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Women Offenders' Narratives of Violent Crime

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Abstract

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South Africa has one of the highest rates of violent crime in the world and while considerable local empirical attention has focused on male perpetrators, women's violent perpetration has largely been ignored. This study addressed this lacuna in the research literature by examining the subjective accounts of women incarcerated for violent crime. By locating itself within a poststructuralist framework, this study investigated the meaning which women attributed to their perpetration. It examined the identities which women posited and analysed how they either took up or rejected stereotypical gendered norms. Narrative interviews were conducted with 24 women who were serving sentences for crimes such as culpable homicide, murder and armed robbery. The narrative analysis established that women contextualised their perpetration within their life narratives, thus these acts could not be understood in isolation of other life experiences. The form and content of stories were analysed and three narrative forms were identified: Conversion narratives focused on the transformation of the protagonist from a bad girl into a good woman – thus violent crime and subsequent incarceration were necessary for this evolution. Stability narratives concentrated on the consistent goodness of the protagonist and violence was constructed as a temporary aberration. Incoherent narratives were typified by an inability to present coherent, plausible stories about the self – thus narrators were unable to accord any particular meaning to their violence. Women occupied a range of subject positions such as the bad girl, victim or good woman to tell particular stories about the self. Most of the women closely identified with hegemonic femininity while a few rejected this in favour of masculine identities. The study showed how women variedly attribute agency in their accounts and how life stories are used as an explanatory context. It offers insights into how to understand women's violence and challenges traditional notions of these women as devoid of agency.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The sensationalisation of *murderous women* in the South African media in recent years has drawn attention to women who kill. “Baby killers” and “killer moms” have elicited public fascination (and ridicule) because their intentional, premeditated acts (as defined in criminal law) caused the deaths of children. “Black widows” have been publicly maligned for machinating the deaths of their husbands for financial gain. *Violent women* hold a certain allure as their acts confound and challenge societal conceptions of stereotypical femininity which is constructed as caring, non-violent, passive and nurturing.

In 2007 Dina Rodrigues received a life sentence for contracting two men to murder her ex-boyfriend’s six-month-old baby. This case was extensively reported on and captured public attention because Dina, a young, attractive, white woman, was accused of orchestrating the crime. Media portrayals of her as gentle and sweet-tempered were juxtaposed with those of her as a vengeful and desperate young woman who resorted to violence to win back her lover. In the same year Ellen Pakkies received a three-year suspended sentence for murdering her methamphetamine-addicted son. Chronicles of the sexual and physical victimisation she suffered throughout her life were superimposed on the account of her son’s strangulation. She was portrayed as a victimised woman and a despairing mother at the end of her tether. Her story eventually championed the cause of anti-drug campaigns targeted at working class, coloured families facing similar challenges. In 2009 “black widow” Najwa Petersen was sentenced to 28 years in prison for the contract killing of her famous musician husband. She was alternately constructed as avaricious and mentally disordered as the media (and public) tried to make sense of her role in the execution-style killing of her spouse.

The media narratives around these women conveyed stories about the ostensible motivations for their acts while also interweaving particular gendered interpretations. It is significant that in South Africa, which has one of the highest rates of violent crime in the world, media constructions of *these* women continue to reinforce notions of *violent women* as pathological, deviant or victimised. These depictions reflect societal and mainstream academic discourses about women perpetrators whose acts are often not viewed within the larger context of violence in our country.

This study examines the narratives of *violent women* and argues that these stories can inform analyses of the broader problem of violent crime in South Africa. Understandably, a preponderance of local research has focused on male perpetrators (Boonzaier & De la Rey; CSV, 2008; Ratele, 2009; Stevens, 2008) since a significant proportion of men are incarcerated for these offences. In South African prisons, currently, there are 61 097 offenders serving sentences for violent crimes ranging from robbery with aggravating circumstances to murder (downloaded from <http://www.dcs.gov.za/webstats>, 10 June 2011). Women constitute a small percentage of this population ($n=1009$) which may explain the scant empirical attention paid to their acts. However, in line with other local work analysing men's violence, a critical examination of women offenders will deepen our insights into perpetrators. Given that violence prevention continues to occupy a vital place on the national agenda, such empirical work is crucial. In addition, an in-depth investigation of women's violence enables us to explore their constructions of themselves, and move beyond the pejorative discourses in which they have traditionally been framed.

Violent crime in South Africa

Notwithstanding the allure of studying *violent women*, the investigation of violent crime in South Africa continues to be a critical undertaking. According to crime statistics released by the South African Police Service (SAPS), 16 834 murders, 68 332 sexual offences and 205 293 aggravated assaults were recorded during the period 2009-2010 (downloaded from http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2010/crime_situation_sa.pdf, 10 June 2011). These figures attest to alarmingly high levels of violence despite SAPS indications that the incidence has decreased over the last 10 years. While the veracity of these claims continues to be debated (Bruce, 2010a; Burger, Gould & Newham, 2010), high levels of violent crime are considered as both a criminal justice and a public health issue (Butchart & Emmett, 2000). Thus dealing with crime rates has to extend beyond the arrest, conviction and incarceration of offenders – there is a dire need to develop initiatives aimed at preventing the development of violent behaviour. Consequently a public health perspective emphasises the importance of establishing risk factors predisposing individuals or groups to violence while also devising interventions to address the problem (Butchart & Emmett, 2000). Accordingly there has been a drive towards empirically understanding violent crime to inform initiatives focused on the aetiology and consequences of these acts.

In a comprehensive study commissioned by the Minister of Safety and Security and conducted by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), the core findings focused on the nature and incidence of violent crime in the country (CSVR, 2010). Three “forms” (p. 5) of violence were identified: “assaults linked to arguments, anger and domestic violence; rape and sexual assault; robbery and other violent property crime” (CSVR, 2010, p. 5). Various offences such as murder, assault with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm (GBH) and robbery with aggravating circumstances were “indicators” of these “forms” (p. 5) of violence, thus official police statistics were used to analyse crime levels. The study showed that these “forms” accounted for more than 66% of violent offences and that some provinces had much higher levels of violent crime than others.

For example, statistics for 2007-2008 showed that the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, unlike other provinces, had rates of armed robbery that approximated or surpassed the national rate of 247.3 per 100 000 of the population. Interestingly KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces had the lowest rates of assault GBH and sexual assault compared to the other seven provinces, which had levels higher than the national rate of 439.1 and 133.4 per 100 000 of the population respectively. In reflecting on statistics, it was established that the geographical concentration of these crimes has remained more or less consistent over the last 10 years, with the highest levels occurring in the urban areas. Significantly, perpetrators made use of weapons (firearms and knives) in the majority of these crimes while guns were the primary cause of deaths of victims.

In accounting for these high crime levels and the ubiquitous use of weapons, the study reflected on how “a culture of violence and criminality” (CSVR, 2010, p. 7) maintains the status quo. In cases of armed robbery, young men were more likely to be part of groups (gangs or crime syndicates) that collectively orchestrated these crimes. However, men’s individual acts of violence were primarily motivated by personal investments in criminalised identities – therefore violent behaviour was adopted as part of the normal behavioural repertoire and was a valued attribute suffusing perpetrators’ identities. In fact, the arrest records of violent men in several urban areas in South Africa showed that these men had extensive criminal histories involving a range of violent and non-violent offences, indicating that criminality and violence were integral personality characteristics. Thus a “culture of violence” was found to engender and perpetuate violent behaviour (CSVR, 2010).

In further analysing the mechanisms shaping this culture, another CSVR study (2009) identified several systemic factors that may account for crime rates. Violent oppression of the indigenous people was pervasive in South Africa's colonial history - this later became institutionalised within the Apartheid system. The systematic oppression of black people was reinforced by violent social control; thus a "culture of violence" became endemic. This coupled with impoverished living conditions, forced removals, migrant labour and the breakdown of traditional nuclear families created a social fabric in which violence became rife. Undeniably such social conditions also negatively impacted individuals psychologically, which could explain their predisposition to violence. These socio-historical factors have been reinforced by current socio-economic disparities and the failure of the State to adequately address the needs of the majority of the population. Hence the social context fortified this "culture of violence" (CSV, 2009).

As argued above structural factors have played a crucial part in fomenting violent crime in South Africa. However, central to the study of this phenomenon is an analysis of the individual mechanisms that fuel it. Bruce (2010b) explored the motivations underlying violent crime in the country to ascertain the psychological and/or other correlates associated with these acts. He distinguished between "instrumental violence" (perpetration as a means to an end), "expressive violence" (perpetration motivated by intense negative emotions) and "gratuitous violence" (perpetration with no ostensible purpose) and contended that even though the majority of violent crime was instrumental in nature, any accompanying brutality may be understood in terms of the latter types. In further analysing these motivations, it was argued that intrapsychic deficits may explain the viciousness associated with some crimes – accordingly perpetrators' inability to experience empathy could account for their physical and psychological violations of others. The extant psychological literature yielded various aetiological explanations for this "lack of empathy" ranging from organic deficit theories to psychosocial theories. Hence violence may well be underpinned by intrapersonal deficits. Bruce's (2010b) work therefore points to the need for psychological analyses of perpetrators' motivations as well as assessments of personality characteristics predisposing individuals to violence. He alludes to a clinical psychological approach to understanding perpetration: while this implies a pathological framework, his argument challenges researchers to explore individual mechanisms underpinning violent crime in South Africa. This type of analysis is particularly useful in accounting for instances of "expressive" and/or "gratuitous" violence.

