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"I Feel like I've Come so Far with my Family": Families of Origin in Women's Desistance in Aotearoa New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This study employed narrative interviews with 15 women with histories of imprisonment in Aotearoa New Zealand to explore how their familial relationships affected their desistance. The article explores the women's relationships with their families of origin (i.e., parents, siblings, and extended family) throughout the life course, including their childhoods, and throughout their desistance journeys. The findings emphasize how women's familial relationships are often complex and contradictory, and how women engage with these relationships in different ways throughout their desistance journeys.

INTRODUCTION

Multiple studies have established that familial relationships often play an important role in desistance from crime (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Meisenhelder, 1977; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Warr, 1998; Weaver & McNeill, 2015). These studies have mainly emphasized relationships with romantic or marital partners and children (families of formation), rather than families of origin, such as those with parents, siblings, aunties, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and other relatives who have lived or interacted with an individual during their childhood. However, other research on reentry and desistance has recognized that families of origin can be a key source of emotional and practical support for those leaving prison (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Farrall, 2002, 2004; Leverentz, 2011, 2014; Mills & Codd, 2008). Indeed, Mills and Codd (2008) note that while families of formation often act as the motivation for desistance, families of origin are more likely to have the resources to support those leaving prison and to remain in contact with them. At the same time, literature has also recognized that not all familial relationships are conducive to desistance, and some may encourage further offending (Gadd & Farrall, 2004). Some scholars have thus distinguished between "pro" and "anti" social capital, or relationships which are "good" or "bad" (Giordano et al., 2002; Hucklesby, 2008; Kay, 2020; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009).

The role that families of origin play in women's desistance is likely to be especially complex, and may blur the boundaries between distinctions of "good" or "bad," "anti" versus "pro" social relationships and capital. Women's families of origin can act as key sources of practical and emotional support for women upon release from prison, including assistance with childcare, housing, and finance, as well as providing general love and care (Cobbina, 2010; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001;

Jeffries et al., 2020; Leverentz, 2011, 2014). However, it is also the case that many women with histories of imprisonment have experienced abuse, trauma, and neglect at the hands of their families of origin (Gilfus, 1993; Leverentz, 2011, 2014; O'Brien, 2001; Österman, 2022). This abuse often begins in childhood and contributes to women's pathways into crime and related issues concerning drug/alcohol abuse, mental illness, and trauma (Gilfus, 1993). While some male-based desistance literature conceptualizes the family as a "safe haven" for desisting individuals to "call upon in times of need" (Farrall, 2004, p. 67), research on women's desistance must be critical of the notion of the family as always being a site of safety (Österman, 2022). At the same time, literature also recognizes that women leaving prison often wish to strengthen their relationships with their families of origin, even where they have been the source of trauma and abuse (Gilfus, 1993; Leverentz, 2011, 2014; O'Brien, 2001). The complexity of women's relationships with their families of origin warrants further investigation into how women navigate these relationships throughout their desistance journeys.

This article therefore seeks to explore the role of women's families of origin (parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and siblings) in women's desistance from crime in Aotearoa New Zealand. It examines the effects of these relationships at different stages of the women's life histories, including their earlier childhood experiences, their initial periods of offending, and their pathways out of crime. The majority of the sample identify as Māori (New Zealand's Indigenous population), and the article frames these women's experiences within the context of New Zealand's colonial history and neo-colonial present, which has resulted in significant trauma and suffering among many Māori communities, including their overrepresentation in the prison population.

THEORIZING WOMEN'S FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Women's Familial Relationships and Social Bonds/Social Capital

Traditional (male-based) desistance theory recognizes that familial relationships are a key bond to 'conventional' society, and provide an important source of social capital to desisting individuals (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993). The traditional desistance literature has emphasized connections between families of formation (i.e., marital partners, romantic partners, or children), rather than families of origin (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Meisenhelder, 1977; Sampson & Laub, 1993). However, some more recent research has recognized that families of origin can provide a key source of social capital to support the desistance process (Farrall, 2004; Leverentz, 2011, 2014; Mills & Codd, 2008). Research involving female participants, in particular, suggests that families of origin can provide valuable financial, social, and emotional support, including support with childcare, to women leaving prison (Cobbina, 2010; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Österman, 2022).

In Cobbina's (2010) research, for example, family members could provide women leaving prison with material support by providing a place to stay and/or financial assistance. They also provided women with important emotional support (such as talking to them daily and writing letters), which made the women aware that they "had people who cared and wanted to see them succeed in conventional society" (Cobbina, 2010, p. 219). Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) similarly emphasize that emotional support from relatives – the provision of love and care – can enhance women's self-esteem upon leaving prison. More recently, Jeffries et al. (2020, p.27) note that families can provide women leaving prison with "love, encouragement, understanding, emotional security, strength, and a sense of purpose, belonging and responsibility."

While families can offer invaluable emotional and moral support to a family member on release from prison, it is important to recognize that not all families have the resources to provide material assistance to those leaving prison (Wolff & Draine, 2004). The families of people who have been to prison, and especially the families of ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples, often experience poverty and may lack the resources to provide any significant financial or material assistance (Baldry, 2010; Harding et al., 2016; Jardine, 2017). It is also important to recognize that

not all family relationships are conducive to an individual's desistance and some connections may encourage further offending (Gadd & Farrall, 2004; Mills & Codd, 2008; Rodermond et al., 2016; Wolff & Draine, 2004). Thus, certain forms of social capital may encourage an individual's criminal behavior, rather than promote their desistance (Hucklesby, 2008).

As such, a distinction is often drawn in the desistance literature between "prosocial" and "antisocial" capital, or "positive" and "negative" relationships (Giordano et al., 2002; Hucklesby, 2008; Kay, 2020). Hucklesby (2008), for example, uses "prosocial" capital to refer to relationships which may support desistance (such as employment, and ties with non-offending family and friends), and "antisocial" capital to refer to networks associated with offending. Kay (2020) adopts these terms and suggests that desistance involves an individual reorienting their avenues for social capital acquisition, from relationships that imbue "anti-social capital" to those that imbue "pro-social capital." Using similar language, other desistance scholars distinguish between positive and negative relationships more generally. For instance, Giordano et al. (2002, p. 311) note that desisters in their study came to "recognize that there are multiple benefits of associating with good rather than bad companions." Paternoster and Bushway (2009, p. 1130) similarly propose that an individual's desistance may involve moving away from the "antisocial members of the network," or the "bad guys" toward "the prosocial members and their conforming normative orientation..

