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**PENETRATING THE FENCES:
A GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE PRISON**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the prison experiences of female and male prisoners. The study aims to record and analyse the ways in which prisoners represent their experiences behind the wall. To do this, the study has involved in-depth interviews with 100 prisoners or ex-prisoners. Specifically, 54 male prisoners from Yatala Labour Prison and 38 women prisoners from Adelaide Women's Prison in Adelaide, South Australia were interviewed. Interviews conducted with a further six male and two female ex-prisoners from South Australia and Victoria have also been included. All the male prisoners interviewed at Yatala Labour Prison were maximum security prisoners. Fifteen of the 38 women interviewed were low security prisoners accommodated in the Living Skills Units at Adelaide Women's Prison. The study also draws on 53 interviews conducted with prison staff from Yatala Labour Prison and Adelaide Women's Prison. Forty of the 53 interviews were with prison officers, and the remainder were with professional staff and managers.

This thesis reviews previous studies and understandings of 'the prison' and prisoners' experiences, and it compares and contrasts these studies and understandings with insights gained from the interviews conducted with prisoners in South Australia.

The existing literature provides a starting point from which 'the prison' and prisoners' experiences can be analysed. While previous studies have established that women prisoners' experiences of prison are often traumatic, the task for this research is to explore the extent to which this trauma is likened to existing understandings of 'the prison', and 'the prisoner' both in legal and popular discourse. This thesis provides new understandings about the culture of 'the prison'. Through its interrogation of the French philosopher Michel Foucault's thesis of penalty and the analysis of interviews with prisoners, it explores the different ways in which gender operates in men's and women's prisons as a core technique of power.

Furthermore the thesis investigates the meaning of masculinity for criminality and how a specific form of masculinity is inscribed in the language and understandings of what constitutes a 'real criminal'. In so doing, this study provides new understandings about the ways in which a particular form of criminal masculinity is sustained, especially in the face of increasing female imprisonment.