 1979) — turning the lens away from the ‘criminal’ and onto the material and discursive conditions within which individuals exist. By exploring the ‘micro-physics’ of power at play in the lives of research participants, it becomes possible to build a broader understanding of how criminalised young people are discursively constructed and the influence of this on their material realities, subjectivities and the avenues of resistance available to them (Andersen 1996).

This thesis also uses the concept of ‘violence regimes’ (Hearn, Strid, Humbert & Balkmar 2022a) to highlight and explore the multiple violences present in the lives of young people. Hearn et al.’s (2022a) violence regimes lens offers a way of thinking about and theorising violence that draws attention to the violences inherent in the everyday. This lens makes it possible to see violence as existing in more than just direct, physical acts, but violence as, itself, a form of inequality that is discursive, systemic and structural, and ingrained within, normalised and perpetuated by colonial societies. In illuminating multiple violences, a violence regimes lens enables an examination of the violence inherent in the lives of criminalised young people, and the carceral society at large through a broadened understanding of violence — enabling an exploration of both its direct (visible, physical, and deliberate) and indirect (diffused, discursive, dispersed and socially

embedded) forms (Hearn et al. 2022a). Foucauldian perspectives and the violence regimes lens share a focus on the material-discursive, thus enabling alternate constructions and possibilities existing outside of the dominant carceral discourses to be uncovered and explored — offering possibilities for social change.

In alignment with its post-structural underpinnings, this thesis seeks not to present the objective reality of life as a criminalised young person. Rather, post-structuralist thought enables the lived experiences and narratives of criminalised young people to be understood as nuanced, fluid and constructed through multiple, often competing and contradictory, discourses (Butler 2011). Thus, this thesis seeks “...not to reveal the individual subject but to investigate the processes of subjectification” that have shaped the lives of research participants (Davies & Gannon 2005, p. 318). By presenting richer insights into the complexities of life as a criminalised young person, and the discursive and material forces that shape these, this thesis encourages policy makers and practitioners to shift their focus away from simplistic, individualising solutions and on to complex, societal problems. Given recent calls to design social services in partnership with those with lived experience (Ahmed, Windle & Lynch 2021; McDonagh & Bateman 2012; Turner 2021; Yarbrough 2020), these findings will benefit policy makers, program managers and practitioners looking to work with, and meet the needs of, marginalised young people without drawing from carceral or criminalising practices. This project offers an important reorientation, away from individualising and silencing research practices and the “fully funded failure” (McIntosh 2023) of the existing carceral system. Instead, it advocates that discursive change is required to radically reimagine how we understand, and engage with, inequity, harm and accountability (Lamble 2020).

In my determination to honour the voices and perspectives of participants, this thesis is infused with stories of pain, suffering and trauma. However, the participants pain, suffering and trauma is far from the holistic truth of these young people’s lives. Their lives are nuanced, complex and often stitched together by relationships and community that, even in the face of societally imposed deprivation, demonstrate a level of care and selflessness that has, on occasion, left me speechless. Writing this introduction, I am struck by the memory of one of my participants, Benji, sharing his last cigarette with another homeless young person, despite knowing it would be ten days before he could afford to buy any more. It was Benji too who, on being given \$50 by a stranger on Christmas Day, decided to spread his (relative) good fortune by buying a Christmas feed to share with others also experiencing hunger, homelessness and deep pain. This was despite the fact that Benji was grappling with severe addiction, homeless and didn’t have a dollar to his

name. Rather than using the money to buy the methamphetamine to which he was addicted, Benji looked to others and reflected to me: “See, we all look after each other in a way, even if we don’t know each other”. These acts, Benji’s as well as those of the other young people I have encountered, are ones of deep generosity, community and reciprocity. It is the stories of young people that prompted me to theorise, both the violences that shape their lives, and the resistances they enact on a daily basis.

1.3 Thesis format

Broadly speaking, this thesis comprises three overarching sections, spread across eight chapters. The first of these sections, comprising Chapters Two and Three, aims to orient the reader to the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the thesis. Chapter Four offers a Foucauldian inspired discursive analysis of the existing research literature as a foundation for the analysis that follows. Chapters Five to Seven, draw from participant narratives and comprise the combined findings/discussion chapters of this thesis, which are summarised in Chapter Eight, the conclusion.

I begin this thesis, in Chapter Two, by detailing the theoretical conceptual framework that underpins this work. By situating this separately from my ‘methods’ chapter, and before reviewing the literature, I make explicit the lens through which I conceptualise and interpret both my own research data, and the existing body of literature. Chapter Two begins by exploring some key aspects of both post-structuralism and Foucault’s theorising on discourse, knowledge, power and subjectivity. The chapter then moves into an exploration of the distinct, but interrelated and mutually reinforcing, concepts of the ‘carceral society’ and the ‘carceral logic’ which, I argue, powerfully shape the material realities, subjectivities and agency of the young people who participated in this project. These also provide the lens through which the existing evidence base and participant narratives are examined and analysed.

Following this, in Chapter Three, I detail the methodological practices and considerations underpinning the *doing* of this qualitative research — beginning with an exploration of the power of language to shape realities in order to contextualise my decision to use the term ‘criminalised’, as opposed to offenders/delinquents/criminals, to refer to research participants and contributors. The chapter then moves into a discussion of co-design principles and my implementation of these in order to ensure that the voices of those most impacted — those that have long been excluded and silenced — informed each stage of the research. Following this, the narrative approach and novel interviewing tool used in this project are detailed, as well as the recruitment and sampling

techniques and ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter concludes by outlining the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis inspired approach used to analyse the data in this thesis.

In keeping with the post-structural underpinnings of this thesis, I have chosen not to provide a standard literature review that reports on *what* has been studied in the field of youth crime. Instead, Chapter Four explores *how* youth crime and criminalised young people have been studied — offering a discursive analysis of the epistemological approaches and research methods that dominate. In this chapter, classical, positivist, social, structural and multi-factorial approaches are analysed and considered in relation to the discourses, logics and practices of the carceral society. A focus on *how* criminalised young people have been studied, framed, and conceptualised within research enables the assumptions, constructions and approaches that dominate the field to be illuminated and the alternate approach advanced in this project to be contextualised. Chapter Four concludes with an exploration of what post-structural criminological research offers, arguing that it provides a framework for interrogating the dominant discourses, research approaches, and systems of knowledge that produce the carceral society (Foucault 1984), while enabling the complexity and multiplicity of power relations that shape the lives of criminalised young people to be unearthed and explored (Butler 2011).

Central to this post-structural project is an understanding of both social research and crime, like all social phenomena, as socially constructed. In exploring power and its operation in society, this research therefore focusses on the relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault 1979), which enables the privileging and reification of certain discourses and the discounting of others (Duso & Arrigo 2018). Thus, Chapter Five draws from participant narratives to speak back to the positivist, individualising discourses and understandings of violence, adversity and trauma critiqued in the previous chapter. As shown in this chapter, counter to dominant, individualising approaches, young people generally chose to talk about their experiences of adversity and violences beyond the self and the family, focusing instead on the violences inherent in multiple sites and practices within the carceral, colonial society. Consequently, through participant narratives, Chapter Five explores how the dominant discourses of race, class and gender produce inequity and violence, whilst simultaneously shaping dominant understandings of what violence is and is not. This chapter begins by introducing the theoretical concept of violence regimes (Hearn et al. 2022a) — a framework which is drawn on to analyse participant narratives and the litany of direct and indirect violences produced by dominant discourses of race, class and gender. Applying a violence regimes lens makes it possible to draw out, both, the institutionally produced violences

and the “wider material-discursive politics of violence” (Hearn, Strid, Balkmar & Delaunay 2022b, p. 696) that shape the lives of criminalised young people. Instead of reducing violence to “individual psychological traits or dysfunctional families or institutions”, this approach urges us to understand violence as a “social and societal inequality in its own right” (Hearn et al. 2022a, p. 585).

In Chapter Six, Foucault’s (1979) concept of the carceral society provides the focus for discussion of the dispersal of disciplinary practices of power, “the logics, practices, and technologies of prison” (Martensen 2020, p. 1), throughout society, achieving a reach far greater than the formal carceral system. Through this lens, it is possible to see that the formal carceral system exists as just one, albeit particularly overt, manifestation of a much broader, capillary like regime of power and control (Foucault 1979). Within this landscape, education and welfare services, even if “well-intentioned”, are co-opted into participating in the carceral practices of categorisation, surveillance, normalisation and control (Martensen 2020, p. 6) — carceral practices of power that have become so naturalised that they are often invisible or seen as natural, self-evident truths; just the way things are. Chapter Six’s engagement with participant narratives seeks to interrogate the ways in which carceral and disciplinary practices have infused sites not normatively conceptualised as ‘carceral’, shaping the lived, and living, experiences and subjectivities of research participants in violent ways. The chapter draws from specific examples offered up by research participants to render visible the practices of surveillance, categorisation, pathologisation, discipline and control that, in the carceral society, infuse our schools, child protection, housing, Centrelink³ and mental health services.

Chapter Seven draws from participant narratives to interrogate the violences and disciplinary practices produced within the formal carceral system — conceptualised in this thesis as comprising policing, prisons, courts, corrections and community youth justice. This chapter, the final of the findings/discussion chapters for this thesis, takes the institutional context of the formal carceral system as its focus, arguing that it is within this microcosm that the violent practices of the carceral society manifest most acutely for research participants. This chapter interrogates how the carceral societies practices of surveillance, control, discipline and punishment (Foucault 1979), and the violences produced by dominant discourses of race, class and gender, manifest within

³ Centrelink is Australia’s income support program providing welfare payments to eligible recipients.

policing and prisons — exposing the bodies and subjectivities of criminalised young people to a litany of state-sanctioned, societally legitimated violences (Hearn et al. 2022a).

Finally, linking the theoretical, methodological, discursive review of the literature and findings/discussion chapters together, Chapter Eight concludes this thesis by discussing key findings from my analysis of participant narratives — narratives which urge us to contemplate the possibilities for transforming, rather than perpetuating, the material and discursive inequities that shape criminalised young people's lives (Ben-Moshe 2018; Davis 2003; Kilroy, Lean & Davis 2023; Mathiesen 1974).

1.4 Positionality and my journey into this research

My interest in how social issues are constructed, understood, and responded to emerged throughout my seven years in direct social work practice, working primarily in the youth homelessness sector. In this context, consistent with neoliberalism's hollowing out of the welfare sector (Giroux 2015), resources were scant, and it would often take three months of daily advocacy and, due to the lack of housing options, daily safety planning, to find a teenage girl a bed in a youth shelter — during which time she would endure a litany of societally produced, but entirely avoidable, violences. To me, this characterised a critical social issue — one deserving of the utmost attention and resources. As a somewhat naïve 21-year-old, I struggled to understand how we, as a society, could accept anything less. However, I rarely saw the issue reflected in public discourse and in explaining my work socially, people would routinely respond with statements like “I didn't even realise that we had youth homelessness in Adelaide” or “Isn't it dangerous? Don't you feel unsafe?”. This dynamic, I can now see, speaks to the dominant construction of those experiencing homelessness as either unimportant, responsible for their own situations or inherently deviant and dangerous.

The starkness between the material resources invested into the social issues of youth homelessness and youth offending first became painfully clear to me in my first year as a social worker. I was working with a seventeen-year-old to find accommodation which was difficult to secure. Becoming increasingly desperate, the young person broke into a car, was found asleep in the vehicle and was arrested and incarcerated — all within the time in between me leaving work and returning the next morning. I was appalled that in this situation, and in the many I witnessed after it, it was only when this young person ‘posed a threat to society’ (or, to the property of the ‘deserving’) that the system responded — with a carceral response, one significantly more

expensive⁴ and violent than simply providing safe housing in the community. For me, the challenges of social work in the youth homelessness sector rarely related to the behaviours of the young people I worked for. Whilst I didn't have the language for it at the time, what kept me up at night was the constant fight I had to wage against the discourses and practices of the neoliberal, colonial, carceral society which, instead of investing in addressing social inequity, invested in, encouraged and normalised practices of surveillance, control, and discipline (Wacquant 2001). It was these observations, and the rage that was building within my being, that ultimately brought me to PhD studies.

After years of walking alongside criminalised young people, I moved into this research with the keen knowledge that I am not, nor will I ever be, an expert on the themes, for example of poverty, homelessness, police violence and incarceration, to be explored. The knowledge I bring is neither embodied nor lived. It is merely cognitive, theoretical and observed. As a white, middle-class, able-bodied researcher with no lived experience of criminalisation, I recognise the ethically fraught nature of conducting research (in collaboration) with criminalised young people and the harmful power dynamics inherent in much criminological research. As detailed in Chapter Three, I have sought to, meaningfully but imperfectly, grapple with, and reduce, the risk of unintentionally perpetuating the symbolic violence (Farrugia 2012) of silencing practices (Deckert 2016), thus replicating the very power dynamics I seek to challenge. It is for these reasons that I have adopted co-design practices and applied these, where possible, within the confines of a PhD project.

This research is not free of broader societal power dynamics that shape my subjectivity and the subjectivities of the research participants. In presenting the narratives brought forth by participants, I do not purport to demonstrate the truth of the matter, nor do I see youth criminalisation as a phenomenon that can ever be studied objectively and in its entirety. I am acutely aware that the worldview I bring has shaped this project in particular ways — many of these which, despite ongoing critical self-reflection, remain invisible to me. Instead of “seeking to remove all traces of” myself from this study (Yunkaporta 2019, p. 38) — a labour of love that has consumed nearly every corner of my mind for the past three and half years — I have been guided by Yunkaporta's (2019, p. 38) critique of the positivist assertion that a researcher must not influence the data with their humanness “otherwise their data is considered to be contaminated”. “Contaminated with what?”, he questions, “With the filthy reality of belongingness? The toxic

⁴ To incarcerate a single child in South Australia costs \$3,145 per day, or \$1.15million per child, per year (Productivity Commission 2023).

realisation that if we can't stand outside of a field we can't own it?" (Yunkaporta 2019, p. 38). I am not separate from this research, nor am I separate from the discourses, practices and violence inherent in the carceral society — and to suggest otherwise would be to obscure the messy reality that we all live.

1.5 As you proceed

As you proceed through this thesis, I urge you to hold onto the knowing that there is a beating heart behind every one of these stories. A beating heart that harms and hurts and loves deeply. There is pain, and violence, tenderness, toughness and tears. There are glimmers, but often only glimmers, of joy. There is violence — violence by, violence onto and into, violence from one body to another and the violence of the systems, structures and discourses of the carceral society. These are beating hearts that have been silenced, hurt, and ignored, but they also resist, regroup and have so much to teach those willing to listen.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical conceptual framework underpinning this thesis. As defined by Ezzy (2019, p. 13), the methodology of a social research project can be understood as “the worldview influenced lens through which the research question and the core concepts are understood and translated into the research approach we take”. A methodology, then, can be understood to encompass all elements that inform the *doing* of the research — including the research questions, theoretical framework, epistemology, ontology, axiology, standpoint/worldview, ethical considerations and methods. Traditionally, the methodology underpinning a research project emerges from the existing evidence base (Ezzy 2019) and as such is presented following the literature review, often within a single chapter. However, within this thesis, I have made the decision to present the theoretical framework first, so that I can situate the epistemological stance underpinning the research from the outset. In foregrounding my theoretical framework, I seek to make explicit the map through which I conceptualise and interpret data throughout the entirety of this thesis. Specifically, such an approach enables me to analyse not only my own findings, but also the existing body of literature and the discursive context within which this research sits through a coherent, targeted lens.

Within this thesis, which adopts a post-structural, Foucauldian inspired lens, the knowledge/power practices produced through Enlightenment based knowledges, and their relationship to constructions of deviance and the discourses and practices of the carceral society, are key. I use the terms the ‘carceral society’ and ‘carceral logic’ to refer to two distinct, but highly interrelated and mutually reinforcing, concepts. The concept of the carceral society — a term coined by Foucault (1979) to reflect how the disciplinary practices of surveillance, normalisation, and control extend beyond the overtly carceral site of the prison to infuse society at large — is central, and, as I see it, is both produced by, and produces, the ‘carceral logic’. The ‘carceral logic’ is a phrase I use to describe the systems of knowledge, ideas and discourses that produce and reinforce the practices of the carceral society — practices which seek to govern members of a society in alignment with capitalist, ablest and racist norms produced through liberal, Enlightenment based epistemologies (Coyle & Nagel 2021; Davis 2003; Gilmore 2007; Ince 2018; Jackson, K 2021; Lopez 2022; Martensen 2020; McKinnon 2020; Okello 2022; Rudolph 2023; Saleh-

Hanna 2017). The logics and discourses of the carceral society produce practices of power that influence the lived experiences, subjectivities and means of resistance most accessible to research participants and, within this thesis, are the primary discourses and practices against which the existing evidence base and participant narratives are analysed. A key aim of this chapter is therefore to present an articulation of some of the many complex discourses, knowledges and systems of power that both inform, and are produced by, the carceral society. However, in order to reach such a point, some important post-structuralist foregrounding is required. As such, this chapter begins by introducing some aspects of both post-structuralist theory and Foucault's theorising on discourse, knowledge and power that are particularly pertinent to this research, before finishing with a conceptualisation of the carceral logic that infuses contemporary 'Australian'⁵ society.

2.2 Post-structuralism

This thesis assumes, ontologically and epistemologically, a post-structural stance to explain the nature of reality and the production of knowledge as socially constructed, subjective and contextual (Weedon 1997). However, beginning this section by attempting to define post-structuralism is a fraught task given that one of post-structuralisms most primary tenets is its resistance to the concept of fixed definition. As fellow post-structuralist researchers explain, "poststructuralism is, of course, not one thing; rather it encompasses a range of theoretical positions, perspectives and ideas" (Seymour 2012, p. 47), many of which "deny the very possibility of any clear and fixed characterization of it (or of anything else)" (Hammersley 1995, p. 14).

Despite this resistance to definition and categorisation, the first stirrings of post-structuralist thought are said to have emerged in the 1960s as a counter to structuralist understandings of a reality that can be known, studied and represented accurately through language and research (Weedon 1997). Post-structuralist theorists began calling into question the assumptions of objectivity and 'truth' associated with structuralist schools of thought — assumptions which continue to permeate the social sciences, whereby social research is often understood as a process of uncovering the 'truth' of a subject (Popoviciu, Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 2006). Post-structuralists, instead, argue that meaning is constantly evolving and that reality is so contextual, nuanced and fluid that it can never be accurately represented linguistically (St Pierre 2000;

⁵ Again, I couch this term in scare quotes to reflect an understanding that Australia is an illegitimate product of colonisation and the colonial imagination.

Weedon 1999). Post-structuralism, thus, calls into question the truth status of commonly taken for granted entities (like reality, truth, knowledge, facts, laws, science, race and gender) that often go unquestioned by essentialist, structuralist and modernist schools of thought. Instead, post-structuralism understands these to be culturally and contextually specific constructs which are both shaped by and shape the lives of those who interact with them (Weedon 1997). If all meaning is understood to be subjective and constructed, then social issues can also be seen as socially constructed entities (Clarke, J & Cochrane 1998) — an understanding which paves the way for alternate understandings of the concepts integral to this thesis, such as crime, deviance and violence, to emerge (Duso & Arrigo 2018).

As will be elucidated in Chapter Four, criminological research has traditionally been dominated by positivist understandings which frame research as a mechanism through which the ‘real’ world can be known, studied and described without distortion. Such an epistemology assumes that “reality is both *prior* to and *independent of* representation” with little recognition of the various conditionings a given participant, researcher or context will bring to the conduct, analysis and representation of research (Edley 2001, p. 435). This practice can be seen, for example, in the countless studies that seek to identify the ‘truth’ of what drives youth crime by drawing from structured assessment tools to assess and classify various traits believed to be located within, or distinctive to, the offender (Cunneen & White 2011). Within such studies, the highly values laden, fluid and subjective nature of the behaviours classified as ‘criminal’, the categories constructed as ‘risk factors’, the forces shaping these constructions and the research process are rarely interrogated and are thus presented as neutral ‘truths’. Post-structuralism, in contrast, provides this thesis with a counter-framework to critique dominant social processes, systems of knowledge and ways of framing and intervening in the lives of those ‘othered’. It challenges notions of academic knowledge as ‘truth’ and current understandings of, and responses to, crime as natural and objective — rather than socially constructed and fluid (Blagg & Anthony 2019).

2.2.1 Post-structuralism and Foucault on power, discourse and subjectivity

As has been widely recognised, Foucault did not himself identify as a post-structuralist or political theorist — remaining resolute in his resistance to being categorised within any particular school of thought (Foucault 1984, 1998). In any case, Foucault’s theorisings on the nature of truth — for example, in his statement that “what appears obvious to us is not all so obvious” — and in his critiques of the positivist assumption that one can reflect reality without embedding bias, inspired the post-structuralist school of thought (Foucault 1984, p. 139). Through his work, Foucault

challenged the idea that there exists some pure truth about humans that can be revealed by scientific research and instead sought to examine the processes by which, through discourses and the practices of power they produce, humans *become* subjects (Foucault 2001). Foucault's insights are both vast and complex, and thus impossible to do justice to in brief. However, his theorising on power, knowledge, discourse and subjectivity are central to the analyses adopted in this thesis and, as such, this section engages only with these particularly pertinent concepts.

Foucault was not interested in categorising exercises of power as good or bad, moral or immoral, in fact he sought to eliminate all binary constructions that “fix asymmetric, oppositional relationships like those between innocence and culpability, reason and madness, the good and the bad, and the normal and the pathological” (De Folter 1986, p. 52). Foucault instead sought to understand the ‘microphysics of power’ — how power is conducted in the everyday. In his theorising on power, Foucault argued that traditional (‘juridical’ and ‘sovereign’ as he called them) explanations of power are products of the Enlightenment era, and as such fail to reflect the evolution of power and its exercise within modern society (Foucault 1981). Sovereign notions frame power as heavily tied to the monarchy, and the inherent and inherited right of leaders to rule and exercise power *over* their constituents. Juridical notions emphasise the rule of law as the key site and instrument of power. Whilst differing slightly in their understandings of power, both conceptualisations see power as being invested into some powerful individuals/groups/institutions and asserted over other less powerful individuals/groups within a hierarchical society sanctioned, primarily, by the rule of law and/or fear of punishment (Foucault 1978). In such a conception, power is localised within particular sites (for example, within the royal family during the classical age, and later, within the state) and is possessed by powerful interest groups (kings, politicians, rulers, judges, the upper classes etc.) and is said to operate “through repression, negation, concealment, or prohibition” (De Folter 1986, p. 57). As Rabinow and Rose (2006, p. 196) explain, this was an understanding of power that was produced and disseminated in and through “classical political philosophy”. However, as these philosophies were being disseminated, Foucault argues, new mechanisms of power were emerging — a power not solely based on ruling, but of governing too (Waller 2020). Foucault countered traditional understandings of power arguing instead that in modern society power is not monolithic, not localised within certain sites, is not a commodity that is simply possessed by certain groups, nor is it exercised solely through repression or the threat of punishment. In counter to juridical and sovereign constructions of

power, Foucault proffered the concepts of both 'disciplinary power' and 'biopower' (Foucault 1979, 1982).

Biopower is the term Foucault uses to describe "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power" (Foucault 2007, p. 1). Biopower, Foucault (2007) argues, refers to the model of power that emerged in the 19th century, the point at which the human became the object of scientific study — something to be known, measured, quantified, documented, compared, understood and, ultimately, he argues, governed. The data emerging from the scientific study of the human subject during the Enlightenment period enabled the classification of humans — a practice which Foucault (1979) suggests enabled power to be exercised over, through and by subjects. It is in this period that "the normal was systemically catalogued" (Mulholland 2013, p. 21) by scientists across fields as diffuse as medicine, psychiatry, linguistics and economics — all of whom naturally brought pre-existing biases into their work and who began defining human characteristics (of health, capacity, intellect, productivity, sanity etc) against this 'norm'. It is against this category of 'normal' that the 'abnormal', 'deviant', 'irrational', 'mentally ill', 'inferior', 'unproductive', 'criminal' human is produced (Foucault 1979). During this era, these scientific practices set the parameters of both 'truth' (which can only be discovered through scientific approaches — an ideal that, as will be elucidated in Chapter Four, remains pervasive) and 'normality' (the white, middle-class, able-bodied and minded male) against which subjects could be compared, shaped and conditioned. It is through these processes of construction that humans were able to be categorised along a continuum of normality/abnormality and superiority/inferiority and through which we see the social construction of race, eugenics and social Darwinism emerge (Foucault 1979).

Additionally, during this period, with the rise of the state and liberalism, Foucault (2007) argues that the 'population' and the 'economy' become important concepts of study as it is the population that provides the state with its labour, and thus, its primary source of wealth. It is in this liberal context that birth and mortality rates, the control of illness and enhancement of productivity become important (Waller 2020) and through which the modern form of governmentality arises. In his 1979 lectures 'The Birth of Biopolitics', Foucault (2008) insists that biopower, and I would add inequality and the carceral society, cannot be understood in isolation from liberalism — "the framework of political rationality within which they appeared and took on their intensity" (Oksala 2013, p. 329). Foucault (2008) asserts that it was liberalism, with its

emphasis on economic rationalism, scientific reason, individual rights and limited government intervention, that “redrew the ontological boundary between economy and politics” (Oksala 2013, p. 331) and sought to shape individuals into the optimal, economically productive subjects.

Shaped by Enlightenment ideals, research based on the hierarchical framing of the human subject has produced new strategies for “silencing and controlling deviance” and has paved “the way for training and normalizing people to be obedient and dutiful citizens from cradle to grave” (Bang 2016, p. 93). It is the hierarchisation of humans through science, Foucault argues, that enabled the privileged to assert their “class power” as natural, “legal and legitimate” (Bang 2016, p. 93) and through which laypeople could be trained towards docility, economic productivity and acceptance of their place within the existing order. Within such a system, punishment and repression have “become merely one element in a range of mechanisms working to generate, incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize and organize” subjects to adhere to, uphold and participate in dominant norms and expectations (Rabinow & Rose 2006, p. 196). Foucault sees the emergence of modern science as an extension of the “arm of the king, providing sovereignty with a new instrumental and moral rationality for removing, or hindering the emergence of, disorder in society” (Bang 2016, p. 92). It is this fusion of Enlightenment based knowledges, about both the economy and the human subject, that gave rise to the “specific form that biopolitics assumed in Western societies” (Oksala 2013, p. 329) — knowledges that continue to inform and disguise mechanisms of power, and the carceral logics, prevalent within Australian society today.

Prior to his theorisings on biopower, Foucault introduced an analysis of power and its operation at the institutional, relational and individual level through his concept of ‘disciplinary power’ — an understanding of power that underpinned the later, and more state-based, analysis offered by biopower (Oksala 2013). Disciplinary power, for Foucault, offers an inverted (both top-down and ground-up) and generative explanation of power and its operation within society. He explains:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault 1981, p. 119)

Disciplinary power and biopower, Foucault (1981) argues, are not merely exercised through unilateral or binary relationships where the powerful oppress the powerless, but rather produce intricate networks of relations that are imbedded (to varying degrees) within all aspects of society — operating within and through social relations, knowledge, discourse and the “micro-penalties of

everyday life” (De Folter 1986, p. 58). Foucault’s concepts of disciplinary and biopower describe a power that is dispersed and ‘omnipresent’ (across our schools, families, hospitals, workplaces, relationships etc.) — seeking to *produce* subjectivities, modes of existence, behaviours and lifestyles that are beneficial to the governance of society. Through this lens, power is seen to exist through the production of knowledge and social norms that (by asserting what is deemed normal, healthy, socially acceptable, desirable and undesirable) seek to regulate behaviour and produce the self-governing, productive subject (Foucault 1979; Weedon 1997).

Prior to Foucault’s theorising’s on power, the dominant western philosophies of the time framed power as separate from, and standing in opposition to, knowledge — power was seen as “as something which distorts our perception of the truth” (Cronin 1996, p. 58). Foucault, however, posed a radical challenge to such notions, arguing that “for knowledge to function as knowledge it must exercise power” (Foucault 1997, p. 71). To Foucault, the concepts of discourse, knowledge and power are closely related — he argues that power is exercised within and through certain knowledges that come to be seen as ‘truths’, and in so doing disqualify competing knowledges as ‘non-truths’. To Foucault, knowledge is not objective, and power is conducted and dispersed throughout society through the “production, accumulation, circulation and functioning” of knowledge and discourse (Foucault 1981, p. 93). As such, for post-structuralist theorists, power dynamics are unearthed and interrogated through the study of discourse — the ways in which dominant discourses constitute and construct the worlds we inhabit is key. Consequently, this thesis is interested in exploring and interrogating the dominant discourses that construct, interact with and shape the subjectivities and material realities of criminalised young people.

Weedon (1997, p. 105) explains Foucault’s concept of discourse as reflecting more than just ways of speaking, “thinking and producing meaning” but, as “ways of constituting knowledge” that influence, and are influenced by, “social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations”. Fairclough (2013, p. 57) explains discourse as something which “constitutes the social” through “knowledge, social relations, and social identity”. As Seymour (2012, p. 50) explains, “different discourses present different truths and different ways of knowing, thinking and speaking about the ‘truth’”. Through this lens, all knowledges/discourses exist within and are shaped by particular historically specific contexts and carry varying degrees of power and, as Weedon (1997, p. 105) explains, the most dominant, and thus powerful, discourses are those which have “firm institutional bases”. Dominant discourses determine what issues are discussed, how they are constructed, understood and, in the case of ‘youth crime/criminals’, problematised and named as

a social issue. When dominant knowledges/discourses shape and become embedded within our institutions (such as our education systems, workplaces, legal structures, the media etc.), they also become embedded within our everyday interactions with the self and others, thus shaping societal norms, expectations and structures and the landscapes of understanding available to us (Weedon 1997). Through this lens, our thoughts, feelings, values, worldviews and our sense of ourselves and others are not solely our own, but have been formed in, and shaped by, a discursive landscape of power relations from which they cannot be separated (Weedon 1997). Power, then, is not executed by the conscious, free agent acting out one's autonomous values. Instead, power operates through historically and contextually specific "mechanisms of bodily discipline that escape the consciousness and will of individual and collective social agents" (Cronin 1996, p. 56). In recognition of this, Foucault encouraged a shift in analysis — away from the subject of knowledge, towards the "regimes of power-knowledge relations", the processes that enable certain discourses to achieve truth status, thus producing and/or maintaining power dynamics and shaping subjectivities (Cronin 1996, p. 58).

In his emphasis on the processes through which humans become subjects, Foucault (2001) posed a fundamental challenge to humanist representations of individuals as possessing an essence that is a priori, "unique, fixed and coherent", an essence that "makes her what she *is*" (Weedon 1997, p. 32) — understandings which continue to permeate studies on youth crime, whereby both crime and the young people under study are framed as possessing some true or inherent quality that can be known and reflected through research (Halsey 2006). Instead, subjectivity in a post-structuralist context frames human identity as unstable, contradictory and in-flux — existing in constant interplay with many, often competing and contradictory, discourses. By arguing that identity categories — such as race, class, gender etc. — possess no inherent qualities but are, instead, historically contextual social constructs, post-structuralists are not denying that such markers impact tangibly upon how we are perceived, exist within and experience our worlds. In fact, central to much post-structuralist work is the recognition that whilst identity categories are not fixed or experienced universally, the socially constructed meanings attached to them are imbued with power and inevitably have material impacts. The assertion that subjects are produced through ongoing processes of construction implies that our subject positions are "not innate, not genetically determined, but socially produced...through a whole range of discursive practices — economic, social and political — the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power" (Weedon 1997, p. 21). Through this lens, it is knowledge and discourse that shape how we see

ourselves, how we are seen by society as certain ‘types’ of people and which both produce and confine the possibilities for the self and the avenues of resistance most available to us (Weedon 1997). From a post-structuralist perspective, power operates in the lives of criminalised young people not simply through the law, policing and the prison, but also through the discourses and knowledges that shape how we construct, understand and respond to the various subject positions they occupy. These practices of power shape and inform both society’s understanding of, and responses to, the socially constructed phenomena of crime and the landscapes of self-understanding and behaving most available to criminalised young people themselves.

Subjectivity, in a post-structural context, urges us to understand that no human exists in isolation, and thus an individual’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences are all shaped by discursive, ideological and linguistic practices (Weedon 1997). Thus, this thesis seeks to present the narratives of criminalised young people not as a demonstration of the ‘truth’ of their lives, but rather as vital insights into how dominant discourses shape how these lives are experienced and made sense of — both by criminalised young people themselves, and by the broader carceral society. By exploring the narratives of criminalised young people, we can begin to interrogate the practices of power that produce their subjectivities and, thus, shape their lived experiences and everyday lives. Understanding the various identity categories that shape subjectivity as both socially constructed and tangibly experienced, supports this thesis in its desire to explore how Enlightenment based knowledges continue to inform constructions of difference and deviance in ways that produce regimes of inequality, violence and carcerality (Hearn et al. 2022a).

In his theorising of power and its exercise, Foucault (1979) drew parallels between the practices of surveillance and self-governance that he saw as permeating the disciplinary society and those central to the design of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon prison — a circular prison with a one-way surveillance tower in its centre. Within Bentham’s Panopticon, the observation tower was always visible; however, inmates were never able to observe the guards themselves, nor could they determine when they were being observed and when they were not (Foucault 1979). Bentham argued that the threat of constant visibility and surveillance served to produce the self-governing, self-disciplining inmate, enhancing a prison’s capacity to control more people with fewer resources — a metaphor, Foucault (1979) argues, for the contemporary disciplinary society. As Foucault (1979, p. 203) explains, both the Panopticon and disciplinary practices of power produce “... a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power”. Through this lens, the simple threat of being observed doing the wrong thing produces a self-

governing subject who becomes “caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (Foucault 1979, p. 203). To Foucault (1979), the Panopticon served as both an illustration of disciplinary power in its most essential form, and a metaphor for its operation, and relationship to surveillance, within broader society.

In contemporary society, practices of surveillance are widespread and can be seen through overt measures like the prevalence of surveillance and speed cameras, the monitoring of electronic devices by employers and schools, drivers’ licenses linked directly to records of conduct and health insurance companies tracking health behaviours etc. Surveillance, however, also occurs in less overt ways, through the teaching of social norms which become embedded within institutions like, for example, our schools — with children who fail to conform to standards of intellect, behaviour, presentation, gender expression, communication etc. being routinely monitored and disciplined by teachers, and/or teased and bullied by their peers. So too, the mandate of standardised testing enables children as young as eight to be judged and compared against a ‘norm’. For those criminalised, life in the community is characterised by an additional litany of formal surveillance methods as they are kept under the watchful eye of the state through the use of GPS tracking devices, random home visits, drug tests, regular reporting requirements and a catalogue of restrictions that must be adhered to at all times. This population also tends to be subjected to additional informal surveillance by fellow citizens who have often been conditioned into hypervigilance of the conduct of humans occupying racialised (Patel 2012), disabled (Hilton 2017), mentally ill and/or marginalised (Clarke, A, Parsell & Lata 2021) bodies.

2.3 The carceral society and logic

This thesis takes the knowledges, discourses and practices of the carceral society as a key focus as, through a Foucauldian lens, these forces powerfully shape the subjectivities available to all of us — yet for none more acutely than those criminalised by its practices. It is not within the scope of this chapter, nor through a post-structuralist epistemology is it possible, to provide a complete examination of the discourses and knowledges producing the carceral society, as these are multifaceted, fluid and have evolved over centuries. However, in laying the groundwork for analysis to come, my aim here is to present a brief and subjective exploration of just some of the discourses and knowledges I see as particularly key — as it is against these that the existing evidence base and participant narratives are analysed. Making the knowledges, discourses and logics informing the carceral society explicit, provides a foundation for analysing how racialised,

classist, gendered, ableist and punishment-based logics have “distorted our thinking” (Lopez 2022, p. 387) about ‘deviance’ — what deviance is, its drivers and solutions — and helps to elucidate the pervasiveness of these logics in contemporary society.

Within this thesis, I use the terms the ‘carceral society’ and the ‘carceral logic’ to refer to two distinct, but highly interrelated and mutually reinforcing, concepts. The carceral logic and society are concepts that have been either directly coined, or inspired, by Foucault’s (1979) theorising on the practices of surveillance, categorisation, normalisation and punishment that pervade contemporary society. Foucault’s (1979) concept of the carceral society helps to illustrate how, through disciplinary and biopolitical modes of power, “the logics, practices, and technologies of prison” (Martensen 2020, p. 1) have become embedded across diffuse aspects of society, with a reach far greater than the formal carceral system. Within the carceral society, practices of surveillance, discipline and control infuse institutions not commonly conceptualised as ‘carceral’ — seeking to govern subjects in alignment with ‘norms’ set by capitalist, ableist and racist standards produced through liberal, Enlightenment based epistemologies (Coyle & Nagel 2021; Martensen 2020). It is the fictions of ‘normal’, constructions of a ‘race’ hierarchy and measures of worth based upon productivity produced during this epoch that inform and produce the ‘carceral logic’ and the practices of the carceral society. These logics remain culturally pervasive and produce practices of surveillance and control in the lives of us all — practices which, at times, justify the expulsion of ‘deviant’ subjects deemed to pose a threat to the effective functioning of the society. The carceral logic, thus, is the term I adopt in an effort to name the complex system of knowledges and discourses that birth and reinforce the practices of the carceral society. These mechanisms of power — the carceral society and the carceral logic — I suggest, are mutually reinforcing and cannot be easily extrapolated from each other.

For many academics, the carceral logic is a term used to describe the entanglement of discourses of empiricism, white supremacy, racism, colonialism, neoliberalism and capitalism that infuse the carceral society (Coyle & Nagel 2021; Davis 2003; Gilmore 2007; Ince 2018; Jackson, K 2021; Lopez 2022; Martensen 2020; McKinnon 2020; Okello 2022; Rudolph 2023; Saleh-Hanna 2017) and which fuse together to produce regimes of surveillance, control and punishment that “further the colonial, racializing and capitalist agendas of dominant nation states (especially European ones)” (Coyle & Nagel 2021, p. 3). The following section will explore the role of (neo)liberalism and Enlightenment based knowledges in shaping the contemporary carceral society.

2.3.1 Enlightenment thinking, colonialism and the carceral logic

In interrogating constructions of race and processes of racialisation that have produced and continue to pervade the contemporary carceral society, we can see the enduring power of the discourses, knowledges and biopolitical practices born of Enlightenment research on the human subject which, drawing from biological determinism, sought to establish scientific validity for hierarchical constructions of 'race' (Moreton-Robinson 2006). Under a thin veneer of 'objectivity', scientific racism asserted that the biological features of certain 'races' made them inherently inferior to a constructed 'norm' of whiteness (Oksala 2013). It is these constructions of racial superiority/inferiority, and the understandings of deviance they produced, that licensed British colonialism and the attempted genocide of those indigenous to so-called Australia (Blagg & Anthony 2019; Cunneen 2011; McKinnon 2020). Following unsuccessful genocidal efforts, the discourses of race produced by these pseudo-scientific knowledges were inserted into colonial Australia's legal, political and educational systems — producing practices that targeted Aboriginal⁶ communities for heightened surveillance, control and confinement. The systematic surveillance and control of the Aboriginal population is exemplified, for example, through the introduction of various 'Aborigines [sic] Protection' Acts which enabled governments to control the minutia of everyday life for Aboriginal people and saw the forced relocation of many to tightly surveilled mission settlements or boarding schools for forcibly removed children (Anthony 2013; Blagg & Anthony 2019; Cunneen 2011; McKinnon 2020). During this time, efforts to study and scientifically prove the primitive nature of this supposedly 'genetically inferior race' were expanded and interventions to control reproductive rights were intensified in an effort to assimilate and eventually 'breed out' Indigeneity and pave the way for broader colonial settlement and wealth production. As explained by Tedmanson (2008, p. 149):

The history of the 'protection' of Australia's Indigenous peoples is patterned with the governmentalities and biopolitics of power — the legislations, the definitions, the surveillance — and continual forms of material violence which have combined to keep Indigenous peoples inside detention — in reserves, on islands, in gaols — and outside — away from the wider/whiter community.

⁶ Throughout this thesis, in consultation with my Aboriginal mentors, I use the term Aboriginal when referring to the First Peoples of mainland 'Australia'. I use the term First Nations peoples when referring to the First Peoples of both mainland 'Australia' and the surrounding colonised islands. I also use the terms Aboriginal, Indigenous, First Nations, or a specific community/language group depending upon the preference of the person I am referring to.

As Amangu Yamatji⁷ academic Crystal McKinnon (2020) argues, in the Australian colonial context, we begin to see the rise of policing and prisons as a primary mechanism of carceral control of Aboriginal populations at the same time that missions, reserves and children's homes were becoming increasingly critiqued and delegitimised. The increased "freedom of movement" afforded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the wake of the 1967 referendum was again met with the intensified use of policing and imprisonment (McKinnon 2020, p. 695) and "the racially defined carceral regime of missions and reserves was increasingly replaced by the mainstream mechanisms of the criminal justice system" (Cunneen et al. 2013, p. 32).

Within this complex web of governmentality, we can see that confinement was, and still is, just one of many biopolitical mechanisms of colonial carcerality. This short tracing of history highlights the reliance of the settler colonial state on the surveillance and control tactics of the carceral society as a mechanism of occupation since the earliest stages of colonisation (Tedmanson 2008) — practices which both paved the way for, and normalised, the continued disproportionate surveillance, policing, incarceration, and institutionalisation of racialised people today. When viewed in relation to colonial biopower, and the hegemonic norms around race that, although widely disproven (Rabinow & Rose 2006), persist, the sustained hyper-surveillance and incarceration of First Nations and racialised people can be seen not as a symptom, or "unintended consequence", of a broken or malfunctioning system but rather as "...the logical extension of several centuries of policies, laws and practices designed to complete the dispossession of Indigenous people as bearers of Indigenous sovereignty" (Blagg & Anthony 2019, p. 15) — a sovereignty that threatens the legitimacy of the colonial population. The historic and contemporary hyper-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can thus be understood as an "outcome of deliberate intervention by the settler state" (Blagg & Anthony 2019, p. 15) — an outcome of knowledges and discourses invested in asserting colonial legitimacy, white supremacy and sustaining settler access to land and resources. The contemporary carceral logic — which sees First Nations children and young people excluded from schools, removed from their parents and criminalised at higher rates, younger ages and for more minor offences than their non-Indigenous counterparts and which sees them comprising 90% of the child/youth prison population across various states and territories (Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous

⁷ The Amangu Yamatji people, belonging to the Yamatji Nation, are the First Peoples and custodians of Geraldton and the Mid-West coast of Western Australia.

Peoples 2017, p. 12) — has “been well-rehearsed on previous generations” (McKinnon 2020, p. 695).

2.3.2 (Neo)Liberalism and the carceral logic/society

The discourses and practices of (neo)liberalism are deeply entangled with the carceral society for they produce and exacerbate inequalities, license the erosion of welfare services, embed values of economic productivity and self-sufficiency into our institutions and punish those who fail to comply. From the mid-20th century, neoliberalism has built upon Enlightenment era Liberalism and — with its emphasis on individual freedom, liberty, agency, free-market capitalism, and private investment over state responsibility — has reshaped relationships between governments and citizens in ways that emphasise productivity and self-sufficiency and licensed the gradual erosion of social welfare systems (Martensen 2020). The rise of neoliberalism saw a “mainstreaming of individual responsibility” (Martensen 2020, p. 4); a ‘pull yourself up by the bootstraps’ ideology, and a mechanism of social control, that has become embedded within our schools, which are designed to create productive neoliberal citizens, and welfare services, who have become the policers of poverty, micromanaging the behaviours of the poor and imposing sanctions onto those considered unproductive or disruptive to the neoliberal status quo.

Simultaneously, the rise of market-based principles, which promoted the globalisation of jobs and casualisation of labour, left working class people precariously, under or unemployed, with only an eroded and increasingly difficult to navigate welfare net to fall back on (Martensen 2020, p. 4). The social divestment resulting from the adoption of neoliberal ideologies has “had exceptionally devastating effects” (Martensen 2020, p. 4) on those furthest from hegemonic norms, including poor, racialised, disabled, mentally ill, homeless and queer folk (Jackson, K 2021), who have been forced into methods of survival and resistance that are either criminalised, such as sex work and the illicit substance trade (Jackson, K 2021, p. 3), or hyper-policed and controlled, like loitering, sleeping rough and begging. Neoliberalism both contributes to higher crime rates — as those relegated to the margins struggle for survival — whilst simultaneously framing this struggle as an individual failing, rather than a product of the systems and structures it produces (Oksala 2013). Through this logic, neoliberalism rationalises the expansion of, and increased reliance upon, carceral practices and the formal carceral system to control the social issues it produces. As Martensen (2020, p. 2) explains, neoliberal discourses “gained public support for domestic wars on poverty, crime, drugs, and immigration, which reconstructed our political, social, and economic landscape in ways that lent itself to the buildup of a Carceral State”. It is these discourses that

produce a carceral society fanatical about punishing survival-based offending, like the theft of food from supermarkets, whilst such capitalist giants face underpayment claims (Victorian Government 2023), hoard wealth and report annual yearly profits of \$1.6 billion (Barrett 2023). Within the contemporary carceral logic, those pushed to the margins of the capitalist, colonial society become fodder for a criminal 'justice' system shaped by tough-on-crime politics, structural racism and neoliberalism (Martensen 2020).

A post-structural framing helps us to see how the neoliberal politics underpinning the carceral society place those existing at the margins of normativity in a particularly vulnerable position, framing them as responsible for their situations and giving rise to systems of, both, "mass homelessness" and "mass incarceration" (Martensen 2020, p. 4). Linking neoliberal political shifts to the over surveillance, control and incarceration of black, brown, poor, mentally ill and disabled bodies is, Martensen (2020, p. 5) argues, "essential to a critical conceptual analysis of the Carceral State". Through this lens, the carceral logic is a framework which has produced a carceral society that is grounded in "colonialism, white supremacy and racial capitalism" (Coyle & Nagel 2021, p. 2). This thesis engages with the carceral logic, and the carceral society it produces and is produced by, in or to render visible its machinations in the lives of criminalised young people, whilst simultaneously offering up, and contributing to, alternate ways of knowing.