The discussion above highlights the structural correlates of violence in the country but also hints at the importance of understanding perpetrators. There is a dearth of empirical work in this area, especially in-depth analyses attempting to comprehend the individuals behind these crimes. Whereas a few local studies have focused on men (Boonzaier & De la Rey; CSV, 2008; Stevens, 2008), women's perpetration has not been adequately investigated. Empirical work has concentrated on women who kill their abusive partners, thus framing these acts within victimisation experiences (Pretorius & Botha, 2009). While the importance of such work is not at issue here, violent perpetration outside of intimate relationships also requires an analytic lens. The current study addresses this lacuna in the research by examining the narratives of women incarcerated for various violent offences – it views these acts as situated within the “culture of violence” in South Africa. In doing so it also locates itself within the broader scholarship on women's violence that has proliferated in the Northern hemisphere in the last two decades.

Women's aggression and violence

Whereas the current study is chiefly concerned with narratives of violent crime, other studies have focused on aggression and violence which may or may not be criminalised. Some analyses have used the latter two terms interchangeably, creating the impression that they are synonymous. However in several studies aggression has been used to refer to behaviour ranging from verbal to physical harm, thereby including a variety of indirect and direct ways of inflicting injury (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Campbell, 1993; Jack, 1999; Ringrose, 2006). The current study therefore employs the term violence to refer to any act which inflicts lethal or non-lethal injury on another person. It specifically concentrates on criminalised violence, to contribute to empirical work aimed at analysing and addressing violent offending in South Africa.

In the last twenty years a range of studies in the West/North have increasingly focused on women's aggression and violence (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Campbell, 1993; Jack, 1999; Miller & Meloy 2006; Motz, 2008; Spinelli, 2001; Swan & Snow, 2003; Weizmann-Henelius, Viemerö & Eronen, 2003; White & Kowalski, 1994). Empirical interest in this phenomenon was sparked by, amongst others, a rise in arrest statistics for women engaged in intimate partner violence (Archer, 2000; Brush, 1990; Melton & Belknap, 2003; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus, 2005; West, 2007) and growing public concern about the purported

increase in the number of women arrested for violent crime (Kruttschnitt, Gartner & Husseman, 2008; Pollock & Davis, 2005). Consequently feminist and non-feminist researchers have sought to understand the nature, incidence and aetiology of women's violence. Non-feminist researchers have produced the majority of empirical work in this area and have for the most part reinforced notions of *violent women* as pathological, victimised and/or deviant. Feminist researchers have largely located perpetration within the context of women's gendered experiences and have also explored their subjective constructions of their acts. While ideological differences separate researchers, the seminal question which we continue to face is whether *violent women* are "active, rational, subjects" (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006, p. 322) or whether their gendered experiences effectively negate agency.

While women's perpetration within intimate heterosexual relationships has arguably received the most empirical attention (Capaldi, Kim & Shortt, 2004; Ferraro, 2003; Graves, Sechrist, White & Paradise, 2005), several studies have also concentrated on violence perpetrated against strangers (Jones, 2008; Rossegger, Wetli, Urbaniok, Elbert, Cortoni & Endrass, 2009; Weizman et al., 2003). This body of work extends conceptions of women's acts as being solely circumscribed to the home and challenges notions that perpetration only occurs within the context of victimisation. In particular studies focusing on criminalised violence have examined the motivations and factors underlying women's perpetration (Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Marcus-Mendoza & Wright, 2004; Makarios, 2007). Whereas the international literature reflects growing trends in the investigation of this phenomenon, these developments have not been mirrored on the African continent. Despite increasing numbers of women participating in conflict-ridden regions as well as growing numbers of women incarcerated for violent crime, empirical attention has been rather limited. Women's perpetration has primarily been explored within the context of intimate partner violence (Adinkrah, 2007; Pretorius & Botha, 2009; Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, 1999) thereby discounting other situations in which this may occur. The current study therefore contributes to scholarship in the global South as well as the West/North to provide an African feminist perspective on women's violence.

The Study

While the extant literature on violent perpetration has historically focused on men, women's voices have largely been marginalised due to the low levels of violent perpetration and the

pejorative constructions of them as mad, bad or victimised. This study examines the narratives of women incarcerated for violent crime in South Africa for the meanings they attach to these acts and the identities they construct. It also examines how these narratives convey their gendered constructions of themselves. This project does not analyse violence from a clinical psychological perspective nor does it attempt to understand it within the context of women's racialised, gendered and classed experiences in South Africa. The significance of this work is that it represents one of the first local attempts at examining the stories of women offenders, thereby contributing to our understanding of perpetrators of violence. This, in turn, can inform societal and institutional efforts aimed at violence prevention. In addition, the study also contributes to scholarly knowledge regarding the construction of femininities in a post-colonial, post-Apartheid context.

Outline of dissertation

Chapter Two presents a review of the empirical literature on women's violence over the last 20 years. It discusses the construction of women perpetrators in mainstream psychological, sociological and criminological empirical work and identifies discourses underpinning these analyses. Chapter Three examines recent feminist research on *violent women* and locates this study within a feminist poststructuralist framework. It highlights the challenges feminist researchers face in their attempts to account for women's perpetration. Chapter Four describes the narrative methodology employed in this study by providing an account of the research process and discussing the facets of a feminist methodological approach.

The analytic narrative is presented across three chapters: Chapter Five investigates the contextualisation of violent perpetration within the life story. It identifies two narrative forms women used to make sense of their acts and illustrates the various subject positions which they occupied in these stories. Chapter Six examines a third narrative form conveyed by the majority of women and shows their unsuccessful attempts at providing coherent accounts of their lives. Chapter Seven draws on themes that emerged in the previous two chapters and explores women's gendered constructions of themselves. In Chapter Eight I conclude the dissertation by revisiting the research questions underpinning this study. I explore how the findings have contributed to our understanding of women's violence and locate my work within broader feminist discourses of women's perpetration. I also reflect on the implications of this work for contributing to initiatives aimed at addressing violence in South Africa.

Chapter Two: Mainstream Discourses of Women's Violence

This chapter sets out the trends that have emerged from the literature on the interpersonal violence of women in the last 30 years. It explores how women's actions have led to the infliction of serious injury on, or the death of others, and unpacks the ways in which these acts have been conceptualised. I have organised the trends into three broad areas, which correspond in their reflection on particular perspectives of the aetiology of women's violence. I will illustrate how these perspectives draw on discourses of traditional femininity in conceptualising violent women and understanding their acts. Examples of empirical work, focusing on several types of violence are provided to elucidate how they develop and maintain of various discourses of femininity and violence. The perspectives considered here are pertinent to the current study and therefore the review does not include other violent acts engaged in by women, such as the perpetration of violence in political conflicts and war zones, the perpetration of sexual offences and female genital mutilation.

Firstly, I will examine how the literature has constructed the *mad* woman by focusing on the pathological underpinnings of violent actions. The notion of the mentally disordered woman who perpetrates lethal violence has been one of the predominant constructions providing a palatable explanation for these actions. The literature in this area has supported a discourse of psychopathology that has historically been utilised to explain women's aberrant behaviour (Busfield, 1996; Chesler, 1997; Comack & Brickey, 2007; Lerman, 2005; Ussher, 2005). The internalising discourse present in this body of knowledge has focused on supposed inherent biological and psychological deficits, which provide evidence of women's essentially fragile and emotionally unstable natures. I will also illustrate how this discourse serves to constrain, censure and control women who do not conform to traditional notions of femininity.

Secondly, I will focus on the *victim-perpetrator* as constructed in the literature on both non-lethal and lethal violence of women within intimate relationships. I will illustrate how women's victimisation by their partners has been regarded as the primary aetiological factor in the perpetration of such violence. By critically analysing this discourse of victimisation, I wish to show how this perpetuates certain notions of traditional femininity. It is not my intention to discount or minimise women's experiences of violence, as I am acutely aware of the deleterious consequences of physical and sexual abuse on their physical, social and

psychological well-being. Instead, I intend to demonstrate how women's expressions of agency have been framed as aberrations of traditional feminine behaviour. I wish to show how these constructions limit the foregrounding and development of alternate conceptions of gender and violence.

Thirdly, where women's violence cannot be easily understood in terms of their victimisation and/or pathology, the literature has constructed these acts as those of the *deviant* woman who is a product of a bad environment. Structural factors such as family composition, socio-economic status and race interact to provide a context that predisposes women to violence. Research in this area has added to the discourse of deviance that has historically been used to explain the actions of men who do not conform to expected normative behaviour (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Smart, 1995). While in some ways this literature draws attention to the experiences of marginalised women, there is no critical attempt to unpack what this means. Thus, deviance often becomes associated with being poor and black, as if it were intrinsically related to these social positions. I wish to illustrate how this notion further stigmatises marginalised women without adequately questioning or critiquing social forces, such as patriarchy and racism, which cause gender, race and class oppression. I will also show how this body of work does not explore the particular experiences of women, choosing instead to develop demographic profiles that purportedly describe those *sectors* of society that are at risk.

While the discussion seemingly presents these discourses as discrete, they are obviously not mutually exclusive. In some instances empirical and theoretical work may draw on all three discourses intersecting to provide a more complex understanding of women's violence. For example, a woman may be violent in response to victimisation by her partner, and this violence may be conceptualised as stemming from a mental disorder. In addition, if she happens to be poor and black, this positioning may well highlight her predisposition to violence, thus bolstering the aetiological framework for her actions. I would argue that the interaction of these discourses presents a picture of unacceptable feminine behaviour, thereby further entrenching traditional discourses of femininity.

