NARRATIVES AS COPING MECHANISMS AMONG YOUTH OFFENDERS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

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Declaration

I, Christofer Van Rooyen, hereby declare that the contents of this dissertation represent my own unaided work, and that the dissertation has not been previously submitted for examination purposes towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the University of Pretoria.

Signature:

Date:
Abstract

The dissertation is concerned with narratives, especially narratives told to me by incarcerated youth offenders at a Correctional Centre in the Western Cape, South Africa. My own position within the research study is motivated by the fact that I had been working in a correctional setting for over a decade and had started to question my position as a correctional official. The main study finding indicates that narrative structures assist Christian converts in adapting to the correctional setting and to the reality of being re-incorporated into life outside prison.

The problem statement of my dissertation reads is as follows. What insights do narrated stories of incarcerated offenders offer, as we think about the ways in which youth offenders cope with the life in prison? I am arguing that in the narratives under examination prison, as an institution, seems to fulfil the role of provider. One of the positions taken in the research is that the narrated life stories do not only reflect psychological coping mechanisms for individuals, but also reveal important aspects of coping with social relationships and institutional contexts.

The non-probability sampling approach was used to select the research participants. Data was collected using unstructured in-depth interviews. The study is qualitative in nature, using the inductive content analysis approach. In exploring the raw data sets, I learned that social relations between participants provide meaning in the study context.

Study findings contribute to the broader debate on incarcerated offenders and conversion narratives. The study is important because narratives provide some insight into the present, past and future life of participants. The researcher recommends that the offenders’ narrated life stories can serve as a basis for developing sentence plans which may contribute to the rehabilitation process of offenders.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Without their tireless encouragement and endless patience, I would have given up long ago.

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5. The young men who willingly agreed to participate in the study. Without their contribution this study would not have been possible. It is my sincere hope to promote a more nuanced understanding of the life-world of youth offenders.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation is concerned with narratives, especially narratives told to me by youth offenders who converted to Christianity at a correctional centre in the Western Cape, South Africa. Moen (2006:56) summarises narratives as follows:

As we make our way through life, we have continuous experiences and dialogic interaction, both with our surrounding world and with ourselves. All of these are woven together into a seamless web, where they might strike one as being overwhelming in their complexity. One way of structuring these experiences is to organise them into meaningful units. One such meaningful unit could be a story, a narrative.

The study investigates the narratives of four sentenced youth offenders who converted to Christianity in prison. One of the most common and fruitful ways people have envisioned self and reality is through the lens of narratives. Part of the analysis is to focus on my own experiences as a former correctional official who made the transition to being a researcher. In the wider literature this is called reflexivity. Gilgun and McLeod (1999:185) argue that those researchers who espouse a reflexive approach typically attempt to write themselves into the analysis. Reflexivity as a research methodology allows me to learn from my own life experiences as I study others. In my dissertation I use the social constructivism paradigm as the theoretical framework for analysing the narratives of the youth offenders that I interviewed.

1.2 Background

The first claim in my introduction is that human beings organise their experience of their worlds into narratives. Humans are “living narratives” so to speak, and our actions and experiences are basic forms of social life. MacIntyre (1990:129) notes that one of the reasons for an eager espousal of a narrative approach in both the humanities and social sciences might be that it is useful to think of an “enacted narrative” as the most typical form of social life. Narratives

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1 “Sentenced youth offender” means a convicted person sentenced to incarceration.
2 “Correctional official” means an employee of the Department of Correctional Services.
become the vehicle through which participants reconstruct their social status. Narratives are clearly related to life stories and life histories. Roberts (2002) simplifies the most common distinction between “life stories” and “life history”, namely that a life story is a story narrated by the author [teller], whereas a life history is the later, interpretive, presentational work of the researcher.

What are narratives in the social sciences and humanities? Here I outline three important aspects of narrative research. Firstly, in clinical literature, there is reference to illness narratives, life stories, and narration in psychotherapy about the past. Secondly, Labov (1967:20) holds that all stories are about a specific past event and that they have common properties. Elsewhere Labov and Walelzy (1972:21) argue that stories follow a chronological sequence. Thirdly, narratives are integral to human culture because “culture is constituted through the ensemble of stories we tell about ourselves” (Plummer, 1995:5). The order of events in a story moves in a linear way through time and the order cannot be changed without changing the inferred sequence of events in the original semantic interpretation. In the first approach, narratives are about the content, while in the second and third approaches it is about the structural dimension. I employ all three approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the life stories and life histories of the participants.

Moreover, narratives are constructed. Fraser (2004:189) writes as follows: “For instance, narrators may tell stories that circle around particular themes or try to drive home a particular point. Some may tell stories that seem to be well rehearsed, almost perfect”. Fraser (2004: 189) notes that at other times, they may try to describe events and experiences never before vocalised. In this study the role of the researcher and analyst is effectively to spin and yarn by weaving together the threads of different stories.

Lastly, studying narratives are useful. Firstly, focusing on narratives shakes off the positivistic illusion of objectivity that we still encounter in some social science research. Secondly, narratives refer to the activities and experiences of ordinary people; they represent empirical data drawn from real life. Thirdly, the practical association with the metaphors of knitting and travelling assists me in envisaging the concrete tasks involved in narrative research and analysis. Finally, I see myself as a researcher in development studies who is looking for signposts, but not always finding them.
1.3 Problem statement

This dissertation is concerned with the following problem: What insight do the narrated life stories of incarcerated offenders who converted to Christianity in prison in relation to their crimes, family relations, household and the community at large, offer us as we think about the ways in which youth offenders can be reintegrated into society? As such, this dissertation is concerned with how individual youth offenders narrate their life stories in relation to social actions and their relation to social actors prior to, and during imprisonment. An important assumption underlying this research is that the way in which youth offenders narrate their life experiences, prior to, and during incarceration, could offer us insight into how they adapt to their imprisonment [life inside], how they work out new and professed identities, and how they seek to make sense of their past and present through narratives. Another position that this research adopts is that the narrated life stories do not only reflect psychological coping mechanisms for individuals, but also reveal important aspects of coping with social relationships and institutional contexts.

1.4 Research objectives

In pursuance of the abovementioned problem statement I formulated the following research objectives:
1. In what way do youth offenders transform their past in relation to their crime committed, family lives and communities?
2. What kinds of identities do youth offenders construct through their narrated life stories?
3. What meaning do the memories of the past have for young offenders in the context of prison?

I consider narratives in relation to the individual, group and social actors between characters. My concern is the narration of life stories which articulate the “voices” of the participants from a subjective position. In responding to the three objectives, I am mainly concerned with how the participants narrate their social world.

1.5 Literature review

As mentioned above, I adopt a social constructivist theoretical perspective in this dissertation, while also focusing on the construction of narratives by the research participants. Such an
approach means examining how language is used to communicate experiences and relationships. Gergen and Gergen (1983:27) pointed out how people’s understanding of the world relies on linguistic and communicative dimensions, created through interactions and relationships. Gergen and Gergen (1983:27) define social constructionism as a theoretical paradigm that seeks to redefine various concepts in the social sciences, including our understanding of constructs such as mind, self and emotions. Gergen and Gergen (1983:18) write that narrative accounts are embedded within social action. They further highlight that events are rendered socially visible through narratives, and that they are typically used to establish expectations for future events (Gergen and Gergen, 1983:18). Another aspect of social constructionist thinking is the issue of power, created by the knowledge generated in human experience and language and which is used to define and narrate the experience and its meaning. Part of the concern of constructionist approaches is that they accept that socially constructed meanings are based on the claims made by a selected group in a community. The danger of such approaches is that they may neglect the claims made by disadvantaged segments of society.

Social constructionism as a theoretical framework has been used before in the study of offenders and the incarcerated. Presser (2009:7) used the social constructionism framework in studying the identities of offenders. In her work, she theorised identities as being beyond a static position but always noted the influx and the outcome of negotiation. Somers (1994:607) describes that narratives locate identities in overlapping networks of relations that shifted over time and space. The assumption is that all participants are members of networks. Shamai (2003:546) argues that although it is possible to assume that knowledge about a situation is created by the relationship, power affects the knowledge and everything that constructs this knowledge, for example, experiences, interpretation of experiences, meaning, relationships and language. Social constructionism provides insight into participants’ experiences and relationships with the social world.

Important to note is that during the narratives, participants may perform performative acts. In a discussion, Langellier (1999:126) explains performative acts by reflecting on Labov’s (1972) structural model of a fully formed personal narrative. He highlights Labov’s (1972) six parts; namely an abstract [what is the story about], an orientation [who, when and why?], the complication [then what happened], evaluation [so what], result [what finally happened], coda [that’s it]. Langellier (1999:126) argues that Labov’s model embraces the tension between the
structuralism of the 1960’s and the post-structuralism which followed, between more traditional, literary approaches to narrative and more performance based, pragmatic analysis. Langellier (1999:126) defines performance as a term used to describe a certain type of involvement and dramatised oral narrative. Langellier (1999:127) contextualises performance acts as personal narrative performance which is situated not just within local occasional talk, conversation, public speech and ritual, but also within the forces of discourse that shape identity. Identity is inclusive of race, gender and class. Langellier (1999:129) emphasises that identity is a symbiosis of performed story and the social relations in which they are materially embedded in sex, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, geography, religion and so on. These social relations form part of the narrative data analysis process in this study. Langellier (1999:129) argues that the importance of narrative performance is especially crucial to those communities who have been deprived of the privileges of dominant culture, those bodies who do not have a voice in the political sense. The performance of personal narratives is about social relationships in a specific context. Langellier (1999:129) concludes that performance acts become the means by which we problematise how we categorise who is ‘us’ and them. What we can learn about performative acts is crucial and simple. Langellier (1999:132) summarises the lesson as follows: firstly, personal narratives may be the key to a change in the status of discourse in storytelling; secondly, we learn that personal narratives always rely upon the conventions of performance within communities and situations; thirdly, every performance is unique and depends upon its particular circumstances and participants.

Performance acts are socially constructed and form part of the social constructivist approach in this study. Lastly, we comprehend the reflexivity of personal narratives as a way of culture that exhibits itself to itself and to others. Bauman (1992:47) argues that performance is also reflexive in a socio-psychological sense, constituting the performing self as an object for itself as well as for others. Participants may reveal knowledge about themselves in conducting performative acts during the interviews. Performative acts are constructed and form part of the social constructivist approach in this study.

Social constructivism connects the entities of the mind and the social world. Moen (2006:57) argues that social constructivist introduces theories on the development of human beings. She highlights that individuals learn and develop through participation in social activities in the world. Moen (2006:57) explains that “Society - or world, of matter – has continuous influence on the individual or the mind and vice versa”. The interaction perspective between an individual and
society becomes the key to understanding human learning and development in a socially and structurally shaped context. I adopt the concept of world from the work of Moen (2006:57) to understand how participants experience social activities inside and outside of prison. It is important to consider the following: How can one place Moen’s (2006:57) argument around the development of human beings in the context of criminology?

One has to turn to the work of Stanley (1999) to find some of the most useful ways of employing “social biography” as part of human and social development. In the context of life stories and criminology, Stanley (1993:45) argues that there is no need to individualise, to de-socialize “the individual”, because from only one person we can recover social processes and social structure, networks, social change and so forth, for people are located in a social and cultural environment which constructs and shapes not only what we see, but also how we see it. Goodey (2000:475) testifies to the centrality of ‘the social’ in people’s lives which is reflected in the basic premise of symbolic interactionism. It suggests that people act towards things on the basis of the specific meaning that anything has for them. Goodey (2000:475) refers to individual biography as the “social biography” in understanding how meanings are variously shaped and reacted to/acted upon through the diverse processes of social interaction. In his biography interview, Goodey (2000:482) explains that a researcher is able to establish the significance of events, or otherwise through clarification of internal coherence and inconsistencies. In this case the researcher should allow the research subject to lead the process. Goodey (2000:487), further notes that in letting the research subjects tell their own biographies, the researcher can hope to find the epiphany embedded in the forces of or in the social structure which are specific to and give meaning to time and place. Goodey (2000:480) focuses on the turning point of criminals to understand their lives. Elder (1981:78) also suggests that an individual’s life needs to be contextualised with regards to the historical changes taking place around them throughout their life course. Goodey (2000:485) refers to socio-historical events such as a national economic depression, alongside significant personal events such as the sudden death of a family’s main income earner that will impact differently on individuals according to their place in the social structure of power and powerlessness. The work of Goodey (2000:485) on social biography forms part of the theoretical framework in the study of youth offenders.

One of the better established theories in social constructionism is the interactions perspective. Adler and Adler (2003:51) agree that the key feature of this view was the belief that defiant behaviour is socially learned, and not from just anyone, but from people’s most intimate friends
and family members. The interaction of participants with family and friends becomes relevant for my study. The theory further suggests that people do not decide at a fixed point to become defiant, but rather it happens as they change friends, for example. Adler and Adler (2003:51) describe the process as drifting into defiant behaviour. People say that they do not know how they end up with defiant behaviour. The notion supports the belief that defiant behaviour is constructed socially. Presser (2009:8) states that when a person is labelled as defiant in some way, narratives help him or her renegotiate that label, in part by complicating and historicising who he or she really is in the eyes of others and, ultimately in his own eyes. Ultimately, the social constructionism approach is how we experience the world and make meaning of our social relationships.

1.6 Significance of research

Why study narratives? Why study the narratives of youth offenders? In the work of Bruner (1986) and McAdams (1993), narratives are regarded as a basic universal mode of verbal expression. This study focuses on an aspect of narratives which is generally overlooked in narrative analysis, namely the performative or social dimension. Plummer (1995:24) argues that a sociological approach to narratives does not remain at the level of textual analysis: he insists that story production and consumption is an empirical social process involving a stream of joint actions in a local context that are bound into a wider negotiated social world. In such an approach, the focus is on individual experiences within the social environment. Smith (2000:332), as cited in Reis and Judd, emphasises how individuals relate narratives in the micro context, for example researchers who focus on specific interaction between individuals as they narrate and attend to stories. Elliot (2005: 38) argues that the aim of analysing an individual biography is to develop an understanding of social groups, classes and cultures and the structural relationship between them. Scanlon (2002:137) suggests that reflection enables practitioners to tap into knowledge gained through experiences. The practitioner gains a deeper understanding of the meaning through the tactic of bringing it to consciousness. This study is important because narratives will provide some insight into the present, past and future life of participants. The study contributes to the broader debate on incarcerated offenders and conversions in the context of prison. Maruna, Wilson and Curran (2006:163) argue that narratives can enhance the understanding of human development in general and the ways in which self-identity is negotiated in everyday life. Moreover, I am discovering my role as a
researcher by using the reflexive method in the study. Finally, the study is constructed by using concepts from the literature. This will follow in the next section.

1.7 Concepts and terms

The aim of this section is to clearly position and describe my understanding of the core concepts in order to inform the reader about the ideas that underpin my dissertation. I explain the terms that are used interchangeably in my dissertation. By using existing subjective – relevant scientific sources, I explain my own understanding of the concepts in the context of my research discussion.

My first concept is narrative. Labov (1997:13) defines narrative as a report on a sequence of events that have entered into the biography of the speaker and that follows the order of the original events. This definition introduces narrative as a technique for reporting past events through connecting specific experiences of the speaker. Smith, as cited in Reis and Judd (2000:328), agrees that a narrative is an oral, written account of events, but is not verbal material that is purely descriptive and detailed. In the first definition, narratives connect events and provide structure and meaning that can be added to the detail. For our purpose, narrative is used to refer to accounts of personal experiences or stories of youth offenders.

The next term is coping mechanism as used in the context of the study. The concept “coping” is used when authors Mohino, Kirchner, and Maria (2004:41) refer to those individual circumstances that form a specific setting or event and that are discerned as causing stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984:141), two of the most popular authors in the field, clarify coping as regular cognitive and behavioural attempts to handle external demands that create stress. What these authors imply is that a coping mechanism includes traits, ability, or avenues, both material and human, which are used to meet the demands of a specific situation. In this dissertation, the concept of coping mechanism refers to how youth offenders deal with the deprivation of imprisonment.

I turned to the work of Stanley (1993:45) to find some of the most useful ways of employing “social biography” as part of human development. Stanley (1993:45) argues that there is no need to individualise, or to de-socialise “the individual”, because from only one person we can recover social processes and social structure, networks and social change. Goodey (2000:475)
refers to individual biography as the “social biography” in understanding how meanings are variously shaped and reacted acted upon through diverse processes of social interaction. I employ the concept of social biography in the dissertation in understanding the process of interaction between the youth offender and his socially constructed environment.

I draw a distinction between life story and life history. Roberts (2002:3) simplifies the most common distinction between the “life story” and “life history” as such that a life story is the narrated story by the author [teller], whereas life history is the later interpretive, presentational work of the researcher. Atkinson (1998:8) describes a life story as the story which a person elects to tell about the life he or she has lived. Atkinson (1998:8) states that “a life story is a fairly complete narrating of one’s entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects”. I use life story in my discussion as an account of a person’s story of his or her life, or a report of it, as told to myself as the researcher.

I use a number of terms related to prison, interchangeably throughout the dissertation discussion. Correctional Officials are referred to as people working for the Department of Correctional Services. The White Paper on Corrections (2005:12) defines every correctional official as a potential rehabilitator who underpins the core values of human dignity and human rights. I use the terms correctional official and warden interchangeably in my dissertation. The White Paper (2005:63) stipulates that a correctional facility refers to all physical infrastructure or buildings, provided by the Department of Correctional Services, for those legally entrusted to its care as well as to staff. The terms Correctional Centre and Correctional Facility are used interchangeably in my dissertation.

1.8 Structure of the dissertation

Chapter one provides the background and introduces the importance of narrative in the study of human behaviour. The chapter further provides the theoretical framework with a clear problem statement. Chapter two summarises the research methodology and design. The discussion explains how the data is captured, transcribed and analysed. In the data analysis, I present a narrative approach which is concerned with content analysis. Content analysis is the key methodology which provides meaning to the narratives of participants. Chapter three discusses my positionality of working in the correctional setting. I apply the research methodology of reflexivity to unpack my own personal experiences. Chapter four analyses segments of narratives of offenders that I interviewed at the Drakenstein Youth Correctional Centre. In my
analysis I pay specific attention to the themes of life inside and outside of prison, as well as violence. I contextualise the reported narratives by placing the individuals in a broader social context of South Africa. In chapter five I delve into the detail of the structural socio-economical contributors which trap the majority of South Africans in poverty, unemployment and structural exclusion from the economy. The final chapter is used to discuss themes that emerge from the data analysis. In the conclusion, I articulate my central argument with a summary of recommendations to the Department of Correctional Services on how narratives can contribute to the rehabilitation process.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter introduces the importance of narrative in the study of human behaviour. I explain how the methodology of reflexivity contributes to my dissertation. The problem statement is explained in relation to the theoretical framework. I explain the research objective and the overall significance of the study. The next chapter will introduce the research methodology.
Chapter 2: Research methodology

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the research methodology. In this chapter, I discuss the narrative research approach that is adopted. Firstly, I contemplate the design of the study, resulting in a short discussion on sampling and the technique utilised. The next section briefly discusses the method of data collection and data analysis approaches. On a general level, it is important to note that, as Chase (2005:652) has argued, “With many recent books on narrative research, it continues to be a popular field in the making”.

2.2 Research design

The research design followed in this research is qualitative in nature. As my study proceeds, the qualitative research design pushes me towards an increasing understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. As such I am using elements of the phenomenological study design in my investigation. Leedy and Ormrod (2014:154) refer to the term phenomenology as a person’s perception of the meaning of an event, as opposed to the events as it exists external to the person. This means, as Creswell (2007:36) argued, that qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world.

As mentioned, narrative is central to my study. Creswell (2007:36) highlights that phenomenological investigations depend almost exclusively on the length of the interviews. The interviews I conducted were often unstructured in that participants and I worked together to arrive at the significant parts. The focus of the investigation became the common themes in the experiences of the respondents with due consideration to the diversity of the individual participants. I explored narratives from a sociological and developmental perspective, focusing on social relationships. The result is a description and interpretation of the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of people who have experience it at first hand.

2.3 Sampling
Sampling is the key to the success of research studies. The non-probability sampling approach was used to select the research participants. Ritchie and Lewis (2003:77) describe a non-probability sample as units which are deliberately selected to reflect particular features of a group within a sample population. Strydom (2011), as cited by De Vos (2011:230) mentions, “In a non-probability sampling, the odds of selecting a particular individual are not known because the researcher does not know the population size or the members of the population”. The non-probability sampling approach provides credibility to the research study.

The purposive or criterion sampling technique was used to select the final group of research participants. My decision to use purposive sampling stemmed from the fact that I was interested in a specific section of the prison population. Purposive sampling is precisely what the name suggests. Ritchie & Lewis (2003:78) mentioned that members of a sample are chosen with a “purpose” to represent a location or type in relation to a key criterion. The following criteria were identified to recruit participants:

a) Young male offenders have to be between 17-23 years old.
b) Offenders should not have an approved release date for the coming three months.\(^3\)
c) Offenders have to be willing to participate in the study.

These were the selection criteria set by myself. Strydom (2011), as cited by De Vos (2011:230), states that “Any case which happens to cross the researcher’s path and has anything to do with the phenomena is included in the sample until the desired number is obtained”. I employed the “walk about” method in the prison to explain my study to eligible offenders. During the first week at the prison, I came across numerous offenders who were interested in participating in this study. I compiled a list of prospective participants. I selected four participants out of twelve. The small number of participants allowed me to drill deeper into the data. The depth of data drilling requires a compatible data collection procedure which I will discuss in the next section.

2.4 Data collection procedures

Data were collected using unstructured in-depth interviews. Greef, (2011) as cited by De Vos, (2011:348) writes that at the root of the unstructured interview is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. Czarniaswka

\(^3\) Availability for interviews.
(2004:49) summarised this as follows: interviews can be treated as observations of an interaction between two people in question. Presser, (2004:83) describes that during the interview process, an interviewee may retell narratives that circulated on a given site of practice, or the interview in itself may become the site for the narrative production. The National Department of Correctional Service’s researcher unit granted permission for interviews session to be conducted in the Youth Correctional Centre. I have decided to conduct interviews which provide participants with the freedom to narrate their stories. Interviews were conducted in a small office inside the prison. This provided some form of confidentiality with regard to what was narrated by the participants. Interviews were conducted in English. English is the second language of the participants and myself. Interview sessions lasted approximately forty-five minutes to an hour. Interview questions were formulated in an open ended fashion with the objective of allowing participants to narrate their life stories. Participants were requested however to narrate important events in their lives. Presser (2004:83) notes that interviews convey particular views of problematic conditions in the world. I encouraged participants to express their views in a way they were comfortable with. Presser (2004:83) notes that the interview may be seen as a collaborative social problem project. This is a joint effort to interpret social problems and to identify the informant. This approach provides participants with an opportunity to challenge their status, by explaining, clarifying and reconstructing the real self.

Data collection was conducted inside the prison in different venues ranging from small offices, to prison cells and courtyards, at the dinner tables and in the prison shop. Strydom, (2011) as cited by De Vos, (2011:330), notes that participant observation can be described as a qualitative research procedure that studies the natural and everyday set-up in a particular community or situation. I observed how participants constructed their respective stories as I was writing field notes. These notes were transcribed and attached to the relevant interviews. Where notes were absent, I listened to the tape recording again to relive the narratives and jotted down some mind notes. This process assisted me in reflecting on my own bias during the data collection process. I interviewed each participant twice to clarify the content of the first interview and prompted participants with clarity seeking questions.

2.5 Transcribing data
After the interview, the data were transcribed. Transcriptions were done after every field visit. Riessman (1993:11) writes that transcription of oral narratives is a complex process that can affect interpretations. Transcriptions include the “exact” wording, accent, coughs, silent moments and other voice intonations. Surrounding sound formed part of the data transcription. I replayed the tapes several times to validate transcripts. I confirmed the correctness of data by re-reading the transcripts. I incorporated my field notes into the text during the transcription process. Field notes provided additional information in the transcripts. I was shocked by how naïve one could be on the data processing work. Data processing requires detailed work and was a time consuming process. Data was saved on a computer in word files and backups were stored on a removable disk. The backup disk was stored in a dry safe place. I have read and reread the data scripts to acquaint myself with the detail of each interview.

2.6 Data analysis approach

Smith (2000:313) explains that narrative analysis deals only with verbal material which are accounts of personal experiences. In my analysis of the narratives I collected during data collection, I used the content analysis approach. Throughout the reading process I coded the common themes by marking segments with the same colours. I kept track of new emerging themes and meaningful patterns in the data. Coding was conducted inductively. Smith (2000:313), explains that the coding system is the heart of the content analytic method. Coding specifies the information to be obtained from the material. As such, I identified segments with thematic information for the analysis process. Common elements were collected from stories of personal experiences. I rewrote or restored the story into a chronological sequence. I used segments as the basic building blocks to chronologically arrange the life stories. Smith (2000:313), highlights that segments are used as coding units and include (a) the entire text unit, (b) words, clauses and sentence and field notes. Segments were analysed to discuss specific themes or ideas.

The segments of participants’ stories built up meaningful story lines. I was concerned with the core function of narratives. Bruner (1990), as cited by Smith (2000:313), states that the function of a narrative is to reflect back on events, relating them, and providing meaning and coherence to a perspective on experiences and one’s social traditions. Participants reflected back on and narrated key events in their stories. Not all the events are coherent in the raw data. I used the

4 “Exact” meaning verbatim words.
content analysis approach to provide some form of coherence to life stories, whilst concentrating on remaining mindful of my objectivity throughout the content analysis process. Smith (2000:331) notes that narrative research also suggests caution in assuming the cross-cultural applicability of content analytic coding systems. Critical to the process of content analysis is to articulate the “voices” of participants.

Smith (2000:331) states that narrative research means sharing a social and cultural perspective. The social and cultural perspective links with the constructivist theoretical framework. The sharing of a social and cultural perspective allows researchers the ability to understand the experiences of participants within a specific context. In exploring the raw data sets, I learned that social relations between participants provide meaning for the study context. In my search for relevant studies on narrative analysis I found the literature of Mishler in the Journal of Narratives and Life History (1995) useful in learning how to conduct content analysis. The article is concerned with how topics from a social perspective are addressed in the narrative analysis approach.

Part of the content analysis process is to restore the narratives. Creswell (2013:70) defines restoring as the process of reorganising the stories into a general type of framework. Following Creswell’s suggestion, I isolated segments and themes within the interview. One aspect of the chronology is that the stories have a beginning, middle and an end. Meaning refers to how the participant experiences the segment. By restoring their narratives I provided causal links between ideas. Czarniawska (2004: 96) adds another element to the analysis, namely deconstruction of the stories. One criticism of chronological ordering of stories is that it may provide an artificial order of events (Fraser, 2004: 189). Gee (2011:43) notes that meanings are locked up in words. In this approach the researcher is encouraged to use a micro-linguistic approach in probing for the meaning of words, phrases, and larger units. I applied the aspect of restoring as part of the content analysis because restoring provides a framework for further analysis.