While these distinctions can be useful, we need to be careful when applying them to women's desistance. Women's relationships are especially complex and may blur distinctions between "pro" and "anti" social relationships and capital. As feminist pathways literature recognizes, familial and romantic partner relationships are often associated with women's pathways into crime rather than their pathways out. Many women in the criminal justice system have experienced significant harms and trauma, often perpetrated by someone who is close to them, particularly a family member or a romantic partner (Gilfus, 1993; Leverentz, 2011; O'Brien, 2001). Data from the New Zealand Department of Corrections show that 61% of women in prison have experienced intimate partner violence and 44% have experienced family violence as a child (Bevan, 2017).

Abuse of this nature can lead girls to run away from home and resort to criminalized survival strategies, such as drug use, theft, and illegal street work (Gilfus, 1993). As these girls develop into adulthood, they often experience repeated forms of victimization and trauma, including intimate partner violence (Gilfus, 1993; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009). Young women may turn to substance abuse as a therapeutic remedy to cope with prior and ongoing trauma and often suffer ongoing and co-occurring mental health issues (Daly, 1994; DeHart et al., 2014). Feminist authors have therefore critiqued the notion that familial or intimate partner relationships can provide an "avenue from more harmful social contexts" (Farrall, 2004, p. 72), when in fact, for many women, these "relationships *are* their harmful social context" (Petrillo, 2022, p. 67).

As such, it has been suggested that although relationships may be a stabilizing factor in the male-based traditional desistance literature, women's desistance may be more about claiming independence (Barr, 2019; Österman, 2022). This was the case for some of the women in Österman's (2022) research who were judged by family members for their previous behavior. Österman (2022) suggests that these family members exacerbated the stigma of an offending past and that independence from these relationships could support the women's desistance.

Yet the process of claiming independence from familial relationships can be financially, socially, and emotionally challenging, and can include significant psychological costs, such as loneliness and isolation (Leverentz, 2014; Maruna & Roy, 2007). Some research suggests therefore that women leaving prison often remain loyal to parents or other relatives, even where they have difficult histories associated with those relationships (Gilfus, 1993; Leverentz, 2011; O'Brien, 2001). In O'Brien's (2001, p. 91) research, for example, many women described their relationships with their mothers as "problematic and sometimes abusive." Despite this, nurturing and reconstructing these relationships after imprisonment helped the women to develop their wellbeing. In

Gilfus's (1993) research, incarcerated women adopted identities as protectors and caretakers for their parents, and stayed loyal to them, even when their parents had abused and exploited them. In Leverentz's (2011, 2014) research with African American women with histories of imprisonment, many of the women had been victimized by their family members who themselves often had histories of offending or drug abuse. Despite these histories, the women rarely wished to sever ties with their family members, and instead sought to strengthen their relationships with them. Leverentz (2011) argues that the women's ties with their families of origin formed a key part of their desisting identities, whereby many of the women defined themselves in relation to their ability to care for their parents, siblings, or other adult relatives (e.g., as a good daughter and sister).

Women's Familial Relationships and Identity Changes

Leverentz's (2011) findings are consistent with identity theories of desistance, which focus on the role of the individual and their changing self-perception throughout the desistance process. Identity theories of desistance suggest that life events and relationships – including familial relationships – may have a different impact on the desistance process depending on the individual's mindset (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Giordano et al. (2002), for example, argue that for a new social or environmental situation to influence desistance (a "hook for change"), the individual needs to have an openness for change and view that hook as a way to effect the desired change. The individual can then fashion a crime free "replacement self" to supplant their prior criminal identity.

Like social bond theories, identity theories tend to emphasize the individual's relationships with their families of formation (children and spouses) rather than their families of origin. The literature tends to concentrate, for example, on the ways that desisting individuals adopt committed maternal or paternal identities as they undergo desistance (e.g., the "good mother" (Morash et al., 2020), "super-fathers" (Maruna, 2001), or the "family man" (Carlsson, 2013)). However, a few studies discuss the ways in which identity shifts can affect a desisting individual's relationship with their families of origin (Farrall, 2004; Giordano et al., 2007).

Giordano et al.'s (2007) research, for example, considers how emotional responses to family members (such as parents) can shift throughout the desistance process. When discussing their earlier lives, the participants commonly referred to an "angry self" which was often tied to their familial relationships, including parental abuse and neglect. However, throughout the desistance process, these individuals experienced a "diminution of the negative emotions" or an "emotional mellowing" associated with these relationships (Giordano et al., 2007, p. 1623). The authors suggest that these "changes in the character or at least intensity of negative feelings" concerning familial relationships "may be one important social dynamic that influences the desistance process" (Giordano et al., 2007, p. 1624). This "emotional mellowing" may be of particular relevance to female desisters whose familial relationships are often associated with significant trauma.

As with social bonds theories, it is important to recognize the gendered dimensions of identity theories. Cognitive shifts do not occur in a vacuum. The content of these shifts is profoundly structured by an individual's social location, including their gender. So while feminist authors have recognized the significance of identity and internal changes in women's desistance (Österman, 2015; Petrillo, 2022; Stone, 2016; Stone et al., 2018), they have also recognized that alternative identities for women are often limited to gender-based roles (i.e., "mother," "family member" or "partner") (Barr, 2019; Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2014). Moreover, stigma associated with women's offending can act as a significant constraint to their desistance and identity change, due to societal perceptions of female offenders as "doubly deviant," having transgressed both the law and traditional expectations of femininity (Gålnander, 2020; Rutter & Barr, 2021; Sharpe, 2015).