Discourse of Psychopathology

As early as the nineteenth century, criminological theorising regarding women's criminality focused on the ways in which women's biology led to developmental delays actuating their inferiority to men. Traits such as passivity and dependence were associated with this arrested development and typified as normal feminine behaviour. Consequently, if women transgressed these social norms through engaging in criminal behaviour, they were deemed to be masculinised and therefore in need of strict censure. In instances where women perpetrated violence, they were described as "monsters" who deviated significantly from the feminine norm (Lombroso & Ferrero, 1895 cited in Comack & Brickey, 2007). Perjorative as this may seem today, the location of women's inferiority within their biology has been the bedrock of much of the mainstream theorising around women's violence.

Mental disorder as conceptualised by diagnostic instruments such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fourth edition text revision) or DSM IV-TR (APA, 2000), has been used to describe and categorise behaviour that is considered abnormal. Within the medical model violence is considered an aberration of normal behaviour, so it has often been conceptualised as a consequence or form of pathology. Thus, women perpetrate violence because they are mad. With more than 300 diagnostic categories, DSM-IV-TR provides pseudo-scientific definitions of mental disorder, many of which entrench patriarchal views about the fragility of women (Lerman, 2005). While it is not the focus of the current study to offer a critical analysis of the nosological validity of the DSM IV-TR or to provide an in-depth historical account of the development of psychiatric discourse, it is of interest how this discourse is intricately intertwined with traditional discourses of femininity, thereby providing a plausible framework within which women's violence can be understood.

In her work entitled Woman's madness: Misogyny or mental illness, Ussher (1991) provides a compelling deconstruction of how mental disorder or madness has historically been used to regulate women's behaviour, thereby forcing them to conform to normative gender stereotypes. Her work unpacks how the psy disciplines have been complicit in the social control of women by pathologising either those who reject the feminine stereotype or those who over-identify with it. By analysing the function of madness in society, her work elucidates how particular disorders have been constructed to embody both stereotypical and

aberrant femininity. In this way, femininity itself becomes synonymous with madness. She argues that men's madness is constructed differently, in that it is often located within the discourse of badness. Thus, deviant men are criminalised and their behaviour is understood within that discourse. As noted by Ussher (1991), the contrasting conceptualisations of women and men's violence have significant consequences for their treatment by the criminal justice system.

In reflecting on the sentencing outcomes of trials involving crimes of violence, Ussher (1991) notes that twentieth century English courts were more likely to sentence women to psychiatric institutions, as their acts were found to result from the symptoms of particular disorders. Violent men, however, were more likely to be incarcerated within the correctional system, as their acts were criminalised and therefore deserving of retribution. Interestingly, in those instances where men were found to be pathological, they were much more likely to be placed within secure facilities. Men's madness seemingly required a greater deal of institutional containment, as it was considered more dangerous (and out of character with traditional masculinity). The lower rates of women's incarceration in secure facilities implied that their madness was more normal; that is, madness was consistent with being female and therefore did not pose the same degree of threat as the madness of men. However, more often than not, men's dangerousness was seen to be too problematic to be dealt with by institutionalisation and therefore prison sentences were imposed. It is therefore significant that even where institutionalisation would have been more beneficial, men were incarcerated - thereby underscoring their badness. Differential custodial outcomes for women and men have therefore reflected gendered discourses of violence.

Similarly, a British study by Wilczynski (1997) found that women and men who were charged with murdering their children were treated differently at all stages of the criminal justice process. Her analysis of 48 criminal case dockets showed that 90% of men compared to 46.4% of women were prosecuted. The majority of women (87.5%) were more likely to be sentenced to short periods of psychiatric treatment (2 years 5 months), while 84.2% of men were incarcerated for longer periods (5 years 3 months). She argued that these differential outcomes indicated that the criminal justice system's treatment of women was predicated on the belief that "men are bad and normal, women are mad and abnormal" (Wilczynski, 1997, p. 419). Her study highlighted the stereotypical ways in which society (and the criminal justice system) views women who murder their children: since motherhood is considered to

be intrinsic to the constitution of females, women who kill their children must be mad. Consequently, these women are not censured in the same way as men, since their hormones and/or other biological factors are seen to be responsible for this severe impairment of psychological functioning. Wilczynski's study points to the ways in which these gendered outcomes underscore and entrench gendered discourses of violence. As will be further elucidated later in this chapter, motherhood, as a natural inclination for all women is left unquestioned.

The arguments outlined above highlight the utility of pathologising women's violence and illustrate how the treatment orientation of non-custodial sentencing offers a means of controlling women who do not conform to the heteronormative stereotype. In doing this, it also substantiates how psychiatric labels deny women agency, placing them at the mercy of their biology. To this end, Ussher (1991) implores:

a diagnosis of madness denotes an absence of reason, this implies that women who commit crimes, who are violent, are not in control of their senses. Is this because criminality, violence or aggression cannot be reconciled with our conceptualisation of femininity, and thus the woman *must* be mad? (p. 172).

If, as Ussher says, a woman who kills *must* be mad, it stands to reason that the violence can be linked to some inherent cognitive or emotional deficit. This view underpins most of the mainstream psychiatric and psychological empirical work on women's violence. I will now consider various examples of this work in order to show how it sustains a discourse of psychopathology.

Psychiatric labels

A substantial body of research has established the biological aetiology of women's violence. Essentially this work has conceptualised violence as having pathological foundations. In this way, violence is medicalised, and acts are seen to result from symptomatology that is reflective of a range of psychiatric disorders. Some studies have established the role of particular personality characteristics and/or other clinical disorders in explaining why women use lethal or non-lethal violence in intimate relationships (O'Keefe, 1998; Swan, Gambone, Fields, Sullivan & Snow, 2005; Stuart, Moore, Coop Gordon, Ramsey & Kahler, 2006; Goldenson, Geffner, Foster & Clipson, 2007), or which could account for their victimisation

of strangers (Weizmann-Henelius, Viemerö & Eronen, 2003). Other studies have examined the role of substance abuse in precipitating violence (Hien & Honeyman, 2000; Simmons, Lehman & Cobb, 2008). The range of disorders accounting for women's violence, have included clinical syndromes (Axis I) and personality disorders (Axis II), as defined by diagnostic manuals, such as the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000).

For example, a Finnish study examining the forensic case files of 132 women who had been charged with murder established that they suffered from psychotic disorders (28%), personality disorders (72%) and alcohol abuse (43.9%) (Putkonen, Collander, Honkasalo & Lönnqvist, 1998). In addition, they ascertained that the majority of women (61.4%) had a history of psychiatric care thereby indicating that they were suffering from "serious illnesses" (Putkonen et al., 1998, p. 679). This study found a strong relationship between psychiatric diagnoses and levels of criminal responsibility. Therefore, the degree of responsibility was dependent on the level of impairment caused by the symptoms. While offenders diagnosed with personality disorders were more likely than those diagnosed with psychotic disorders to be held criminally responsible, the violence in all of these cases was understood to arise from pathology.

In a follow-up study, Putkonen, Collander, Honkasalo & Lönnqvist (2001) compared the characteristics of women in the 1998 sample with each other. These women had been diagnosed with either personality disorders or psychotic disorders. The study determined that women most often killed within the context of interpersonal relationships and that this usually resulted from interpersonal strife. In addition, intoxication played a role in many of the crimes. Putkonen et al.'s (2001) study went to great lengths to validate the clinical diagnoses that had been made, as these were considered to be the primary causes of violence. Interestingly, it was concluded that offenders diagnosed with personality disorders bore personality characteristics similar to men who committed murder. It seems that these women were understood to have adopted masculine characteristics, which could explain their violent acts. The discourse of psychiatry intersects with that of gender, in that women who perpetrate violence are not only abnormal, they are also masculinised.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Weizmann-Henelius et al. (2003), the aim was to investigate the relationship between violent women and their victims and the motives involved in their crimes. Sixty-one women who had been imprisoned or hospitalised for

violent crime were assessed using the Structured Clinical Interview II for DSM-IV (SCID-II) and Hare's Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R). It emerged that 34% of the women had intimate relationships with their victims, whereas 41% were acquaintances and 24% were strangers. The majority of women reported being provoked into an argument by their victims, and being intoxicated prior to the offence. The women who had perpetrated violence against strangers were more likely to have had criminal histories and substance abuse difficulties than those involved in intimate partner violence. The psychological assessment revealed that these women predominantly fulfilled the criteria for Cluster B personality disorders, namely, borderline personality disorder (57.1%) and antisocial personality disorder (71.4%). Conversely, women who killed intimate partners were diagnosed with a range of other personality disorders, including paranoid personality disorder (12.5%) and histrionic personality disorder (12.5%). It is significant that these findings reflect the strong gender biases inherent in the diagnosis of personality disorders (Lerman, 2005). The preponderance of antisocial personality disorder was reflective of masculinised behaviour – women who perpetrated violence were seen to be equivalent to men. Where women seemed to over-identify with the feminine stereotype, diagnoses such as histrionic personality disorder pathologised this behaviour.