2.4 Conclusion

To summarise, the theoretical lens informing this thesis shows that disciplinary and biopower are forms of power that are asserted and exercised through the production of knowledge, discourse and norms that become widely accepted and shape the subjectivities, behaviours and modes of understanding and resistance most accessible to us. Within this conceptualisation, it has been argued that the modern legal system exists not as the primary site of governance and control, but rather as one — albeit very overt — manifestation of the power operations permeating the carceral society more broadly.

This thesis, therefore, interrogates the ways in which, within the carceral society certain discourses of crime and deviance are privileged and reified and others discounted — determining who speaks and who is silenced on matters relating to crime, deviance and those constructed as criminals. This thesis explores the impacts of these discourses upon how we, as a society, construct, research, interact with, respond to and understand criminalised young people and what

this means for how criminalised young people understand themselves. In keeping with its post-structural underpinnings, participant narratives are analysed to uncover, not what they say about criminalised young people themselves but rather, what they say about discourse, power and society — the worlds we create for these young people. By exploring the ‘micro-physics’ and practices of power of the carceral society — how these play out in the everyday experiences of criminalised, often ‘othered’, young people — we can begin to build a broader understanding of “how domination is achieved and individuals are socially constructed” (Garland 1990, p. 134). In viewing carceral logics as nuanced, dynamic and dispersed throughout society, this thesis examines how both overt (such as the law and prison) and subtle machinations of carcerality shape the lives of the criminalised young people who gifted their time and stories — pieces of themselves — to this project. In its interrogation of the discourses and practices of the carceral society, and the ways that these shape and constrain the lives of research participants, this thesis constitutes an act of resistance that seeks to open up, and contribute to, other ways of constructing, understanding and engaging with criminalised young people.

Whilst the discourses that produce the carceral society are pervasive and entrenched, through a Foucauldian lens, these discursive fields and the power relations they give rise to are not fixed. When understood as sites of constant contestation and challenge, multiple subject positions and ways of understanding become possible (Foucault 1978). Despite widespread acceptance and adoption of the logics and practices of the carceral society, the ways in which crime and deviance have been defined, understood and responded to have varied significantly across epochs and, within those epochs, across countries, cultures and social positions. If power and discourse are not fixed but relational and fluid then, according to Foucault (1978), the possibility of resistance — of shifting or reversing discursive power dynamics — is always available. Taking a post-structural approach enables an exploration of the alternate constructions and possibilities that exist outside current dominant carceral discourses. The following chapter builds upon the theoretical framework outlined here to detail the method — the approach to *doing* — adopted in this project.

3 METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodological practices and considerations that underpinned the *doing* of this qualitative research, which asks the broad research question:

‘What can we learn from the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised children and young people?’.

A qualitative, narrative approach was adopted as it enables the lives and narratives of criminalised young people to be centred, allowing a more nuanced picture of the (often silenced) ‘subject’ to emerge (Deckert 2016). Consistent with the post-structural orientation of this project, qualitative research focusses on producing data that is rich and textured; enabling experience, the meanings that participants attach to experience, and the systems of power that sit around those experiences to be illuminated and explored (Ezzy 2019). By exploring the ‘micro-physics’ of power and how these play out across the lives, and in the everyday interactions, of criminalised — often ‘othered’ — young people, this thesis aimed to build a broader understanding of “how domination is achieved and individuals are socially constructed” (Garland 1990, p. 134).

In this chapter, I detail the methodical considerations and practices that have shaped this research and have enabled a nuanced and complex picture of criminalised young people, and the worlds we create for them, to emerge. This chapter begins with an exploration of the power of language to shape knowledges, meanings and subjectivities — making explicit the logic underpinning the use of the term ‘criminalised’ in relation to research participants and contributors. The chapter then moves into a discussion of the value of adopting a co-design, narrative approach, before detailing recruitment and sampling techniques. As is well documented (Heath et al. 2007; Ritterbusch 2012; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert 2008), irrespective of the rigour of planning efforts, the process of enacting a qualitative study often exposes researchers to a host of methodological and ethical issues — this is particularly so when researching a phenomenon which I have not lived, with a population who have, quite routinely, been silenced through, and harmed by, dominant constructions and approaches to research. The chapter begins with an in-depth discussion of the concept of ‘criminalisation’ which is fundamental to this research. This is followed by an outline of the ethical considerations underpinning this research. Finally, this chapter concludes by naming, and briefly explaining, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) — the approach to data analysis

adopted. Throughout this chapter, prior to them being formally introduced in the ‘co-design’ and ‘sample’ sections to come, I will refer to various participants and mentors to, for example, contextualise an argument or recognise their influence on the research direction.

3.2 Conceptualising ‘criminalised’

Within this research, the term ‘criminalised young person’ (as opposed to commonly used titles such as young/juvenile/youth, offender/delinquent/inmate/criminal) has been adopted for various reasons. First, while recognising the value of person-first language, I argue that these young people are so much more than offenders, delinquents or criminals and using these terms in relation to their personhood, regardless of where it is positioned in the order of words, is problematic. Through a post-structuralist lens, ‘criminal’ is not an identity intrinsic to anyone, it is a socially constructed subjectivity imposed upon people by the carceral society. The phrase ‘criminalised young person’ or ‘criminalised child’ more strongly aligns with the post-structuralist underpinnings of this research in that it resists structural or binary definitions and points towards the socially constructed nature of both crime and societal responses to it. Such an approach enables the research to focus less on the act and actor of the behaviours we have constructed as crimes, and more on the social processes, discourses and practices that sit around it. To me, this phrasing helps to more accurately reflect the social processes that shape the phenomena of youth crime and criminalisation, whereby as a society we have chosen to enact practices that often respond to marginalisation, need and harm in ways that further perpetuate these experiences and create the ‘criminal’. Further, this phrase also helps to reflect that not all children or young people who engage in ‘criminal’ behaviour experience criminalisation, and not all who feel they have been criminalised have been charged with a criminal offence. Often, the difference between these outcomes relates to material inequalities, how dominant discourses shape the subject positions available to us and whether society has constructed us as ‘redeemable’ or ‘condemned’.

To provide an anecdotal example, as a child I had numerous interactions with the police, was arrested on multiple occasions, yet always received diversionary responses. While recognising that the behaviours I was engaging in were relatively minor (multiple instances of shoplifting, possession of cannabis at school, intoxicated in a public place etc.), they were cumulative and no less serious than some of the behaviours for which research participants incurred much harsher penalties. Take, for example, Angela, a research participant who will be introduced later in this chapter, who for her first offence was formally charged with shoplifting for stealing a single box of

condoms — contraception that she needed to enable her to practice safe sex in the abusive relationship she was trying to survive. In similar circumstance I — a white girl in a private school uniform who, on multiple occasions, was caught stealing goods of a substantially higher value — either did not have the police called at all, or when I did was collected from the police station by my apologetic mother, who was relatable and could speak the language of the police officers. Conversely Angela was a 16-year-old occupying a racialised body and living in a youth homelessness shelter with no one to advocate for her humanity and redeemability. Despite being caught shoplifting numerous times, the most serious penalty I incurred was a formal warning, while she received a court date that loomed over her head, significantly impacting her mental health, for eight months.

Another illustrative anecdote emerging from this research process relates to the experiences of Lorna, one of the lived experience advisors supporting this project who, as a child of 15, was first arrested and imprisoned for ‘trespassing’ after attending a 24-hour fast food restaurant that she and her friends were banned from. Unlike the response I received in a similar scenario at a similar age, this girl — who had just had her entire world upturned after losing her nephew and her stepfather in a car accident, and whose mother had become permanently cognitively and physically disabled in the same accident — was arrested, detained and taken to the state’s child/youth prison. At the child/youth prison she was made to undergo a strip search, which Kilroy and Lean (2024) astutely refer to as ‘state sanctioned sexual assault’, despite being so naïve she genuinely thought to herself “What do they mean? Kids don’t take drugs”. She was inducted into the prison environment, where she had a seed of rage planted within her chest and met other criminalised girls that she came to idolise who showed her avenues of resistance — and so began her eight-year journey of cycling in and out of prison. This story is a particularly stark, but by no means unique, example of the socially constructed nature of the label criminal — a label that is routinely imposed upon young people in acute need of care and nurturance, without the socially protective privileges I was afforded.

I saw the phenomena I had lived reflected in the lives of two other young people I met with for initial interviews who, whilst navigating some complexity and hardship, appeared to be somewhat cocooned by their middle-class, white privilege and the redeemability that is often assumed of children from perceivably normative families (Feinstein 2015). Although these young people had multiple interactions with the formal carceral system, both had their offending behaviour responded to with diversionary methods and, unlike those young people without parental, class

and/or white privilege, avoided becoming ensnared within the criminal legal system. As such, whilst recognising that diversionary responses are still carceral, these particular young people did not themselves identify as 'criminalised' or feel able to provide insights into life as criminalised young person and, thus, were considered ineligible for the study.

The malleability of the term 'criminalised young person' also encompasses the stories of participants like Jax who, despite never being formally charged with a crime, strongly identifies as criminalised. For Jax, an Aboriginal child born to a criminalised man, the police have been a constant presence throughout their life. During our time together, Jax, a non-binary research participant who goes by them/them pronouns, provided many examples that illustrate the ways society has constructed them as deviant and criminal from the youngest of age — a knowing they reflect was first drilled into them at the age of 11 when, during one of the many police raids they endured as a child, whilst Jax's aunty was being "held down by five cops" one turned to Jax, gestured at Jax's aunty and said "That's gonna be you one day". Jax reflects on the impact of such a statement on their sense of world and their place within it, asking "Can you imagine hearing that as an 11-year-old?". In a magazine article they wrote following our interviews together, they assert "that if you are an Aboriginal child whose parents have been criminalised, police officers see you as a criminal too" (Sansbury 2023, p. 17).

To reiterate, within this research, the terms 'criminalised young person' or 'criminalised child' have been intentionally adopted in alignment with the post-structural origins of this study which emphasise language not as a neutral force, but as a mechanism of power shaping our subjectivities, lived realities and the modes of existence most available to us. The term criminalised young person/child enables this research to resist fixed, essentialised and stigmatising constructions that locate the problem of crime within the characteristics of certain individuals ('criminals') and enables a focus instead on the socially constructed nature of categories like deviance, crime and the criminal and the social processes and power dynamics that sit around these constructions.

3.3 Principles of co-design and centring lived experience voice

From a post-structuralist perspective, institutions like universities have played a powerful role in shaping knowledge, discourse and constructing and mobilising social norms. Such institutions exercise disciplinary and biopolitical power by determining what forms of knowledge and whose voices are legitimised and privileged as the 'truth' on a given topic (Foucault 1979). From a

Foucauldian perspective, the production and existence of ‘knowledge’, like that produced by universities and social research, is not neutral — but rather is intimately connected to, infused with, and informing of, broader societal power dynamics (Foucault 1981). Across history, and still to a large degree contemporarily, the ivory towers of universities exist — both materially and epistemologically — as sites unwelcoming and inaccessible to those with lived and embodied understandings of social phenomena like criminalisation (Foucault 1979; Watego 2021). Consequently, power is exercised through the demographic makeup, hiring processes and preferred research methodologies of universities — practices which serve to silence and exclude certain voices, perspectives and ways of knowing.

This phenomenon, and the particularly sensationalised constructions of ‘youth crime’ that dominate across most colonial landscapes, has meant that criminalised children and young people have been the subjects of a large body of research, media attention and public discourse. Very rarely however, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, have their voices been centred, or even included, in such knowledge generating and discourse shaping activities (Turner 2021). As will be demonstrated, within dominant criminological research practices, we can see a clear distinction between who is the ‘knower’ and who is the ‘known’, who is the ‘expert’ and who is the ‘object’ — a power dynamic this project seeks to unsettle. By centring lived experience voice throughout all stages, this project aims to challenge dominant research dynamics whereby criminalised children and young people are implicitly, and at times explicitly, constructed as “wrong doers who have forfeited their right to voice” (Ward 2021) and instead engages with them as knowledge holders with lived and embodied expertise.

Over the past two decades, within the social services more broadly, through agitation and activism, those with lived experiences of various social issues have called into question dominant understandings of expertise and the ‘expert’ (Yarbrough 2020). Although ‘evidence based’ discourses — whereby researchers and practitioners are framed as rational ‘experts’ and those with lived and embodied knowledge are framed as irrational beneficiaries of this ‘expertise’ — still permeate and dominate, a counter discourse has begun to emerge. This counter discourse, often known as the ‘nothing about us without us’ movement, has resulted in a growing understanding that the voices of lived experience are essential for building robust and nuanced understandings of, and responses to, complex societal issues (Ahmed, Windle & Lynch 2021; Turner 2021). Such a recognition is, albeit very gradually, finding its way into research and practice with criminalised people (Turner 2021).

At the heart of the ‘nothing about us without us’ movement sits a demand that those voices that have long been excluded and silenced — the voices of those most impacted — must be “...directly involved in all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation” (Ahmed, Windle & Lynch 2021, p. 4). As Tabitha Lean and Tina McPhee, prominent lived experience and abolitionist thinkers, routinely encourage those of us without lived experience of criminalisation to understand — the real work is in decentring our own voices and worldviews:

...if you are asked to speak or write about imprisonment, carceral violence, justice solutions, deaths in custody, or penal abolition, and you look around and see no one with lived prison experience having their voice elevated — weaponise your privilege and share your platform, because our voices are valid in this space, because we are experts in our own oppression, and there should be nothing at all about us, without us (Lean & McPhee 2021).

In alignment with both my personal politics and the principles of post-structuralism, the ethics and practices of co-design and the ‘nothing about us without us’ movement lay at the heart of this project.

The first stage of engagement with lived experience voices commenced whilst I was still working as a social worker. In my role in youth homelessness, I worked with many criminalised children and young people who I saw as having important stories to tell — ones that I wasn’t seeing represented through dominant research approaches or in popular discourse. It was in this context that the seed of this project was first sown, and I began speaking with some young people to gain insights into their perceptions of research and whether being involved in a study that sought to amplify their voices was something that felt relevant, interesting or safe for them. The overwhelming response was that young people wanted their stories to be told — but only if it was done on their terms and did not feel cold, clinical or extractive — “Not just some dude with a clipboard that I’ll never see again”. It was these conversations, in conjunction with the rage that had been building in me since commencing social work practice, that drove me to conduct research that, although imperfect, collaborates with, and embeds the voices of, lived experience throughout all stages.

In the early stages of project design, the service that was connecting me to young people lost funding and, consequently, I lost my pathway to a group of young people with whom I had enduring relationships who could have informed co-design processes from the outset. This troubled me as I risked becoming just another white, middle-class, non-criminalised researcher doing what I thought was right. Whilst remaining deeply committed to the ethics of co-design,

both the budgetary and author contribution constraints of a PhD meant that practicing co-design in its entirety — by, for example, employing project leads or research assistants — was simply not possible. It is within these limitations that I still sought to live up to my commitment to embedding, and being guided by, lived/living experience, whilst avoiding the common pitfalls of tokenising or exploiting. In an endeavour to not oversell and present this project as more than it is, I use the language of ‘adopted co-design principles’, instead of describing this research as ‘co-designed’.

Following the closure of the connecting service, I began exploring alternate ways of centring lived experience voice in the design of this project and was able to formalise the ongoing, remunerated support of two remarkable lived experience advisors who played an active role in shaping the research from the outset. Subsequently these advisors, Tabitha Lean and Lorna Robinson, have become dear friends and comrades. This project is deeply indebted to them — their wisdom, generosity, care and guidance has been integral. In the preliminary stages of research design, I also conducted once-off, remunerated consultations with five criminalised young people and two criminalised adults. These consultations built upon the insights provided by young people in the initial engagement and provided an opportunity to gauge new perspectives on the emerging research direction, the ethics of my approach and the first version of the interview tool I had begun developing. Again, a key theme that emerged from these consultations with criminalised people was the importance of facilitating research in a way that enabled participants to speak on their own terms and did not simply dig for stories of pain and suffering. During one supervision with Tabitha, I remember frantically scribbling down her sage words: “Don’t force them to bleed for you Tess. We’re more than just trauma”. Not making participants “bleed” means seeing them as multifaceted beings with interests, strengths and complex identities — not simply walking vessels of violence, suffering or trauma. It means seeing these children and young people as more than ‘delinquents’, more than a score on an Adverse Childhood Experiences test, more than the worst thing they’ve ever done. It means facilitating interviews in ways that consistently support safety, agency and encourage participants to step into the driver’s seat — a concept discussed further when I detail the interview tool I designed to support practices of co-design to sit at the heart of each interview.

Whilst this research did not solely interview First Nations children and young people, in recognising their over-representation within carceral systems as a symptom of colonisation (Baldry & Cunneen 2014; Cunneen 2006, 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2020), and the academy’s propensity to

silence these voices (Deckert 2016; Sherwood 2010), I made active efforts to privilege these voices and embedded processes of consultation and accountability to First Nations people (Ahmed, Windle & Lynch 2021; Tuhiwai Smith 2021). I began by engaging with the work of First Nations academics in so-called Australia such as Bennett (2013), Mirraboopa (2003), Moreton-Robinson (2000, 2004, 2006, 2013, 2021), Nakata (2007a, 2007b), Walter (2016), Watego (2021) and Whittaker (2017, 2020), and consulted the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2020) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research to help form my research ideas and direction. I then ventured further ashore to engage with the work of First Nations peoples, like Tauri (2012), Tauri (2014), Tuck and Yang (2012) and Tuhiwai Smith (2021), from other colonised countries. Once I had established a broad research plan, informed by the voices of lived experience, I met with senior Kurna/Miyurna⁸ Elder, Uncle⁹ Lewis O'Brien to discuss my emerging ideas and gauge his reaction. Uncle Lewis communicated support for this work, urging me, however, to remain committed to ensuring that this research is about more than merely completing a PhD. As someone who came to this research because of my strong desire for social change, this is a commitment I have always been driven by. It is a commitment that is exemplified through, for example, the exhibition¹⁰ I co-produced with some of the research participants — a labour of love which sought to ensure that this project amounted to more than simply a thesis, academic papers and the propulsion of my career and instead brought young people and their families in on the telling of their stories in ways meaningful to them. Following his approval, I engaged with a number of my First Nations friends and mentors — Tabitha Lean, Jared Thomas, Melissa Clarke and Luke Cantley¹¹ — all who confirmed their support for the research question, methods, ethical considerations and interviewing approach.

Having shared in the lives of many First Nations people, I bring to this research both a keen understanding that I have much to learn from First Nations ways of knowing, being and seeing the world, and with a sense of trepidation due to my inability to separate myself from the whiteness and colonial worldview that I have been socialised in alignment with. The relationships, and the mentorship I have received over the years, have given me a much richer appreciation for the ways in which, despite my genuine intentions, the colonial blind spots I bring with me have the capacity

⁸ The terms Kurna/Miyurna refer to the first peoples of what is now known as the Adelaide plains in South Australia.

⁹ Uncle or Aunty are terms of respect often bestowed upon Aboriginal Elders as “highly respected Aboriginal people held in esteem by their communities for their wisdom, cultural knowledge and community service” (Deadly Story 2020).

¹⁰ See p.163-6 for further exploration of the exhibition.

¹¹ All consented to being named within this PhD.

to cause harm. In engaging with literature by Whittaker (2020, p. 50) and Tuck and Yang (2012), I have felt an intense sense of discomfort, yet understand that this discomfort is not something I should seek to overcome or rid myself of, nor is the goal to keep ticking “good ally” boxes until eventually reaching “one of the good ones” status. As a white settler, I am inherently complicit in the ongoing colonisation of this country and any attempt to distance myself from this or move to a place of comfort is an evasion of this reality and responsibility (Tuck & Yang 2012). I have learned, am learning and will continue to learn that this work is endless and my complicity pervasive. As such, as a white, non-criminalised person, I have spent significant time labouring over the interwoven but converse questions of “Who am I to do research on this issue?” and “Who am I to ignore it?”. In this context, however, it is a privilege to simultaneously occupy a social position that enables me to conduct this research and, as someone sheltered from the everyday realities of life as a criminalised person, to be able to ignore it — but to ignore something I have seen, across so many lives, wreak such harm is a degree of complicity I could not accept. In the end, I returned to the advice of one of my mentors, Nukunu¹² man Jared Thomas, who urged me to “Trust that we trust you and get on with doing the good stuff that you’re on this planet to do”.

3.4 Method: narrative-based interviews

In alignment with the goals of centring lived-experience voice and maximising participant agency, this research used narrative-based interviews to collect data. As Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2015, p. 631) explain, narrative interviewing is underpinned by a commitment to placing participants “at the heart” of the research and, consequently, narrative approaches are generally underpinned by relatively broad research questions and aims (Anderson & Kirkpatrick 2015). This is demonstrated in this project’s pursuit of the question ‘What can we learn from the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised children and young people?’. In the interest of both building trust and producing rich data, all participants were offered the opportunity to participate in up to five interviews and, in order to capture the integrity of participant stories, with consent, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Consistent with the epistemological assumptions of post-structuralism guiding this research, story and narrative, — as described by Connelly and Clandinin (2006, p. 375) — can be seen as providing “a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful”. Intrinsically, data produced through a narrative-

¹² Nukunu are the Aboriginal people of the east side of the Spencer Gulf and the Southern Flinders Ranges.

based interview is understood to be a context specific creation, co-produced by both participant and researcher — both of whom exist in constant interaction with ever-changing material, social, and discursive worlds (Clandinin & Connelly 2004). Narrative interviewing is much more than simply living, telling, and hearing stories — it is fundamentally about inquiry into these stories and the discourses that have shaped and continue to shape them. Clandinin (2016, p. 15) argues that, by listening to participant accounts, “we can begin to unravel the layers of complexity” they carry and inquire into the forces shaping the story. Clandinin (2016, p. 17) urges the narrative inquirer to deal with how “place”, “time”, “emotions, moral judgements, and cultural understandings” shape both experience and the narration of this experience. By attending closely to the worlds occupied by participants, and the stories they tell about these worlds, a narrative approach enabled me to explore the personal, the social, the structural and the discursive (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007).

Narrative-based approaches emphasise flexibility as key to meeting diverse communication and developmental needs (Anderson & Kirkpatrick 2015) — considerations that become particularly important when engaging with criminalised children and young people who often have complex and varying developmental and communication needs. However, opening up rich conversations that enabled children and young people to be active drivers required more than simply adopting a broad research question and sitting down and asking a participant to narrate their life. Such an approach, Swartz (2011) argues, fails to accommodate the diversity of human communication needs, rendering interviews inaccessible or disempowering to some, whilst simultaneously leaving the power dynamics often present in a researcher/researched relationship, where the researcher directs the interview and positions themselves, either implicitly or explicitly, as the ‘expert’, unchallenged¹³. As Baker et al. (2004, p. 169) assert, a commitment to recognising and addressing the ways “the academy and academic knowledge in particular is deeply implicated in the operations of power”, is central to emancipatory research practices. Such a stance recognises that researchers are not neutral, rational actors, but rather are “socially embedded subjects” and that research processes cannot be separated from the “meanings made available by the wider cultural context...including those which cause suffering” for criminalised children and young people (Farrugia 2012, p. 112). In recognising this power dynamic, I sought to “flatten the power gradient

¹³ It is important to recognise, as Deckert (2017, p.564) asserts, that criminalised research participants “are not inherently powerless and researchers are not inherently powerful” — power is not fixed or possessed, but fluid and evolving, with criminalised research participants exercising agency and resistance in a multitude of ways. However, adopting methods that are non-silencing can enhance the opportunities for agency and resistance available.

between researcher and young person” (Swartz 2011, p. 57) by extending co-design principles into the data collection phase through a participatory interviewing tool I created. Consisting of 54 visual prompt cards (see Appendix 1), this tool sought to offer up a broad range of topics for discussion and facilitate more egalitarian relationship dynamics by enabling participants to choose from a broad range of topics, thus steering the direction of the narrative-based interview in ways meaningful to them (Davis 1998). The process of determining what prompts would be included in the interview tool was informed by my engagements with criminalised people both in earlier stages of research design and my time in coal-face practice. Additionally, some prompts were generated from the dominate themes focussed on in positivist (i.e. My family; Mental health; Disability etc.), critical (i.e. The area I grew up in; Cops; The things I do to get by), decolonising (Racism) and post-structural (The side of me that people don’t see) approaches. I also wanted to provide space for the emergence of strengths-based narratives (I.e. Goals and dreams; My strengths/things I’m good at). The inclusion of a number of ‘wild cards’ was also important in enabling young people to themselves propose a topic. Table 1 identifies the interview prompts used.

Table 1

Interview prompt cards		
Goals and dreams	Who I really am	Things I worry about
Love	Cops	Court
Being locked up	Culture	The things I do to get by
My future	Getting out of lock up	Working/job
Things that make me angry	Religion/faith/spirituality	Drugs and drink
Being in care	Social media	Covid
Relationships	Gender	Sexuality
Hard things	Family	Hobbies
Mates/friends	Where I live	School/education
Support people	Challenges	A typical day in my life
The area I grew up in	Places I feel safe	Workers

Things that make me sad	My strengths/things I'm good at	What needs to change in the world
The people I feel safe/happy with	My first time getting in trouble with the cops	The side of me that people don't see
Things that don't feel fair	Family	Childhood
Racism	Disability	Health
The things that make me happy	How I spent my time this past week	The things that are important to me
What's going well for me	Mental health	Money
Being in trouble with the law	Wildcard	Wildcard

The tool was introduced to potential participants at the initial meeting so that decisions around engagement were informed by the possible content and nature of interviews. The tool was then drawn on to structure all subsequent interviews. At the initial interview, all interview prompt cards were spread out on a table along with three additional laminated cards with the words 'yes', 'no' and 'maybe' printed on them. I advised participants that it was important to me that this research provided them with the opportunity to speak about the issues and topics that felt important, interesting and safe to them, that they felt able to play an active role in guiding this process and did not feel any pressure to talk about topics that might be upsetting, triggering or simply irrelevant to them. The participant and I would then read through each of the visual prompt cards together. I included visual prompts and read each card aloud as the provision of information through multi-sensory instructions has been recognised to enhance engagement and comprehension for some young people with learning disabilities, like Dyslexia (Rahul & Ponniah 2021; Rappolt-Schlichtmann, Boucher & Evans 2018), and neurodevelopmental conditions, like Autism (Den Brok & Sterkenburg 2015; Meadan et al. 2011). After clarifying that they understood its meaning, the participant was invited to place each card in one of the respective piles — with *yes* communicating an interest in discussing the topic. Participants were advised that any cards placed in the *no* pile would not be raised by the researcher again, although participants were free to bring the topic up themselves at any time. Once a decision had been made about the status of each card, those placed in the *no* and *maybe* piles were removed from the table. As all children/young people placed a significant number of cards within the *yes* pile, *maybe* cards were not revisited. Those cards placed in the *yes* pile were spread out across the table and the participant was asked to choose a card that felt most important, interesting or easy to talk about. Once a choice was made, I responded with something along the lines of "Interesting. What made

that card jump out to you?”, and so the narrative-based interview began. Once I sensed that the discussion about a topic was drawing to a natural close, I would ask the participant whether they had anything else they wanted to say on the topic and if not, to return to the deck and pick their next card. This constant process of returning to the cards, and thus returning the participant to the driver’s seat of the interview, was an intentional attempt to decentre my worldview, and consistently support participant agency throughout the research process. For children and young people who have so routinely had their autonomy constrained, I sensed that this process was particularly pivotal in facilitating a feeling of safety, connection and respect within the research relationship — a sense that was confirmed by Jax, when at the start of our second interview, they immediately asked “Do we get to do the cards again? I really like those cards”.

I also perceived that the topics included in the interview prompt tool provided something like a green light that enabled participants to speak about things they might not have felt able to otherwise. For instance, in choosing to discuss the ‘gender’ card, Jax felt able to identify as non-binary for the first time and, throughout our contact, I was able to share in the joy they experienced in coming home to themselves. As a non-Indigenous researcher with Irish ancestry — someone cocooned by white privilege and inherently complicit in colonialism — I was acutely aware that I was unlikely to be perceived as a safe person with which to discuss issues such as racism or police violence due to, as Eddo-Lodge (2018, pp. ix-x) explains, the refusal of the “vast majority” of white people “to accept the legitimacy of structural racism and its symptoms”. Although simply including cards entitled ‘racism’, ‘culture’ and ‘cops’ was never going to undo the power dynamics that have shaped my life and the lives of the racialised children and young people I was interviewing, using these prompt cards did seem to serve as a sign that I was not wanting to engage in ways congruent with the “epistemology of ignorance” (Mills 1997, p. 18) that shapes so much of the discourse around youth crime and that see an exploration of the role of racism and colonisation routinely sidelined. In contrast to much of the existing literature exploring youth crime in Australia — which, as will be elucidated, pays little attention to experiences of racism and the impacts colonisation on the lives of criminalised children and young people — nine of the 11 participants occupying racialised subject positions identified the ‘racism’ card as a priority for discussion. In reflecting on the value of the interview prompt cards, Jax articulately captures how research *on* criminalised children and young people can become so focussed on the individual that it decontextualises them, denying their realities and blaming them — implicitly or explicitly — for

their own marginalisation (Jun 2010). Jax reflects “This is why I like the research you’re doing. You’re sharing the stories that other people won’t let us tell. It’s easier when I’m the problem”.

To summarise, the narrative-based method and co-design practices adopted in this project continually returned participants to the driver’s seat, providing them with agency to shape the direction of each interview and, thus, the project more broadly. The stories that unfurled as a result were multifaceted, nuanced and paint pictures of complexity not often captured in research on criminalised children and young people.

3.5 Recruitment

In alignment with the post-structural stance adopted in this project — which views practices of carcerality along a continuum (Foucault 1979), with incarceration being just one mechanism in a much broader carceral regime — this study engaged with children/young people, aged between 15 to 25, who identified themselves as having experienced, not necessarily incarceration, but some form of criminalisation. Due to many complex forces, criminalised children/young people are often constructed as a ‘hard to reach’ (Abrams 2010) and ‘vulnerable’ (NHMRC 2018) research population therefore I gave much consideration to the most appropriate, inclusive and safe method for recruitment. Generally, when seeking to engage populations constructed as ‘hard to reach’, researchers draw on agencies for support, adopt more “street-based, snowball sampling approaches” or implement a combination of both (Abrams 2010, p. 541). Each approach presents its own strengths and limitations. As Abrams (2010, p. 541) explains, “agency-based samples provide easier access, meeting spaces, and a more readily available pool of participants”, yet risk excluding the voices of those not connected to an agency “... and can present both coercion and confidentiality concerns”.

Whilst the exclusion of those not connected to agency supports, which often includes those navigating higher levels of intersecting oppressions, and the potential for services to act coercively or as gatekeepers — was of great concern to me, I also took seriously my responsibility to protect participant safety and wellbeing. In consultation with my lived experience and university supervisory teams it was decided that more assertive, outreach-based methods of recruitment could expose children/young people not connected to a service, and thus without access to professional, follow-up support, to unnecessary harm. Consequently, it was determined that recruiting children/young people through agencies, distancing practitioners from any decision-making processes about participation and requiring each participant to identify a personal or

professional support person who could be contacted in the instance that they experienced distress, was the most appropriate, safe and ethical recruitment method.

I began the process of recruitment by contacting 12 youth services organisations. I received initial responses from six of these services and, in the end, four agreed to support the project. Generally, I began by attending a team meeting, explaining the research and fielding questions from practitioners who, if supportive of the project, would then provide research information to their clients. In the interest of including the voices of those with disabilities, cognitive impairments and mental illness — who are overrepresented within criminalised populations — practitioners were advised that I was interested in talking to any young person who met the eligibility criteria and communicated interest in the project, regardless of perceived capacity. I advised that modifications could be made on a case-by-case basis to make the research process accessible.

In order to avoid potential coercion by service providers, unless requested by the participant, practitioners were not involved post the initial introduction and it was made clear to participants that decisions around participation would have no bearing on their relationship with the facilitating service. On numerous occasions, due to their pre-existing relationships with young people, service providers played a vital role — ensuring participants meaningfully understood what participation might ask of them, sharing, with consent, important information about capacity and accessibility needs and providing follow up wellbeing related support (Novek & Wilkinson 2019). In three cases, young people opted to have their worker present for the first half of the initial interview, until a degree of trust and safety was established.

Whilst practitioner support was vital for recruitment, this decision also meant that my access to participants was entirely dependent upon “the goodwill of institutional gatekeepers”, in that I had to rely on the practitioners to disseminate information to potential participants (Heath et al. 2007, p. 405; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert 2008). The process of recruitment adopted was, consequently, imperfect and the exclusion of certain voices remains a concern. For example, initially, when commencing this research project, criminalised young people living in the community were the sole target population. However, as referrals came in and data was generated, I noticed that only a handful of practitioners had requested the information materials to give to potential participants; thus, I became concerned that gatekeeping was occurring and could result in the exclusion of certain voices. Further, while the young people referred to me were navigating high levels of complexity and instability, they were also remarkably reflective and insightful and were referred

by practitioners who said things like “Oh I’ll speak to X, they’ll be great. They’re so insightful”. Despite my assertion that I was interested in interviewing any young person who met eligibility criteria and wanted to participate, I sensed that practitioners excluded potential participants based on their perceived inability to contribute due, for example, to active substance use or disability (Heath et al. 2007). Such a censoring was made explicit to me in a conversation with one practitioner who said something along the lines of “Hmm, nah I don’t think I’ll raise it with X, he has an intellectual disability and probably won’t have that much to say”. I challenged the idea that someone with an intellectual disability could not meaningfully contribute to the research, however, ultimately the power to bridge this gap remained in the hands of the practitioners — all whom bring themselves into the process of sampling and recruitment. As interviews evolved, I began to sense that the data I was gathering was reflective of the experiences of only a narrow sub-section of criminalised young people — those who, despite still navigating significant marginalisation, were in the position to maintain ongoing relationships with a practitioner, were identified as being particularly reflective or had, in some sense, moved through their experiences of criminalisation. This struck me as problematic, and I again began reflecting upon whether another method of recruitment could enable a greater diversity of voices to be centred — an issue that remains a point of internal contention for me.

In the early stages of research development, after engaging with a number of criminalised young people who reported feeling “forced” to participate in research whilst detained, I had made the decision not to conduct interviews in the state’s child/youth prison. The basis of this decision was the inherently coercive nature of the prison environment, in which young people have limited opportunities to exercise choice. I felt that this imposed additional barriers to informed consent, supporting agency and avoiding coercion. However, in response to the sampling issues I saw emerging, I revisited this issue with my lived experiences advisors — both of whom have experienced imprisonment — and a plan, discussed in the ethics section below, for supporting agency and choice in a highly paternalistic setting was devised. As a result, in April 2022, I began the process of seeking approval to offer interviews to incarcerated young people within the state’s child/youth prison. This process was lengthy, and after months of negotiation my application was approved in August 2022.

However, as Abrams (2010, p. 542) identifies, even once a researcher is granted access to an institution, organisational structures and restrictions often shape participant selection “in various and sometimes unforeseen ways”. Interviewing multiple participants in the context of a prison

was, for the Department of Human Services, highly labour-intensive, with each interview requiring two staff members to transport the young person to the interview and wait in a nearby room for its duration. Thus, the Department agreed to facilitate the participation of seven young people to be recruited through their case managers. At this point, however, I had to grapple with the impacts of potential gatekeeping once again. Despite the project being formally approved and practitioners briefed, I received not a single referral; the door between potential participants and me remained closed. Had it not been for my pre-existing relationship with one child/youth prison employee, it would probably have remained this way and the lack of response perceived as a lack of interest on behalf of young people. Despite not being 'floor-level' staff, this practitioner took it upon herself to introduce the research to various potential participants — all of whom agreed to participate. These challenges around gaining access to participants are not unique to this project and, as Heath et al. (2007, p. 410) explain, access to participants may not be facilitated for a variety of reasons ranging from “pressures of time and institutional inconvenience, through to reluctance to expose quasi-private worlds to public scrutiny, or the actual or assumed inappropriateness of a proposed research topic and/or its methods”.

Given the small sample (of seven) that the child/youth prison was willing to facilitate, I sought to amplify the voices of those from demographics that are criminalised disproportionately by approaching First Nations, racialised and Guardianship Care impacted young people. Some participants were only able to participate in one interview before they were released back into the community and contact was lost. As Abrams (2010) reflects, when working with populations like criminalised young people, who often experience housing instability and face financial barriers to maintaining a consistent phone number, the issue of transience can present challenges.

Throughout the interviewing process, contact with highly engaged participants was lost on multiple occasions, for a variety of reasons. In one instance, for example, a participant was reincarcerated in the adult women's prison and, despite my efforts, I could find no avenue to contact her whilst she was detained. This participant later re-presented at the connecting service, asking for her new number to be passed on to me, however when I called the number was disconnected, and contact was not regained. In three cases, participants were released from the child/youth prison without having a phone number on the outside and thus, despite expressing their strong desire to continue engaging in the research process, could not be contacted.

3.6 Sample

The final sample comprised 16 young people: ten cis-gender males, five cis-gender females, and one non-binary young person. Six participants identified as Aboriginal, five simply as ‘white’, one as having mixed heritage (Aboriginal, Māori, Greek and Chinese), one as Torres Strait Islander, one as Filipina/Maltese, one as South Sudanese and one who identified, culturally, as Muslim¹⁴. I include data on the cultural identities of these young people not to suggest that certain ‘races’ possess higher propensities for crime but, rather, in recognition of the impacts of racialisation on the subjectivities and lived experiences of these racialised young people. Four participants had experiences of being placed under the guardianship of the minister, and, at the time of interviewing, two were still on active orders and were, at the time, placed in residential care facilities. Table 1 shows participant demographics.

Table 2

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Cultural identity	Experience of incarceration?	No. of interviews
Community sample					
Bobby	20	Male	Non-Indigenous	Yes — adult.	3
Matt	24	Male	Non-Indigenous	No. Detained in watch house multiple times.	1
Isla	19	Female	Non-Indigenous	Yes — adult.	3
Angela	16	Female	Australian born, Filipino/Maltese ancestry	No.	1
Jordan	22	Male	Aboriginal	Yes — youth.	3
Kayla	18	Female	Non-Indigenous	Yes — youth.	1
Benji	23	Male	Non-Indigenous	Yes — youth.	4
Shyanne	19	Female	Aboriginal	Yes — youth.	1
Jax	17	Non-binary	Aboriginal, Māori, Greek and Chinese	No.	5

¹⁴ The cultural identity/ethnicity of participants was elicited through the open-ended question of ‘What is your ethnicity or how do you identify culturally?’. The dynamic of non-Indigenous participants identifying simply as ‘white’, a response often ending with an inflection or tonal question mark, is explored in Chapter 5.

Incarcerated sample					
Tyson	17	Male	Aboriginal	Yes — youth.	2
Dev	15	Male	Australian born, identifies culturally as ‘Muslim’	Yes — youth.	3
Maror	16	Male	Australian born, South Sudanese, ancestry.	Yes — youth.	4
Rose	17	Female	Aboriginal	Yes — youth.	2
Kyle	17	Male	Aboriginal	Yes — youth.	3
Gus	17	Male	Torres Strait Islander and Papua New Guinean	Yes — youth.	3
Trey	17	Male	Aboriginal	Yes — youth.	1

3.7 Ethics

In pursuing research with criminalised young people, a broad range of ethical issues were carefully considered to ensure that this project did not reproduce harmful power dynamics or adversely impact on the participants. This research received Human Research Ethics approval from Flinders University (project number 4922) and is grounded in a recognition that social researchers can exercise significant power in the lives of young people and that this relational dynamic is not equal.

3.7.1 A ‘vulnerable’ demographic

Research with young people who have experienced criminalisation poses many ethical challenges and, at times, I have struggled to grapple with and hold the tensions, the competing demands and the competing constructions such a process has presented me with. If working uncritically and in alignment with NHMRC (2018) guidelines, a sample population such as mine — one comprised of First Nations, racialised, care impacted, criminalised, queer and disabled minors — could quite simply be classified a ‘vulnerable’ population group. In many respects, this is true — criminalised young people have often experienced harmful power dynamics that are uniquely systematic, explicit and pervasive and even projects with espoused good intentions frequently objectify, speak for, silence and/or place responsibility for complex societal problems within individuals (Deckert 2016). As a practitioner who has walked alongside countless criminalised young people, I know

well the inequality and distress many are forced to navigate daily. Consequently, I took seriously the ethical requirement to provide for participant safety and wellbeing and was committed to ensuring that participation did not compound existing stressors. Simultaneously, however, I struggled to accept the paternalism and removal of choice that often accompanies a construct such as 'vulnerable' and the post-structuralist researcher in me resisted placing such a totalising identity category over a population group who are not fixed but are multifaceted, with ever-evolving subjectivities — subjectivities that exist in constant relation to, and are shaped by, constructions such as vulnerable (Farrugia 2012). As Farrugia (2012, p. 113) astutely articulates, "identities are constructed through being performed and recognised as legitimate by others". Constructing criminalised young people as 'vulnerable' frames these participants in the fixed and the passive and fails to reflect the countless ways in which they enact agency and resistance (Furlong 2015). A genuinely ethical approach to research with marginalised young people, that enables us to hold the mutability of both our own subjectivities and those of the participants, requires active efforts be made "to create the space for discourses, and identities, which do not rearticulate symbolic violence" (Farrugia 2012, p. 119) or frame participants as passive and static.

3.7.2 Informed consent and coercion

As this research involved interviewing young people aged 15-25, specific ethical considerations shaped the research design. The NHMRC (2018) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research shaped my thinking on consent, and after discussion with my supervisors, advisors and practitioners from a youth organisation, it was agreed that this group of young people could be considered "young people who are mature enough to understand and consent" and did not require "the additional consent from a parent or guardian" (Australian Research Council 2018, p. 65). Whilst it is recognised that parental/guardian consent is commonly required in research with youth participants, criminalised young people often experience complex and fractured familial relationships (Halsey & Deegan 2015; Malvaso, Delfabbro & Day 2019). Including such a provision would therefore exclude the many young people without parental support from contributing to knowledge coproduction and realising their rights under article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly 1989).

Ensuring informed consent within this project was understood to be an ongoing process, rather than a discrete event. Information regarding the research was communicated both verbally and in writing, using simple language. For each potential participant, the initial meeting was framed simply as an introduction, participants were provided with multiple opportunities and avenues to

ask questions and were encouraged not to make an immediate decision. Consent was re-confirmed at the start of each interview, and routinely throughout each interview through phrases such as “Just checking in, how are you feeling? Do you feel okay to continue?” Potential participants were advised that I did not work for a youth services organisation, the Department for Human Services or the police, and their decision to participate in the study would not impact on their relationship with, or eligibility to receive services from, the facilitating organisation. Participants were repeatedly advised that they could choose not to speak on a topic or answer any question/s, and/or could withdraw at any time, until publication, without consequence.

In recognition of the valuable contribution made by participants, each participant received a \$50 voucher each time we met. Prior to commencing an interview, I clearly explained confidentiality and its limits, provided the participant with the voucher, made clear that this voucher belonged to them regardless of whether the interview went any further, and reminded them that they were welcome to leave at any time. However, ‘choice’, in highly coercive and controlled environments such as a child/youth prison, is a fraught concept and, as a researcher committed to providing agency, the added risk of coercion in this setting was taken particularly seriously. At the start of each interview with detained young people, I re-outlined participant rights and explicitly asked whether the young person felt up to engaging in an interview today or whether they would prefer if we simply sat together and draw, play a game of Uno or return to their day. The decision to provide participants the option to play a game instead of interviewing was included in recognition of these institutional power dynamics, where young people may not feel able to say no, may not want staff to know that they did not participate, or may simply have needed a break from the monotony of prison life. When participants did choose to not engage in, or terminate, an interview on a particular day — I communicated how pleased I was that the participant felt able to make that decision. On a number of occasions, I sensed that a participant was having a particularly tough day and the option to simply hang out and play a game of Uno was accepted. Such a response made me feel simultaneously both relieved and concerned — relieved because this demonstrated the success of my measures to avoid coercion and concerned because of the suffering I saw our systems inflicting on these young people. All participants received vouchers each time we met for a scheduled interview, regardless of whether participation occurred or what this looked like.

3.7.3 Anonymity

All participants were provided with the option to receive a pseudonym and possible identifying details were either removed, altered or their inclusion was determined in collaboration with the participant. One participant opted to have their real name included in the project as they felt committed to owning their story and wanted it reflected as such. In one case, where the charges a young person was facing were particularly identifiable, no direct quotes or discussion of the nature of his charges were included. Upon extracting themes from the transcripts, I met with all young people who I was able to contact to discuss the data I had planned to include and to revise or remove any data that they did not consent to. Subsequently, some key data was excluded from this research.

3.8 Analysis

This project draws on a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) approach, seeking to situate and analyse the narratives of criminalised young people in relation to the broader historical, political, and discursive contexts within which they exist (Arribas-Ayllon & walkerdine 2017; Jacobs 2019). An FDA approach, with its emphasis on practices of power, enables interview transcripts to be understood as reflections of the discourses and power dynamics at play within a given society at a given point in time — that is, narratives are viewed as productions of the “wider politics of the present” (Arribas-Ayllon & walkerdine 2017, p. 116). FDA offers a means for exploring the “assumptions, techniques, procedures and strategies of power relations that effect what comes to be accepted as the ‘truth’” (Heywood 2002, p. 36). In analysing the narratives of individuals, an FDA approach enabled the lens to be turned away from the participant (the ‘criminal other’), and onto the societal discourses, the processes of subjectification and the ‘truth games’ that produce societal understandings of, and the subject positions available to, criminalised young people (Arribas-Ayllon & walkerdine 2017; Jacobs 2019). By exposing the dominant discourses evident within both participant narratives and societal constructions of the ‘delinquent youth’, I was able to see the technologies of power that shaped subjectivity and experience (Arribas-Ayllon & walkerdine 2017), and the findings chapters are devoted to such an exercise.