Restoring includes elements of both content and thematic analysis. Fraser (2004:190) writes that narrative researchers use the method of numbering the lines of stories in such a manner that they disaggregate into meaningful parts. This method was used because referencing to the lines in the analysis process becomes easier for readers to follow. I used complete sentences in order not to unnecessarily fragment the participants’ narratives and to retain the authenticity of
meaning. A stanza or segment is used to disaggregate ideas or a specific event. Gee (2011:213) defines a stanza as a group of lines about one important event, happening, or state of affairs that occurred at the same time and place, or a focus on a specific character theme, image, topic or perspective. I have given titles to all the segments to highlight the key meaning of the segments. For example, I titled one segment as “The hardest time of my life”. The titles are taken from a specific line in the segment. Clandinin and Connelly (2000:20) suggest that narratives are stories lived and told. Content analysis provides in depth analysis of participants’ life stories. Content analysis needs to be validated. This will be explained in the next section.

During the content analysis I was confronted by validity issues in the narrative research. Smith (2000:331) explains that validity issues in narrative research are similar to those in any quantitative or qualitative research. Data validation forms part of the second interview session with participants. I validated my understanding of experiences against what participants accounted in the first interview session. The aim of the validation questions was to provide more clarity on issues from the perspective of participants. Smith (2000:332) argues that instead of seeking the explanation of natural phenomena, some narrative analysts seek the interpretation of meaning. Meaning is the key to the interpretation of narratives.

The following list of questions was used to analyse data (adopted from Fraser, 2004:190).

- What are the common themes in each transcript?
- Are there “main points” that you can decipher from particular stories?
- Where are the vocal inflections? What might they signify?
- What words are chosen and how are they emphasised?
- What kind of meanings might be applied to these words?
- What other vocalisation and non-verbal gestures are present?
- What contradictions emerge?
- Are there notable silences, pauses or gaps? If so, how might they be distinguished and what might they suggest [for instance, disagreement, boredom, stress]?
- Are there any other useful ways of disaggregating the stories or lines? If so which form of disaggregation will be used?
- If the stories are to be named as well as numbered, how are the names derived? Is the logic of the system made clear to the reader?
I followed the unconventional way of content analysis. Smith (2000:332) indicated that some narrative researchers appear to want to have it both ways; that is to reject traditional science; and interpret a relatively small number of narratives, often without evidence. In summary, the content analysis approach provides me more information because it is not static and moves between the two discourses of narrative and content analysis. The development of narrative research in developmental studies will distinguish the possibilities of both types of analysis.

2.7 Ethics

Ethical consideration is one of the most important elements in any research. Brody (2002:177) defines ethics as the world of human activities that have important moral content. Ethics are the moral issues within the research process. Kvale (2007:23) describes that human interaction in the interview affects the interviewees and the knowledge produced by interview inquiries affects our understanding of the human condition. During the research, I induced negative emotions, for example regret or anger, which may have had the potential to harm the participants. In fact, all participants are human and were treated with the utmost respect. Respect is the key to all moral issues concerning the means as well as the ends of the research process.

I was reflexive in the way I conducted this study. Reflexivity is not usually seen to be connected to ethics because it involves knowledge management by the researcher. Guillemin and Gillam (2004:275) explain that adopting a reflexive research process means a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just in relation to research methods and the data, but also to the researcher, the participants, and the research context. What this means is that during the research project I was not only concerned with knowledge creation but also ethical issues in the research. In this study I conducted research among the offender population which is not an easily accessible community. I was faced with several ethical risks due to the uniqueness of the study population.

A great risk was the possibility that data from the participants may have been of greater interest to the prison officials. For example, the research participants may admit that they are part of a gang group during the research. Gang activities are not allowed according to the prison disciplinary procedures. Therefore, I had to consider precautions in an attempt to protect participants’ confidentiality. Overall, the prison as a research setting poses danger for
participants. I attempted to guard participants against any form of harm during my research study.

All ethical research must be conducted on the basis of voluntary participation. Kvale (2007:27) states that informed consent entails informing the research subject of the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design. Participants were requested to sign a consent from which is attached and marked as Annexure A. During my visit to the prison I invited all prospective participants to gather in one room after which I introduced the study project and myself. I explained the possible risk in terms of emotions [regret, anger] which the study may pose during the interview process. I presented the consent form by reading it aloud to prospective participants. I stressed the point that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing any reasons. I further explained that interviews would be tape recorded and transcribed. I assured participants that the tape recordings will not be handed over to the prison authorities. I gave prospective participants an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the session. Participants responded positively to the request by completing the consent form.

I applied for institutional approval through the Research Ethics Committee at the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) head office in Pretoria. I was granted approval on condition that the study report should be available to DCS after completion of my studies and that participants’ identities would be protected throughout the research project. The letter of approval is attached as Annexure A.

Kvale (2007:29) states that through interviewing, the importance of the researcher as a person is magnified because the interviewer is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge. I found it suitable to familiarise myself with ethical theories, and the University of Pretoria’s ethical conduct guidelines. I applied ethical consideration in all the steps of my research study.

2.8 Study limitations

The study contributed to the knowledge generation of incarcerated youth offenders, however, the study had limitations. The study was gender biased because only male participants were part of the study population. The coverage of the study is limited because the research setting is concentrated on only one Youth Correctional Centre. I only spent short periods of contact time
with the participants because all the participants were actively involved in rehabilitation programmes. The sampling was influenced by the correctional official that assisted me during the study. I realised during the interview analysis that all the participants were part of the “brother room”\textsuperscript{5}.

The qualitative study is not intended to elicit findings that could be definitely generalised to the entire prison population. Interviewing is an individualistic approach of data collection. Narrative content analysis was individually biased and did not include common elements. I did not discuss any common themes with participants in a group context. Notable are the environmental constraints of the prison for example, participants are subjected to a strict daily routine. Limitations of the study will filter through during the reading of this dissertation.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter summarised the research methodology and design of this study. The discussion explained how the data was captured, transcribed and analysed. In the data analysis, I presented a narrative approach which is concerned with content analysis. Content analysis was the key methodology which provided meaning to the narratives of participants. The next chapter introduces the institutional context of the study.

\textsuperscript{5} The brother room is a cell for offenders following Christianity. They are referred to as “converts”.

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Chapter 3: Institutional context and reflexivity

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe and discuss the institutional context of a typical youth correctional centre in South Africa. Firstly, I situate these youth facilities in the wider context of correctional facilities in South Africa. Secondly, I describe the context in which I conducted my field research, namely the Drakenstein Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC) in the Western Cape. This is important because interviews are socially constructed and as such I take it that the surrounding institutional context and social relationships implicated in them would shape the narratives. Thirdly, and for the same reasons, I discuss my own positionality as a former correctional officer so as to shed another light on the institutional context of youth correctional centres and some of the dynamics which shaped the interview process.

3.2 Overview of Youth Correctional Centres

The Department of Correctional Services consists of 241 prisons which are spread throughout the country (Matetoa, 2012:145). While there is no space here to offer a complete discussion of the history and size of correctional services in South Africa, we can note the following, as of 30 April 2015, the South African state was holding 40 803 youths in correctional centres, of which 16145 (40%) were on remand and 24658 (60%) were sentenced. The Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services is of the view that the number of youths behind bars is unacceptably high and that South Africa can ill afford the situation. In the context of the challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, such a high number of youth held in correctional facilities indicates and produces high levels of social dislocation and trauma. Incarceration does not always seem to be the solution. As policy makers note, that youth who have experienced incarceration are even more vulnerable and disadvantaged upon their release (Schrantz and McElroy, 2000:17). The annual report for Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services confirms that 1 in 16 youth on remand, was held in excess of 500 days (Annual Report, 2014/15:44). Clearly an important strategy from within the criminal justice sector should be to ensure that youth do not enter the criminal justice system.

Adolescents are more at risk in Youth Correctional Centres than in wider society. Peacock (2007:61) writes for example that “despite the unique, critical and vulnerable nature of the development stage of adolescents, they are frequently incarcerated in conditions of prison
overcrowding, often as first and/or economic offenders”. The conditions in South African prisons have always been appalling and over time conditions have not improved a great deal (Niehaus, 2002: 87). Today the crisis of overcrowding and the vulnerability of youth is likely to intensify as inflation linked budget increases mean little money for addressing the overcrowding of correctional centres and youth vulnerability.

Overcrowding is not the only problem. It is well documented that Youth Correctional Centres and other correctional facilities have institutional cultures – a prison culture – that is reflected in a system of organisational hierarchies, procedures, speech codes, rituals, signs and symbols. Prison culture typically increases the risks that youth are exposed to. The activities of prison gangs, Peacock (2007:63) writes, “permeate almost every sphere of prison life in South Africa. In essence, there are three numbered gangs (26’s, 27’s and 28’s and other gangs, the Big 5’s and Air Force) are perceived as the most powerful” (Peacock, 2007:63). Peacock (2007: 61) argues that “overcrowding, boredom and powerlessness provide excellent breeding grounds for the formation of gangs and while membership is theoretically voluntary, the young inmate may be compelled to join a gang for his own protection as well as the gratification of needs”.

The literature shows that three gangs dominate the South African prison system. In essence, there are three numbered gangs namely the 26s, 27s and 28s gangs. Haysom (1981:1) writes that the two most prominent gangs are the 28s and the 26s gangs. Each gang has its own rules and codes of operations. Haysom (1981:1) describes gang characteristics as being nationwide with deep historical roots. Steinberg (2004:1) confirms that the number gangs, the 26s, 27s and 28s, are about 100 years old, and that they originated in jails, mine compounds and informal settlements. Each gang operates according to their own codes. Offenders subject themselves to informal social control by adhering to the gang codes. Peacock and Theron (2007:63) write that conditions in prison such as overcrowding, boredom and powerlessness, provide excellent breeding grounds for the formation of gangs and while membership is theoretically voluntary, the young inmate may be compelled to join a gang for his own protection as well as the gratification of needs. The more deprived the prison environment, the more opportunity is created to enact the power relationship between gang and non-gang offenders.

Much has been written about the rules and structures of prison gangs and prison culture in South Africa (Gear, 2010:25, Goyer, 2001:195, Niehaus, 2002:77). Prison gangs play an important role in the culture of correctional facilities and the ways in which power and authority are structured. Steinberg (2004:24) sees the gangs as “locked in an eternal relationship with
their captors”. Niehaus (2002:90) remarked that prison gangs are “hierarchically organised and maintain their own internal discipline”. Gangs play active roles in many aspects of prison life. For example, anyone accused of breaking the rules set by gangs or of disobedience to gang leadership, is given a formal hearing. Gangs have their own court system in prison, emulating the judicial system. In this ‘gang’ court, evidence is presented against the perpetrator, lawyers defend him and the president gives a judgment. The punishment is immediately executed by gang members who can “beat the offender, throw him to the ground and walk on top of him, or could kill him” (Niehaus, 2002:90). An important aspect of gang prison culture is violence and the threat of violence.

What happens when youth offenders enter the prison system and are confronted with prison gangs? Minnie and Van Niekerk (2002:51) write that “Entry into the prison system coincides with the loss of identity and gang membership serves to compensate for the loss of identity”. In her research, Sloth-Nielsen (1998:47) finds that while some children and juveniles admitted to belonging to a gang, most of them were extremely fearful of gangs and disclosing their gang membership. Generally, the Youth Correctional Centre environment becomes a hostile situation for an individual offender. The hostile situation, coupled with the loss of identity, makes gangs seem attractive: Peacock et al. (2007:73) explain that as result of loss of attachment to other role models, the gang provides the incarcerated adolescent with the corporate identity and behaviour directives that assist him in his efforts to cope with the fears of a fragmented identity in a hostile and deprived prison environment. But what about the setting where I conducted my research? What are the experiences of my research participants?

3.3 Drakenstein Youth Correctional Centre

I conducted interviews with youth offenders at the Drakenstein Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC). The Centre was opened in October 1963 and was officially known as Victor Verster. After 1994, with the introduction of constitutional democracy to South Africa, Victor Verster was renamed the Drakenstein Management Area. The naming convention prison was replaced with correctional centre in national legislation (White Paper on Correctional Services, 2005:2). As part of the process of transforming the prison system, the word prison was replaced by correctional centre. The name Drakenstein originates from the Drakenstein mountain range which surrounds the correctional centre. This Youth Correctional Centre (YCC) was officially re-opened in 1998 after the Department of Public Works revamped the old structure. The YCC is
the only Youth Correctional Centre in the Drakenstein Management Area. The Drakenstein Youth Correctional Centre is currently the only prison in the Western Cape that accommodates both minimum and maximum youth offenders. In the South African context, minimum and maximum security offenders refer to offenders serving less than five years [short term] and maximum refers to offenders serving a sentence of more than ten years [long term]. The centre was originally built for 690 youth offenders but at the time of this research the number of offenders ranged between 800 and 950 offenders on any given day; an overcrowding rate of 37.6%. Overcrowding is not unique to the Western Cape or in fact South Africa. At the end of June 2009, DCS facilities could only accommodate 114,782 inmates. However, these facilities had a population of 164,957 inmates which translates to 43.7% of overcrowding at a national level (DSC, 2006:35). These numbers reveal that DYCC’s overcrowding rate is under the national norm. What do we know about the offenders and working population of Drakenstein YCC?

At the time of my research, the majority of incarcerated youth offenders were serving long-term sentences of between ten and twenty-five years. Offenders enter the Correctional Centres as young adolescents and are transferred to an adult prison once they reach the age of 21 years. Youth offenders are, however, transferred only when space at a prison which accommodates adults, becomes available. The staff establishment of DYCC consists of 126 correctional official posts of which 119 were filled at the time of research. This is a remarkably good statistic, given the situation at many other correctional facilities. Tapscott (2005:9) cites the shortage of professional staff such as social workers, nurses and psychologists as a challenge for rehabilitation at South African prisons. At the time of research, the majority of correctional staff members were males; only 14 were female. In brief, 89 officials work directly with 950 youth offenders. In addition, professional staff includes three social workers and one registered nurse. Other professional staff units consist of three social workers, five qualified educators and one psychologist. Professionals render social services to the youth offenders. Social Work Policy Corrections (2007:3) determined that the caseload for social workers is 240 offenders to one social worker. According to Jonker (2011:53), there is a shortage of professional staff rendering services to offenders in Correctional Centres in South Africa. Jonker (2001:19) further indicates that “There is one social worker for every 343 offenders and that makes effective service delivery very difficult”. I refer to the statistical reality because in my working experience at Correctional Services, there was a consistent shortage of professional staff.
When I joined, DSC professionals were paid differently in relation to educators in the mainstream education system. Educators working in correctional facilities are employed by the state under the Correctional Service Act of 2009 and regulated by the ethics of the Department of Basic Education. DCS paid educators an extra danger allowance for working with offenders. All professional staff was required to wear the DSC uniform including the insignia. I found myself in front of a class of learners with insignia on my shoulders. The power relationship between my uniform and the offenders in their prison uniforms did not contribute to the teaching process. How does one build a trust relationship between teacher and learner in this situation?

Officials are ranked in a similar way to the police force and military. Ranks range from the government’s ‘Codes of Arms’ for the lower level officials to the three Protea flower buttons for the senior level officials. Three Proteas are equivalent to the three stars in the police and the military and is recognised as a captain. In the prison gangs, the three stars are used by the 27 gang members. These ranks symbolise and represent the hierarchies of rights and responsibilities among officials and offenders. Ranks or insignia create a hierarchical structure for both wardens and offenders to institute a power relationship. I am mindful of the fact that ranks produce power relationships in prison.

Similar hierarchies exist among prison gang members who are also ranked. According to Haysom (1981:7), these ranks are “symbolic replicas of power visible in the hierarchy of the prison gangs originated from the military”. Gangs also use insignia for identification and these may take the form of tattoos. Given the institutionalisation of gangs and the negative effect on rehabilitation, prison reform has been part of the state’s narrative for the last twenty years.

Wardens with the lowest ranks are normally in contact with offenders and are exposed to danger in comparison with high ranking officials. The religious worker is a custodial warden whose task is to coordinate religious work within the Correctional Centre. The warden coordinates the Sunday services and all religious activities of offenders. Ranks establish authority relations between correctional officials and offenders and are associated with the apartheid-military style of imprisonment.

### 3.4 From imprisonment to rehabilitation

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6 According to Matetoa (2012:121), professionals, by virtue of their status, should be able to guide people with their knowledge and solve problems which may seem insurmountable.
For too long prisons have been regarded only as breeding grounds of criminality, places of punitive authoritarianism and backwaters of everything despised by society. Prisons also represented a microcosm of a divided nation, racked by racial segregation and discrimination, as well as repressive measures such as solitary confinement and violent interrogation. Fortunately, over the last decade, prison reform has shifted from imprisonment to rehabilitation.

As part of the transformation of the prison system in the 1990s, a greater emphasis was placed on rehabilitation in the Department of Correctional Services (White Paper on Corrections, 2005:12). The White Paper on Corrections (2005) was the final fundamental break with the former archaic penal system and ushered in a start to our second decade of freedom where prisons become correctional centres of rehabilitation and offenders are given new hope and encouragement to adopt a lifestyle that will result in a second chance towards becoming the ideal South African citizen. Central to the change is rehabilitation in the context of the socio-economical life of the offender. In the next paragraph, I discuss the key policy shifts articulated in the White Paper on Corrections (2005).

The White Paper on Corrections (2005:10) outlines the new strategic direction of the Department with rehabilitation at the centre of all its activities. The Department of Correctional Services strives to make a fundamental contribution to corrections at societal level. It summarises the philosophy behind and the strategic and operational plan for this new correctional system, and also provides a framework comprising the key steps required to establish the system. The White Paper (2005:12) states that “Correctional Services is an arm of the State and wants to ensure that the vision of the correction contributes to a nation building”. The term prison was changed to Correctional Centres and prisoner to offender (White Paper 2005:12). The White Paper (2005) recognises the Department of Correctional Services as part of a broader state system. What the White Paper 2005 fails to do, is to recognise the role of civil society and non-government organisations in the rehabilitation process of offenders. In chapter three of the White Paper on Corrections 2005 the family is recognised as the most important factor in a person’s life. Corrections have become a societal responsibility which is embedded in the community. The Department also views rehabilitation as a process with three important objectives, namely the correction of offending behaviour, human development and the promotion of social responsibility. It argues that the definition of the Department’s core business as rehabilitation through correction and humane development within a secure, safe and humane framework, impacts significantly on the role of the Department and the Social Sector Clusters. Conversely, this also impacts significantly on the role that these Cluster Departments play in
support of the mandate of the Department of Correctional Services (White Paper on Corrections, 2005:12). Further, the White Paper on Corrections in South Africa provides a framework for the understanding of the philosophy and role of corrections in a democratic South African society. It also provides the purpose of and policy framework for, the Department of Correctional Services and the strategic direction of penal reform within South Africa. The concept of unit management is introduced in the White Paper of Corrections 2005. How evident is unit management in my research site? In the next section I discuss my filed work experience at DYCC.

On the first day I experienced what it was like to work within the prison where unit management was implemented by wardens. Wardens were referred to as unit managers and case officers; terms which I am not familiar with because when I left DCS, the concept of unit management was still new. The White Paper on Corrections (2005:52) acknowledges that the history of the Department shows that correctional officials were not trained in the skills and knowledge critical for a new Rehabilitation-Centred Correctional System. As a result, the Department faces a major challenge in retraining the members in the new paradigm of rehabilitation through correction and development in a secure, safe and humane environment. It was encouraging to note progress in unit management in DYCC. According to the White Paper on Corrections (2005:52), the main challenge is to ensure the paradigm shift among existing personnel, as well as the development of an appropriate recruitment, promotion and retention strategy for the various categories of personnel who are required to deliver on the rehabilitation mandate. As a result, DYCC today offers a range of rehabilitation programmes to offenders which includes social work and educational programmes.

School and social work programmes were strongly articulated in the narratives of offenders. Formal school forms part of the daily program of the DYCC. The educational building accommodates about seventy youth learners in four classrooms. A small computer room is available for youth offenders to do school assignments. The Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) curriculum is taught at the school. What is the rationale of implementing ABET in the prison context?

According to the Bill of Rights in South Africa’s Constitution, all South Africans have the right to a basic education, including adult basic education and access to further education. South African ABET is one of the educational programmes for adult learners. ABET forms part of the apartheid history in the country. As one scholar put it, “The most significant factor is the legacy of neglect of education in general of the vast majority of the population which gives rise to the
‘need for literacy and adult basic education in South Africa today. Indeed, in South Africa, adult education is still frequently assumed to be a term synonymous with literacy and adult basic education” (Aitchison, 2003:161).

The purpose of the ABET programme is to provide an opportunity to previously disadvantaged adult learners to be able to learn how to read and write. Offenders between the ages 18-25 years old are regarded as youth (White Paper on Corrections, 2005:78). ABET is very clearly defined as being basic education for adults at the General Education level of the National Qualifications Framework [that is, NQF level 1, more or less equivalent to public school education from Grade 1 to Grade 9 or Standard 7]. ABET does not include education and training delivered to adults at NQF levels 2 to 4, this is seen as Further Education and Training (Aitchison and Harley, 2006:94). ABET mainly focuses on the general educational band for offenders who did not completed school.

The ABET programme consists of a formal learning programme which starts from level one and goes up to level four. Level one focuses on adult learners that require elementary literacy support in writing, reading and mathematical skills. Level two and three form the middle intermediate phase which strengthens adult learners who have required the elementary skills. Level four is the exit level and requires adult learners to demonstrate advanced skills in reading, writing and numeracy. Adult learners are assessed according to the Department of Education’s national standards. On the successful completion of level four, adult learners receive a General Education Certificate (GEC) which is equivalent to grade seven in the mainstream schooling system (Aitchison and Harley, 2006:94).

Studies on narratives of offenders show how the emphasis on rehabilitation has shaped the narratives of offenders in a way that education becomes a key pointer for rehabilitation. John, my first participant, narrates how he excelled in the ABET system and was accepted by the correctional officials. Ernest, my third participant acts as tutor in the prison school. Most of the participants’ positioned their narrative as transformative in order to construct a progressive narrative to cope with their incarceration. Transformative narratives reflect a process of change.

As I will show later, the theme of rehabilitation or conversion is produced within the narratives of youth offenders. According to the White Paper on Correction (2005:17) rehabilitation is at the centre of the programmes in prison. One of the requirements for parole is that offenders should change their behaviour from bad to good. In all the narratives, offenders demonstrated a strong element of change which is in line with the requirement for rehabilitation.
3.5 Daily rhythms of the Drakenstein Youth Correctional Centre

In South Africa, there is either much or little variation across correctional facilities. Niehaus (2002:61) describes the admission to a correctional centre as degrading treatment which deprives men of active masculine identities. Henderson, Rauch & Phillips (1997:1) regard the wardens’ nature of work generally as routine work. Niehaus (2002:87) describes that “wardens issued offenders with prisoners’ clothing and escorted them to their cells. Inside the cells, older prisoners put the newcomers through a series of humiliating trials”. The procedure described in the study resonates with my experience and is still the same at DYCC.

Much of the culture of correctional facilities, including their rhythms, are a leftover from the apartheid and colonial era with specific reference to the work colony model which was incorporated into the South Africa’s 1911 Prison Reformatories Act (Roos, 2011:62). The South Africa’s 1911 Prison Reformatories Act forced young white male Afrikaners to engage in hard manual labour. Prison governance is a key factor in how prisons are managed today.

Some facilities have reputations for being well run and others are known for their corruption. The Civil Society Prison Reform Imitative (CSPRI) conducted a study on prison governance in South Africa in 2005. DYCC formed part of the sample prisons. The study focuses on the overall management of the prison including the administration. This means that management of specific institutions do matter. The measurement to determine the level of functioning of a prison is mainly through the escape rate and prison riots. As Coyle (2002:42) states, the success of a prison is often measured in the eyes of the public by the absence of escapes. A prison is successfully managed when there are no escapes or riots over a period of time. No prison escape was reported at DYCC for the past year.

Yet, there seems to be a remarkable shared set of practices and daily rhythms across prisons in South Africa. Daily activities at DYCC are structured according to a weekly plan. Every day of the week, offenders are unlocked from their cells at seven in the morning by wardens, except those who clean the prison courtyard. Wardens count prisoners as they leave their cells. Prisoners are given the opportunity in the morning, before they eat, to lodge or register any complaints. Wardens march offenders to the dining hall in two lines. Every morning breakfast is dished out to offenders; it consists of two slices of brown bread, soft porridge and a cup of tea. Breakfast is dished in a rush because seating at the table is limited and offenders are allowed to sit for less than five minutes. They have to eat the hot porridge quickly and many offenders do not eat any porridge at all. Offenders are not allowed to talk to each other during
the eating parade. At this point in time, eating serves as a functional action and not a social function.

Eating is functional and social in a sense because during eating, fellow offenders learn the power base of gangs. Offenders are not allowed to have conversations during the eating parade. After breakfast, Correctional Officials lead offenders to their cells. Back in their respective cells, offenders are required to prepare for the daily activities.

Such daily activities may differ according to specific teams for example the garden team, workshop team or school and social worker teams. Offender teams conduct work on the premises of the prison. Offenders are called according to working groups doing different duties. For example there are kitchen, garden and other working teams. Around nine o’clock in the morning offenders are taken to their respective teams in groups. For the next two to three hours offenders will spend time working whilst other offenders will attend social work or school programmes.

By one o’clock in the afternoon all offenders return to the prison building after working in the surrounding areas outside the prison. Offenders are returned to the prison for lunch. They are searched at the prison gate and escorted to their respective cells. All prisoners are again counted by wardens. Inside the prison, offenders collect their lunch which consists of eight slices of bread called bare-head. After all the youth offenders have collected their lunch they are locked behind bars. Between two and three o’clock in the afternoon, correctional officials (wardens) take lunch and offenders are locked in their cells. When correctional officials return from lunch offenders are unlocked for one hour’s free time and supper is ready for collection by three o’clock. Supper is considered the main meal for the day. Unlike lunch, supper is a cooked meal which consists of corn and pork or eggs. Offenders who work in the kitchen working team are responsible for preparing the supper. By four o’clock in the afternoon correctional officials have managed to dish out food to nine hundred offenders. Normally meal times are the most dangerous times in prison because offenders know the routine in prison.

Once again it is the rule that correctional officials count the offenders and confirm the prison ‘lock up’ for the day. The lock up refers to the physical locking up of offenders in their cells from three o’clock in the afternoon till 7 o’clock the next morning. Niehaus (2001:87) states that “the predictable and boring routine of prison life undermined men’s autonomy”. The boring routine takes away the individuals’ basic choices of when to eat, what to eat and how much to eat. This routine is not limited to offenders and also applies to the working rhythm of wardens’ shifts. The
wardens are divided into two shifts. There is a day shift of 07H00 to 16H00 and two night shifts, namely first watch from 16H00 to 00H0 and the second watch from 0H00 to 8H00. During the first and second watches, all offenders are locked in their cells. These routines are followed daily and offenders’ choices of eating, sleeping and washing are regulated by the prison system. Much has been written about the identity loss of the individual. Goffman (1963: 91) speaks of the inmate experience as one of "stripping" or "mortification", as the inmate is gradually robbed of the tools of his own agency. Participants’ narratives demonstrate that being part of the prison system affected the way that they narrate their own stories. However, the fact that I was part of the social context of prison for more than a decade has influenced my own life story as I transitioned from a correctional official to a researcher.