Personality traits were also the focus of a study on violent female offenders in a prison in the United States of America. Verona and Carbonell (2000) investigated the extent to which over-controlled hostility (high levels of anger inhibition), criminal history and the expression of anger could explain violent behaviour in these offenders. One hundred and eighty six women were divided into 3 groups (non-violent, one time violent, repeat-violent) according to their histories of violence. They were assessed using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2) and the Anger Expression Scale (AX). The study found that one-time violent offenders scored high on the over-controlled hostility scale and that they tended to have shorter criminal histories. This confirmed the hypothesis that women who had high levels of anger inhibition committed their violent offences only after extreme provocation. Repeat offenders, however, had low levels of inhibition and were shown to have histories of violence in response to any kind of provocation. Non-violent offenders were found to exhibit greater control over their expression of anger, leading to the conclusion that their offences resulted from life circumstances rather than antisocial personality traits. The conclusions were that over-controlled hostility was a useful construct for understanding the behaviour of women who killed abusive partners or who killed within the context of other

intimate relationships. These acts were more often than not committed in response to cumulative provocation and represented the proverbial last straw. Interestingly, the study recommended the implementation of therapeutic interventions with incarcerated women in order to teach more effective ways of dealing with their anger. The recommendation of therapeutic interventions for violent women points to the salience of psychological factors as aetiological explanations.

A Swiss study by Rossegger, Wetli, Urbaniok, Elbert, Cortoni and Endrass (2009), found that 7.9% of violent offenders were women. They analysed the court and correctional services files of 203 offenders in order to establish profiles of these women. They found that women were convicted, amongst others, of murder, robbery and arson, and that only one woman in the sample was a repeat offender. The majority of women had histories of violent victimisation during childhood, and almost half of the sample had histories of psychiatric institutionalisation. Rossegger et al. also found that 20% of women experienced delusional symptoms at the time of their offences. While the incidence of women's violence accounted for a very small percentage of the overall sample, the study concluded that their circumstances of offending differed significantly to those of men. Victimisation histories were held to influence women's psychological well-being, thereby predisposing them to mental illness and violence. This conclusion did not apply to the men in the sample. They concluded that there was a need for a "gender-specific theory of female offending" in that "models explaining female criminal behaviour be developed in order to be implemented in treatment plans and intervention strategies regarding female offenders" (Rossegger et al., 2009, p. 86). Women's violence was contextualised in terms of their psychological fragility, leading to the conclusion that psychotherapy and pharmacological treatment be utilised as the primary modes of intervention.

The studies outlined above illustrate how women's violence has been pathologised, thereby profiling the "violent female perpetrator" (Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2003, p. 197). While this may seem to provide plausible explanations for the actions of women who transgress social norms, the consequence of this discourse has been the silencing of alternative views of these acts. This "psychiatrisation" of women's violence (Maden, 1997, p. 245) denies women's agency and reinforces the gender stereotype of the violent woman as mad. In addition, pathologising *violent women* also serves the purpose of maintaining the rigid "cultural gender polarity" (Gilbert, 2002, p. 1282) of society – normal women do not do

violence and therefore those who do, have to be disordered. The challenge of acknowledging women's violence forces us to recognise that the boundaries between femininity and masculinity are blurred. This would require us to develop alternative discourses regarding gender – a task, which threatens the foundations of our social fabric. Therefore, it has been more expedient to label *violent women* as abnormal.

Mad mothers who kill their children

In the preceding sections, I have illustrated how the medicalisation of women's violence has contributed to the relationship between the discourses of psychopathology and femininity. It is significant that the extant literature emphasises that women's violence is largely circumscribed to the home – therefore mothers who are violent towards their children have been the focus of empirical work framed within the discourse of psychopathology.

The idealisation of motherhood in society has generated a standard which all women are expected to attain; consequently, those women who break one of the central taboos, namely, killing their children, are often pathologised. Manchester (2003) argues that filicidal mothers evoke ambivalence in society because there is outrage and concern for the murdered children as well as sympathy for their mothers. She states that “the very act of child murder suggests that the mother was severely ill or demented and therefore deserving of sympathetic sentencing” (Manchester, 2003, p. 714). While in some countries such as England, there are laws that provide for special consideration for the crime of infanticide (the killing of an infant under the age of 12 months), other countries such as the United States of America prosecute these crimes under ‘normal’ murder statutes (Manchester, 2003). Sometimes filicidal mothers are treated differently to other kinds of murderers, while in other cases they do not receive special consideration. However, in both instances, these women are constructed as pathological and their acts are framed as outcomes of mental illness.

Labelling mothers who kill

Studies have shown that women, who are more likely than men to be the perpetrators of these crimes, are mostly diagnosed with Axis I psychiatric disorders, such as major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia (Wisner, Gracious, Piontek, Peindl & Perel, 2003; Koenen & Thompson, 2008; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008). Consequently, these women

receive treatment-oriented sentences, as their lethal actions are framed as stemming from the associated psychotic symptomatology. Less often women are diagnosed with Axis II personality disorders, such as antisocial personality disorder, but in these instances, they are more likely to receive custodial sentences (Kunst, 2002). Therefore, the diagnosis of clinical syndromes that impair normal functioning is held to provide mitigating factors in the outcomes of these trials. A substantial body of work has focused on quantifying the nature of various disorders involved in these acts, the motives for such murders, and the circumstances of the crimes.

For example, in a retrospective study, Putkonen, Weizmann-Henelius, Collander, Santtila and Eronen (2007) analysed 32 cases of neonaticide in Finland over a 20-year period. Neonaticide, as defined in Finnish criminal law, refers to “a crime committed by a woman who, in a postpartum state of exhaustion or anxiety, kills her child” (Putkonen et al., 2007, p. 16). In reflecting on the gendered nature of this statute, the authors state that this law does not apply to men who kill their children; these are charged under homicide statutes instead. Consequently, all cases of neonaticide considered in the study involved women as perpetrators. The study found that 14 of the women had psychiatric diagnoses, ranging from personality disorders to psychotic disorders, and that suffocation was the most common method of killing. In ascertaining women’s motives for killing their children, the majority of women (66%) stated that they were unable to give a reason for their actions. Those who provided motives (32%) cited unplanned pregnancies, fears regarding abandonment by the infant’s father, and difficulties in dealing with the demands of motherhood. The study concluded that the risk posed by the perpetrators’ young age, the lack of support from the child’s father and their dependency on significant others predisposed these women to killing their children. They argued that these factors, while significant, were not the only ones to be considered and concluded that “the reasons may lie more within the perpetrator’s psychology” (Putkonen et al., 2007, p. 21).

Similarly, in the United States of America, Spinelli (2001) investigated the clinical features of 16 women who had killed newborns and who had been charged with homicide. All of them denied their pregnancies, had given birth in secret and had concealed the murders by hiding the corpses or trying to dispose of them. They were evaluated using tools such as the Dissociative Experiences Scale and reported feelings of depersonalisation, dissociation and hallucinations at the time of committing the offences. Ten of the women fulfilled the criteria

for dissociative disorders, while two were found to have antisocial personality disorder. Those who fell within the dissociative category were found to be “good girls” without sociopathy” (Spinelli, 2001, p. 812), whose mental states were exacerbated by dysfunctional family environments. The study concluded that it had provided “a preliminary framework for developing clinical trials to test treatment strategies for these women” (Spinelli, 2001, p. 812).

In a Finnish study by Kauppi, Kumpulainen, Vanamo, Merikanto, & Karkola (2008), 10 case files of filicidal mothers, who killed toddlers and older children, were reviewed. They ascertained that all of these women had histories of depression, which ranged from major depressive disorder to postpartum psychosis. The sample also had psychosocial histories marked by family dysfunction, traumatic loss in adulthood and lack of support in their maternal roles. The study concluded that these women killed their children for altruistic reasons, which included saving them from inheriting maternal mental illness or protecting them from an unsafe world. The altruism inherent in these acts has consistently been reported in similar studies, thus reinforcing the idea that this violence was not borne out of malice (Koenen & Thompson, 2008; Spinelli, 2003, 2004). While ostensibly well-intentioned, these misguided acts resulted from significant impairment caused by psychosis. This construction results in the preservation of the integrity of the archetypal mother, because her primary concern for the welfare of her child(ren) filters through her psychosis.

While the above examples illustrate findings from documentary analyses and clinical evaluations, some qualitative work has focused on eliciting women’s subjective experiences of perpetrating infanticide.

For example, in a study by Stanton and Simpson (2006) in the United States of America, six women who had killed their children were interviewed to ascertain their perceptions of their acts during their subsequent hospitalisation. Participants were diagnosed with depression, schizoaffective disorder or schizophrenia, and their acts were found to have been committed within the context of the symptoms of these disorders. All the women were unable to provide coherent accounts of their acts and reported hazy memories, which were attributed to their incoherent psychological states at the time of the offences. In their narratives, they also distanced themselves from their acts by not locating themselves in the stories regarding the deaths of their children. Significantly, these women also focused on the importance of their

maternal relationships with their surviving children, thus confirming that motherhood was central to their identities. In addition, they also viewed their diagnoses as comforting, since their acts were contextualised within a biomedical framework. Interestingly, this study recommended that therapeutic work be focused on helping filicidal women to reconstruct their identities as mothers, thereby validating the existing positive aspects of mothering.

The above studies illustrate how motherhood continues to be venerated as an integral aspect of normative femininity by pathologising mothers who kill – in constructing filicidal women as abnormal, motherhood itself remains unquestioned.