Finally, feminist authors remind us that women's experiences of poverty, abuse, discrimination, and marginalization do not disappear as they attempt to desist from crime, and theories which focus on identity or agency alone risk perpetuating patriarchal structural injustice by celebrating the fortitude of a few individuals (Barr & Hart, 2022; Weaver et al., 2023). The reality is that many women in the criminal justice system experience multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage by their class, ethnicity, and gender, which may limit the alternative identities practically available to them.

THE AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Indigenous Māori women, and women from other marginalized ethnic groups, such as Pacific Islander women, face interlocking forms of oppression which can significantly constrain their desistance. Māori and Pacific Islander women are overrepresented in negative social statistics concerning the criminal justice system, health, employment, and poverty (Marriott & Sim, 2015; Tuiburelevu, 2018). Compared to Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent), these ethnic groups are around twice as likely to experience poverty (Marriott & Sim, 2015), and are especially likely to experience discrimination and racism in areas of health care, housing, and employment (Cormack et al., 2020; Ministry of Health, 2023).

For Māori women in particular, the forces of colonialism and patriarchy can intersect to make desistance especially arduous. Māori, were colonized after 1840 when Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) was signed by Māori chiefs and British settlers (Walker, 1990). Even though the Treaty affirmed Māori political authority and rights over their lands, British settlers failed to honor its terms and employed colonial policies, including warfare, to disenfranchise Māori of their land, power, and resources (Mutu, 2019; Webb, 2017). While prior to European contact whānau (extended family and networks of support) and hapū (sub-tribe) members held collective responsibilities and respectful and complementary relationships, colonial policies and practices worked to systemically break down Māori whānau (Jackson, 1988). In the mid-20th century Māori moved from rural to urban areas, where they were encouraged to assimilate into Pākehā society. As a consequence, Māori were separated from whānau and traditional structures of support (Te Uepū Hāpai i te Ora, 2019).

The destructive effects of patriarchal colonialism saw many Māori women move from positions of worth and good wellbeing to positions of marginalization and hardship (George & Ngamu, 2020; Johnston & Pihama, 1994; Mikaere, 1994; Smith, 2021). As Smith (2021, p. 173) notes, colonization has had "a destructive effect" across all aspects of Māori society:

> Family organization, child rearing, political and spiritual life, work and social activities were all disordered by a colonial system which positioned its own women as the property of men, with primarily domestic roles.

These historical processes have had ongoing and intergenerational effects, including the passing down of trauma and socioeconomic deprivation from one generation to another, and the associated high rates of Māori imprisonment (George et al., 2014). Despite representing only 17% of the general population, Māori make up over half of those in prison (Department of Corrections, 2023; Statistics New Zealand, 2022). This overrepresentation is especially acute for Māori women, who represent 66% of the women's prison population (Department of Corrections, 2021). The enduring legacy of colonial patriarchy has also resulted in high rates of family violence among many Māori communities, and particularly toward Māori women, who are more likely than any other ethnic group in New Zealand to experience family violence (McIntosh, 2022). Māori children are also particularly vulnerable to whānau violence (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2017), and are overrepresented in state "care" services where they are vulnerable to further abuse (Stanley, 2016).

Despite the devastating impacts of colonization, "whānau continues to be a key cultural institution for Māori" (Workman, 2019, p. 7). Unlike Pākehā conceptions of the nuclear family unit, whānau refers to "a person's connection with a broad kinship system" including their aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins (Leaming & Willis, 2016, p. 60). These extended familial relationships are recognized as playing a key role in Māori identity formation, including in children's formative years (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). Indeed, the practice of whāngai, where a child is raised by another relative other than their birth parent (such as aunts, uncles, or grandparents) is a customary Māori practice (McRae & Nikora, 2006). Māori scholars have recognized that supportive whānau relationships are a vital source of general health and wellbeing (Durie, 1985), and can play a key role in reducing reoffending (Workman, 2014; Te Uepū Hāpai i te Ora, 2019). Pacific Islander cultures also hold collectivist values underpinned by strong family interdependence (Shepherd & Ilalio, 2015). Unlike Western conceptions of the nuclear family, in Māori and Pacific Islander cultures "the extended family network is the locus where one's identity, role, spirituality, social principles, and responsibilities are cultivated and supported over the life course" (Shepherd & Ilalio, 2015, p. 2).

This underscores the need for desistance research – particularly New Zealand-based research – to move beyond an exploration of social bonds with children and romantic partners to explore the role of wider kinship connections in desistance. The current research takes up this task by exploring how a sample of (predominantly Māori) women navigate their relationships with their families of origin (including mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, and grandparents) throughout their desistance journeys. Drawing on the literature reviewed above, the article explores the complex and contradictory ways in which women engage with their families throughout their offending and desistance journeys.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis in this article is based on data from a doctoral research project exploring the role of housing, relationships, and motherhood in women's desistance from crime in Aotearoa New Zealand. The doctoral research forms part of a wider Marsden-funded project exploring the role of housing in reducing reoffending. Narrative interviews were carried out with 15 women with histories of imprisonment. To be eligible, participants needed to self-identify as female and to have remained out of prison without reoffending for at least one year. It was hoped that a crime free period of at least 12 months would enable the recruitment of participants who had at least entered the "primary phases" of desistance (i.e., an initial period of non-offending) (Maruna et al., 2004). The women were mainly recruited through personal contacts and non-government organizations working with people who have been to prison. Two additional women were recruited from the wider Marsden-funded project.

Participants were aged between 22 and 49 years, with an average age of 37.6 years. The majority of the women (10) identified as Māori (67%). Of those 10, one woman also identified as New Zealand European and Rarotongan, one as Scottish, Irish, and French, and two as Cook Islander. For the remaining five women, one identified as Pākehā/Polish, three as New Zealand European, and one as Samoan. Eight of the women had served their most recent prison sentence between one to three years prior to the interview; three women between four to six years prior to the interview; and the remaining four women had not been to prison for nine years (or longer) prior to the interview. Most of the women had histories of sustained offending across different offense types including fraud, armed robbery, drug dealing, possession of class A drugs, kidnapping, and theft. The majority of the women ($N = 12$) referenced previous issues with or addictions to drugs or alcohol. One additional participant referred to a gambling addiction.