3.6 Moving from a correctional officer to a researcher

I worked at Hawequa Youth Correctional Centre (HYCC) for a period of eleven years as a correctional officer. I grew up in Paarl in the Western Cape Province and lived in an area referred to as lower Paarl. In lower Paarl, areas were named after renowned American cities. I stayed in Chicago but you will also find New York, Magnolia, Lantana, New Orleans and Dallas as surrounding areas. Given the presence of gangs, lower Paarl can be described as a depressed community. A study conducted by Reckson and Becker (2005:107), that focused on narrative accounts of teachers in gang-violent communities in the Western Cape, state that in many depressed communities circuits of illegal accumulation and gang violence have become integral to social and economic reproduction and therefore can be seen as part of the broader social patterns. Reckson and Becker (2005:109) further cited that unemployment, poverty and apathy in the community, as well as changes in school policies and inadequate social services, contribute to the problem of gang violence. The accounts from teachers on the social conditions in the Western Cape areas resonate with what is happening in lower Paarl, Chicago, and today.

On the 4 April 2016, my place of birth, lower Paarl, Chicago, made the national headline news. The South African National Civic Organization (SANCO) on Tuesday called for action against rampant gangsterism in the Western Cape town of Paarl and for an end to the ‘senseless violence’ in the area. The call came after violent clashes in the lower Paarl area which saw a number of people injured and houses set alight. SANCO national spokesperson Jabu Mahlangu condemned the violence and said that youths, aged between 10 and 13, from the Chicago, Magnolia and Lantana flats were being blamed for the violence. He said that “the Chicago area
in Lower Paarl must be a centre of hope for youth development and not a battleground for drug dealers and gangs who are fighting over territory” (SABC news dated, April 2016). I was shocked by the news, on learning about the younger age gangsters produced in Chicago. The indication is that the gang violence has infiltrated the younger generation which will have far reaching implications in future for the community. How do families survive in this place?

We were a family of nine, consisting of our parents and four sisters and three brothers. My sisters were the oldest and the boys were the youngest in the family. My father worked in a factory and my mother worked as a domestic worker. These were the only means of employment my parents knew for their entire life. Our family lived in a rented house surrounded by flats. The factory owners that employed my father were the owners of the house. Our family did not own any land or property. I have reflected on my father’s relationship with his employer. He was dependent on employment to secure a house for his family. My father occupied several positions in the community, for example, he was the president of the local civic movement and an elder in church. As a family, we were closely bonded and always active in the church activities. This situation has changed over the years.

My parents separated when I was about 17 years old. We lost our rented house and had to move in with other family members. We were scattered as a family and my mother was the one who had to care for all seven children. This was a difficult time for us as a family. After two-and-a-half years my mother was allocated a municipal rented flat. We moved into the flat and were again unified as a family. I managed to complete my matric and worked for a year at the factory where my father had been employed for years. During the time that I worked at the factory, I decided not to follow in the tracks of my father by becoming a factory worker. After four years I graduated as a teacher at a local college. I worked as a teacher for one year in a contract position after which I was employed at the Department of Correctional Services as a teacher. This is the summary of my life story. I have experienced numerous transitions in my life. In the next paragraph I will be discussing my transition from being a warden to becoming a researcher.

In reflecting on my own transition from being a warden to becoming a researcher, I draw on a growing body of literature in the social sciences on the topic of reflexivity. As part of a larger movement to critique positivism in the social sciences, reflexivity calls for researchers to drop the perspective that their positionality does not shape the research process. It suggests that data is ‘produced’ in the research process and not ‘collected’. As such, “Reflective writing is, by its very nature, in the first person, and is therefore essentially subjective. It acknowledges from
the outset that what is presented is that relating and purporting to the experiences and perceptions of the author” (Jasper, 2005:247). As Myers (2008:204) has written, “A reflexive approach is helpful to make sense of subjects where knowledge is often hidden, obscured or claimed by emotions, theory and professional power”. In the context of correctional facilities, where power is institutionalised in specify ways (Booyens, 2008:221), makes sense by reflecting on my experience on both sides of the institutional divide – as a warden where my duty was to order inmates around and as a researcher I had to listen to offenders life stories.

Much of my knowledge of the institutional context of correctional facilities, I draw from memory. As someone who has written similarly about his own memory, Rolfe (1997:448) states that “these elements of what I know are, in a way, the dismembered parts of my unique body of knowledge. I carry them all in my memory, but it is impossible to consider them all at the same time. It is only when I write memories down that I can pull them together into a coherent body of knowledge and come to recognise the totality of what I know”. Likewise, Scanlon, Care and Udod (2002:137) suggest that “reflection enables practitioners to tap into knowledge gained through experiences. The practitioner gains a deeper understanding of the meaning of the experience by bringing to consciousness tacit knowledge”.

The prison building at Hawequa Correctional Centre stems from the 1800s when it was still referred to as the “work colony”. Architectural style reflects designs from the 1800s when the Cape was referred to as a work colony. Work colonies were first established in South Africa in the 1890s by the Dutch Reformed Church [Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk], (NGK) to help rehabilitate poor white families (Roos, 2011:54). Certain categories of white men were detained in these state work colonies, which existed until the 1960s, initially to punish the poor whites for idleness and drunkenness. After the National Party assumed power in 1984, legislation was passed to re-educate poor whites (Roos, 2011:54). Roos (2011:54) states that the aim of the state work colonies was to condition white men for urban life. Roos (2011:54) writes that “It was hoped these settlements would give poor whites who had suffered dispossession and dislocation a second start, providing conditions for their economic and moral rehabilitation within the evolving economy of the post-agrarian society”. The majority of colonies were opened in prisons. The principles of colonies were incorporated in the “new penology” under the South Africa’s 1911 Prison and Reformatories Act. Since the inception of the new penology, work colonies were associated with prisons. During my childhood I assumed that a work colony and prison were the same institution. How did I experience thoughts of prison during my childhood?
As a child growing up in apartheid South Africa, prison was associated with anxiety and fear. When reflecting on my childhood years, prison was used to scare children out of doing wrong, for example theft and fighting amongst each other. Prison represents the dark spot and dangerous place in my community. As an adult, I have learned that prison is a social institution which forms part of the socio-political context. The perspective of Foucault was that “punishment in general and the prison in particular, belonging to a political technology” (Hoffman, 2012:23); prisons form part of the political dispensation. How did my working in prison shape my views around prison as a social institution?

### 3.7 Correctional officers

During my working years I have observed many things. Reflecting on my experiences, I can now identify three kinds of correctional officials. First, there was the tough but fair official who followed the rules of the institution. Secondly, there were the ‘good guys’ who did small favours for the offenders and never punished them. Thirdly, the majority, were the officials who were hostile, arbitrary and aggressive in how they responded to offenders – they took pleasure in humiliating offenders. Reflecting on my own experience as a teacher in a prison, I would say that I fitted the second kind, that of the good guy. I think my background in education shaped my position in this regard.

Good teachers are after all good listeners who place humans at the centre of their work and vocation. My training in education emphasises that every person should be treated with respect. Moreover, teachers are trained not to be overly judgmental. Before I worked in the prison system as a teacher, I was of the opinion that officials are central to the processes of rehabilitation that offenders go through.

In this section, I discuss my journey of being a warden and how the prison conditions prompted me to ask uncomfortable questions about the social relationships between offenders, warders and my community of birth. I identified with the life stories of my research participants and I realised that we are all part of the human race. However, it becomes important to discuss social relationships in the semi-military environment in which wardens find themselves, one which is regulated by the authority of ranks.

### 3.8 Hierarchy and rank
Correctional officials wear insignia which explicitly indicate their respective ranks. These ranks are linked to police and military ranks. Officials mainly use instructions to communicate. Registers are key to all instructions because they are regarded as evidence. Notable is that one finds the same structure in the offender gangs. Offenders wear insignia in the form of tattoos. The highest rank person in the gang is the general. The general is responsible for all decisions. Gangs operate on the same line of authority as the correctional officials. This is a similar process of hierarchical authority. I realised that offenders mimic the actions of the correctional officials. This view is supported by Steinberg (2004:24). Subsequently I am of the opinion that insignia or ranks reinforce gang activities in the correctional setting.

I will now navigate the reader through a day in prison. A day in the prison starts at five o’clock, before sunrise. The correctional official on night duty disturbs the morning by ringing the iron bell. This happens for both summer and cold winter mornings. The sound of the bell is an indication to offenders to wake up, shower and start cleaning their cells.

Correctional officials arrive at seven in the morning. The duty clerk calls out the names of officials to confirm that they are on duty for the day. Once again this reminded me of a military drill. The duty clerk allocates work stations to correctional officials. Prison routines are engrained into the prison activities. What stands out is the way that both correctional officials and offenders follow the routines.

Whilst the parade for correctional officials is unfolding inside the prison, offenders wait to be unlocked for the day. The final clock rings and all offenders are ready for inspection parade. By this time all cleaning activities have been conducted to the finest detail. What happened over the last fourteen hours behind the darkness of bars will not be visible during parade. The rooms are well-organized, with blankets folded into shapes of flowers, natural landscapes which can only be seen in paintings of art. This art forms part of the prison subculture and is known as ‘styles’. Styles are part of the daily activities of the ‘frans’. Being part of this routine for more than ten years, I never questioned the process. Today I realise that setting up an overcrowded room must have taken effort and organization and that youth offenders in HYCC demonstrate organisational skills in decorating a room.

The next step is for correctional officials to enter the cell rooms. Youth offenders stand in a line inside the room. They greet the correctional officials by saying ‘good morning sir’. I am reminded of my days when, as a primary school learner, we were visited by the school headmaster. I was only seven years old. Our principal, a big fat man, would walk into our
classrooms. His authority consumed the room space and we as learners were intimidated. We all greeted in one voice ‘good morning sir!’ I am relating my own experience to the authority of the head of the prison. After reflection of my own experiences, I now realise that authoritative relationships are created by humans in different social institutions and shared across our society.

Prisoners step back into the cells and prepare themselves for breakfast. Breakfast is only served after the prisoners have been officially handed over from the night duty staff to the day staff. This means that the prison lock count [number of offenders counted] is reconciled with the opening count. Offenders walk in lines per room to the dining room for breakfast. The breakfast menu consists of warm porridge with tiny sugar spots in the middle of the metal plate and mild coffee and is served in an open dining room. Correctional officials guard working teams after breakfast. Correctional Centres in general operate by adhering to rigid and routine daily activities. Goffman (1961:45) argues that areas of autonomous decision are eliminated through the process of collective scheduling of daily activities.

One way to think about this co-dependent relationship that exists between correctional officials and offenders is to see what they have in common. Both groups organise themselves into hierarchies that include ranks made visible on their bodies [uniforms, insignia and tattoos]; both groups have rituals and are subjected to the same routine inside the prison.

3.9 Becoming a researcher

Once I obtained permission from National Department of Correctional Service research committee and from the Drakenstein Management Team to conduct this research, I managed to set up an appointment with the Head of the Prison to explain the research project.

When I entered the prison as researcher, I had a different experience compared to the time spent working as a correctional official. My first impression was the tedious process followed by a visitor in order to enter the prison. At first, the visitor is intimidated by all the gates and keys and secondly the number of registers to complete. One has to declare the purpose of one’s visit and hand in all mobile devices, cash and keys. After this routine, a warden is appointed to escort one around the prison. One has to wait for about an hour for the warden to collect one from the front gate. I was wearing civilian clothes; a pair of jeans and a t-shirt and not a uniform, as I would have done previously. By wearing civilian clothes, I perceived myself as neither one of the wardens nor the offenders. When walking through the long passages, I was
intimidated by the desperate expressions in the eyes of offenders. Was I only imagining the question that the offenders were thinking? Who is this person and what is he doing here? When I arrived in the section, the offenders were having their breakfast and I had to wait in the reception office.

Whilst waiting in the reception office, I observed how two young offenders were admitted to DYCC. The routine of admission is the same as previously discussed in this chapter. The only notable difference was the reference to concepts associated with unit management. The warden escorted me to the section where he introduced me to a group of offenders.

The first day. I met all the prospective participants of my research as one group in a room inside the prison. During this meeting, I observed that offenders were attentive. I felt that they were assessing the possible benefits of participating in the research project. I observed that some were leaving the group and new faces were joining the group. I saw the desperation in their eyes of wanting a quick response to their question. I also heard this desperation in their questions about the researcher, for example, would they receive any form of recognition for participating in the research project?

I had anticipated that I would interview three participants on the first day. However, I could only manage the introductory meeting and compiled a list of possible interviews for the second day. I managed two interviews per day over a period of eight days. The experience was draining as I listened to the life stories of offenders. Some life stories were well structured and others were fragmented. I recorded the interviews and compiled field notes and at night I updated my notes by listening to the taped interviews again. I stayed in one of the guest houses at Drakenstein Management Area.

The more I heard their narratives and the more I listened to the recordings of the young men, the more I realised the human bond that we share. The mere act of listening to them made them more human. I started seeing them not as numbers but as individuals with character and dignity. As a warden it was difficult to see offenders as individuals.

The institutional context is designed in order to remove the individuality of offenders. They are given numbers, they wear similar uniforms, sport similar hairstyles, and eat similar food. Goffman (1961:43) argued that the prisoners are stripped of their personhood in the total institution. Conducting interviews in a prison made it clear to me how the institution seeks to underplay and erase human individuality. Of course, it would be difficult for humans [wardens]
to shout at, instruct, order around and police other humans [offenders] if there are not clear boundaries between these roles and if wardens are confronted with the humanity of prisoners.

My personal experiences described above bring into sharp reality the insider-outsider dichotomy that structures the culture of the institution and the speech of those who work in it. As part of the introduction, I narrated my own life story to the group. In a way, I set the scene for the interviews that were to follow. Reflecting back now, after having conducted the interviews and having analysed them, there are strong similarities between the narratives of my research participants and my own life story. This also facilitated the process of becoming a researcher and of seeing the common human bond between myself and my research participants [youths converted to Christianity].

Firstly, I am a coloured male who grew up in the Western Cape under similar conditions as described by some of the participants. Secondly, my parents divorced when I was 17 years old. From then on I lived in a household where my mother was the head. From early on in my life I was aware of crime and substance abuse growing up in the area, Chicago, which I discussed above. I grew up in a Christian family which inculcated the values of goodness and holiness in our lives.

In other words, there was not a large social distance between myself and the youth offenders that I interviewed. Even though institutionally I used to be a warden and had now arrived at the prison as a researcher, our different institutional roles did not make it impossible for me to see what we had in common. As Earle (2014:29) argued, studies where the researcher can claim some degree of insider perspective by virtue of their gender and or ethnicity have long promoted the importance of producing knowledge from situation quoted experiences. It is not surprising then that as I was analysing the life histories of the youth offenders I interviewed, these narratives evoked feelings of empathy. They were after all not that different from me. I found myself in a position which some scholars have called “liminal” - I was both insider and outsider. This refers not only to the binary of life inside prison and life outside of prison; it also refers to the social distance between myself and the research participants.

My field notes are testimony to the peculiar power of the institution and the hold it has over sociological imagination, but working inside a prison and delving into the research literature, also posed particular personal challenges for me. The conditions in prison are demanding and require a well-trained correctional official. Clearly correctional officials need to be retrained and empowered to reorient themselves to become effective change agents in prison under a
democratic regime. My research highlights the need for a study that focuses on the retraining of correctional officials. Training curricula should be broadened by including how prison gangs operate and the role of the correctional official in the social context of South Africa.

3.10 Conclusion

In this section I described the context in which I conducted my field research and situated the research site in the broader scope of Youth Correctional Centres in South Africa. I discussed the key policy shifts articulated in the White Paper on Corrections (2005). The White Paper on Correction (2005) centralises rehabilitation of the offender in the context of the socio-economic conditions in South Africa.

I further reflected on the process I followed, from working as a warden and then entering the prison context as a researcher. This reflection has allowed me to consider my researcher participants as fellow humans. When I narrated my own life story I discovered how similar I am to the research participants, based on race, social background and life events. I developed empathy with my research participants with a renewed perspective on youth incarcerated in correctional youth facilities. My research experiences closed the gap between researcher and research participants.

In the following chapters I will discuss thematic themes emerging from the data. Themes are explored from a social, gender and political perspective in the context of South Africa. As you will see, in my discussion on the inside / outside world and on being a real man, thematic discussions will form the basis for the final argument in this dissertation.
Chapter 4: Narratives of life inside and outside prison.

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I analyse segments of the narratives of the offenders I interviewed at the Drakenstein Youth Correctional Centre. In my analysis I pay specific attention to the themes of life inside and outside of prison, as well as to violence. As part of my analysis of the segments, I try and contextualise the reported narratives by placing the individuals in a broader social context outside of their lives in prison. This means paying attention to how they narrate where they were born, where they grew up, and how they narrate their own class and race position in South African society. I draw on secondary sources and my own experience of life in South Africa and at correctional youth facilities in order to contextualise these narratives.

As I discussed earlier, narrative analysis is a form of qualitative analysis in which the analyst focuses on how participants impose order on the narrated flow of experiences in their lives. As an analyst, I am particularly interested in how I can use the narrative analysis to preserve the integrity of personal biographies and the events in the lives of my research participants that cannot adequately be understood in terms of their discreet elements (Riessman, 2000:218). Importantly, personal narratives are produced in conversation and as such I pay attention in my analysis to the interview as both situation and as conversation, by offering the reader verbatim segments of participants’ narratives followed by analysis (Riessman, 1993:31).

4.2 Participant one: John

4.2.1 Report A: “Hardest part of my life”.

1. I’m John from Knysna and I’m serving a fourteen-year sentence due to a sexual offence whereby I have done something wrong in my community.
2. My father left my mother and myself when I was one-year-old. I grew up only with my mother and she was a single parent, until I was three years old.
3. This was the hardest part of my life because it was something very difficult seeing my mother struggling paying my school fees, you know. I’ve set myself rules and regulations in life.
4. I failed in standard A, at the very first year. I was always feeling like a failure, you know, as I was growing up because my father left us, there was no support from my father’s side, you know, and that caused so much bitterness and grief in my life.
5. I was always longing for a father and a father figure in my life, someone who can play a…a vital role. My mother could not satisfy me because she had to play both roles of mother and father.

6. In Standard One I started to become discouraged in terms of school because nothing was making sense to me, my father was not present although I was always longing for a father.

7. I never received a distinction at school because it was always my desire to do good so that I could feel more worthy towards others in school. I was struggling through my school years.

8. I admitted school was not for me.

This is how John introduced himself to me during our first interview. The interview session took place inside the courtyard of Drakenstein Youth Correctional Centre during the morning around nine o’clock. John was the first participant I interviewed in my fieldwork. A young coloured man according to South African social taxonomies, John introduced himself to me by referencing his place of birth outside of prison and then immediately moved to his life inside the prison by noting the length of the prison sentence he was given [14 years] together with the crime he committed [sexual offence]. At the time of our interview he had served seven years. In the introduction of his narrative, John sets up the binary of life outside and life inside, a binary that structures much of the narratives of the offenders I interviewed. Moreover, by stating his crime and punishment he communicated to me aspects of his life inside prison as these are important signifiers for how prisoners get treated and how they respond to life inside the prison. Fourteen years is a long sentence and sexual offence usually refers to rape, a crime that typically implies interpersonal violence. Unlike crimes directed at property such as theft, violent crimes directed at other humans [rape, murder] inevitably raise deep moral questions in all societies. They are morally reprehensible, the moral sanctions against these crimes are higher, and punishment is more severe. They increasingly also raise questions about human and social development. Thus Burton (2007:2) writes that “Violence is perceived as a real threat to everything that a modern society aspires to [peace, individualism, emotional well-being, stability and equality] as well as the threat to standards of development, equality and economic growth”.

It is likely that the Knysna that John experienced as a young child under apartheid has not changed much. A coastal town in the southern parts of the Western Cape Province, the population of Knysna has more likely than not become more diverse and unequal in terms of race and class since the end of influx control measures in the late 1980s. The inequalities have in all likelihood become more pronounced as more people from the Eastern Cape hinterlands and rural areas move to towns in line with broader patterns of rural-urban migration in South Africa [and worldwide]. I have observed these inequalities on the several occasions I
frequented Knysna. While they were most likely less pronounced and visible under apartheid, today the northern section of the town is inhabited by a minority of wealthy white property owners and the peripheries are populated by black and coloured residents living in informal settlements. A small mixed-race middle class slightly lessens the racial and class inequalities (Neighbourhood Development Programme Grant Study report for Knysna Municipality, 2012:74).

Following that introduction, John described himself to me as growing up in a family situation where his father was absent and where his working class mother was struggling to make ends meet. As such he positioned himself in the wider context of Knysna as working class, coloured and male. He was raised, in other words, in a context that other scholars have described as one where direct structural violence was prevalent. We know from the wider literature, Galtung (1969:175) and Clark (2012:80) that black communities under apartheid were exposed to direct and indirect forms of state violence and interpersonal conflict. Scholars Burton, Leoschut and Bonora (2009:1) write “The stark reality for many young people in South Africa is that violence and crime is a way of life; it insidiously infiltrates every aspect of their lives with both direct and indirect effects on their psychological, emotional, development and physical well-being”. Those histories of violence have not disappeared. In 2006 the Justice Crime Prevention and Security Cabinet Committee (JCPSCC) contracted the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVRC) to carry out research aimed at enhancing our understanding of the nature of violence in South Africa. The central argument in the CSVRC report is that inequalities in South African society are deeply connected to structural processes that exclude large sections of the population from meaningful participation in the economy. Visagie (2013: 151) writes that in South Africa “Inequalities have deteriorated since the early 1990s, despite the substantial growth of the GDP. Income gains appear to have been concentrated at the top end of the distribution of income since 1993”. Visagie (2013:151) relates this inequality to the continued high levels of violence in society. Demombynes and Ozler (2005) investigated the effects of local equalities on crimes in South Africa. The study utilised data on crime and welfare from all police precincts in South Africa. The study found that “property crime is strongly correlated with mean expenditure in the precinct, indicating that returns from crime are major determinants of property crimes. Considering the welfare levels in neighbouring precincts, we show that precincts that are the wealthiest precinct in their criminal catchment area have higher levels of burglary” (Demombynes and Ozler, 2005: 269).
South Africa is characterised by high levels of inequality. In addition, reflecting the legacy of apartheid, it is characterised by inequalities which are highly racialised and with poverty, highly concentrated in the marginalised black, coloured and Indian population. The arguments of scholars such as Seeking and Nattrass (2006) are supported by the CSVRC report in that the exclusionary legacy of apartheid is reinforced today by the current growth path of the economy which required high levels of capital and skills to be successful. The CSVRC report notes that the structural exclusion that drives and deepens inequalities also produces psychosocial consequences. The structural exclusions can be read into John’s narratives. He makes it clear that his absent father and his position as a young son in a working class family impacted on his schooling and education – he struggled at school. As a result, John’s low education levels and his limited skills levels effectively excluded him from many economical activities and opportunities.

The literature shows that an important consequence of violence and social and economic exclusion is the development of specific types of masculinities. While there is not much published on Knysna specifically, there is an important body of literature that addresses the drivers and consequences of social and economic marginality among poorer residents, including the youth designated in South African social taxonomies as ‘coloured’. In the City of Cape Town, Cooper and Foster (2008), for example, conducted a study on young coloured boys who grew up on the Cape Flats. The study explored the masculinities of 25 young coloured, marginalised boys awaiting trial for various offences. The boys hailed from the impoverished areas created by the apartheid system known as the Cape Flats and most of them were involved in antisocial activities through “gangs”. For these boys, the language and practice of the tough gangster produced a certain kind of masculinity that also sought to provide for and protect their families. They show how the boys invest in multiple discourses of masculinity as they navigate the tumultuous post-apartheid context and the multiple anxieties they experience in their lives. For one, they depict themselves as movie stars, as men who are successful, powerful and in control of their and others’ lives. The Cooper and Foster (2008) study of young boys’ masculinity is informed by strands of social theory which see masculinity as a contextually contingent phenomenon, socially and historically produced (Connell 1987). Connell (1987), for one, theorises the existence of different masculinities that are hierarchically situated in relation to one another. His conceptualisation of masculinity as hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalised is now well-known.
In South Africa, masculinities are also the product of cultural traditions that imply moral senses of personhood and right and wrong. When John uses the word “wrong” to describe his behaviour, he was indicating that he is aware of his community’s reaction towards the crime he committed. Knysna provides John with a community of belonging through which his role as individual to society is mediated. John developed the sense of belonging as he grew up and was socialised into this community. When he uses the phrase “I am serving time” in relation to the crime he committed, he is accepting his punishment, not only in relation to the state, but also in relation to his community of belonging. In Connell’s terms, John portrays a ‘marginalised masculinity’ in the introduction of his life story. Marginalised masculinities are a consequence of the apartheid and colonial dynamics which deprived and emasculated men through class and racial domination. In contradiction, hegemonic masculinity is associated with the adoption of a socially exalted form of being a ‘real man’.

In the literature, dealing with masculinity and violence in South Africa, marginalised masculinity is often associated with crime. This in turn is often linked to a phenomenon which is incredibly widespread in society, namely households with absent fathers where single mothers take on the role of provider and care-giver. In South Africa, Holborn and Eddy (2011:4) write, “The typical child is raised by their mother in a single-parent household. Most children also live in households with unemployed adults”. Perhaps unsurprisingly, John mentions this in the opening lines of his introduction. His father left his mother when he was one-year-old and he grew up with a strong desire for a father figure. He links in his narrative the absence of his father with his own sense of low self-esteem, echoing what is argued in the academic literature.

Holborn and Eddy (2011:4), in their study, conducted and published by the South African Institute for Race Relations, summarise the findings from the wider literature which suggests a strong positive relationship between the presence of a father and cognitive development and intellectual functioning of children. They point to a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) that argues that “the influence of a father is both direct and indirect. The direct influence includes support for the mother as well as influencing all major decisions regarding health, well-being and education, access to health services, as well as the length of time spent at school” (Holborn and Eddy, 2011:4). The HSRC study further found that “boys growing up in absent-father households are more likely to display ‘hegemonic masculine behaviour, including aggression” (Holborn and Eddy, 2011:4). Indeed, a closer look at further
aspects of John’s narrative reflects the characteristics of hegemonic masculine behaviour towards women.

In a later interview, John mentioned that his mother worked at a local car wash station while he was young. Getting by has always been difficult for his mother and for him. We know from the literature on single-parent households in South Africa that “some 31% of African urban single parents were unemployed, as were 25% of coloured, 14 % of Indian and 5% of white parents” (Holborn and Eddy, 2011:4). The pressure on single mothers who work in low paying jobs is immense. No doubt the pressures of not having money exacerbated his longing for a father figure. In his narrative, John indirectly blames his absent father for his failure to pass Standard One [grade one] at primary school. John clearly connects his father [and specifically his father’s absence], to negative experiences in his childhood when he uses words such as “bitterness” and “grief”. As we will see, John narrates later developments in his childhood in relation to his disappointment over his absent father.

To summarise: the first segment of John’s narrative is constructed by John as the “hardest time” in his life, filled with struggling to make ends meet, dealing with feelings of grief and abandonment, maladjustment at school and developing a sense of low self-esteem. The following segment of his narrative reads like a response to his childhood in which he substitutes his mother with a group of friends, drops out of school and engages in criminal activities rather than the world of work in order to provide both material goods and a sense of belonging.