Analysing mothers who kill

While avoiding a strictly biological discourse but still focusing on an internalising discourse, some of the psychological literature has focused on how intrapsychic mechanisms can account for women's filicidal acts. In the last 20 years, some psychodynamic thinking has further theorised the infantile roots of adult violence (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1997; Fonagy & Target, 1999; Jack, 1999; Terry, 2005).

For example, Fonagy & Target (1999) have postulated that violence has its roots in severe disruptions in early attachment experiences. Dysfunctional or inadequate parenting, or parental loss combined with other adverse life experiences severely impair the child's psychological development. The child does not develop the capacity to mentalise and it is unable to recognise and think about the mental states of the self and others. In addition, an inability to mentalise refers to an inability to see that these mental states are distinct from behaviour. Consequently, the adult experiences mental states in a physical manner and uses violence to relieve psychic pain. Violence serves a self-preservative function. This body of psychodynamic theorising illustrates the ways in which women's violence can be linked to dysfunctional early childhood experiences. Accordingly, early victimisation coupled with inadequate or non-existent parenting results in the development of pathology. Thus, we see an intersection of these two discourses as they provide a plausible explanation for violence.

Clinical case studies have provided the basis for much of the clinical psychological research on women's violence. Kunst (2002), for example, drew on his clinical experience with filicidal women in order to develop a psychodynamic understanding of their acts. His analysis

was based on his work with 20 women diagnosed with a range of psychotic disorders, such as depression with psychotic features, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. He found that the violence perpetrated against a child served to protect the self and/or the child against an apparent threat. All of the women had committed these acts in the midst of psychotic breakdowns, in which they were “faced with the challenge of managing unthinkable delusional anxiety linked to imminent, catastrophic danger” (Kunst, 2002, p. 20).

Two personality types were distinguished, namely the “disorganised type” and the “organised type” (Kunst, 2002, p. 21). The former referred to women with chronic histories of schizophrenia coupled with abusive and traumatic life experiences, which led to severe personality fragmentation. As a result, they did not possess the emotional capacity to deal effectively with any perceived threat or anxiety and utilised violence as a concrete means of projecting these feelings externally. The “organised type” referred to women whose premorbid functioning was better and who suffered from a range of mood disorders with or without comorbid substance abuse disorders. Their crimes were committed during the first psychotic episode, which they experienced in response to severe environmental stressors. Kunst (2002) argues that this psychotic break at the time of the crime reflected a defence used by a “pathologically organised” (p. 28) ego. Kunst’s (2002) work provides some insights into the prognosis of women falling within these groups. The “disorganised type” had a very poor prognosis because of severe ego fragmentation. Consequently, therapeutic intervention would have limited success. The “organised type” was described as “highly treatable” (Kunst, 2002, p. 35), as such individuals were able to draw on insights gained during the therapeutic encounter. As Kunst’s study illustrates, this body of work illuminates the psychodynamics and treatment of violent women.

In a similar vein, Motz (2008) in her work entitled The Psychology of Female violence: Crimes against the Body, provides a psychodynamic interpretation of women’s violence by analysing a collection of therapeutic case studies of patients who had been referred to her for therapeutic intervention. Her work covers a wide range of violent acts, including infanticide and the sexual abuse of children. She argues that these two crimes represent an extreme violation of society’s ultimate taboos, as they challenge the sanctity of motherhood. While these acts may be abhorrent, Motz argues that they are manifestations of severe psychological dysfunction. She understands women’s violence in terms of their early object relations, and ascribes it to “perverse mothering” (Motz, 2008, p. 10). She views violent acts as serving a

communicative function; in other words, they are seen as an expression of unconscious conflicts arising from the perpetrator's experiences of her own mothering. In her analysis of a case of infanticide, she argues that the act represents the mother's unconscious wish to commit suicide. Since she is unable to distinguish psychically between herself and her child, she focuses her rage on the child whom she views as a "narcissistic extension" (Motz, 2008, p. 157) of herself. The killing of the child represents her attempts to annihilate those negative, unacceptable parts of herself, which she has projected onto her child. The child then comes to represent her badness, and annihilating the badness – and thus the child – is the only way in which she is able to survive psychically. Motz's (2008) work is embedded in an intrapsychic model that views violence as an outcome of some form of pathology. It also draws on biological notions of how being female may result in violent or "perverse" behaviour. While her work readily acknowledges women's ability to perpetrate violence, she does not address the idea of how women do gender. She uncritically accepts the determinism of female biology, thereby ignoring the multiplicity of positions and identities, which women may assume.

As I have discussed above, the discourse of psychopathology has been instrumental in equating femininity with madness. In particular, where women have transgressed normative gender role expectations, this discourse provides a plausible framework for understanding women's violence. However, as shown, this internalising discourse has limited the ways that psychological research has attempted to understand this phenomenon.

Discourse of Victimisation

Ironically, the notion of the *victimised woman* came about largely because of early feminist efforts to draw attention to the prevalence and consequences of gender-based violence in women's lives. The focus on women's experiences in abusive relationships highlighted intimate violence as a social problem and constructed women as victims of the most damaging manifestation of patriarchal power. While this work has been invaluable, the notion of the powerless victim has continued to permeate conceptualisations of their experiences. The phenomenon of the *violent woman* who perpetrated violence against her partner emerged in the late 1980s, thereby challenging feminist notions of the *victimised woman*. Feminist attention therefore concentrated on entrenching the idea that this violence should be seen as

reactive, and that it did not alter women's positions of relative powerlessness in these relationships (Comack & Brickey, 2007). Consequently, "(t)he Violent Woman of feminist discourse thereby emerged as the 'Victimized Woman.' Her violence was not of her own making, but a response to her 'victim' status under conditions of patriarchy" (Comack & Brickey, 2007, p. 8).

As I will illustrate below, this construction suffuses the conceptualisation of women's violence in intimate relationships.

Non-lethal violence in intimate relationships

For almost three decades, researchers have focused on the notion of gender symmetry in intimate relationships so as to show that women are just as violent as men (Archer, 2000; Brush, 1990; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus, 2005). While this has underscored the notion that women have the propensity to commit violence, these acts have been understood within the context of violence perpetrated against them. Women's violence, both lethal and non-lethal, has principally been constructed as retaliatory and as acts of self-defence (Dasgupta, 2002; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Muftic, Bouffard & Bouffard, 2007). Empirical work has demonstrated that, in most instances, women do not initiate violence; instead, they resist abuse in an attempt to protect themselves and/or their children.

This body of research has highlighted the ways in which men and women are equally violent in the hope of dispelling the idea that men are always perpetrators while women are perpetual victims. The focus has been on quantifying the gendered perpetration of violence, and in some instances, results have shown that women's levels of perpetration are much higher than men's (Archer, 2000; O'Leary, 2000). While these studies have sought to construct women's perpetration as part of the dynamics of violent families, they have been criticised for equating the nature, frequency and severity of men and women's violence. It has been shown that men inflict far greater injury and do so to maintain power and control within relationships (Loseke & Kurz, 2005). Women's violence, conversely, has been argued to serve protective functions, in that it occurs in response to physical threats (Dasgupta, 2002). Gender symmetry research has been criticised for decontextualising these acts and defocusing from the serious (and sometimes fatal) consequences of men's violence (Loseke & Kurz, 2005). These criticisms notwithstanding, the impact of intimate partner violence research provides interesting insights

into how women's violence has been constructed and how this has lent support to the discourse of victimisation.

Perpetration and concurrent victimisation

In light of the recent mandatory dual arrest policies for domestic violence in countries such as the United States of America, there has been an increased interest in the phenomenon of domestically violent women (Melton & Belknap, 2003; West, 2007). These studies have focused on "bidirectional asymmetric violence" (West, 2007, p. 98), which refers to differences in the type, severity and frequency of men and women's violence. While this approach acknowledges that violence is mutual, it also emphasises that the expression of violence is highly gendered. Consequently, empirical work has focused on establishing correlations between violent victimisation and perpetration.

Melton and Belknap (2003) reviewed 2500 cases involving intimate partner violence and compared the characteristics of both men and women who were arrested. They found that, while the groups shared some demographic similarities, they differed significantly in terms of arrest history and contextual factors surrounding the violence. Men were more likely to have several prior arrests for violence against their partners, while women were more likely to be arrested together with their partners. Even though there was little difference in the incidence of perpetration between the two groups, the context of perpetration differed greatly. In these dual arrests, women reported their violence as acts of self-defence. This study showed that, although the perpetration of violence seemed to be symmetrical, the context in which it occurred should not be overlooked.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Swan and Snow (2002), the aim was to establish a typology of American women's violence in intimate relationships. Participants consisted of 108 women, the majority of whom reported that they had used moderate physical violence (pushing, shoving and smacking) against their partners. While some women (57%) reported using severe violence (beating up or choking), the results showed that their partners' violence was one-and-a-half times greater. Three types of abusive relationships emerged from these results, namely, "victim type" (34% of women were violent in response to extremely abusive partners), "aggressor type" (12% of women initiated violence and were more abusive than their partners) and "mixed type" (of which there were two subtypes: 32% of women were

physically violent but their partners were more controlling, and 18% of women were physically violent as well as controlling) (Swan & Snow, 2002, p. 302). Even though the results indicated that all participants engaged in substantial levels of violence, only 12% were categorised as aggressors, while others were three times more likely to be categorised as victims. By limiting our understanding of violence solely in terms of victimisation, the role of women's agency is not explored. Additionally, this discourse obscures opportunities for further examining instances where women initiate violence.