3.9 Thesis format

Within this chapter, I have detailed the research design that informed this project which, in its exploration of the carceral society, sought to centre the voices and narratives of criminalised young people. From here, I move into presenting the findings of this research — findings which are

structured across four chapters with analysis and discussion embedded throughout. The first of these chapters offers up a discursive analysis of the existing evidence base and the epistemologies, discourses and practices of power that dominate in research on youth crime and criminalised young people. Following this, I move into an analysis of the worlds we have created around these young people — exploring, through a violence regimes lens (Hearn et al. 2022a), the ways that dominant discourses of race, class and gender produce violences in the lives of research participants. I then move into an interrogation of the broader services landscape, exploring how the discourses and practices of the carceral society are embedded and find their expression within our schools, mental health and welfare institutions. I round out my findings by exploring how carceral logics and discourses produce, license, and normalise violence within the formal carceral system. As discussion is embedded throughout each chapter, I finish the thesis with a brief discussion/conclusion chapter, bringing my key arguments together.

4 CARCERAL LOGICS AND RESEARCH ON YOUTH CRIME: A DISCURSIVE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

4.1 Introduction

The phenomena of youth crime, criminals and crime control have received significant research attention since the Enlightenment period when humans, and thus human deviance, first began being studied in a systematic way. As such, over the past few decades, researchers, governments, and stakeholder organisations have produced an extensive body of literature relating to youth crime, criminals, and crime control. For Foucault, the academic disciplines, and the practice of academic research, constitute powerful bodies of knowledge that construct, feed into and mobilise societal norms, playing a significant role in whose voices, what knowledges, methods and ways of understanding are privileged within a specific discursive field. Through this lens, the disciplines are seen as holding the power to “...hierarchise individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate” (Foucault 1979, p. 223). Foucault explored at length the mechanisms of governance and control exercised by the disciplines of psychiatry, criminology and the penal system — and whilst always contextually and historically specific, many of these mechanisms continue to pervade today.

In keeping with its post-structural underpinnings, this chapter does not offer a standard literature review that sweeps the existing ‘evidence base’ to report on *what* has been studied in the field of youth crime over the preceding decades. Instead, this chapter offers a discursive review, exploring *how* youth crime and criminalised young people have been studied. It offers an analysis of the epistemological approaches and research methods that dominate in research on youth crime — considering these in relation to the logics of the carceral society. Such an approach supports this PhD project in its intention to constantly orient towards an exploration of power operations as, as articulated by Cunneen (2006, p. 329), power operations within the academic disciplines can be seen by identifying “...who has the power to define the problem in a particular way, [and] who is silenced” by the definitions, discourses and practices that dominate.

Given the scale of research on youth crime, it is not possible to conduct a discursive review of this body of work in its entirety. Instead, this chapter engages with studies based upon the distinct epistemological and ontological stances adopted — which, in turn, shape the perspectives on youth crime proffered. It reports on dominant approaches thematically and then pulls out specific studies exemplifying this lens for deeper interrogation. By picking apart the discourses,

knowledges and power dynamics at play, this chapter seeks to challenge the truth status afforded to conventional criminological research approaches — making explicit the role these play in the “construction, validation and dissemination of disciplinary” and biopolitical knowledges and the logics and practices of the carceral society (Cunneen & Tauri 2016, p. 23).

The chapter begins by introducing some of the major epistemological and theoretical approaches, adopted in research on youth crime. Three main overarching categories provide the scaffolding for the remainder of the chapter, with key studies presented and unpacked in relation to their individualist, social/structural, or post-structural orientation and the carceral logics produced or resisted.

4.2 Theories of crime

As explained by Cunneen and White (2011, p. 27) no criminological theory exists “in a political vacuum” — instead, each theory is inextricably interwoven with social and philosophical views of society, human nature and the subjects of research. Criminological theory, like all theory, is value laden and exists in interplay with a political, discursive, and material context and, whether explicitly or implicitly, researchers of youth crime draw on and, hence, reinforce particular perspectives on youth crime (Cunneen 2015a). Critically engaging with research studies — paying attention to their stated aims, concepts, and approaches — makes it possible to examine the underpinning discourses, assumptions, and concerns that interact with — reinforcing or resisting — the logics and practices of the carceral society (Cunneen 2015a). Whilst there are countless approaches to classifying theories of crime, in this chapter I fuse the work of Cunneen (2015a), Hayes and Prenzler (2012) and Marsh (2006) to identify three overarching categories within which most major theories can be positioned. These focus, primarily, on *individual* factors, *social/structural* factors, and, lastly, those drawing from *post-structural* approaches.

4.3 Individual explanations

4.3.1.1 Classical

Originating in the ‘classical’ school of thought, traditional *individualist* perspectives of crime frame all humans as possessing equal capacity for rational thought and, thus, equal capacity to live within the confines of the law (Cunneen 2015a). Through this lens, crime is understood as individually willed — the result of a rational choice made by a subject who has weighed up the pros and cons. As such, from a classical perspective, responses to crime should aim to deter both

the individual and the broader community through certain, prompt and proportionate punishment. The construction of criminal behaviour as freely chosen first emerged during the Enlightenment era with the rise of liberalism, which saw religious or superstitious explanations lose prominence to newly established ideas about rationality, free-will and the social contract expected of members of a society. Despite losing prevalence in research, and growing rhetoric regarding rehabilitation and trauma-informed interventions, due to the discourses and practices of power produced through Enlightenment ways of knowing, classical, ‘deterrence’ based, understandings of crime — underpinned by the assumption that people must be persuaded that the negative consequences of crime outweigh the ‘benefits’ — continue to pervade within public, media and policy representations of, and responses to, crime. SA’s Youth Justice State Plan, for instance, centres the role of the rational individual by referring to the State’s youth justice legislation as, “importantly”, promoting the role of “individual responsibility”, followed by “restitution to victims, community safety” and, lastly, “the rehabilitation of young people” (Government of South Australia 2020b, p. 6). References, as seen here, to ‘community safety’ demonstrate the persistence of thinking about prisons, and punitive interventions, as, in some way, necessary to the production of safer societies and reflect the persistence of the law-and-order politics of classical thinking.

An example of contemporary research informed by a classical lens can be found in Zemel, Einat and Ronel’s (2018) focus on the role of self-control in desistance from crime. Drawing on ‘criminal spin’ theory, an individualising criminological approach emphasising decision-making processes, their work comes imbued with strong and binary assumptions about free will — demonstrated, for example, in their assertion that “the very essence of human existence is individuality and liberty” and, as such, “humans are free to assess, evaluate, and reconsider their choices in life” (Zemel, Einat & Ronel 2018, p. 4754). The authors assert “criminal spin”, is characterised by a “heightened self-centeredness” and an “embracement of egoistic desires”. Despite participants narrating immense hardship they argue that humans “choose various forms of behavior due to their perceived importance and not as a result of peer pressure or absence of alternatives” (Zemel, Einat & Ronel 2018, p. 4747). Participant decisions to, for example, “disengage from their families” and “school” are framed as “self-centred” and “egoistic” pursuits (Zemel, Einat & Ronel 2018, p. 4742), despite numerous participants describing fleeing from abusive family dynamics and at least one disengaging from school due to expulsion. Participants in Zemel, Einat and Ronel’s (2018) study are represented only as a pseudonym and collection of offences and, despite the research

occurring in the imperial, colonial context of Israel, one participant explicitly naming experiences of racism as shaping his trajectory, and many referencing experiences of homelessness, poverty and social exclusion, the reader is provided with no further information about participant subjectivities. Such an omission likely reflects the classical belief that factors outside the individual are irrelevant in shaping crime. The authors argue a belief in choice, free-will and the power of self-control, reinforce individualist perspectives of crime and, as such, fail to engage with the socio-political contexts of complexity that shape the narratives, and the lives of the narrators, before them. From a classical liberalist perspective, any action by a young person who ‘chooses’ not to desist from crime is interpreted as an obfuscation of responsibility and an expression of the free-will and agency each individual possesses.

Another example of qualitative research in which a classical, individualist perspective can be seen is Amemiya, Kieta and Monahan’s (2017) study of desistance which, drawing from interviews with 39 criminalised males (aged 14-19), explores participant reflections upon desistance. However, despite being frame as elucidating participants “experiences in desisting from crime”, many had only recently been released back into the community and all were still under probation orders (Amemiya, Kieta & Monahan 2017, p. 768). Consequently, responses might be more appropriately framed using Soyer’s (2014) concept of ‘imagined desistance’ — as reflecting participants ambitions towards desistance. Such a distinction may seem trivial, however, due to many complex factors, there often exists a significant gap between criminalised young people’s intentions towards, and capacity to realise, desistance (Ashkar& Kenny 2008; Halsey 2008) — thus, to explore intentions alone is to miss a large piece of the desistance puzzle.

Within Amemiya et al.’s study, interviewers opened by asking participants whether there has “... ever been a time in your life when you decided that you wanted to make a change from your past behavior ... that got you in trouble with the police?” (Amemiya, Kieta & Monahan 2017, p. 768). From the outset, the researchers convey a classical, individualist understanding of crime and, by commencing in this way it is likely they shaped participant responses — guiding them to reinforce dominant discourses of individual choice and responsibility. Unsurprisingly then, the most common participant responses were those that spoke about desistance as an individually enacted phenomenon, narrating experiences of “self-discovery or self-empowerment” and/or expressing a desire to “make good”, “be better”, “be mature” and/or “change to be successful in mainstream society” (Amemiya, Kieta & Monahan 2017, p. 769). The authors classified this theme of responses as desistance due to a “psychological reorientation” and, in doing so, offer no consideration of

how dominant discourses of crime may have influenced the research context and participants' understandings of their behaviours (Amemiya, Kieta & Monahan 2017, p. 769). By failing to critique or challenge the discourses that operate in and through the carceral society, shaping both research and individual subjectivities, classical approaches have the potential to reinforce young people's understandings of themselves as deficient, deviant and solely responsible for their circumstances. The second theme identified by Amemiya, Kieta and Monahan (2017, p. 769) focused on those who sought desistance from crime solely due to negative experiences with the carceral system — a theme the authors classify as “reacting to consequences (only)” and one which, again, serves to reinforce a key discourse of the carceral logic; that punishment works. As Halsey and Deegan (2015) suggest, studies such as these are often highly regarded within youth justice systems because they seem to validate the classical carceral logic that prison and punishment works to reduce crime.

Again, the individualist, carceral logic is reinforced in the authors' classification of those “persisting”, who were described as feeling “condemned to crime” or enjoying the “antisocial lifestyle” (Amemiya, Kieta & Monahan 2017, p. 771). In presenting such responses, Amemiya, Kieta and Monahan (2017, p. 771) failed to consider why, at such a young age, one might already feel “condemned to crime” and analysis did not engage with critical issues such as class, poverty, and race, nor any forces beyond the individual. Across all presented themes, rather than considering the contexts of complexity and constraint shaping young people's lives, the authors routinely steer attention back to the individual and the need for ongoing surveillance of “deviant values” and control of this risky population (Amemiya, Kieta & Monahan 2017, p. 777). Within this study, we can see at play biopolitical mechanisms and a carceral logic that reinforce the need for surveillance and control-based interventions.

The authors also identified the “agentic moves in desistance” made by participants, identifying five themes, all of which emphasise young people's active participation in desistance from crime, with the authors reporting that “many adolescents spontaneously told the interviewer that desistance is a self-initiated process” (Amemiya, Kieta & Monahan 2017, p. 771). The authors do not, however, reflect on the possibility that, rather than representing the objective ‘truth’ of desistance, such responses may instead reflect the dominant discourses repeatedly fed to, and engaged in by, all of us — but to none more acutely than criminalised young people. Interestingly, in speaking about their efforts to desist, some participants talked about having or planning to, in effect, cut themselves off from their communities by avoiding peers, certain ‘criminogenic’ areas

within the neighbourhood, or simply remaining inside their own home as much as possible. The authors, however, offer no consideration of the structural inequality that sees some young people living in neighbourhoods where, in order to desist from crime, they feel unable to leave the house. Instead, for Amemiya, Kieta and Monahan (2017, p. 768) the onus of responsibility sits squarely with young people and how they, themselves, “can change their lives for the better”. In a study in which the majority of participants occupy both economically marginalised and racialised subject positions (74% Black, 12.8% biracial and 5.1% Native American), a classical, individualist lens simply reinforces the dominant carceral logic that those who engage in criminal behaviour must make better decisions, whilst denying the significance of material-discursive forces like colonialism, capitalism and (neo)liberalism and the discourses and practices of the carceral society that shape and constrain their lives. So long as classical understandings of agency and free-will are left unchallenged, it seems likely that society will continue seeking to dogmatically, and unsuccessfully, punish our way through the complex social issue of youth crime.

4.3.1.2 *Positivist*

Retaining a focus on the individual criminal, positivist approaches have their roots in (neo)liberalism, the Enlightenment and empiricism but, rather than framing crime as rationally acted, see criminal behaviour as *determined* — resulting from biological, psychological or biosocial factors (Cunneen 2015a). Research in the positivist tradition is most commonly quantitative and is driven by the desire to identify, assess and classify various traits — or internal deficits — believed to be located within, or distinctive to, the criminal (Cunneen & White 2011). Whilst distinct from the classical conceptualisation of individuals as “responsible for their criminality” (Cunneen & White 2011, p. 30), the positivist school of thought still aligns strongly with the dominant carceral logic in that it sees crime as an individually acted phenomena, and the individual as requiring intervention, treatment, ‘care’ or control to correct some form of moral, cognitive or internal deficit. In its failure to consider the social, structural and discursive contexts that influence behaviour, positivist approaches produce racist, ableist, classist and liberal understandings of youth crime, based on the idea that — due to their personal characteristics — some population groups are more deviant than others. As explored next, positivist approaches, under the guise of objectivity and neutrality, reproduce the individualising discourses of the carceral society based on individualised understandings of criminalised young people and the narrowly conceived subjectivities available to them.

Individualist, positivist explanations of youth crime dominate the field of research and can be seen in the countless studies that seek to quantify the range of adversities, risk factors or ‘criminogenic needs’ experienced by criminalised young people (often referred to as offenders, delinquents etc.) (Bonta & Andrews 2007). Quantitative studies drawing from an individualist, positivist framework, for example, present characteristics or experiences — such as familial incarceration (Chng et al. 2016; Gilbert et al. 2015; Malvaso, Delfabbro & Day 2016), mental illness (Gilbert et al. 2015), intellectual disability, cognitive impairment, and borderline conditions such as foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (Bower et al. 2018; Government of South Australia 2020a) and experiences of sexual abuse (Baglivio et al. 2014; DeHart & Moran 2015; Dembo, Schmeidler & Childs 2007; Ford et al. 2008; Johansson & Kempf-Leonard 2009; Kerig et al. 2009; Tyler, Johnson & Brownridge 2008) — as important in explaining youth offending. Within this section, whilst these approaches to studying crime are highly related, I discuss positivist studies exploring the relationship between ‘adversity’ and crime, and those that address criminogenic risks/needs, separately — beginning with a critique of positivism and adversity.

4.3.1.3 *Positivism and adversity*

A multitude of positivist, quantitative studies explore the high prevalence of childhood trauma, abuse and neglect experienced by criminalised young people (Baglivio et al. 2014; Dierkhising et al. 2013; Evans & Burton 2013; Fox et al. 2015; Hurren, Stewart & Dennison 2017; Malvaso et al. 2017; Malvaso, Delfabbro & Day 2019; Mersky & Reynolds 2007). For example, often drawing on secondary data such as court records, studies by Fox et al. (2015), Baglivio et al. (2014), Craig et al. (2017), DeLisi and Beauregard (2018) and Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day (2019) use the ‘Adverse Childhood Experiences’ (ACEs) tool to assess the rates of cumulative adversities in the lives of criminalised young people. Authors including Deckert (2016) and Cunneen and Tauri (2016), however, are critical of the widespread use of secondary data in this context, and in positivist criminological research more broadly, which they refer to as a ‘silencing method’ for their ability to draw conclusions about the lives of people they haven’t actually engaged with. Such approaches make it possible for researchers and academics — symbolic elites — to speak *for* researched populations and maintain control over discourses on youth crime and criminalised young people (Cunneen & Tauri 2016; Deckert 2016).

Prior to being adopted more broadly, the ACEs assessment tool was used widely within public health research to demonstrate the adverse effects of childhood trauma across various health outcomes (Anda et al. 2010; Bellis et al. 2014; Cicchetti 2013; Danese & McEwen 2012; Shalev et

al. 2013). In alignment with their positivist/individualist underpinnings, ACEs tools assess only a limited number of individual level factors with little regard for the role social, structural or discursive conditions — such as poverty and racism — may play in shaping developmental and life trajectories (Finkelhor et al. 2013). The childhood experiences deemed ‘adverse’ by the ACEs tool are: “emotional abuse; physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional neglect; physical neglect; violent treatment towards mother; household substance abuse; household mental illness; parental separation or divorce; and having an incarcerated household member” (Finkelhor et al. 2013, p. 73). By assessing only micro experiences of trauma, positivist research, like ACEs studies, can decontextualise experiences of adversity and obscure the broader societal forces that create and maintain disadvantage. Within such studies, analysis often remains removed from the contexts within which adversities occur (Cunneen 2015b).

In 2010, Grevstad conducted the first study comparing the ACEs scores of criminalised young people with those of Felitti et al.’s (1998) original sample of private health insured American adults. To do so, Grevstad (2010 cited in Baglivio et al 2014) applied the ACEs assessment tool to secondary data, including court reports and risk assessments, for a sample of criminalised young people. Results showed that this population of criminalised young people experienced the forms of childhood adversity assessed for at approximately three times the rate of the original population group (Grevstad 2010 cited in Baglivio et al 2014). Following this, Baglivio et al. (2014) released a similar study using secondary data to map the ACEs scores of 64,329 criminalised young people in Florida, with similar findings. Whilst advancing an understanding of criminalised young people as an often highly traumatised population is important, studies such as these, in their focus on adversities located solely at the micro or interpersonal level, continue to produce a carceral logic that frames crime as stemming from *within* traumatised or dysfunctional people; of interpersonal, often family based, adversity as causing crime. Interventions with a ‘rehabilitative’ focus might claim to address these adversities but they do little to challenge the damaging assumptions that underpin carceral systems and leave systematic and structural injustices and inequalities unaltered.

Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day (2019) conducted the first Australian study to map the ACEs scores of criminalised young people, accessing the administrative (secondary) data of 2045 young people detained in SA between 1995 and 2012. Limitations associated with the use of secondary data meant that the authors could assess only eight of the 10 original ACEs (parental separation, witnessing domestic violence, household member substance use problem, household member

incarceration, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse), but added 'parental death' to their assessment, arguing that this is an important adversity previously overlooked by the tool (Malvaso, Delfabbro & Day 2019). Of the 2045 young people studied, only 1.8% of non-Aboriginal females, 2.4% of Aboriginal males and 6.9% of non-Aboriginal males recorded zero ACEs. Notably, every Aboriginal female included in the study had at least one documented ACE. Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day (2019) reported that for the criminalised cohort, experiences of maltreatment were not isolated, but actually heavily interrelated, with just under a third recording six or more ACEs. The authors assert that these figures "clearly demonstrated that ACEs are not isolated events in the lives of young people", and thus advocate a "cumulative stressor approach" (Malvaso, Delfabbro & Day 2019, p. 424) — asserting that "understanding the interrelatedness of ACEs is critical" and "considering ACEs in isolation may lead to erroneous conclusions being drawn about the impact of single events" (Malvaso, Delfabbro & Day 2019, p. 413).

Whilst the essence of this assertion is valuable (although a post-structuralist lens would argue that there is no one 'correct', or objective, conclusion to be drawn about a complex social phenomenon like youth crime), in seeking to broaden ACEs research, the authors include only one additional, individualising, category, that of 'parental death'. In keeping with the individualising focus of ACEs studies, the authors appear to be somewhat blinded to the idea that adversities are often not experienced solely at the individual or familial level — they are not simply perpetrated by neglectful, abusive or absent families. Whilst a single sentence in Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day's (2019) study does allude to non-familial adversities — leading to their recommendation that future research consider factors such as poverty and neighbourhood violence (Malvaso, Delfabbro & Day 2019, p. 426) — in subsequent studies, the authors maintained their narrow focus on solely individualistic forms of adversity (Malvaso et al. 2022). Here we can see how despite being well-intentioned, in their exploration of individual deviance, dysfunction and its relationship to crime, ACEs studies serve to reproduce the dominant carceral logic which frames damaged young people and their dysfunctional families as the source of crime and the primary site of intervention. Such a framing fails to recognise that adversities, for many, are also experienced at the social, community, societal and discursive levels — a phenomena clearly demonstrated in subsequent chapters of this thesis, for example, in the detrimental impacts of early experiences of racism on participants' sense of safety and place in the world. As such, in denying systemic and structural injustice, ACEs studies, and the proposed interventions that stem from them, produce narrow understandings of the nature and impacts of adversity in the lives of criminalised young people.

Despite purporting to recognise the cumulative impact of adversity, ACEs studies generally pursue a line of inquiry that decontextualises the experiences of criminalised (and of often racialised and marginalised) young people from the complexity of their worlds (Cunneen 2015b).

Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day's (2019) earlier work exploring differences in ACEs across cultural demographics, is also problematic in its classification of participants as either Indigenous or non-Indigenous — reflecting the whiteness inherent in the colonial, carceral society in which First Nations people and families are constructed as uniquely deviant, and the diversity of cultural identity and experiences of racialisation for other non-white identifying young people are rendered invisible. In seeking to explicate differences across cultural groups, Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day (2019) link family criminality and family substance use problems among Aboriginal people to the “transmission of intergenerational factors”. In a separate section, the authors briefly mention the phenomenon of “disproportionate minority contact with police”, but do not consider its links with higher rates of “family criminality” and criminalisation for First Nations young people (Malvaso, Delfabbro & Day 2019, p. 424). At no point do the authors name contemporary Australia as a colonial context, nor do they reflect on colonialism as playing a role in the disproportionate and intergenerational criminalisation of the First Nations young people. Instead, in alignment with the dominant carceral logic, the authors return to an individualising understanding of this phenomenon to explain their findings, thereby placing the problem of criminality within — transmitted intergenerationally by — Aboriginal families.

Palawa¹⁵ academics, Guerzoni and Walter (2023, p. 494), argue that such research “represents offending by Indigenous individuals and their subsequent incarceration... as an Indigenous issue”, rather than a “more complicated phenomenon embedded within the ongoing consequences and operations of settler colonialism within the nation-state”. In the work of Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day (2019) we can see this play out in their “use of quantitative methodologies to support assertions that there must be greater degrees of criminality amongst Indigenous people, without due consideration given to how such patterns reflect entrenched racially and colonially determined systemic factors” (Guerzoni & Walter 2023, p. 494). First Nations families and young people are, thus, the problem, and the “culturally sensitive”, yet still carceral, “intervention and treatment strategies” (Malvaso, Delfabbro & Day 2019, p. 424) provided by colonial Australia

¹⁵ Palawa are the Aboriginal people of the island now known as Tasmania.

remain the solution. Through this carceral logic, it is still ‘us’ that can fix the ‘Aboriginal problem’ (sic) — thus maintaining the status quo in this colonial, carceral society.

The influence of the positivist carceral logic, that welfare based carceral interventions currently exist and are the solution, can be seen quite early on in Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day’s (2019, p. 414) paper, in their assertion that:

Australia’s youth justice system differs from that in other countries in so far as in some States, such as South Australia, the guiding legislation is focussed on the *welfare of young people* who commit crime with a strong emphasis on diversion...At the heart of the welfare approach is *the best interests of the young person*. (emphasis added)

Only within a society so steeped in carceral logics could it be plausibly argued that children as young as ten, who the researchers themselves have identified as being highly traumatised, should be removed from society and forcibly placed into prisons (where they experience further trauma, are stripped of their autonomy and any semblance of a normative existence) in their own ‘best interest’. To reiterate, through this framing we can see how positivist research into criminalised young people as a traumatised population puts forward a logic that the problem of crime can be addressed within existing systems, i.e. through prisons, as these spaces already *are* (as suggested above), or have the capacity to *become*, ‘welfare based’ and ‘trauma-informed’, as argued for in Day et al. (2023). It is seen to be this trauma (inflicted by families) that must be the focus of interventions, whilst the structural social and material inequities navigated by many criminalised young people remain intact.

4.3.1.4 Positivism and risk:

A range of assessment tools¹⁶, with similar purposes and positivist origins to the ACEs tool, are used widely in both criminological research and youth justice practice. Grounded in empiricism and based on statistical inferences using large scale, population-level data, such tools conflate certain, apparently neutral, characteristics with a young person’s level of ‘riskiness’ (Alexander 2018; Cunneen 2011, 2015b, 2020; Cunneen & Tauri 2016; Deckert 2016; Henne & Troshynski 2019; Shaw & Hannah-Moffat 2013; Strauss-Hughes, Heffernan & Ward 2019; Thompson & Putniņš 2003). While studies exploring risk and protective factors, or criminogenic risks and needs, have contributed, in some ways, to understanding how exposure to certain experiences or factors

¹⁶ Commonly used positivist risk assessment tools include: the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory; the Australian Adaptation of the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (Thompson & Puntins 2003); the Positive Achievement for Change tool (Baglivio et al. 2014); The Victorian Offending Needs Indicator for Youth (Papalia et al. 2020); and the Secure Care Psychosocial Screening (Thompson & Puntins 2003).

can heighten a young person's risk of criminalisation, authors such as Cunneen (2015b), Alexander (2018), Shaw and Hannah-Moffat (2013) and Henne and Troshynski (2019) argue that actuarial tools are not merely reductionist, but perpetuate biases and stigmatisation, producing a self-perpetuating cycle whereby young people are not assessed on their individual circumstances or needs, but on population based data — with those assessed as 'high risk' receiving more intense levels of carceral intervention and surveillance. The claims of objectivity, neutrality and scientific rigour associated with positivist approaches both reflect and contribute to, what various theorists describe as, 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens 1990; Van Marle & Maruna 2010) — the perceived sense of precariousness and preoccupation with risk evident in many late modern societies (Cunneen 2011, 2015b, 2020). In such a climate, overtly punitive responses to law-breakers emerge as a means for acting decisively in perceived uncertainty (Costelloe, Chiricos & Gertz 2009).

By focusing narrowly on the risk presented by children and young people, positivist studies taking an actuarial/risk lens can overlook the profound harm present in their lives. Power is thus exercised through the biopolitics of knowledge and empiricist claims of objective and neutral facts — mechanisms which license increasingly intrusive and earlier interventions aimed at addressing offending that children have not yet, but might, commit (Cunneen 2015b, p. 32). For example, in their study exploring the validity of using the ACEs assessment as a screening tool to identify, and intervene in the lives of, children at risk of "serious, violent and chronic offending", Fox et al. (2015, p. 163) argue that "each additional adverse experience a child experiences increases the risk of becoming a serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offender by 35" and "that the ACE score could be used by practitioners as a first-line screening tool to identify children at risk of SVC offending before significant downstream wreckage occurs". Studies like this produce and perpetuate a deterministic carceral logic that sees crime as produced and enacted, not by rational individuals who were born criminal as espoused in a classical view but, by those born *into criminality* through their experiences and positionality — a line of reasoning, and form of cultural racism/classism, only subtly distinct from the biological classism and racism offered up by classical carceral logics. These practices constitute a biopolitical mechanism of control which perpetuates biases and, in and of itself, increases the likelihood of criminalisation for young people occupying certain subject positions.

While the importance of early intervention and Fox et al.'s (2015, p. 171) assertion that "prevention is worth a pound of cure" is one widely recognised in the literature, it is the framing of

the issue, the understanding of what intervention should entail (i.e. individualistic, rather than social, material, discursive) and the authors justifications for intervening that present issues. Fox et al. (2015), for example, argue repeatedly that children's ACE scores, that is the score given to the level of childhood adversity and trauma they are experiencing, should be routinely assessed to "identify children at higher risk of becoming 'serious, violent, chronic' offenders before destructive criminal behavior develops" (Fox et al. 2015, p. 165). The authors also invoke the economic and social cost borne by society as a result of this cohort of 'serious violent criminal offenders' as justification for early intervention. That is, intervention is framed as worthwhile when it reduces economic and social harm to the broader community. The needs of these children and young people — who are framed as a threat to society — for safety and stability appears a peripheral afterthought, with the potential benefits of early intervention on their wellbeing receiving only one mention. The mechanisms through which risk-based, positivist studies attribute meaning to the adversities experienced by these young people sees them constructed as risky subjects requiring heightened intervention — and, therefore, becomes yet another adversity imposed upon them. Actuarial studies, thus, produce and reinforce a deterministic carceral logic in which, in order to prevent harm to the 'community', surveillance and control of those deemed 'risky' is essential (Australian Human Rights Commission 2020; Cunneen 2011, 2015b, 2020).

Fox et al.'s (2015) study provides an example of how viewing criminalised young people through an individualist, damage-centred discourse provides little room for nuance — complex and multifaceted young people are rendered static and one-dimensional. Further, the propensity of positivist research, like that conducted by Fox et al. (2015) and Hart et al. (2007), to label children and young people 'delinquents' or 'offenders' serves to dehumanise, reducing their identity to the 'criminal' and perpetuating a divide between 'them' (the criminal 'other') and 'us' (those who stand to be harmed by 'them'). Deckert (2016, p. 47) highlights that it is through processes of "othering", distinguishing the 'criminal' from the 'non-criminal', that "academic criminological discourse ensures its own survival". These approaches to criminological research then, in Deckert's (2016, p.48) understanding, represent an "imperialist science", designed specifically to create and control 'the other' and "thus is an accomplice to persistent neocolonial epistemologies". Through this we can see how conventional criminological discourse — which, in drawing from Enlightenment thinking and empiricism seeks to quantify deviance — exerts disciplinary power over its subjects (delinquents/criminals/offenders) through the production and dissemination of

knowledge — a process that has both manifested and reified criminology as an academic discipline (Foucault 1989; Tauri 2012).

Authors such as Alexander (2018), Cunneen (2020), Henne and Troshynski (2019) and Shaw and Hannah-Moffat (2013) further argue that the positivist, risk-based approach emphasis on social and economic conditions of individual lives reflects the dominance of (white) societal norms (e.g. the heterosexual, nuclear family, western education, employment etc.) which, under the illusion of scientific neutrality, have become entrenched within criminological discourse, policy and practice — further contributing to the criminalisation of marginalised and racialised communities. For example, in their study on the influence of gender on risk and protective factors for offending, Hart et al. (2007, p. 367) focus on the “marital status of parents, marital conflict, substance use, age of first substance use, learning difficulties, and school failure” as risk factors and “parenting styles, academic achievement, attitudes unfavorable toward violence, having a mentor, positive relationships with peers, and being involved in extracurricular activities” as protective factors. Unsurprisingly, they concluded that ‘nondelinquent’ subjects had higher protective factors and lower risk factors than both the ‘non-violent delinquent’ and the ‘violent delinquent’ cohort. Risk-focussed approaches like this, however, are infused with normative values — such as the importance of parental marriage — and repackage structural and systemic issues, like lack of access to extracurricular activities, as individualised characteristics (Alexander 2018; Cunneen 2011, 2015b, 2020; Henne & Troshynski 2019; Strauss-Hughes, Heffernan & Ward 2019).

Hart et al. (2007), for example, acknowledge the significance of the school environment in young people’s lives, however, in focusing only on young people’s “academic abilities and learning difficulties” (Hart et al. 2007, p. 369), rather than their experiences of schooling, the authors merely reinforce normative standards of individual performance. The authors go on to assert, with little apparent justification, that “programs for delinquent adolescents should target emotions and teach them alternatives to aggression in coping with shameful situations” and that boys “who are failing school and using alcohol and drugs should be placed into programs that can help them through school and cope with the stress that goes along with having learning difficulties” (Hart et al. 2007, p. 379). As is common with positivist studies, the stress experienced by young people with learning difficulties is understood in terms of their lack of resilience or skills, rather than as an issue that is systemic and structural in origin. By reframing young people’s lives and experiences as individual, family and/or community failings (for example, bad attitude, neighbourhood, parenting, peers etc.), studies such as this ignore the “profound collective economic and social

disadvantage” (Baldry & Cunneen 2014, p. 289) that shapes some young people’s lives. In their assertion that girls who lack “protective factors” should “be closely monitored and, if necessary, placed into programs such as structured after-school activities” (Hart et al. 2007, p. 380) epitomise the biopolitical nature of much criminological research — producing the heightened surveillance and control of those constructed as “at risk”.

Consistent with a positivist approach, ‘evidence-based’ paradigms of risk, like the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI), have been adopted extensively within youth justice systems in Australia — seeking to categorise and manage criminalised young people based on their perceived level of ‘riskiness’. The YLS/CMI, for example, assesses young people across eight “empirically derived risk factors” — factors which Dellar et al. (2022, p. 2) argue “are strong and direct predictors of reoffending” that “should be the intermediate targets of treatment”. These are: “Criminal History, Family Circumstances/Parenting, Education/Employment, Peer Relations, Substance Abuse, Leisure/Recreation, Personality/Behavior, and Attitudes/Orientation”.

While actuarial tools like the YSL/CMI have gained traction due, in part, to their claims of objectivity, many of the items assessed are highly subjective, value laden and individualising. Take, for example, the risk/need domain of ‘leisure/recreation’ which assesses young people’s involvement in organised and other activities, ascribing value-based judgements such as “could make better use of time” (Hodge & Andrews 2021). By constructing engagement in organised activities as a personal characteristic, tools like this repackage systemic and structural issues — like lack of access to resources and opportunities — as evidence of individual deficit, reflecting normative and decontextualised understandings of leisure. Similarly, the domain of ‘peer relations’, in drawing a distinction between ‘delinquent’ and ‘positive’ peers (Hodge & Andrews 2021, p. 12), functions to reproduce marginalisation. In doing so, binary and totalising understandings of subjectivity and behaviour are produced, and these tools fail to interrogate both the socially constructed nature of the behaviours framed as delinquent or positive, and their relationship to classism, racism and ableism.

In reflecting on how risk-based approaches impact First Nations people specifically, Cunneen (2015b, p. 42) argues that those who possess membership to a “risk-defined group” are “invariably cast as a ‘problem to be solved’, rather than as a people who have been actively oppressed and are demanding recognition of their fundamental human rights”. As explained by Alexander (2018, p. 1), “these advanced mathematical models ... appear colorblind on the surface

but they are based on factors that are not only highly correlated with race and class, but are also significantly influenced by pervasive bias in the criminal justice system". Similarly, Cunneen (2020, p. 528) argues that these tools, and the knowledges that inform them, provide an example of "the technologies of racial governance within the 'post-racial' society, whereby race is removed from the visible techniques of governance, but nevertheless continues to operate silently in producing highly racialized outcomes including state surveillance, supervision and incarceration". Risk assessment processes, thus, are infused with notions of whiteness that (whilst implicit and under the guise of 'science') embed assumptions about what is it to be a 'good' "law-abiding, socially conforming and economically engaged citizen" (Cunneen 2020, p. 528) — and in doing so function to expose "those who fail the test of (White) social conformity" (Cunneen 2020, p. 528). Within such tools, Cunneen (2020, p. 530) argues, "Race is masked in the questions which are asked, but reconfirmed in the negative results generated for particular racialized groups of young people". Here we can see how Enlightenment based practices continue to exercise biopolitical power through the study of the human subject and the myth of neutrality and objectivity which, in this context, creates "a seamless and seemingly irrefutable link between race and propensity for crime" and further neoliberal discourses of marginalisation as an individual failing. What such tools mask and render invisible, Cunneen (2020, p. 530) argues, "are the opposites of the risk factors: being wealthy, White, living in an exclusive neighbourhood and attending an elite private school".

To conclude, both classical and positivist epistemologies have their origins in Enlightenment era knowledges and, whilst differing in their understandings of its source, both produce individualising discourses of youth crime. Classical explanations of crime argue that the human experience is one characterised by free will and that offending behaviour is the result of a rational, calculated decision. Therefore, these approaches offer no consideration of factors outside the individual and posit that deterrence and practices of punishment are effective interventions. Whilst losing prominence in research, this way of understanding and intervening remains dominant within carceral policies, processes and practices. Positivist approaches, build upon classicism, yet shift in emphasis — away from the study of free will and agency, instead bringing scientific methods into the study of deterministic factors. As has been argued, such approaches continue to produce racist, ableist, classist and liberal understandings of youth crime, based on the idea that some population groups are more criminal than others. While presented as neutral and objective, such studies draw on, and reinscribe, dominant discourses that reinforce narrow, and damaged-

centred, subject positions for criminalised young people. These discourses enable a carceral logic that positions young people as the primary site of change, leaving intact the broader relations of power that so potently shape their lives. So long as criminal behaviour is understood as the product of free will, individual traits and internal deficits, the silencing practices of research, and the individualising interventions of the formal carceral system, will continue. Within the classical and positivist research explored here, we can clearly see the relationship between research and the logics and practices of the carceral society.

4.4 Social and structural explanations

Although less commonly adopted in research on youth crime and criminalisation, alternative social or structural explanations of crime have also been influential over time. Social and structural explanations differ from individualising approaches, turning the lens away from the individual and onto the social or structural conditions within which individuals exist — often speaking back to dominant knowledges and constructions of crime and criminalisation. Originating in the sociological traditions, social explanations may emphasise crime as learned behaviour (social learning theories), the significance of peers and the ‘social strains’ generated by poverty and social inequality (social structural strain theory), or the significance of social bonds (social control theories). More recently, critical criminologies provide a more explicitly structural perspective, arguing that crime is produced by the systems, structures and values of a given society (Cunneen 2015a). Whilst an umbrella term, in general, critical criminologies seek to expose the “underlying power relations that shape how different groups are treated in, and by, the criminal justice system” (White, Haines & Asquith 2012, p. 252). Marked by their focus on structural inequality, critical theories generally have aspirations beyond the carceral system — arguing for “radical cultural change” (Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy 2018, p. 1) and action to “transform the present social order” (White, Haines & Asquith 2012, p. 252).

Whilst, in their critique of individualist studies, social and structural explorations of crime have provided an important reorientation towards factors broader than the individual, such approaches are not without critique and often engage in similar truth games, borne of the Enlightenment, in which uncovering the objective truth of a subject is the goal of research. When exploring social phenomenon like crime and criminalisation, explanations based upon fixed understandings and single factor approaches — whereby crime is understood as stemming from a clearly identifiable factor/s can obfuscate complexity, erase nuance and overlook discursive power relations as critical

to subjectivities. Below I outline three of these approaches; which are social, structural and multi-factorial.

4.4.1 Social approaches:

Social theories of crime orient towards the influence of the social world — exploring, for example, how peer relationships, social interactions, family dynamics, environmental and/or community factors shape criminal behaviour. Interactionist explanations — like those explored below — are broadly social in their focus on crime as the “outcome of social interaction” (Hayes & Prenzler 2012, p. 240). Through differential association and social learning theories, for example, crime is understood to be behaviour learned through social interactions, where individuals are exposed to attitudes and behaviours about crime that influence their own actions. Social bond theory argues that holding strong connections to the institutions of normative society, like school and family, increases compliance and participation in social norms, thus reducing risk of criminal behaviour. The significance of interactions between offenders and “those with the power to label” (White, Haines & Asquith 2012, p. 97) is recognised in labelling theory, which argues that the labels, and the associated stigma, that society imposes upon those deemed deviant, influence identity and future behaviour. Neutralisation theory explores the social forces that shape offenders’ rationalisations for their actions. One example of a social approach to researching youth crime can be seen in Feinstein (2015) labelling theory study which explores the influence of racism and white privilege on the criminalisation process, societal perceptions and young people’s sense of self. Here, rather than conceptualising race as a static factor or variable, Feinstein (2015) foregrounds race and racism in terms of its significance for societal and self-perceptions of criminality, thereby enabling an exploration of the protective impacts of white privilege. Having compared the experiences of youth of colour, who reported feeling judged as inherently criminal regardless of their involvement with the criminal justice system, with white youth, who were much less likely to report these labelling effects, Feinstein (2015) concluded that racism and racial bias impact significantly on the identities and life trajectories of criminalised young people of colour.

4.4.2 Structural approaches:

Structural approaches adopt a distinctly different orientation again, focussing on the role of systemic and structural inequality in producing criminal behaviour. Critical theories, for example, see the formal carceral system as a tool of oppression, used by the powerful to assert control over disenfranchised individuals and communities and often take a broader approach to studying harm

that encompasses, for example “socially injurious behaviors like racism, heteronormativity, poverty, unemployment, sexism, imperialism, inadequate social services ...” (DeKeseredy 2021, p. 13). Structurally influenced research, such as that by the Australian Law Reform Commission (2017), CREATE (2018) and McFarlane (2010) turns the gaze away from the ‘damaged’ young person, as imagined in much of the positivist literature — instead taking systems, including the child protection system, as their primary foci. The Australian Law Reform Commission (2017, p. 20), for example, point to the mounting body of evidence demonstrating the strong connection between the child protection, juvenile and adult incarceration systems, asserting that “child removal into out-of-home care” and the higher rates of youth criminalisation that often accompany this “could be considered key drivers of adult incarceration”. In their qualitative research with 86 care impacted young people, CREATE (2018, p. 20) also take a structural stance, identifying the out-of-home care environment as itself criminogenic, exposing young people to stigmatisation, heightened levels of policing and the criminalisation of developmentally common adolescent behaviours.

Within social or structuralist studies like these, the overrepresentation of care impacted young people within youth justice systems cannot be explained as solely the result of internal damage caused by the trauma that led to removal. Instead, we are provided a glimpse into the many ways that young people in care are subjected to criminalisation, due simply to being in the ‘care’ environment. The higher rates of criminalisation of this demographic are, thus, at least in part, due to systemic or structural conditions in which the behaviours and needs of young people are constructed and responded to, by the very systems purporting to help them, in ways that further entrench their status as deviant ‘other’. A structural approach to researching on youth crime, thus, moves us away from an individualising carceral logic, towards one that sees crime as produced by the systems and structures of a society.

4.4.3 Multi-factorial studies

Lastly, unlike individualist studies that position interpersonal trauma as *the* driver of crime, multi-factorial studies are oriented towards an exploration of the ways in which the individual, the social and the structural interact (Cunneen and White 2011). Studies by Barnert et al. (2015) and Halsey and Deegan (2015), for example, explore both young people’s reflections on interpersonal and family-based trauma, as well as traumas that could be considered systemic or structural in nature as evidenced through accounts of ‘survival offending’ — that is, offending undertaken to meet a basic, but otherwise unmet, human need (such as stealing food to stave off hunger, robbing

and/or selling drugs to pay rent, or stealing cars for shelter) or to protect oneself from the hazards of life on the streets (Barnert et al. 2015; Halsey 2008, p. 105; Halsey & Deegan 2015). Multifactorial studies, thus, often highlight the link between the ‘crimes’ committed by young people and the intersecting societal, social and individual forces that constrain their lives — pointing towards an understanding of crime as more than just a personal choice or a symptom (of trauma, disability or mental illness), but, at times, a necessary act of survival. As one young person in Barnert et al’s (2015, p. 1367) study explains: “A kid with no money, he’ll probably steal to get what he needs, like he’ll steal from the store to eat or he’ll rob a house to eat or to provide for his family”. Research that seeks to understand narratives through a multifactorial lens counters a sole focus on individual young people by paying attention to the power relations that shape the lives, possibilities and opportunities available to them. As Halsey (2008, p. 105) reflects, while young people’s actions may be formally addressed as crime, “structurally and politically, the focus should be on the lack of viable options for persons who find themselves in situations where crime presents as the solution to one's problems”.

4.5 Post-structural approaches

Social, structural and critical approaches to understanding youth crime and criminalisation have provided a much-needed shift — away from crime as originating within individuals, and towards an interrogation of the social dynamics, systems and/or structures of a society that are seen as the key drivers of crime. As such, structuralist and critical approaches align more strongly with, but are not uncritiqued by, the post-structural orientation advanced in this project. Like critical criminologies, post-modern and post-structural approaches — including chaos theory, discourse analysis and Foucauldian-inspired works — are primarily oriented towards exploring power. While structural and critical theories locate power within oppressive societal structures, post-structuralist epistemologies challenge the top-down notions of power inherent in this understanding by emphasising the disciplinary and productive nature of power and its relationship to knowledge, discourse and subjectivity, as detailed at length in the theoretical framework chapter of this thesis. In exploring power and its operation in society, post-structural approaches pay particular attention to language and discourse, and the role these play in constructing issues, knowledges, norms and subjectivities, as key mechanisms of power. Post-structural approaches pay attention to the exercise of power through knowledge, evident in the privileging of certain discourses and the discounting and silencing of others (Duso & Arrigo 2018).

Further, in understanding reality as socially constructed, post-structuralist approaches reject the essentialism that can be seen in some social, structuralist and multi-factorial approaches which treat crime as a self-evident truth, rather than a socially produced and defined phenomena. In understanding subjectivity as fluid and in continuous interaction with the material and discursive worlds that shape it, a post-structural approach challenges the idea of an objective reality that can be studied and known, thereby rejecting the grand narratives and overarching explanations of social and structuralist approaches. Instead, post-structuralism offers an epistemology for exploring the multi-layered fields of power that operate and interrelate to produce the social structures that give rise to subjectivity and therefore urges against essentialist understandings of the subject.

4.6 Conclusion

The process of producing this chapter has generated within me a deep understanding of the ways in which dominant academic criminological discourses, imbued with disciplinary and biopolitical power, both reflect, produce and reify the discourses, logics and practices of the carceral society. Shaped by dominant discourses, research approaches often seek to understand the origins of youth crime through positivist, quantitative and individualising frameworks, rarely centring the stories of criminalised young people told on their terms. Such studies have contributed to knowledge development but are often limited by their narrow, individualising focus and their reliance on ‘silencing methods’ (Deckert 2016) which disregard the perspectives of young people. Whilst there exists a strong and growing strong body of theoretical research turning the gaze away from those deemed criminal and onto the society and carceral logics that construct and produce crime — see, for example, Anthony (2014), Baldry, Carlton and Cunneen (2015), Baldry and Cunneen (2014), Blagg and Anthony (2019), Cunneen (2006, 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2020), Cunneen and Porter (2017), Cunneen and Tuari (2016, 2019), Giannacopoulos (2006, 2020, 2024), Tauri (2012) etc. — there remains, relatively speaking, only a small body of empirical literature adopting this stance. There remains a paucity of qualitative studies meaningfully privileging the voices and agency of young people who have been constructed as ‘criminal’. Instead, knowledge generating and shaping activities, according to Deckert (2016, p. 48), continue to be dominated by the worldviews of “so-called ‘symbolic elites’” (i.e. academics). The confinement and relegation of criminalised young people to the margins thus occurs not only in physical spaces, like child/youth prisons and the resource-starved communities they are often born into, but also within knowledge generating activities like social research.