4.2.2 Report B. “I’m a failure.”

9. After dropping out of school in Standard Six I told myself I will join people who can satisfy me.
10. I’ve joined the wrong friends and I believed that this was the way to go with my life, you know, and I was always seeking recognition and a reputation to satisfy myself.
11. So, I was satisfied by my friends because they were actually uplifting me and giving me much recognition, and that built my reputation.
12. In my community I was recognised by many people for the wrong things [crime, inserted by author].
13. I started to break into houses and all these kinds of wrong things, knowing it was wrong.
14. I stepped so deep into my mother’s heart, you know, so that my mother was crying many times.
15. I had that thing [belief, inserted by author] in me that I’m living a failure life and that nothing good can come out of me and I was always feeling like a failure especially when people said words to me that broke me physically down, you know, that failure always came to my mind when people criticised me.
16. That is why I’m a failure.
John narrates how he dropped out of school at a young age as he transitioned from primary to high school. His narrative stresses his experience of primary school as difficult and his inability to cope with the first year of high school. Again, John's narrative points to factors which the literature suggests could lead to anti-social and violent behaviour later in life. Ward (2007:21) writes that schooling is an important arena for child socialisation and that it tend[s] to become more important as children move into adolescence. Wards (2007:21) explains that children who perform poorly at school, who drop out of school, who are not committed to school, who have low educational aspirations, and who change schools often, are more likely to engage in violent behaviour. John dropped out of school with low educational aspirations.

In his narrative John suggests that he is aware of the morality of his actions. His criminal action of housebreaking was a transgression in the eyes of his community of belonging and it hurt his mother. Yet his desire to earn a reputation amongst his friends and to be satisfied in life trumped his commitment to his kin and community. I think his sense of failure is closely linked to the emergence of an instrumentalist perspective towards people. His efforts to overcome his failures urge him to use people, in this instance, his friends. Stokols (1990: 642) writes that people who adopt an instrumentalist perspective in relation to other people tend to view such people as well as the broader physical environment, as a means for achieving important behavioural and economic goals. Already in this segment this becomes evident in John's narrative. Such a perspective may also shape his relationships in prison, an artificially constrained environment. He may be well aware of the fact that the correctional officials will determine his date of release and as such, he maintains good relations with them.

To summarise: John's narrative suggests that his trajectory after leaving school is a response to his early childhood. In this narrative segment he suggests that he replaced his mother's influence with his friends and his desire to develop a reputation amongst his friends. To be satisfied in life he trumped his commitment to his mother, resulting in feelings of failure and continued low self-esteem. Firstly he fails in school and this is translated into failure in the household and the wider community. John does not focus on the reasons and causes for his failure but rather emphasises the consequences of the events.
4.2.3 Report C: “I committed several rapes.”

17. Taking you back to my life before my imprisonment. I remember an occasion where I was watching two partners having sexual intercourse, you know, because I started with the wrong things [crime, inserted by author] and felt that this was the way to satisfy my friends and myself.

18. I did all the wrong things with my friends, looking at people having sex or intercourse by force, you know. It really affected my life as I was growing up, you know, because I was thinking it was the right thing.

19. I saw that men were forcing themselves on women to have sex or intercourse and I was thinking that this was the right way to do things.

20. I grew up with that belief.

21. During my childhood stage it really affected my life by looking at partners and everything having sexual intercourse because that was the cycle, you know, in my life.

22. I came to a point whereby a woman or my girlfriend broke up [ended the relationship, Inserted by author] because you see that was not healthy in a relationship you know.

23. I was always forcing my way on her.

24. I was having that demanding power, you know, as a man, you know, so which means this was how I experienced myself.

25. My mother could have told me that, “John, this was not the way to treat a woman”.

26. Actually, I think it was my father’s role, he was supposed to tell me how to treat a woman.

27. That drove me to a point whereby I started to disrespect my mother as a woman.

28. This behaviour was exercised outside the house and I committed several rapes.

In this section John uses the phrase “you know” several times in order to create empathy and understanding between the two of us. His narrative is picking up speed, the sentences are shorter and they circle around the topic of his crime, the sexual offence he committed, and which his narrative has to address. Again he invokes life before imprisonment and uses the phrase “wrong things” to speak of his knowledge of his immoral actions.

In this segment John directs his narrative back to his childhood. He describes a context in which gender relations meant the domination of women by men. Interesting is the way that he connects events of viewing people having sexual intercourse with his own “wrong things” or immoral actions. His view of sexual relations between partners consisted of heterosexual relationships in a patriarchal society. Moreover, such sexual encounters meant men forcing themselves onto women. This was the norm and the right thing, even as his mother suggested otherwise. If, as Barrette (1980: 45) argues, sexual practice is the area in which systematic inequalities of power between men and women are played out, then all men are in a position to exercise this power - whether or not they are inclined to do so. It is not surprising then that sex and sexual violence feature in the narrative of John.
John uses the phrase “wrong things” to refer to both viewing people having sex as a child and the sexual crimes he committed in his adolescent years. There is a clear connection between these two events. What may be the connection? John views violent or forced sex and the “wrong things” he did as unacceptable behaviour. He connects the “wrong things” with his friends who replaced his mother and household as a primary social group. In this new friendship group, the domination of women is key and violence against women becomes an acceptable norm for men in the community. Again, the wider literature agrees with John’s self-assessment. According to Vogelman and Eagle (2009:217), violence against women in the South African context is so widely tolerated that it has become almost the norm and to a large extent, accepted rather than challenged. Vogelman and Eagle (2009:218) argue that the ideology constructed around heterosexuality, marriage and the family, acts to conceal and mystify violence and abuse against women. Men and women are socialised from birth onwards into this gendered ideology, making its exposure a radical and complex process. John narrates how he was socialised into abusing women.

The cost of being accepted into his group of friends is that John has to abide by the inevitable peer pressure, part of which involves doing “wrong things”, such as forcing himself on women. John learns that “wrong things” are part of a criminal’s life. Willis (1997) and Comstock (1991) argue that “this is especially so among working-class men of all races for whom hegemonic masculinity apparently offers instant access to power, often denied to them by their socio-economic status”. Suffering from low-esteem, and in his search for self-confidence, John’s submission to peer pressure results in violence and criminal activities.

John’s journey into committing sexual violence, including rape, has to be set against the wider prevalence of rape in the South African society. Jewkes, Levin, Mbananga and Bradshaw (2002: 319) report that, according to their analyses of the 1998 South Africa Demographic and Health Survey, with a sample size of 11 735 women aged 15-49 years, 153 women or 1.6% of these women had been raped before the age of 15 years. These studies, and more recent studies, suggest that rape is becoming more common in communities. Gqola (2016:3) writes that rapists can be everywhere; rape culture and the manufacture of female fear are part of how we are collectively socialised to accept the ever-presence of rape. The prevalence of rape is one of the most alarming elements of South African society: a “nightmare”, as Gqola terms it in her book. While the literature on violence against women in South Africa points to divergent drivers for the historical and contemporary resurgence of such gendered and sexual violence,
there is broad agreement that violence is fuelled by several inequalities in society. Feminists such as Dworkin (1982) argue that violence against women has maintained high levels in that such violence is illustrative of a general and continued devaluation and objectification of women in patriarchal societies. Gqola (2007:119) notes that gender based violence is very ordinary, it is everywhere, commonplace and made to seem normal. Gqola (2007:121) notes that today, women do not feel safe in the streets and homes of South Africa, that women’s bodies are seen as accessible for consumption - touching, raping, kidnapping, commenting on, grabbing, twisting, beating, burning, and control, that women are denied the very freedom that ‘empowerment’ suggests, the very freedom which the South Africa’s Constitution protects.

In his narrative, John returns to aspects of his childhood which include how he was socialised into the domination of women and the fact that his father was not there to teach him how to relate to women, other than through the language of domination and violence. These childhood experiences set him on a trajectory that included cycles of sexual violence which resulted in turn in the discontinuation of intimate relations. It is likely that John’s unstable family environment played an important role in his socialisation process during youth. The study published by the South African Institute for Race Relations finds that “families play an important role in socialising young people, and if large numbers of families are dysfunctional in one way, it may be that many young people are growing up seeing verbal and physical fighting as a normal way to interact” (Holborn and Eddy 2011:11). John narrates his social relationship with women as one characterised by physical violence.

To summarise: in this segment John circles around the issue that resulted in his life inside prison, the crime of rape. He refers to what he had observed in terms of gender relations and sexual violence during his childhood years and his absent father features as a void which could have prevented him from committing rape. Peer pressure played a role in normalising sexual violence and ultimately his relationship with his mother, as with the other women in his life, suffered.

4.2.4 Report D: “A real man in prison.”

29. Gangs are having this thing of umsizwa, to become a real man in prison you know?
30. This was their view [gangs’ view, inserted by author] of looking at [defining, inserted by author] real men here, inside prison.
I've seen several Xhosa speaking guys arrived in prison and claimed to be men according to their tradition but they are deemed to be frans [offenders who do not belong to prison gangs, inserted by author].

Xhosa offenders went to the bush outside [to be initiated as men, inserted by author] and come to prison and are treated the very same way as any frans.

There are strong procedures in gangs. You can’t just talk.

In the gangs they have two offenders who are called the glas [Afrikaans for glass, inserted by author] and draad [Afrikaans for wire, inserted by author], you know, they will speak on your behalf to the gang leaders.

If you are a frans you cannot sleep late; you have to clean the room, wash the clothes of the gangs and have no say over your own belongings.

Gangs have that power over other prisoners.

You [as a prisoner who wants to join a gang, inserted by author] are stripped from being a person and have to follow the rules of the gangs to become a real man or umsizwa.

I was part of the gangs during my first year in prison.

I was expecting John to tell me more about his arrest and sentencing at this point of the story. However he was silent about his arrest. In this segment, John shifts the narrative from life outside of prison to life inside of prison. He suggests there are parallels to life outside and inside, especially in relation to masculinity and group behaviour. Outside of prison, growing up, his friends played a crucial role as the primary social group or institution once he left school. In prison, gangs of male prisoners become the primary social group that he joined during the first year inside prison. Life inside prison is structured not only by the state but also by prison gangs. This structuring relates to membership of gangs or not, and the ritualised and gendered process of becoming a gang member. Becoming a gang member is about “becoming a real man”. Becoming a gang member and a real man inside prison is similar to the cultural process whereby young men - including Xhosa boys and boys from other cultural traditions - have to “go to the bush”.

This period during which boys become men involve separation from society, education and also physical circumcision. Ngxamngxa (1971: 201) notes that the trauma of circumcision pain is experienced by initiated men as an achievement. In his discussion, he mentioned that those who have gone through the experiences successfully are socially acknowledged through ceremonies. Ngxamngxa (1971: 201) explains that indeed, it is this process of undergoing bush-school and bearing the pain, which is necessary to the process of becoming a man. A ceremony signifies a status change from boyhood to manhood. Ngxamngxa (1971: 201) writes that circumcision symbolises the death of childhood and the birth of manhood. During this process, boys are also taught about specific ideas related to masculinity. The image of the “real man” is an important aspect of this process. Initiates are taught the behaviour expected of them
and their responsibility as men. One part of the initiation process is teaching boys to endure physical pain and such endurance comes to symbolise the toughness associated with “real men”; hence the rule that initiates are to suppress all signs of pain - boys may not cry during the initiation process.

By invoking Xhosa initiation, which he certainly would have been aware of, given that he grew up in a region in South Africa where Xhosa is a dominant language, John was comparing the ritual process in the prison of becoming a member [real man] with the ritual process of becoming a man. Indeed, both ritual processes involve turning young boys into men. They take place in different social contexts, however. This is made clear by John when he indicates that prison gangs do not recognise cultural initiation processes that take place outside of prison. There is a difference between “being a man” outside the prison [adulthood] and “being a man” inside the prison [gang membership].

Yet both speak to a change in social status which is accompanied by symbolic acts. Cultural initiation not only turns you into a man but also creates bonds of fictive kinship and friendship between age mates [age mate sodalities]. Ngxamngxa (1971:193) writes that “all boys discharged from the circumcision together form a semi-legal, or mutual union of friendship and if there is the chief’s son amongst them, the boys circumcised before and the boys circumcised after are his blood relatives, since their blood mixed on the spear with which he was operated upon”. Likewise, joining a prison gang creates bonds of fictive kinship, even if these bonds are perhaps more hierarchical than those suggested by the brotherhood of age mates. Nonetheless, this discussion demonstrates the existence of a clear line between social practices inside the prison and those outside the prison.

Joining a prison gang may be a response, not only for those who look for the protection and kinship that a group offers, but also because of deprivation experienced during the first phases of incarceration. In their study of the relative over-representation of black and coloured men in the prison population and prison gangs, Minnie, Prinsloo, and van Niekerk (2002:52) discuss the deprivation of prisoners’ experience during imprisonment and note that the deprivation model serves to explain the deprivation experienced by prisoners when admitted to the system. In his narrative, John refers to this process when a new offender wants to join a prison gang as “stripped from being a person”. This deprivation may include loss of status, experiencing poor living conditions, lack of freedom and privacy, and a loss of conjugal rights (Minnie et al.,
In other words, becoming a prison member involves double deprivation: first as newcomer to the prison and then as newcomer to the gang. In the process of becoming a gang member you may obtain, within the confines of life inside the prison, better living conditions, an elevated status and right to sex with other men (Minnie et al., 2002:54). The process of becoming a member of a prison gang also differs, depending on which gang you join. In a subsequent interview, John indicated that he was a member of the 28s prison gang.

Scholars like Bonner (1999:65); Goyer (2004:36) and Lotter and Schurink (1984:67), agree that gang codes require members to be obedient and loyal to the fellow gang members and not to “snitch” or to co-operate with the authorities. These gang codes construct the line between the gang members and non-gang members [frans] and prison authorities. Booyens (2008:22) describe the ‘frans’ as people that do not have a say in the prison. Authorities refer to the prison as a social institution which enforces a different set of codes than that endorsed by the state. Offenders are caught up in a situation where they are faced with two different sets of codes or rules which are contradictory in nature. One example is the use of tattoos; gang codes require the engraving of tattoos in the skin as part of the initiation ritual and serve to identify gang members. However, the Correctional Services institutional codes or rules criminalise tattooing as an offence. Offenders use tattooing as a way of demonstrating their rejection of the authorities’ rules. Steinberg (2004:24) is of the opinion that gangs are “locked in an eternal relationship with their captors”. In other words, with the fostering of masculine traits such as bravery and solidarity, gangs will always use the Correctional Services institutional rules to demonstrate their existence.

John was part of the 28s gang. Niehaus (2002:89) explains that “their tattoo was a heart with a vagina inside, or a circle with four arrows extending from it. The former showed their desire for sex; the latter for them meant that all directions end in prison. The description of the 28s gang circles around the crime of rape that resulted in John ending up in prison. John had a choice between the 26, 27 and 28 gangs. He decided to join the 28 gang. Niehaus (2002:89) describes the 28 gang members mainly as long-term prisoners sentenced for rape and murder. They spoke mainly Afrikaans and operated mostly in the dark. They are associated with violence. John’s profile fits the Niehaus’s (2002:89) description of the 28 gang which confirms his association with the 28 gang.
The 28 gang may have been a group that John identified with because of the way that he interacted with women. Interaction with women refers to John’s life outside prison. I am finding a strong correlation between John’s life outside prison and the type of group he associates with in the prison. One cannot assume that this is by coincidence but rather due to the way in which social structures inside and outside prison are related. Some of the social relationships in prison are based on outside norms. The 28 gang tattoos demonise sex by portraying it as a negative result, which is imprisonment. When John narrated his involvement in the prison gangs, the topic was only brushed over and placed in the background. I could not understand why John did not expand on his experience as a gang member. John’s disclosure of being part of prison gangs may impact negatively on his release date from prison. This may explain his reaction towards his gang experience in the interview.

To summarise: in this segment John moves from his life outside of prison to his life inside of prison, yet he makes several connections between these seemingly disconnected worlds. These connections revolve around masculinity, ritual processes of becoming an adult man outside of prison and inside of prison, and his own experience as a member of the 28 prison gang. His sentences are longer and he narrates his views and his own experience with confidence. We sense that this is a turning point in his narrative and that something, perhaps redemption, is around the corner.

4.2.5 Report E: “I’m proud of myself”.

39. In 2006, I was sentenced to fourteen years’ imprisonment for rape.
40. I’ve tried to enrich my life and by starting school in 2008, I was enrolled at the lowest level in school. I worked hard and at the graduation ceremony of 2008 I was the best student in ABET [Adult Basic Education and Training, inserted by author] Level 2. This meant that teachers [inside the prison, inserted by author] started to believe in me, other people started to believe in me due to my results however, I was still living with that bitterness and grief inside of me.
41. During 2009 I’ve started to attend a course named ‘Touching Lives’ and there God really worked in my life. God delivered me and God healed me from that bitterness and grief, because I was living with that unforgiving feeling towards my father.
42. I forgave my father totally for what he had done unto me, at that specific date and time, you see.
43. In ABET Level 3 I became once again the top student in 2010, you know, so it did me good, I felt good about myself and what I have reached, you know, so I phoned my mother and I told her that I forgave my father.
44. Then during 2011, I was the best again in ABET level 4 and at the very same time I became a motivational speaker being selected at Medium B Prison.
45. I started to motivate groups of visitors to the prison, for example, school children.
46. I was always doing the motivational speeches and was the master of ceremony at numerous occasions when the [Department of Correctional Services, inserted by author] commissioners visited the Drakenstein Prison.

47. I felt close to many of the correctional officials and so I started to build a good relationship with all these correctional officials.

48. I’m proud of myself for what I have achieved during my seven years of imprisonment; it also showed that there were no boundaries in life and I must never give up, you know.

In this final segment of his narrative, John turns the page and offered me a turning point in his narrative. He does not mention that he left the prison gang, but during his second year in prison he set upon a different path. He enrolled for an adult educational programme in prison and excelled. In what must have been a first for him, John established a good relationship with his teachers. Earlier in his narrative, he admitted that being a young boy in a public school outside of prison was “not for him”. Much later, at an older age, he had a positive experience of schooling inside of prison. More is to come. Despite him excelling as an adult inside prison and impressing his educators, he became aware that he had yet to confront his unresolved feelings of “bitterness” towards his father. This was most likely the result of an encounter with the Christian religion which came to a climax during a religious course that involved a conversion. The Christian theology and language of forgiveness allowed John to absolve his father – for his absence during his childhood. This was the major turning point in John’s narrative and thereafter he walked a different path that involved motivational speaking and one that took him further away from the prison gangs and brought him closer to the wardens and the possibility of an early release on the grounds of good behaviour.

To summarise: the build-up in John’s narrative, hinted at in the end of the previous segment, reaches a crescendo in this segment. That crescendo is a familiar one in studies on prison life: conversion to the Christian faith. It provides John with the language of forgiveness and mechanisms through which to deal with aspects of the psychosocial trauma he had experienced as a child, and probably also with the crimes he had committed towards others and himself.

4.2.6 Conclusion

In the analysis I identify the specific role that John adopts in the segments. John’s role in the narrative is the distillation of an underlying storyline of a person who sees himself as having no power over his circumstances. A story-line of grief, abandonment, maladjustment at school and a low self-esteem. He is constructing the foundation of a typical tragic hero within a general
I have noticed that the story-line is not static but rather fluid. Presser (2009:179) asserts that narratives “change too quickly to be captured and measured by the researcher”. One can describe the story-line as moulding with high action activities along the way, for example his early exposure to violence and his criminal activities. John is still in his adolescent years when he actively seeks identity. Along the way of finding his identity, John’s relationship with his mother and other women was transformed into accepting violence as a norm. John changes spaces in his narrative by moving from his life in his space in prison to his space outside of prison. He successfully managed to form a connection between life in prison and the outside life. These connections revolve around the transition from adolescence to adulthood. He did not disclose too much information of being a gangster. He only admitted that he was a 28 gang member. The account given by John shows the justification which is the hallmark of a tragedy. The story-line moves into redemption and this event serves as a turning point. However, when reading his narrative, many people would actually describe John’s life as a tragic course from his childhood years to a disaster waiting to happen.

4.3 Participant two: Clive.

4.3.1 Report A: “I stood my grounds”.

1. My name is Clive and I was born in Mitchell’s Plain on the Cape Flats.
2. I’ve been incarcerated for the past ten years and I’ve been convicted for murder as well as robbery.
3. Being in prison for the past ten years life has thrown a whole lot of curveballs at me as well, umm… and I can tell you that my prison sentence or being here, is a learning experience not just for myself but for my family members as well.
4. I stood my grounds.
5. There were barriers because I believed there were no perfect parents, being here and landing in prison I cannot blame or shift the blame to anyone else but myself.
6. As well – umm, like I said, there was no perfect family.
7. I would say we as a family were in constant gathering together meaning that there was always that sense of dependency.
8. I could sense the difference of going to high school.
9. Due to what I was exposed to, it was a visual age what you see on television.
10. I grew up, fortunate enough to have both mother and father, who were both working parents and whom I can say ensured that they inflicted the proper amount of rules.
11. My parents provided me with enough love and support, however, there were some barriers.

As if he is resorting to the same formulaic response as John, Clive introduces himself in this segment by naming his place of birth outside of prison, the length of time he has already spent in prison, and the crime he committed that shifted his life from outside of prison to inside prison.
Like John, Clive is from the Cape Flats. More specifically, he was born in Mitchells Plain. According to Haefele (2011: 72), Mitchells Plain is one of Cape Town’s largest suburbs with a predominantly coloured, working class population, located on the Cape Flats about twenty kilometres outside Cape Town. Constructed during apartheid as a “model township”, the suburb is located on the border of the city. Its population is housed in substandard housing and was meant to provide low cost labour to the needs of whites and industries around the city. The suburb was built during the 1970s to provide housing for victims of forced removal due to the implementation of the Group Areas Act. The political demarcation of the apartheid city impacted communities on the Cape Flats: “Many families relocated from District Six to Mitchells Plain when District Six was razed to the ground, and today resembles an area swamped with gangs and drugs” (Haefele, 2011: 76). The Western Cape Provincial Government estimates that about 48% of households in Mitchells Plain live below the poverty line. Only 43% of the working age population is employed. Like townships elsewhere in South Africa, and ghetto communities across the world, social problems such as drug abuse and drug-related violence are everyday phenomena in Mitchell’s Plain (Haefele 2011: 72). The structural legacies of apartheid have been exacerbated by present dynamics such as urbanisation. During the 2001-2006 period, the Western Cape gained an estimated 240 000 migrants, mostly from the impoverished Eastern Cape (Marindo, Groenewald and Gaisie, 2008: 12).

The title of this segment “I stood my grounds”, allows me to discuss the issue of ‘manhood’ in the context of the prison. In 2004 and 2005 the Centre for the Study of Violence (CSVR) surveyed juvenile inmates at Gauteng Correctional Centre [n=311] through administered questionnaires that posed questions about their experiences of violence and sex in prison (Gear, 2010: 26). Emphasis was placed on their feelings and social processes in the context of the prison. “We found that the longer they had spent in prison, the more prominent were rites of passage to manhood that had taken place while they had been inside the prison” (Gear, 2010: 30). The finding is relevant to the life story of Clive and demonstrates that he “learned” how to cope with prison life.

Clive seems very much aware of this context and he seems aware that his family circumstances perhaps did not resemble those of his neighbours and friends. As Holborn and Eddy (2011: 1) remind us, “many children in South Africa are growing up in fractured families. Millions grow up living without one or even both of their parents”. Hence his use of the word “fortunate”. The word describes the social standing of his family in the context of the local community. He grew
up in a nuclear family with both parents and both of them were wage earners. His life outside of prison did not prepare him for life inside of prison – life in prison has been a surprise and a learning experience. While his family was certainly not perfect, his parents were together and they provided him with rules and guidance as a child. This assisted him in standing his ground once he was incarcerated. Clive makes the point that no one but himself is to blame for his incarceration, yet he ends this segment by hinting at “barriers” that shaped his upbringing.

To summarise: Clive commences his narrative in a similar manner to John, making it sound as if they were both responding in a formulaic manner, as if they had told this story in such a context many times before. Clive also invokes the distinction between life outside of prison and life inside of prison, yet makes it clear that, unlike John, he came from a relatively stable family in which both parents were present and both were working. As such, he did not struggle with abandonment and with basic provisioning. Yet, he suggests, there were issues.

4.3.2 Report B: “When to challenge my father”.

12. My father was a drinker, he consumed alcohol.
13. I had a lot of respect for him due to the fact that he never allowed his drinking habits to influence his work.
14. He ensured that his family was taken care of.
15. Yes, he was the core responsible person.
16. My mother admitted that she was very dependent on him.
17. I can describe my perfect mother and father despite the shortcomings in our family.
18. My father and I could not sit down with mother.
19. Due to his drinking problems we would not have special times, except after he had consumed alcohol, when he would open up to me.
20. He told me his feelings towards his wife and children and mentioned that I am not the only child but that I have a younger sister as well.
21. I started realizing that this father who seemed so stubborn at first was a very passionate person.
22. As I grew up I remember that I started sharing my feelings towards girls and women with my mother.
23. She advised and reprimanded me on how to treat and respect them.
24. She bought little gifts for me, to give to them on Valentine’s Day.
25. There was a type of understanding between us.
26. When my father was coming in late or my mother did not cook supper.
27. I was well aware of and when and where [At which time and place, inserted by author] I had to open my mouth.
28. I also grew up knowing when to challenge my father and when to challenge my mother.

One of the barriers Clive hinted at in the end of the first segment of his narrative emerges as his father’s alcoholism. This was a problem for Clive yet he comes across as mature and
considerate in that he can weigh up his father’s abuse of alcohol with the fact that his father lived up to the role as provider. So despite his father’s “drinking habits”, Clive also describes his father as a “responsible” person. His father was clearly the main breadwinner in that Clive describes his mother as being financially dependent on his father. Yet the mother does not appear utterly dependant [she also worked] and with agency – she refused to cook dinner when Clive’s dad did not come home early. This suggests that even though his parents lived together, they may no longer have been in love with each other. His narrative suggests that he related to each of his parents individually, rather than as a collective. Clive narrates that despite his mother being a worker, she occupied a traditional feminine role in the domestic spheres. Clive could only communicate with his father when his father was intoxicated yet he could converse with his mother about “girls and women”. Unlike those youths who are sent to jail for crimes committed because they come from distressed families or abusive fathers, Clive cannot claim the same for being in jail, hence his recourse to words such as “chance”, “luck” and “fate”.

To summarise: Clive continues to narrate his childhood in a way that highlights his own maturity and even-handedness. He discusses the barrier [his father’s alcoholism] yet also attributes to alcohol the possibility of having conversations with his father. Clive’s narrative segment stresses that there were no uncertainties as to the different and respective roles his parents occupied. Yet this was perhaps not a loving home. Still he is unable to find in his upbringing and his household a stable cause for the crime he is yet to tell me about, and thus he resorts to the language of chance. Perhaps a more clear and stable cause is yet to emerge.