This limiting discourse was illustrated by Swan and Snow's (2003) subsequent analysis of the data gleaned from their 2002 study (Swan & Snow, 2002). In this study, the authors reformulated one aspect of the typology they had previously devised. They reformulated the "aggressor type", as it was felt that the concept did not reflect or encompass women's experiences of victimisation in these relationships. Consequently, they coined the term "abused aggressor" (Swan & Snow, 2003, p. 78) which ascribed a victim-perpetrator identity to women who initiated violence. Even though women had reported initiating some of the violence, their actions were contextualised in terms of men's violence against them. In addition, by devising a typology of abusive relationships, women perpetrators were also labelled; in describing the relationship dynamics, the study also described the characteristics of women in these relationships. Not only does such labelling stigmatise women who try to find ways of surviving in these relationships, but it also has the effect of categorising women in terms of their perceived deficits. In this way, their actions are ascribed to inherent deficiencies, which arise from the abuse. In doing so this discourse becomes intricately intertwined with the discourse of psychopathology, as researchers such as Swan and Snow (2002, 2003) attempt to establish the characteristics of women victims (and perpetrators) of violence.

Stuart, Moore, Hellmuth, Ramsey and Kahler (2006) surveyed 87 women court-mandated to attend domestic violence programmes, to explore their reasons for perpetration. Participants were required to complete self-report questionnaires focusing on levels of perpetration as well as the motivations for these behaviours. The study also investigated whether the severity of victimisation by partners was positively correlated with high levels of perpetration by women. Participants (38.7%), particularly those who had been severely victimised, reported self-defence as one of the main reasons for their actions. Other reasons included retaliation to provocation (38.9%), previous abuse (35.3%) and difficulties in affect regulation (38%). The

study concluded that these reasons should be heeded when devising interventions with violent women. The focus should be on the increased provision of institutional resources that women can access as alternatives to violence. An additional recommendation was for intervention programmes to help women to find constructive ways of dealing with anger and alternate ways of resolving conflict.

Similarly, in a qualitative study exploring women's motivations for violence, Miller and Meloy (2006) observed 95 women who were participating in group sessions as part of batterer intervention programmes. The content of these sessions was analysed according to various themes pertaining to women's use of violence. In addition, participants were classified in terms of the type of violence employed. Five percent of the sample used violence in response to general conflict, highlighting that these women were violent to both partners and other parties. Thirty percent of the participants retaliated to violence by partners in final attempts to thwart them. These women had long histories of victimisation and often engaged in mutual combat in an effort to protect themselves. The majority of women (65%) reported defensive behaviour in which they tried to protect themselves or their children. Thus, their violence was self-preservative and in response to immediate threats. Within the context of abusive relationships, women's positions of power relative to men did not change when they perpetrated violence. Moreover, the preservative function of these acts did not ward off further victimisation by their partners. Given this contextualisation of women's acts, the study concluded that "the truly violent woman is an anomaly" (Miller & Meloy, 2006, p.104).

As illustrated above, this body of literature reflects mainstream thinking which positions women as victims, thereby robbing them of agency and pathologising their acts. Victimhood implies a state of disempowerment and a lack of internal resources required for survival. This construction points to limited (and short-sighted) attempts to understand the actions of women who initiate violence. In fact, the meaning that women accord to these acts is largely ignored in the mainstream literature, which speaks on behalf of women by categorising and labelling them as victims.

Perpetration and histories of victimisation

While concurrent victimisation has been at the heart of understanding women's violence in intimate relationships, some researchers have also considered how previous histories of

trauma have laid a foundation for perpetration in later life. These studies have shown that most women who were domestically violent have also been affected by the cumulative effects of earlier victimisation experiences. The interaction between previous and concurrent victimisation has provided a plausible framework within which to understand their actions.

Sullivan, Meese, Swan, Mazure and Snow (2005) studied the impact of early childhood abuse on women's later perpetration of violence in intimate relationships. In a sample of 108 women, more than half reported significant levels of abuse before the age of 10. There was a strong correlation between women's histories of child abuse and their perpetration of violence, yet childhood experiences of abuse were not significantly related to women's current experiences of victimisation.

In a similar study Graves, Sechrist, White and Paradise (2005) surveyed the victimisation and perpetration experiences of 1300 college women over a four-year period. More than half the sample had experienced some kind of abuse during childhood. This included witnessing violence in their families of origin, experiencing physical abuse by a primary caregiver, and experiencing sexual abuse. These experiences affected women's emotional well-being but the effects of victimisation in the family of origin declined during the college years. The impact of physical and sexual victimisation within current intimate relationships had a greater effect on women's perpetration of violence against their partners. Significantly, the study found that, over time, women who had experienced higher levels of physical victimisation were more likely to decrease their levels of perpetration. This negative relationship between victimisation and perpetration was hypothesised as either relating to increased victimisation by partners or the realisation that retaliation did not have the desired effect. While the statistics reflected noteworthy patterns, the study did not comprehensively explore women's reasons for perpetrating violence, nor did it probe their reasons for decreasing their levels of violent engagement. Instead, the relationship between victimisation and perpetration was offered as the primary reason for women's violence.

As is common in the literature, the above studies highlight women's pathways to violence. By demonstrating the relationship between cumulative victimisation and subsequent violence, a compelling developmental trajectory is set up. By constructing these acts as credible outcomes, the criminal culpability of women is rendered questionable. Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2004) argue against the criminalisation of victimisation, thus accentuating that the

“enormous costs of being born female” (p. 97) explains why women find ways of protecting themselves against their aggressors.

The treatment of domestically violent women has further entrenched the notion of the *victim-perpetrator*. Consequently an explanatory framework focusing on victimisation has been constructed in order to inform interventions with violent women. Empirical work has therefore concentrated on further unpacking, as well as reinforcing, the relationship between victimisation and perpetration.

In a qualitative study Loy, Machen, Beaulieu and Greif (2005) examined the experiences of fifty women who participated in a sixteen-session therapeutic group for domestically violent women in America. The majority of women (84%) reported responding to abuse by their partners with a range of violent behaviours, including kicking, punching, assaulting with an object and stabbing. It is significant that the authors constructed these acts as “survival skills which are maladaptive” (Loy et al., 2005, p. 38). On the one hand, participants’ acts were considered protective and hence understandable and even justifiable. On the other, the subsequent agency shown by these women was viewed as problematic when they became confrontational and challenging within the therapeutic group setting. This behaviour was interpreted as stemming from women’s previous traumatic life experiences in which they had learnt to react in aggressive ways. The subtext of this interpretation was that challenging and confrontational behaviour was not acceptable feminine behaviour, and that it should be understood within the context of victimisation. In other words, good women are neither aggressive nor conflictual. Another major theme was the intrapsychic difficulties resulting from victimisation. While avoiding diagnostic labels, the authors nonetheless pointed to difficulties in self-regulation particularly with regard to emotions and behaviour. The inability to regulate emotions was seen as peculiar to women – a notion which contrasted therapeutic understandings of domestically violent men. The emphasis was on developing nurturing and non-confrontational women who utilised more acceptable ways of resolving conflict.

While a significant proportion of the empirical work has investigated the life experiences of women in non-custodial settings, some studies have homed in on offender populations in order to enhance understandings of the aetiologies of women’s violence.

Byrd and Davis (2009) aimed to ascertain predictors of violent behaviour in a group of 151 incarcerated female offenders. Based on their criminal convictions, the sample was divided into two groups, namely, violent ($n=38$) and non-violent offenders ($n=110$). Three participants did not disclose their convictions. The self-report questionnaires assessed various types of traumatic experiences, including physical and sexual abuse. The results showed that 98.7% of the sample reported some kind of trauma during their lifetimes: 75% experienced sexual assault, 70% had been physically assaulted without a weapon, while 64% had been physically assaulted with a weapon. The study established no significant difference in the levels of trauma between the two groups, nor any difference in the levels of perpetration of violence. It was concluded that violent behaviour in the sample could not be operationalised only in terms of their criminal convictions. The analysis revealed physical abuse was the strongest predictor of the frequency of violent behaviour, positively linking women's histories of victimisation to their levels of perpetration. This study illustrated how childhood victimisation could predispose women to violence in later life. It also showed that, while only 25% of the sample was incarcerated for violent crime, the rest of the group reported using violence which had not been criminalised. Therefore, expressions of violence were common to all participants regardless of their convictions.

It could be argued that early experiences of victimisation may predispose women to various crimes, including violence (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004), thus providing an acceptable understanding as to why these women end up being incarcerated. In this way, the victimisation-perpetration duality becomes entrenched in our constructions of women's violence. This literature provides insights into the gendered nature of their experiences, illustrating how society both enables and supports the violence of men. However, framing women's perpetration solely within a victimisation framework is limiting, as it imposes a victim identity, which presupposes that they are incapable of agency or expressions of power.

Lethal violence in intimate relationships

Perhaps the most popular conception of the *violent woman* is the *battered woman* who kills her partner. Consistent with the trends in the literature on women's perpetration of violence, the central construction of these women has been that of victims who kill in self-defence. This has been reified in the constructs of "*battered woman*" and "*Battered Woman Syndrome*", which have permeated the psycho-legal literature on intimate partner violence

and which have played a seminal role in providing explanatory models for understanding women's actions. The discussion that follows will illustrate how these constructs have pivotally contributed to a discourse of victimisation, while also reinforcing a discourse of psychopathology.