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. Each woman contacted the author directly, or requested to be

contacted, after being told about the research by a gatekeeping agency or a friend or contact who had been interviewed. The author (who carried out all of the interviews) explained the research aims and interview process with each woman prior to the interview. If the women remained interested in participating, they were emailed a participant information sheet and were asked to review it and confirm that they wished to take part. At the start of the interview, the interviewer went through the participant information sheet again, and provided participants with the opportunity to ask any questions to ensure that each woman had made a free and informed decision to participate. After the interviewer had answered any questions, participants signed a consent form.

Narrative interviews were then carried out. The interviews took a broad approach and aimed to understand the women's life experiences prior to, during, and after their imprisonment. However, the interviewer asked some specific questions, or probed parts of the narrative, that were relevant to housing, relationships, and motherhood. For example, participants were asked about any key relationships in their lives that had helped them to make a change. Where participants referred to their relationships with family members (e.g., mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents, aunties, uncles), the interviewer often probed further to explore the particular role these relationships played in desistance. This typically began with the phrasing "Could you tell me a bit more about your relationship with …?" and "Do you think [family member] has helped you to make a change? If so, how?"

With participant consent, each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed according to a thematic approach which aimed to capture patterns of shared meaning, or "themes" across the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019). The author read and re-read the transcripts to identify key codes concerning what had contributed to the women's offending, what had constrained their potential to desist from crime, and what had supported or catalyzed their desistance journeys. Consistent with narrative approaches to research, it was critical that all codes were understood in relation to the wider context of each woman's narrative and desistance journey. For this reason, a code could apply to a single sentence, or to several pages of data to avoid removing the code from the context in which it arose. Codes were then compared within and across interviews to establish wider themes and sub-themes relevant to the research topics.

FINDINGS

This section is organized into two parts. Part One explores the women's familial relationships during their childhoods, and in particular how several of the women's offending histories appeared to have been influenced by their familial environment. Part Two explores the women's familial relationships during their desistance, and the ways in which the women engaged with these relationships differently throughout their desistance journeys. What emerges from these analyses is that women's relationships with their families of origin are often complex and contradictory and may change over time or with context.

Part One: Early Familial Relationships

Many of the women in the sample came from socially and economically deprived backgrounds, and several of them mentioned that their families and whānau had been involved in the criminal justice system. For the Māori women in the sample, their experiences reflect the ongoing and intergenerational effects of colonization, including socioeconomic disadvantage and trauma (George et al., 2014; McIntosh & Radojkovic, 2012).

Jacqui, a Māori woman in her mid-thirties, explained that her whānau are gang affiliated. She said "it's life, they're our family." As a 13-year-old, Jacqui's uncle gave her cigarettes and alcohol. Jacqui alluded to incidents of severe childhood trauma, particularly inflicted by her mother. Sam,

a Cook Islander / Māori woman, explained that her family and extended family are "all alcoholics, addicts and doing crime" and at the age of 15 she "started living the life I had seen growing up, because that's all I knew." Annie, a young Māori woman, lived with her father during her teenage years, which she described as: "Two years of drinking, drugging, every single day like that was all there was to life, like I couldn't see any other way to life." Liz, a Cook Islander / Māori woman, grew up in social housing with her mother and her sister. She described her mother as "a good mother" who "raised us right"; however, she referred to gang affiliated cousins, and explained that her sister had been to prison. During Liz's teenage years, her sister's social network influenced her pathway into crime and addiction: "I took off with my sister's friends cause they … they were all doing drugs and alcohol and stuff."

Rose, a Pākehā woman in her thirties, lived with her mother and brother in a car during her teenage years. Here, her mother "would cook drugs [and] deal them to the prostitutes." Rose went on to struggle with addiction (and would commit crime to support that addiction) for an 11-year period (serving "16 lags" in prison over this time). Tuchey, a Māori woman in her late forties, described an addiction and offending history which spanned nearly two decades. Tuchey's father passed away when she was five years old, and she was raised by her mother. Tuchey explained that her mother had "done her best, she really done her best" in raising Tuchey and her siblings. However, Tuchey also explained that her mother's social connections and associates led to "alcohol and drugs, gang affiliations coming in and out of our home." Tuchey implied that one of these associates raped her, which led to a downward spiral into crime: "I was raped on my sixteenth birthday, so that really made me set downhill and I ended up doing drugs, alcohol, affiliating with gang members and the black-market underground world."

Several other women experienced abuse (physical, sexual and/or emotional) at the hands of family members or extended family members. Consistent with feminist pathways literature (Daly, 1992, 1994; Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014), these women's early experiences of trauma contributed to issues concerning their mental health, substance abuse and eventual offending. Mandy, a Māori woman in her early thirties, was sexually abused by her father while living with him during her childhood. Mandy went on to battle related mental health issues which continued into adulthood: "I started getting really emotional and I started cutting, I was always angry I just couldn't deal with my feelings." At the age of 15, Mandy ran away from home. She left school and moved in with a boyfriend who introduced her to cannabis and methamphetamine. She also began to "drink to blackout every time." Mandy ended up drug dealing, and her addiction spiraled "out of control."

Mary, who identifies as Māori, European and Rarotongan, spent the early years of her childhood living with her grandparents where she experienced ongoing "sexual, physical, mental [and] spiritual abuse." Mary intermittently stayed with her parents, and described her mother as "very, very abusive […], violent, very violent." She then went on to live with several different family members throughout her childhood: "we were going around whāngai to a lot of whānau, we had been through about 120 schools by now, and we were only 11." Ashleigh (also Māori), described being "passed" around, from one family member to another. She explained how her pathway to prison was influenced by this lack of stability and exposure to criminality in her family: "I was passed around through aunties and uncles, so I grew up with different people teaching me different ways. My dad was a gang member, my mother was a drug addict. I saw that stuff and then I ended up in girls' homes, juvie, prison."