Post-structural criminology provides not only an important framework for critiquing dominant approaches to research, but also tools for questioning the systems of knowledge that produce particular constructions of, and responses to, youth crime (Foucault 1984) and advancing understandings of the complexity and multiplicity of power relationships that shape the lives of criminalised young people (Butler 2011). The remaining chapters of this thesis draw on a post-structural lens to explore, and hold on to the complexity and messiness of the narratives, lived experiences and subjectivities shared so generously by the 16 criminalised young people who participated in this project.

5 A VIOLENT SOCIETY: DISCOURSES OF RACE, CLASS AND GENDER

5.1 Introduction

Central to this post-structural project is an understanding of both social research and crime, like all social phenomena, as socially constructed. As such, in exploring power and its operation in society, this research focusses on the role of discourse in constructing issues, knowledges, norms and subjectivities and seeks to examine how the exercise of power enables certain discourses to be privileged and reified and others discounted (Duso & Arrigo 2018). Such an approach is adopted in this chapter to explore, how the dominant discourses of race, class and gender produce violent societies, whilst simultaneously shaping dominant understandings of what constitutes violence. This chapter points out that power is exercised in the very construction of violence — as framing definitions of violence as neutral, objective and “lying outside hierarchical power relations of race and gender ignores how the power to define what counts as violence is constitutive of these same power relations” (Collins 1998, p. 920). This chapter begins by introducing the theoretical concepts of both inequality and violence regimes — frameworks which are then drawn on to analyse the litany of direct and indirect violences produced by dominant discourses of race, class and gender.

5.2 Inequality and violence regimes

Borrowing from Hearn et al.’s (2022a) ‘violence regimes’ concept, this chapter examines the violence inherent in the lives of criminalised young people through a broadened understanding of violence — one which enables an exploration of violence in both its direct (visible, physical, and deliberate) and indirect (diffused, discursive, dispersed and socially embedded) forms. The violence regimes approach (Hearn et al. 2022b) extends upon the work of ‘regimes of inequality’ scholars (Acker 2006; Costa 2011; Jasini & Salomon 2023) who adopt an intersectional lens to argue that societal inequalities are shaped by the economic, political, discursive, social and cultural practices of a society which interact with certain subjectivities, like class, race and gender, in ways that produce entangled, regime-like systems of exclusion (Costa 2011). These regimes of exclusion are fluid and context specific, yet also “interlink with regional, national, [and] local patterns” (Jasini & Salomon 2023, p. 90) that shape how inequality is understood and governed (Lynch 2020).

Hearn et al.'s (2022a) violence regimes approach extends upon this work to argue that violence should be considered a regime of inequality in and of itself. Consistent with my theoretical approach, through their 'violence regimes' framework, the authors offer a post-structural understanding of violence as a 'material-discursive' phenomenon — enabling an interrogation of both the physical effects of violence on bodies, subjectivities and material realities, and the discursive, epistemological aspects of violence and its construction. As Hearn et al.'s (2022b, p. 698) assert, an emphasis on the discursive and indirect aspects of violence, on “what is not yet accepted, measured, or politicized as violence”, is particularly important as it enables an exploration of systemic, colonial, material-discursive, symbolic, and epistemic violences and poses “questions of what constitutes violence” and according to whom? (Hearn et al.'s 2022a, p. 698). A violence regimes approach, thus, sees violence as far more than a set of intentional acts, arguing instead that violence is exercised within and through all layers of the capitalist, colonial society — existing as a “fundamental constituent element of sociality and social life” (Hearn et al. 2022a, p. 585) that can be “both cause and consequence of social realities” (Hearn et al. 2022a, p. 568). The exploration offered within this chapter demonstrates the necessity of adopting broader conceptualisations of violence, enabling those under study to be active contributors — participants, not objects — in this, and understanding that “violence cannot be reduced to individual psychological traits or dysfunctional families or institutions...Violence can be a social and societal inequality in its own right” (Hearn et al. 2022a, p. 585).

Participants in this project articulated experiences of direct and indirect violence, and, at times, reflected upon the centrality of these experiences to the unfolding of their lives and subjectivities. Counter to dominant, individualising approaches, young people generally chose to talk about their experiences of violences beyond the self and the family — across multiple sites within society. The stories shared by participants highlight the violence inherent within the formal carceral system, the broader services landscape, and the discourses, knowledge and power relations that enable these — narrations which become the focus of the following two chapters, Chapters Six and Seven. The focus of this chapter, however, is to interrogate how inequality regimes have interacted with participant subjectivities in ways that are violent (Hearn et al. 2022a). In the storying of their lives, participants repeatedly shared examples pointing towards the violent effects of dominant discourses of race, class and gender. Violence, and its interaction with these subjectivities — these regimes of inequality (Costa 2011) — becomes the focus of the remainder of this chapter. A violence regimes approach argues that multiple forms of violence often

intersect, with exposure to one form of violence leading to increased risk of exposure to other forms and the violences produced by dominant discourses of race, class and poverty are no different (Hearn et al. 2022a). Whilst acknowledging the violences produced by discourses of race, class and gender are highly interrelated, for the purposes of coherence, each is presented and unpacked in its own right.

5.3 The violence of dominant discourses of race

The experience, and implications, of racism was a significant theme for participants in this study. Eleven of the 16 participants I engaged with occupied racialised subjectivities — five of these identified as Aboriginal, one as Aboriginal, Māori, Greek and Chinese, one as Torres Strait Islander, one as Filipina/Maltese, one as South Sudanese and one who identified, culturally, as Muslim. Of these, nine shared stories elucidating the material and discursive violences that continues to be exercised in, through and by dominant discourses of race which construct race as a ‘real’, biological truth and set whiteness as the invisible norm against which ‘others’ are compared and rendered inferior (Jiwani 2006).

A violence regimes approach (Hearn et al. 2022a, p. 585) enables an interrogation of the social relations and practices of power produced by dominant discourses of race, which it sees as being “produced or underlain by violence”. It asserts that these discourses shape society and the lives and subjectivities of us all — doing so, either, by affording subjects invisibility, protection and neutrality or by rendering them hyper-visible and exposing them to a litany of direct and indirect violences that, as will be demonstrated, are deeply damaging to bodies, minds and subjectivities (Hearn et al. 2022a; Jiwani 2006). This invisibility, for example, can be seen in the responses of the non-racialised participants (n=6) who did not chose the ‘racism’ card for discussion, with one asserting that he thinks “racism is funny”, and who often could not identify their ancestry — by, instead, simply identifying as ‘white’, a response often ending with an inflection, a tonal question mark. These participants seemed to suggest they had not considered themselves as raced beings — experiences that starkly juxtapose the participants whose subjectivities have been racialised. Consequently, in seeking to demonstrate that dominant discourses of race produce violence in colonial societies like Australia, this section draws from the narratives of racialised, criminalised young people. However, in engaging with this task, I am interrogating but one tiny piece of a much larger puzzle, and seek to make it explicit that dominant discourses of race not only exercise violence in the lives of racialised, criminalised young people — when they are exposing those

constructed as racialised ‘others’ to harm — but rather they are violent in their very essence, in the ways that they neutralise, naturalise, invisibilise and privilege whiteness. As Jiwani (2006, p. 6) reflects, for the racialised body “to be constructed as different and inferior means that the White body retains its pristine, innocent, and valorized status. Thus, racialization is a dialectic process. It rests on the centrality of Whiteness — its normativity and invisibility”. To show how dominant discourses of race produce violence, this section explores the impacts of dominant discourses of race on the bodies and subjectivities of racialised participants and on the whiteness I bring with me to the research process.

For some young people occupying bodies that have been racialised, racism was identified as one of the most important topics to discuss — and stories of violence through exclusion, othering and physical harm were offered almost immediately. Maror, Jax and Angela, for example, chose racism as the second most important card for discussion, and shared stories of the persistent racial violence they have endured during their short lives. In their narrations, these young people provide insights into the pervasive violence produced by dominant discourses of race, and the wounds that such experiences can etch into racialised young people’s sense of themselves and their place within the world. Maror, for example, responded to my question regarding why he chose the racism card as such a high priority by explaining that he “experienced a lot of racism growing up” which he believes “caused most of” his “anger issues”. Maror went on to recall first experiencing racism at just four years old, in the first few weeks of primary school, when his peers began attacking him with racial slurs — calling him “black monkey”, “black dog”, and asserting that he, unlike them, did not “belong here”. Here Maror’s peers draw from the logics of dominant discourses of race to strip him of his personhood by referring to him as a “black monkey” — a dynamic that demonstrates how the widely disproved Enlightenment based discourses of race continue to manifest, are kept alive, and exercise violence, in colonial contexts today. In the Australian context, Majavu (2018, p. 191) asserts, “the humanness of Africans is denied” — or in post-structural terms, dominant discourses of race exercise power and violence over bodies and subjectivities — through a multitude of overt, subtle, and routine violences like the “the simianisation of Africans, everyday racism, the criminalisation of African men and the perpetual refugee trope”. Devastatingly, throughout the course of this research, Maror, a boy of only 15-years, narrated lived experiences of each of these forms of racial violence. The dominant discourses of race at play in the above narration include ideas about race (that it is a biological truth), blackness (that it is representative of deficiency) and whiteness (that it is, somehow, more

neutral, more desirable, more normal) that shape the subjectivities and lived experiences available to all of us in violent ways — regardless of whether these discourses expose us to harm, or to protection.

Angela shared similar reflections on the violences of dominant discourses of race in primary school contexts, and how these shaped her understandings of herself, others and the world she was learning to navigate. She reflected:

Kids can be mean. Since very young I was getting picked on for being the darkest in the class, these two freckles on my forehead — just like getting picked on for everything. Anything that's different. How thick my hair was. Anything. It just [pause] aint easy”.

Angela paused, looked down at her feet, then proceeded to share a particularly formative experience of racial violence that her and her friend were exposed to when they were around seven years old:

It was a bunch of year seven boys. Yeah, he was like 'Go back to your own country. You and your mum go back to your own country' and stuff like this. We weren't doing anything wrong. We were just kids. And yeah, it got really bad [pause]...it wasn't okay. At first, we were just laughing and stuff and once they tried to like, they were putting my friend's face into bird shit on the bench.

Here we can see how, in children of primary school age, Enlightenment, biological determinism based, discourses of race already produce indirect violences (Hearn et al. 2022a) by perpetuating stereotypes, establishing hierarchies, rendering whiteness invisible and normalising direct violence towards those these discourses racialise — providing damning insights into broader societal dynamics. This is the violence of dominant discourses of race.

Angela went on to reflect that she experiences racism “wherever” she goes and narrated another incident that she endured only a few months prior to our interview, during the peak of the Covid19 pandemic. She explained that, while simply attempting to catch the bus home from the gym, a group of men approached her and aggressively accused her, a Filipina/Maltese young person, of being responsible for the pandemic — “It’s you, you fucking bat eating cunts” one of the men asserted. Angela explained that she did not respond, and instead simply walked away and “just jumped on the next bus”. Racial violence, here, saw Angela feeling as though removing herself from the situation as quickly and quietly as possible was the only viable option. “I’m not trying to get stabbed”, she reflected. The enduring of racial insults based upon essentialised, stereotyped and incorrect understandings of Angela’s cultural identity she explained “was just degrading as, I’m not even Chinese”.

In the above narrations, we can see the role that dominant discourses of race play in shaping constructions of who or what constitutes a ‘real’ Australian and how this is weaponised to other and exclude racialised people (Majavu 2018). Despite being born in Australia, both Angela and Maror were overtly told that they do not belong in the country and should return to some imagined country of origin. As Majavu (2018, p. 195) explains, since the earliest stages of colonisation, ‘Australia’ has been conceptualised “as a geographically white space” — a discursive landscape in which black, brown and Asian bodies are rendered “hyper-visible”, unfamiliar and foreign (Majavu 2018, p. 195). By constructing young people like Angela and Maror as intruders, as “perpetual refugees” (Majavu 2018, p. 187) from some other land, dominant discourses of race produce both direct (visible, physical and deliberate) and indirect (diffused, discursive, dispersed and socially embedded) violences (Hearn et al. 2022a).

When discussing the ‘The area I grew up in’ card, Maror provided further insights into the centrality of racial violence in shaping his early life experiences. In reflecting on the suburb he grew up in, Maror clarified a tension — between the sense of community that his blackness afforded him and the violence that dominant understandings of this blackness exposed him to: “It was good”, he explained, “cause I was always around my family, my cousins. A lot of my people out there”. This sense of family and community, however, are juxtaposed by the presence of “a lot of dangerous white people” who waged violences against the body of this young child. Maror explained:

So, like, one of my neighbours let their dog attack me — me and my family — on the way to school. [...] Yeah ... ‘cause me and my sister used to walk to school, ‘cause my mum used to work in the morning and my dad used to be a doctor, so we’d walk in the morning, and he just stared straight at us and let his dog just come and attack us. Another time, I got hit by a car. They just drove off. I looked, I saw the car coming. It was so far, it was far, far away and I thought ‘Nah, I’m gonna walk’...So, I crossed the road and the guy just sped up, boom, drove off...[pause] and I know he saw me. He hit me with his car and drove off.

In response to my question, “And so do you think that these things happened because of racism?”, Maror responded “Because I’m black? Yep. 100%”. By an early age, Maror had experienced enough racial violence to produce, within him, a deep sense that these experiences were because he “was black”.

Within both Angela and Maror’s narratives, we can see violences that are psychological, symbolic, cultural, discursive, and at times physical, and exercised in and through constructions of race which serve to hierarchise, degrade, other and expose bodies to overt physical harm. The

everyday practices of whiteness, through which racialised young people are othered, excluded and inferiorised, interacts with and shapes, in powerful ways, the emotional landscapes, the material realities, the subjectivities, and sense-of-self available to these young people (Jiwani 2006). For Maror, discourses of race, and the violences these produce, have shaped his sense of the world, and his place within it, in significant ways. These experiences, he explains, “somewhat, I believe, caused all *my* anger problems” and “just made me [*pause*]...not to trust anyone [*pause*]...yeah, except my family”. Later, in reflecting on the racial violence he has survived, he adds, “I just developed a hard spot”. For Angela, these experiences interacted with her subjectivity, causing her to feel “so out of place” and “like the black sheep”.

The narrations, provided by Maror and Angela, help to illustrate not only how deeply inadequate dominant, individualising discourses of violence — as adopted, for example, in ACEs studies — are for understanding adversity and violence in colonial societies, but also how, in disregarding diffused, discursive, and socially embedded forms of violence, dominant approaches invisibilise these mechanisms of harm (Hearn et al. 2022a). Such discourses silence the voices of those othered, render dominant ways of knowing the ‘truth’, which Hearn et al. (2022a) and Dotson (2011) refer to as ‘epistemic violence’.

5.3.1 Subjectification effects: Epistemological violence and a damage-centred self

For a number of participants, the violence of dominant discourses of race was felt through the silencing practices and the racial gaslighting¹⁷ that often accompanies the naming of these experiences (Davis & Ernst 2020) — a practice of power that both hegemonic approaches to research, and the carceral logic, perpetuate. When first meeting with participants, for example, I would ask whether there was anything I needed to know to help them feel safe during the interview process. In addition to Maror, a number of the incarcerated, racialised boys (Kyle, Tyson, Gus and Trey) responded that it was important for me to know that they had “anger issues”. Maror, in particular, was quick to assert that he would “never hurt a woman”, and that I had nothing to fear — but insisted that I needed to know that *he* had anger issues. The above excerpts present but a tiny snippet of the violences dominant discourses of race have exposed Maror too,

¹⁷ Davis and Ernst (2020, p. 761) define racial gaslighting as “the political, social, economic and cultural process that perpetuates and normalizes a white supremacist reality” through denying the lived realities of racialised people and “pathologizing those who resist”.

yet the anger he has expressed in response to these experiences has been identified as, itself, the problem:

Tessa: And so, did that stuff [racial violence] happen kind of right through school or did it chill out for a bit?

Maror: It happened from reception until year three and then I got expelled from that school.

Tessa: Right, for fighting or?

Maror: Yeah.

Tessa: And did the people that were being racist, did they ever get in trouble or punished or anything like that?

Maror: Nah.

Tessa: How did your little brain then, how did it make sense of that?

Maror: It just made me [pause]...not to trust anyone [pause]...yeah, except my family. And that's why my first instinct is to fight. Because that's what I did growing up ... And that's how the racism stopped growing up, 'cause then people would be like 'if you say something to this kid, he's gonna fight you'.

Tessa: Yeah?

Maror: Yeah...It happened to my older sister as well, 'cause my older sister was the only black kid, we were basically the only black family at that school until my cousins started coming.

Dominant discourses of race work to construct certain children and young people as inherently violent, whilst failing to recognise the routine violences with which they live and in which physical violence can feel like their only available resource. Like Maror, Tyson too reflected upon using physical violence when experiencing racism, commenting that he doesn't "know what else to do" but to respond to racial violence with physical violence. Angela also considered this dynamic:

Angela: I had a few Aboriginal friends and stuff, even they'd get picked on. But they knew how to, like, stand their ground and not take shit. But that's where I fucked up and that's...yeah.

Tessa: So, you think that you fucked up by not knowing how to stand up for yourself or...?

Angela: That and because, like, the only resolution I found was just hitting them. Because otherwise they don't stop it and sometimes people, I feel, do need to get hit to stop — like, yeah, it was crazy.

Tessa: It's an impossible situation that you're in as a kid. There's no right way to do this.

Angela: It's a big responsibility to be on me though.

Both Maror and Angela reported seeking support to address racism through formal, 'appropriate', channels, without success, before concluding that responding to this violence with physical violence was one of the only mechanisms available to them. As Majavu (2018, p. 192) asserts, in colonial Australia, "everyday racism is both everywhere and nowhere, consisting largely of silences and the careful failure to notice social interactions that are shaped by the logic of whiteness". The discourses of race that dominate in the colonial context of Australia constitute race as a biological

truth that hierarchises and essentialises, whilst simultaneously invisibilising the violences it licenses. In this context, racialised bodies are rendered both hyper-visible and inherently problematic and young people like Maror and Angela are exposed to both the direct violences of their peers and the discursive and epistemic violences of a schooling system that both produces, and refuses to acknowledge, this violence. In Maror's case, these systems added insult to injury by blaming him, through expulsion, for his reaction to the injustice of racial violence. Dominant discourses of race, here, exercise violence by silencing racialised young people, whilst simultaneously sending messaging that they are other, that it is *them* that there is something wrong with. Davis and Ernst (2020, p. 761) argue that racial gaslighting — “the political, social, economic and cultural process that perpetuates and normalizes a white supremacist reality through pathologizing those who resist” — remains a key mechanism through which contemporary discourses of race are exercised. Dominant discourses of race, thus, are highly influential in shaping how we make sense of, and seek to contain and control, the pain and anger expressed by racialised people (Brown 2018).

Maror's story demonstrates that despite being a deeply loving and committed older brother, an adoring son to his mother and a child as human as any, the cultural “script of black masculinity”, that is “the gendered code ascribed to black boys and men” (Motimele 2021, p. 61), has shaped “the subtle ways that [his] blackness is read” (Brown 2018, p. 56). For Maror, this meant being both subjected to physical violence (from his peers, his neighbour, strangers driving their cars), and epistemological violence when, in retaliating, he is constructed, as violent. As Brown (2018, p. 52) argues, many contemporary practices of racial violence are informed by enduring racial discourses that have, across time, “consistently rendered black males as feared and dangerous” (Brown 2018; Mills 1997; Motimele 2021). Research by Todd et al. (2016) suggests that these constructions are imposed upon black boys as young as five. The “regimes of power and truth” enabled by such discourses of race work to constrain the wholeness of black personhood, leading those in colonial settings to inherit a “distorted sense” of black boyhood and masculinity (Motimele 2021, p. 64). These limiting constructions, Motimele (2021) argues, are not only fed to those occupying white subjectivities, but also to those occupying racialised positions who must begin to wrestle with these harmful constructions from early childhood. For example, in a later interview when talking about the various mental health services he has been provided with, Maror provided insights into the ‘damage-centred’ self-narrative that he carries: “I am damaged. I don't know how you can fix damage that's already done”.

In the following, Jax, a descendent of the Stolen Generations, also demonstrates how dominant discourses of race, and constructions of Aboriginality as inherently violent, have shaped the frameworks available to them for understanding their subjectivity and that of their family. Like Maror, 'being damaged' is part of Jax's narrative:

Jax: That's just the way my family is, they're really prone to violence. That's what everyone says about the [LAST NAME], that we're prone to violence. That we're born that way, from the get-go. That we come out of our mums throwing hands.

Tessa: Do you believe that?

Jax: Like, yeah, we, bro, we don't even need trauma to be the way we are. We just come out that way.

Dominant discourses of race and Aboriginality have fed Jax an understanding of themselves and their family as violent, such that they attribute this violence to some inherent biological deficit, obscuring the relentless, intergenerational, colonial violence Jax's family has survived. This leaves Jax contemplating the inevitability of their own violence, fearful that they will turn out to be "a bad person". Here we can see how dominant discourses of race are violent both in the ways that they obscure violences of a systemic, structural and discursive nature, and feed racialised young people distorted, damaged-centred self-narratives. However, through a post-structural lens, subjectivities are never fixed, always nuanced and are often a site of struggle and in our time together young people like Jax, Gus, Maror and Angela also offered insights into the counter narratives — of resistance, of pride, of strength and of a sense of collectivism "where one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self" (Moreton-Robinson 2013, p. 341) — that they have been able to access that can help mitigate some of the racial violence they have experienced and continue to experience in the colonial context.

5.3.2 Subjectification effects: Lateral violence

While most of the stories of racial violence provided by participants reflected the violence enacted by white Australia and its colonial systems, dominant discourses of race, as demonstrated in the previous section, can also be violent in their subjectification effects — in the ways that they interact with racialised peoples sense of themselves and of others these discourses construct as like them. This subjectification can, at times, see the harmful power dynamics of broader society perpetuated horizontally, within one's own community or towards other racialised groups/people (Whyman et al. 2023). For Jax, experiences of racial lateral violence, exercised through colonial, Enlightenment based constructions of authentic Aboriginality and racial essentialism, have been particularly painful and disorienting. This phenomenon can be seen playing out in a number of

Jax's narrations related to their experiences of growing up in a large, Aboriginal family, with comparatively fair skin — their experiences “of not being black *enough*”. Jax described having their Aboriginality questioned repeatedly throughout their life, reflecting that they “absolutely love, being an Aboriginal person, but hate being a white-black one”. This messaging has led Jax to internalise the idea that their “ancestors wouldn't consider” them “Aboriginal because of” their “skin” — a belief they were fed by a beloved great-great-grandfather when Jax visited him in hospital before he passed away. Whilst at the hospital, Jax and their cousins painted themselves up “traditional way” and this dying family member questioned Jax's right to claim ‘authentic’ or ‘pure’ Aboriginality:

Jax: He was like 'Oh, you look beautiful like that, my daughter¹⁸, you really do'. And that's when I was like 'Oh, true? Yeah, I feel like a real beautiful, proud black woman right now' and that's when he was like 'Yeah, even though the ancestors might not see you as black, I see you as a beautiful black woman' and I was like 'What do you mean my ancestors don't see me as black?' and he said, 'Oh', you know the way he put it wasn't really the nicest, he said 'You're breaded out'. And I was like 'I'm breaded out? What does, what does that mean?' He goes, 'You know, you real proud to be all these other cultures and I think that's good, that's good my baby. Don't, don't not be proud. You know, with your Maori, your Gunthi, your Greek and all that, be proud ... But you're breaded out'. And I, I felt like punching him and I was like, 'WHAT DO YOU MEAN I'M BREADED OUT?' and he was like 'You're not full Aboriginal'. And I was like, 'Oh, but I am because of my mum and my dad. My mum is literally a full Aboriginal and so is my dad. And last time I checked, that doesn't mean I've got an ounce of white in me' ... And that's when he goes, 'No', and I felt so upset when he said this. He was like, 'No, you're not full Aboriginal ... If you were full Aboriginal you wouldn't have that Maori and Gunthy and Greek in you, when people ask you what you are you say just Aboriginal'. And that's when I was like 'But that's, that's mostly my heritage'. I was like, 'Literally, if I'm gonna go get go to get a blood test, it's gonna say I'm mostly Aboriginal. I bet my Greek and all that stuff isn't even like a lot. It's probably like a few percent, because I'm mostly black'. And that's when he was like, 'Yeah, and your skin too miss'. And he's real dark, like real dark, and he goes 'You know, your skin miss, it's not like mine' and I was like 'Yeah, I know it's not like yours uncle ... You know how upsetting it is!'

The above excerpt highlights the complex ways that dominant discourses, in this case the discourses of racial essentialism which assert that race is a biological truth — a discourse that has been used to classify and segregate First Nations peoples since the first waves of Australian colonialism — interact with subjectivities and are either/both internalised and/or resisted. A post-structural lens argues that all of us are shaped by, and wrestle with, an entanglement of complex and often competing discourses. For Jax, and Jax's great-great-grandfather, we can see how this

¹⁸ Female pronouns are being used when referring to Jax as a child as, for Jax, this experience of being gendered female for the majority of their life is significant and is something they want reflected. I recognise, however, that this dynamic is not true for all non-binary people and that mis-gendering of transgender and non-binary young people in historic accounts can be a violent practice.

entanglement can enable them to both resist dominant damage-centred constructions of Aboriginality, evident in their clear sense of pride in their cultural identity, and engage with essentialising, colonially imposed constructions that render invisible the diversity of Aboriginality. As Whyman et al. (2023, p. 185) explain, the dominant discourses of race available in colonial Australia have been shaped by “the settler colonialists” who “had (and continue to have) the power to define Aboriginality, and determine who constitutes as ‘Aboriginal’”. These constructions, Whyman et al. (2023, p. 185) assert, “are based on the pre-colonial view of Aboriginal people as dark-skinned, traditionally oriented, and internally homogenous”. As Jax once reflected, “real black Aboriginals get racism out there, and whiter ones like me get it in here [community]. Either way, we [Aboriginal people] all get it”.

Jax’s account illustrates how dominant, colonial discourses can be internalised and perpetuated by people occupying racialised subject positions (Whyman et al. 2023), thus shaping the subjectivities available to young people like Jax, who, as a descendent of the Stolen Generations, now feels compelled to constantly re/assert their Aboriginality, whilst also navigating the internalised shame and guilt of disconnection from specific cultural knowledge and practices. A violence regimes approach, here, helps us to understand that racism isn’t merely a structure imposed *onto*, it is also discursive and interacts *within* us and shapes our subjectivities in complex, nuanced and contradictory ways.

5.3.3 My whiteness

The participants whose narrations are explored above appeared hungry for a space to share their experiences of racialisation and racism; for some this was accompanied by a sense of catharsis (Maror: “It’s better for white people to know what we go through”; Angela: “It feels good to let it all out”), while, for others, this was a difficult and draining task. I have little doubt that my whiteness, and the carceral context in which some of these interviews occurred, exacerbated this sense of difficulty and fear. After several of the initial interviews, I reflected on the processes of vetting I believed I was observing whereby some young people occupying racialised subjectivities appeared to be scoping me out before touching on the topic of racism. Participants like Gus and Tyson, for example, gently pointed towards the idea, appearing to gauge my reaction before eventually deciding to talk about racism, but not without a degree of caution. For Gus, who appeared to speak openly and freely on all other topics, the discussion of racism seemed to be particularly difficult:

Tessa: Which card do you want to talk about next?
 Gus: Racism, yeah.
 Tessa: Have you experienced racism throughout your life?
 Gus: Oh, yeah!
 Tessa: Yeah? By people you went to school with, by cops, by workers, who?
 Gus: Cops, people I went to school with when I was younger...
 Tessa: Do you remember the first time you experienced racism?
 Gus: Umm...[long pause], yeah [looks me up and down].
 Tessa: Is it something you can talk about?
 Gus: [silence].
 Tessa: I imagine that's probably a pretty painful thing to think about...
 Gus: Yeah, I dunno [looking at ground, avoiding eye contact].
 Tessa: If you don't want to talk about it, we can skip this one.
 Gus: Yeah, I'm not really sure. It's tough. Yeah...I don't know how to explain it, but yeah, it's, it's a hard topic.
 Tessa: Maybe we don't, I mean, that's a really difficult thing to talk about, I think, particularly sitting across from a white lady...
 Gus: Haha, yeah.
 Tessa: It's maybe not the easiest space to talk about racism.
 Gus: Haha, yeah.

Here, in response to my suggestion, Gus seems to indicate that my whiteness, a subjectivity that has fundamentally shaped my social position and the ways of understanding most accessible to me, inhibits his ability to access the level of safety necessary to share painful stories of racism. In so doing, Gus points towards the epistemic violences produced by dominant discourses of race that have, so routinely since invasion, denied, silenced and gaslighted First Nation's voices. It is a violence that, as Eddo-Lodge (2018, p. 9) articulates, is exercised through the "emotional disconnect", "the bewilderment", "the defensiveness" or the "indignation" that often characterise white responses to racialised people articulating their experiences of racism. It is a violence that silences, that compromises safety and that requires racialised people "to prioritise white feelings", even in the sharing of their hurt (Eddo-Lodge 2018, p. 9). It is a violence that sees young people like Gus censoring themselves in the presence of people like me, in order to protect themselves from being silenced, denied or portrayed as the problem.

On another occasion, Tyson (a participant), appeared to allude to racism in our conversation of the 'things that don't feel fair' card. Whilst discussing this card, Tyson's body language visibly changed, I noticed him push away from the table, look me up and down, begin fidgeting before proceeding to say, "We don't really get treated right". I responded by saying "Mm, do you mean you personally or...?". Tyson paused, "Nah, I don't know" he said whilst he looked me up and down and tapped the table rapidly with his hand. Recognising his discomfort, I suggested that we could revisit this at another time, and asked what he would like to talk about next. Tyson did not

respond verbally, but moved his hand to hover over the 'Racism' card and the conversation unfolded as follows:

Tessa: I see you looking at the card here about racism, is that something you feel you want to talk about?

Tyson: Like what?

Tessa: Do you think that racism exists in this world? In Australia?

Tyson: Like racists?

Tessa: Yeah, racist people?

Tyson: Yes. Course it does.

Tessa: Yeah? Is that what you were kind of talking about when you were talking about being treated differently? Or were you talking about something else?

Tyson: Yeah [again, begins fidgeting with hands, banging lightly on table, looks me up and down]. Most, most of the kids that I know, say they'll buy something and then some people, you know, because they see you with something good, they don't like it — so they always think that you steal, and like ring the cops on you.

Tessa: Yeah, mm, and so do you think that that happens because of racism? Like that for Aboriginal people, that would happen more? Is that kind of what you're getting at?

Tyson: Yeah. Some, some people are good, but some people just think they're better than others. Yeah.

Due to the litany of violences waged by whiteness, I recognise the importance of the interview prompt cards in these encounters with young people. The racism card, for example, was an explicit sign, that I (an Irish settler) was open to, even welcomed, these conversations. However, I am equally sure that, given the violence inherent in my whiteness, there are many things that I wasn't told, being open to a conversation is not synonymous with safety. I include these reflections not as a pat on the back to myself, nor to demonstrate that I got it right or that I am "one of the good ones" (Whittaker 2020, p. 50). The harms produced by dominant discourses of race are far more complex than good or ill intent. Instead, I seek to acknowledge that, despite my attempts to democratise the research process, the dominance of Enlightenment ideals of reason, logic, objectivity and empiricism that are embedded in colonial thinking, and the power dynamics produced by dominant discourses of race, produce silencing practices (Deckert 2016). Some scholars refer to this as epistemic violence (Dotson 2011). As Gabriel (1998, p. 13) argues:

The power of whiteness lies in a set of discursive techniques, including exnomination, that is the power not to be named; naturalization, through which whiteness establishes itself as the norm by defining 'others' and not itself; and universalization, where whiteness alone can make sense of a problem and its understanding becomes the understanding.

These stories elucidate just some of the violences (Hearn et al. 2022a) produced by dominant discourses of race in colonial Australia — violences which have influenced the unfolding of all of our lives. For the racialised participants in this study, these violences have shaped their sense of

self and their place within the world in significant, and harmful, ways. Dominant discourses of race produced physical, epistemic, systemic and discursive violence in the lives of young people and placed them both in danger and constructed them as the danger. Through the dominance of individualised, empiricist approaches to understanding both violence and crime, criminological research and the carceral logic largely ignores the violences that are exercised by, and through, discourses of race, and in doing so, perpetuate epistemic violence (Hearn et al. 2022a).

5.4 The violence of dominant discourses of class and poverty

The experience of financial and material deprivation, produced by dominant discourses of class and poverty, was a significant theme for participants in this study. Twelve of the 17¹⁹ participants I engaged with offered stories illuminating the violences produced by discourses and practices of class — violences which have become deeply embedded within the fabric of the neoliberal, colonial society (Hearn et al. 2022a). Each of these young people, for example, narrated experiences of homelessness — a violence Hamann (2009, p. 46) describes as subjecting people “to the harshest and cruellest effects” of neoliberal governance. Neoliberalism, as both a discourse and an economic framework, produces political, discursive and epistemic practices that exacerbate wealth and social inequalities (Lynch 2020) and produces a particular discursive ecosystem in which experiences like homelessness, hunger and poverty are understood and responded to (Hearn et al. 2022a).

In reflecting on his experiences of “begging up”, Benji, for example, illustrated some of the ways that neoliberal discourses of class produce violences and interact with the subjectivities of those experiencing homelessness and hunger — etching profound wounds into their bodies, psyches and sense-of-self. Benji reflected, “I remember every day in the last like 18 months, every time I sat there with an empty stomach and all I could do was cry. I remember, you know, even though I was shameful about it, I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to ever beg up again, but I had to”. He continued:

I remember ... I just had my 270s [shoes] stolen off my feet [tears up] ... The only shoes I owned ... and I remember writing on a piece of paper 'Can someone please buy me a feed? I don't want your change. I just need someone to buy me a feed' and I kept asking people, you know, and everyone said, 'no', 'no'... I just felt so invisible, so worthless.

¹⁹ Jordan, Jax, Bobby, Tyson, Angela, Trey, Kayla, Benji, Matt, Rose, Gus and Shyanne.

The existence of poverty, homelessness and hunger, in a country as wealthy as Australia, is both a political choice and a manifestation of the violence inherent in neoliberalism — an economic, social and discursive practice that sees the hoarding of wealth and the entrenchment of disparity as a natural and acceptable symptom of market-based governance, thus producing “a society whose guiding light is profit” (Rodríguez et al. 2014, p. 361). In such a discursive context, marginalisation is framed as an individual failure and social inequity is “rendered invisible” (Hamann 2009, p. 43). For Benji, these discourses have interacted with his subjectivity, his sense-of-self, in ways that produce self-judgement, “shame, stigma, [and] humiliation” (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer 2017, p. 57). Neoliberal discourses of class and poverty act as a normalising force asserting that inequality is both inevitable and the result of individual deficit or failure and, thus, produce socially embedded violences (Hearn et al. 2022a). It is these discourses that produce both Benji’s sense of shame for “begging up” and the indifference that enables so many of us to walk past such an overt display of inequity and human suffering. It is a violence that sees Benji feeling as though self-immolation might be the only way to both express the extent of his pain and to be seen. He reflected:

As crazy as it sounds, sometimes the thought comes into my brain, this is going to sound out there, but some days I just want to pour gasoline all over me and get a lighter and maybe people would see the pain that I feel. ‘Can you see? I’m hurting. This is my pain’.

For Benji, the existing social order sees him living in a violent reality he experiences as “hell”, in which stability, safety and happiness exist only in his daydreams. “Sometimes” he commented, “I daydream, and my day would be going so fucking well and then I come back to it [reality], and I realise, ‘Fuck, I’m in hell’ [voice shakes, tears in eyes]”. For Benji, these daydreams often revolve around “coming into money, good ways” or doing “something good with my life”: then “I wake up and realise none of it, none of it fucking happened, and I’m just still in hell. Just still homeless. Still an addict. Still got no money. Still alone”. In these daydreams, Benji considers, he can touch “happiness” he’ll “never have” in the real — neoliberal — world. In a society marked so profoundly by inequality, the hunger, the illness and the rough-sleeping related criminalisation experienced by Benji, and other participants, can be seen as direct or material forms of violence (Hearn et al. 2022a). In their positioning of people as responsible for, or inviting, their own suffering, dominant neoliberal discourses of class and poverty further entrench these violences.

As Hamann (2009, p. 45) explained, “the neoliberal approach to dealing with growing poverty, unemployment, and homelessness is not simply to ignore it, but to impose punitive judgments

through the moralizing effects of its political rationality". These judgements have become deeply embedded within the fabric of the neoliberal society, instilled in us implicitly through our social norms and education systems, and explicitly, for example, through the criminalisation of survival offending and the rise in mutual obligation and work for the dole programs: programs informed by former Prime Minister Tony Abbotts assertions that "we can't abolish poverty because poverty in part is a function of individual behaviour" and that we must replace the "welfare culture" with a culture of "self-reliance" in which "people on benefits are prepared to pull their weight" rather than choosing to be "idle at taxpayer expense" (Ayer 2004, p. 1).

Neoliberalism, and dominant discourses of class and poverty, are exercised through multiple modes of governmentality — modes which seek to govern citizens at the societal level, through the micro-practices of the everyday and through "the work that individuals perform upon themselves in order to become certain kinds of subjects" (Hamann 2009, p. 50). Neoliberal governmentality, thus, acts not just through coercion and paternalism, but also through processes of subjectivation that encourage subjects to self-govern in alignment with prevailing norms — norms that produce self-regulating, politically docile and self-blaming citizens. These neoliberal discourses, which frame poverty and marginalisation as the result of individual deficit, or a life mismanaged (Hamann 2009), shape, in significant ways, the subjectivities available to excluded, marginalised young people like Benji whose self-narrative, has become infused with neoliberal ideas of individual responsibility and of 'normality'. He commented:

When you're in the park at 3.00am, you're on your own again and you're like 'You're a fucking failure, you're fucking failing at life Benji'. I don't want to be a fucking failure anymore. I just want to be fucking normal. What's wrong with me? Why can't I just be normal like you?

In response, having known Benji for almost ten years, since he was 15 years old, I attempted to contextualise his position based upon the systemic, structural and discursive injustices I had seen him endure. However, for Benji these dominant discourses held strong, and he was unable to move past a position of self-blame which saw him continue to assert "but I still made these choices". There is a violence, we can see, in the act of begging — begging to be seen, heard, fed and housed in a society as plentiful as ours. There is an even deeper violence in being made to believe that the experiences of poverty, hunger and homelessness that Benji has navigated since he was 15 are, somehow, his own fault.

The inequalities inherent in the neoliberal, capitalist society saw many of the participants in this project growing up in resource deprived families and communities. Quite predictably, material deprivation, and the constraints this places on the choices, opportunities and modes of existence available, saw some²⁰ participants adopt behaviours of resistance and/or survival that, within the carceral society, have been constructed as criminal. For Bobby, “the violence inherent in” the neoliberal “social order” (Eckermann 1998, p. 304) influenced his pathway into drug-running and debt collecting — as a means to acquire food, shelter and money — at around age 16 after he and his mother fled domestic violence. During this time, Bobby found himself homeless and fending for himself in contexts that exposed him to many subsequent violences. He discussed the stress of this time: “The stress of being able to survive knowing that I've got nothing, I've gotta go out and fend for it”. Bobby reported navigating this journey, through adolescence, family violence and homelessness, without any formal support, a dynamic possibly shaped by the erosion of welfare services that, since the 1980s, various waves of neoliberalism have produced (Haly 2010). Bobby admitted that this role as drug debt collector was often deeply distressing and frightening — a ruthless world to be a child in — yet it was one of the few ways he could meet his base level needs. Without it, he noted, “To be honest, I probably wouldn't have survived as easy. I probably would have been a lot different to what I am now”. I enquired what he meant by this, in what ways might he be different? He paused, then responded “I'd probably be less...fucked? But, like, I have no idea [how I would've survived]”.

Here we can see how, in engaging with the lives of criminalised young people, the lens we bring shapes, in powerful ways, what we pay attention to. In narrating his experiences as a drug-debt collector, Bobby talks about his use of violence as it is understood normatively, as an intentional and physical act. By adopting a violence regimes lens (Hearn et al. 2022a), however, we can understand these physical violences as occurring in a broader context of violence and inequality — violences that saw a traumatised, 16-year-old child, in a country as wealthy as Australia, feeling as though he needed to “fend for it” by himself. An emphasis on the violences produced by neoliberal discourses of class and poverty enables us to orient towards an exploration of “the social machinery of exploitation and oppression” (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer 2017, p. 48) Bobby was subjected to, and “the ways in which the epic poverty and inequality” produced by neoliberalism can “become embodied and experienced as violence” (Farmer 2010, p. 293). Further, it enables a focus shift, away from questions of *who* is a risky subject (i.e. Bobby), and onto an exploration of

²⁰ Jax, Benji, Bobby, Tyson, Jordan, Trey, Gus and Kayla.

the forces that place people “at risk of risks” (Link & Phelan 1995, p. 80) and the mechanisms of power that produce and sustain these (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer 2017).

Rose, Kayla and Kyle all reflected upon a paradox whereby, despite its deprivations and harms, the violent practices produced within the child/youth prison can, at times, be perceived as less harmful than the neoliberal violences they are exposed to in the outside world. According to Kayla, the outside world “is just a *really* fucking hard place”. I make this point not to comment on or debate the merits of incarceration and our formal carceral system and, generally speaking, within this study and the broader literature recognising this phenomenon (Ashkar & Kenny 2008; Australian Human Rights Commission 2020; 2015; Halsey & Deegan 2015; Paton, Crouch & Camic 2009; Training Centre Visitor 2020), youth imprisonment is understood to be an overwhelmingly adverse and damaging experience. Rather, I draw from these young people’s narratives as they provide a clear demonstration of the violences produced in a neoliberal society which in its obsession with the market, individual agency and personal responsibility, produces economic and social inequality, repackages this inequality as individual failure, invests minimally in welfare and social services, and proceeds to punish, (as will be unpacked in Chapter Seven), those who have been relegated by its manifestations. That young people across so many studies recognise the harms of incarceration, yet still experience it — in some perverse way — as better than the alternative, should point to the profound need for us, as a society, to disentangle ourselves from the violences of neoliberalism and the class structures it produces.

5.5 The violence of dominant discourses of gender

Alongside the violences produced by dominant discourses of race and class, the violences produced by dominant discourses of gender also emerged as a significant theme — with seven²¹ participants sharing narratives concerning the influence of gender constructs on their subjectivities. In engaging with the work of gender and masculinities scholars, I have pored over these narratives with a view to interrogating the work of gender (Shepherd 2019), what gender ‘does’ (Zalewski 2019), the ways in which it regulates “the boundaries of acceptable identity” (Blackbeard & Lindegger 2007, p. 30), “has infused our very ways of thinking” (Wibben 2010, p. 17) and can be experienced as a form of violence in and of itself (Hearn et al. 2022b). In interrogating the ways in which participants sought to make sense of, enact, perform, control, and understand

²¹ Bobby, Benji, Jax, Maror, Matt, Angela and Dev.

gender, it became clear to me, as Sjöberg (2014, p. 532) asserts, that dominant discourses of gender are “always and everywhere violent, and violence is always and everywhere gendered”.

Whilst it is not within the scope of this project to trace the history of gender theory, this research adopts an understanding of gender as “a messy entanglement of things, ideas, behaviours and identities” (Zalewski 2019, p. 19). Thus, gender is understood as a construct that is fluid and impossible to tie down, yet shapes our realities, experiences and subjectivities in tangible, and as will be argued, often violent, ways (Hearn et al. 2022b). Aligned with the work of Butler (1990), within this project, gender is understood not as a “stable identity” but rather as a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1990, p. 519), a social construction fed to us by discourses that are performed, repeatedly, through “culturally prescribed practices” (De Boise 2016, p. 49). To elucidate how dominant discourses of gender — alongside discourses of race and class — produce violence in both the lives of the research participants, and society more broadly, the following themes are explored: gender, subjectification and emotion; peer group masculinity and physical violence; living masculinity; and the violence of the gender binary.

5.5.1 Gender, subjectification and emotion

In her seminal work, Connell (1995, pp. 186-7) traces constructions of masculinity as rational and unemotional to Enlightenment era philosophies which, she asserts “...constructed reason and science through oppositions with the natural world and with emotions” with masculinity defined “by rationality”. It is here, as De Boise (2016, p. 50) explains, that we see the beginning of “the Cartesian split” — the discursive “separation of mind and body” into separate entities, connecting the mind with logic, rationality and masculinity and the body with emotionality and femininity. Such binary thinking perpetuated and embedded gendered stereotypes within society, constructing males as rational beings equipped to lead and manage society and women as emotional and thus compatible only with domesticity. Such constructs shaped cultural norms around gender and emotion — requiring men to personify rationality and suppress emotions, such as fear or sadness, constructed as weak or feminine. As De Boise (2016, p. 59) offers “rationality was a colonial, patriarchal discursive construction which often positioned white, heterosexual, middle-class, Western European men in relation to ‘others’” and, therefore, even hegemonic constructions of masculinity, i.e., that of the unemotional man, are not singular or experienced equally. Engagements with discourses of masculinity are also intersectional and shaped by the subject positions we occupy (De Boise 2016).