4.3.3 Report C: “I was also unfortunate.”

29. I was also unfortunate to lose a brother who was five years younger than me. That was a tragic incident that occurred on a Sunday.
30. He drowned at one of my aunt’s places in the vicinity of Paarl and that was traumatic in the sense that I could see the effect it had on my father as well as on my mother.
31. I had the experience of what death does to loved ones, what it caused and the after effects, the ripple effect of losing a loved one.
32. My family, in particular my mother and father, made no secret of how they felt. They explained everything to me. I was still very young, so death, I would say, no one ever understands.
33. In the same space I could sense my father’s feelings, his whole…. his, his whole life had crashed. He became a bit more secure and I could sense that whenever we talked about my brother, he would always get emotional and he told me of his feelings, his hopes for me.
34. He just wanted me to be successful.
In this segment Clive indicates that he had a wider family network that included an aunt who had several places / homes. It was at one of these homes that a family tragedy occurred which had a great impact on his parents. In an earlier segment Clive had indicated that his father had a daughter who did not live with their family. In this segment another sibling is introduced, but through tragedy. Clive was five years older than this brother, but still young. We can safely reason that his brother was most likely a toddler when he drowned. The loss of a child is always a traumatic event and when this happens as a result of an accident, it is hard to deal with the feelings of loss and guilt. In this segment, Clive’s narrative shifts from him describing himself as “fortunate” to “less fortunate”. The narrative is reaching a turning point. His narrative is well structured and he deploys the vocabulary of a person who finished school. The death of his younger brother is the disturbing event that becomes the turning point. He describes the event as having caused a “ripple effect”, meaning that this had a severe effect on him and the social relationships he had with those kin around him.

Clive indicates that his parents explained everything to him about his brother’s death. This may be an indicator that his parents were concerned about him missing his younger brother. However, he could not understand and this led to confusion. Clive narrates his confusion. As a young child he was unable to process the death of his brother. He narrates that he could see and feel the responses of his parents to his brother’s death – they experienced grief, loss and trauma. Clive also narrates another consequence of his brother’s death and that is his father focusing his hopes and desires of success on his remaining son, Clive.

To summarise: the death of his brother is a traumatic event in his childhood. Unable to comprehend the death and work through his own feelings, he internalises two important responses to the tragedy by his parents: their feelings of grief and loss and renewed pressure on him as the remaining son to make a success of his life. Clearly a sensitive and educated young man, Clive hints at the end of this segment that he may not have been able to live up to the increased expectations of his father.

4.3.4 Report D: “I was looking for answers”.

35. I made myself guilty of something that, that, that no words, I believe, can ever take back or change. I ended up killing two people, two innocent people.
36. Yes, on that specific evening I just realized that the power that I had, was a power that each individual possessed. I was pushed and went over the edge, and it led me to do it, what happened that evening led me to take two people’s lives. This was not me!
37. I was looking for answers - I was trying to point the finger - I was trying to deny my actions - that this was not me - I shouldn’t be here, it’s not right - only God knows what happened and why it happened.

In this segment, Clive slips into the passive voice, talking about himself in the third person as if he is looking at himself from the outside trying to comprehend what had happened on that fateful night: “I made myself guilty of something”. Clive is reinterpreting his crime. He produces a narrative of a tragic hero. He minimises the effects of his actions on the victims. Consistent with the role of a tragic hero, he accepts responsibility for the effect that his actions had on others, including his victims. Presser (2004: 89) describes this process as an “agentive episode” in one’s life. What it implies to Clive’s interpretation of his crime is that he was not in control of himself. Again I find this consistent with the role of tragic hero where the offence is an inevitable, justified act that the protagonist is powerless to avoid.

In this segment Clive finally mentions the crime. Yet, despite having spent ten years in prison for this crime, he still has not made sense of it. He does not speak about what had happened “that evening” yet he accepts that his own actions are responsible for his imprisonment. His narrative suggests that he realised his power that night but that the realisation emerged not during normal life but after having murdered two people.

To summarise: in this segment Clive mentions the dreadful night that resulted in his life outside prison coming to an end. He stutters and sounds confused. For the first time in his narrative he mentions God. Only God knows what happened that night, and why it happened.

4.3.5 Report E: “Prison was a stepping stone.”

38. So, that is what I start taking from prison [learning from prison, insert by author]. You might come in sweet and innocent but somehow you will be changing, either for the good or for the bad and that is what I can say about myself.

39. I believe the impression that you are going to make is going to pay for your future, umm, your belief system, the attitude it determines, how you are going to walk and about what is in your vision for your future.

40. I’ve said to myself that it must be God that allowed this to happen and I am sure God has a plan for me and, who knows, maybe I’m wrong, maybe I’m wrong. Although, my sense of belief indicates that man won’t be able to turn or twist things around.

41. Prison doesn’t necessarily mean that being here and caught up in negativity doesn’t mean that you have to go out and follow the same trends and come back again.

42. That was an individual choice I believe, that was totally an individual choice of coming back again to prison. Prison was a world on its own and a world for men.
There was always a reminder how would my mother or father react to your wrong decisions? There was state of mind of being in this place [prison inserted by author] but the desire to be different from other offenders.

I am caught up in the norms of the prison and nearly joined the 26 gang.

I couldn’t see myself giving up that guts and glory and I have set myself up for the race.

In this segment Clive again recognises his relative privilege in relation to other prisoners and that his relative privilege in life outside of prison during childhood did not prepare him for the realities of life in prison: he arrived in prison “sweet and innocent”. This segment is a kind of closing statement, a summary of the point at which he is in trying to make sense of his life. Unlike John, Clive does not find refuge in the language of Christianity. His is doubtful: “it must be God that allowed this to happen”. Yet, even though “I am sure God has a plan for me”, God has yet to reveal this plan to Clive. So he is left wondering, doubting, uncertain: “maybe I’m wrong, maybe I’m wrong”. Not finding solace in religion, Clive has to try and understand the context in which he finds himself: prison. He talks about prison in the past tense and talks about “coming back” to prison, about prison as a space of men and prison as a “stepping stone”. In this segment Clive indicates that he is starting “to take” from prison, suggesting that he is learning from prison. He refers to prison positively and experiences his imprisonment as part of a learning opportunity. In other words he constructs a positive image of a prison that can “give”, much like a provider or a father figure.

To summarise: in this segment Clive presents a rather ambiguous evaluation of the prison environment. In his case, he was transformed from being “sweet and innocent” to being “bad”. He does not find refuge in the language of Christianity. Unlike John, who talks repeatedly about group dynamics and peer pressure, Clive highlights individual responsibility and personal choice. In a follow-up interview, Clive admits that he is a born-again Christian. Perhaps the only way to deal with his guilt was to become not only a Christian but to become a minister. Clive perceives himself as a convert. Maruna (2006:162) argues that conversion narratives are valuable, not for their descriptions of historical observable events but rather as a self-narrative or personal myth. In other words, the narratives tell the researcher more about the individual’s present. His ability to minister inside the prison creates the possibility for a more positive evaluation of life inside prison. By being a minister in prison, Clive managed to be different from his fellow offenders.
4.4 Conclusion

Comparing the narratives of John and Clive, we are able to establish both differences and similarities. Both Clive and John introduced themselves to me in remarkably similar terms by introducing their names, their places of birth, the sentence they had received and the crime for which they have been sentenced. Built into these introductions is the divide between life outside of prison and life inside of prison. This divide is a central structuring device in both the narratives. Perhaps this is not surprising but still it points to the way in which these narratives function to assist the offenders in mediating the tension between life inside and outside of prison. It is also likely that these introductions are representative of a patterned and formulaic way in which offenders introduce themselves to outsiders to the prison: social workers, ministers, researchers. Outsiders become the audience of the narrative. Research by Presser (2008) and Riessman (2002) suggests that the construction of a narrative is a process where participants present a preferred version of themselves. What this suggests is that participants may change their life stories depending on the type of audience.

Furthermore, an analysis of the structure of the narrative shows similarities in terms of a stage through stage representation of the offender’s life story. In the introduction, the narrator provides information about his background and criminal history. Yet the two narratives discussed in this chapter do this differently: John places himself in the context of a struggling working class family with a single mother and absent father, whereas Clive places himself in a relatively privileged middle working class family where both parents work and are present in raising him. John’s narrative points to the importance of social groupings and peer pressure in his life outside of prison and then inside of prison – made visible through the rituals of initiation and incorporation – while Clive’s narrative stresses individual responsibility and personal choice. John dropped out of school early and his speech is characterised by stutters and uncertainty. Clive speaks well with an extended vocabulary and a rehearsed narrative. Whereas John finds peace through salvation and a conversation to Christianity inside the prison, Clive is more ambiguous about making sense of his crime, yet becomes a minister inside the prison.

Participants clearly articulate how they related to their respective lives before imprisonment. Adaptation to the correctional setting by the youth were quite varied. Abrams and Hyun (2009:39) describe the process as “A smooth transition to the correctional world meant that the youth found some enjoyment in working within the power structure, felt the fit in among peers
and mostly forged a positive connection with staff.” Offenders who adapted well in all three settings found some synergy between the rules of their worlds and those of the correctional facilities. In the context of an authoritative structure that demolished their power, youth adaptations were linked to perceptions of belonging in the facility as well as their ability to locate a sense of personal power. The authors Abrams and Hyun (2009:44) argue that the range of youths’ “possible selves” was often shaped by the strength of their past “worlds” as well as the realistic limitations they would likely experience in their home environment. I argue that the narrative structuring assists both John and Clive in adapting to the correctional setting and the reality of being incorporated into life outside the prison at a later point.

A study conducted by Abrams and Hyun (2009:26) builds on the theories of youth identity transition among incarcerated youth. Ethnographic data were collected at three correctional institutions in the Midwest region of the United States. The study population consisted of one-hundred-and-ninety-two incarcerated youth offenders. The three settings consisted of one large correctional institution, one small and one non-profit maximum correctional institution. A total of 29 incarcerated youths participated in a longitudinal interview series across the three facilities. A purposive sampling method was applied with specific criteria. Data collection was done through in-depth interviews over a period of thirty-two months. Cross-case displays were constructed to locate and process the whole sample. Abrams and Hyun (2009:36) adopted an individual case approach in relation to (a) incoming professed criminality, (b) style of adaption to the correctional world (c) strategies to negotiate treatment and (d) identity transition styles. The data indicate the discourse of multiple worlds and identities of all participants.

The level of high criminality may indicates criminal activities were a norm moves throughout multiple worlds. Abrams and Hyun (2009:37) explain that “All boasted about their criminal aptitude and relied on criminality as an anchor of personal achievements”. All four participants in my study were focused on the crimes committed and the length of sentences. Criminal identities were also reinforced in multiple worlds where status and power conferred through illegal activities. Multiple worlds were life inside prison and life outside prison. I am arguing that the structuring divide of high and low criminality assists participants in adapting to the correctional setting and to the reality of being re-incorporated into life outside the prison after release from prison.
Chapter 5: Narratives of anger and confusion

5.1 Participant three: Ernest

5.1.1 Report A: “Sentenced for twenty-five years”.

1. My name is Ernest; I am originally from Ebenezer.
2. I am the younger child of two siblings, uhm, I’ve been in prison for almost nine years and I’ve been here for two cases.
3. I’ve been sentenced for twenty-five years, life in prison for murder and robbery.
4. I grew up in Ravensmead, my father was a teacher but he retired and worked as a commercial farmer in Ebenezer.
5. My mother was a retired nurse and is currently a housewife - where should I start?

Unsurprisingly, Ernest starts his narrative by introducing himself in terms that are quite similar to that of the research participants discussed in chapter four. From my observations and based on further interviews, I can state that Ernest is a coloured male in his twenties who obtained a high school education. He introduced himself to me by placing himself in the context of the wider society by saying that he is originally from Ebenezer. This means that he was born there and that he considers Ebenezer as his “community of origin” or “home community”.

Ebenezer has an interesting history in the context of the Cape Province and what was the Cape Colony. Situated close to the town of Vredendal, on the West Coast of today’s Western Cape, it was established in the 1890s by the [predominantly white] Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). The purpose of the mission called Ebenezer was to provide land and safety for a group of “coloured” Christian converts who were marginalised by colonial society, in that they were not allowed to own land, despite having become Christian. The relevant piece of colonial legislation, amongst others, was the Natives Land Act of 1913 which was meant “to make further provision as to the purchase and leasing of land by Natives and other Persons in several parts of the Union and for other purposes in connection with the ownership and occupation of land by Natives and other Persons” (Feinberg, 1993:68). In the case of Ebenezer and other mission stations, the DRC held ownership of the land in trust for the community of Christian converts. The name Ebenezer is drawn from the Old Testament and means “stones of help”. The mission community is a model that was followed in several towns in colonial South Africa, including Elim and Wellington in the then Cape Province. We can assume that Ernest’s parents come from a family that formed part of the close-knit community of believers at Ebenezer in which the church was the dominant social and community institution. Kinship between the members of these communities
was typically formalised not only through blood but also by their common religion and membership of a church and mission station. Later in the interview, Ernest talks about how his home community was in uproar and “shocked” about the crime he had committed in Ebenezer. He also mentions his sibling who, as we learn later, played an important role in his life story. As was the case with John and Clive, Ernest’s introduction also includes a reference to his crime and punishment [length of sentence].

At the time of the interview Ernest was twenty-eight years old. He entered prison at the young age of nineteen. I remember, thinking during the interview, that he had already spent a large part of the most productive years of his life behind bars. As I previously discussed in chapter 3, I was trained as a warden not to become emotionally attached to prisoners. As a result, I never entertained such thoughts of sympathy about offenders when I acted as a warden. Clearly my new role as a researcher reduced the distance between myself and the research participants. I realised that I was coming to see offenders from the perspective of a researcher and not of a correctional official.

Despite being born in Ebenezer, Ernest grew up in the middle class suburb of Ravensmead in the City of Cape Town. The suburb forms part of the Cape Flats discussed in the previous chapter. It is also regarded as one of the crime hotspots in the Western Cape (Statistics South Africa, 2016:26). As a middle class suburb in a large city it would have been very different from the rural Ebenezer in which his parents were raised. Ravensmead is a suburb known for the high prevalence of violence and drug abuse, especially amongst young coloured men. Ernest’s story then is a familiar one of intergenerational change brought about by migration from a rural town based on agricultural provisioning to a suburban setting where wage work is the main source of income. Designated as a coloured area, Ravensmead was constructed under apartheid and its residents have been described as socially dislocated (Cooper, 2009:2). Most coloured residents in these designated coloured neighbourhoods on the Cape Flats spoke Afrikaans, but our interviews were conducted in English. One of the features of colonialism and apartheid was the creation of small and isolated pockets of black, Indian and coloured middle class communities. These pockets included mission stations and designated neighbourhoods in coloured, black and Indian areas that were reserved for middle class residents, many of whom worked for the apartheid state in the educational, health, policing and religious sectors. The fact that Ernest’s father earned a living as a teacher, indicated that his father was most likely a respected figure. Under apartheid, teachers together with nurses, wardens and policemen were regarded as respectable and middle class occupations (Ndletyana, 2014:12). It is important to
note that middle class here meant that they did not own the means of production and also did not perform manual labour: Ndletyana (2014:2) states that “The middle-class derives livelihood from salary earned on the basis of specialised skills and expertise”. The class structure of South African society has of course changed since the advent of constitutional democracy, as a number of scholars have shown (Seeking and Nattrass; Southall, 2004; Seeking 2008; Krige 2012). Suffice to say, as Ndletyana (2014:12) has pointed out, working class children face greater impediments in escaping their social background than middle class kids. It is not surprising then that Ernest, who hails from a middle class family, was able to complete his high school – unlike John, whose family situation could be described as working class.

In interviewing Ernest, I learnt that his father, on retirement from teaching, moved back to Ebenezer and engaged in commercial farming. His mother worked as a nurse and we can assume that, despite the harshness of life under apartheid, there were two breadwinners in the house, both of whom held down middle class occupations, Ernest did not grow up in deprived circumstances as the way John did [participant one]. In the final line of the segment provided above, Ernest places his mother in the feminised role of a housewife, indicating that she had worked as a nurse before.

5.1.2 Report B: “Why did God take my sister away?”

6. Uhm, at primary school in 1994, I was in grade three and my sister passed away - her name was Veronica [not her real name, inserted by author] she was a very ‘down to earth’ person. She always took care of me and she was doing a degree in Theology. So, I only saw her over holidays.
7. When I heard about her death - she had committed suicide - I was very down because she was the one that gave me stuff. I was very down and it was a big shock.
8. At that time I questioned God: Why did He take my sister away?
9. I didn’t receive any answers. My parents told me that she was dead and I didn’t understand why.
10. For all these years up to seventeen years old, I was walking around with this question in my head: Why did God take my sister away?
11. In that way I can say that anger started to build up in me. I started to smoke dagga and experimented with sex and alcohol. My studies were badly affected through my bad behaviour.
12. So people compared my life with my sister’s life. Then they said things like: Why are you acting this way?
13. In my mind I was thinking that why are they comparing me with my sister?
14. I am me, you understand.
15. This of comparing me against my sister has made me angry and I went deeper into drugs.
In this segment, Ernest signals the cause of much of his misfortune and unhappiness. In his narrative, it started quite early in his life with the death of his older sister when he was eight or nine years old. His sister had committed suicide. Given the age gap between him and his sister, and given that his parents were both working, his older sister took care of him from an early age. His sister was an important authority figure in his life and acted as a parental figure. Later in the interview, Ernest mentions that he felt like he was neglected as a child and this was a consequence of his parents holding down middle class jobs and not being present as parental figures. The limited support from his parents exacerbated the loss, doubt, uncertainty and not being able to find closure to the death of his sister. The fact that she had taken her own life intensified his sense of being at a loss to explain this misfortune. He was unable to account for her death and by the time he had reached seventeen, this had morphed into anger and resentment.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, by his teenage years he was questioning God and he was in the process of renegotiating his relationship with his parents and his community of origin. Structurally, the death of his sister is a turning point in the narrative, a point at which a decisive change in the life of the narrator is narrated. After this turning point, he narrates his decline into the abuse of sex and alcohol and eventually drugs, in the process making a connection between his rebellious behaviour and his inability to deal with the death of his sister.

In this segment, he narrates aspects of his life through a series of rhetorical questions: why this, why that, why me? By using these questions to tell his narrative he effectively gives us a sense of his state of mind: he is confused, uncertain, at a loss, and defensive when questions about his behaviour lead to a comparison with his sister. The defensiveness turns into anger the older he gets. Clearly still hurting from the death of a parental figure, his recourse is to embrace anti-social behaviour that would have upset his parents. What will surely follow in his narrative is an account of the crimes that lead to his imprisonment.

5.1.3 Report C: “All of life’s anger was relieved”.

16. I went to college after standard eight and on my last day of college I was writing mathematics, after which I met up with a friend Clive, [Clive is the second participant in my study.] and my other co-accused Jerry, [not his real name, inserted by author] and we decided to go clubbing.
17. This was on a Wednesday evening and we wanted to celebrate my last day of writing my exams at a local college in Ebenezer. We had booze and we even smoked dagga and buttons [dagga mixed with heroin, inserted by author].
18. We decided to hi-jack someone [steal a motor vehicle, inserted by author], so we came at that house where we took a car of one of those ladies. We only came there to get the car. The plan was to get the car but we ended up killing them.

19. Now just to take you on the scene. That specific evening when we came to that house, the first accused [Jerry, inserted by author], he went to the car with this lady then Clive [second participants in my study, inserted by author] and I went into the room and the other lady was asking me: What do you want?

20. I told her I want nothing and she asked me: do you want money? So, I said: Yes!

21. We went into the room and she gave me a bag, she said that I must check in the bag there was money [in it, inserted by author].

22. Whilst I was putting my hand in the bag I saw a shadow behind me and this lady was pointing a gun at me.

23. We did not know that the gun was not loaded with bullets.

24. So, it all ended up when my co-accused [Jerry, inserted by author], came back to the room and when I saw this lady she was already stabbed.

25. I was shocked because this was not part of the plan!

26. So, we put them all in one room and we went out of the house.

27. Then at that specific moment I did know what to do. I saw blood. I was scared because I know the capabilities of my co-accused [Jerry, inserted by author].

28. He was 27 years of age and I was only 17 years old. He was a very aggressive person so I thought if I didn’t do what he said I would have been dead today. So, then he said we must kill these two women and he was doing nothing, he was only swearing at me.

29. I just took the knife and I went and stabbed one of the ladies and I went out and I took the car’s keys and I waited for them.

30. On that specific moment when I took that knife I just started stabbing them. All of life’s anger was relieved at that specific moment.

31. I have never been aggressive or harmed someone. I was like a quiet guy all the time. So that event changed my whole life and I ended up in prison.

As expected, this segment of his narrative delivers the story of the crime. In his narrative he talks about taking me back to the “scene”, as if he had replayed the event many times in his head. At this point in his life he is back in Ebenezer, the town of his birth. On the day of writing his final examination in high school, as if this was the final debt he had to pay to his parents and society before becoming his own person, he used drugs with older friends whom he knew were aggressive and a plan to commit robbery turned into the killing of two women. Yet he reflects on that night as an extraordinary event, as unusual, for he has never been aggressive before. He acted out of character that night, and is still paying the price for that. In this way he attempts to restore his moral self as a good person. As a person who only had a bad night. He describes himself as “a quiet guy” thus constructing the identity of a good moral person.

There is a tragic element in Ernest’s narrative. He comes from a relatively privileged background, was unable to work through the trauma of his sister’s suicide, and his anger drove him to anti-social behaviour that resulted in a night of murder and robbery. No doubt Ernest was familiar with the consequences of drug-taking and violence. Having grown up on the Cape
Flats, he would have seen the close-up view of the shocking statistics: SAPS statistics reveal that the Western Cape has the highest drug-related crimes reported to the South African Police (SAPS) in South Africa, and increased from 25, 3% in 2001/2 to 44, 8% in 2009/10" (SAPS Crime Statistics, 2009/10). Yet he came from a relatively privileged background and his criminal action is explained by him in his narrative in relation to personal trauma rather than having stemmed from socio-economic circumstances.

5.1.4 Report D: “My relationship with my father”

32. My relationship with my father and myself was insignificant as there was not a lot I can say about because we did not speak.
33. My father went into community development. He developed the community but he neglected his own family.
34. I can’t blame him because if I looked at the history of his father he didn’t know how to set an example because there were about sixteen children and he was the eldest.
35. He spent most of his time in developing the community but at the same time he neglected his own family…his own children.
36. I started… looking for a father figure in the community. I ended with the wrong friends.
37. So, as a teenager I was looking forward to nice times but although I had a father figure he didn’t set the example which I was expecting.

In this segment Ernest speaks about his father and his need for a father figure. It is most likely that he has narrated this before our interview. He does not have much to say but does suggest that his father was both absent and, as a result, negligent. The neglect does not stem from not being a provider, or from having abused his son, but from the fact that they did not speak much to each other. Also, his father is construed in the narrative as being active in the community, where he offers leadership, but being passive at home. In the community his father was regarded as a respected person. However, his father’s community work compromises his fatherly relationship with his son, Ernest. At the same time he is able to see that his father also perhaps struggled with the same issues when he was a child.

Ernest confirmed in the second interview that he misses his father. Evidently Ernest lost a parental figure after the death of his sister. The relationship with him and his peers filled the gap of the father-son relationship. Ernest prioritised the approval of his peers as he grew older through engaging in sexual acts and drug use. As such, he is not untypical. Ward (2007:22) writes that “Many delinquent acts are committed by children seeking peer approval, suggesting that peer groups play similar socialisation roles as families and schools. They too model and reward violent behaviour, enable children to develop self-confidence to commit violent acts and set standards that approve violence”. Arguably, after the death of his sister, his relationship with
his parents, especially his father, deteriorated. This most likely meant that peer groups played an increasingly important role in his socialisation.

5.1.5 Report E: “The real me!”

38. I always believe that you need to get the recognition for everything that you do and as a child I always wanted to get money for cleaning the car, for cleaning my room, for cleaning the garden.
39. Coming to prison - it was never a thing for me - I wanted to be seen as a gang [member, inserted by author], the desire was there ...
40. But when I saw the results of being a gang member I realised that this was not worth the price to pay.
41. I’ve shifted my mind into a different direction and I decided to seek God. God’s face.
42. I’ve prayed a lot to God and in the beginning of my incarceration I just wanted to survive, so I did everything in my power just to survive.
43. I kept on pushing…. pushing to please my mother, to please myself and to please the correctional officials.
44. So, that they can see me as a changed person. The real me!
45. I wanted to change my whole life when I came to prison because I’ve…I’ve heard a lot of negative stories about prison.
46. I’m currently doing just that and pushing myself even though I don’t see the results now, but I know one of these days I will be rewarded.
47. I gave my life to God.

In this section Ernest offers us an explanation of how he had a religious experience of conversion in prison. In the process he recalls his childhood days, especially how he craved monetary recognition for doing domestic chores. He connects the world outside of prison, especially the domestic chores, with the world inside the prison by referring to the material rewards one is entitled to as a gang member inside.

Ernest distinguishes himself from most of the other offenders. He implies that the son of a respectable teacher and community man is destined for better achievements in life. Prison was never one of the options. Given the social standing of his family outside prison, Ernest believes that he does not belong in prison. The denial of his prison sentence is part of his adoption to the prison context. He refuses the label of “criminal” through his conviction that prison is not for him.

Ernest recognises the desire to form part of the prison gang. He refers to his early days in prison when he was an awaiting trail prisoner. In his interview, I identify a different type of discourse a discourse based on values, respect and discipline. In the segment he conveys a sense of decency [ordentlikheid]. This moral narrative is based on Ernest’s interaction with his fellow offenders, wardens and myself as a researcher. Salo (2010: 99) describes morale in one
of her studies on the Cape Flats as the sense of decency [ordentlikheid] through the places occupied by the youth, by attending school and respecting older people. Ernest is a tutor in the prison school, sleeping in the bible study room and respecting wardens and myself. In the study conducted by Cooper and Foster (2008:3) on marginalised masculinities of twenty-five awaiting trail coloured boys in post-apartheid Cape Town, this discourse is labelled as traditional masculinity: Cooper and Foster (2008:13) define the term traditional masculinity as somewhat problematic, ambiguously omitting exactly whose traditions are alluded to. There are also elements of hegemonic masculinity in this discourse, related to success and affluence.

In this segment Ernest distances himself from prison gangs which are associated with violence, toughness and control. He also articulates elements of what Cooper and Foster (2008:13) call a “gentleman identity of a gentleman displays a good personality”. While gangsters conform to gang laws and codes of behaviour, not displaying spontaneity or individuality, gentlemen can be unique individuals with ‘personalities’. The individuality of the gentleman therefore acts as a conduit for producing a non-violent form of masculinity, within this traditional discourse (Cooper and Foster, 2008:13). Ernest’s positioning as a gentleman may place him outside the identity of the gangs but he is still searching for some belonging in the prison. There are a few options in prison when it comes to joining peers or groups. Apart from prison gangs, a prisoner can associate with groups of religious converts. Ernest is confronted with two options in an attempt to cope with imprisonment. One is to follow the hegemonic masculinity embedded in joining a prison gang. The second is to follow the ‘gentlemen identity’ and find his place in a group other than a gang.

At the end of this segment, Ernest declares that he is a convert – he gave his life to the Christian God. As such, Ernest’s narrative ends with a conversion. We know from the literature, and indeed popular culture, that conversions are an integral feature of prison life across the world. Several scholars have studied this phenomenon. Why do prisoners convert? What changes when prisoners convert? This is a critical question that needs to be asked in attempting to understand the final turn in the narrative of Ernest.