Although many of the women in the sample described childhood familial relationships which appeared to contribute to trauma, mental health issues, addiction and crime, a few women described largely positive childhoods and supportive relationships with their parents and other family members (such as siblings, cousins, and grandparents). Lucy, a Samoan woman in her forties, "grew up in a good family" and both of her parents "worked extremely hard." She said that although "we didn't have a lot of money […] we certainly didn't grow up hungry or without."

She added: "I could honestly say we had a really good upbringing." Lucy described a short offending history; where she used her position as an account manager to defraud her employer over a two-year period. Lucy explained how her offending had resulted from "overextending myself in terms of family commitments," including payments for funerals and weddings. She emphasized that in her cultural context there are "huge expectations to give." Other research has recognized that the connection between familial economic provisioning and women's offending can be "exacerbated in cultural contexts where women's financial familial responsibilities expand beyond the nuclear family" (Jeffries et al., 2020, p. 3).

For other women, their pathways into crime did not appear to be influenced by the familial setting, but rather a variety of differing factors and circumstances. Beth, a Pākehā woman in her forties described a middle-class upbringing. She grew up in a "huge house," and her father owned a number of shops in their local neighborhood. Beth explained that although her parents often fought because her "dad was not a good husband and not a good father," her mother "kept everything happy." She explained: "my childhood I think of, happy." Beth described a short offending history, where she was convicted of possession of a class A drug (methamphetamine). Consistent with literature suggesting that women's romantic partner relationships are often implicated in their pathways into crime (Daly, 1992; Leverentz, 2006, 2014), Beth described her conviction as a consequence of her relationship with her partner who had stored methamphetamine on their property: "If I wasn't with [partner] definitely I wouldn't have gone to prison […] I guess it boils down to an unhealthy relationship."

Harley, a Pākehā woman, also described a more supportive upbringing than other women in the sample. She described her mother as "a great mum" and her family, who "don't drink or use drugs," as "pretty straight." Harley's father left when she was two years of age. She spent her childhood living in a "massive house" with her mother and grandmother. She described her childhood as "I guess what you call a good upbringing." Harley's offending appeared to be influenced by a drug addiction and various mental health issues which developed during her teenage years.

Part Two: Familial Relationships and Desistance

At the time of the interviews, all of the women had not reoffended for at least a year, with some of the women further along their desistance journeys than others. As the women progressed along their desistance journeys, they began interacting with their families in different ways. Some of the women strengthened, or reestablished, their family relationships. Some began to perceive of their families as an important source of emotional and material support and began to engage with this support. Others neutralized previously intense feelings of resentment or hostility toward family members who had harmed them in the past.

Family as a Source of Emotional and Material Support

Some women came to perceive certain family relationships as valuable sources of emotional and material support and began to engage with these relationships as supportive of their change. Liz explained that during her offending her sister had encouraged her to make a change: "She was telling me to stop doing all these things. But I couldn't." Although Liz could not initially engage with the support of her sister and other family members (which may have been due to an addiction to alcohol), she had been going straight for over a year at the time of the interview. Her sister and other family members had been a supportive influence in motivating and reinforcing her change.

Liz explained that she stopped offending as soon as she left prison (for armed robbery and 16 other minor charges) and rather than returning to her old criminally involved friends, stayed

with her mother, sister, and other family members: "I stopped as soon as I got out, yeah, I didn't go back to any of my old friends, I just stayed with my mum and family, my sister." Liz described being away from her family during her imprisonment and not wanting to return to prison as motivating factors for her desistance: "Being away from my family […] that's why I've changed heaps. Plus I didn't wanna go back to that place." Liz also reflected on having a "moment" (or "cognitive shift" (Giordano et al., 2002)) thinking about how her incarceration was negatively affecting her mother, who had visited her in prison every week. In this moment, Liz decided that she "didn't want her to come in again … I didn't wanna put her through that anymore." In addition to providing her with a place to stay upon release from prison, Liz's mother, sister and wider whānau have provided her with ongoing emotional support, including regularly "check[ing] up" on her:

> My aunties and stuff, the one's that we lived with … all my mum's side, all my mum's sisters and brothers, all my uncles and stuff […] they just kept like … when I got out of jail, they kept checking up on me every week. Until now until this day they still do. They check up on me and him [referring to her baby] as well. (Liz)

Beth was one of the few participants to leave prison and resume a comfortable, middle-class lifestyle. Beth returned to the house that she had owned and lived in prior to her imprisonment. Although Beth had "distanced" herself from her family during her offending, her family, especially her mother, was a key source of support upon her release. Beth's mother met her mortgage commitments until Beth sold her house. Beth also emphasized the emotional support that her mother has provided her since leaving prison. Like Liz's family, Beth's mother frequently "checks in" on her:

> My mum has started a thing where every morning when one of us wakes up, we text the other one saying "morning" and it's … I think it's just her way of just checking, you know, just keeping up […] just to make sure that I'm mentally handling it. (Beth)

Harley explained that during and after her imprisonment, her mother and mother's partner "couldn't be more supportive really." They supported Harley both financially and emotionally, including visiting her while in prison and taking her to medical appointments:

> So, they would come and visit me in prison like every week from [city], apart from like maybe three or four times in a year. They came to my court hearing they sort of got me all my clothes and stuff in jail, when I got out they had all my food ready and my clothes all folded and washed and stuff, and yeah just totally looked after by them really and uh they helped me a lot uh financially as well yeah at times and emotionally whenever I needed it really. And yeah, taking me to hospital, medical appointments and things like that. (Harley)

Jacqui explained that during her offending and drug abuse she had not "realize[d]" that her brother and father were available to offer support. However, once she overcame her addiction to methamphetamine, she began to value these relationships and the support they could offer:

> Cause of the support I got I didn't realize I had, I was too busy fucking them over [laughs] but I cleaned all that up, and it's been a long road to build their trust back up again, all I had to do was get off that shit [methamphetamine]. (Jacqui)