The myth of male invulnerability and the denial of certain emotions produced by this construction of masculinity, however, continues to shape the subjectivities on offer to boys and men today. For example, despite experiencing danger, violence, and hurt, often of an extreme and persistent nature, all male identifying participants placed the interview prompt cards relating to the emotions of fear and sadness into the ‘no’ pile. Discussions regarding these emotions were avoided and sometimes actively detested. For example, when asking Matt whether he would like to talk about the ‘what makes you feel scared’ card, he replied “No. Nah. I never feel scared. I am never scared”. In contrast to emotions characterised through discourses of masculinity as feminine, most male participants placed the card relating to the emotion of anger, a more apparently ‘masculine’ emotion (Butler 2011), into the yes or maybe piles. The influence of discourses of masculinity on the emotional landscapes available to young boys is reflected by Maror who, in explaining his placement of these cards, stated that he finds it much easier to talk about anger than about sadness.

In addition to the avoidance of conversations about certain emotions, on numerous occasions throughout this research I noticed gendered dynamics around the deployment of bodily positioning. In our time together, Matt provided one, seemingly harmless, example of the performativity and subjectification effects of gender (Butler 1990, p. 519) when he demonstrated for me how one can “walk staunch” in order “to make people scared of you, if they’re gonna come at ya”. In doing so, he demonstrates an embodiment of the phenomenon of men learning to act like ‘men’, to walk like ‘men’. The pervasiveness of gendered messaging, Cassino (2020) asserts, results in a process of subjectification that see behaviours, like gendered styles of walking, sitting and being, becoming culturally reproduced, normative, performed and accepted as natural demonstrations of masculinity — thus shaping the subjectivities and modes of behaviour available to all who interact with such discourses.

When talking about particularly hurtful or traumatic experiences I noticed a number of the male identifying participants shift their sitting position to ones that took up more space and felt, to me, to be more assertive — non-verbal messaging I experienced as creating a level of distance from the highly gendered subject positions of vulnerability and victimisation. On a number of occasions, whilst transcribing interviews I was struck by how differently I experienced the content. When not so focussed on my role as interviewer, I was able to hear nuances — like the quivering of a voice, the swallowing down of emotion, the rawness and vulnerability — that conflicted with the, to use Matt’s words, “staunch” body positionings I saw being deployed whilst interviewing. On a number

of occasions, I found myself weeping, partly at the content of a story, as many of these were truly devastating, but also at the ways in which I could hear these boys suffocating the human emotions that often accompany experiences of grief, trauma and distress. This societally imposed self-censoring struck me as a particularly injurious kind of violence. It was in these moments that the words of Durie-Smith (2019, p. 80), who argues that gender should be understood “not only as a cause of violence but also as a subject of it”, felt particularly palpable. Gender, we can see, “continues to perform and induce powerful effects many, even all, of which might be regarded as violent” (Zalewski 2019, p. 13).

In the storying of their lives, Bobby and Benji, both survivors of family and domestic violence, provided insights into the ways that they have been influenced by dominant discourses of masculinity, how they have engaged with the subjectivities on offer and worked to both resist and enact the association of masculinity with physical strength, violence and a lack of emotion. For Benji and Bobby, this masculinist discourse has been, and remains, pervasive and continues to powerfully shape their subjectivities — including their understanding of certain emotions and behaviours as inherently feminine and, therefore, weak. Linking their childhood experiences of domestic and family violence to their continuing struggles with emotional vulnerability and expression, both recall, for example, being shamed for crying:

Benji: I remember him [violent step-father] taunting me, like ‘Oh, you’ve finally grown a pair? Not gonna be a little bitch anymore? Are you gonna cry?’. And I’ve still got that little boy inside of me that feels like I need to prove that I’m not weak ... Now I just hate crying. I feel so weak.

Bobby: I remember dad sitting there and going, ‘What? You’re gonna cry now? You’re gonna cry now? You little fucking sook! What are you going to be a little bitch?’ ... That explains like, why I don’t want to cry all the time, why I always just do it by myself, don’t do it around anyone. I’ll kinda either cry when I’m in the shower, so that way no one can tell, or if I’m crying, and I can hear someone walking towards my room, I can go from looking like I’m a wreck to looking like I’m fine in two seconds.

These boys, we can see, have grown up in environments in which emotions are seen as inherently ‘feminine’ and, in turn, inferior and shameful (De Boise 2016, p. 46) — discursive environments that reflect, but also magnify, dominant societal discourses of gender. Constructs of masculinity, in this context, exercise violence against the bodies and subjectivities of these boys and young men through, for example, the expectation that they endure, and stand up to, physical violence without showing the very human emotions of fear and vulnerability, lest they be shamed for failing the gendered expectations imposed upon them. However, as Hearn (1993, cited in De Boise 2016)

explains, “what is remarkable is not so much that men cry, but that this crying itself is seen as remarkable”.

5.5.2 Peer group masculinity and violence

The constructions of masculinity modelled to Bobby by his violent father were reaffirmed, embodied, and enshrined in a peer group who, during social gatherings, would routinely “throw the gloves on” and “fight” each other to demonstrate who was the toughest, often to the extent of seriously hurting each other. In telling me about this, I could see Bobby wrestling with competing ideas around masculinity as he both critiqued such displays of violence, whilst simultaneously drawing on these discourses to assert his own masculine status. For example, on the one hand Bobby referred to the use of physical violence among peers as “dickhead-like” and “immature”, explaining that his friends would “be like, 'Oh, we're sick cunts, we can fight, we're a tough cunt' and it's like, you don't need to be like that”, whilst simultaneously stating, with a sense of pride, “I remember no one ever offering to throw the gloves on with me”. Bobby outlined one occasion where a friend had angered him, yet — despite the usual process of settling disputes — this friend refused to “throw the gloves on” and “settle it like men”. Even years down the track, in sharing this story I sensed some degree of pride within Bobby — pride in being perceived as tough and able to “flog” someone, even if this someone was his friend. Bobby went on to explain that, whilst refusing to fight Bobby (to which he responded “Cunt, you know you’re going to get flogged”), Joey, the transgressor/friend, later agreed to fight Jack — another member of the group who had offered his body up on Bobby’s behalf. Bobby elaborated:

He wouldn't with me but then a few minutes later, Jack remembered that I was trying to get the gloves on with Joey and he's like, 'Wait a second, weren't you trying to get the gloves on with Joey?' and I'm like 'Yeah' and he goes 'Alright, watch this'. I'm like, 'Alright, fucking here we go'. Jack goes, 'Come on Joey, let's go put the gloves on' and he's [Joey] like 'Yeah, let's do it' and going 'Oh fuck, Jack's gonna obliterate this cunt for me'.

Bobby reflected on the fact that often in these scenarios friends would seriously injure each other, and this situation was no exception. Whilst Joey was on the ground, his nose “pissing out with blood”, Bobby explained that he and his peers “were all filming” and yelling “Jack, just end it, just fucking do it”. Once the fight was finished, a winner and a loser declared, Bobby recalled that a now seriously injured Joey “jumped up and he’s like, ‘Oh, look. I’m a fucking sick cunt. I handled it like a man’”. Bobby and his friends, however, were quick to shut this down — responding by proposing that if Jack was a real man, he would now “put the gloves on with” Bobby. Jack again

declined to fight Bobby — a response that saw Bobby and his peers taunt “You’re not a man then, stop saying you’re a man”.

As demonstrated here, dominant discourses of masculinity are often performed for and with other men (DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2013) — performances that can produce, normalise and encourage violence as a means of gaining respect from and hierarchising peers, whilst simultaneously policing and punishing demonstrations of physical weakness or vulnerability as un-masculine. In my conversation with Bobby, I inquired about this dynamic explicitly — asking whether, within this group, being a man was demonstrated through the showing of physical strength, being tough and not showing emotions. Bobby confirmed that “yeah” it was but “it was a stupid way of showing it”. Within this group, as within his childhood home, Bobby explained, anger was the most comfortable, male emotion:

Tessa: What would your friends do if they were feeling scared or upset or anything like that? Do you show it, or do you just push it down?

Bobby: Depends on if we're having a mental breakdown, we kind of just get angry, smash things and then start crying and then go back to the stage of anger again. And then we'll just keep going through those cycles of angry happy, angry, angry crying, angry, crying, angry.

Tessa: Did you feel like in that group anger was more acceptable? And more manly than ...?

Bobby: I feel more anger was down here and the testosterone was up here ha ha.

In this process of meaning making, we can see Bobby drawing on gendered discourses of men and masculinity, in which male violence is biologically predisposed and linked to biology — something “natural, justified and inevitable” (Duriesmith 2019, p. 81). Whilst it is widely recognised that perpetrators of physical violence are overwhelmingly male identifying (True 2012), there exists little evidence to suggest that this elevated use of violence is “dictated by ‘innate’ biological differences based on chromosomal structure” (De Boise 2016, p. 62). Despite this evidence, the normalising impacts of dominant discourses of masculinity powerfully shape the meaning making processes and modes of existence most available.

We can see here how dominant discourses of gender and masculinity shaped the “boundaries of acceptability” (Blackbeard & Lindegger 2007, p. 25) in Bobby’s friendship group, such that he and his peers felt compelled to endure violence and pain in order to prove their masculinity (Duriesmith 2019). As theorised by Blackbeard and Lindegger (2007, p. 25), we can see here how the male peer group can serve as a site in which “the construction of masculine ‘acceptability’ ... involved performative acts of displayed toughness” and invulnerability. The refusal to use

violence, or to use it inadequately, thus becomes demonstrative of femininity and weakness — behaviours that justify the waging of ‘insults’ such as “you’re not a real man” which, as Cassino (2020) reflects, is a slur that is both imbued with far more meaning than the counter insult of “not a real woman” and is reinforced and made dominant through male-to-male peer relations (DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2013). Through the above narrations, we can observe “the multiple and often contradictory ways in which masculinity both causes violence, and is itself an object of violence” (Duriesmith 2019, p. 86).

5.5.3 The violence of gender: Living masculinity

As identified earlier, hegemonic masculinities, while dominant, are not singular, fixed or experienced in the same way across class, culture, location etc. (De Boise 2016). For Maror, the Australian born young person of South Sudanese descent who made it explicit that, despite having anger issues, he would never use violence against a woman, ‘gender’ was the first card of choice. When I queried his choice, Maror confidently asserted that he “100% identifies as male” and articulated the ‘masculine’ values and behaviours that were, for him, most significant. Being a man was not associated with physical violence towards women for Maror, but, rather, with family responsibility or, in his terms, “morals” — “like looking after your family, providing, stuff like that” and “putting my family before myself”. Supporting the family materially was especially significant for Maror, as by the age of ten or 11, after his dad left, he was already providing financial support. Maror’s subjectivity, we can see, has been shaped and constrained by hegemonic constructions that associate masculinity with morality, protection and neoliberal framings of a ‘real man’ as the self-sufficient provider and breadwinner.

Inherent within these discourses of masculinity is a binary construction of gender, based upon the essentialist construction of gender as innate and sex as biological. As Shepherd (2008, p. 84) asserts, “what we expect of men and women in terms of their behaviours, violent and otherwise, is limited by the meaning(s) ascribed to male and female bodies”. In this context, as a young boy Maror felt compelled to prove his ‘manhood’ “in the face of economic and social disenfranchisement” (De Boise 2016, p. 53) and racial bullying towards his siblings. The violence of gender, here, is a violence that, in Maror’s words, “started my crime, yeah, 100%”. We can see how the categorisation and regulation of bodies based upon sex can produce and constrain the modes of existence, “the conditions of possibility and impossibility for gender intelligibility” (Chambers 2007, p. 663), available to us — both producing and reifying social norms, modes of behaviour and practices of regulation that have come to be seen as natural and inevitable (Lloyd

2013). Through this lens, enacting masculinity is simply an extension of the biological fact of maleness; all who desire the honour of the title must adhere to the uniformity, to the social order, it produces.

Like Maror, Bobby and Benji grew up in contexts where ideas of male responsibility had significant subjectifying effects. For Bobby, physical, verbal and psychological violence was an almost daily occurrence and from the age of six, he remembers grappling with conflicting ideas about himself — as both a child with limited power to influence the situation (“I wanted to get something and hurt Dad, but it's my dad — there's nothing I can do. If I get involved, I know that he's gonna turn on me”), and as a male who should be doing more to protect his family (“And I fucked up. I should have called the cops when I seen that”). The discourses of masculinity Bobby has been able to access — both as a young child and, now, as a young adult — are so contradictory, and ask so much of him, that they are impossible to enact. As De Boise (2016, p. 59) asserts, since the 18th century, talk of the crisis of masculinity reflects the complex and contradictory demands of masculinity that “no one man could hope to embody all the recommended qualities”.

Benji also grew up in a context of domestic and family violence and offered similar reflections on the conflicting discourses of masculinity and the violences these exposed him to:

Benji: And I hate abusers, you know. My stepdad, he ruined my life. I took so many beatings for my sisters and my mum. I remember my mum, when I was real, real young grabbing my face, like hugging it but also kinda choking me 'cause she was so upset and angry and staring into my eyes and saying “when you get older my boy, you're going to protect mum”. She'd be like “promise me, promise me”, like yelling “look after your sisters”, “you're going to protect your mum”, you know? “Protect your sisters”. And so, I did. I remember the first time, when I was finally big enough and I stepped up to the cunt and he's like “oh, you've finally grown a pair? Not gonna be a little bitch anymore?” And I've still got that little boy inside of me that feels like I need to prove something, to prove that I'm not a door mat. That I can't just be walked all over. Cause if I don't prove that, then people think I'm a little bitch and they take and take and take. But I hate abusers. The worst thing you could ever become is an abuser.

Here we can see how dominant discourses of gender see “boys position themselves and *are positioned*, often in contradictory ways, within a repertoire of masculinities made available” (Blackbeard & Lindegger 2007, p. 27, emphasis in original). As boys growing up in contexts of domestic violence, Benji and Bobby were fed conflicting, but highly interrelated, discourses of masculinity — as unemotional, unless this emotion is anger, and as both the violent aggressor and the violent protector — which they continue to wrestle with today. For example, in our time together Bobby recounted the role he was playing in supporting a female friend to navigate a

violent relationship. Through this storytelling, we can see him — both a survivor and historic user of domestic violence — wrestling with the limited discourses of masculinity available to him:

Bobby: And I was just like, 'Dude, it doesn't matter. Because I can tell you right now, she's a female. That is not a man act. That's a fucking dog act'. And he's just like, 'What?' And I'm like, 'Dude, I know this. I've been to jail for the exact same thing. I know this shit, trust me. You're lucky I'm trying to talk to you right now and he's just like, 'Yeah, I know'. And I'm like, 'Yeah, so you fucking should know'.

Tessa: I wonder how different that is for him hearing that message from you, who is someone who is kind of owning those behaviours but also saying they're not okay, than it would be say from someone like me. I wonder whether that may hit differently for him?

Bobby: I honestly don't know, I think it did but at the same time, like, I know what it's like in that situation. You don't think when you're angry, you just do. And at the same time, I wish when I was in that situation, someone would have said to me, 'If you don't pull your fucking head in, I'm gonna fucking kick your head in'.

In the above, Bobby draws from his own lived experience of using violence in a relationship as a platform from which to advocate a version of masculinity associated with non-violence (towards women). Here we can see the contradictory expectations produced by dominant discourses of masculinity that see Bobby detesting its manifestation in the context of domestic violence, yet drawing on similar constructions of masculinity — as violent protector — in order to do so. Further, in grappling with how things could have unfolded differently when he was, himself, engaging in domestic violence, Bobby continues to centre violence — someone threatening to “kick his head in” — as the only imaginable solution (Duriesmith 2019).

5.5.4 The violence of the gender binary

For Butler (1990, p. 116), “the category of sex imposes a duality and a uniformity on bodies”. It is a mode of categorization that, Buttler (1990, p. 116) asserts, is “a violent one, a forceful one”. For Jax, a non-binary young person, the categorising effects produced through the discursive constructs of gender and heteronormativity have shaped, in inescapable and violent ways, the subjectivities and modes of gender expression available to them. Chambers (2007, pp. 664-5) explains, heteronormativity “reveals institutional, cultural and legal norms that reify and entrench the normativity of heterosexuality” and the gender binary. In the narration below, Jax provides some small insight into the productive, normalising effects of discourses of heteronormativity which, for years, saw them attempting to mould themselves to fit dominant constructions of femininity and the gender they were assigned at birth:

Jax: [In relation to not presenting in alignment with their authentic gender identity] I could be on the verge of having anxiety attack because of that and the whole day will feel like I'm not breathing properly. It will feel like the air around me — I could be in the

most open space like a meadow, for goodness sakes, and it will feel so closed in, because doing that hurts me because I was doing it for so long, pretending to be straight, pretending to be a female, you know? Like, 'I was born female. I am a female. I'm gonna die female. I'm a female, female, female'. So, thinking about going back to that, oh, it's very scary. And it's just, I feel like with a lot of things in my life, with relationships, with my sexuality with, you know, my gender, a lot of it was always closed off into a box. And I feel like if I ever bend my will to how society wanted me to be, how my sister wants me to be or how my Nana ... I'm pretty much, bit by bit, putting myself back in that box and I don't want to go back there — that box should be burned and destroyed and spat on.

The word heteronormativity, as argued by Chambers (2007, p. 665), reflects the important distinction between “‘what the majority do/are’, on the one hand, and *normalisation*, on the other”. Thus, heteronormativity offers not merely a “bare description of fact (most people ‘are heterosexual’)” but rather “a political articulation of the *normativity* of heterosexuality”. Heteronormativity “serves to stress the politics of norms” (Chambers 2007, p. 665) and the practices of regulation and governance that such a discourse produces — practices that see Jax continuing to self-govern in alignment with dominant gendered norms:

Jax: Like that [socially transitioning/identifying openly as non-binary] would help me a lot, but I'm a female in everyone's eyes ... I think, in like all honesty, and I've been working up the courage to say this to myself for so long, I think that the only reason I say I don't know what I want is because of how shit scared I am of my family hating me for coming out as trans, or you know, maybe some of the people around me not, you know accepting that ... It's just so God-damn scary thinking about it. And that's probably why — that's not *probably* why, that *is* the reason why — I have not done anything. I present myself femininely only because I, I, I know that's what people want. So, yeah, thinking about it actually does make me really upset. It makes me a bit suicidal from time to time because it's just so bad.

Heteronormativity is a material-discursive construct that “is woven into the fabric of social life, pervasively and insidiously ordering everyday existence” (Jackson, S 2006, p. 108). It is not inherently ‘normal’, but has become ‘normalised’ and interacts with, shapes and constrains the modes of gender expressions available — not just to queer, trans and gender diverse people like Jax, but to us all. For Jax, the construction of gender as binary, heterosexuality as the norm and anything else as shameful and deviant was, and still is, pervasive — within the school environment, their peer groups, the media, their paternal family, and society at large. Had they not reunited with their mother, a proud lesbian, Jax reflects “I wouldn't even have a [sexuality/gender] journey at this point. I would have continued my life pretending I was straight, to fit in and feel less alienated”. For Jax, their journey has been shaped, hamstrung and constrained, by fear — fear of the violences of discourses of gender and heteronormativity. Over the course of the research journey, however, I witnessed Jax begin to resist these dominant

discourses and take steps to exist in the world in ways that more closely honoured their gender identity. To resist the normalising effects of heteronormativity is to risk a great deal, but as Jax articulates in reflecting on the pain and the fear associated with embarking on such a journey, there is also joy and freedom to be found:

Jax: For the first time, I am happy, so very happy with who I am, you know, might not actually know who I am, like, you know, Jackie, or Jackson, Jacqueline or whatever the hell, but I'm happy and freer than most.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate that the prevailing construction of violence and adversity in the lives of criminalised young people is not only narrow, but, in its individualising focus, is a violence in and of itself. My intent has been to highlight the ways in which dominant discourses both produce a violent society and reify certain understandings of violence, while silencing or obscuring others. I do so as, as Walby (2013, p. 95) articulates, “new ways of making violence visible unsettle old notions of the nature and direction of violence; challenging assumptions that the disadvantaged are more violent than the powerful; and that modernity is increasingly less violent”.

The carceral logic is a meaning making framework deeply intertwined with colonialism, capitalism and (neo)liberalism — mechanisms of power which remain invested in understanding violence through a particular framing (Jiwani 2006). Whilst often invisible, these logics are exercised and conveyed through institutions and mechanisms of legitimation, like social research, which, “through the very definitions employed to define and describe violence”, help to render this “discursive economy of violence” legitimate (Jiwani 2006, p. 4). As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the constructions of adversity and violence that dominate in research on criminalised young people are those that focus on violence as an interpersonally enacted phenomenon exercised at the micro level by ‘deviant’ and ‘dysfunctional’ subjects. Such understandings of violence have become normatively enshrined, influencing the conceptual frameworks for understanding violence available to our society, our institutions and us as individuals (Jiwani 2006, p. 4). This chapter has demonstrated that such definitions often overlook violences and adversities of a discursive, cultural, systemic and/or structural nature and fail to grapple with centrality of violence to the functioning of the colonial, carceral society. Dominant, individualising, definitions produce a carceral culture that seeks to blindly punish its way through social inequality — removing ‘deviant’ people from society, only to return them back to contexts of social inequity

and violence once their period of punishment is complete. Such constructions further fail to interrogate the mechanisms of power that see some manifestations of violence magnified, and in some cases criminalised, while others are rendered natural or invisible (Jiwani 2006). The exploration offered within this chapter, I hope, helps to demonstrate the necessity of enabling those under study to be active contributors — participants, not objects — in knowledge generating activities like research.

Counter to individualising understandings of violence, in drawing on the work of Hearn et al. (2022a), I conceptualise the violence of dominant discourses of race, class and gender as producing violent societies, the practices of which profoundly shaped the lives and subjectivities of the criminalised young people engaged in this project. A violence regimes lens urges us to understand that “violence cannot be reduced to individual psychological traits or dysfunctional families or institutions...Violence can be a social and societal inequality in its own right” (Hearn et al. 2022a, p. 585). Whilst urging the adoption of broader conceptualisations of violence, this chapter does not argue that if we simply broadened the categories of adversity assessed for in positivist studies we could unveil the true source of crime and criminalisation. Instead, this chapter seeks simply to highlight complexity and “unmask the discourse of denial” (Jiwani 2006, p. 3) inherent in much of the existing research, laying bare the societal and discursive contexts that shape it and the harms it can produce. When we, as researchers, practitioners, therapists, and teachers, don't provide the space for experiences like those detailed above to be considered, we participate in the silencing of those navigating societally imposed violences. When we don't acknowledge, hold and nurture the anger and the pain that often accompanies these experiences, we decontextualise and pathologise distress, locate this pathology within individuals and blame them for their reactions to, or resistance of, injustice, violence and inequality.

6 THE CARCERAL SOCIETY

6.1 Introduction

A key implication of Foucault (1979) work on power is his assertion that within the disciplinary, carceral society, prisons and the formal carceral system exist as simply one, albeit particularly overt, manifestation of a much broader, capillary like regime of power and control. In seeking to illustrate how, through disciplinary modes of power, “the logics, practices, and technologies of prison” (Martensen 2020, p. 1) have become embedded across diffuse aspects of society, Foucault (1979) offered up the concept of the carceral society. Within the carceral society, as Coyle and Nagel (2021, p. 1) explain, “almost no area of modern life” remains untouched by carceral logics and practices. In such a context, “well-intentioned people and organisations”, including education and welfare services, are co-opted into the carceral logics and practices of categorisation, surveillance, normalisation, control and punishment — logics and practices aimed at creating productive, conforming neoliberal citizens and licensing the ostracisation, punishment or expulsion of those who resist or fail to comply (Martensen 2020, p. 6). Within the carceral society, as Foucault (1979, p. 304) asserts, “[t]he judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social-worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based”. In such a context, our bodies and subjectivities are constantly entangled within a multiplicity of power relations that are embedded “within the workings of everyday life” (Hancock 2018, p. 449) — carceral practices of power that have become so naturalised that they are often rendered invisible or are seen as self-evident truths; just the way things are. As such, even before their first contact with the formal carceral system, the criminalised young people in this study had been exposed to a litany of disciplinary techniques aimed at producing normative, docile and useful disciplinary subjects (Foucault 1979). As explained by Henman and Marston (2008, p. 201), within the carceral society, surveillance practices tend to “coagulate more heavily on the more disadvantaged members of society” and, for those existing outside the dominant social norms, the practices of the carceral society can have particularly formative and violent effects on their subjectivity.

In the storying of their lives, participants narrated some of their interactions and experiences with societal institutions that might not normally be conceptualised as ‘carceral’ — like schools, child protection, housing, Centrelink and mental health services. In engaging with these narratives, this chapter seeks to interrogate the ways in which carceral practices have infused these spaces,

shaping the subjectivities and life worlds of research participants in violent ways. This chapter draws from specific examples offered up by research participants to render visible the practices of surveillance, categorisation, pathologisation and discipline that, within the carceral society, infuse our institutions (Foucault 1979). In critically interrogating the logics and practices of the carceral society, and the violences they produce, this chapter does not seek to shame or denounce specific disciplines or practitioners as inherently ‘bad’ or violent. Rather, it seeks to render visible the pervasiveness of the discourses, knowledges and power dynamics of the carceral society which, in their omnipresence, shape institutional contexts, policies, practices and norms and, in so doing, the subjectivities, knowledges and ways of working most accessible to all of us. To reiterate, the intent here is certainly not to assign blame, or to induce guilt, but rather is to critically interrogate the broader context of power and control that all societal institutions, and all disciplinary subjects, exist within. These practices are highlighted in the hope that this may play some small role in aiding us to collectively resist the violence inherent in the logics and practices of the carceral society. I write this chapter with a 23-year-old me in mind — a version of me, who, whilst caring deeply for the people she worked with, was oblivious to the broader context of power shaping her work in alignment with carceral practices of surveillance, discipline and control.

In its exploration of the carceral society, this chapter draws from participant narratives to explore how discourses, logics and practices of carcerality find their expression, and exercise violence, in our mental health services, schools, Centrelink, Job Network and child protection services.

6.2 The carcerality of biomedical discourses of mental health

In reflecting upon their experiences of ‘mental health’ interventions, a number of participants provided narratives identifying the direct and indirect violences that Eurocentric, biomedical ways of knowing can wage against the bodies and subjectivities of those deemed ‘mentally ill’. Within this section, I draw from participant narratives to interrogate the links between the carceral society, regimes of violence and biomedical discourses of mental illness and seek to challenge dominant, biomedical ways of knowing which deprive marginalised subjects of “epistemic authority” (Redikopp 2018, p. 90).

In contrast to dominant understandings of doctors and psychiatrists as “observers of the truth of [the mind and/or] the body” (Kafer 2013, p. 34, cited in Redikopp 2018), from a Foucauldian perspective, biomedically informed mental health practices are inherently “social, political and constituted in power relations” (Hancock 2018, p. 455). Biomedical knowledges play a significant

role in shaping constructs of normality/abnormality, which inform how “norms, rules, laws, and regulations are deployed against people” (Hancock 2018, p. 448). In their “capacity to invalidate ‘marginalized’ knowledge claims” (Redikopp 2018, p. 80), biomedical knowledges and practices are not only highly subjective, but also violent (Hearn et al. 2022a). However, in critiquing the pathologising and medicalising practices of psychiatry, my intention here is not to dismiss the lived reality of trauma, distress or mental ‘illness’. Rather, I seek “to illuminate the precarity and power dynamics of diagnostic categories” which can produce “forms of regulatory control” that constrain individuals “within prescribed forms of being deemed morally acceptable” (Lester 2013, p. 72). Borrowing from Redikopp (2018, p. 77), I thus seek to both honour “the materiality of mental illness categories” and contest “the epistemic violences and hierarchies which foster their construction and pathologization”.

At the end of our last formal interview together, just before we went our separate ways, I remember Benji grabbing my shoulder and excitedly enquiring, “Wait, have I ever told you about my theory on mental health?”. I’ve known Benji for eight years now, and him sharing his thinking, monologuing on the meaning he makes of this world, is always something I learn from, sometimes delight in and, often, am devastated by. His astute analysis of the carceral society and the disciplinary practices of the mental health sector was no different. Benji lit a smoke and began:

So basically, generation by generation of people being on Centrelink — we’re starved of mental health, you know? And we seek mental health services, and we get diagnosed, then we get this medication. First, they start us off on sleepers for insomnia and then they put us on Benzos or Opiates. Either way you get them young — sleepers, Benzos or Opiates.

While not using these words, here Benji points to practices of biopower. His assertion that pacifying, psychiatric drugs are prescribed to people from marginalised backgrounds at high rates and young ages was echoed by Bobby, Isla, Kayla and Rose. Bobby, for example, reflected on “popping Xanax like TicTacs in school” and Isla described being routinely prescribed a dosage of Seroquel that, in her words, “knocks me out and I can’t move. I’m very, very zombie”. Moreover, Benji, Jax, Bobby and Gus all identified prescribed psychiatric medications as their first drugs of addiction — early experiences which flowed into dependences which, though perhaps serving a similar (self)medicating purpose, have seen these young people criminalised. As Bobby explained:

I can get searched at any point. So pretty much like anything I do, even the smallest thing, they can look up my record and be like ‘well, see you later mate’. Honestly, beyond a joke. I don’t smoke weed for no reason. Like, as you said, a lot of PTSD and then when I’m not smoking [marijuana] I feel like I’m on meth because I’ve got too much

energy. And that's my ADD. That's why I smoke weed. It mellows me out like this, and I'm not as anxious. I have tried a lot of other prescription stuff to help me through my doctor, and a lot of it has really, really fucked with me — sent me for six and I've been just sleeping.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the prolific prescription of psychiatric drugs and the criminalisation of others, like marijuana, reflects the exercise of discursive, institutional and biopower in which medical experts retain the authority to determine what is a valid illness and what is a valid intervention. Within such a discursive context, the intersectional identities of marginalised people shapes the ways that these agentic decisions to engage with substances are interpreted and, in the carceral society, often criminalised.

From Benji's narration above, we can see how within the disciplinary carceral society, mental health services are structured around practices of categorisation and control that, whilst differing in their mechanisms and manifestations, bear striking similarities to those of the formal carceral system. Across both systems, health professionals engage with complex social problems in individualising ways that, through the power wielded by 'expert knowledge', influence — and at times dictate — the day-to-day existence of those deemed deviant. Within such a discursive landscape, the medicalisation and pathologisation of mental illness "does not simply redefine human problems; rather, it redefines human beings themselves as problematic" (Hancock 2018, p. 442). Benji continued:

So, this is the generational curse. Two partners on Centrelink seek help with mental health, yeah? They get diagnosed, they get put on this medication. They have to listen to the system and take their medication, be good, listen to the government what they gotta do. If they don't take their doped-out out drugs then the medical tribunal takes them through this little program, deems them unfit and puts them on a depot shot²² and vegetables them. It changes them. Every person I've ever seen on a depot shot has changed. They've never been the same again, and not in a good way either.

Here Benji reflects an even deeper understanding of the carcerality embedded within mental health systems, whereby the threat and/or imposition of punitive interventions, like depot shots, exist to govern and shape individual behaviour in alignment with dominant social norms of adherence to hierarchy, 'expert' knowledge and conformity. Throughout this monologue, Benji returned continually to his argument that these medical mechanisms are about "doping" poor people "out". Phrased in Foucauldian terms, Benji is pointing to disciplinary practices aimed at rendering deviant subjects docile or compliant. As Benji identifies, those who resist this expert

²² Benji uses the term 'depot shot' to refer to a long-acting antipsychotic medication that is administered by injection and is often mandated for people on involuntary treatment orders.

knowledge are then “deemed unfit” — a classification, and form of epistemic violence, that licences the imposition of an intensified regime of disciplinary, carceral control. As Benji explained:

And so, if they don't take the depot shot that they're told to take, that keeps them on the right edge for the system to see, then they get detained but if they just take their Benzos, they take their opiates that they're prescribed they don't, but they're doped out zombies anyways.

Here Benji provides yet another example of the ways in which the practices of mental health and the formal carceral system mirror each other. These systems, however, do not simply sit alongside and reflect each other from a distance — they frequently overlap, intersect, collude and work together. Both Kayla and Rose, for example, spoke about the role of psychiatry within the children's/youth prison environment in responding to acute distress through biomedical interventions aimed at producing docility. Kayla, for instance, reflected: “Then I got put in [Child/Youth Prison]. It was really bad. They just med you up. They just give you medication to go kind of pass out, so they don't have to deal with you”. Rose echoed these sentiments when reflecting upon the heightened levels of distress she experienced after being placed on a ‘restricted behavioural management plan’ which, in her words, saw her confined to her cell for all but 30 minutes each day:

Rose: This place is starting to get to me. So today I only had 30 minutes out and that was because I had a meeting. It was my mental health meeting cause they're putting me on new medications. They're putting me on anti-depressants and anti-psychotic ones.

Tessa: And so, do you have a choice in that?

Rose: Nah.

Tessa: And are you happy about getting new medication or?

Rose: Yeah. I hope it helps me like calm down. Because like, since I've been in my room [approximately 23 hours a day] I've been like stressing out lots and getting anxiety pretty bad, you know? Today is the first time I've came out of the unit in over a week, man. I haven't even been out for exercise, I haven't been out for fresh air. Nothing. I am going crazy.

Here we can see how, through administering medications, biomedically informed mental health interventions can exercise both disciplinary and biopower that see subjects — often navigating extreme complexity and injustice — intervened against in ways that seek to produce compliance, docility and normalisation.

In contrast to biomedical discourses of mental illness, in his critique of the mental health sector, Benji points to the relationship between poverty, marginalisation, mental illness and coercive practices and, in doing so, resists dominant, individualising understandings of mental illness. In the following, Benji helps to illuminate the knowledge/power nexus and the subjectification effects

produced by biomedical discourses of mental illness when he reflects upon seeing marginalised people discounting their own lived and embodied experiences and continuing to put their faith in systems and ‘experts’ that have harmed them:

Then they [parents] have kids and they get born into it, they have the same problems because they’re in the same poverty ridden area, of violence, drugs and then they get put on the medication because they seek mental health because they think the systems gonna help them, their parents don’t know no better. They were on Benzos and they were doped out zombies. They can’t get up and go to work every day. I don’t know how some people do it. They’re on like 800, 900, 1200mg of Seroquel and Serepax and Benzos, and all sorts of drowsiness and grogginess drugs, so they don’t find work because they can’t. I feel like its generation after generation. It’s a curse. It’s like generation after generation of mental health, no ability to get a job. This generational curse keeps going on and on and on and that’s why so many people are stuck in poverty because they’re doped out by the system. You know? I’m talking about poverty in general, I’m talking about Australia and this is a problem, I want to do more research on it because I believe it’s a problem. I believe we are doped out by a system, you know? They want us to be doped out you know. They make money of us being poor and doped out, you know?

Benji clearly sees the insidious ways in which power operates through biomedical, carceral discourses within mental health systems — systems in which professionals are framed as objective experts and, thus, are given a social and legal license to control and govern the lives of individuals through practices of categorisation, diagnosis, medicalisation, involuntary treatment orders and detention. Like the parents he reflects upon above, despite experiencing the pervasiveness of individualising and pathologising practices within mental health systems as violent, Benji has, for many years, held on to some degree of hope that mainstream mental health institutions could give him the tools to, in his words, “help fix myself and work with my brain better”. In the following words from Benji we can see how the medicalising and normalising gaze of biomedical discourses can become “socialized into our very subjectivity” producing “self-scrutinizing” subjects on a relentless quest to normalise our abnormalities (Hancock 2018, p. 444):

Benji: Since a young boy I was seeking help from mental health and I didn’t know no difference — between therapy, psychologist, psychiatrist. I saw no difference between them. I thought it was all the same because I wasn’t educated on that. I was never educated by the mental health system either — just in and out of hospitals [mental health wards] as a young boy. So, I sat there and kept going at this system trying to get answers. I was chasing it, chasing it, because I believed that diagnosis would give me the mental health tools to find a way to work around what they’re gonna label me as.

However, in his pursuit of mental health intervention, Benji talks of his experiences — across multiple practitioners, hospitals, voluntary and involuntary admissions — of “just diagnosing and then medicating”:

But, what I found out in the end is, sadly, a mental health plan from a psychiatric assessment gets me a label and from that label they put me on prescription drugs, they don't teach you any skills, no therapy is mentioned. Why isn't therapy mentioned before dragging people through that system of the pharmaceutical drugs? What I need is not pharmaceuticals, it's therapy and a place to sleep. They should have been giving me therapy. Not a diagnosis and meds.

As Redikopp (2018, p. 79) asserts, "all knowledge is socially situated" and, within the colonial, carceral society, the ways in which knowledge exercises power is "contingent on the position of the knower/speaker" and the raced, classed, gendered and abled dynamics that shape this. In such a context, biomedical discourses, which centralise "reason, rationality, sanity and 'objectivity'" (Redikopp 2018, p. 79), medicalise the symptoms of systemic injustice and imbue mental health professionals, particularly psychiatrists, with the epistemic legitimacy to both erase marginalised knowledges and impose labels and punitive interventions.

The knowledge/power nexus created by biomedical discourses of mental illness produce asymmetrical power relations; the very idea of 'expertise' is predicated on assumptions about what knowledge is valid and who is able to speak 'truth' in the meaning making of mental illness. For Benji, these practices of power have licensed mental health practitioners with both the ability to impose labels, diagnoses, medication and periods of involuntary detention, and, at the other end of the spectrum, to discount and invalidate his lived reality, framing his behaviour not as mental illness, but as 'bed seeking':

Benji: So, when I was younger there was this time where I was in full blown drug induced psychosis, like on another planet. Seeing the most scariest fucking things. I'm like running around the city, hiding behind walls, peering out at these demons and, even though I was seeing all this shit, I knew I was in drug induced psychosis, but I just couldn't make it stop. So, I went to the hospital and they admitted me, but then this psychiatrist came around and I was just begging her to see me, to see my pain, like crying in front of her and she just called me a liar — 'a pathological liar'. Said 'Benji, mental health is not a joke okay. You can't just lie about your experiences and expect to be taken seriously' and kicked me back out onto the street. I was just so devastated, but was also seeing these fucking demons, and I was running out onto the road, right in the city, and these Nunga workers pulled over and grabbed me and just wrapped me in a hug and I just fell into their lap, just crying. She [psychiatrist] just didn't take me seriously and I was so scared and she just called me a liar and it made me feel crazy. And I was crazy, but not in the way she made me feel. And now, you know, after that, after spilling my whole life to someone, begging to be seen and them just shutting me down, calling me a fucking pathological liar, that power, you know?

With this dismissal of Benji's lived reality as 'pathological lying', we see the societal and institutional authority of psychiatry to determine the 'truth' of the situation: what and whose knowledge about mental illness is valid. In authorising the ability to, for example, admit Benji to

the mental health ward, detain him against his will or kick him ‘back out onto the street’, dominant discourses of biomedicine thus produce epistemic violence.

Whilst Benji has been deeply impacted by the power effects of biomedical discourses of mental illness, he is by no means passive. He exercises his agency by offering up rigorous critiques of a societal system that he asserts has harmed him, his family and many others within his community and by deciding that, even though there is a small chance that the next psychiatrist might be “one of the few good ones”, he will no longer subject himself to the violences of a biomedically informed mental health system. In a world in which the power/knowledge nexus of biomedical discourses is so pervasive, the exercising of this agency has not been without cost. Prior to our last interview, Benji had finally been provisionally accepted into an exceptional needs program that he was first referred to some five years prior.²³ However, in order to proceed with a tailored support plan, Benji was required to complete a full psychiatric assessment. He explained:

Now I've got this psych[iatric] assessment coming up and every time I've tried to talk to a psych[iatrist] again I just freeze up and the walls come up and I know that's gonna just happen again. I'm not gonna go. I'm just not doing it. I can't.

Due to his previous experiences of psychiatry, Benji did refuse to submit to this process and, as a result, lost his place within this program.

Like Benji, Maror also narrated his experiences of mental health services and the harms these individualising responses exposed him to. In our third interview together, Maror selected the interview prompt card entitled ‘workers’. Upon choosing this card, Maror sighed deeply before proceeding to rattle off a list of the professionals currently involved in his life. In addition to the police, who are omnipresent for Maror, and the army of ground level staff in the child/youth prison who meticulously govern his daily movements, Maror was also working with a lawyer, a Child and Adolescent Mental Health worker, two psychologists, a youth justice worker, and a cultural mentor. Whilst commonly conceptualised as supports, from a carceral society perspective, the pervasive presence of such professionals can be understood as a tightly woven web of surveillance, control and normalisation — a web of control that interacts with and reinforces the formal carceral system.

²³ The Exceptional Needs Unit is a South Australian government service working with people who have complex needs, who are assessed as “at risk or posing a risk to others” and for whom “mainstream services must have been attempted and found to be ineffective, not helpful, inappropriate...” (Department of Human Services 2023, p. 1).

As Hancock (2018, p. 442) explains, biomedical discourses do not simply circulate throughout biomedical institutions, but rather they circulate “throughout the social landscape” and become “internalised in the process of the constitution of the self”. This process of internalisation can be seen in Maror’s response to my asking whether he’s found these services helpful; again, he sighed before reflecting, “Nah, I don't know how you can fix damage that's already done”. This comment provides insights into the ways in which pathologising, biomedical discourses — which frame individuals navigating mental illness or the impacts of trauma as intrinsically and internally ‘damaged’ — can become internalised, shaping the subjectivities of those they purport to describe and reinforcing the idea that it is them that is broken and in need of fixing. Maror explained that other than his cultural worker, he doesn’t talk to any of these professionals about his feelings. For Maror, doing so is “useless”, for “they all say the same thing”:

‘It's the way you think about it. You've been thinking about it like this, you could think about it like this, breathe in, breathe out, da, da, da’. I don't want to hear any of that. If I hear that, I just walk away because it doesn't do anything to help.

As a young person who has been exposed to a litany of injustices across his life, being told that it is his thought processes that are the problem sends a message to Maror that these, predominantly white, middle-class, mental health professionals “don't really care about” or understand his lived reality — “they're just doing what they’re trained to do, what they’re getting paid for. Telling kids to relax, to breathe”. Benji echoed these sentiments when he reflected: “I'm just sick of my feelings being shut down [by workers]. I feel like they're shutdown. Being told just to calm down”.

In the absence of critical interrogation of the discourses — of biomedicine and individual pathology — that shape normative mental health interventions, such services will continue to regulate and govern individual emotions and behaviours. Through standardised interventions, complex social and psychological issues — like the trauma and rage that a lifetime of enduring racial violence can produce — are reduced to individual pathology that can only be remedied through personal thought and behavioural change. As in the formal carceral system, the emphasis is thus turned away from inequity and violent social practices, and onto dysfunctional individuals (Hearn et al. 2022a). Rather than contemplating the distress that a discursively and materially violent society may produce, interventions like these instead seek to transform this distress into a more socially acceptable, normative, docile and self-blaming form. In this context, Maror enacts practices of resistance by refusing to engage with the systems, knowledges and practitioners that he sees as incapable of holding the complexity of his experiences. Instead, he seeks this support

from his cultural worker and his sister who, like Maror, have an embodied and lived understanding of the corrosive effects of injustice.

Whilst in the stories captured here, biomedical practices of diagnosing, labelling and medicating have served to harm and silence, others have experienced these practices in more positive ways — as providing a valuable “explanatory model” (Redikopp 2018, p. 85). Jax, for example, reported experiencing extreme relief when they, at the age of 17, received a tentative²⁴ diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) as “it explained a lot, it made sense about everything. I honestly just thought I was fucked up. That no one was like me, I wasn't like anyone”. Here we can see how a diagnosis can hold the power to “redefine human subjectivity” (Hancock 2018, p. 442). Whilst, for Redikopp (2018, p. 83), BPD is a highly contested, stigmatising, gendered and epistemically violent “diagnostic category” and “mechanism of social control”, she also recognises that some do “resonate with the diagnosis” and “borderline knowing” is a valid and valuable epistemological position.

Redikopp (2018, p. 78), a lived-experience researcher, urges us to “hold productive tension between the ‘construction’ of BPD”, which she sees as violent, gendered and individualising, and “the diagnoses’ potential to validate borderline knowers”, like Jax, who felt as though “this whole BPD thing, this is literally me. You ask anyone what I'm like, they're gonna say everything about BPD”. Here we see an example of how practices of categorisation and diagnosis interact with subjectivities and shape the landscapes of self-understanding available to us. Jax experienced this diagnosis as a tool to help make sense of how their lived experiences have shaped their development, behaviour, emotions, and relationships. This label, which for many has been experienced as pathologising and stigmatising, helped Jax to begin speaking back to the self-blame they have carried for much of their life. Jax stated, “For so long I thought I was fucked up. I thought I was the only one, the only person that was like this — but I'm not fucked up, I have BPD and that's not my fucking fault”. Whilst Jax reflects that, on the one hand, this tentative diagnosis helped “make sense about everything”, it also remains an unknown, as Jax explained, “even though I have BPD, I don't actually know a lot about it. Is there any way to get rid of BPD?”. Here we can see Jax pointing to the asymmetrical power dynamics between psychiatrists (as expert

²⁴ In Australia, prior to the age of 18, formal diagnosis of BPD is not common practice as adolescence is understood to be a period of often tumultuous developmental change in which where personality is still developing, making it difficult to distinguish between typical developmental changes and more, apparently, ‘fixed’ traits (Larrivée 2013).

knowers) and patients (as their subjects) who are rarely supported to meaningfully understand the label/s they have been ascribed.

Like the practices of the formal carceral system, “the politics of psychiatric categorization are fraught with power” (Redikopp 2018, p. 82). Although presented as objective and neutral, these practices are products of dominant discourses and norms with “little, if any, stable grounding” (Lester 2013, p. 72, cited in Redikopp 2018). According to Szasz (1974, p. 2677), these discursive practices amount to nothing more than a “falsely legitimated moral judgement”. This is an assertion Ussher (1991, p. 196) draws on in her framing of “madness” as a subjective label “founded on values, morals, and political allegiances — a medicalization of deviance in order to maintain social control”. It is through these practices — of constructing, diagnosing and managing deviance — that biomedically informed mental health practices exercise both carcerality and violence.