In a study conducted by Maruna and Wilson (2011:166), this question was discussed by analysing literature from the sciences of anthropology, psychology, sociology and criminology. In addition, the life stories of seventy-five individuals, prisoner “converts”, were collected, both in Texan and British prisons. All the participants in this study were male prisoners and each had converted to some form of Christianity. The authors defined conversion as referring to “a wide range of religious and non-religious activities from the routine joining of a church to the
emotionally charged experience of becoming a born again” (Maruna and Wilson, 2011:166). For them, conversion also implies reinterpreting one’s autobiography [narrative] or experiencing a change in subjectivity (Maruna and Wilson, 2011:166). In their study, conversion then becomes a way in which prisoners reinterpret their autobiographies that assist them in adjusting to prison life. They write: “In this situation [of imprisonment], the conversion narrative makes considerable sense”. Maruna and Wilson (2011:166) argue that “the conversion narrative can integrate disparate and shameful life events into a coherent, empowering whole new prisoners' sense of their own personal biography, and provide them with hope and vision for the future”.

The process of conversion and the framework of Christianity provide Ernest with a way to reinterpret his life history into a coherent narrative that can displace some of the shame associated with his criminal acts. It also offers him membership of a group in prison other than the gangs. With group membership also comes some form of protection which, as Evans and Wallace (2008) remind us, is much needed in a prison system that is known to be violent and cruel. Conversion narratives are one of the coping mechanisms that prison sociologists have documented. As the pioneer sociologist Goffman (1961:24) remarked, “The recruit comes into the establishment with a concept of himself made possible by certain stable social arrangements in his home world. Upon entrance, he is immediately stripped of the support provided. In the accurate language of some of our oldest institutions, he begins a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations and profanations of self. His self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified”. Conversion narratives help alleviate this sense of mortification.

In the previous chapter I discussed the narrative segments of Clive. These also contained a conversion narrative. This is not surprising because Clive and Ernest are serving time in prison for the same crime. Both Ernst and Clive expressed pride in being different from their peers in prison, evaluating themselves as less criminal or offensive in comparison to the other offenders. Both entered the prison with a minimal criminal identification, having grown up in families where both parents were present and where poverty was kept at bay. Both excelled at school and have a sense of themselves as being unique or somewhat eccentric.

5.1.6 Report F: “I wanted to be a leader”.

48. There was a difference between the outside world and the prison, a huge difference because … just to make an example of one …
49. When there was conflict between two people in the outside world you tend to run away from the conflict situation.
We liked to run away outside, but here you need to face it. I also believe that the people outside don’t really know what loneliness is in the true sense of the word.

There are people outside who don’t have their parents anymore, but those who have their parents, they don’t really know the...the real meaning of loneliness.

I believe that prison can teach you so many things that the outside world could not teach you.

Outside you don’t have a lot of time because there is a lot of stuff keeping you busy on a daily basis.

At first when I came to prison, I had a very low self-esteem and I couldn’t talk much, I didn’t talk much because I believed that whatever you said, people used that information against you.

So, in order to protect myself I had kept my pose.

I’ve learned so much and the first thing I learned was that I needed to accept who I am, the second thing was that one needs to accept other people ...

I wanted to be a leader, I always wanted to teach people and I am living that dream today inside the prison. I don’t feel bad about the decisions that I’ve made in prison about taking the opportunities, taking these activities as learning...as a learning curve.

I’ll try my best because I believe that anything is possible in life, if you did not try you would never know.

In this segment, Ernest is echoing the metaphors of two worlds - one inside prison and the other outside prison - as discussed in the previous chapter. He explains how prison confinement limits opportunities for engaging with others. Ernest highlights parenthood as an important aspect of life. The family provides a protective environment for Ernest. In spite of the painful experience of imprisonment [for example loneliness], Ernest is recasting his experience as a learning experience. Increasingly sounding like a motivational speaker, his narrative offers a view of prison as something positive that, for example, enhanced his self-esteem. He admits to having suffered from low self-esteem when he arrived at the prison.

As is often the case with people who have found an elevated social status in society, and who then want to express this newfound status through charity work or “giving back”, Ernest in this narrative segment expresses the desire of giving something back. His way to fulfil this desire is to become a “leader”. This desire to give back follows the conversion narrative which elevated his position in prison. He begins to view himself as an instrument of God working selflessly for the benefit of others less fortunate [lower in social status]. This position of power and influence that Ernest now assumes in the narrative contrasts sharply with the social position of the powerless offender. This status of a “leader” provides Ernest with a sense that he is above the daily regime of the prison. Again, Ernest is distinguishing himself from the other offenders. He finds some synergy between the rules of his past world [for example his father was a leader outside] and the world of prison [he too is a leader now, inside]. Ernest also reinforces his uniqueness and individuality when claiming this position as a leader. Ernest fully accepts his
identity as a convert. In the conclusion of this segment Ernest demonstrates that he has reduced his anxiety about the future. He conveys his commitment to change in the conversion narrative. Whereas earlier segments expressed his confusion and questioning of God, his confusion has been replaced by an integrated narrative that stresses confidence, selflessness and leadership.

5.1.7 Conclusion

In summary: the first part of this segment is about the series of events that unfolds in his life story. Important in this introduction are the distinctions between Ernest and the social world. A short snapshot of the family structure provides background to the family status. The life sentence represents the crisis in the life story. This can be interpreted as the beginning of the plot when the narrator accepts his prison sentence. Orientation in this structure is about the setting, place and situation. The childhood stage is one of anger and confusion due to the suicide of his older sister. Ernest relates the anger that resulted from his confusion and the inability to make sense of her death. This is the middle of the narrative: he finds himself in a state of confusion. At the end of the plot he presents the transformed person and the confusion is cleared. He concludes by sharing his future plans as a successful person.

5.2 Participant four: Mpu

5.2.1 Report A: “At home”.

1. Yeah at home we are six with my mother we are six children at home, you see, and there are twins and also, a brother and sister, you see, and there’s also a younger sister she came after me, she’s a girl, you see….and in Gugulethu I’ve stayed at various places not only in section 3 cause part of my life is in section 3.

2. I’ve also stayed in section 2 which is NY 44 and section 3-142 section 2 again in NY 52 that...this is where I stayed.

3. I grew up in an informal settlement, you see, I really loved my father when I was growing up, I loved…I really loved him, you see, there were times when on Fridays…he worked on different places.

4. He was good with his hands, he worked with gardening, he worked with plants, you see, nurseries, different nurseries, and he even brings us some fruits when he comes from work.

5. My relationship was good when I was growing up with my father, that relationship between father and son, when I was still young.

5. I remember those days when I was still young becoming a teenager, you see, when I was still young.
7. I could not sleep at home without seeing my father, you see.

In this segment, Mpu introduces his family and place of residence. Mpu mentions in the follow up interview that he is serving fifteen years for high jacking, robbery and housebreaking. Mpu committed offences which are economical [house robbery, car theft] in nature. He is a young, black Xhosa male who grew up with his family in an informal settlement called Gugulethu in Cape Town. Growing up, the family consisted of seven members with Mpu being one of the six children. He narrates his family context without mentioning his father. He indicates that he lived at various locations in the township as he grew up, in all likelihood the result of precarious living arrangements, characteristic of informal settlements. Gugulethu is one of the biggest townships in Cape Town and the first one that was established by the apartheid government for black people. The township is located on the Cape Flats and is situated in the Western Cape, 18km south-east of Cape Town. Gugulethu is yet another example of a socially engineered “apartheid city” (Seekings, 1996:104). A central feature of such an “apartheid city” was that black people lived on the periphery of cities with limited economic opportunities. The Apartheid rulers did not want black people in the urban areas, but had to admit to the presence of black people as their labour was required (Eppel, 2007:30). Mpu explains his living arrangements in the next paragraph.

Mpu’s living arrangements and that of his family is a feature of Cape Town and many other cities in South Africa. Informal settlements existed under apartheid and have mushroomed in post-apartheid South Africa with the abolishment of influx control measures. Urbanisation is of course also a global phenomenon. Cape Town has a long history of a housing shortage. Qotole (2001:108) claims that the housing backlog that was created under the Union government [up to 1948] was, in fact, contrary to the laws surrounding housing delivery at the time. Qotole (2001:108) explains that the local City Council was actually legally “bound to provide adequate alternative housing before relocating squatters and, because African housing had to be financed by the cash-starved Native Revenue Account, it was usually unable to do so”. In addition to this, Saunders (1984) wrote that white tax payers were often unwilling to have their tax money spent on housing for black people. Pinnock (1998:1) furthermore notes that the housing shortage was also driven by the belief that Africans did not belong in the cities and should not be given the chance to “consolidate” their lives in the city (see also Krige 2012:34).

In a study conducted by the Centre for Social Research in (2010) the apartheid city is described as distinctive in several important aspects. Firstly, it was characterised by the separation of
people based on race and ethnicity (Eppel, 2007:30). Secondly, influx control limited the growth of the urban African population and also determined “where workers could live if they were allowed into the cities” (Seekings, 1996:120). Thirdly, the purpose of segregation was to ensure a clear racial hierarchy in which poor whites would be uplifted economically and socially (often by limiting the opportunities of black people). Fourthly, African people were not permitted to own their houses in townships (Seekings, 1996:121). All of these combined to create a huge demand for housing and the growth in informal settlements. Africans were not allowed to own land in urban areas, except for a few freehold suburbs, further compounding the housing problem. This was the broader context that shaped the housing options for Mpu’s family. The demand for houses increased as urbanisation increased: Eppel (2007: 30) describe that “Many families shared a single bed as the homes were too small to fit in anything else. Townships like Gugulethu and Nyanga came under more pressure as more people came to Cape Town in search of work”. In a study conducted in Johannesburg, Krige (2012:34) highlighted that “the structural shortages of housing in Black Johannesburg had led to cultural, social and economic valuing of houses. Moreover, houses, whether owned or rented, became material and symbolic sites for the expression of social class and membership to the city”. How did the structural shortages of houses influence Mpu’s story?

Significant is that Mpu mentions that two of his siblings are twins. In many African societies the birth of twins is considered an extraordinary event and birthing celebrations take on greater meanings. Twins are often considered to possess unique powers. At the same time families can be struck with misfortune if twins are mistreated. Given his position as older sibling, Mpu was expected to be the protector of the twins. In the following segment Mpu also mentions his father, after the initial silence. Like all my other research participants, Mpu uses his narrative to reflect on his relationship with his father during his childhood years. He depicts this as a caring relationship. Mpu’s father worked as a gardener suggesting that Mpu and his family lived precariously and belonged to the unskilled lower class. As such, his father was unlikely to have been able to afford to buy a house in the formal township area. The implication of his father’s economic status is that the family income was low and that they had limited access to basic resources like food and clothes. Mpu paints his father as the provider of these resources to all six children and his mother. Mpu narrates the development of a strong bond between Mpu and his father during his childhood years.

5.2.2 Report C: “He was a part of me”.
It is now when I am becoming more alert noticing what is happening around me, you see.

My father was an alcoholic, so he was drinking a lot, whenever he gets paid he will not come at home.

So that moments of me, you see, waiting for him on a Fridays at some points they will come to nothing, ten at night my father is not still at home, we are still waiting for him, for his arrival.

Everyone that working with him is at their houses, you see, they are even asleep, so we have to cry all night, because I cannot sleep without my father, you see, I loved him very much, you see.

He was a part of me, so my mother will sent me out with my brother, my older brother, to go and seek for him where he is, so search for my father, search for him and search for him at some point I will find him lying on a couch.

Drunk with his pockets outside, you understand, and for me it's totally a sign that he was eating here, you see.

Then we will pick him up here, drunk and out as he is and will sent him home, once at home he won’t sleep.

If I should've left him there, you see, I wish I... if I didn’t cry to seek for him, you understand, I almost developed that hatred, you see.

Because of that disappointment of him not coming, you see, yeah.

In this segment of his narrative, Mpu’s life story is moving from childhood to adolescence. This is the stage when Mpu becomes conscious about events in his life. His earlier adoration for his father is replaced by disappointment as he comes to realise his father’s alcohol addiction. He internalises the problem and blames the deteriorating condition of his family on his father. He compared his father's actions to other working men in the community and could not understand why his father was behaving differently. Friday nights are depicted in his narrative as a significant time of the week because this is the time when working men return home. This is when men bring their wages home yet Mpu’s father turned Friday nights into moments of discomfort and embarrassment by not coming home to his family with wages. Mpu’s changing views of his father become a prominent element of his narrative at this point.

In his narrative, Mpu is explicit and articulates what makes him happy and unhappy about his father’s behaviour. Mpu narrates how he developed feelings of anger and hatred towards his father because of his father’s alcohol abuse. During his childhood years, he had a caring relationship with his father yet in his adolescent years he developed a hatred for his father because his father neglected to fulfil the traditional masculinity role of the provider in the family. In line with what scholars have argued, father figures play an important role in early childhood development “most children desire for their father to spend time with them” (Cooper and Foster, 2008:13). Mpu missed the connection with his father in his adolescent years.
5.2.3 Report D: “People started to fight”.

17. After ’94 yes, you understand, but before then it was peaceful community.
18. Now that government houses people started to fight against each other.
19. They start to want to know now who is going first in those houses, you see, whose family is going to go first.
20. It…it only went as far as who knows who, you see who knows who, and there were times that the guys they will come into our house and then they ask money for beans.
21. I thought beans was food, you see, but I always ask myself why you keep on asking every Friday money for beans man, but we never see the beans cooked, you see, but I only realize later on that they speaking about money for bullets, you see.
22. When they referred to guns they will refer to sticks but they use the Xhosa word, you see....the...the...intonga it mean the sticks, you see, we are going to buy sticks, money for sticks, you understand.
23. So people keep on give money, man every Friday, Saturday when the fight started to escalate people’s houses were burnt down, you see, so for me as a child, you see.
24. It was very hurtful because now we had to separate with our friends, you see, they had to be moved now by their families, some of them they were starting very far using the transport, no the transport cannot longer come in to fetch them so they have to be taken they have to move to some other place and also the....the community peacefulness was gone.
25. Yeah….there is one incident I can think of, one day we were at school, you see, with my younger sister, then all of a sudden, you see, we were called by our teachers, hey you need to come out because there are people of other side they are coming in so our…our school was like a…a point whereby the children of this two groups are meeting.
26. We were two groups at school because I’m staying in section two now I cannot associated with a child of section four although we are staying in the same class because children they can quick… they learn quickly because they see the type of atmosphere that they are in so we adopted also that lifestyle, you see.
27. You see, because those are the children who are there and their fathers are involved in those fights, you see, but remember we were called us to come out, to rushed out, so I couldn’t rushed to my sister because she was still younger than I, I looked for her then I get her, when we coming out we can see the people of section four they were coming for us.
28. Now the whole community was outside because it was like an open field, so you can see the communities they are out, and even our communities they are out, you see, it’s more like there’s was a fight now these guys are protecting us, the guys in our communities, you see, and we were running.
29. He was running to ..... road which is very busy, you see, with cars, so they didn’t count what might happened, they just wanted to cross that road.

In this segment, Mpu describes another kind of awakening he experienced. This one was more political, referring to the world outside of his family and household. He described the era before 1994 as peaceful, but this was most probably because he was too young to have realised the kind of violence and disorder that occurred in townships under apartheid. Mpu’s awakening to greater violence after the first democratic elections in South Africa appears to him through struggles over housing. I have already sketched some of the historical reasons why housing was an important social and political issue under apartheid for Africans. It evidently impacted
on Mpu’s life and consciousness when other more privileged children were playing sports and learning in school.

A study conducted by Eppel (2007) sheds some light on what Mpu and his family may have experienced. Eppel describes the conflict as taking place between two groups of people in Cape Town, ‘borners’ and ‘migrants’. Borners claim legitimacy to houses as residents of Cape Town as a result of having lived for a longer period of permanent settlement in urban areas than the other group, the migrants. The borners demonstrated a greater sense of entitlement or right to housing than the migrant group. Earlier, Wilson and Mafeje (1963) in research conducted in Langa Township in the 1950s, also observed how the categories of ‘town’ and ‘rural’ became identity markers of authenticity. Eppel (2007:12) argues that the categories were resuscitated by people after 1994 as a means to understand why they had not benefited from housing delivery. Consequently, the study argues, the categories are then mobilised as instrumental tools to give some claimants to housing supposedly greater legitimacy than others. Mpu and his family were caught up in the midst of this housing conflict which shaped not only housing but also other social institutions, such as schools. The social and economic marginalisation experienced by Mpu and countless other boys on the Cape Flats certainly fuelled their own often violent response to marginalisation: Cooper and Foster (2008:5) argue that violence and crime are therefore often components of certain forms of masculinity where marginalisation is present and youngsters do not have alternative means to gain respect.

5.2.4 Report E: “I’m not afraid”.

30. Okay, when I arrived here in prison, you see, we….I think we were ….. it was me and my accused, at that time I was already two years and six months in prison…at that time, you see.

31. I was sentenced, I was arrested in 2003 and I was sentenced in 2005, you see, now it’s 2013 now, and when we arrived here, I was just taken straight to the section, you see, you know the first thing that you tend to look for in prison, you tend to look for familiar faces, you see.

32. Since this is prison maybe there’s other inmates will come in and go that you don’t remember, others that can recognise you.

33. So I was looking for those familiar faces but I could not see familiar faces but there were faces that when they saw me they knew me, then we were put in this room, room three here in prison.

34. I was in prison practising that you have to stand next to the door, to be called by the “glas en draad”, you see, in prison terms, you see, they will speak with the guys in “sebella” since I was…

35. I was a 28-gangster, so the guys were in prison who are a 28 gangster, they will speak, they will call the guys in “pumalanga” that is what they calling the “grysgat” and they will
tell that guys they must come and speak with us meaning they will get the instruction to come and speak with us.

36. You see, so because I was coming from Pollsmoor where gangs were prominent.
37. I’m not afraid of anything, you understand, you see, I’m not afraid of being controlled, you see.
38. When I’m challenged with that problem of the door closed behind me, the correctional officials left.
39. Then what they did after that they’ve gave you a bed this is where you going to sleep, you see, they emptied beds for me.

Skipping over the crime he committed, Mpu now relates his life inside of prison after having discussed his childhood outside of prison. From his narrative, it is evident that Mpu is well versed in prison routines and prison culture, including the gangs. In Mpu’s description of the initiation process in a different prison, a dichotomy is established between the known and the unknown. The unknown represents the uncertainty of whether he will be accepted by his fellow gang members. This is the reason why he searches for familiar faces on arrival. Mpu knows the rituals that will follow because of his previous prison experiences. He relates how he joined the 28s gang. He knew what to do. Part of prison culture is that cells are allocated according to gang affiliation. He was placed in a cell controlled by the 28s gang. As he entered the cell, the correctional officials left the cell and effectively handed him over to the cell authorities, the prison gang. In his narrative, Mpu indicates his knowledge of the heavily male prison language or “sebella” to introduce the ritual. He constructs a discourse of masculinity of toughness, fearlessness and control. As Cooper and Foster (2008:4) have shown, such displays of hegemonic masculinity resonate with narratives of initiations into gangsterism and into prison culture where there are competing gangs. They also note that the initiation narratives are characterised by violence, risk-taking, the overcoming of adverse conditions and of course the subjugating of others (Cooper and Foster, 2008:8). Having undergone the initiation and having re-joined the gang in this cell, Mpu is offered a bed. A scarce commodity in prison, the bed signals his membership and new status in prison, partly a result of coming from Pollsmoor, one of South Africa’s most dangerous prisons.

5.2.5 Report F: “There are two lines”.

40. Yeah, when you….how do you move between those ranks it…it depends now how are you going to acquire…
41. Which one does you going to acquire, you see, like for instance when you become a gang in prison.
42. They mentioned there are two lines, you see, there’s a white line and there’s a red line, the white line.
43. I know it is in Xhosa now, you see, but it symbolises... the white line symbolises you sleeping with another man and then the red line it only means that they beating somebody so that the blood can come out. That is the red line, you see.
44. So that is the line, the two lines. They not become a gangster now to say...you first go to deep level whereby you can be taught the basic of .... you see.
45. Gangs operates then after that you will stay for a certain amount of days until they see that you know what they are teaching you. Meaning that....uhm...in Xhosa it's "Msumvuku"...uhm it's more like a re....recitation for they teaching you so that you can know it by mouth....

In this segment Mpu further elaborates on the prison gang of which he was a member. When he was talking about ranks he was referring to the hierarchy in the prison gangs. Several scholars (Gear, 2001; Goyer, 2001; Haysom, 1981, and Steinberg, 2004) agree that gang structure and its imaginary uniforms is a key part of South African prison history. Haysom (1981:6) writes that gangs, or as they refer to themselves, men of the number, are organised in a hierarchically ordered quasi-military structure. Members are voluntarily in uniform, though not in reality. Each gang draws on its own oral tradition and bears its distinctive colourful uniforms, tattoos, flags and salutes. An example of the uniform is the star used by the 28s gang which is the equivalent of a 'pip' in conventional army terms. Gang insignia is crucial in identifying new offenders who arrive from other prisons. When a 28s gang member is transferred to another prison, he will identify himself by revealing his uniform, describing in detail what he is wearing, flashes, buttons or braid. In my reflection as a warden, I realised that gang insignia is reinforced by correctional institutions by providing full recognition to gangs.

Correctional officials group offenders according to gang insignias. Officials allocate cells or specific sections in prison to specific gangs. These are mostly the high-risk rooms or sections in prison. Gangs are constantly in competition over control of non-gangster offenders or 'franse'. When Mpu speaks about the red and white lines, he is referring to gang insignia. Mpu also narrates the ways of moving through prison ranks. He mentions the process of changing from a non-gang to a prison gangster.

5.2.6 Report I: “You are an Ndoda”.

46. Yes...okay the Xhosa tradition does not have anything against tattooing, you see?
47. Xhosa tradition says that a man must go to the bush, so when a man goes to the bush he's a man, you see?
48. When he comes to prison then he says that he is man again, so now it is discouraging that one of a man coming into prison, that is a Xhosa tradition, do you understand?
Tattooing, you see, they only see you know as a….as a….I don't know because there is a lot of tattoos everywhere but those days they see you as a horror as a….as a….as a very violent person having a tattoo looking at the community.

Yeah it's that road of ritual, is the road that takes you to that initiation, you understand, and takes you whether to the white line or to the red line, you understand?

You are an “Ndoda”? Here in prison, you see, and then each and every person that you going to meet, they're going to tell you their story, you see?

Mpu is using prison language, “sebella”, to confirm his status as a gang member within the prison. Steinberg (2004:25) explains that Ndoda means man in Zulu, and there can be little doubt that the recruitment is an initiation into manhood. Mpu, echoing John [my first participant], and draws a strong correlation between Xhosa initiation rituals and the initiation process into gangs that we find in prisons. Mpu is Xhosa and went through the cultural initiation process. John, however, self-identifies as coloured and did not experience the cultural initiation ritual. As mentioned in chapter 4, the relationship between inside prison and outside prison is a complex one. It is a central feature of narratives produced by prisoners. This relationship is also changing. Steinberg (2004:18) argued that since 1970 there has been a new configuration in this relationship. Whereas before, the outside and inside worlds were relatively distinct and separate, now the prison culture and prison gangs are no longer contained within the correctional services system – it is spilling over into the street corners of the Cape Flats. Steinberg (2004:18) notes that the street gangs took the world of the prison, its metaphors, and its logic and imprinted it on to the ghettos. Street gangs adopted prison rituals and number rituals. Notwithstanding the fact that prison gangs have their origins in the 19th century, they draw on present prison culture as well.

5.2.7 Report H: “Who will hire me?”

The….the things that is worries me a lot is that I no longer know the outside world as I used to, you see?

Then I don't have any working experience, you see, you know this is the thing where am I going to find work, employment, you see?

How do I apply for work, you see?

Who will hire me, you see?

In prison I have a warm bath in the morning, a warm food, you see, and a warm bed but those are the things that I'm going to face outside, you see, yeah?

Surprisingly, in this segment, I note a change of tone in Mpu’s narrative. The once hegemonic masculine tone changes to a concerned tone. The concern is about his future. Every line in this segment ends with a rhetorical “you see” question as if he is unsure about himself and wants some affirmation from me. He imagines himself in the outside world and the labour
market as part of a large group of unemployed jobseekers without any work experience. For Mpu, and many other working class men with a criminal record, the situation looks bleak. Again, the statistics confirm Mpu’s wariness of life outside of prison. Kagee & Cooper (2005:3) write soberingly that “Sixty-one percent of the young people under the age of thirty [on the Cape Flats, inserted by author] is unemployed, there are approximately eighty to hundred thousand gangsters and 130 gangs that contribute to 40% of the murders, 42% of the robberies and 70% of the crime in general in the Western Cape”. Several other studies have investigated the high crime level in the Western Cape.

One of the studies done by Haefele (2011:70) employs the qualitative case study approach in analysing South African Police Services (SAPS) crime statistics for the period 1st April to 30 March 2009/10. An explorative case study was done in Mitchells Plain during 2008 where eight males and five females were interviewed. Participants had been involved in the substance abuse field in Mitchells Plain for over ten years. The participants consist of a social worker, community members, religious leaders and gangsters living in the area. Eight interviews and one focus group discussion took place over four days towards the end of February 2008. Haefele (2011:72) further asks the question why there are areas in the Western Cape with higher drug related crime figures than in other areas reported on. In order to find answers to these questions, the Social Disorganisation Theory as Ward’s Theory of Risk and protective factors, was applied. The theory identifies the characteristics of communities with high crime rates and draws on social control theory to explain why characteristics contribute to crime. Haefele (2011:76) states crime is more likely in communities that are economically deprived, large in size, high in multi-unit housing like apartments, with high rates of residential mobility (people moving into and out of the communities) and high rates of family disruption. About 48% of households in Mitchells Plain live below the poverty line. Mitchells Plain is an economically deprived community which is large in size and the majority of residents live in flats. Important to note from the Haefele (2011:76) study is that it includes all drug related crimes. These crimes included both the use, possession of and dealing in drugs. The South Africa Police Statistics (2009-2011) reported that Mitchells Plain Police Station on the Cape Flats has the highest drug related crime figures out of all the police stations in South Africa (Haefele, 2011:72).

I return to the first question in the Haefele (2011:76) study. Why are drug related crime figures so high in the Western Cape? In the previous discussion Haefele (2011:74) discusses possible explanations for the high drug-related figures such as inward migration, unemployment, population composition and the introduction of methamphetamine also known as “Tik” to the
Western Cape. “Tik”, the house produced drug, is readily available to drug users in the province. All the suburbs historically populated by coloureds, who make up about half of Cape Town’s population, are also gripped by the epidemic of “Tik” addition that has exploded in the past five years (Kapp, 2008:194). The Medical Research Council (MRC) estimates that there could be as many as 200 000 “Tik” users in and around Cape Town (Kapp, 2008:193). In a Lancet article, Clair Kapp (2008:194) describes that “Tik” abuse originated from the gang culture on the Cape Flats. Whereas cocaine abuse were reported among the affluent white community, the same is not true for Tik.

Kapp (2008:193) explains that “The provinces of Gauteng, which include Johannesburg and Pretoria, and KwaZulu – Natal, home to Durban, have large black African majorities but do not have the same gang culture and reported negligible Tik abuse”. Among young black Africans, cannabis and alcohol are the main substances of abuse (Kapp, 2008:193). What is evident in this discussion is the difference in gang cultures in the Western Cape and other provinces. The Western Cape gang culture of drug abuse seems to be an important catalyst for “Tik” abuse amongst the young coloured youth. The likelihood of a young person to engage in drug related crimes is higher in the Western Cape than in provinces like Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Three of my participants live in the Western Cape. This may provide some explanation why three of my study participants’ life stories were about drug abuse and violence. Migration contributes to the population growth of the area.