Upon release from prison, Jacqui stayed with her father and was still living with him at the time of the interview. When asked whether living with her father had helped her to make a change, Jacqui highlighted her father's influence in maintaining and reinforcing her change:

> "Where you been, what you been doing, who are you with?" "Are you with the crack heads?" [laughs] "Where"s all my light bulbs" "Yeah fuck that one blew and that one blew and there they are over there" [laughs]. He keeps me on my toes, but I love him, he"s the only one that can talk to me like that though. (Jacqui)

Lucy discussed how changes in her mental and emotional wellbeing have affected her relationship with her family members. Lucy described her mental state during her offending: "I was

going through quite a lot of depression, and just really struggling with my life." Lucy mentioned that during this period she did not reach out to her family for help (who were not involved in crime or drugs). However, Lucy said she is much happier now and feels she can ask her family for support when life becomes difficult:

> **Lucy:** I think for many years now I've been in and out of depression, for many different reasons but I do feel a lot more content with my happiness now. Um, and when I do feel overwhelmed, I have got tools to cope with those things. Like taking time out for myself, you know, taking myself away from my children, having a bit of space. And asking for help, which is a huge thing for someone like me. When I do struggle, I ask for help.
>
> **Interviewer:** Mm, absolutely. And who do you normally ask for help?
>
> **Lucy:** Um, normally my family, I talk to my family, I talk to my husband, I talk to my sisters about how I'm feeling and you know what the situation is, and you know, they're usually a lot more… when they're on the outside of my problems they have a lot more understanding and yeah, just really, you know, they don't always necessarily have the answers, but they're just, uh, you know, an avenue where I can vent and talk.

It appeared that Lucy needed to develop a sense of emotional wellbeing before she could conceive of her family as an effective source of support. As Lucy became more content within herself, and developed the "tools to cope," she began to view her family as an effective "avenue" to "vent and talk."

Neutralizing Negative Emotions Associated with Familial Relationships

One woman in the sample, Ashleigh, explained that part of her pathway out of crime involved cutting ties with, or "knifing off" (Maruna & Roy, 2007), various family members: "So I cut the ends off and so I haven't really talked to anybody since like over … 12 years or even longer." Ashleigh explained that while she remains in contact with some of her family and whānau, "if they haven't changed, I've cut them off."

However, most of the women did not cut ties with their family members. Consistent with prior research (Leverentz, 2011, 2014; O'Brien, 2001), even where certain family members had been abusive, neglectful, or criminally and/or drug involved, most of the women maintained their relationships with them. In line with Giordano et al.'s (2007) findings, some of the women came to (at least partially) neutralize prior negative feelings toward family members who had been the source of significant trauma.

Jacqui alluded to extreme parental neglect from her mother that resulted in significant trauma. She described a period of criminality and drug abuse that started in adolescence and spanned several years. However, since leaving prison, Jacqui has been committed to "going straight," mainly motivated by her children (see Low, 2022). She has addressed her addiction and begun to develop a sense of emotional wellbeing. As part of these changes, Jacqui appears to have experienced a change in the "intensity of negative feelings" toward her mother (Giordano et al. 2007, p. 1624). Having described "hat[ing]" her mother for most of her life, Jacqui described their current relationship in the following terms:

> Norm, better than what it was, when she used to see us, she used to go "oh fuck, look at you, you black monkey" I hated her. And now it"s like "chea mum" and she"s like "hi baby" "up to?" "I got $11 can you buy me a wine!" [laughs] I just look at her and go "maate, hang on I"ll go and do my shopping I"ll see if I can afford it" [laughs]. (Jacqui)

Mary also described "hating" her mother. During Mary's childhood, her mother and father left her with her abusive grandparents while they engaged in recreational drug abuse. Mary also recalled a harrowing incident in which her mother deliberately crashed her car out of anger, having suspected that Mary's father had been unfaithful. Mary's brother, who was sitting in the

passenger seat, flew through the windscreen and was seriously injured. Mary described her thoughts toward her mother at this time:

> This is me in my head, you [her mother] didn't learn the first time [you went to prison]. So, you know, you really need to go to jail for hurting my brother. And I really wanted her to, just so much hatred.

However, like Jacqui, Mary has since neutralized at least some of her negative feelings toward her mother: "I'm glad I let that go though. But anyway, in a sense you know, physically and mentally. But spiritually, I will always be broken over that." Later in the interview, Mary described her current relationship with her mother. She explained that although she often disagrees with her mother, she no longer argues with her. This approach has helped Mary and her mother to maintain a relationship and for them both to "feel better":

> We haven't got anything in familiar, me and mum, you know she's… she doesn't like group settings, she doesn't like talking to strangers, she doesn't like people being in her business, she doesn't like this, she doesn't like that and yeah I just disagree, I don't say anything anymore, I used to sit there and argue until the cows came home, and I don't now. I just accept it and just tell her 'Oh okay, okay mum.' […] You know that's the only way I know how to deal with it now because it makes me feel better and it makes the other people feel better. (Mary)

Mandy's mental health issues, addiction and trauma were heavily influenced by her experiences of sexual abuse from her father during childhood. Mandy was receiving ongoing counseling sessions to help her deal with her experiences of childhood abuse. She explained that she now has the emotional regulation to deal with – or at least begin to deal with and confront – her childhood trauma: "But just the emotional regulation parts. I'm not cutting is the first part, so I can deal with that sexual abuse stuff when it comes to it." As Mandy has begun to confront her childhood trauma and develop a sense of emotional wellbeing she has "started back talking to my dad." She has also reconnected with other family members, such as her brothers. Mandy now feels that she is part of a familial support network "for the first time":

> I feel like I've come so far with my family, and I've got like a support network and I'm part of my family for the first time forever, I feel like I actually have that, I'm actually a part of it and they're proud of me. (Mandy)

For Mandy, Mary, and Jacqui, it appeared that to develop a sense of emotional wellbeing they needed to confront, come to terms with, and begin to heal from their trauma. Their respective healing processes appeared to involve establishing a relationship that was no longer volatile or acrimonious with the family members who had caused or contributed to their trauma.