6.3 The carcerality of schools

In reflecting upon their experiences of schooling, several participants shared stories illuminating schools as sites infused with practices of carcerality. Within this section, I begin by drawing from participant narratives to argue that schools exist as sites of normative control, underpinned by neoliberal norms aimed at moulding subjects into productive neoliberal citizens. Following this, I draw on narratives provided by Jax to explore the hidden curriculum of gender that permeates schools within the neoliberal, carceral society — shaping the ways of understanding, and modes of gendered existence, most available to students. I then draw from Yoneyama’s (2015, p. 5) work on school bullying as a “an over-adjustment to the school’s hidden curriculum” of inclusion and exclusion based around dominant social norms to explore participants experiences of being bullied for the aspects of their subjectivities that marked them as different from the socially constructed norm. Finally, I explore, briefly, the ways in which schools draw on the formal carceral system — through the calling of police — to manage various behaviours deemed deviant.

6.3.1 The school’s hidden curriculum: Neoliberal social norms

From a carceral society perspective, more pertinently than sites of formal, curriculum-based learning, schools exist to impart a “hidden curriculum” (Yoneyama 2015, p. 5) — one aimed at shaping subjectivities in alignment with dominant social and neoliberal norms (Blackbeard & Lindegger 2007; Rudolph 2023). Through this lens, schools “are imbued with social and cultural processes that produce identities” (Blackbeard & Lindegger 2007, p. 28) that, as Rudolph (2023, p.

8) argues, are “in service of the state”. This phenomenon, of schools shaping students to become productive neoliberal citizens, is one Angela points towards when she reflects, “I don’t think schools for everyone really, unless you want a nine-to-five”.

As Piro (2008, p. 41) asserts, “perhaps more than any other social institution, schools create a regime of power by defining norms” and, in so doing, by defining deviance and abnormality — producing what Foucault (1995, p. 199, cited in Piro) terms “binary division”. Within the carceral society, this way of seeing — of normality versus abnormality — becomes a mechanism “for defining and regulating people and their behaviour” (Slee 2004, p.40, cited in Rudolph 2023). In the education context, schools and teachers become both the crafters and the policers of normality and, as within the formal carceral system, deviance from the norm is constructed in terms of individual deficit requiring individual intervention (Rudolph 2023). This dynamic, of schools as sites of normative control, can produce — as reflected in the narratives provided by young people in this study — a deep sense of alienation, disconnection and shame in those existing outside hegemonic norms. Angela explained, “I always felt like the black sheep” in school. Gus echoes these sentiments when he reflected, “right from early, early primary [I didn’t like school]. The teachers were always so strict”.

Glancey (2006, p. 5, cited in Piro 2008) asserts, in contrast to normative constructions of schools “as a friendly and inspiring educational tool”, through a Foucauldian lens, schools are understood to be mechanisms of disciplinary, carceral control designed, not to build “individuality or creativity”, but to produce subjects who can be made “productive”. The following commentary, provided by Jax, exemplifies just one of the many ways this phenomenon — of stifling creativity and normalising students to become productive neoliberal citizens — is exercised in schools. During one of our interviews, Jax, who was fiddling with the cards, looked at me and said, “You know, there’s just so much about life that just doesn’t make sense to me”. Jax went on to explain that, time and time again, they see the people around them living life on other people’s terms — pursuing goals and behaving and presenting in certain ways just to make others happy. Jax reflected, when you ask someone why they do what they do in life “they never say for themselves, it’s always for someone else — and you just end up being miserable”. Jax continued:

Some people feel forced, and sometimes not even forced, but like they just can’t do something different to everyone else — they force themselves to be someone they’re not and so many great minds die like that. There could have been so many more Albert Einsteins, you know? Stephen Hawkings. But being someone you’re not, you just kill

you. You might think 'I'm happy because everyone else is happy', but you're just slowly killing yourself.

In reflecting that “some people feel forced” to pursue normative behaviour, whilst others do the work of constraining themselves, Jax points towards both the repressive and the productive nature of power in the carceral, disciplinary society. Within such a context, normalising forces aren't simply imposed upon us, coercively, from above, but are also exercised through a regime of invisible forces — ‘micro-psychics of power’ (Foucault 1979) that work “within” and “through our bodies” (Schwan & Shapiro 2011, p. 42) to produce normalising effects. I asked Jax where this knowing — that so many of us constrain ourselves in alignment with expectations — came from, and they replied, “I think it came from my own personal experience, at school”. Jax described a time, in primary school, when a teacher imposed normative, wing-clipping beliefs that crushed a young and hopeful Jax's sense of creativity and hopes for the future — poisoning one of the few outlets they had to process their distress, their art. They explain:

I used to love drawing and I always wanted to live in a little studio where I could teach younger children to paint and where I can sell art of my own...but I don't do art anymore... I was told by my art teacher that I 'have a very unique outlook on life, but it won't get me anywhere'. She said it in a sad way, like, 'you know, you have a very unique way of doing things, you are just very unique' — and I know that's another way of saying weird — but she said that 'not many people would get it [the art]'. So, you know, she said she understood, but only as much as her brain would let her and she said, 'you know, I'm a very open-minded person, so if I don't really understand [your art], I don't think other people will, honey' and I was like 'Oh' [sad tone].

Jax goes on to both resist the normalising discourse that this teacher imposed upon them, whilst simultaneously demonstrating the long-lasting implications that interactions like this can have on the subjectivities of those they seek to mould: “I learned from a very young age that there are very stupid people out there that are very small minded, and probably should keep their small-minded selves to themselves — but after that I just couldn't paint anymore”.

Jax's narration helps to identify how, within this discursive context, the education system, and its everyday actors, are imbued with the authority — the institutional and disciplinary power — to observe, validate, dismiss and/or regulate far more than a student's academic work, but also their way of seeing, being and existing in the world. This process, for Jax, had violent subjectification effects (Hearn et al. 2022a). They reflect: “Yeah, because of that woman I stopped like drawing, little by little by little. And now whenever I pick up a pencil, I can't do anything with it. Yeah. I don't really have that creativity I once did”.

As Youdell (2006, p. 31) explains, key to the normalisation of the “ideal” learner, the reform of the “acceptable” or malleable student, and the “exclusion of the bad” or “the unacceptable” student is the implicit, and at times explicit, “normal/abnormal dichotomy” that underpins schools, as well as many other institutions within the carceral society. This construct of normality “becomes the language and technology for defining and regulating people and their behaviour” (Slee 2020, p. 20). As within the formal carceral system, this technology of defining and regulating normality is “coupled with a corrective impulse” (Rudolph 2023, p. 3) which often leads to the exclusion of those deemed deviant through the practices of time-out, detention, suspension, and expulsion. The majority of participants in this study have experienced multiple bouts of suspension, at least five had been excluded from mainstream schooling and were instead referred to alternative education programs, and at least five had experienced expulsion. During our time together, Kayla reflected upon her experiences of schooling and exclusion and, in trying to make sense of these, she wondered aloud “What's the point even going to school if you're just gonna get in trouble and just get put in a room and you're not even learning?”.

The subjectification effects of these practices of exclusion can be seen in Angela’s account of being excluded from school, “about three times within two years. It was just all from petty stuff”. “I was a really bad kid”, she commented. While I challenged Angela’s perception of badness as something existing within her, by reflecting upon some of the hardships that she had navigated during primary and secondary school, Angela responded that “Yeah, I did have a lot going on, but I just reacted in the wrong ways”. Here we can see the internalisation of the discourses of deviance within schools in which distress related behaviours are framed as issues of individual deficit, requiring individual remedy (Rudolph 2023). In refusing to let herself off the hook — as if there is a correct way of responding to the sexual, religious and racial violence she was surviving — we can see how a narrative of deficiency and self-blame has become entangled with Angela’s subjectivity. Echoing the subjectification practices of the formal carceral system, carceral logics shape how ‘deviance’ is understood and intervened against in school contexts — discursive practices we can see reflected in Angelas readiness to see herself as the problem and her acceptance of the punitive consequences she endured as logical and appropriate.

For Angela, the internalisation of the idea that she is deviant and deficient for failing to thrive within the rigidity of the school environment has had long-lasting implications which continuing to shape her understanding of herself, her behaviour and what is possible for her future today.

Angela: I love animals, it's always what I wanted to do as a kid. But yeah, that's at TAFE ... one of my main problems is, I don't know how I'm going to work in that sort of space because I didn't do good at school. I was just always anxious, I hated being around so many people, I wasn't concentrating whatsoever. So that's like one of my biggest fears.

Here we can see evidence of the violent subjectification of dominant discourses of intelligence, academic achievement and conformity espoused within schools — knowledges and practices which replicate and reinforce broader power dynamics that privilege, and thus also marginalise, particular ways of knowing, learning and existing in the world.

Another example of the normalising function of schools can be seen in Jax's narration where they recall being reprimanded for failing to behave within the constructed boundaries of acceptability when, while learning about the Stolen Generations — a violent, colonial practice from which Jax's family is still yet to recover — Jax “cried in class” and was subsequently told, by their “white” teacher, to “calm down”. Jax explained:

I try not to pay attention to that [the Stolen Generations], because the little bit about that I've learned in school, it actually pissed me off. I flipped a table ... They always have white teachers, teaching us Aboriginal children about our culture. And it's like, it's not insensitive. I really appreciate how they talk about how it's [colonialism] really fucked up, we didn't deserve that ... but when you get frustrated about stuff, they tell you to calm down. Like, I cried at something we were watching in class, because it actually made me sick to my guts and the teacher told me that I didn't have to be upset, and I should just calm down and I said, 'That's not your ancestors up on the fucking screen, bitch'. I was like, 'Those are mine. That's my blood, right there, in fucking chains, being raped, being murdered just because of the colour of their fucking skin'.

Within this passage, we can see how dominant discourses of race reflect power and enact epistemic violence within the Australian schooling context by shaping not just what knowledge is taught but how this knowledge should, within the socially constructed boundaries of acceptability, be received by students with diverse subjectivities. In Jax's case, probably due to the practices of whiteness that infuse Australian educational institutions (Rudolph 2023), the teaching of history was treated as a neutral, cognitive exercise, rather than as a violent and lived practice that some students may have intimate and traumatic relationships with.

6.3.2 The school's hidden curriculum: Gender

Further illuminating the normalising function of schools, Jax discussed their experiences as a non-binary young person and the assumption, made by every single teacher, that they identify as the gender they were assigned at birth: “They haven't asked, so I don't really tell, but I think people should be more in the know with this stuff”. Jax continued talking about the one time that they did attempt to assert their correct gender identity within a school context, only to be exposed to

epistemic violence (Hearn et al. 2022a) through the denial of their lived reality and the admonishment they received for their response to this denial:

Jax: I understand there are a lot, and I mean a lot, of people out there that don't get it, because I explained to this woman one time at school, she was like, doing my height and everything and then she just ticked my gender and that's when I was like 'Miss, I'm not trying to be rude, but are you, aren't you gonna ask me what my gender is?' And she smiles, 'I can tell you're a female' and I just gave her, I don't like to, but I give people dirty looks when they piss me off. And yeah, I stared her down and I was like 'I would actually really appreciate if you asked me what my gender was'. And she was like 'there is no need for me to ask you what your gender is'. And that's when I, you know, I got a little disrespectful and I said, 'Oh, well, listen here, granny — I don't identify as a female or a male, so you put they/them down'. And she was like, 'Oh, it doesn't matter love, I've already written it out'. I was like, and I yelled, I was like, 'You put they/them down'. And then I got pulled up by a teacher and they're like, 'You can't talk to staff that way'.

Schools, as Graham, Treharne and Nairn (2017, p. 1) assert, “invite the repetition of particular social constructions of gender” which “generates the normalisation”, and as such the marginalisation, “of certain gendered practices”. Through binary practices — like single-sex schooling, the imposition of sex-based uniforms of skirts, the lengths of which are often tightly policed, for girls and pants for boys, the policing of hairstyles, the length of which is often tightly policed for boys, the segregation of students based upon sex for sports, sex education programs and school camps etc — dominant, binary discourses of gender become dispersed within the institutional context of schools. As such, from the age of four or five children become exposed to “the disciplinary practices that create these norms” within schools, which see dominant gendered practices infused, normalised and, often, internalised (Graham, Treharne & Nairn 2017, p. 1). Through such practices, schools construct and police the enactment of gender through the binaries of male/female and acceptable/unacceptable. In reflecting upon their fears of coming out and existing in the world as non-binary and gender fluid, Jax identified that they present:

...femininely, as female, only because I know that's what people want to see — because, obviously, I'm a female in everyone eyes. Whenever they think about Jackie [former name] from year eight, you know, that pretty girl, they think long black hair and I think, well I know, the only reason why I say 'I don't know what I am' is because of how shit scared I am ... of people around me not accepting it.

Here Jax helps to elucidate schools as sites where dominant discourses of gender produce “certain understandings about the appropriate gendered ways of being” (Graham, Treharne & Nairn 2017, p. 1). These discourses, thus, shape students “understandings about the correct way to enact gender” for both the self and for those around them — meting out, as Jax fears, “social punishment to peers not seen to be obeying the norms” (Graham, Treharne & Nairn 2017, p. 1).

6.3.3 The school's hidden curriculum: bullying

As Yoneyama (2015, pp. 1-2) explains, since school bullying first emerged as a research interest in the 1970s, “the discourse on school bullying has been constructed primarily within the framework of the ‘first paradigm’” which, with its origins in psychology, “sets its etiology in the personal attributes of the bully and the victim”. The first paradigm of bullying constructs bullying as involving repeated incidents in which a bully, with an intent to harm, abuses power in ways that cause distress to the victim/s (Walton 2005; Yoneyama 2015). In Australia, this paradigm remains dominant and its key tenets are adopted in the South Australian government’s current school bullying policy which defines bullying as “an ongoing and *deliberate misuse of power* in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that *intends* to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm” (Government of South Australia 2019, p. 7, emphasis added). As Walton (2005, p. 57) asserts, definitions such as these — which are rooted in positivism and empiricism and, as such, are apparently “objective” and “divorced from ideological underpinnings” — assume that “good kids don’t bully, bad ones do” and that bullying can be solved by “rooting out the bullies, like pulling noxious weeds from an otherwise aesthetically pleasing garden”. In contrast this to, Yoneyama (2015) — drawing from the second, and more sociological, paradigm of bullying research — frames bullying as “a social dynamic” (p. 3) “entwined with various aspects of schools as social institutions” (p. 1). Bullying, through this lens, is understood to be a collective process — an issue of “ordinary”, as opposed to deviant, children performing “an over — adjustment to the school’s hidden curriculum” of inclusion and exclusion based around dominant social norms (Yoneyama 2015, p. 5).

Such a conceptualisation, of bullying as a discursive and social process of inclusion, exclusion and conformity — a policing of dominant social norms (Yoneyama 2015) — can be applied to the narratives of the five participants who were targeted, through school bullying, due to the aspects of their subjectivities that marked them as deviating from the norm. For example, we can see this reflected in Maror and Angela’s accounts of being bullied for existing outside the parameters of worth and desirability set by dominant discourses of race which, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, find their exercise in schools. Angela explained: “Since very young, I was getting picked on for being the darkest in the class, these two freckles on my forehead — just getting picked on for everything, anything that’s different. How thick my hair was”. Bobby similarly reflected upon his experiences of being bullied at school, both verbally and physically, due to his markers of difference:

Bobby: Even throughout primary school, I was getting called junkie, I was getting called fucking everything under the sun, just because of how skinny I am. It was pretty hard to be honest. And, because I wasn't the smartest kid, I'd struggle with my work a lot and I wouldn't understand, or I'd get questions wrong a lot, and I'd get made fun of a lot! [emphasis] And because of my dyslexia, I got made fun of for that. It doesn't matter what it was, I got made fun of. My brother gave me he shoes — I got made fun of for that, because they were second-hand shoes, but they were still Nike.

From a Foucauldian lens, rather than “a static category of violence” (Walton 2005, p. 60) enacted by ‘bad’ individuals (Yoneyama 2015), the violence of bullying is understood as “a discursive field of power relations” with “political and historical antecedents” (Walton 2005, p. 59). Within Bobby’s narration, we can see how he was targeted for bullying on a number of grounds: his failure to perform and conform to the dominant ideas of gender (too skinny for a male), class (too poor to wear new shoes) and intellect (too dumb to get questions right) that infuse school environments. We can also see how the violence of bullying exists as a form of “school-floor, peer-surveillance ... which helps to perfect the enforcement of school norms” (Yoneyama 2015). Bobby goes on to reflect upon how the violence he was experiencing at the hands (metaphorically and literally) of his peers, in conjunction with the violence he was experiencing at the hands of his father, meant that, as a primary school aged child, he was moving from one violent space to another: “Yeah, I had anxiety because of my Dad, but also bullying at school. It would be: wake up and get worried if Dad's gonna flip his shit, and then go into school and be like, ‘okay, who's gonna bully me today?’”.

Jordan similarly reflects on being bullied “heaps in primary school” for the aspects of his identity and appearance that marked him as different, as non-normative. He was bullied, he reflects, for having a learning difficulty and “bad” handwriting, for being Aboriginal, for being the “poor kid” living in public housing in a “really posh” area and for not having the correct school uniform. Through this lens, bullying is produced and culturally legitimised by the discursive norms and institutional practices — of categorisation, regulation and normalisation — that see students struggling to exist within dominant social norms identified, disciplined and excluded, not just by their peers but, by their teachers through the behaviour management practices and policies of schools (Yoneyama 2015). Bobby outlined his experiences of being bullied and the ways that this bullying was reinforced and licensed by the interventions of the school which, like for Maror, he saw as focused more on his response to being bullied than the bullying itself:

I started getting anger issues and I'd be like, 'Well, okay, if you're gonna keep saying all this shit, I'm just gonna flip my lid'. All throughout primary school it happened, and I took it, took it, took it and just one day in the middle of the class I ended up losing my

shit at some kid and in the end, I was always getting in trouble for it. I was always to blame. And I was just like, 'Well, I don't understand how I'm always to blame when I'm reacting to them. I know it's bad, but I can't help it if no one helps me'. So, I'd always have detentions, suspensions — like full blown office suspensions, you have to sit in the office for lunch, have a different recess, different lunch. So, you have to literally sit there, watch everyone outside playing around you while you're sitting there doing schoolwork.

6.3.4 Schools and police: carceral collusion

As detailed above, schools have embedded within them mechanisms of disciplinary, carceral control that mirror, reflect, inform and reproduce the practices of the formal carceral system. However, as with the biomedical discourses that shape mental health institutions discussed earlier, these disciplinary machines don't merely mirror each other from afar, but instead frequently collude, intersect, and overlap. Schools play a fundamental role in the 'reformation' and 'rehabilitation' of 'deviant' subjects detained in child/youth prisons, and policing plays a key role in regulating those deemed too deviant to be managed within the disciplinary site of classroom. This collusion, between schools and prisons, is both discursive and material; as evidenced in Tyson's explanation that "I never liked school, right from the start I was always in trouble. All the schoolteachers always told me that I'd end up in here [child/youth prison]", and Jordan, Kayla and Kyle's experiences of having the police called to them by their schools. In the case of Kayla, collusion across these systems occurred under the guise of supporting her engagement and attendance at school, but as she noted:

When a kid's not coming to school, you just get like the police and stuff to come to take them? That's more trauma. Why would you even want to come to school if you're getting escorted to school by the police? Everyone's just looking at you and they just think differently of you.

Further demonstrating the overlapping of the carceral practices of the school and the formal carceral system, Jordan reflected upon being arrested in class when his school contacted the police and, as a result, drug detection dogs examined all student lockers for illicit substances. He explained, "They just had a sniffer dog that was sniffing all the lockers, because apparently someone was dealing cocaine, and then they found two and a half ounces [of marijuana] in my locker". For Jordan, dealing marijuana to his peers occurred within the context of being a 'poor', Aboriginal, scholarship kid at a wealthy private boy's school. In such a setting, Jordan desperately wanted to be 'normal' and the selling of marijuana provided him with both social currency, as he granted access to something sought after by his peers, and with a disposable income which

distanced him from the subject position of the poor, scholarship kid — a positioning which, since primary school, had been a source of ostracisation for Jordan:

Tessa: And so, what was going on at that time? Why were you selling such large amounts?

Jordan: Just money. It was easy money. Everyone had money and everyone wanted dope, so it was like 'okay'.

Tessa: And so, as a scholarship kid, did you notice that other students they had more money than you?

Jordan: Yep! It was also for the friend group. I was bringing in friends with it.

Tessa: Yeah? So, it gave you like a status or something?

Jordan: Yeah, a reputation.

Tessa: And they needed you for something?

Jordan: At the time, yeah.

Here we can see how, as argued by the school to prison pipeline literature (Bahena et al. 2012; Cuellar & Markowitz 2015; Nance 2015, 2016; Skiba, Arredondo & Williams 2014), schools don't simply enact carceral practices of discipline and control that can be experienced as violent and ostracising, they also frequently call upon, and collude with, the formal carceral system — by calling the police — to manage subjects deemed too deviant for the disciplinary regime of schooling.

6.4 The carcerality of Centrelink

As within mental health and educational institutions, the 'welfare' sector — a system purportedly designed around principles of care and support — exemplifies carcerality in its logic, organisation, practices and effects. Whilst participant narratives illuminate carceral logics and practices as infusing the welfare sector at large, for the purpose of brevity, within this section I seek to explore the entanglement of carceral logics within the specific sites of Centrelink and Job Network providers. Through a disciplinary, carceral society lens, the institutional machine of Centrelink — "ostensibly a welfare institution underpinned by the goal of poverty alleviation (or at the very least the provision of a social 'safety net') — can also be seen to act "as an agent of surveillance and policing, blurring the boundaries between welfare provision and criminal justice functions" (Wilcock 2017, p. 2).

Within the Australian context, the administration of welfare payments "has a long history" of employing carceral logics and practices under the guise "of ensuring eligibility" and "detecting welfare abuse" (Wilcock 2017, p. 84) — "a deep suspicion", as Henman and Marston (2008, p. 194) argue, has always pervaded this system. However, since the rise of neoliberalism and the Howard government's introduction of heightened accountability mechanisms, through 'activity testing'

and ‘mutual obligations’, in the late 1990s, the ‘welfare’ institution of Centrelink has subjected the unemployed to ever increasing regimes of surveillance, discipline and punitive control (Parker & Fopp 2005). Key to this shift towards heightened surveillance and governance of welfare recipients is the discursively constructed notion of a culture of ‘welfare dependence’ – a core enemy of the neoliberal state and, reportedly, a product “of an over-generous welfare system which subsidises laziness” (Parker & Fopp 2005, p. 110). Consecutive Labor and Liberal governments have drawn heavily on this discourse, perpetuating stereotypes about unemployment, ‘work-shy’ individuals, ‘dole bludgers’, and a generational underclass who must be made to earn their ‘welfare’. Take, for example, former Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s assertion that welfare reform must require “responsibility” and “end the corrosive aimlessness of welfare” (Buckmaster 2010, p. n.p) and former Liberal Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s assertions that “we can’t abolish poverty, because poverty in part is a function of behaviour” of the unemployed who choose not work “because they do not have to” (Ayer 2004, p. 1). Within such discursive constructions, being in receipt of a welfare payment reflects more than simply being in a state of economic dependence, it is also tied to a state of “moral-psychological” dependency (Dean 2010, p. 76). Implicit within this framing is the idea:

...that poor people have something more wrong with them than their poverty. Welfare dependency is hence a syndrome lurking behind the welfare state that can be related to biology, psychology, upbringing, culture or behaviour, or several or even all of these factors (Dean 2010, p. 78).

Through actively participating in the construction of both the ‘welfare fraud’ and the ‘welfare cheat’, consecutive governments have licensed “a ‘reordering’ of social assistance administration enabling the introduction of a host of intrusive surveillance practices”, whilst simultaneously muzzling discussions about the inadequacy of benefit rates (Wilcock 2017, p. 28) — an issue identified by the numerous participants who reflected upon the impossibility of surviving on a Centrelink income alone.

In such a landscape, Centrelink’s litany of carceral techniques include: a large-scale “electronic data matching program”; a specialist taskforce, ‘Taskforce Integrity’, which targets, for heightened scrutiny and surveillance, suburbs deemed ‘high risk’ for welfare fraud or non-compliance; the contracting of private security firms to conduct “covert optical surveillance”; the creation of “a full-time fraud tip-off hotline enabling the public to ‘dob in a dole cheat’” (Wilcock 2017, pp. 1-2); algorithmic ‘debt recovery’ programs like ‘Robo-debt’ (Braithwaite 2020); and racially discriminatory mechanisms of control like the “Basics Card” (Dee 2013). Through mandatory

“mutual obligation requirements” (Services Australia 2023), mechanisms of disciplinary surveillance are also “deeply embedded in the daily minutia of life for people attempting to survive on welfare” (Dee 2013, p. 275). Those who fail to meet the litany of employment and reporting related tasks required of them each fortnight face significant, carceral like, sanctions, such as, payment reduction or suspension. Benji, for example, presented at one interview deeply distressed, saying that, after six months of sleeping rough, he had finally been offered public housing but had to reject this due to Centrelink sanctions on his income, meaning that he would not be able to afford the fortnightly rent and bills. He explained: “I've just lost the place because I couldn't sign my lease, 'cause my Job Seeker takes \$300 from me every payday now”. This sanction, which was imposed upon Benji after, unbeknownst to him, his ‘mutual obligation’ exemption due to homelessness was removed, was to last a minimum of “a month and a half to three months, depending on whether I do my requirements”. Benji explained:

My worker, he took the requirements of job search off because of homelessness, but when they just flicked me over to another worker it all defaulted back. The manager of [Job Network Provider] said that he [previous worker] ‘had too much leniency and you're supposed to be searching for jobs while on job seeker’. And they said I'm going to incur penalties ... they told me that after [I hadn't met requirements for the relevant period] and then they said ‘We're taking \$300 from every pay day for about a month and a half to three months’.

This new worker asserted that Benji’s current state of rough sleeping and quite debilitating methamphetamine addiction, for which he was desperately seeking admission to a residential rehab, had no bearing on his status as a ‘job seeker’ — if he wanted the benefit of an income, no matter how meagre, these were the normatively inscribed hoops through which he must jump. Chunn and Gavigan (2006, p. 189) comment, within the neoliberal society ‘welfare fraud’ and ‘welfare dependency’ have been “so successfully installed in public discourse and government policy”, transforming previously enduring constructions of deservingness: “[f]ew people it seems, qualify as ‘deserving’ poor anymore”. This shift, “from welfare fraud to welfare *as* fraud” (Wilcock (2017, p. 28), is evident in Benji’s experience as a young person sleeping rough, who very rarely has his own phone and can only access a computer at the public library, and who, due to mutual obligation requirements, has to apply for “thirty jobs a fortnight”:

Tessa: Have you been applying for your jobs?

Benji: Yeah, I started. It increased from 20 to 30. I've got to do 12 more by the end of the week.

Tessa: It's the end of the week today.

Benji: Yeah.

Tessa: How do you apply for them? What do you do?

Benji: I just do Seek and then through the Workforce app. I have to do it on a shitty phone that I have. The Seek app, like sometimes it's like 'browser not working' and just goes off when I'm right in the middle of it.

Infused with suspicion and paternalism, these expectations can be seen as practices of punishment, producing violent power dynamics (Hearn et al. 2022a). Through the simple change of a worker, the meagre income of someone like Benji can be radically reduced or revoked entirely — a dynamic he reflected upon as:

Pretty tricky, you know? Having only \$340 left. [SAHA worker] was trying to tell me 'Just sign it [lease] and live off thirty-five bucks' and I was like, 'I wouldn't be able to pay bills, then the bills would be cut off', you know? I wouldn't be able to get food. It's like setting myself up for failure. I'd spiral ... And I remember when I was in the room with [SAHA worker], when I signed the termination forms, and she's like, 'Are you sure? you sure?' I was just like tearing up, like 'Can you stop asking me if I'm sure, you know? It is what it is'. I try and say that to myself every day, because if I don't, I'll spiral.

Within the neoliberal, carceral society, the welfare recipient has become so stigmatised, so “tinged with criminal suspicion” (Wilcock 2017, p. 28), that “the concept of ‘welfare’” itself has become “loaded, not with compassion, but with fear and loathing of a criminally indolent welfare dependent class” (Dee 2013, p. 274). Such discursive practices produce a feedback loop in which further carcerality becomes the only logical, and politically palatable, course of policy action. Through a carceral society lens, Job Network Providers can be seen to enact mechanisms of disciplinary control that constrain the choices available to those they sanction — practices which don't simply replicate those of the formal carceral system, but also push people closer into its reaches. Benji, for example, illustrates this constraining when he explains, “If I signed it [the lease], and had no money left for bills and shit, I'd probably go do crime to get on drugs”.

Under discourses of welfare dependency, and the government policies of mutual obligation they produce, Job Network Providers play a key role in the governance of normality — enacting practices of power which seek to shape subjectivities in alignment with dominant neoliberal norms. These coercive practices, to which welfare recipients must simply submit or face sanctions, produce a notably carceral power dynamic. In penalising those who fail to comply, Job Network Providers become the judges, enforcers and sanctioners of neoliberal discourses of ‘welfare dependency’. As within the formal carceral system, these carceral practices have far-reaching implications for people like Benji who, at the time of writing — months after he was unable to accept a housing offer due to a Centrelink sanction — remained both sanctioned and homeless. Through a violence regimes lens, this intentional deprivation imposed upon Benji by an institution of the state, and the subjectification effects that accompany this, can be seen as violent (Hearn et

al. 2022a). During this particular interview with Benji, I got a glimpse into how the practices of power produced by discourses of class and welfare dependency have, at times, produced a sense of resignation within Benji. Towards the end of this interview, for example, I asked Benji whether he would like me to contact his job network provider to advocate that his hardship exemption be reinstated, however Benji simply responded: “I just don't really want to like fuck with it anymore or piss them off, you know? You know when you've gone so far to the point where you just can't anymore? You just can't try anymore”.

6.5 The carcerality of ‘child protection’

Of the four care-impacted young people participating in this study, three²⁵ chose to speak about the violences of the child ‘protection’ system — a service landscape that, whilst ostensibly designed around the protection of those within its reaches, is replete with carceral logics; the harms of which are immense (Dettlaff, Abrams & Teasley 2023; Edwards et al. 2023; Kelly 2021; Whitman 2023). As Kelly (2021, pp. 264-5) explains, child ‘protection’ systems are commonly constructed as “a kind of avenging angel”, rescuing vulnerable children “from brutal parents and placing them safely in the laps of caring foster parents”. However, “much like the romanticized version of the police as protector belies the reality of police brutality, so too does the image of the kindly hand” misrepresent the disciplinary and violent nature of many practices within child ‘protection’ institutions (Kelly 2021, pp. 264-5). For Whitman (2023, p. 295), a survivor of what he terms “the family regulation system”, guardianship care “is neither a benevolent nor neutral system”. Disciplinary practices of surveillance, classification, normalisation and control, as will be argued, are built into its very fabric — shaping, in violent ways, the lived experiences and subjectivities of the children who call its services ‘home’ (Whitman 2023). However, as Rose astutely reflects, to refer to the countless residential care settings she has been placed in since age 12 as ‘homes’ is to radically misrepresent how these sites are often experienced. She explained:

A foster home is normally a home for you, respite care is just a place where all kids just stay. I think it's not really fair on the little kids that go to care. People shouldn't be going to [residential] care at a young age, you know? ‘Cause it changes your life completely.

In narrating her experiences of residential care, Shyanne also reflected upon the cold and institutional nature of group homes, shedding light on the existence of pervasive practices of disciplinary power, normalisation and control. She explained:

²⁵ Gus, Shyanne and Rose — all First Nations young people.

For me, I feel like I just got put there [residential care] and I had to do it all on my own, sort it out by myself and just go through it all by myself. And there's certain workers that are just, they're telling us directly their job is just to 'make sure that we're doing the right thing'. They just won't even talk [to us]. It's like we're just the objects — 'You do this, you do that, or no you can't do this, you can't do that'. It's just 'You do this, or we won't do nothing for you'.

In this residential care setting, practices of surveillance, discipline and control — to ensure Shyanne was “doing the right thing” — were prioritised over the goals, as espoused by the Department for Child Protection, of providing “a secure and stable environment” characterised by “safety”, “nurturing care” and “developmental” and “relational healing opportunities” (Department for Child Protection 2022). These practices, as Shyanne articulates, left her feeling not like a nurtured child, but rather like an “object” under constant, panoptic surveillance:

If we was to even, during the day, go out [into the] backyard with other kids, they'd watch us from the window. They'd be standing at the window ... but we had cameras at the same time, so it was like we don't need double security. You've got the cameras; we don't need you to follow us around and watch us like little kids.

The presence of multiple layers of surveillance highlights the panoptic nature of residential care, in which there is an assumption of deviance requiring regulation and discipline. Evidencing the long-lasting impacts of these carceral practices, Shyanne talked about continuing to feel “triggered” and “like someone is constantly watching” her, years after fleeing the state of South Australia to escape residential care. She explained:

So basically, it feels like since I've left I've got, not PTSD, but my mental health is a bit different. Just something from there, it'll trigger [me] ... including the part where I feel like someone is constantly watching me — because the workers was always there. If you look here, or if you look that way, even if you look out the window, they're just standing there. It was so many of them. It was just like 'we could just pick you out, we know where you are'. And they could just be listening to us because of the thing, the [intercom].

Within the carceral society, practitioners — often from my disciplinary home of social work — employed under the guise of providing ‘trauma-informed’ care are coopted into regulatory and control-based practices that seek to normalise and produce self-governing compliance in young people constructed as deviant, ‘at-risk’ and ‘risky’. These carceral logics produce an authoritarian power dynamic “often akin to policing, where surveillance, behavior management, and control” are seen as essential to the provision of ‘care’ (Edwards et al. 2023, p. 1). As Edwards et al. (2023, p. 4) argue, in a normative home environment, “communal spaces such as kitchens, hallways, and closets are seldomly locked; however, in out of home care, locking doors and restricting access to communal spaces are common practices” — a dynamic Shyanne elaborates on in the following:

We had a playground, but it was gated off. We were not allowed to go out on the other side by our curfew, we all had a curfew. Once it's dark time, no one's to leave the inside — you'd have to jump the gate or they'd have to open it [back door] with their card. We couldn't even sit in our own backyard, just to sit and talk ... Just always in your room, and then if we were to open our door it would beep, so it would tell them that we have opened our doors ... And if we didn't, people would actually get hurt. They would send night workers in, if we don't go into our [rooms].

The imposition of strict curfews, the gating off or locking of certain areas within the 'home' and the electronic monitoring of doors create a disciplinary environment in which the resemblance to prison is striking. As Shyanne continued, when these practices of surveillance and containment failed to produce compliance, further, more overt and coercive mechanisms were drawn upon — through, for example, the introduction of "night guards", akin to prison or security guards.

They would get two big guys to come and manhandle us into our rooms. Just night shifts, these guys that don't even work there, to come and tell us to go into our rooms. Me and this girl, we did not listen so they full on rushed at me and put my hand behind my back and I thought they broke my finger. I thought they broke my finger; I was in that much pain. And they told me to walk into [my room], instead of me going into the room, I walked into my kitchen. He just grabbed me and just shoved me into my room like I was just a piece of furniture. And I was telling them, I was like can you not see what you're doing is wrong? Me and this girl physically got just chunked into our rooms.

Rose, like Shyanne, also described her experience of residential care as institutional, restrictive, unpredictable and unstable. For Rose, these carceral practices and power dynamics meant that the youth prison "felt more like home" than the one assigned to her by the very system that terminated her parents' rights and took on the responsibility of 'guardian' and 'protector'. Talking about her first experience of prison at age 13, Rose explained:

Rose: I was very scared, but it changed my mindset. I liked this place because I've never had a home to feel like home, you know? And this is the first place that I know all the staff, I know who's gonna be on every day, you know? I know I'm gonna have food, I know I'm gonna have a bed, you know? That's why I've been coming here, cause, all my friends in here will tell you 'Yeah, this feels more like home'.

Tessa: And so, does that say something about this place or it says something about the world outside?

Rose: Yeah.

Tessa: And how not at home care is?

Rose: Yep [sighs].

As with all institutional sites discussed thus far, the carceral practices of the family regulation system don't simply mirror but also frequently call upon the formal carceral system in the disciplining of unruly subjects (CREATE 2018; Dettlaff, Abrams & Teasley 2023; Edwards et al. 2023; Kelly 2021; Whitman 2023). As Kelly (2021, p. 263) asserts, "[t]he two systems are connected and feed one another". For example, police and family regulation workers work

together when children are removed from their family and/or placed in care, departmental workers must make a case in court for legal orders against a parent and, as demonstrated by a CREATE (2018, pp. 32-3) report, which interviewed 148 young people in care across Australia, police are frequently called by carers “as a response to challenging behaviour or minor offending, in a manner that would be atypical in a family home”. Within the CREATE (2018, p. 26) study, for example, 18 participants reported being charged with assault, and 17 with “wilful damage”, following a fight with a carer or a co-tenant in the residential care environment. One participant explained he was charged with “breaking and entering” after he returned to his residential care home after curfew, unlocked the window and “climbed in with” his “mates” (CREATE 2018, p. 26), while another reported being charged with “trespassing” due to entering his home’s office area. One young person reported having police called due to using “bad language towards workers” (CREATE 2018, p. 33).

These findings are reflected in the narratives of Rose, Gus and Shyanne who also report having the police routinely called to them by carers. Shyanne, for example, outlined the multiple occasions in which police were called when she and her peers chose to hang out in the communal lounge room, rather than being confined to their bedrooms, after curfew: “The police would come from each door, you’re arrested for this, you’re arrested for that”. Shyanne was, herself, arrested “so many times” for breaching care related rules.

Whilst in South Australia, the act of staying out past curfew or refusing to return to a residential care placement is not itself deemed criminal, the practice of residential care workers calling the police due to a young person being absent from placement is common and undeniably exposes care-impacted young people to increased police contact and scrutiny (CREATE 2018; Edwards et al. 2023; Kelly 2021). Shyanne commented:

Shyanne: So many times [the police were called]. I was a missing person so many nights. They [the police] would have to come pick me up and either take me to the cells or to where I lived.

Tess: What if you were out with friends until 10:30?

Shyanne: No, you’d go missing person. They [the police] would just look at me and be like ‘you already know, get in the car’. And then they’ll just take me straight there [residential care] and then to your room. Always into the room. We’re not even allowed to sleep in the lounge room. We’d even try to drag our single bed mattresses out and ‘no, we’re going to call the police if you don’t get into the room’. And every time they’d [police] come, they’d be like ‘This is the second time we’re here. There’s nothing else we can do, just to send you to [youth prison]’.

Gus similarly suggested that residential care workers would routinely use the police as a mechanism of control — “If you didn’t come back” by curfew, he explained, “they’d call the cops”. As young people like Gus, Shyanne and Rose were often on bail, conditional release or good behaviour bonds, such a practice could see them breached and returned to prison — getting “breaches” for “going MPR”,²⁶ Gus explained, “that’s common”. Rose similarly reflected upon the many times that residential care workers called the police on her for “going MPR” when she would decide to spend the night at her older brother’s home. Rose explained that due to the instability of the residential care environment in which she’d had “probably over fucking five hundred carers”, this older brother was the only person she felt truly able to rely on: “I lean on my brother a lot”, she said. However, due to the restrictive and rigid practices of the child protection system, Rose was not allowed to spend the night at her brother’s place, although on many occasions she “just ran away from there” — a decision that saw her routinely “grabbed by the cops” and “taken back to care”. So strong was her drive to be with her brother, though, that Rose would often “just leave straightaway” when returned to residential care; “I’d just run away every single time”, she explained. As with Gus, for Rose the practice of workers calling police due to absence from placement can also be linked to increasing risk of criminalisation. Whilst the act of ‘going MPR’ was, itself, not criminalisable, the reliance on police to manage this behaviour exposed Rose to additional police contact and heightened scrutiny. During MPR related interactions with police, Rose reports being “caught with drugs a lot” — “I’d get charged for possession of drugs”, she explained. Here we can see just some of the ways in which the family regulation system — a system which purports to ‘protect’ children — doesn’t simply enact practices that are carceral, but also those which can contribute to, and exacerbate, the criminalisation of those under its care.

6.6 Conclusion

At the centre of this chapter lies an interrogation of the ways in which, whilst masked behind a façade of support and service provision, carceral mechanisms of surveillance, discipline, normalisation and control are etched into many societal institutions, shaping, infusing and constraining the work that can be done by even the most critical of practitioners. Whilst undoubtably still providing supportive functions, like access to income, these ‘welfare’ based institutions also exist as sites of scrutiny, regulation and control — practices which produce and maintain the violences of inequality (Hearn et al. 2022a) and shape, in significant ways, the

²⁶ Going MPR is a common colloquialism used to describe the practice of police being called when a young person fails to return to their placement.

subjectivities of all whom interact with them. However, as Henman and Marston (2008) argue, these practices of carceral control tend to target those existing outside the dominant social norms particularly acutely — producing formative, corrosive and violent effects on subjectivity, social position and, as has been argued, shaping pathways into criminalisation. This chapter highlights the ways in which, within the carceral society, we are all coopted into practices of carcerality and the pressing need for us, across all layers of society, to begin envisioning and enacting new methods of responding to harm and inequity.

7 THE VIOLENCE OF THE CARCERAL SYSTEM

7.1 Introduction

In seeking to interrogate the violences and disciplinary practices produced within the formal carceral system — conceptualised here as comprising policing, prisons, courts, corrections and community youth justice — this chapter draws from both the work of Foucault (1979) on the disciplinary nature of the carceral society and the violence regimes approach offered by Hearn et al. (2022a). Whilst this chapter focuses solely on the practices of punishment, discipline and violence exercised within, and by, the formal carceral system, as demonstrated in previous chapters, it does not suggest that such practices, or the discourses, knowledges and micro-penalties of power that produce them, are unique to this setting. As Foucault (1979, p. 216) asserts, within the carceral society, disciplinary practices of surveillance and categorisation have been infused throughout societal institutions including schools, universities, hospitals and welfare agencies, “whose major, if not exclusive, function is to assure that discipline reigns over society as a whole”. This chapter, the final of the findings for this thesis, takes the institutional context of the formal carceral system as its focus because it is within this microcosm that the violent practices of the carceral society are laid most bare (Foucault 1979) and manifest most acutely for research participants. As such, this chapter seeks to interrogate how the carceral society’s practices of surveillance, control, discipline and punishment manifest within policing and prisons, exposing the bodies and subjectivities of criminalised young people to a litany of state-sanctioned, societally legitimated violences (Hearn et al. 2022a).

Whilst research participants provided narratives illuminating the violences inherent in, for example, the carceral site of the courthouse and the carceral processes of conditional release, parole and home detention, here I engage with only the most dominant themes, as foreshadowed in the preceding chapters. The first section of the chapter, thus, follows the same format as Chapter Five, the first of the findings chapters — beginning by exploring how dominant discourses of race, class and gender produce violent practices within the formal carceral system. However, after this point this chapter deviates, structurally, from that of Chapter Five, and goes on to explore the violent bodily and subjectification effects of discourses of deviance, as evident in the practice of extended lockdowns, within the context of the prison as an institution of violence.

7.2 Institutions of violence: race, policing and prisons

All of the participants in this research opted to speak about their experiences of, and interactions with, the formal carceral system. As within broader society, for those occupying racialised subjectivities, the discursive and material violences of discourses of race infiltrated their experiences of criminalisation (Hearn et al. 2022a). As articulated by Giannacopoulos (2023, p. 81), for these young people the violences of these discourses, and this “imposed law”, were “visible and palpable”. Again, it is worth reiterating that this project interrogates the dominant discourses of race that proliferate within the carceral society, not to engage with the notion of race as “objective, inherent or fixed” but, to emphasise “the social, political, economic and legal processes through which dominant society engages in racializing different groups, in making race intelligible and in structuring the field of raced relation(ship)s” (Cunneen 2020, p. 523). Thus, instead of focusing on the racialised other, this section draws from a violence regimes lens (Hearn et al. 2022a) to interrogate the specific mechanisms through which racialisation is produced and enacted as violence within the formal carceral regime. However, whilst focussed on specific incidents, in alignment with a violence regimes lens, this section understands carceral violence as more than just a collection of overt acts, but as something built into the very fabric of the carceral system through its relationship to the “organisation and maintenance of colonial power” (Giannacopoulos 2023, p.83). As Cunneen (2009, p. 209) explains, the carceral state “claims monopoly over the legitimate use of violence against its own citizenry”, predominantly through the construction of deviance and related practices of surveillance, punishment and control. Examining the ways in which violence is clustered around racialised young people makes it possible to see, both, the symbiotic links with colonialism and the dominant discourses of race that enable and sustain this (Cunneen 2009, p. 210). The formal carceral system, as will be elucidated, emerges as a microcosm in which the societal practices of direct and indirect racial violence (Hearn et al. 2022a) are repeated and perpetuated through contextually specific techniques (Foucault 1979).

Cunneen (2020, p. 523) argues that the practices and processes of racial violence adopted within the carceral system can be directly linked to “the production of knowledge about the behaviours and pathologies of the racialized other”. Grounded in Enlightenment knowledges, such practices reify race as a delineable, biological truth and, in so doing, produce essentialised, stereotyped, and racialised understandings of the people these categories purport to describe. In this study, for example, Angela’s account of an encounter with a police officer illustrates the ways in which

essentialised, stereotyped discourses of race enact violence within the formal carceral system. In recounting the interaction, in which the white police officer tells Angela's (also white) mother that he has "an Asian adopted daughter at home" who "sometimes acts up too", Angela astutely names the harmful stereotyping as well as the subjectivity/power dynamics that so routinely shape interactions between the police and the policed. As she explains, "He said that in front of my mum and my mum didn't say anything, because he's a cop. She just sat there because he's a cop, there's nothing you can really do". Unlike her mother, however, Angela "got mad" and challenged these harmful constructions. She reflected:

I was like 'What do you mean act up? Why are you stereotyping my culture, my background, for being problematic and acting up?' And he was white too. He was just a typical white cop and my mum, who is white, was also in the room. She's white, so he probably assumed that we're not related too. So many assumptions. So many things just went through my head I was just like, 'Nah, not it. You don't culturally just pinpoint other children if they're white or something'.