A study conducted by Abrams and Hyun (2009:26) builds on the theories of youth identity transition among incarcerated youth. Ethnographic data were collected at three correctional institutions in the Midwest region of the United States. The study population was one-hundred-and-ninety two incarcerated youth offenders. The three settings consisted of a large correctional institution, one small and one non-profit maximum correctional institution. A total of 29 incarcerated youth participated in a longitudinal interview series across the three facilities. A purposive sampling method was applied with specific criteria. Data collection was done through in-depth interviews over a period of thirty-two months. Cross-case displays were constructed to locate and process the whole sample. Abrams and Hyun (2009:36) adopt an individual case approach in relation to (a) incoming professed criminality, (b) style of adaption to the correctional world (c) strategies to negotiate treatment and (d) identity transition styles.

These are key determinants which were demonstrated in the life stories of participants. One of the study findings is that youths entered the correctional centre with a strong professed criminal
identity. John, Clive, Ernest and Mpu introduced themselves in the study interviews with strong criminal identities.

5.2.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the introduction of Mpu’s segments differs from the previous study participants John, Clive and Ernest. Mpu describes his poor family living in Nyanga, a typical South African township. Clark (2102:80) describes Nyanga as a poverty stricken deprived working class area, predominantly occupied by blacks. Other participants introduced themselves through their crimes committed and length of sentence. Mpu uses his family’s social status [deprived] in the beginning of the plot. The introduction demonstrates the brutal effects which the “apartheid city model” had on black families in South Africa. The “apartheid city model” which I have alluded to in my previous discussion, is a structural driver which marginalised black communities under apartheid. Mpu’s father could not fulfil his role as the breadwinner due to his exclusion from the economy. Anthony Altbeker (2008) argues that the majority of South Africa’s population has been excluded from participating in the economy as a result of constraints on their families’ and their own education and acquisition of skills; where they were born and now live, and limits to their social networks that undermined their chances of finding work. Mpu’s story narrates strong elements of social exclusion in this segment. He narrates a strong bond between his father and himself during his childhood years. However, the relationship between father and son deteriorated over time. Mpu inherited social exclusion from his father’s status under apartheid. His story suggests that economic exclusion is intergenerational which may be transferred from father to son.

The orientation in this plot is the community violence, situation and place. The situation is how his family was caught up in the midst of the housing conflict. Mpu demonstrates characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. He takes a brave stand against the conditions of prison and confesses that he is not afraid. In the middle of the plot he finds himself in the state of responding to confrontation. Participants John, Clive, Ernst and Mpu referred to the confrontation as the process of becoming gang members. The process is interwoven with the transition from boyhood to manhood through hegemonic masculinity in the context of the prison. Hegemonic masculinity may be thought of as “a range of popular ideologies of what constitutes ideal or actual characteristics of being a man” (Collier, 1998:21). The concept hegemony is borrowed from a Marxist paradigm and the class analysis of Antonio Gramsci. Cooper (2009:3) explains that “Hegemony implies a dominant power or class within a set of competing powers;
social ascendancy and is achieved in a paly of social forces. Hegemony is not totally based on brute force; it is maintained ideologically by the influence of those who govern”. Scholars such as Gear (2001), Goyer (2001), Haysom (1981) and Steinberg (2004) agree that gangs govern the prisons with all its rituals of turning boys into men, as previously discussed in this chapter.

Gang rituals are one way of emerging as a man in the context of the prison. Participants in this study joined gangs for different reasons, however it is ultimately done to be recognised as being part of a group. Jensen (2008:168) argues that gangsters discursively turned the stereotypes upside down, and used the suffering, marginalisation and extensive systems of incarceration as the media through which social maturity was achieved. They emerged as respected men through being “a bad motherfucker”. In Mpu’s narrative, he explains how he overcomes institutional violence in order to become an “Ndota” in relation to the weaker offenders in prison. Johnny Steinberg (2004:16) argues that gang practice fosters real masculine virtues such as bravery, stoicism and solidarity. Similarly, Elaine Salo described how ex-offenders were persons who demanded considerable respect in their townships. Salo (2004:34) stated that contention into gangsterism is both a rite of passage into manhood and “signifies these men’s embodiment of the contradictory meanings of race, class and gender”. These are precepts of adult agency which offenders need to survive the conditions in prison. Jensen (2001:168) asserts that Salo’s and Steinberg’s work becomes important for the discussion on masculinity. Initially they both argued convincingly that the practice of oppression can be re-inscribed as a means of achieving the masculinity which is otherwise denied to young men on the Cape Flats. Secondly the main character in the book “The Number”, Magadien Wentzel, converted to Christianity after failing to get recognition through other social projects. My study confirms Jensen’s (2008:168) assertion that imprisonment provides young men with an opportunity to renegotiate their masculinity which may have been denied them in the social world outside prison.

Finally, in Mpu’s story, the rhetorical use of words such as “you see”, can be interpreted as a state of insecurity and self-doubt. At the end of the plot, Mpu confirms his uncertainty about his employment opportunities after his life in prison. One can interpret Mpu’s state of insecurity and self-doubt as a warning sign of him being amenable to criminal activities. Altbeker’s work (2008) asserts that psychosocial consequences, namely discontent, frustration and anger, as well as insecurity and self-doubt among young men living with exclusion, are the main driver of physical violence. Mpu is struck by the reality of the world outside prison with limited or no opportunities for people with criminal records. He may be aware that criminal status is a
disqualification for employment in both government and the private sector. This disqualification is applicable to all my study participants. How will study participants cope with these structural conditions or will they revert to their criminal life before imprisonment? This question can only be answered after the study participants are released from prison and can serve as a follow up research study.
Chapter 6: Theme discussions and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss themes that emerged from the data analysis in chapter five. Firstly, I address the theme of “life inside and outside prison” and analyse how youth offenders construct these two as separate, yet connected worlds, in their narrated life stories. As such, my discussion is about the “world” before imprisonment and the “world” within a correctional centre. An important part of this distinction made by research participants is the way in which their status changed as a result of the transition from “outside” to “inside” and their experiences of the prison as a liminal situation. Secondly, I discuss the theme of “professed identity” in relation to how research participants narrate changes in values that occur in their own lives as they are in transit between these two “worlds”. Thirdly, I highlight the importance of the theme of fatherhood in their narratives and discuss how this contributes to offenders’ acceptance or rejection of the prison authority. Fourthly, I discuss what youth offenders’ life stories tell us about the social construction of masculinity. In each of the following sections I articulate my findings and conclusions. Further I relate to experiences of despair by participants and my own life story. With the reflection of my own life story, this chapter contributes to the broader debate on youth offenders in South African prisons and the prison culture (see Gear, 2010:25, Goyer, 2001:195, Niehaus, 2002:77; Steinberg, 2004:24). I conclude by offering some practical recommendations, such as how storytelling may contribute to the rehabilitation process for youth offenders in a correctional setting.

6.2 Life outside and inside prison

Every day, hundreds of youth offenders enter Correctional Youth facilities in South Africa and bring with them experiences and values that are drawn from their families, neighbourhoods and communities, in other words, the “outside world”. As I have shown, the distinction between the “outside world” and the “inside world” is an important feature of the narrated life histories of my research participants. In their narratives, life “outside” and life “inside” prison feature as two separate, yet connected worlds for incarcerated offenders. On one level, the “outside world” consists of the social relations and social structures into which the youth offenders were socialised. Cut off from the outside world, the “inside world” centres on the correctional centre.
context and centrally, the relationship between wardens and offenders. Wardens represent the state and offenders represent convicted citizens.

Goffman (1961:268) described prisons as total institutions in the sense that they are places of residence and work where a large number of individuals are cut off from the wider society for a period of time. The rules for these total institutions are set by the state but, as many scholars have shown, prison communities often develop their own rules and culture (Niehaus, 2002:90). As much research has shown, prison gangs are a prominent and long-standing feature of South African prisons (Luyt & Moshoeu, 2013:224). We know that prison gangs are hierarchically organised and maintain their own internal discipline which can translate into acts of violence.

The theme of “outside and inside world” was prominent in the narratives of all my research participants. They all made reference to how they experience two different “worlds”. This division has also been encountered in the narratives of those incarcerated in other studies. Authors like Phelan, Davison & Yu (1998), Ungar & Teram (2000) and Weis & Fine (2000) focus on this division created by those incarcerated and developed the concept of “multiple worlds”, which I also employ in this dissertation. Phelan et al. (1998:10) define a “world” as cultural knowledge and behaviour within a specific setting or boundaries like families, schools or groups. In an earlier study, Phelan had defined such worlds as containing “values and beliefs, expectations, actions, and emotional responses familiar to the insider” (Phelan et al., 1998:7). Participants in this research also reflected on the values of respect and beliefs and how prison or “life inside” can change their lives.

In the context of my study I will use this concept “outside world” to describe the cultural knowledge of the participants before imprisonment. This includes participants’ knowledge about family lives. Further the “inside world” describes the correctional settings and how these feature in the narratives of the incarcerated. Phelan et al. (1998:9) suggests that the incarcerated are constantly traversing the boundaries and borders of the multiple worlds that are set up through the process of incarceration and the material boundaries of correctional facilities. How did my research participants construct multiple worlds in their narrated life stories?

Participants typically started their narrated life stories by mentioning their place of birth or origin. From this starting point, they constructed a discourse with a spatial dimension in coping with their experience of prison confinement. In his study, Vorster (2012:33) notes that coloured
youths in South Africa were over-represented in respect of total convictions for all crimes as well as for the seven most serious crimes, ranging from murder through rape to motor vehicle theft. The majority came from disadvantaged neighbourhoods with poor quality schools, a high rate of domestic, neighbour, and school violence and limited opportunities for success in the legitimate economy. Similarly, most of the participants in this research are from disadvantaged, poor and marginalised communities. Kynoch (1999:62) states that “virtually every study dealing with gangs and township life has emphasised poverty and anomie as the central factor resulting in a high incidence of violent crime in black areas”. Both participants, John and Mpu, come from backgrounds characterised by poverty and anomie.

During the incarceration period, youth offenders are faced with several changes. The one change is coming to terms with a change of social and legal status from citizen to offender. As a result, incarceration can be a catalyst for identity reconstruction, as “prisoners face a crisis of self-narrative, due to the social and psychological trauma of separation from others and the prison environment” (Maruna, Wilson and Curran, 2006:168). One study remarks: “Inmates subjected themselves to informal social control by adhering to the inmate code, which is further reinforced by gang activities” (Peacock & Theron, 2007:62). Similarly, Goffman (1961:43) refers to the experience of identity change as one of “stripping or mortification” in that many offenders were gradually robbed of the tools of their own agency. Such changes, one study noted, “could be compared with the routine of stripping off civilian clothes as an attempt to strip of personal identity” (Peacock & Theron, 2007:20). The process of stripping is part of and symbolises the development of “multiple worlds” in the lives of the incarcerated. Phelan et al. (1988:9) conceptualise the transition across these borders or worlds along two axes: the congruence or dissonance between the norms and values of the youths’ multiple worlds and their experiences of the world inside. My research has shown that participants associate the stripping of personhood with a discourse of survival.

Throughout their narratives, participants discuss their change in social and legal status to offender in relation to their crime and length of sentence. All four participants use their criminal history as part of their introductory remarks. Participants talked of having committed crimes like rape and murder. At times, participants boasted about their criminal history and relied on their criminal record to demonstrate personal achievements that feature in the construction of life inside and life outside.
The tone in the introductory paragraphs, which typically is about the participants’ criminal history, often sounds boastful. I noticed a change of tone in the paragraphs that follow directly after the introduction. For example, in the section following the introduction, both John and Mpu tried to link their poor living conditions with their criminal behaviour. Seemingly not coincidental, both John and Mpu were raised in poor households headed by a single mother. As previously discussed, Kynoch (1999:62) reminded us that poverty is a key contributor to violence in poor communities. As they reveal in their narratives, John and Mpu were exposed to a high prevalence of violence during their childhood.

In contrast, Clive and Ernest do not link their criminal behaviour to their childhood experiences of poverty and social dislocation. Both grew up in households where both parents were working, they were high achievers in school and had a strong Christian background. The childhood experiences of Clive and Ernest clearly differ from that of Mpu and John. When Clive and Ernest arrived at the prison for the first time, they were placed in solitary confinement. Clive and Ernest requested solitary confinement from the wardens. This is an indication that their adjustment to life inside was somewhat difficult. Clive and Ernest saw themselves as less criminal or violent in comparison with other offenders. Their appraisal of themselves as “better and different” may have served to reflect their personal self-image, yet at the same time it contributed to the difficult process of adapting to the correctional centre. In their narrative, it became clear that both Clive and Ernest experienced difficulty in accepting their change in social and legal status and adapting to life inside the prison.

There are clearly many ways in which youth manage “border crossings” such as the transition between life outside and life inside prison. In his narrative, Ernest articulated a feeling of remorse which may have led to a process of acceptance of his prison sentence and his change of social and legal status. What is interesting is the way that he moves, in his narrative, between the boundaries of the multiple worlds. Ernest finds himself in conflict between the Christian values he learnt at home [respect, honesty, peace] and those of his peers [disrespect, dishonesty, violence]. At some point in his narrated life story, he adopts the values of his peers and this brings to the fore a conflict. From here on Ernest’s friendship with his peers becomes a dominant theme in his narrative. When Ernest talks about the murder, he claims to be acting “out of character”. I interpret this “out of character” statement as a recognition that his behaviour was in conflict with the values he had learnt at home: respecting the lives of other people and that murder is a sin. How does Ernest cope with his changed social status?
Moreover, the relatively high social status occupied by Ernest in the “outside world” was not transferred to prison upon his incarceration. Ernest had to negotiate a new social status when he was incarcerated. Inside he worked towards re-establishing an elevated position by positioning himself as a candidate for the role of an assistant teacher in the correctional facility. In this way, he transformed his identity as an offender to match the social status occupied by his father in the “outside world”. Ironically, he found a way to return to the values of his parents in the context of “life inside”.

Whereas Ernest found a way to return to the values of his parents inside the correctional facility, John positioned himself in a submissive role in prison by recognising the prison as a dominant social institution. For John, life “inside” became the accepted context. For example, in his narrated life story, John placed himself in a submissive role in relation to characters like his friends and mother. Likewise, in prison, John joined a prison gang which means he subjected himself to the authority of the gang. Inside prison, gangs became a substitute for his family outside. Unsurprisingly, John experienced a strong feeling of identification with prison gangs. In a similar study conducted by Abrams and Hyun (2009:38), it was found that crime becomes a major cornerstone of personal accomplishments and becomes an acceptable part of an offender’s identity. I found the same with John: he accepted his background of being poor, living in a poor household headed by a single mother and living in the marginalised coloured community of Knysna. John’s acceptance of his prison sentence confirms his submissiveness towards authority and allows him to adapt to prison life with less difficulty in comparison with Clive and Ernest.

In his narrated life story, “inside” Clive is confronted by a different set of values which he did not experience in the “outside world”. Clive grew up in a closely knitted family in which he experienced a high degree of belonging. It was a typical family in that the father was respected for fulfilling his role as the provider of material goods. His father’s weakness of not connecting on an emotional level with the children was brushed away because he was fulfilling the role of the provider. Clive had an open communication line with his mother. He could discuss anything with her, including his intimate relationships with girls. He finds himself in the “inside” world living in voluntary solitary confinement for the first part of his prison sentence. Clive did not want any direct contact with the other offenders during his solitary confinement period. He could not communicate openly with anyone because at this stage he had no relationship with
the wardens and fellow offenders and his social standing “outside” did not prepare him for life “inside”. In a sense, he was observing the “inside world” from a safe place, namely solitary confinement. This may have influenced his response towards the “inside world”. How did he respond?

Clive distanced himself from the “inside world” and from his fellow offenders. He considered himself unique in relation to the broader prison population. This perspective was constructed upon the view that he hails from a “fortunate family”, at least in relation to his fellow incarcerated and that he was not destined to be in prison. He had been taught rules of respect, searching and open communication. His parents were respected authoritative figures in his life. Thus, he expressed values like respect for other people in his narrative. After his incarceration, he finds himself in a place where respect for others is installed through fear and violence.

As previously discussed by Sloth-Nielsen (1998:47), some children and juveniles admit that they belong to a gang but most of them are extremely fearful of gangs and of disclosing their gang membership. The Youth Correctional Centre environment becomes a hostile situation for some individual offenders. Peacock et al. (2007:73) write that as a result of loss of attachment to other role models, the gang often provides the incarcerated adolescent with the corporate identity and behaviour directives that assist him in his efforts to cope with the fears of a fragmented identity in a hostile and deprived prison environment. In his narrated life story, Clive constructs a discourse of being an outsider [offender] in relation to the gangs that rule inside of the correctional facility. Clive’s difficult adaption to the “inside world” may have been prolonged because of his sense of himself as an “outsider”. For example, he eventually accepted prison as a learning opportunity and opened himself up to learning. However, Clive experienced a challenge in finding an attachment to the “inside world” and its rules during the period of his prison sentence.

The previous discussion constructs possible value frameworks from both the “outside and inside worlds”. When participants are isolated from their outside world, some adopt a new value framework which may not necessarily be the same as their family values. Other participants, for example Ernest, adopt different strategies in order to return to their family values. The data suggest that the task of integrating values from the “outside” to the “inside” world remains a significant challenge. The experiences of the multiple world become important for participants
in order to cling to the positive anchors of their family values and reject the negative thrust of the correctional setting.

This study demonstrated that all participants changed their status from youth offenders to converted Christian youth offenders. Participants were referred to as “brothers”, which is equivalent to converts in the context of prison. Maruna et al. (2006:162) explain that converts claim to experience a newly-found or greatly revitalised faith accompanied by substantial changes in attitudes, thoughts, and self-understanding. The imprisonment brought to the fore fundamental questions about the individuals’ place in life. Such as questions of belonging and identity. Maruna et al. (2006:166) argue that to convert means to reinterpret one’s autobiography or to experience a change in subjectivity. Data implicate that the participants come from a Christian background. Maruna et al. (2006: 176) argue that the framework of Christianity provides the master story that allows individuals to “read” the world again. Participants identify with the change to Christianity which is in relation to their Christian backgrounds in the outside world.

What becomes important for the process of youth rehabilitation is to understand the multiple worlds from the perspective of the converted Christian youth offender. One way to access this perspective is by paying close attention to their narratives. I argue that the structure of narratives demonstrates the potential adoption skills of young offenders in the correctional setting. I further argue that the interaction between the values from the “outside and inside” worlds may contribute to the rejection of the negative trust of the correctional setting.

6.3 Professed Identities

All of us meet people in different social roles on a daily basis, for example a priest and a gardener. These social roles determine which identity we choose to project when engaging with others. When I was interviewing participants, the relationship between researcher and offender was already established. I am the researcher from the “outside world” and the participants are offenders from the “inside world”. Throughout the narrated life history of the offenders, they map how their professed identities changed in relation to the values of the two worlds. This is important because, as Langellier (2001:1) argues, when we tell stories about our lives, we perform our preferred identities. My discussion here focuses on the “professed identities” described in the narratives of the research participants and how these professed identities
change during the lifespan of the narrative. What determines the change in identity in the participants’ narratives? The answer to this question is important to understand from a social perspective. As such, identity responses are useful in understanding participants’ preferences and behaviour in the social context.

What becomes important for my discussion is to define the two types of criminal identities found in the literature. A similar study conducted by Abrams & Hyun (2009) in the United States comparing youth in three juvenile facilities, defines the two extreme criminal identities as high and minimal criminal identities. Abrams and Hyun (2009:37) argue that high criminality in our logic means that criminal activities were a norm woven throughout multiple worlds and that criminality comprised a significant piece of their prior professed criminal identity. Further, Abrams and Hyun (2009:37) define minimal criminality as the distancing of the self from criminal identities and association. Important to note is that both high and minimal criminality form part of the multiple worlds of participants.

I find strong harmony between the backgrounds of John and Mpu. The discussion on background includes stories of both John and Mpu. Further I find elements of harmony between Clive and Ernst and group them in another discussion. Following Abrams and Hyun (2009), I argue that John and Mpu construct a high criminal identity. The construction of the high criminal identity in their narrative is followed by a storyline where criminal identities are contextualised in relation to the “outside world” of the participants. For example, John’s family history revolves around a struggling and abused single mother that comes to reflect his own involvement in committing sexual crimes [rape]. Similarly, Mpu narrates his exposure to community violence in Nyanga during his childhood. John and Mpu are constructing shared features in their narratives. Both John and Mpu are from a poor single mother household, where failure at school and criminal activities provide them with a personal sense of accomplishment. The high criminal identity is further supported by my discussion on violence and drugs in chapter three of this dissertation. The high criminal identity status may have eased John and Mpu’s adaptation to conditions in the correctional facility.

Data indicate that both Clive and Ernst entered the prison with minimal criminal identification as defined by Abrams & Hyun (2009:38). Instead they projected shared features. The three shared features were the sense of being unique, growing up in two working parents’ households and being achievers at school. Clive and Ernest had passed their school grades with flying
colours and received recognition for academic performance. How did the attribute of being the best amongst peers at school influence Clive and Ernest’s adaptation to the correctional environment?

Both Clive and Ernst were first time offenders at the time of the interviews. They were not part of gang activities in the “outside world” like John and Mpu. They view themselves as different from their fellow offenders and believe that on some level they were not meant to be in prison or to have committed crimes. Their rational appraisal of themselves as “better” and “different” may have served to elevate the images they held of themselves. Their belief in their own superiority in relation to criminals inside is echoed by references in their narratives to their lives outside. Believing they are better than other offenders is not new because they transfer this belief from their lives outside prison. In the narratives, it is evident that this belief has resulted in them feeling or becoming alienated from other incarcerated youth offenders who come from working class and poor backgrounds. Being alienated from other offenders and embracing a low criminal identity did not make the transition process into life inside easier for the above-mentioned two offenders. In fact, the process of transitioning into the correctional environment is described in their narratives as leaving them feeling conflicted, and filled with resentment and denial.

By re-reading their narratives it becomes clear to me that they could not find synergy between the values of the “outside world” and the prison environment – or “life inside” and “life outside” prison. Prison was too contrasting; and their middle class upbringing made it difficult for them to adapt to life inside. While the initial transition period was particularly difficult for them, they managed over time, as is revealed in their narratives, to construct a new identity that was more accepting to life inside, however, only in the first year of their prison sentences. In the narrative, a new identity emerged when they both accepted their prison life. All four participants projected an identity of change.

I argue that a high criminal identity, such as in the case of John and Mpu, makes the transition from the outside world into the inside world somewhat easier. A smooth transition to the inside world indicates that John and Mpu find some enjoyment in working within the hierarchical structures like prison and gangs. One needs to be reminded that both John and Mpu are not first offenders. They are entering the correctional world with a criminal history of belonging to prison gangs. For these two, the correctional world is not unfamiliar terrain and elements of the
hierarchical structures mirror their past in the outside world. John and Mpu are allowed to be submissive by living in the hierarchical structure and this is a strong point of congruency between the outside and inside worlds.

Likewise, the experiences of Ernest and Clive differ from John and Mpu. I argue that participants who come into prison with a medium criminal identity, experience difficulty in adjusting to the correctional world as in the case of Clive and Ernest. My argument here draws on Abrams and Hyun (2009:40) in finding that participants who enter the prison with either a medium or a low profile criminal record, experience difficulty in adjusting to a correctional facility in a qualitative way. Clive and Ernest refuse to accept their offender status and believe that they do not belong in prison. I revert to my introductory question which is ‘what determines the identity change in the participants’ narratives?’ Data reveal that identity change is strongly influenced by the family values of the participants.

### 6.4 Fathers as providers and protectors

Fatherhood is a theme which emerges strongly in all four narratives. In these narratives, images of fathers and fatherhood are strongly articulated or denied. The narratives reveal vivid memories of fathers that emerge at different life stages or moments of the narrators and in different plots of their story lines. Creswell (2007:283) states that such life stages are stages in an individual’s life or key events that become the focus of the biography. What role does fatherhood play in the narrated life stories of participants?

In literature, the concept of fatherhood is often used interchangeably, however, it is important to distinguish between the biological father and someone [caretaker] taking the social role of the father. The data analysis of fatherhood focuses on the connection between participants and fathers. Morrell (2005:86) states that a biological connection with the child is not necessary for successful fathering. More important are love, reliability, availability, dependability and support. For the purposes of my study, both the biological father and [caretaker] are included in discussions. How participants experience a father is a key data element which guides the discussion on fatherhood.

Firstly, I discuss participants’ experiences of fatherhood at early childhood stage. Secondly, I discuss developments in the social relationship between father and son as they were narrated.
to me. Thirdly, I write about how participants substitute their fathers as role models with their peers who lead prison gangs. In this I take my lead from Sparkes (2012:175) who argued that we do not ever see our fathers in totality, only in bits and pieces that float by in the currents that toss and turn our memories of the flash over time. The researcher attempts to connect participants’ small pieces of experiences of fatherhood on a thematic level.

John introduces his father as the second character in his narrative. This comes as a surprise because his father was absent from his childhood life. I would have expected him to first introduce his mother. According to the high tone of John’s voice, I observed that introducing his father before his mother was a priority. John’s father is introduced in his narrative as being absent during his life. Clearly John experienced a childhood without a father. It is clear that John’s father was physically absent during his childhood. John attempts to explain his high criminality identity in relation to having an absent father. The sequence in which he introduces his father becomes of importance. John introduces his father in the narrative after he constructs a criminal identity.

At first he expresses hatred towards his father but this then evolves into forgiveness. I argue that this is a turning point in the narrative that assists him in coping with incarceration. On one level, it confirms what I have argued earlier that such changes assist him in accepting the prison as the authoritative structure. His narrative also suggests that the absence of the father during childhood created a gap in John’s life - a gap which was filled by his friends and later by the prison as a social institution.

Like most South Africans, in his narrative, Mpu attempts to place his father in the social role of the provider and protector of his household. This is complicated by his father’s alcohol abuse. Yet, Mpu learns about the role of a father as a provider and a protector during the course of his childhood. Mpu substitutes for his father by helping his younger sibling to obtain food. Despite the alcohol abuse, he develops a strong bond with his father. He expresses awareness of the father’s low occupied role by working as a gardener. Nevertheless, he recognises his father as the authoritative figure in the household although he introduces his father late in the narrative. The sequence of introducing characters in the story becomes important for our discussion. Mpu introduces his father after his mother and siblings in the household. The late introduction of his father may indicate that Mpu’s father was not a priority, however, Mpu confirms a strong bond
with his father during his childhood years. Yet the father-son relationship, and the role of his father as provider, was in question.

Clive narrated his father during childhood quite differently in comparison with John and Mpu. In his narrative, he highlights the value of meaningful communication between his father and himself. He respects his father as the authoritative figure in his childhood and the context of the household, but does narrate how he challenged decisions taken by his father. Following the normative ideal in much of South African society, Clive places his father in the position of both the protector and the provider of the household. Clive narrates a specific event [death of his younger brother] after which he repositions his father in a weak role that suggests a compromised authority. During childhood, Clive had a close relationship with his father however this relationship deteriorates as his narrative unfolds over time. Throughout the narrative, Clive places his father in the background and places his mother in the foreground. It seems that the father’s authority was substituted by that of his mother. What will be the resolution or outcome of this small piece?