Complicating the Pro/Anti-Social Binary

The experiences of Mandy, Mary, and Jacqui in neutralizing negative emotions toward family members illustrate the complexity of women's familial relationships and blur the boundaries between distinctions of "pro" or "anti" social influences often employed in desistance literature (Giordano et al., 2002; Hucklesby, 2008; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). These experiences show how a previously "anti-social" influence could become a more neutral or even "pro-social" influence with time. In all three cases, the relevant family members had caused the women significant psychological harm, which may have contributed to their offending pathways. And yet the process of reconnecting with these family members appeared to promote the women's emotional wellbeing, inner peace, and healing, which served to further reinforce their desistance.

Other examples in the women's narratives illustrate how an influence may be considered "anti" social in some contexts or time periods, while supportive or "pro" social in other contexts or time periods. As noted, Liz's sister had previously been to prison and her social network had influenced Liz's pathway into crime and addiction. However, once Liz's sister left prison, she

"changed" and encouraged Liz to follow suit. At the time of the interview, Liz was living with her sister, who remained a supportive influence on her change.

Rose's relationship with her father similarly complicates the binary of "pro" or "anti" social influence. Rose described her father (who was a gang member) as having "a very big resentment to me 'cause I reminded him so much of my mother." As a teenager, Rose experienced "lots of hidings from my father." However, Rose explained that her father had tried to support her later in life, during her offending and struggles with addiction, and had therefore (at least on some occasions) exerted a more supportive or "pro-social" influence:

> I had an opportunity to get clean, but I again had all of this trauma that was going on around me, and no stability […] by this stage my dad was over it, you know my dad had tried to support me at different times, but I wasn't ready. (Rose)

Tuchey's relationship with her mother provides a further example which complicates binaries of 'pro' or 'anti' social influence. As noted, Tuchey's mother's social connections and associates led to alcohol, drugs and gang affiliations coming into Tuchey's childhood home. One of these associates raped Tuchey, leading to a downward spiral into crime. Despite this, Tuchey empha-sized that her mother has always been there for her: "My mum's always there for me, she listens to me. And she's just like 'oh you better wake up you little […] or you're going to get left behind' […] she's always been there."

In some cases, the same social influence can be simultaneously 'pro' or 'anti' social, depending on the context or frame of reference. As noted, Jacqui's brother and father provided her with invaluable support upon release from prison to strengthen and reinforce her desistance. Jacqui explained that since leaving prison, the "only thing[s]" that have kept her focused on staying clear of crime and drugs are her relationships with her brother, father, and children. When asked how her brother and her father have kept her focused, she emphasized their words or 'memorable messages' around how to avoid being a 'bad mother' (Stone, 2019):

> Drumming it in my head, 'you wanna be a dumb cunt?' 'Do you like being talked about?' 'Shame you can't even walk in the shops bro 'cause you're wanted!' 'How in any way is that good for kids?' 'To take them out, you know to I dunno Splash Planet and shit like that, knowing that someone could walk up to you in front of them and go 'hey you're that fucking thief' 'that out the gate' [laughs] 'fucking what I'm gonna jump on your face'' [laughs] It's not cool. (Jacqui)

These sorts of comments may play a contradictory role in Jacqui's desistance. Women often associate their offending with guilt and shame (Rutter & Barr, 2021). They experience heightened stigmatization due to being seen as "doubly deviant," having transgressed both the law and trad-itional expectations of femininity (Lloyd, 1995). Feelings of guilt and shame are perpetuated for offending mothers who fall short of societal expectations regarding what it means to be a 'good' mother (Stone, 2019). In the short-term, Jacqui's brother and father's comments seemed to motivate her desistance. Jacqui actively resisted the 'feared self' (or 'bad mother') that her brother and father condemned. She emphasized that she does not want her children "to have that shame." However, the same comments could negatively impact Jacqui's desistance in the long-term. They may perpetuate a sense of shame and complicate Jacqui's potential to shed an offending identity and attain a sense of tertiary (or relational) desistance (i.e., a sense of belonging to a wider com-munity and receive recognition of change from others) (McNeill, 2016; Nugent & Schinkel, 2016).

DISCUSSION

Families of origin played significant roles in motivating and/or reinforcing the desistance journeys of many of the women in this research. This is consistent with prior research, which emphasizes the importance of supportive familial relationships in women's desistance from crime (Cobbina,

2010; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). These relationships may be especially important in settler states where colonial and neo-liberal policies have left limited structural support for marginalized groups and individuals. In the absence of adequate state support, familial relationships – however strained or difficult – can provide essential support for desistance.

Unsurprisingly, given the difficult nature of some of these relationships, existing research has also emphasized the complexity of women's familial relationships in desistance (Leverentz, 2011, 2014). The current study adds theoretical development to such research by identifying some of the dynamic and contradictory ways in which women's familial relationships may influence their desistance, and the different ways in which women may engage with these relationships throughout their desistance journeys. The findings suggest three ways in which the women interacted differently with their families throughout their desistance.

One way was to draw on untapped familial resources to support their change. As the women began to heal from trauma and addiction issues, some of them began to perceive their families as important sources of emotional and material support and began to engage with this support. Consistent with prior research (Cobbina, 2010; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001), such familial support helped to strengthen and reinforce the women's change and support their transition from prison to the community. This finding lends support to identity theories of desistance (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001), and suggests that for a 'hook for change' to effectively influence desistance, the individual involved must actively engage with that 'hook' to support their change.

Another way in which the women interacted differently with their families throughout their desistance was to disengage with, or "knife off," these relationships altogether (Maruna & Roy, 2007). However, this was rare and illustrated by only one case (Ashleigh). Consistent with prior research (Gilfus, 1993; Leverentz, 2011, 2014; O'Brien, 2001), the majority of the women in the sample remained loyal to various family members, and maintained their connections with them, even if they had been the source of significant trauma.