In calling out the police officer's overt racial stereotyping, Angela actively resists this positioning, yet still her agency is constrained in this context — as the officer reframes her resistance as further evidence of her deviance. Here we can see how practices within the formal carceral system, as within society at large, essentialise and racially gaslight (Davis & Ernst 2020), highlighting the "political, social, economic and cultural process[es]" that enable and normalise a "white supremacist reality through pathologizing those who resist" (Davis & Ernst 2020, p. 761). These remain key mechanisms through which racial violence is both exercised and invisibilised (Majavu 2018).

Angela's story, above, represents more than the actions of a single police officer; rather it draws attention to dominant discourses of race which produce harmful and essentialised understandings of 'deviant' young people, highlighting, in turn, the discursive power dynamics that pervade policing practices — practices which are entangled with criminological efforts seeking to establish "connections between ethnicity and crime" (Palmer 2014, p. 119), as discussed in Chapter Five. When not coupled with an analysis of broader social processes, such research practices have perpetuated supposed 'truths' — linking certain 'races' with deviance and crime, thus constructing heightened levels of racialised surveillance, exclusion and control as both necessary and a logical response to the 'evidence-base' (Cunneen 2020; Majavu 2018). This is a phenomenon that racialised participants in this study — like Gus, Maror, Tyson, Trey, Kyle, Angela and Jax — were acutely aware of. Gus, for example, reflected on his sense that:

Cops just see young black youth just walking down the road, they just pull them over, try to red flag them for something, anything, just for doing nothing. Ninety percent of the time it's just because of the clothes you wear and your skin colour.

Here, we see Gus identifying and resisting some of the subjectification effects of dominant discourses of Indigeneity which, within the carceral, colonial society, construct him as inherently more deviant than others. For Gus, this understanding of racial profiling is not merely theoretical, it is lived and embodied: “You see it happening to other people, and then it happens to yourself a couple of times — you kind of just find it out yourself. It just keeps happening”.

Dominant discourses of race, and the disciplinary practices they produce, have exposed Gus to the injustice of what he experiences as heightened, racially motivated, surveillance, whilst simultaneously shaping his subjectivity in ways that seek to render him compliant and self-governing (Foucault 1979). Closely associated are the practices of intensive policing involving racialised surveillance and ‘stop and search’ approaches that “inevitably lead to increased rates of arrest” (Cunneen 2020, p. 526). However, as Cunneen (2020, p. 526) explains, the “vast majority” of racially targeted ‘stop and search’ incidents are “‘unsuccessful’ with no further action being taken — thus compounding minoritized young people’s feelings of unfairness and targeting”. Thus, as Gus explains, any feelings of anger or distress in response to these practices are not only invalidated but punished: “We get in more trouble. If I get angry, they bash us”. More than anger though, these experiences leave Gus feeling “scared” and “nervous” every time he sees police, even when simply walking to the bus stop. Through his narrations, it becomes clear that Gus holds a deep knowing that, within the colonial, carceral society, he has been constructed as inherently more deviant than others — as he says, “They wouldn’t do it to a white kid”.

Gus — like Maror, Kyle, Tyson, Jax and Trey — demonstrates an acute understanding that these constructions shape how he is seen and treated by agents of the carceral system, thus exposing him to a heightened risk of violence at their hands. Also shaping his emotional and behavioural landscape, these constructions produce an embodied sense of fear and dread: “Even if I’m doing nothing wrong, [if I see police] I’d just run off, did whatever I could, change where I was walking”. Across the narratives of other research participants, these self-censoring or avoidant behaviours — of removing oneself from the vicinity of police — are often interpreted within carceral regimes not as a reasonable fear response to the threat of carceral violence, but as yet more evidence of deviance and guilt. Benji, for example, reflects upon this dynamic, describing a time when he ran from police who, in their pursuit, drove their vehicle onto the footpath, causing Benji to fall over

the handlebars of his bike, only narrowly avoiding being run over by the police car. As he explained, while the police asked “Now what was that all for? If you’ve done nothing wrong, why'd you run then?”, he thought, but didn’t dare say, “Well why'd you drive on the footpath you psychos? Cause I’m fucking scared of you”.

Foucault (1979) argues that within the carceral, disciplinary society, surveillance practices aimed at regulating and disciplining subjects have become normalised but take on a particular intensity in relation to those constructed as deviant. Trey, Tyson, Kyle and Jax, all Aboriginal young people, talked about their experiences, from a young age, of being monitored and profiled while with their family or friends, demonstrating an acute awareness of the harmful discourses that shape such practices. Jax, for example, reflected upon a time at the age of about 12 when their aunty was pinned to the ground during a violent arrest and they heard the police officer mutter “That’s going to be you one day. All of your family are like this, you’re gonna be like this too”. After sharing this, Jax looked down at their hands and, with a sad tone, asserted that “Just because we have had bad things happen to us, doesn’t mean that we’re bad people”. Dominant discourses of Aboriginality, as Jax demonstrates, are not simply descriptive but material in their effects (Hearn et al. 2022a). These discourses exercise power and in so doing reinforce social hierarchies and inequalities, shaping the subjectivities of young people like Jax, with little recognition of the historic and ongoing colonial violences that so often shape the social positions, experiences and subjectivities of First Nations people. Even within such a powerful discursive climate, though, in Jax’ assertion that their family are “not bad people”, we can see Jax exercising agency as they resist the construction of both Aboriginality and their family as inherently deviant.

In alignment with Jax’s experiences, Tyson similarly suggested that “cops just hate...certain groups”. In reflecting on the subjectifying effects of these practices of power, Tyson explained: “And the cops always, when something happens, look at me and when they always blame me for stuff, makes you feel like you wanna go and do it, you know?”. Here we can see how, within the disciplinary, carceral society, surveillance is used as a mechanism of power and control to reinforce stereotypes about Aboriginal youth — discursive practices which shape both societal and self-perceptions and constrain the modes of existence that are most available to young people like Tyson. In this way Tyson provides insights into some of the subjectification and internalisation effects of heightened, racially motivated, surveillance on racialised, criminalised young people, such that fulfilling these expectations can seem like the only pathway of resistance. However, Tyson also provided insights into the sense of resignation such practices of disciplinary power can

produce. Like Gus, when asked about the impacts of this heightened surveillance, Tyson seemed more defeated than anything else: “Nah. I don't know what to do, I just, yeah [pauses, looks down at his hands] don't know what to do”.

As a young person who reports having a good relationship with his case worker (or ‘Community Youth Justice [CYJ] worker'), these are issues that one might expect Tyson to have discussed with his worker. When asked, however, Tyson was clear that he would not talk to his CYJ worker about his experiences of racially motivated police surveillance, responding that, “Nah, [CYJ worker] sort of helps with trying to get me a job and that”. Here we can see how disciplinary practices, aimed at producing docile, self-governing and neoliberally productive citizens (Foucault 1979), are embedded across our carceral/welfare institutions — institutions underpinned by individualising understandings of ‘deviance’ and expressed through ‘normalising’ practices with little acknowledgement of the systemic, structural and discursive violences that shape young people’s lives.

Maror provided similar reflections on the racial violence exercised through and by the carceral system, suggesting that, since leaving the formal schooling system, police remain one of the few sources of overt racism in his life. He provided examples of being referred to as “a black dog”, of being beaten and racially profiled and of seeing recent video footage of police “beating a black man” at his local police station. As Maror explained: “You know, I got arrested for something I didn't do once, because someone that looks like me, same description ... just a black man [pause], a black man, so I got arrested for something I didn't do”. Maror thus provides yet another example of how dominant discourses of race infuse and inform violent practices within the formal carceral system. Here we see how essentialist racial profiling leads to more than just heightened levels of carceral surveillance, but also heightened levels of arrest, incarceration and criminalisation. These biases and assumptions described by Maror produce increased surveillance that, in turn, as Cunneen (2020) explains, results in increased visibility, police contact and criminalisation. For Maror, like others, profiling by police has been an omnipresent force in his life since he was around 12 years old. He explained:

Right since the start, they knew who I am before I even got arrested. They had photos of me walking around before I'd ever been arrested. Knew my street name, everything, just because of the people I associated myself with. While I was young, my older cousins already had criminal records so me hanging with them, made me a target by the police.

As an Australian-born, South-Sudanese young person, the dominant discourses and cultural meanings ascribed to Maror's black masculinity (Motimele 2021) overwhelmingly construct him as violent, dangerous and, as will be demonstrated, gang-affiliated (Cunneen 2020; Majavu 2018) — shaping how even the simple act of spending time with family is made sense of and responded to. As Cunneen (2020, p. 524) explains, over the past decade, “sections of the media and conservative politicians have promoted an association between African youth gangs and violent crime”, creating, in the eyes of the public, a “racialized connection between being African and being criminal”. This is a phenomenon we can see produced and perpetuated by former police officer and current Leader of the Opposition, Peter Dutton, who draws from racialising discourses to construct African youth as dangerous ‘others’ who pose an inherent risk to (white) Australia:

The reality is, people are scared to go out to restaurants of a night-time because they're followed home by these gangs [. . .] We just need to call it what it is, it's African gang violence [. . .] Frankly they don't belong in Australian society (Kenny 2018, p. 1).

Here we see a federal politician, then in the position of Home Affairs minister, drawing from and reproducing discourses of race that construct “the African male as the embodiment of everything that is the opposite of”, and dangerous to, “whiteness” (Jiwani 2006; Majavu 2018, p. 194). It is a discourse which constructs African young people, particularly those with South Sudanese ancestry (Cunneen 2020), as “synonymous with crime, deviance and ... social problems ... as the repository for the Australian fear of crime” (Majavu 2018, p. 194). In this discursive context, the bodies and subjectivities of racialised others “continue to be regarded as requiring control and containment” (Jiwani 2006, p. 10).

Maror is not naïve to the racialised discourses that have shaped his subjectivity though — discourses which see him interpreted through a specific lens within the carceral system and the carceral, colonial society at large. He demonstrates a keen awareness of the “anti-black stereotypes” that are skilfully deployed to construct him as inherently criminal and are “used to justify the racist violence that is intermittently meted out” (Majavu 2018, p. 194) in this discursive context. In narrating his experiences of police brutality, Maror expands on the lived effects of this discursive positioning — a positioning that constructs him as inherently criminal, untrustworthy and deserving of the carceral violence he has endured. In responding to my query about whether he would ever report the police brutality he has endured, he explained:

Maror: How can I get justice? I'm labelled as a gang member. I'm labelled a person that doesn't do anything but hurt people. So, the justice I'm gonna get is the people telling

me 'What can we do for you? You're just a gang member, you've been locked up, you've been in trouble with the police'.

These are discourses Maror sees as setting a path “for black people to fail, 100%”. It is a path that many of his cousins and friends have been guided onto — and now too his younger brother who, despite not being involved in criminal activity, is actively experiencing the scrutiny of targeted policing. Through his narrations, we can see dominant discourses of race at play which simultaneously construct Maror as violent whilst exposing him to, and legitimising, racial violence perpetrated against him. With their institutional bases within the carceral society, these are practices of control that, for Maror, first showed themselves in the primary school context, in the neighbourhood and then, as he graduated to a criminalisable age, the formal carceral system. These institutional bases serve to perpetuate, normalise and invisibilise racial violence (Davis & Ernst 2020; Majavu 2018) — thus reinforcing existing material-discursive power structures and perpetuating inequality. However, Maror, like all young people in this study, is not simply a passive victim of these discursive practices of power (Foucault 1979). In naming the racially motivated injustices he has endured, and challenging the constructions and normalising practices that underpin these, Maror exercises resistance and subjective agency.

Kyle, an Aboriginal young person, shared similar reflections on the powerlessness he feels at being targeted by police who “have always been around, I guess”. Kyle has very early memories of “it being, you know, 9pm and police just booting down the door”. The omnipresence of police in his life, according to Kyle, came down to both “racism” and the racialised hypervisibility of his surname — “Because my last name is real known to the police so, I guess, they treat you sort of differently”. He added:

They go 'Well, if his dad is like this, then why isn't he?' As soon as they see my name, they're sort of like 'Well, we're going to have to bring in someone that's like that'. I never got dealt with by normal cops. It's always a STAR force, which are like a discipline group.

As with the other young people, when asked about the personal impact of this, Kyle communicated a sense of defeat in the face of such deeply embedded racism: “You can't, you can never stop the police, you know what I mean? So, it's like, yeah [long silence]”. Kyle noted that, in his younger years, his dad was pursued by “a special operation”, targeting, in Kyle’s words, “the Aboriginal, you know, the little group of them”. Here, Kyle is referring to the supposed ‘Gang of

49'²⁷, yet he skilfully resists engaging in language that perpetuates a link between groups of Aboriginal young people, crime and gang affiliation. These 'gang' specific police operations, Kyle explained, "used to deal with Dad when he was a lot younger, and so now it's following on to us". The police, he stated, have "set up a whole task force just for the Aboriginal boys and stealing cars and stuff like that. And we've [Kyle and his friends] been named as a big gang, that's not really a gang" — constructing them as, in Kyle's words, "the new Gang of 49". Here we can see how the carceral institution of policing constructs and reinforces a racialised discourse, centring on the culturally evocative spectre of gangs, which stigmatises and essentialises the racialised 'other' to rationalise the over policing and criminalisation of particular groups. Kyle goes on to wrestle with the discursive construction of 'gang member' that has been imposed upon him and, in his dance between resistance and resignation, outlines the complex and often conflicting ways that dominant discourses interact with and shape subjectivity:

But yeah, we've tried telling them it's not a gang, it's just a group. They started that 'It's a gang', sort of thing. At the start, it was just a group of us boys that just hang around. Yeah, we get into a bit of trouble but then they started saying it's a gang. So, it's like, then we thought, 'Oh well, we've been named as something, we might as well take that name and keep it you know'.

Maror similarly reflected on the racialised nature of gang construction in the colonial carceral society when he asserted the police "just put your name on the wall for all the crimes you've done, who you know, who you associate with and say 'Yeah, he's part of this gang'". This practice, Maror reflects, "it's just dumb" and racist — "If a group of white kids does it, it's a group. If a group of black kids does it, it's a gang". Maror astutely identifies the racialising practices of the disciplinary, carceral society — a society in which, as a South-Sudanese young person, his behaviours are relentlessly filtered through a racialising lens, producing material effects that uphold existing power structures and have harmed Maror "a lot, a lot". We can see, again, the relations of power and mechanisms of control produced by carceral institutions, such as the police, within the carceral society. In such a context, police act as agents of the carceral state, drawing on institutional discourses and stereotypes that mirror the dominant discourses of society, to impose the label of 'gang member' onto racialised, criminalised young people — a label that renders certain young people as deviant others, requiring heightened levels of surveillance and control.

²⁷ The 'Gang of 49', a construction of Australia's mainstream media, refers to a so-called 'gang' of "violent, hardcore and lawless" Aboriginal boys and men who were blamed, and pursued by police through "Operation Mandrake", in relation to a spate of often unrelated crime across Adelaide in the late 2000's (Due 2013, p. 41).

Through a violence regimes lens (Hearn et al. 2022a), the disproportionate targeting of racialised young people by police can be seen as systemic violence that produces, preserves and perpetuates social inequalities and marginalisation. Through the discursive process of gang construction, the police legitimise both their own institutional existence and, under the guise of community safety, the violence they so often wage against racialised people. Over time this dynamic no longer produces overt rage or sadness, instead, as Maror states, “I’m used to it. Police do what they want to do. They abuse their power ... I don’t expect anything from cops. They just do what they want to do”.

As noted previously, these constructions produce more than just heightened surveillance and policing, but also heightened levels of arrest, incarceration and criminalisation — a dynamic reflected in the disproportionate incarceration of racialised people across all youth and adult prisons in the Australian colonial context (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023; McCausland & Baldry 2023). Reflecting upon his first time being detained in the state’s youth prison, Jordan, for instance, explained, “I knew everyone that was locked up. They were all my cousins. They were all Aboriginal except two people, which is pretty hectic”. On entering the frightening and unknown environment of a youth prison, Jordan perceived this racial dynamic as, simultaneously, both “hectic” and as producing a sense of safety: “It was scary at first but then when I knew who was in there, I was good. It made me feel safe”. Gus similarly reflected upon this dynamic and the “hierarchy” it produces in which, due to their smaller numbers, “most of the white kids, they’ve got control over nothing. Yeah, Nungas²⁸ got more control”. Gus’ description of experiencing some sense of “control” in the overtly coercive environment of a prison illustrates the multiplicity of power relations running “through the whole social body” (Foucault 1981, p. 119). As within the broader community, we can see the child/youth prison as a microcosm in which power is not simply hierarchical, one dimensional or imposed only from above. Rather, power is capillary-like, contextual and is negotiated amongst peers, through both adherence to and resistance of dominant discourses and social norms. Whilst the over-representation of racialised young people in youth prisons is a symptom of broader power dynamics, as Foucault (1979, p. 95) argues, “where there is power, there is resistance”. Within the microcosm of the youth prison, racialised young people may feel like they have — relatively speaking — more “control” than their peers due to numerical dominance. In this context, taking

²⁸ Nunga is an Aboriginal vernacular term used to refer to Aboriginal people in what is now known as South Australia.

“control” of social/peer dynamics could be interpreted as an act of resistance to the colonial practices of power that see racialised young people so routinely othered within the community.

In such an overtly coercive setting, young people like Gus must navigate existing power structures in their quest for agency. His experience of the injustice of disproportionate policing of racialised subjects, as discussed earlier, produces, paradoxically, a prison environment in which racialised young people are able to exercise power over their peers; as Gus puts it, “You get to kick back” more and not feel so under threat. When asked whether there is any other societal setting in which First Nations people might feel “in control”, Gus paused for an extended period before responding “Nah, not really”. Through a violence regimes lens (Hearn et al. 2022a), the racial dynamics of the prison could be understood as a form of institutional and systemic violence produced by dominant discourses of race which draw upon, and perpetuate, existing patterns of violence and inequality. The fact that Gus talks about these issues — of hierarchy, control and, in essence, racial segregation — so casually, also highlights the normalisation and embeddedness of racial violence within the carceral landscape of prisons.

Many of these conversations occurred within the walls of South Australia’s only youth prison — Kurlana Tapa, meaning ‘new path’ in Kurna. Through a Foucauldian lens, the naming of a societal institution is a discursive practice that, in this case, both mirrors and reinforces the power structures of the broader society. The use of an Aboriginal language to name a youth prison, in a State where universities, hospitals and most schools still retain their colonial titles, is, I argue, a form of symbolic violence. It is a discursive practice that situates prisons, but not schools, universities and hospitals, as Aboriginal spaces, thus reinforcing dominant constructions that connect Aboriginality with criminality, whilst simultaneously obfuscating the violence of such a site.

7.3 Institutions of violence: class, policing and prisons

As detailed in Chapter Five, the inequalities inherent in neoliberal, capitalist societies saw many of the participants in this project, like the vast majority of criminalised people generally (McCausland & Baldry 2023), growing up in resource deprived families and communities. Quite predictably, for many, the lack of material resources available to them resulted in a perceived need to resort to offending in order to meet what were often basic human needs. As Kayla explained, “I was homeless for such a long time, like I was couch surfing and I was doing like crime to get money ... to legit survive” and as Tyson echoed “Just gotta steal to eat and to survive and that”. Jax also

provided insights into the poverty-based pressures they navigated from the age of 13 — pressures which were acutely exacerbated each time their father, and primary caregiver, was incarcerated, leaving Jax with their grandmother who was grappling with intergenerational exclusion, complex mental health and addiction issues. Thirteen-year-old Jax, a fiercely loving and dedicated older sibling, thus became the informal primary caregiver of their younger brothers and sisters; selling marijuana and stealing, in their account, was the only avenue available to feed themselves and their family:

Jax: Um, I remember one time I nearly got arrested, the cops actually, like the cops keep trying to bring it up still. Because I broke into [NAME] shopping centre...I just wanted to steal shit to make money to feed my brother, because my dad was in jail. And I'd ran out of weed to sell.

Tessa: How old were you at this stage?

Jax: Oh, 13? I was like, I need to break into the shop. I need shit. I need to get this, I need to get whatever the fuck I can from this fucking shop...Yeah, it was so bad.

The neoliberal society, and the carceral system of which it is a part, plucked Jax's father from their life and thrust Jax and their four siblings from subsistence living into abject poverty. This illustrates the violence inherent in both the social inequity produced by neoliberalism and a legal system that not only fails to address, but perpetuates and punishes, those impacted — trapping people in perpetual cycles of poverty and criminalisation for which they are then blamed.

Similarly, for Kyle, as a child growing up in a small country town, as his mother struggled to support six children on a meagre Centrelink income, poverty shaped his everyday reality in fundamental ways. Kyle's Dad endured long periods of imprisonment and wasn't around much during Kyle's childhood. Kyle reflected that upon reconnecting with his Dad as a late teen, "It was almost like meeting a stranger that I had to call dad, sort of thing". For Kyle, this fusion — of an absent, incarcerated father and a single mother navigating the stress of parenting in a context of deprivation — shaped his world and his subjectivity in significant ways. It was in this context that, at the age of ten or 11, his relationship with his mother broke down; he began couch surfing, rough sleeping and stealing food from the local shop to survive — as he puts it: "That's when all the trouble started, having to yeah, make money myself, not rely on anyone". In this neoliberal, carceral context, at such a young age, Kyle felt responsible for meeting his own needs for food, housing and safety so as "not rely on anyone".

Kyle discussed how difficult it was to survive in a small, resource-starved regional town where many were struggling financially and there was only one shop. At the age of about 11, he made the decision to jump on a Greyhound bus and move, by himself, to Adelaide — a place he had

visited only once or twice prior. Kyle didn't know much about the city, he didn't know where he would stay or how he would support himself when he arrived. All he had was the contact number of a friend from his younger childhood and a knowing that the means to survive weren't available to him in this small town. For a few months, Kyle was able to survive by stealing food from the shops, but soon began breaking into cars for food and shelter. This was the first crime for which he was arrested and placed in a child/youth prison.

Since the age of 11, Kyle has been arrested and detained countless times. He has spent years and years of his pre-teen and teenage life confined within the walls of a child/youth prison — at huge expense to the state²⁹ and with little impact on his material circumstances or his offending. This is a story I have heard in various forms many times before, yet, for me, it never seems to lose its punch. Still, as I write this, it takes the wind out of me to reflect on the magnitude of the “fully funded failure” (McIntosh 2023) that is our carceral system, investing grotesque amounts of money into entrenching and punishing the violences of inequality. In the following, Kyle reflects upon, and counters, dominant, neoliberally informed, framings of crime as simply a rationally acted phenomena, disconnected from external forces that influence and constrain ‘choice’, and, reflecting upon his lived experiences, muddies the constructions of free-will, agency and choice that neoliberalism and the carceral logic so relentlessly feed us:

Tessa: Were there any cops that you felt like kind of treated you pretty fairly, or like...?

Kyle: Oh, there's a few cops that are just, you know like, they see it as we're troubled kids, but 99% of them see it as we just, yeah, *are* trouble. You know what I mean?

There's nothing wrong, we just like to fuck around and do what we want, and it's not really like that ... I come from nothing ... for me, it's like, you know, I had no choice.

Kyle's repeated incarcerations and experience of cognitive-behavioural-therapy interventions aimed at addressing ‘his anger’, his violence and his ‘poor decision making’ reflects both the neoliberal idea that some defect within Kyle is the source of his offending behaviour, and the persistent refusal of carceral practices to meaningfully grapple with the violence of neoliberalism, poverty and homelessness. Despite the immensity of the resources invested into these carceral interventions, Kyle could not remember a single intervention that sought to address his lack of income and stable accommodation. Despite being homeless since the age of 11, and eligible for a Centrelink income since the age of 15, at the age of 17 Kyle still felt no closer to any sense of security, nor even a Centrelink income:

²⁹ To incarcerate a single child in South Australia costs \$3,145 per day, or \$1.15million per year (Productivity Commission 2023).

That's the one thing, you know, that a lot of us boys do say. When we get out of here, there's not much for us, you know what I mean? They say all these things that they're going to set up, but as soon as you get out, you never see it. You know what I mean? That's why we come back, because we don't even know what to do. You know? I've got a case manager on the outside and they say they're going to do all this and that for you but all it is, is they drug test you, you have to sign in to make sure you, you know, you're still around.

The relationship between the carceral logic and neoliberalism — and the norms and values these discourses produce — generates a cultural context in which the prioritisation of individual responsibility is so pervasive that, time and time again, investment in punishment takes precedence over young people's basic needs for shelter and food. We can see how neoliberal, carceral discourses produce violence, both, when they starve people of the means to meet their basic human needs, and when they then punish them — as deviant neoliberal subjects — for taking matters into their own hands.

The preference for individualising interventions over those aimed at providing material resources and improving stability can also be seen in the narratives offered by Trey, Gus and Tyson — all of whom report lacking the necessary support to secure a Centrelink payment. In reflecting upon the process of criminalisation he has experienced, Tyson explained that police were first called on him for stealing food from the shops at age six. For Tyson, stealing food was, and continues to be, a necessity. He has never accessed a Centrelink income: "I've never been on one in my life. It's, [pause], I don't really know how to do all that stuff", and links his offending to the need to survive — "Just gotta steal to eat and to survive and that", leading to repeated periods of imprisonment and entrenched criminalisation.

7.4 Institutions of violence: gender, policing and prisons

A number of research participants lived with harmful constructs of gender and masculinity, modelled to them by parental figures, popular culture and peer groups, as unpacked in Chapter Five, as well as the gendered discourses and practices that permeate carceral institutions. As Duriesmith (2019, p. 82) suggests, group cultures in contexts like policing, prisons and the military are "dominated by masculine modes of behaviour" which produce and police the boundaries of acceptability — boundaries which "normalize or even demand violence to prove membership to the group". Such gendered dynamics can be seen in the reflections of Dev who, in the context of the youth prison, talked about having to "stick up for yourself and that". Likewise, Gus, a young man who presented as kind, gentle and reflective in one-on-one interviews, described a brutal fight between two 14-year-old boys that he and his friends orchestrated, for entertainment, in

their unit the night before our last interview. This dynamic, of prisons as hyper masculine spaces, also plays out in the narrations of Bobby who reflected on the physical violence that pervaded the adult male prison, requiring him to “bridge-up” and “man-up” — physically fight — much older men on various occasions in order to earn respect. For Bobby this was “a pretty intimidating experience, but at the same time, it was like, if you stand your ground people respect you at the same time”. This violence, Bobby considered, was enabled by the guards who either observed these violent altercations without intervening or encouraged them by saying things like “If you act like this, you’ll get bashed — I’ll let you get bashed”.

Similarly, in our time together, Benji discussed the construct of the ‘alpha male’, a construction of masculinity he sees as being particularly pervasive throughout policing practices and prison systems. Police, Benji asserted, “just say little taunts, they shadow over you, they get coppers that are taller than you, so they look down on you. Give you this very demeaning look, you know? Bully tactics. Real alpha male. I hate alpha males”. This construct of the alpha male, of “I wanna be the toughest cunt in the room”, is one that Benji claimed to detest, yet also felt compelled to embody: “I’m chill [until] someone pokes the bear. If someone pokes the bear, you’re gonna see another side of me ... I can’t be walked all over”. For Benji, “alpha males” make up the majority of people around him. He recounted times he has sat with younger “street kids”, telling them “Look bro, you don’t have to be something you’re not. I’m a lover bro. I’m not a fighter. You don’t have to be a fighter, my bruv. You don’t have to be. You don’t, you don’t have to go to jail”. This statement is an example of the complex and competing nature of discourses of masculinity that young men like Benji must wrestle with — discourses which are so contradictory that, as Forth (2008, p. 42) explains, “no one man could hope to embody all the recommended qualities”.

Despite identifying as “a lover not a fighter”, Benji reflects on the material-discursive realities of his life and what he sees as the inevitability, due to the violence inherent in the carceral system, that he will need to perform hyper-masculinity again in the future. This is evident when he talks of his fears regarding his upcoming court hearing and the potential that he will be sentenced to detention in an adult prison:

Benji: But you see, in jail you pull shit like that, you get your head smashed in. It’s a whole different reality. Yeah.

Tessa: Yeah. So, is it a very real fear of yours that you’ll get locked up in adult prison?

Benji: Yeah, and I’ll have to do things that I don’t want to do. Like hurt people [voice goes quiet]. Cause people will try and out me as a bitch. You know? They’ll look at my bodyweight, they’ll look at, you know, how I look, they’ll size me up and they’ll try and take what I have. And I’ll have to...[silence] I’ll have to be that alpha cause I can’t, I can’t

be stood over. I can't be branded as a bitch. I'm not signing up for protection. They're not running me out of mainstream.

Tessa: Yeah, right?

Benji: Yep. And you'd be a bitch. Everyone would know it. You went into protection because you couldn't, you couldn't have a punch on. You know, someone touches my shit, all right, we'll go in the cell, we'll have one-outs. One-outs is one-on-one in a small cell, and you just smash it out and you shake hands afterwards. Like men.

Tessa: Wow?

Benji: It's a respect thing. Know what I mean? If you can go in there, and you can give it your all, you're right. And I'm confident I'll give it my all [voice trails out, looks at the ground].

Tessa: Wow. That's a lot for your brain to have to step up to.

Benji: I'm ready for it. I'm ready for the day I have to step into the cell and go one-outs with a man three times my size.

The practices of policing and imprisonment mirror the violence Benji was exposed to as a young child growing up with domestic and family violence and as a teenager navigating life as a “street kid”. From a violence regimes lens (Hearn et al. 2022a), Benji’s narration illustrates how carceral institutions produce, maintain and demand violent gendered practices, where those pulled into its reaches must imitate violent and domineering behaviours to avoid victimisation. Such practices of power reinforce and reproduce broader discourses and norms of masculinity and constructions of violence as inherent, and natural, to certain subjectivities.

The influence of dominant discourses of masculinity in carceral spaces was further evident during one of my visits to the child/youth prison for this project. I witnessed firsthand the performance of male peer masculinity based on the sexualisation of women — a performance led and sustained not by the detained young people, but by the prison guards. On this particular occasion, my visit to the prison was brief and I met with a number of young people in quick succession for the purposes of signing a consent form. This meant that instead of the usual practice of two prison guards accompanying a single young person, five prison guards were present. Afterwards, as I sat in the interview room taking notes, I heard one of the guards say “Oh, [female co-worker/prison staff] looked pretty hot yesterday. Don’t you reckon?”, before tapping one of the young people, who was staring at the ground, on the shoulder. This young person had received bad news earlier that day and was noticeably, and uncharacteristically, withdrawn. I heard him offer a grunt, before the guard, looking perplexed, moved on to another young person — who had previously shared with me his complete disinterest in dating and girls — saying, “What do you reckon [NAME]? Did [female co-worker] look hot yesterday or what?”. While this young person offered a weak nod and began looking at his feet, a third young person laughed, and another prison guard chimed in: “She looked better than she normally does”. In response, a different guard, who I sensed was aware of

my presence, said “I think she looked professional”, to which the other guard scoffed and delivered the line, “She didn’t look professional when she woke up next to me this morning”. One young person was now actively engaged, the other two continued to look at their feet as one of the prison guards began boasting about the size of his penis.

I sat, frozen, enraged and perplexed at the scene I was witnessing; a group dynamic of “non-relational heterosexuality” — described by Blackbeard and Lindegger (2007, p. 39) as the “voyeuristic objectification of girls, displayed heterosexuality ... and ‘trophyism’” (p. 25). This scenario struck me as a particularly appalling, and violent, social dynamic. As we can see from the narratives unpacked in Chapter Five, society has fed these young men such limiting and harmful discourses of masculinity, then locked them up, in part, for enacting these same harmful discourses, trapping them in an environment in which those tasked with their ‘rehabilitation’ actively produce and perpetuate the very same ideals. On my next visit to the prison, I discussed what I had overheard with one of the young men who had been present; he remembered the interaction and stated that conversations like that happen all the time, that they make him uncomfortable but he just has to go along with it. On this particular occasion, his perspective on the guards’ behaviour was that they were worried that the young person who had received bad news would “kick off because he was upset”. Thus, this interaction represented the guards’ attempt to reduce the likelihood of unrest by appealing to the group’s (assumed) shared masculinity and peer dynamic. Female staff, in this context of violent masculinities, become the fodder and the collateral.

7.5 Discourses of deviance: embodiment and subjectivity

In addition to, and alongside, the direct and indirect violences produced by the dominant discourses discussed above, the use of physical violence by police was a significant theme for participants including Jax, Maror, Kyle, Gus, Kayla, Rose and Tyson. In this section, I interrogate, through participant narratives, the phenomenon of physical violence by police — its pervasiveness, normalisation, and its profound implications for the subjectivities and bodies of those deemed deviant. I do so not to suggest that violence by police is only harmful when physical, when it breaches legislation or reaches a certain threshold, or “to demarcate between acceptable and unacceptable state violence” (Wall & Correia 2018, p. 217). Rather, I interrogate the prevalence and normalisation of physical violence by police as but one manifestation of the violence inherent in the carceral society — a violence that is intertwined with, and cannot be

separated from, the violent discursive constructions of race, gender, class and deviance discussed thus far.

For Jax, Maror, Kyle, Gus, Kayla, Rose and Tyson — young people who have been constructed as deviant — physical violence at the hands of the police was not only pervasive but also normalised; just part and parcel of the existing social order. As Maror reflects, the police have been violent with him “right since the start”, when he was just 12 years old and first “tried to run away” from them. “They just bashed me”, he says, “put their knee on my neck, one of them had their knee on my head, twisted my arm into places I didn't know it could go”. Maror, then a young black boy of 12 years old, remembers pleading with the police, saying “‘I can't breathe’ and they just said ‘You're still resisting’. I got arrested and they just started abusing me in the car. They didn't even let me call my Mum”. This experience is one Maror tries “not to think about” but, from this point onwards, he reflects, the violence from police “just becomes worse, worse, worse”. Maror's experience bears striking similarities to that of Gus who explained “I was about 15 the first time I got actually fucked up” by the police. Gus had a warrant out for his arrest for a minor offence and, upon sighting the police, ran from an officer who caught him and “was like bang, bang, punching me, holding my head down, punching me in the back of the neck”. This officer, Gus remembers, “put his knee on the back of my head, folded my legs up in my back. He was just sitting on me, with his knee on my head”. Gus got arrested and was released later that night shaken, both physically and mentally — “It was pretty scary and confronting”, he recalled. Kyle also talked about his dislike of the police due to their routine and pervasive use of physical violence:

Oh, probably just all the assaults and that. They assault most of us, most of us boys ... They don't mind kicking us, hitting us with their batons or torches. I come in here and I had stitches in my head because they hit me with a torch that many times, and yeah they hit me with their car, rammed me off, like I was just on a scooter and they rammed me off the scooter and stuff like that and then just started bashing me.

Rose echoed these sentiments when she asserted that “the cops beat me up all the time, it happens all the time”, as does Kayla who explained:

I've begged them [the police] for help and they've just, don't do anything. Most of them are so corrupt. You've got the good ones, and you got the bad ones but they like tackle me as well. If I just resisted, I used to, sometimes, I would like take my hand out the cuffs and they wouldn't like that, they'd get like seven men jumping on me, leaving me all bruised up and shit. I don't like them at all. I don't want to deal with them and don't want to talk to them. It's just, it's a bit of a [pause, sigh] wormhole.

The stories told by these young people align with Anthony's (2018, p. 251) assertion that these acts of violence reflect “more than a set of individual harms” and Rodríguez et al.'s (2014)

argument that physical brutality by police exists not as an isolated transgression but, rather, is inherent to the practices of policing — often sanctioned, “formally or effectively”, by policy, law, discourses and cultural norms. Jax — the child of an economically marginalised, criminalised, Aboriginal man — points to the violent effects of discourses of deviance, for example, when they assert:

I need you to trust me when I say that violence by police officers towards Aboriginal people is real and I need you to trust me when I say that if you are an Aboriginal child whose parents have been criminalised, police officers see you as a criminal too (Sansbury 2023, p. 17)³⁰.

For Jax, the police have been an omni-present force for as long as they can remember. “Growing up in the houses I did”, Jax reflected, “you get really, really used to STAR Force booting down your door”. During Jax’s childhood “house raids were a normal thing. We'd be sitting down watching fucking Steven’s Universe, house raid. We'd be even having birthday parties, house raid. Sleeping, house raid. It was just a normal thing growing up”. Due to the relentless presence of police in their life, Jax explained, “after a while” these surprise raids “didn't faze” them anymore; “I would literally just walk out of the room with my hands up, so they knew I didn't have anything, and just stand up against the wall because I knew they were gonna search me”. Jax first remembers being searched, and brutalised, in this way at just ten years old:

Even when I was like ten [they searched me]. Yeah, I got shoved up, when I was literally ten years old, because my dad, his wallet dropped out of his pocket and I thought, you know, because that's his wallet, his property ... I went to grab it, I got shoved up against the wall, I could barely breathe and that's when my dad got arrested for resistance of arrest, because he broke free from three cops holding him down to come to me, because I was crying.

The experience of frequent police raids during childhood was also shared by Kyle and Tyson — both Aboriginal young people from economically and materially marginalised backgrounds. These practices of policing form part of the larger regime of violence, coercion, surveillance and control waged, systematically, against disenfranchised communities. As Jax’s account of the routine nature of police raids shows, institutional patterns of carceral violence shape the day-to-day lives, experiences, behaviours and subjectivities of children growing up in contexts constructed as deviant. Thus, Jax adapted to living with the constant threat of violent intrusion by adopting self-protective, compliant behaviours, such as “walking out of the room with” their “hands up”, in

³⁰ I reference this quote as it is sourced from a magazine article that I supported Jax to write.

order to escape these interactions as unscathed as possible. These interactions, Jax noted, taught them, from a young age, that:

Violence like with cops, it is so true. I've seen so many of my family members get bashed. I literally watched my uncle get his teeth kicked in by cops for no fucking reason, because he was 'resisting arrest', trying to move his face off of the fucking ground.

Jax also described their “most worst experience” of police violence — an incident that occurred when they were about ten years old:

I was really sick one day and I was sleeping in my dad's room and my cousin just jumps into bed with me. I go to get up and he just lays my head back down gently back on the pillow and he's just like 'Oh, just go back to sleep, go back to sleep'. And that's when I hear a big BOOF. I knew what it was straightaway. I knew the cops were coming in to get him [cousin], so I just latched on to him.

Here we see the extension of carceral practices of surveillance, discipline and control beyond the prison, bleeding into the most intimate, vulnerable and mundane aspects of life. Jax's ability to immediately identify the unique 'boof' of a police raid illuminates the normalisation and omnipresence of carceral practices — in this case, violently ripping a sick child from a fever dream to a far more terrifying reality. Jax continued:

I full on latched on to him, dug my nails into him and everything. He knew what I was doing, so he latched back on to me. And they [the police] lifted up the blanket and there was a gun in my face. Like a big arse fucking gun. I couldn't see it at first, because it's got a big arse, bright torch attached to it. They turned the torch off, turned the light on, there was just a big ass fucking long ass gun in my face. And I just started crying straight away because I'd never seen a gun in real life. Like it's cool in the movies, it's not cool when it's fucking pointing at you, and he had his hand on the trigger. Like he could've accidentally slipped, shot me in the fucking head. It was very scary.

Jax's response — latching onto their cousin and yelling at the police to “fuck off” and that they weren't taking him” — only made things worse; “that's when three cops proceeded to grab” Jax's cousin, who Jax continued to latch onto. Jax explained, the police then “dragged him out and one ripped me by the back of my shirt off of him. I was crying so badly”. The situation escalated further when Jax's father noticed what was happening and “he just came for me, picked me up and literally like slung a cop up against the wall, and was like, 'Don't touch my fucking daughter’”. Jax was then “snatched” out of their “dad's hands and two cops dropped him on the floor and said that was ‘assault towards an officer’” and proceeded to “slam” him “onto the ground” — all in front of Jax and their younger siblings. Jax recalled, “It was like some George Floyd shit. He could not breathe”, but “I was just so used to it at that point, I was just sitting there, waiting for it all to

be over”. Particularly poignant is Jax’s description of finding their younger brother, with his body wedged between the curtain and the window:

and he's there watching my dad being bashed on the ground out the front, screaming 'Dad, dad' and he's looking back at me with tears in his eyes. He's pointing at the window, tapping on it so hard like he's about to break it like 'Dad, dad'. And I literally had to rip him away from the window. I saw my little brother and he looked like, he reminded me of myself — just so tiny, so helpless, no idea what the fuck is going on, why these random people are in the house or why these people were screaming and why there's blood or why someone's crying or yelling. It was just, it made me angry and I just told my sister, I was like, 'fucking hold him and cover his ears and eyes' and I was like 'I'm sorry. I don't mean to yell. I don't, I don't know what the fuck to do right now. I don't know what to do', but you don't fuck with my siblings. That's one thing I will never allow.

Jax discussed their quest to shield their younger siblings from the carceral violence that they grew up with and, in a show of resistance, reflected, “I walked out the front and just screamed 'You're scaring my little fucking brother — fucking stop’”. When police “shoved” Jax “up against a gate”, Jax continued to yell, “I just want you to stop. My baby brother, he's literally five years old, he's inside. He just saw what you guys are doing to my dad”. In their resistance, Jax challenges both the violence waged by the police, questioning the morality of such practices and contesting the discursive construction of Jax and their family as the violent subjects in this scenario:

Then I started like, you know, fucking with their heads. I was like, 'Are youse proud of that? Youse happy doing your job, like, traumatising a fucking kid?' I was like, 'Are youse proud of yourselves? Youse gonna go back to your families at the end of the day and tell them like, “Oh, I held him down in front of his child and heard him scream and cry and I still did it. Like it was fun’”. I was like, 'Are youse fucking proud of that?’

Here Jax, as a ten-year-old child, seeks to disrupt the existing power dynamics by flipping the dominant discourse of violence on its head and turning the moralising gaze back onto the police. Through questioning the morality, the ethics and the harm produced by the routine violence of policing, Jax undermines the legitimacy of carceral institutions by challenging the construction of them and their family as ‘violent’ and ‘criminal’.

These participant narratives highlight the legal and social sanctioning of violent police practices used against those constructed as deviant. The requirement that police use body-worn cameras, for example, does not protect Kayla, Kyle and Maror, as they explain:

Kyle: The police that we get dealt with, they don't wear body-worn cameras — because they're such a high up operation, they don't have to wear a camera. If you've got no camera, you're not gonna get caught for doing anything and you're never going to win over a cop in court.

Maror: Because the people that arrest me, they don't wear video cameras. So, what evidence do I have? I don't have any evidence that they bash me, because they don't wear body cams and it's my word against six other cops.

Kayla: Sometimes they do [wear body worn camera's], sometimes they don't. It's really weird when they don't

The pervasiveness of police brutality within these narratives shows how, within the carceral society, criminalised subjects are conditioned to accept punishment, and the violence that so often accompanies it, as a routine feature of their existence. When asked if they had ever considered, or attempted, to challenge, report or hold police accountable for their brutality, a sense of impossibility and of powerlessness ran through the participants' responses. For example, Gus commented "there's no point. It's not gonna stop them from doing anything". Maror extended this assertion and demonstrated a deep knowing that the discursive construction of his subjectivity — as a black, apparently gang-affiliated, criminal — shapes how he is perceived by society and by institutions of 'justice', framing him as deserving of the brutality he is subjected to:

Maror: How can I get justice? I'm labelled as a gang member; I'm labelled a person that doesn't do anything but hurt people. So, the justice I'm gonna get is the people telling me 'What can we do for you? You're just a gang member. You've been locked up, you've done that. You've been in trouble with the police' [claps hands].

These comments demonstrate how discourses of deviance reflect the relations of power that shape understandings of both what constitutes violence and legitimates its use (Hearn et al, 2022a). The pervasive sense amongst participants that seeking accountability is futile highlights the disciplinary nature of power in the carceral society — it is a power that operates not only through physical force and overt violence, but also through the discursive construction of the police, as reliable and deserving witnesses, and those criminalised, as unreliable and undeserving. Such constructions seek to produce self-regulating subjects who know their place and, thus, don't bother challenging the violent practices of the carceral system. The power of such discursive constructions was experienced firsthand by one participant³¹ who, after a particularly traumatic and brutal assault, decided that things had gone far enough and attempted to seek some form of justice within the very system responsible for such violence:

I tried taking that [a particularly brutal assault by police] to court because I had scratches all down my face and a broken arm. They broke my arm and stuff, but it just got dropped in court because they took it as like 'You're the one out stealing cars', you

³¹ For the purposes of protecting anonymity, due to the potentially identifying nature of the scenario discussed, I will not refer to this participant, even by their pseudonym, within this section. Whilst consent has been granted to use this specific story, the scenario in which these injuries were sustained may make it possible for the narrator to be identified by prison staff. I do not want this narration to be linked to others provided by this young person.

know what I mean? Like, 'You somewhat deserve it' and there was no evidence, because they don't wear cameras or anything so it's like, yeah. I had a lawyer and she tried her hardest, but we just couldn't do nothing. I guess, you can't, you can never stop the police, you know what I mean.

This young person's experience of having his criminality used as justification for the violent practices of the carceral system demonstrates how dominant discourses are weaponised to both legitimise existing power structures and to construct certain acts of physical violence, by certain actors, as not just acceptable, but even morally right or necessary.

Collectively, these narratives paint a picture of profound systemic injustice, reinforcing the assertion by Foucault (1979) that the carceral system exists not simply to reduce crime, but to preserve existing patterns of power, order and control. Through the very act of sharing their testimonies, highlighting practices of violence and injustice that are commonly excluded from mainstream narratives, these young people contribute to an emerging counter-discourse; an act of resistance against a system that has interacted with their bodies, subjectivities and material realities in such violent ways.