Another participant, Ernest, narrated similar experiences of fatherhood. Ernst’s narrative is filled with images of a father that serves his community selflessly, often at the expense of his own children. His father occupied a relatively high social status as a community leader. In his narrative, Ernest suggests that he experienced the status of his father as placing high expectations on him as a child. His sister served as an authoritative figure that substituted his parents while they were at work. When his sister died, the space in his life was filled with other family members; but not by his parents. The death of his sister thus impacted on his relationship with authority figures and his relationship with his father.

The data indicate that all fathers are different in their own right. The common denominator for all participants was that they are faced with the transition from boy to manhood with or without a father. The concept of fathers as breadwinners is alive in the discourse of the narratives. Morrell (2005:86) describes the father and son relationship from a provider perspective. Participants evaluate the success of fatherhood according to the ability of the father to provide the material needs of the household. Fathers are separated by different material resources [employment status, race and class] which have a direct influence on their ability to provide the basic needs of the household. The evaluation of successful fatherhood was done irrespective of background, race or educational level. Fathers were positioned in a less dominant role in
relation to mothers. However, in two of the participants’ life stories, fathers cohabitated with the family. Groombridge (2005) suggests that as men, being the breadwinner involves more than just a job, in that it actually serves to legitimate their maleness. The data suggest that fatherhood should move beyond the status of provider to an active fatherhood approach.

6.5 Being a real man

The discussion focuses on how participants were socialised in accepting the image of a “real man” as well as what “real man” means in the context of the prison and how participants construct a masculine discourse. Further I explore gender from the perspective of the participants. Over the past decades, scholars like Connell (1987) and Messerschmidt (1993) have produced a body of literature on gender socialisation, development of gender identity in childhood and adolescence and the intersection of masculinities with race-based and class-based identities. The underlying argument in the literature is that “the contextual understanding of masculinity espoused by a masculinity theorist implies that there is no universal, essential masculine identity” (Abrams and Anderson-Nathe; Aguilar; 2008:24).

In a study conducted by Connell (2000), he argues that gender relations are socially structured or patterned within social formation. This structuring firstly occurs along axes of power within societies. The most obvious of these is the historically patriarchal nature of male dominance and female subordination within modern social formations. Whitehead (2005:412) defines patriarchy as the social relations of men as a gender category over women and as a gender category in society. In South Africa axes of power within societies are historically embedded in race, class and economical classification. Men in South Africa adopt a range of gendered responses to their social environment. Abrams et al. (2008:24) state that masculinity as a personal practice can be understood only within the historical context of societal institutions, such as the state, school, the workplace, and the family. Kynoch (1999:59) argues that a masculine identity is expressed through violent behaviour and predicated on the domination of girls and women. In the next section, I use examples from John and Mpu’s life stories to illustrate Garde’s (2003:7) four features of traditional masculinity namely power, ambivalence to femininity, dominance, and avoidance of emotion.

Firstly, the narrative of John demonstrates how he views men’s power in relation to women. John directs us through his life story to his childhood. He associates his experience of viewing
adults having sexual intercourse with “wrong things” which can be seen as equivalent to him committing a crime. He uses the phrase “wrong things” repeatedly to refer to seeing people having sex and committing crimes during his adolescent years. In his narrative, he makes a clear connection between these two acts. The connection could have been that the sexual acts that were observed by John were committed by close relatives. Further, he connects “wrong things” with the crimes he committed with his friends. The social relationship between men and women demonstrate male dominance over women. John’s exposure to male dominance over women in the narrative emerges as the key theme of my discussion. His life story is marked with footprints of male dominance over women.

In the next section, I discuss the participants’ relationships with women and their ambivalence to femininity. In his narrative, John suggests that his romantic relationships with women did not last very long because of his violent behaviour towards women. John’s feelings of ambivalence towards femininity are evident in his narrative when he talks about his romantic relationships with women. This ambivalence is expressed in his narrative through narrating the prominence of women abused in his household since his early childhood. Throughout his narrative, it emerges that violence towards women became a norm and that it reflects a “cycle” which never ended. In his narrative, John connects his socialisation to a particular view of women as linked to his father’s absence. His father’s absence left his mother in a vulnerable position that other men were able to exploit. Violence was a part of this process of exploitation, and he was socialised into accepting the abuse of women. How did John cope with the absence of women and the presence of gangs in the prison?

As we know from previously discussed literature, prisons are environments where gangs as dominant masculinity structures, are highly prevalent (Peacock and Theron, 2007:21). John was used to expressing his male dominance over women and in the absence of women he may have exercised dominance over weaker male offenders. A study conducted by Gear (2007) finds that in the absence of women in prison, the gang culture turns males into women. Gear (2017:216) argues that the prison demolished masculinity and imposed womanhood on vulnerable offenders. In the narrative John is silent about his sexual activities in prison. This is understandable because sex in prison is a criminal offence. John presents his coping strategy on how to survive in prison as part of his life story. Gang members have power or control over non-gang members. He interprets maleness by demonstrating dominance over a subordinate. Kynoch (1999:58) explains that a masculine identity can be expressed through dominate
behaviour of girls and women. Dominance refers to male power embodied in physical strength and violence. John's masculine characteristics of power and control direct my discussion to studies on masculinity in prisons.

Masculinity studies in prisons were mainly conducted among men in the United States. Connell (1995:76) suggests the notions of rugged individualism, stoicism and competitiveness are embodied in “hegemonic masculinity” which is the dominant form of masculinity against which others can be measured. Connell (1995:77) defines hegemonic masculinity as the configuration of gender practices which embodies the current accepted answer and problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Abrams et al. (2008:25) state that through discursive practices and other institutionalised mechanisms, hegemonic masculinity encourages competition and dominance and supports the subordination of women, gay men, and other lesser forms of masculinity.

A further addition to this body of literature is the work of Goodey (2000:473) who introduces the notion of “social biography”. He argues that men's life experiences contribute to their ability to perform hegemonic masculinity. The concept of social biography illustrates the impact of a lifetime of experiences which may include aggressive role modelling by adult men during childhood, or socio-economic constraints on the ability of men to uphold the expected role of the provider masculine figure (Abrams et al., 2008:25). Abrams et al. (2008:25) emphasise that the metaphor of a biography is instructive: men's gendered masculine behaviour results from a lifetime of experiences and can only be understood in the context of those experiences. Participants' life experiences become the key to understanding their life stories.

In all the narratives, male dominance over women is evident when narrators connect their life story events with their own understanding of masculinity. Butler (1990:80) argues that one of the key factors of masculinity is to achieve something, a set of acts that she calls “performative acts”. Butler (1996:372) wrote that identity categories [race, class, gender] are sites of necessary trouble because they are out of our control to fully signify; what is excluded always returns to disrupt this meaning. Toch (1998: 88) confirms that in sites largely dominated by males such as prison, the desire to be seen as real men can manifest in an oppressive, violent, and hyper-masculine culture. All four participants were trying to reclaim control over their lives after entering the correctional facility. One of the ways was to become part of the prison gangs and some form of solidarity of the gang and not of the individual. Kynoch (1999:58) argues that
group solidarity was forged to meet the needs and correspond with the world-views of gang members struggling to survive in hostile surroundings. However, participants had to earn their solidarity through gang activities. All participants used their criminal identity to introduce themselves. The data indicate that criminal identity forms part of the performance narrative. All narratives present ‘performative acts’ both inside prison and outside prison. Langellier (1999:127) describes performance as the term used to describe a certain type of particularly involved and dramatised oral narrative. Further, Langellier (1999:127) emphasises the importance of how performance contributes to the evaluative function of the personal narrative. The response to the ‘so what or how’ performance is interesting. The criminal identities projected by participants were revealed within the discourse of language, identity [race, class and gender] and life experiences.

Here too, the overall function of the performative acts in narratives was to normalise violence. Violence becomes a necessity in perilous or hostile social environments. Performative acts serve to reinforce dominant or hegemonic constructions of masculinities. John’s narrative displays excessive violence. As noted by Hall (2002:37), male cultural production exalts these practices by giving men the impression that they have a legitimate right to call upon violence when it is deemed essential to the maintenance of the traditional order. The violent behaviour of men [participants] are frequently part of their performance act in the narratives. I argue that participants use performative acts to give expression to their own agency. This finding confirms the work done by Butler (1995:137) where she argues that we cannot stand outside the discourse that constitutes us, but we can derive agency from within the discourse. Participants are reclaiming control over their past, present and future in their respective narratives.

However, through certain turning points, they had to evaluate the codes and move beyond performative acts towards a more balanced view of their own masculinity. In the case of John, he forgives his father and talks about him as a good father. Ernest reclaims his agency by conforming to the same social role [teacher] as his father. This is an indication that their views on masculinity change over the lifespan of their respective life stories.

6.6 Violent crime and drugs

Violence emerges as one of the strong themes in the narrated life stories of the participants I interviewed in the study. When I talk about how participants navigate terrains of violence, I
define violence to include poverty, loneliness, gangsterism, fights, drugs and discrimination. Goodey (2000:457) argues that social biography assists us in understanding how meanings are variously shaped and reacted to or acted upon through diverse processes of social interaction. The youth offenders that I interviewed talked about how they assaulted, raped and murdered. Violence is ingrained in the participants’ narrated life stories. A study finding by Davies and MacPherson (2011:8) confirms that violence has become part of the social fabric of South African youth. This discussion concerns itself at its core with a very basic, yet critical question: Why are the youth in South Africa so violent?

At first it is important to settle on an acceptable definition of violence. Van der Merwe and Dawes (2007:33) note that definitions of violence in research literature are inconsistent and varied. The World Health Organisation’s (WHO) definition of violence is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (Krug et al., 2002:5). Another definition recognised in the literature is “Any behaviour by an individual that intentionally threatens, attempts to inflict, or does cause physical, sexual or psychological harm to others or to themselves” (Stanko, Beirne, and Zuffuto, 2002:1083). Both the afore-mentioned definitions are adopted in this study. These two definitions agreed on the core element of violence which has become established through interactions in which at least one party experiences a reduction in his or her being. The definition recognises the social structure from the individual level [person] to the group level [community]. In the definition, physical force or power is the catalyst. In the WHO definition, the result of violence is clearly defined in the context of social relationships.

This study employs both definitions which are interchangeable in the discussions.

There seems to be consensus among scholars Holborn and Eddy (2011:3) that “the reasons why South African youth are so violent are multiple and interconnected”. A single factor explanation is not sufficient. There is consistent evidence that a socio-economic disadvantage is associated with both criminal activities in general and violent crime in particular (Swanson, Holzer, Ganju, and Jono, 1990; CSVR, 2007, Van der Merwe and Dawes, 2007). However, the majority of people living in South Africa are poor, lack employment opportunities and were marginalised by apartheid. Holborn et al. 2001 note that South Africa is classified as a middle-income country according to the United Nations (2010) yet poverty rates are exceptionally high. Proudlock et al. 2008 use the General Household Survey (GHS) 2006 to estimate that about 68
per cent of South African households receive an income of less than R1200 per month. The level of income confirms that South African households are generally poor. What is the link between crime, inequality and poverty in South Africa?

According to Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla and Ratele (2014:101), poverty and inequality are crucial social dynamics that have contributed to South Africa’s burden of violent injury. They are inseparably related to other key drivers such as the dominant patriarchal construction of masculinity, and the intergenerational cycle of violence, alcohol and drug misuse. As such, the themes of patriarchal constructions of masculinity, intergenerational violence, and alcohol and drug abuse are strongly demonstrated in the participants’ narratives. Perhaps unsurprisingly, participants in this study demonstrate strong elements of hyper masculinity as they recounted their respective life stories. Hyper masculinity resonates with their narratives of initiation into gangsterism, their references to violence and toughness and the need to be in control. Their narrated story lines are characterised by performative acts of violence, risk taking and the need to overcome adverse conditions such as poverty while also harming other people. In some cases, the participants had injured or murdered girlfriends or relatives with whom they had shared living spaces. Gender features prominently in the narratives of the participants when they narrate the violent crimes they committed. Firstly, the victims of the crimes are predominantly females. For example, in the case of Clive and Ernest, they killed two white females and John is part of partner intimate violence. What role did masculinity play in the participants’ criminal behaviour?

Masculinity from the perspective of a criminologist is framed by acts of crime. Mcfarlane (2013:329) notes that often such acts are perpetrated against women but they are also committed by men against men with the similarity of outcome that is demonstrative of physical strength and control. Hall (2002:37) added to this notion by stating that male culture production exalts these practices by giving men the impression that they have a legitimate right to call upon violence when it is deemed essential to the maintenance of the traditional order. The traditional order refers to patriarchy. Whitehead (2005:451) describes patriarchal as a notion of social relations which may be understood as the power of men, as a gender category over women, and as a gender category within society. John demonstrates patriarchal dominance over his female partners.
The participants, as young boys, experienced gender inequalities in their communities. John demonstrates acts of intimate partner violence against women in his narrative. WHO defines intimate partner violence as behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, and psychological abuse and controlling behaviour. Wood and Jewkes (2001:17) describe how control of women is a key aspect of ‘successful’ masculinity among many young men, primarily defined in terms of their ability to have the right partner, to have a greater number of partners and to control their girlfriends. Masculinity was constructed and evaluated in ongoing acts of competition in relation to male peers, with sexual conquest being regarded as a sign of status, whether achieved by wooing, begging, trickery, or, ultimately, the use of violence.

The anthropologist Bourgois (1996:412), argues that among the men he studied in El Barrio, New York, ideals of masculinity were recrafted to emphasise control over women, substance use, and participation in crime in the face of poverty and little or no prospect of employment, which restrict the alternative paths through which youth may demonstrate ‘success’. In this model, many men have been socialised to believe that violence is an integral part of being men. Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985:598) argue that male dominance is a dynamic system constantly reproduced and reconstituted through gender relations under changing conditions, including resistance by subordinate groups. They further suggest that boys are socialised in society to be in control of their female counterparts in all terrains of life.

The author Burton (2007:4), from the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, reports that a culture of violence continues to be firmly embedded in South Africa’s democratic society. Pelser (2008:8) notes that for a significant proportion of young South Africans, crime and violence has been normalised and has become ‘culturally acceptable’, mainly through consistent experience and exposure in the key institutions of their socialisation – their homes, their schools and their immediate environments. Participants narrated acts of violence in their respective homes, school and communities. This is evident in the narrative of Mpu, where he experiences intra-community violence as a way of solving the housing shortage in the community. Ward (2007:27) notes that children who are raised in poor families and in neighbourhoods where the majority of families are poor, are more likely to engage in violence. Mpu indicates that violence is part of his daily activities.
Elsewhere, historian Kynoch (2008:629) argued that brutalising the mining environment, combined with the racial ordinance that criminalised Africans and Coloureds and exposed vast numbers of men to prison and prison gangs, produced a culture of urban violence unique to colonial Africa. Kynoch (2008:644) indicates that South Africa’s mining industry served as an incubator for violence and we need to consider the ways in which African migration influences patterns of crime and conflict in the urban areas. Migration patterns are having an influence on the demographics of prison populations; demographics which are divided along racial lines. Given this history, it is perhaps not surprising that Africans and Coloureds are over-represented in the prison population. Leggett (2004:22) indicates that coloured people represent only 9% of the national population, but they make up 18% of the national prison population. The legacy of apartheid is still reflected in our prison population. Participants in this study are part of the marginalised groups that existed under apartheid. Kynoch (2008:443) explains that the mining industry on the Witwatersrand, which employed hundreds of thousands of black men in the first decades of the twentieth century, provided the foundation for a contagion of violence that spilled over into the neighbouring townships. This discussion indicates a strong relationship of how men in South Africa were regulated in a working environment where violence was normalised. The next paragraph will discuss the state’s violent response towards civil society.

Dinan et al. (2004:730) argue that violence is part of the state’s response to civil society; individuals learned that violence is an approach to conflict resolution and the acquisition of power. As Strydom and Schutte (2005:120) said, the freedom struggle that lasted for 25 years in South Africa created a climate in which a whole generation grew up with violence as part of their daily lives. Data from this study support the argument that participants were exposed to violence in their local communities. In the literature, it remains undisputed that the structural violence institutionalised during the reign of the white minority government has left lasting scars on South African society, for example the normative of rape. Vogel (1991:205) states that violence such as rape has certainly become so prevalent and widely tolerated in the South African context that it has come to be perceived almost as normal and to a large extent accepted, rather than challenged.

The family and socialisation are important factors which can influence violent behaviour. Holborn et al. (2011:11) state that many young people who are exposed to sexual violence, perpetrate violence against partners and peers and at the same time are particularly vulnerable to being the victims of crime. Mpu and John explain in their narrative, the violence in their family
and in their neighbourhood. Jewkes, Lewin, and Penn-Kekana (2002:1605) have shown that childhood experiences of violence in the home serve to reinforce the normative nature of violence and thus increase the likelihood of women’s acceptance of abuse. Holborn et al. (2011:12) note that violence within families appears to be a major contributing factor to youth crime. “Young offenders were significantly more likely to have experienced victimisation at school than non-offenders” (Holborn et al., 2011:13).

Two out of the four participants come from poor single mother households. Three participants indicated that their heads of household abused alcohol. Glanz (1994:16) agrees that there are apparent factors which lead to young people committing crime, especially originating from within their family systems. Glanz (1994:16) notes factors such as broken homes, parent–child relationships, absent parents [single parent families], substance abuse by parents, poverty, unemployment, truancy, violence and abuse. The provision of basic needs such as food, shelter and protection are limited in poor, single mother households. The family provides an individual with a personal and corporal identity. Participants expressed their identity based on their household background. Participants are associated with a particular community which assigned them with an identity. For example, Ernst originates from a town called Ebenezer which represents good. The cultural and moral norms of the Ebenezer community help Ernest as an individual to grow into a productive member of the community. The interplay between family environments is evident in the narratives of youth offenders [social relationship in family], extra familial processes like peers, neighbourhoods, schools, community institutions and others. Holborn et al. (2011:15) note that there is evidence that people from broken families are more likely to go on to have relationship problems and create fractured families themselves. The result shows a significant association between witnessing the abuse of one’s mother and becoming the abuser in the partner relationship. John talks about the cycle of violence during his childhood and how he witnessed gender based violence as a child. John’s childhood may have contributed to his violent behaviour towards women. Gangs were omnipresent in John’s neighbourhood which provided him with a form of identity.

In the narrative of John and Mpu, violence emerges as a main theme. According to Davies and MacPherson (2011:13), group membership is one way of establishing and maintaining a sense of identity, status and notoriety. John’s and Mpu’s narratives demonstrate the omnipresence of gangs. According to Pinnock (1980), gang membership in Cape Town has burgeoned as a result of poverty and deprivation caused as a result of discriminatory political projects,
specifically forced removals. Gang membership is demonstrated as part of hyper masculinity which provides a sense of regaining power over the prison experience. The new identity may overcome the sense of powerlessness, and the lack of self-worth. This is experienced in the narratives of Ernest and John. Both John and Ernest indicated that they were abusing drugs. In the next section, I focus on drug abuse. The next paragraph provides a broader context for drug use in the Western Cape where the participants lived. The question to be answered is why drug related crimes are higher in the Western Cape in comparison with other provinces in South Africa.

6.7 Positionality and reflexivity

I worked in a correctional setting for over a decade and became interested in the lives of youth offenders. My interest is in discovering how the life stories of youth offenders can serve as incubators for rehabilitation. Colombo (2003:3) states that knowledge is not sustained by its correspondence to an object reality, but is rather inherently constructed and sustained by social processes, or in other words, by communal practices. I am including a reflection on my own life as part of the discussion that follows. My personal experiences described above bring into sharp relief the ‘insider-outsider’ dichotomy that structures the culture of the institution, the speech of those who work in it and those who are incarcerated.

Reflecting back now, after having conducted the research, there are strong similarities and patterns between the narratives of my research participants and my own life story. I am a coloured male who grew up under apartheid. My parents divorced when I was 17 years old. From then on I lived, like most of my research participants, in a single female headed household. Growing up in lower Paarl in the Western Cape, from early on in my life I was aware of crime and substance abuse. My childhood situation and social and economic context was not that different from the research participants. I too could have ended up in prison, not as a warden but as a youth offender. The situation of growing up in a violent neighbourhood has placed me in a liminal space. I found myself feeling emotional and uncomfortable when I used the self-reflexivity questionnaire to interpret field observations and interviews. I moved between the role of warden and researcher. Van Gennep (1972:3) defines a liminal space as a place between two worlds or spheres of culture. Van Gennep (1972:5) describes how people transitioned from one stage of life to another they exhibited similar characteristics at different stages of their transition. As I am now a researcher, and no longer a warden, I find myself torn
between different roles and positions while I attempt to negotiate the two positions of researcher and correctional official. I remain cognisant of my point of departure in that I am not different from my research participants. The research process forced me to confront my own history and childhood in ways that did not occur to me while working as a warden. I discovered that I am not alone and that I am part of the bigger prison community.

Prison is a social institution which forms part of the social fabric of society and cannot be seen in isolation from society. The way prisons function and their purpose in society are strongly influenced by the political paradigm of the day. The democratic government tried, through various White Papers and Acts, to break with the apartheid prison system but certain features persist. Prison gang activities continue to influence how communities are organised. One example is that the White Paper on Corrections (2005:6) places offender rehabilitation at the centre of departmental activities. However, the daily activities in DYCC demonstrate that hard labour is still used as an approach to rehabilitation. I discovered during my research that I am a product of the broader political system which has influenced the life stories of the research participants and myself. I learnt that the researcher is a human instrument which engages with research participants. It is not surprising then, that as I analysed the life histories of the youth offenders, that these narratives evoked feelings of empathy. They were after all not that different from me. The empathy developed for my participants refers not to the binary of life inside prison and life outside of prison. The focus is on the social distance between myself and the research participants. This also facilitated the process of becoming a researcher and of seeing the common human bond between myself and my research participants [youth offenders]. Is this how I discover myself?

6.8 Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it is pertinent to reflect on the findings that emerge from this study. My central argument is that the narrative structure assists participants in adapting to the correctional setting and to the reality of being re-incorporated into life outside the prison at a later point. Important is how participants managed the past, present and the future. Participants’ adaption implicates that they held onto the idea of the past, for example Christianity, peers, gangs and family values. Participants negotiate a balanced identity between the outside world and the prison in their respective life stories. They adapt to the prison
environment by accepting authoritative structures that diminish their power but they manage to locate a sense of personal power within the social institution.

Three out of four participants constructed a high criminality identity in their narratives. This finding supports the argument of Abrams (2008:37) that offenders with a high criminal identity found a smooth transition to the correctional setting; that is between life outside and life inside. This can be ascribed to some form of acceptance which is manifest through working with the prison hierarchical structure in relation to the prison gangs. I further argue that participants with a low criminal identity could not find synergy between the values of the household and that of the prison environment. The participants who display a low criminal identity seem to have more difficulty in adjusting to the correctional environment. The data indicate a strong relationship between drug use and crime. Sawyer-Kurian, Wechsberg and Luseno (2009:13) suggest that there is a link between drugs such as methamphetamines [Tik] and violent sexual behaviour against women. Sawyer- Kurian et al. (2009:13) note that drugs may be used to get a woman high so that several men can rape her without resistance. Drugs and gangs are interrelated because it is not only about accessing drugs but also about controlling the supply to users. I admit that one cannot reach a definite conclusion about the relation between drugs and violence, however, the life stories of youth offenders provided the researcher with some compelling details. The relation between drug violence is complex.

There is a striking absence of positive father-son relationships in all the narratives. Participants perceive the role of the father mainly as the provider. The role of providers is challenged and we see a strong desire in participants to have fathers who are emotionally attached to their children. In cases where participants do not find the desired attachment, they substitute fathers with friends or other role models. I further argue that the prison as an institution substitutes the father figure of participants and fulfils the role of the provider of basic needs. The discussion on masculinity supports the argument of Goodey (1997:405) that men live experiences that contribute to their ability to perform hegemonic masculinity. Cooper and Foster, (2008:5) describe that violence and crimes are therefore often components of certain forms of masculinity where marginalisation is present and youngsters do not have alternative means to gain respect. This implies that all participants view masculinity differently. I argue that events or performative acts in life stories have different meanings for youth offenders, based on the structural analysis of events. Further research is needed to understand why youth offenders construct performance narratives.
6.9 Recommendations

The most prominent narrative told in this study is the conversion narrative. The conversion narrative supports Presser’s (2004:86) argument of the plot or point of return that the narrative revealed moral transformation back to the essentially ‘good person’. I recommend that youth rehabilitation programmes should consider this aspect of moral transformation. Narrative analysis is a useful methodology which can shed light on problematic family social relationships. I recommend that when working with youth offenders from deprived socio-economic backgrounds, one needs to bear in mind that construction and expression through narratives may differ from the expectation of the researcher.

When I consider the history of the concept of prison, I am of the view that prison has not changed much and is today still driven by the philosophy of rehabilitation through labour on which the “work colony” was based. My view is consistent with Matetoa (2012:113) who writes that it is evident that the new prison laws were affected by history and some of the practices that were put in place or ideas that were suggested many years ago, are still considered in the administration of the correctional facilities in South Africa today. Today, in the year of 2017, new beginnings is still a key element for rehabilitation in the White Paper on Corrections (2005:4). The recommendation is that daily activities in prisons should be centred around rehabilitation programme which addresses the offenders’ behaviour and not on working teams.

Another recommendation is that individuals’ life experiences serve as the basis of developing an offender’s sentence plan. Specific attention should be given to the unlearning of the negative aspect of masculinity. Offenders’ rehabilitation programmes should address the habits of aggression and violence. Officials in the Department of Correctional Services should have a set standard to which they must adhere when addressing the issue of masculinity during the rehabilitation process. Self-esteem is central to how participants present themselves in narratives. High self-esteem was associated with progressive narratives whilst low self-esteem was associated with regressive narratives. A particularly strong focus should be placed on the construction of male identity in the context of the father and son relationship.

The next recommendation is on the hierarchical structure of wardens. Correctional Services should review the organisational structure and promote a culture of a less hierarchical authoritative structure in the ranks. Ranks such as captain and sergeant should be abolished
and replaced with a general public sector term for example ‘assistant director’ as stipulated by the Department of Public Service and Administration Act. I recommend that ranks be removed from the shoulder and replaced with a chest plate which states the position of the person. This is the practice in other uniform wearing state institutions, for example the Department of Home Affairs. This may reconstruct the power relationship between gangs and correctional officials. Story telling can be employed as one of the key rehabilitation methods by the Department of Correctional Services in contributing to the vision.

“The responsibility of the Department of Correctional Services is first and foremost to correct offending behaviour, in a secure, safe and humane environment, in order to facilitate the achievement of rehabilitation, and avoidance of recidivism”.
(White Paper on Correction, 2005: 3).

7. Bibliography


Appendix A:  Letter of research approval: Department of Correctional Services

[Letter content]

Thank you for your application and interest to conduct research in the Department of Correctional Services.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

ND SHALEZANA
DC: POLICY CO-ORDINATION & RESEARCH
DATE: 13 05 2013
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

To participate in the Research Project: “A study into the perception of incarcerated youth offenders about HIV/AIDS and risk”.

I ______________________________________________________________________

(Name and Surname/ Optional )

I give consent to voluntarily participate in this research project. I won’t hold the state liable for any injury or damage that may occur during this research project. I was fully informed about the purpose of this project by the researcher.

_________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Offender      Signature of Researcher

Date