This leads to the third way in which the women interacted differently with their families in their desistance: they neutralized their prior negative emotions associated with their familial relationships. Consistent with some existing research (e.g., O'Brien, 2001) some women managed to establish civil relationships with family members who had neglected them or inflicted trauma on them. These women did not necessarily fully embrace these family members or rely on them for emotional support, but they were able to neutralize their negative feelings toward them despite the trauma they had caused (Giordano et al., 2007). The mere fact of establishing a relationship with these family members helped the women to come to terms with the trauma associated with these relationships and develop a sense of emotional wellbeing in support of their desistance. This is consistent with O'Brien's (2001) research, which found that nurturing or reconstructing difficult familial relationships may help women to develop wellbeing.

This finding therefore emphasizes the importance of healing from trauma in women's desistance, and tends to support Barr's (2019) assertation that women's desistance involves 'desistance from harm' rather than desistance from crime. For some women, this healing may need to come (or at least begin to come) before they can engage with and embrace their family as a source of support. These women may require other avenues of support, such as counseling, or drug and alcohol treatment programs, to help them begin the process of healing before they are ready to connect with family. This appeared to be the case for a young Māori woman, Mandy, who was receiving ongoing counseling to help her to deal with the childhood abuse she experienced from her father. Mandy had only recently developed the "emotional regulation" to deal with and confront her childhood trauma and had since reconnected with her father. It is important that policy and practice recognize that some women may need to undergo their own emotional healing – and receive significant socio-structural support to do so – before they are ready to connect with family, and especially those family members who have been the source of trauma or neglect.

The findings also highlight the complexity of women's familial relationship, and the need to view these as complex and contradictory processes whose influence may vary over time or merely with context. This complexity blurs the pro-social/anti-social distinction that is often employed to understand the role of relationships and social capital in desistance (Giordano et al., 2002; Hucklesby, 2008; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). The same family members that influenced the women into committing crime or inflicted the trauma that contributed to their offending could also feature in their pathways out of crime. In this sense, a previously 'anti-social' influence, may change into a more 'pro-social' or at least 'neutral' influence over time. In other cases, the same social influence may be simultaneously 'pro-social' and 'anti-social' depending on its frame of reference. For instance, Jacqui's brother's and father's comments about her needing to be a 'good mother' may have motivated her desistance in the short-term, but they may perpetuate Jacqui's feelings of guilt and shame regarding her prior offending and complicate her potential to embrace a more positive version of herself or the 'future self' she could become (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009).

This is consistent with previous research which has recognized that other relationships in the desistance process can be viewed as processes which may change over time. For instance, Leverentz (2006, p. 484) has recognized the need to view women's relationships with their romantic partners as "processes rather than as static entities" and that "[a] single relationship may prove to both encourage desistance and lead to reoffending, depending on when it is looked at." However, this insight is likely to be especially salient when considering women's relationships with their families of origin, due to the strong loyalty and social bonds associated with these relationships. Research has indeed recognized that although women may be decisive about cutting ties with friends/associates, or romantic partners, they often maintain relationships with their family members, including those living the sorts of lifestyles they seek to avoid (Leverentz, 2014; Low, 2023). As Giordano et al. put it (2007, p. 1624), family members are "less disposable than earlier peer contacts."

The findings also highlight how gender, class and racial dimensions intersect to influence access to familial social capital (both emotional and material) in desistance. The participants described a variety of childhood experiences characterized by differential levels of access to familial support. Beth and Harley – who were both Pākehā – appeared to come from more middle-class backgrounds and had greater access to financial support from their families of origin upon release from prison (such as loans of money), than many other women in the sample. They did not speak of childhood experiences that involved significant trauma or socioeconomic marginalization. By contrast, Māori women in the sample were particularly likely to speak of socially and economically deprived childhoods, characterized by frequent relocation or exposure to drug/alcohol abuse and criminality, or trauma. These women's experiences are illustrative of the devastating and ongoing effects of colonization on many Māori communities, including socioeconomic disadvantage and a breakdown of whānau relationships (Jackson, 1988; McIntosh & Radojkovic, 2012).

The findings therefore emphasize the importance of placing women's lived experiences in the specific context in which they occur (Österman, 2022). Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial history has meant that many whānau lack the resources to support a family member leaving prison. In light of this, and as others have argued (Mills & Codd, 2008), it is important not to place the burden of desistance entirely on families and whānau without additional support, particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand where so many families have been marginalized by colonial violence and processes (Jackson, 1988; McIntosh & Workman, 2017; Webb, 2017). While whānau can play a key role in supporting desistance, it is important to remember that whānau themselves need support (Te Uepū Hāpai i te Ora, 2019). Communities and whānau struggling with intergenerational disadvantages, including abuse, poverty, and racism, cannot be expected to find the additional resources necessary to support desistance by themselves. Rather, it is up to the state to take

responsibility for its past and ongoing wrongdoings and to redress harm and a legacy of social neglect (Baldry, 2010; McIntosh, 2022; Te Uepū Hāpai i te Ora, 2019).

This redress includes support and resources for Māori-led interventions which focus on whānau healing from historical trauma. That is, "healing frameworks that are cognizant of collective and historical Indigenous experience, particularly in regard to colonization and its impact" (McIntosh, 2022, p. 28). It includes providing support for women and their families to access safe housing, mental health and addiction support, education, and childcare. These wider welfare-based interventions and structural changes are required to disrupt the intergenerational transmission of social inequalities and trauma, and instead support desisting women and their families and whānau to flourish. Indeed, most of the women in this study may not have entered the criminal justice system in the first place if state policies and practices had not relegated them and their whānau into marginal or liminal spaces (Baldry, 2010).

The findings in this research therefore underscore the importance of a wider research agenda recognizing that desistance is not only about individual change but is dependent on one's social and cultural context, and how this context is shaped by wider structural and historical processes (Calverley, 2012). This context is especially pertinent when considering Indigenous women's desistance in Aotearoa New Zealand and other settler states where these women have been pushed to the margins of society through the forces of colonial patriarchy.

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This research was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, Reference Number, 024509.

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