7.6 Institutions of violence: The prison

Legislation and policy documents — such as the Strategic Plan for Youth Justice (Government of South Australia 1993, 2020b) and the *Young Offenders Act* (1993) in South Australia — exist as discursive mechanisms of control that justify and normalise the surveillance, regulation and incarceration of young people deemed criminally deviant. The *Young Offenders Act* (1993), for example, exists “to secure for youths who offend ... the care, correction and guidance necessary for their development into responsible and useful members of the community”; and the safety of the “community” which “must be adequately protected against violent or wrongful acts” (Government of South Australia 1993, p. 4). Similar sentiments echo throughout the Strategic Plan for Youth Justice (Government of South Australia, 2020b), in which discourses of deterrence, individual responsibility, restitution and community safety are repeatedly invoked through statements like: “The principles of the youth justice system are to deter individuals from committing acts against the law or reoffending” (p. 5), to “support young people to make positive choices” (p. 4) and “learn from their mistakes” (p. 6), to provide “a child or young person who is guilty of an offence” with “the opportunity to make restitution” whilst simultaneously meeting “community expectations” and providing for “community safety” (p. 6). Throughout both documents, the promotion of individual responsibility and self-improvement frames youth crime

as the acts of individuals, expressed through the poor choices of ‘irresponsible’ and ‘unproductive’ subjects who set out to harm both individuals and the broader community. In its individualising focus and repeated reference to victims of crime and community safety, the State Plan both justifies and obscures the violences of youth incarceration, including through its use of therapeutic language such as “child-centred” (p. 5), “trauma-informed” (p. 16), and references to the paramountcy of children’s “safety and wellbeing” (p. 5) (Government of South Australia 2020b).

Kayla, a young person navigating significant instability, trauma, and homelessness in the community, highlights the material effects of these discourses when she describes the “the law and everything” as “just too traumatising” and failing to grapple with the “bigger picture” of youth crime:

I don't want to be doing crime and shit, but, yeah, it's [the carceral system] definitely traumatising. They should definitely go a bit easier, because clearly these kids are doing all this stuff for reasons. There's a bigger picture to it.

Her narrations help to elucidate how discourses of individual responsibility produce practices of punishment, deterrence, and surveillance that can be experienced as violent and traumatising, far from the ‘wellbeing’ and ‘child-centred’ focus espoused in the state plan. “[A]fter like five weeks” of being detained in the youth prison, Kayla says, “I went really crazy. I like lost the plot, I felt like a guinea pig”. Like many of the research participants, Kayla endured extended periods of “lockdown” during her time in the youth prison, during which she was unable to attend school, exercise or leave her cell for more than an hour or two. Extended lockdowns can occur for a range of reasons, including understaffing and Covid (Collard 2023), and were referred to by all of the young people in this study who had experienced youth detention. The similarities across time, in the narratives of both those currently, and historically, detained in the state’s youth prison — spanning over six years — were also striking.

Reflecting on lockdowns, Tyson explained that “whenever there’s staff” incarcerated young people get to do things like attend school and go to the gym but, “if there's no staff, we just stay in our rooms all day”. Relatedly, Dev observed that “this place don't really got a set timetable for anything. It's kind of annoying because you expect something to happen then it gets cancelled ‘cause of short staff”. Dev explained, this happens “all the time” — prison staff, he commented, just “chuck sickies all the time, I overhear them say it to the other staff, and then we're in our rooms the whole day”. In thinking about the preceding week, Dev said that his unit, which was “only locked down for one day”, was “lucky” when compared with others who were understaffed

and were out of their cells “for like only an hour, two hours a day”. Dev reflected upon the period after he was first detained, “maybe three months ago”, when “you were probably in your rooms four days — four days out of the whole week, you were locked in a room because they can't be bothered to show up for work”. These stories help to elucidate the material effects of carceral discourses of deviance, which — despite the existence of a Charter of Rights³² for Youths detained in Youth Justice Facilities — strip young people of their rights to education, to social connection, to exercise etc.

Kayla initially experienced these extended lockdowns as traumatising and acutely distressing — “I would just sit up and just cry”. What might be seen as predictable distress — a normal response to abnormal isolation — was, however, pathologised and repackaged as mental illness, requiring psychological or psychiatric intervention:

I had someone I was talking to, like, a psychologist, a psychiatrist — I can't remember, but someone in there and yeah, she knew how bad it was really for me, for my mental health ... They just med you up, they just give you medication to go kind of pass out, so they don't have to deal with you. They don't even come to work.

By pathologising Kayla's distress, the carceral institution turned the gaze away from the harmful practices of confinement and back onto the deviant subject — an approach that enables such violent practices to continue.

Similarly pathologising and medicalising interventions were imposed upon Rose — an Aboriginal young person from a residential care background with a noted history of complex trauma. Placed on a 'Restricted Routine' due to “behavioural issues”, Rose described being confined to her cell for 23 hours a day “for over a week”. Talking about the times she was allowed out of her cell — twice a day for 30 minutes — to sit in the unit's courtyard with handcuffs on, Rose stated:

Being in this place is starting to get to me. This place is getting me down, man. So today I only had 30 minutes out and that was because I had a meeting — it was my mental health meeting, cause they're putting me on new medications. They're putting me on anti-depressants and anti-psychotic ones.

When asked about this new medication, Rose explained that while she doesn't have a choice, she hopes it will help her to “like calm down — because like, since I've been in my room I've been like stressing out lots and getting anxiety pretty bad, you know?”. The imposition of psychiatric

³² These minimum standards, among other things, stipulate that detained young people have the right to “participate in activities and programs that help your rehabilitation; continue your education; to get exercise every day, and to go outside every day except in bad weather; not be isolated from other young people unless necessary to keep you or others safe, and never as a punishment” (Training Centre Visitor 2021).

medications in response to Rose's deteriorating mental state reflects a form of biopower — a concept more robustly explained in Chapter Two — whereby the carceral institution draws from medical interventions to regulate the mental state, bodies and behaviours of those deemed deviant. Rose's perceived lack of choice in the matter further emphasises the use of 'therapeutic' coercion — for your own good — as a practice of power in carceral spaces. Rose goes on to explain, "this is the first time I've came out of the unit in over a week, man. I haven't even been out for exercise; I haven't been out for fresh air, nothing. I am going crazy".

These disciplinary practices — of punishment, confinement, segregation, heightened surveillance and pathologisation — aim to regulate and govern Rose's body, behaviour and subjectivity, whilst simultaneously reinforcing the authority of the carceral regime. Rose's experience of exclusion and isolation provides insights into the pernicious practices of disciplinary power and control that pervade the prison environment. Government responses have, however, sought to play down concerns raised about the impacts of extended lockdowns on young people including extreme distress and self-harming behaviour, arguing that these have been "erroneously" linked to lockdowns, "when in reality a young person's mental health relates to a varying number of features, including their history of trauma" (Collard 2023).

Kayla described how, as her mental health deteriorated, her initial — acutely distressed — response to the violent practice of prolonged periods of confinement became normalised. "After being in there for like a month", Kayla reflected, "I started getting used" to it:

It felt like it was my home and then I just wouldn't leave my room, because I was so used to being stuck in my room. Every time I got offered 'Hey, you want to come out to get some fresh air?' And I was like, 'Nah'. I stopped eating. Just stayed in there [in cell] for like two weeks, no proper meal. It was really bad. They were like, 'She doesn't even want to leave the bed'. And so, I started getting used to it ... and I was just picking up on things and like no privacy too, being watched. It's fucked up.

As lockdowns become normalised, they likely come to be seen by both young people and prison staff as acceptable, even essential, responses to challenging behaviours. Kayla's account of surrendering to these conditions illustrates the panoptic power of the youth prison — as Kayla, the criminalised subject, came to feel like a rat in a cage, stripped of the right to privacy, constantly surveilled and controlled. These practices of disciplinary power aim to produce the self-governing, less agentic subject who adapts to and accepts the violences inherent to incarceration (Foucault 1979).

Similarly, Tyson talked about feeling distressed, agitated, and angry when first experiencing extended lockdowns but, after several months in the youth prison, is “used to it now”. Gus recalled his entire unit being contained to their cells for about a week straight. Each day, he remembered “They’d get one person at a time, you’d make a [phone] call and then you’d go back down and then bang, rest of the night, you’re in your cell”. Gus commented that whilst it was “pretty fucked” and he hated just “sitting there” in his cell all day “watching TV, sleeping a lot”, he got through it: “You just deal with it; you just have to deal with it”.

However, as Foucault (1979, p. 95) observed, the ways in which discourses, power dynamics and disciplinary practices interact with subjectivities are never uniform, and “where there is power, there is resistance”. For two participants, however, these practices of confinement did not produce a sense of docility, acceptance or resignation — but rather were met with resistance, activism and strategic political organising. One of these participants³³ reflected that “not too long ago” during a period of particularly bad lockdowns, “me and another boy got left in our room for two days straight [and] because we were apparently too angry to open our doors ... we didn’t have food, got denied our food and medication we needed — we got denied all that”. Drawing from pathologising discourses, prison staff “said ‘you’re too angry’ ... we were laying down on our bed, but we were apparently still too angry to open our door because we’d been swearing at them half an hour before that”. During this period, the young person noted, “two days had come that we’d only had dinner for one night of that, not even lunch, no breakfast, no medications”. In this context, the communication of anger may be reframed as a form of resistance to the practices of power of the youth prison that enable extended lockdowns to occur.

Discourses of individual deviance and pathology — coupled with practices of surveillance, control and continuous risk management — are used here to justify the denial of food and medication to detained minors. The denial of such vital resources is a form of biopower through which the carceral regime seeks to regulate the bodies, behaviours, and minds of those deemed deviant. Again, we can see the pathologising discourses the carceral regime draws upon to frame these young people’s anger as a symptom of individual dysfunction, rather than as a legitimate response to injustice — thus rationalising yet more punitive interventions. This young person reflected that,

³³ For the purposes of protecting anonymity, due to the potentially identifying nature of the scenario discussed, I will not refer to this participant, even by their pseudonym, within this section. Whilst consent has been granted to use this specific story, the scenario in which these injuries were sustained involved only a few young people within the child/youth prison and, as such, it is possible that the narrator may be identifiable to prison staff. As such, I do not want this narration to be linked to others provided by this young person.

while several detained young people attempted to formally report these prolonged lockdowns to prison management and the Guardian for Children and Young People:

They'd come back and tell us 'Oh yeah, there will be new staff coming on' but the new staff, you know, they never came. We tried and tried to get our point across and they don't know how it feels to be locked in a cell, like we'd only come out for like 20 minutes a day just for two phone calls — and I know one of the rules here, you're meant to get at least two and a half hours out a day. Like that's the least, you know what I mean? We were telling the Guardians that we make complaints to about it, but nothing was happening there.

After yet another weekend of being locked down for 23 hours a day, this young person felt compelled to take more overt and disruptive steps to challenge this treatment: "So, when we came out, we had no other way to tell them 'This is bullshit'. The only way we could was smashing everything up. It was the only way we could actually get our point across". According to these young people, this 'riot' was not uncontrolled, indiscriminate deviance, but rather was a strategic action — a form of activism — aimed at amplifying their cause:

Our plan was to make it on the news — and it did. We actually planned it, 'Yeah, let's make it on the news for more people to see' and that's when it started improving, because of how it was all over the news, you know, about the poor conditions in here and stuff like that. So, that was the only way we thought we could get our point across, because it wasn't, it wasn't working if we just talked to certain people in here, wasn't even making it out on the outside, you know?

The response to the young people's activism and resistance to their oppressive conditions, constructed as a 'riot', saw the calling in of the STAR Force who, armed with "full on assault rifles" and "wearing big gas masks and oxygen tanks ... shot this canister thing in and it just like pretty much gassed us all out". In addition to the use of physical force to exert power and regain control, the carceral regime responded to these acts of resistance by imposing further criminal charges, thus reinforcing institutional power dynamics; silencing these dissident voices and sending a clear message to others regarding the futility of resistance.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn from participant narratives to examine the violences inherent within the overtly carceral regimes of policing and youth prisons. This chapter has taken a particular focus on how dominant discourses of race, class, gender and deviance produce inequality and license state-sanctioned and societally accepted violences within these sites. The violences produced and enacted by carceral regimes are both direct and indirect. They are interpersonal, systemic, structural and discursive. They are waged against individual bodies, subjectivities and against

entire communities. They are violences in which we all participate. Dominant discourses of race, class, gender and deviance position criminalised young people, who are overwhelmingly male, racialised and economically marginalised, as inherently deviant and, as such, as either unreliable witnesses or deserving of the carceral violence they endure. These same discourses construct the police as trustworthy, reliable actors and, thus, the violent carceral practices they enact and uphold as legitimate, even necessary, responses to deviance.

I have argued that the violences produced in and by the formal carceral system are meted out unequally, across raced, classed and gendered lines and exist not as aberrations but as practices inherent to the carceral society at large. Thus, the institutions of the formal carceral system, within the broader carceral society, exist not only as sites of punishment, but also as sites of normative control that are essential to the maintenance of the racialised, classed, and gendered inequalities that shape colonial 'Australian' society. Drawing from participant narratives, I have highlighted the violence of carceral regimes and challenged the material-discursive practices that work to invisibilise, normalise and/or rationalise such violence. Meaningful community safety, I argue, can never be achieved whilst the violences of the formal carceral system and the inequalities produced by dominant discourses of race, class and gender remain, not merely unaddressed but, perpetuated and exacerbated.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This PhD project has drawn from the narratives of 16 criminalised young people to answer the research question: ‘What can we learn from the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised children and young people?’. In adopting a broad research question, and a post-structural, co-design and narrative methodology, this project has sought to challenge individualising and silencing discourses *on* youth crime. As Deckert (2016, p. 49) asserts, as researchers we can begin to counter hegemonic knowledges, discourses and practices of power by adopting “non-silencing research methods” that meaningfully amplify participant voice in the knowledge generating and discourse shaping activity of social research. By centring criminalised voices, this thesis has positioned these children and young people outside the narrow constructs of passivity and deficiency and has sought not to restrict agency or render participants ‘known’ through the use of totalising and pathologising labels like ‘criminal’ or ‘delinquent’. Rather, this project has engaged with participants as complex, nuanced individuals who, whilst ever evolving in relation to the discursive contexts within which they exist, are knowers and holders of wisdom. From a co-design perspective, the practice of situating those with lived and embodied knowledge as authorities is the bare minimum, not a radical act (Turner 2021). However, as this project has demonstrated, the production and existence of ‘knowledge’ is not neutral but rather is intimately interconnected with the practices of power of the broader carceral society which, since the Enlightenment, have created distinctions between who gets to be the ‘knower’ and who is the ‘known’, who is the ‘expert’ and who is the ‘object’ (Foucault 1981).

I begin this conclusion chapter by summarising the key findings of this thesis, before briefly detailing the research translation project I undertook that sat alongside it. I then move into an exploration of what all of this means. To do so, I endeavour to explicitly answer the research question guiding this project and conclude the thesis with some final reflections.

8.2 Summary of key findings

In this project, when allowed to speak outside the rigid and narrow categories allowed for by positivist studies, participants brought forth narratives infused with complexity — narratives that challenged the validity of dominant, individualising understandings of adversity, violence, power, and crime. However, having known some of the participants for years through my work in the

sector, and despite interviewing some for upwards of ten hours over multiple interviews, I am acutely aware that what I have presented here reflects but a drop in the ocean of their lives. Whilst this research — in its narrative, co-design and post-structural orientations — may edge closer to reflecting complexity than dominant approaches, like all research, it remains a great distance away from capturing the nuance of these young people's identities, their lived, and living, experiences and the forces that shape and constrain these. Further, it is important to recognise that all findings and analysis have been filtered through my lens — the lens of a middle-class, white, non-criminalised researcher. Capturing the objective truth, the essence of an issue, however, is never the goal of a post-structuralist approach to research. Instead, a post-structuralist approach seeks to sit with the messiness, nuance and contradictions inherent in human stories about social phenomena — stories which are understood to be subjective and ever evolving in relation to the material and discursive contexts that produce them.

In Chapter Five, the first to present participant narratives, I drew from the violence regimes lens proffered by Hearn et al. (2022a) to both make sense of participant narratives and speak back to, and challenge, the discourses shaping dominant understandings of violence and crime, as critiqued in Chapter Four. In researching violence, as I have argued, dominant approaches tend to focus on direct violences (Hearn et al. 2022a) — what these young people and/or their families do or have done — in a decontextualised way, not seeing direct/interpersonal violences as manifestations of, and as inherently connected to, the broader violences that are built into the colonial carceral society. Rather than focusing predominantly on narrating the direct violences of families, as emphasised in much of the literature, participants within this project painted pictures of a violent, unequal society — a society in which dominant discourses of race, class and gender produced and exposed them to violences, both material and discursive/direct and indirect.

As such, in Chapter Five, I drew from participant narratives to argue that direct violences are inherently tied to and produced by indirect — or diffuse and dispersed — violences. For some research participants, for example, dominant discourses of race produced verbal and physical bullying in both the school and the broader community — a form of direct, interpersonal violence that etched profound wounds into both the bodies and the psyches of these racialised children. However, such direct violences, I have argued, are produced and enabled by violences of a discursive and epistemic nature which construct how we understand what violence is, who is violent or deviant and who is worthy, moral and normal. It is these diffuse and dispersed violences that inform the practices of the education system. These discourses saw teachers dismissing a

student's concern about racial bullying — a form of violence that “is (often) not yet seen as, accepted, measured or politicized as violence” (Hearn et al. 2022a, p. 585) — then framing the racialised child as the problem when they reacted to racial violence with physical violence. The exercise of this form of violence within the schooling context is inherently linked to the diffuse, dispersed and epistemic violences of dominant discourses of race which produced the racial hierarchy that licensed colonialism and which, although widely disproven, continues to pervade and create inequality and violence today.

In applying a violence regimes lens, in Chapter Five, I have argued that, in order to more robustly understand the forces that shape the everyday lives and lived experiences of criminalised young people, we must broaden our understanding of violence from simply the physical to include, for example, the discourses that produce racism, homelessness, poverty, social exclusion and colonialism etc. I have highlighted the violences in criminalised young people's lives as not simply individually enacted or randomly occurring phenomena but, rather, as expressions of the practices of power embedded within the social, economic and political systems of the carceral, colonial society (Hearn et al. 2022a). In this context dominant discourses of race, class and gender form both the “wider material-discursive politics of violence” (Hearn et al. 2022b, p. 696) and are themselves productive of violence. Adopting a violence regimes lens has enabled me to move away from questions of *who* is a risky subject, towards an exploration of the forces that place people “at risk of risks” (Link & Phelan 1995, p. 80) and the mechanisms of power that produce and sustain these (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer 2017).

A key implication of Foucault's (1979) work on power is his assertion that, within the disciplinary, carceral society, prisons and the formal carceral system exist as particularly overt manifestations of a much broader, capillary like regime of power and control. As Foucault (1979, p. 216) asserts, within the carceral society, disciplinary practices of surveillance, categorisation and control have been infused throughout institutions, like schools, universities, hospitals and welfare agencies, “whose major, if not exclusive, function is to assure that discipline reigns over society as a whole”. As such, in Chapter Six, I drew from both Foucault's (1979) theorising on the carceral society and participant narratives to interrogate how carceral logics — encompassing discourses and practices — have infused the broader services landscape, shaping the lived experiences and subjectivities of research participants through violent and carceral means. This chapter rendered visible just some of the practices of surveillance, categorisation, pathologisation, discipline and control embedded within schools, mental health, Centrelink and residential care services. Thus, while we are all

implicated in carceral discourses, the power effects of carceral practices are not equally distributed but, rather, accumulate around certain groups — like criminalised young people — illuminating the multiplicity of violences in the lives of those less valued, reducing their voices “sometimes to the point of obliteration” (Hearn et al. 2022a, p. 587).

Chapter Seven — the final findings chapter for this thesis — takes the formal carceral system as its focus, as it is within this microcosm that the violent practices of the carceral society are laid most bare and manifest most acutely for research participants. Following a similar format to Chapter Five, this chapter explored how dominant discourses of race, class and gender, and carceral practices of surveillance, control, discipline and punishment, manifest within policing and prisons — exposing the criminalised body and psyche to a litany of state-sanctioned and societally legitimated direct and indirect violences. The violences of the formal carceral system are physical, interpersonal, systemic, structural, epistemic and discursive and are waged against individual bodies, subjectivities and against entire communities. In this chapter, I have argued that dominant discourses of race, class and gender produce epistemic and discursive violences, positioning certain young people — those who are (overwhelmingly) male, racialised and economically marginalised — as more inherently criminal than those with greater proximity to the constructed, desirable norm. These discourses wage further violences, by constructing such young people as either unreliable witnesses or as deserving of the carceral violence they endure, whilst simultaneously constructing the police and other carceral agents as trustworthy, reliable actors with a legitimate license to use violence. In Chapter Seven, I finish off the findings chapter of this thesis by arguing that the institutions and practices of the formal carceral system exist not only as sites of punishment, but also as sites of normative control that are essential to the maintenance of the racialised, classed, and gendered inequalities that shape colonial ‘Australian’ society.

8.3 Research translation

In the second year of my PhD, I was awarded the Catherine Helen Spence Memorial scholarship — a grant which funded a research translation project to sit alongside my PhD. This project came about because I recognised that research participants had gifted so much of themselves to this project, and I felt a sense of responsibility to do more than simply produce a thesis that might propel my career but would do little to impact on their lives or produce tangible differences and opportunities for them. The project sought to bring young people in on sharing their stories in ways that were meaningful to them, whilst simultaneously rendering their stories, and research

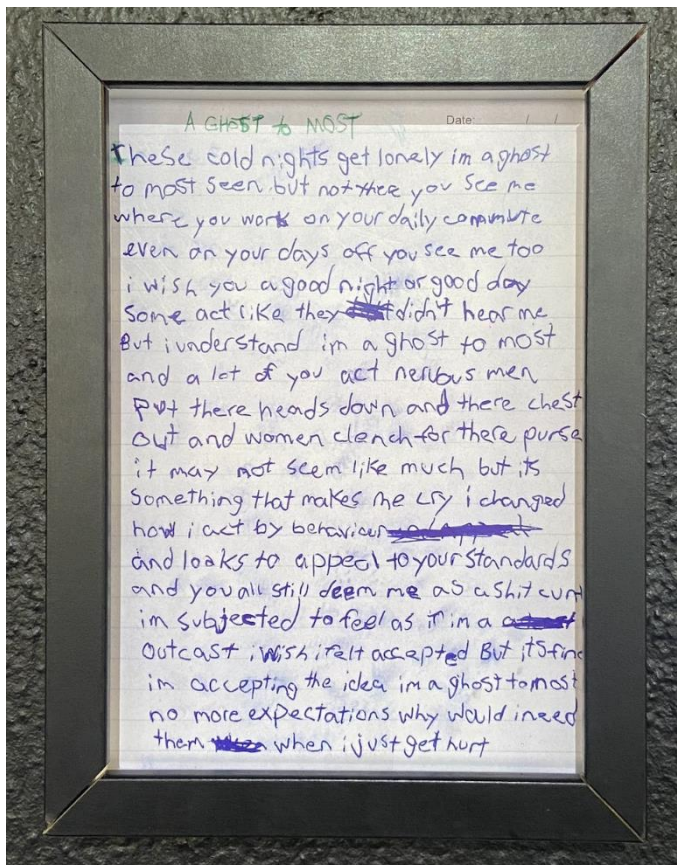
findings, more accessible to participants, their families, practitioners, organisations and the broader community.

This research translation project culminated in a weeklong exhibition entitled 'A Permanent Record', featuring installations I worked on with some research participants. One young person, for example, turned one of their stories into a three-minute spoken word poetry video. This video was co-produced with, and was recorded by, prominent Larrakia³⁴ musician, photographer and videographer James Alberts/Jimblah who, in working with this young person, taught them writing, voice acting and videography skills. Another participant engaged in an artistic project exploring dominant and alternate constructions of criminalised young people which were then painted onto the tracksuits worn in the state's youth prison. Another attended the Old Adelaide Gaol with me, where we filmed an immersive video from within a cell, reflecting the feeling of intrusion produced by constant surveillance and periodic room checks throughout the night. One participant worked with me to produce a timeline of significant life events, documented on the wall of the exhibiting gallery, modelled on the chalk lines some parents draw on walls to track their child's physical growth across time. One young person wrote two poems which were both printed, framed and presented as an exhibition installation, and performed live on the closing night of the exhibition. The exhibition also included a recording of a spoken word poem that I authored, as well as excerpts from various participant interviews, reflective of the dominant themes explored in this PhD, which were re-recorded, using voice actors to protect anonymity, onto audio-devices. These audio-devices were set up around the room, enabling attendees to engage with the stories of young people in their own words. Other formerly incarcerated artists Sarah Tucker and Tabitha lean also contributed to the exhibition. Young people were remunerated, through Visa vouchers, for their time working on the installations and two were enlisted as exhibition assistants, helping with set-up and pack-up.

During the exhibition week, we hosted an opening night — attended by some of the research participants, their families, and 60 people from the broader community — during which formerly incarcerated musicians, poets and storytellers shared their stories, and I summarised the PhD findings. During the exhibition week, I hosted 14 professional development workshops for groups of practitioners and organisations at which I communicated the stories of young people and dominant themes that emerged through my PhD research. Also throughout the week, two of the

³⁴ The Larrakia people are the traditional owners of the region now known as Darwin.

research participants (whose work was featured in the exhibition but who had not planned to speak at opening or closing nights), one family member of a participant, one lived experience advisor and five other formerly incarcerated people who had attended the exhibition launch contacted me explaining that they too wanted the opportunity to share their stories in an environment like the exhibition opening night. In response to this, for closing night, we hosted a second music, poetry and storytelling night where 18 formerly incarcerated people took centre-stage to share their art and tell their stories to a sold-out event of 80 people.



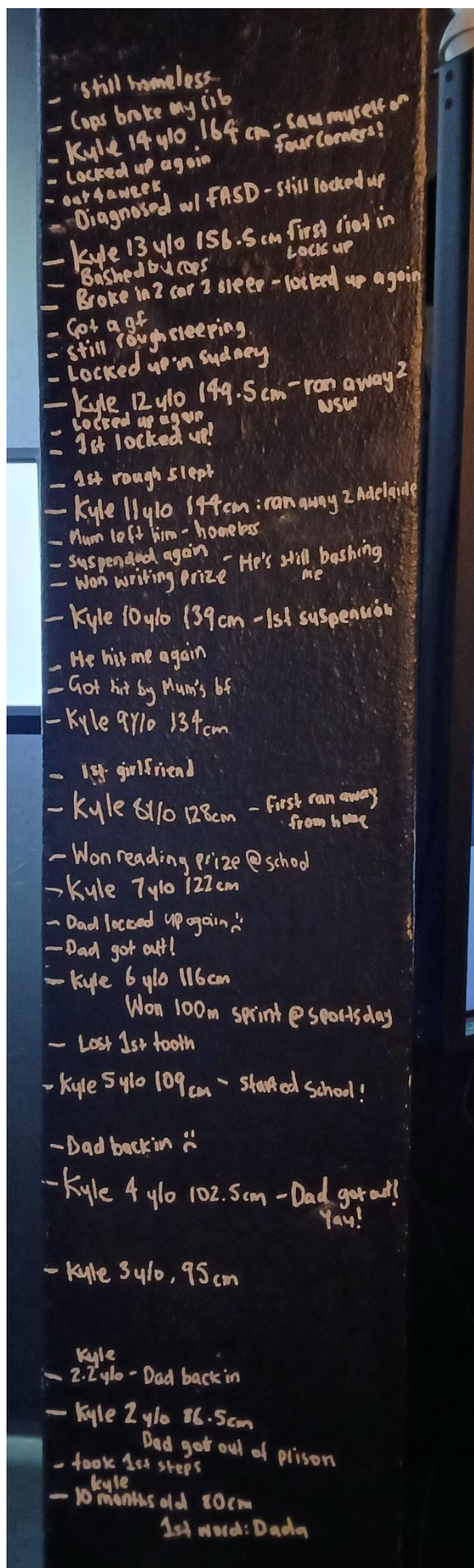
A Ghost to Most: Poetry from the street, written by Benji

Poem reads: 'These cold nights get lonely im a ghost to most seen but not there, you see me where you work on your daily commute even on your days off you see me too I wish you a good night or good day some act like they didn't hear me but I understand im a ghost to most and a lot of you act nervous men put there heads down and there chest out and women clench for there purse it may not seem like much but its something that makes me cry I changed how I act my behaviour and looks to appeal to your standards and you all still deem me as a shit cunt im subjected to feel as if im a outcast I wish I felt accepted but its find im accepting the idea im a ghost to most no more expectations why would I need then when I just get hurt'.

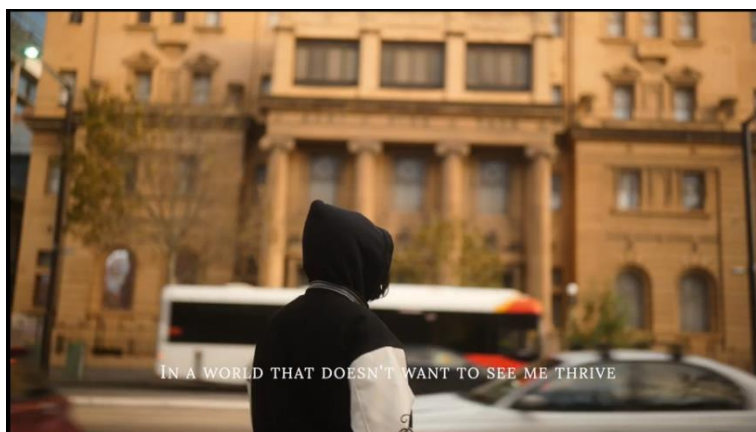
Threads of identity: constructing the criminalised child by Benji, Gus, Jax and Tess

This piece delves into the dominant and alternative narratives imposed onto criminalised young people. It features three sets of tracksuits, like those worn in the youth prison. On the front, pictured, the tracksuits are painted with deficit-based narratives, reading 'criminal', 'dangerous' and 'punish'. However, on the back young people painted alternate understandings. Contrasting with the label 'criminal', the back of tracksuit one reads 'child'. Challenging narratives of criminalised young people as 'dangerous' or 'a threat', the back of tracksuit two reads 'hurt/excluded/scared/ hungry' etc. The back of tracksuit three challenges punishment-based approaches by reading 'nurture/invest/support' etc. Language is powerful and how we construct young people matters. If we see these young people as criminals who are dangerous, we see punishment as the natural and logical solution. When we see them as children, who have been hurt, marginalised and excluded, we can begin to meet their needs.





Lines of impact: Drawing inspiration from the height lines families use to track children's growth, this piece instead traces the traumatic milestones that have shaped Kyle's life – leaving indelible marks that often go unrecognised. Each line, etched on the wall, tells a story of resilience in the face of systemic violence and adversity. From early childhood experiences of homelessness and incarceration, these lines chart the harsh realities of life for Kyle, and many criminalised young people like him.



Still image from 'I am a flower', videography piece produced by James Alberts/Jimblah, written by James, Jax and Tess.

Full poem:

I am a flower.

I have my petals, the layers of who I am.

My environment?

They say when a flower is sick, you don't heal the flower — you heal its environment.

'Ahh, another Sansbury. You're just like your father and if it's not your father, it's your aunty'.

My aunty?

Ah, my aunty. She would always find ways to make us kids laugh.

She deserved better, and I was only 11.

'Hey, look out. It's the Dooyas'.

The Dooyas, that's what we call them.

It's easy to think you know who I am, to judge the things we've done to survive.

But just like my Dad, my Nan, my Great-Grandmother and my Great-Great-Grandmother,

I've had to learn how to provide for myself in a world that doesn't want to see me thrive.

My name is Jax, Jax Sansbury,

And I am not the problem.

To access the video:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IJfDRzOZ-3u6jQjlsMKNOpq2QVERx5E6/view?usp=drive_link

8.4 What can we learn from the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised children and young people?

When commencing this thesis, I set out to answer the question ‘What can we learn from the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised children and young people?’. As I conclude this three-and-a-half-year journey, it feels near impossible to reduce the many complex, and often devastating, lessons that I have learnt from young people into something digestible. Further, post-structural thought urges me to resist tying this thesis up in a bow, resist fitting complex social, systemic, structural and discursive issues into a neatly packaged box, by offering fixed solutions or concrete recommendations for alternative interventions — merely tweaks to an inherently violent society.

Due to the dominance of positivist epistemologies, post-structural theorisings are often critiqued for being too abstract — for they rarely offer prescriptive or universal solutions. Such critiques, however, work from the very assumption that post-structuralism rejects — that there exists a single correct or universal response to the complex issue that we have labelled crime (Ben-Moshe 2018; Brown & Schept 2017). Through a post-structural lens, there exists no coherent reality in which human interests are universal and based around “a shared conception of justice” (Cronin 1996, pp. 58-9). Consequently, in concluding this PhD, I seek not to engage in essentialist emancipatory politics that aim to overthrow ‘unjust’ power relations in pursuit of a singular ‘justice’. Rather, I recognise that justice is always subjective and contextual (Ben-Moshe 2018; Brown & Schept 2017; Davis 2003). Hence, what I offer in this thesis is a “dis-epistemology”; a way of knowing “that rejects” the “certainty” of Enlightenment based knowledges (Ben-Moshe 2018, p. 341). In setting out to challenge the dominant knowledges of the human subject — infused with constructs of truth, evidence, expertise, race, class, and gender — this thesis has created space for other, less definitive, ways of knowing (Ben-Moshe 2018, p. 347).

Through this PhD project, I have learnt that these criminalised young people did want to talk about violence and trauma, but not in the ways that are so often made available to them — in which the violences of their behaviours and their families are the primary reference. Rather, what participants were hungry to discuss was the violence of the carceral society and the violences produced by dominant discourses of race, class, gender and deviance. Applying a Foucauldian lens to the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised young people has enabled me to highlight the relationship of knowledge and power to the discourses that construct race, gender and class, and the social inequalities they produce. I have learnt that these practices of

power give shape to subjectivity — influencing how criminalised young people see themselves, and how they are seen by society, as certain ‘types’ of people — and influence material realities and the modes of existence, resistance and avenues for change most available (Weedon 1997).

Within this thesis, the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised young people have further entrenched my understanding that we live in a violent and unequal world, where violence is not simply physical or interpersonal, but is woven into the fabric of the colonial, carceral society (Hearn et al. 2022a). Through applying both a post-structural and violence regimes lens, I have shown that the stories of violence offered up by research participants are not isolated incidents, aberrations or rarities. My analysis has highlighted the violence inherent in, and produced by, dominant discourses of race, class, gender and deviance in the lives of criminalised young people. These are the discursive violences with which we all live, whether these are cocooning us in privilege or exposing us to harm. A violence regimes lens requires us to reflect upon the ways that we all participate in harm — whether overtly through our actions or because of our position within the existing social order that enables us to uphold violent discourses and the systems and structures they produce. Drawing from both the narratives of criminalised young people and Hearn et al.’s (2022a, p. 585) violence regimes lens, I have shown that, as a “fundamental constituent element of sociality and social life”, direct and indirect violences shape the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives, not just of criminalised young people but, of all who exist within the colonial carceral society.

In the narratives and discussion offered up in this thesis, the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised young people have enabled me to draw attention to the dominance of, and the violence inherent within, the carceral logic — an individualising discourse that locates the source of crime within deviant or deficient individuals, evident, for example, in their poor decision-making/morals/upbringing, their trauma, their inherent badness, or their belonging to a deviant cultural group or class etc. The carceral logic, as Lamble (2020, p. 153) explains, teaches “us that there are good people and bad people, victims and perpetrators, innocent and guilty” and conditions us to intervene as if people are binary — simply “one or the other”. However, as I have demonstrated through participant narratives, this is far from reality and many of those who harm others have been profoundly harmed, both directly and indirectly, themselves. The lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of research participants have helped me to understand that the carceral logic conditions us to disregard the broader contexts of inequality that so often shape the lives of those it criminalises. It is a logic that seeks to control, discipline and punish its

way through harm, marginalisation and deviation from the constructed norm — whether that be, as explored in Chapter Five, through discourses that construct social inequity as an individual failing or, as identified in Chapter Six, through biomedical discourses of mental illness that shape constructs of normality/abnormality and license the forced medicalisation of distress or, as argued in Chapter Seven, through carceral practices that incarcerate a homeless child for stealing food. Dominant discourses of race, class, gender and deviance make up the carceral society, both informing the construction and management of ‘deviance’ and producing the prison as its most overt manifestation (Davis 2003). Carceral logics and practices, as I have argued in this PhD, play out most acutely across gendered, classed and raced lines, leaving certain young people particularly exposed to criminalisation and the social, systemic, structural, and discursive violences that often produce/accompany this.

As I have demonstrated, carceral control within the lives of criminalised young people, and society more broadly, operates in ways that are much more complex than a formal carceral system, disconnected from the society within which it exists. As Foucault (1979) suggests, the formal carceral system exists as but one manifestation of broader societal power dynamics. In making available certain subject positions, discourses of normality and deviance produce the self, shaping both how we see ourselves and others, and the lives we imagine are possible for ‘people like us’. Embedded also in institutional logics and practices, discourses enable the governance and regulation of individuals, including through the expertise of authoritative ‘knowers’ (doctors, psychologists, social workers, teachers, judges, etc.) that provide the context for both self-management and formal interventions. Through constructing normality and deviance, these discourses and practices of power construct the criminal as well as dominant understandings of crime and, hence, the logics of punishment and the centrality of the prison (see Garland, 1990, 2001). Thus, from a post-structuralist lens, if we are ever to change the violent practices of the carceral society, the formal carceral system cannot be the sole focus. Rather, we must target the knowledges, practices and power effects of: Enlightenment based constructs of rationality, autonomy and normality; dominant discourses of race, class and gender; and carceral logics — all of which shape the landscapes of self-understanding most available to criminalised young people and interrelate to produce the practices of categorisation, surveillance, normalisation, discipline and control that pervade the carceral society. As De Folter (1986, p. 59) argues, if the existing “repressive criminal policy of the state was abolished”, but the discourses and practices of constructing and controlling deviance, race, class and gender in broader society remained

unaltered, it is likely that the prison would simply be replaced by similar, possibly “even more subtle”, mechanisms “of social control”.

Coupled with the stories of the research participants, the post-structural and violence regimes framing adopted here provides a platform for thinking differently about violence — how it is understood, experienced and responded to. Whilst this project comprises but one tiny particle in the larger landscape of academic discourse on crime and criminals, by challenging dominant discourses, knowledges and practices of power, this research constitutes an act of resistance. The subjugated knowledges of young people have been drawn on to produce alternate constructions — or counter discourses — of violence, crime and criminals (Foucault 1981). Such practices of resistance are important as dominant discourses inform how issues like crime, and those constructed as ‘criminal’, are understood and intervened against. Once a certain meaning becomes attached to constructs like violence, adversity, crime and/or the criminal, for example, particular policy responses “become ‘thinkable’, even necessary, while others are excluded” (Shepherd 2019, p. 4). When individualising discourses are allowed to dominate, carceral practices of discipline and control — practices which produce the formal carceral system and the prison, but pervade society more broadly — emerge as the logical solution. When a discourse of crime, deviance and violence that considers discursive, systemic and structural forces is privileged, radically different interventions can begin to be imagined and explored (Shepherd 2019).

To summarise, in exploring the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised young people, I have been able to show that criminalised young people are knowledge holders who have valuable contributions to make to the knowledge generating and discourse shaping activity of research. This research has shown that when criminalised young people’s voices and agency are meaningfully centred, the narratives and research findings that emerge can become tools of resistance that challenge dominant, individualising understandings of violence, crime and deviance. The narratives and lived experiences of these criminalised young people have helped to illuminate the violences that shape and constrain their lives and subjectivities — violences which are exercised by and through dominant discourses of race, class, gender and deviance and the practices of discipline and control that pervade the carceral society. However, these narratives also shine a light on society more broadly and have taught me that we all live, and are implicated, in a violent and unequal society.

To reiterate, in engaging with the lived experiences, narratives and everyday lives of criminalised young people, this PhD argues that meaningful change towards a safer society will only occur when we begin naming, interrogating and addressing the violence and inequity inherent within colonial Australian society and within dominant discourses of race, class, gender, deviance and practices of carcerality. Through a post-structural lens, there is no fixed or predetermined destination, but instead, what is required is an ongoing journey seeking to address harm, of an individual but also a systemic, structural and discursive nature, through a myriad of ever-evolving means (Ben-Moshe 2018). This journey, however, must begin with us identifying, challenging and undoing the violences produced by carceral logics (Lamble 2020) and the discourses of race, class and gender that dominate within the colonial, carceral 'Australian' society. Broader social change will not occur in the absence of discursive change and, as such, the creation of, and engagement with, counter discourses that meaningfully centre the voices and perspectives of criminalised young people and provide new ways of understanding are essential — an act of resistance this PhD project has sought to enact.

Whilst unlikely to result in significant or immediate tangible changes to the dominant discourses and practices of the carceral society, this thesis, and the research translation project that accompanied it, provided a safe space for criminalised young people, who have so routinely been silenced, pathologised and framed in the deficient, to exercise agency in the telling of their stories. These stories both help us to edge closer to an understanding of the complexity of life as a criminalised young person and provided these young people with opportunities to understand and experience themselves differently — often in ways they'd never been given permission to before. The subtle, but profound, changes that can come from an exercise such as this can be seen in Angela's statement that "It feels good to get it all out". It can be seen in Jax's reflection that "This is why I like the research you're doing. You're sharing the stories that other people won't let us tell. It's easier when I'm the problem" and in their request to access all of their transcripts, so that they could "see how differently" they "speak about" themselves "now". The opening up of new avenues for self-understanding can also be seen in Gus' reflection, after closing night of the exhibition, that "I never thought I'd want to tell my story, but I do now. I'm not so shame and Mum's real proud of me". It can be seen in the text message I received from Benji that read "Thank you again Tess for everything thank you for giving me the confidence thank you for reassuring me I wouldn't have been able to have this opportunity if it wasn't for you thank you so much". The potential ripple-effects of opportunities like this on the families of criminalised young

people can be seen in the message I received from one of the participant's mothers that read "I feel unbelievably inspired, and I do feel proud, honestly. This work was incredible, inspirational and empowering". Consistent with the post-structuralist stance of this project, the avenues of resistance and of self-understanding opened up through opportunities like this can enable young people to see themselves as different types of people — as actors in their own lives who, whilst constrained and influenced by broader forces, are not one-dimensional, fixed or powerless. They are agents who, if provided the opportunities, can resist the dominant constructions that many had internalised and imagine different versions of, and possibilities for, themselves.

8.5 Final reflection

The journey this PhD project has taken me on has been transformative, in a way that feels fundamental. The relationships I have formed with participants have been many things — at times incredibly challenging, confronting and devastating, and at other times, inspiring, entertaining and deeply growth-inducing. These young people brought themselves to this project, often with a complex fusion of trepidation, bravery, vulnerability and honesty — rarely shying away from the messiness of their lives. They have sat in complexity with me and have taught me lessons that no textbook ever could, and I hope that I have been able to translate and convey some of these here. The narratives offered up by them help to elucidate violence not as simply an individually enacted phenomena, but as inherent to the maintenance of the status quo (Hearn et al. 2022a). These narratives urge us to begin building a world in which harm is responded to in ways that transform, rather than perpetuate, this and in which investments in communities seek to meaningfully address material and discursive inequities (Ben-Moshe 2018; Davis 2003; Kilroy, Lean & Davis 2023; Mathiesen 1974).

9 APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW TOOL

The things I do to get by



Mental health



Wild card

(you chose a topic that's not on the cards)

Being in trouble with the law



What's going well for me



My strengths/things I'm good at

Good friend Positive
Smart Can rap Resilient
Kind Brave Caring Good at
Good at sport maths
Funny Loyal Friendly
Creative Wise Good cook

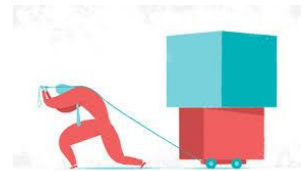
My first time getting in trouble with the cops



Being in care



Hard things



Where I live



School/education



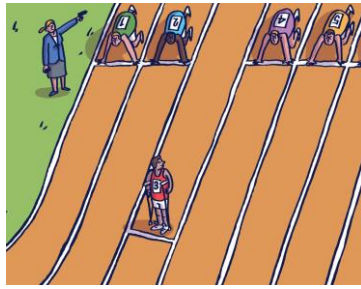
My future



Money



Things that don't feel fair



Childhood



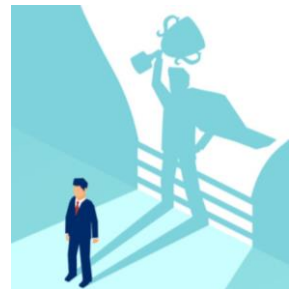
The area I grew up in



Who I really am



Goals and dreams



Relationships



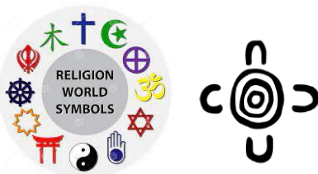
Health



Family



Religion/faith/spirituality



Sexuality



Mates/Friends



Things that make me sad



Things I worry about



Cops



Love



Being locked up



Court



A typical day in my life



Places I feel safe



Culture



Workers



Support people



Challenges



The people I feel safe/happy with



Drugs and drink



Things that make me angry



The side of me people don't see



Working/job



Gender



Disability



Racism



Covid



Getting out of lock up



Things that make me happy




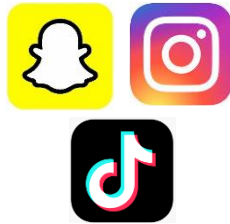
Hobbies




What needs to change in the world

A conceptual image featuring a single tree standing on a horizon line. The left half of the tree is bare, black, and skeletal, while the right half is full of vibrant green leaves. The ground is split: the left side is cracked, dry earth, and the right side is a lush green field. The sky is also split: the left side is a pale, overcast grey, and the right side is a clear, bright blue. This visual metaphor represents the stark contrast between environmental degradation and a healthy, sustainable world.

Social media

The image displays three social media logos arranged in a triangular pattern. At the top left is the Snapchat logo, a yellow square with rounded corners containing a white ghost outline. To its right is the Instagram logo, a square with rounded corners featuring a gradient from purple to pink to orange, with a white camera outline. Below these two is the TikTok logo, a black square with rounded corners containing a white musical note with a red and blue chromatic aberration effect.

Things that are important to me





How I spent my time this past week



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