Constructing victims: 'Battered woman' and 'Battered Woman Syndrome'

Lenore Walker (1980) first proposed the idea of the "*battered woman*" to highlight the experiences of women in domestically violent relationships. She devised the concept of "*Battered Woman Syndrome*" (BWS) (Walker, 1984, 2009) in which she explained that women who were abused by their partners exhibited a range of psychological symptoms consistent with exposure to continuous trauma. She argued that repeated exposure to violence combined with periods of caring and affectionate behaviour, left women feeling unable to exercise control over their lives, thus preventing them from leaving their abusive relationships. Walker (1984, 2009) drew on the work of Seligman (1975) and argued that this "learned helplessness" could explain why women felt unable to leave. While the idea that *battered women* were passive, helpless and devoid of agency has been criticised (Dutton, 1996; Ferraro, 2003), Walker (1984, 2009) argued that learning theory provided a useful model for understanding how women learnt to cope within these relationships. In addition, she explained that the dynamics of abuse resulted in trauma responses, which could further impede women's ability to leave. Central to her understanding are the deleterious psychological effects of battering that result in psychological difficulties. However, in various editions of her seminal work The Battered Woman Syndrome (Walker 1984, 2009), she is at pains to explain that her aim is to illuminate the impact of battering and not to pathologise women. It is therefore significant that in a 2006 study she focused her empirical attention on trying to reframe BWS into an identifiable psychological disorder.

In a cross-national study, Walker (2006) empirically sought to test the hypothesis that BWS was a subtype of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Questionnaires focusing on various psychological symptoms were administered to 76 *battered women* from Russia, Spain, Greece and the United States of America. The study found that women exhibited high levels of avoidance, hyperarousal and re-experiencing of traumatic events, all of which fulfilled the criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD. Walker concluded that there was empirical evidence for the contention that BWS was a subcategory of PTSD. She argued that there was strong evidence

for the clinical utility of the diagnosis in guiding therapeutic interventions with women. Despite this, it is concerning that Walker advocates the pathologising of women's responses to trauma (Dutton, 1996; Ferraro, 2003). It obscures the stigma attached to mental illness thereby further complicating the identity ascribed to *battered women*. Given that the construct of *battered woman* imbues women with victim identities, the addition of a diagnosis ascribes pathologised identities. Hence the discourses of victimisation and psychopathology intersect to construct women who are impotent and pathological and who have little, if any, internal locus of control.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Walker's work has been central to the development of discourses around women's victimisation and perpetration (Rothenberg, 2002). Walker (2006) outlined how the diagnosis could be used in forensic settings in order to highlight the impact of BWS and PTSD on the functioning of women. She argued that forensic psychological evidence in criminal and civil proceedings was pivotal in providing insight into their mental states. Her 2006 study built on the arguments in her work on *battered women who kill* (Walker, 1992), showing how expert testimony on BWS could be beneficial in understanding why abused women resorted to violence and how their actions could be seen as self-defence. Her central thesis was that women's violence served a self-protective function and that BWS provided a contextual framework within which the judiciary could understand these actions. Walker argued that the acceptance of such testimony as grounds for excuse or mitigation in criminal trials ensured that *battered women* would not be further victimised by the legal system. The subtext of her argument is that the lethal actions of *battered women* should not be viewed in the same light as the actions of people who kill in other circumstances. From a legal point of view this has led to gender violence activists arguing for the right of battered women to use BWS as a complete defence (Ludsin, 2003a, 2003b). This implies that syndrome evidence should be used as justification for murder, as it provides a plausible psychological framework to understand their actions. A successful defence will result in acquittal, thereby acknowledging the deleterious circumstances in which these women kill. While internationally gender violence activists have strongly advocated for this, courts in jurisdictions such as South Africa have been circumspect in accepting syndrome evidence as the basis for self-defence (Ludsin, 2003a).

The impact of Battered Woman Syndrome on criminal trials

Given the legal challenges posed by *battered women* who kill as well as the controversial nature of the BWS construct, the last two decades have seen an empirical focus on the status of syndrome evidence and its impact in criminal trials (Kasian, Spanos, Terrance & Peebles, 1993; Schuller & Hastings, 1996; Schuller, Wells, Rzepa & Klippenstine, 2004). The predominant trend in the American literature has been simulated jury perceptions of BWS testimony and the influence this has had on verdicts.

For example, in a study by Kasian et al. (1993), 237 undergraduate psychology students participated in a jury simulation experiment assessing the impact of expert testimony on the outcomes of various defences. Half of the participants heard a case in which a battered woman who used automatism as a defence, pleaded not guilty to the charge of murder. The expert evidence claimed that cumulative abuse coupled with a head injury caused the defendant to slip into a dissociative state during which she murdered her husband. It was argued that the defendant could not be held criminally culpable, because she was unable to exercise volitional control due to her impaired mental state. The other half of the participants heard the same case, but the defendant claimed self-defence. While the details of the abuse presented to participants were identical, the expert evidence focused on the woman's belief that her spouse would eventually kill her. It also used BWS to explain that her actions served a self-protective function and that the woman killed her spouse to prevent further abuse. The study found that mock jurors were more likely to acquit the woman if she pleaded the defence of automatism. Where self-defence was used, jurors were more likely to enter a guilty verdict. Kasian et al. (1993) found that expert testimony was only nominally useful in increasing not guilty verdicts and stated that this finding was consistent with verdicts in actual trials.

Terrance and Matheson (2003) investigated the impact of BWS expert testimony on mock jurors' perceptions of a defendant who claimed self-defence. Three hundred and sixteen undergraduate students were presented with one of six videotapes of simulated trials in which a woman was charged with the murder of her abusive partner. The expert testimony focused on either BWS or BWS with PTSD. In each of the cases the woman either strongly conformed to the battered woman stereotype or did not appear as a 'typical' abused woman. The study found that the credibility of the defendant was increased if BWS with PTSD was

presented as expert testimony. The inclusion of a recognised mental disorder as part of the evidence bolstered a defendant's claim of self-defence, as the diagnosis provided proof of her psychological instability and fragility. However, while jurors seemed to accept this evidence, it did not sway their verdicts such that the number of acquittals increased. Expert testimony did not significantly influence the number of acquittals across the various simulated situations. It was concluded that expert testimony was not useful in affecting the outcomes of trials involving self-defence, as the situational factors (i.e. precipitating events) were more important in these deliberations. It was suggested that, even though the credibility of defendants was increased by a PTSD diagnosis, this evidence would be more useful in insanity pleas rather than self-defence pleas.

Similarly, Russell and Melillo (2006) explored the extent to which the *battered woman* stereotype was used as a yardstick by juries in assessing the veracity of a woman's claims of the impact of abuse. Six hundred and eighteen undergraduate students were presented with two legal cases in which both defendants presented as battered women. In the first case, the woman killed her husband during an incident in which she feared he would kill her. In the second case, the woman shot her husband during an argument in which there was no violent victimisation by the latter. In both instances, the expert testimony claimed that the women were suffering from BWS and PTSD. The study found that, where the defendant fit the stereotype of the battered woman (i.e. passive and helpless), the self-defence claim was more likely to succeed and jurors would acquit. However, where the defendant was shown to have a history of resisting her abuser, participants were more likely to enter a guilty verdict. Significantly, participants' responses also reflected gendered views of battered women. Men were more likely to render guilty verdicts and were less likely to believe that these women fit the *battered woman* stereotype. They held onto the belief that real battered women were incapable of retaliation. Women participants were more likely to accept defendants' self-defence plea, however, and considered the BWS testimony useful in understanding their actions. The study concluded that mock jurors' perceptions of evidence were coloured by their own beliefs and ideas about what constitutes the typical *battered woman*.

In another study, Braden-Maguire, Sigal and Perrino (2005) investigated the impact of race (of the defendant and the juror), type of abuse (physical or emotional) and prior knowledge of BWS on the outcome of a simulated trial. One hundred and one African American and white undergraduate students were asked to read trial transcripts, in which either African American

or white women were charged with the murder of their abusive partners. The study found that jurors were more likely to render a not-guilty verdict if claims of physical abuse were made, while guilty verdicts were delivered when defendants claimed emotional abuse. While it was hypothesised that white jurors would be more sympathetic to white defendants and that African American jurors would be more sympathetic to African American defendants, this was not confirmed. Thus, the race of the defendants and mock jurors did not influence jurors' decisions. Unlike the study by Russell & Melillo (2006), this study found that the gender of the participants did not increase the number of acquittals. Even though a significant number of women (compared to men) reported greater knowledge of domestic violence, this did not make them more sympathetic in rendering their verdicts. The study concluded that contextual factors, such as the type of abuse, rather than the characteristics of the defendants or the mock jurors, affected the outcomes of simulated trials.

The above examples reflect much of the empirical work seeking to understand the impact of expert testimony on self-defence claims in the trials of *battered women* who kill their partners. Since the jury system is employed in jurisdictions such as the United States of America, the value of these studies lies in their reflection of public views towards battered women who kill. However, this work is limited to the investigation of societal perceptions, and the subjective experiences of women are not explored.

Profiling Battered Women who kill

The focus on the stereotypical *battered woman* has also spawned a body of literature aiming to describe and profile women who kill. African researchers in particular have recently contributed to this body of knowledge by investigating the phenomenon of violent women in various contexts.

Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza (1999) investigated the experiences of 66 women incarcerated in various prisons in Uganda. Seventy-one percent had been convicted of murder, while the rest were serving sentences for attempted murder, serious assault and assault with intent to commit grievous bodily harm. Women's ages ranged from 15-60 years old with the largest representation being in the 20-24 year old category. A third of the women committed their crimes with accomplices who were mostly family members. Where husbands were the victims (30%), self-defence was offered as the primary reason for the murder. These women

reported histories of violent victimisation by their partners particularly in response to their attempts to assert themselves within their relationships. In addition, women reported emotional and financial abuse, which made them feel humiliated and disrespected. Their attempts at resisting abuse triggered further victimisation, thus leading them to kill their husbands. The study concluded that the patriarchal nature of Ugandan society enabled the victimisation of women, because it privileged the rights of men. Since these women had little institutional recourse, violence was often the only option.

A Ghanaian study investigated the dynamics of spousal homicides in an attempt to describe the incidence, circumstances and nature of these crimes. Adinkrah (2007) analysed newspaper reports of 12 cases of husband killing occurring over a 15-year period from 1990-2005. Demographically, women's ages ranged from 28-50 years, they came from the rural areas and they had low socio-economic status. Half of the women killed their spouses in self-defence to thwart sexual or physical victimisation. Husbands were also killed because of their polygamous intentions, their extramarital affairs or their wives' desire to pursue affairs of their own. In the majority of cases (42%), poisoning was used, while other methods such as burning and shooting were also employed. The study concluded that these acts of violence could be attributed to women's resistance to cultural marital norms (i.e. polygamy), as well as traditional beliefs regarding conjugal rights.

Pretorius and Botha (2009) interviewed 60 women incarcerated in five South African correctional facilities to profile women who had killed their intimate partners. Participants completed a biographical questionnaire eliciting information such as family composition, circumstances of the crime, history of abuse and medical/psychiatric history. The profile of the 'typical' South African woman who killed her partner was someone who fell within the 36-45 age range and had a history of violent victimisation at the hands of her partner(s). The abuse resulted in psychiatric difficulties, such as depression and suicide attempts, as well as a host of physical ailments. Consequently, coping mechanisms such as substance abuse were employed. The major precipitant was victimisation of the women and/or her children and the most commonly used methods were stabbing and shooting. While the 'typical' woman orchestrated the murder herself, third parties would sometimes be hired to execute the deed. The study concluded that high levels of violent victimisation explained why women killed their partners. The finding was that 'violence begets violence'. In addition, the social costs of

incarcerating women included the further fracturing of families and the loss of appropriate role models and caregivers for children who had been separated from their mothers.

Deconstructing victims: the persistence of the Battered woman and Battered Woman Syndrome

While jury simulation studies seem to utilise the constructs of the *battered woman* and the *Battered Woman Syndrome* uncritically, there have been some attempts to challenge and transform the ways they are used. In fact, since the mid 1990s, these constructs were reformulated, conceptualising women's experiences in abusive relationships as "the effects of battering", in order to move away from the pathologising notions underpinning BWS (Ferraro, 2003). However, Rothenberg (2002) found that BWS continues to maintain "cultural authority" (p. 82), because it has become firmly entrenched in discourses of women's victimisation.

As a result, legal activists such as Ferraro (2003) have focused on establishing the extent to which courts still rely on syndrome evidence to assess whether defendants conform to Walker's conception of the stereotypical *battered woman*. By analysing several cases in which she acted as an expert witness for women accused of murdering their abusive partners, she found that, in instances where defendants did not conform to the stereotype, they were convicted of murder and had heavy sentences imposed. The stereotype of the *battered woman* was that of a helpless and passive woman, which, in court, was often inconsistent with the image of a woman capable of lethal violence. While the defence painted a picture of a woman who was adversely affected by the consequences of battering, the prosecution focused on proving that she did not conform to the "mythical stereotype" of the *battered woman* (Ferraro, 2003, p. 110). The significant contribution of Ferraro's work has been her analysis of the stereotype. She argued that traditional notions of femininity are equated with a white, western, middle-class, heteronormative yardstick. The image of white women as weak, delicate, passive and reliant on men was a standard by which all women were measured. Thus, women of colour, lesbians, working class women and other marginalised women have been constructed in opposition to this yardstick – often as robust and able and therefore "less feminine" (Ferraro, 2003, p. 113). Consequently, BWS testimony has not been an avenue available to marginalised women, since, by virtue of their particular social positions, they do not conform to the traditional feminine stereotype.

In criticising the exclusionary language of the constructs, Ferraro's analysis focused on two main themes. Firstly, she found that, where women displayed signs of power and agency, they were more likely to be convicted. Women with histories of resisting their partners' violence were held to be inconsistent with the *battered woman* stereotype, implying that the circumstances of her actions could not have been that serious. Instead of seeing "standing up for herself" (Ferraro, 2003, p. 119) as an act of survival, courts misconstrued this as wilful and deviant.

Secondly, Ferraro (2003) established that, where *battered women's* sexual histories were questionable, courts were more likely to be circumspect regarding claims of the impact of abuse. The heteronormative, monogamous yardstick consistent with traditional femininity was used to measure the morality of women who had engaged in other sexual relationships while still living with their abusers. Prosecutors used knowledge of women's sexual histories to illustrate that they could not have lived in fear of their partners, as they would not jeopardise an already tenuous situation. In addition, this evidence showed that women who sought out 'illicit' affairs were not helpless or powerless (as suggested by BWS). Ferraro argued that women's sexual histories were used to nullify any evidence of the impact of battering because these women did not fit the stereotype.

Analyses such as Ferraro's (2003) highlight how the discourses of victimisation and psychopathology provide powerful lenses through which women's actions are viewed. On a practical level, this affects courts' interpretations of the actions of women who kill their violent partners. It can be seen that women's conformity to the "mythical stereotype" of the battered woman (Ferraro, 2003, p. 110) is important, if courts are to accept the circumstances surrounding their actions. The persistence of the image of the helpless, weak and passive *battered woman* illustrates that there is little room for understanding women's violence as an act of survival. While women's displays of power and agency are desirable in challenging gender-based violence, Ferraro's work shows that these displays do not necessarily result in advantageous outcomes in criminal trials. In fact, women are severely censured for protecting themselves and for overstepping the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour. Conversely, if they over-identify with that stereotype (as typified by BWS-consistent behaviours), it is considered a mitigating factor in their defence.

The above discussion has illustrated how the discourse of victimisation has positioned violent women as devoid of agency. This rather limiting discourse does not allow for alternative explanations of women's actions, nor does it explore how women themselves understand them. Given the "cultural authority" accorded to constructs such as BWS, as well as other established diagnostic categories, it would be important to explore how violent women view themselves and their actions. In this way traditional notions of gender can be challenged and our understanding of violence can be expanded.

Discourse of Deviance

The construction of the *bad* woman in the literature has focused on women who are deviant because of bad environments. This discourse concentrates on how structural factors account for women's violence, and reflects macro-level forces (as opposed to individual and/or intrapsychic factors). Deviance has historically been used to account for men's crime in general and violence in particular, thus reflecting a strong gender bias. In fact, feminist criminologists have criticised the ways in which women's crime (and violence) have been marginalised by mainstream criminological thought (Smart, 1995; Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). As discussed in the preceding sections, women's violence has predominantly been understood within frameworks of pathology and victimisation that reflect particular conceptions of aberrant femininity. However, in the last three decades, sociologists and criminologists have turned their attention to the phenomenon of women's crime, and have sought to understand the mechanisms that account for deviant women.

Gender trends in crime

In trying to account for specific gender trends in crime, some theorists have focused on women's particular positions in society. Early theories falling within this ambit have concentrated on the impact of the women's liberation movement on women's crime. According to researchers such as Adler (1975) and Simon (1975) the emancipation of women brought about by the feminist movement was largely responsible for an increase in crime rates. Adler's analysis of women's violent crime during the 1970s concluded that emancipation encouraged women to become more masculine and therefore more prone to crime. Thus, in straying from the traditional feminine role of wife, mother and homemaker,

they became more predisposed to offending. This conclusion was echoed in Simon's (1975) analysis of arrest statistics, in which she found an increase in property crimes related to increased access to the workplace. She argued that emancipation afforded women greater opportunities to commit crimes, as they had gained greater access to spheres previously dominated by men. However, Simon later revised her findings, as subsequent comparative studies (Chernoff & Simon, 2000; Simon & Landis, 1991) showed that women's crime had not increased to such an extent that it was commensurate with their representation in the population. Regarding violent crimes, these studies found that women's homicide arrest statistics had actually decreased in some instances. Hence the move away from traditional feminine roles did not necessarily translate into more violent behaviour.

The sociological literature has been dominated by comparative studies that are concerned with establishing whether traditional theories that account for men's crime, can also be applied to women. The work of Steffensmeier and Allan (1996) addressed this issue in a study comparing gender differences in crime over a 30-year period in the USA. They found that, to some extent, theories focussing on the impact of macro-social conditions provided adequate explanatory frameworks for women's crime. Thus, factors such as low socio-economic status, low educational levels and poverty seemed to account for both women's and men's economic crimes. However, they found shortcomings in theorising around serious offending, as these theories largely ignored the impact of gendered experiences on women's perpetration of violence. Contrary to the findings in Steffensmeier and Allan's (1996) study, Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2004) argue that traditional theories do not suffice, as they assume similar gendered experiences for women and men. They contend that women and girls' pathways to crime are qualitatively different to men's, since women are more likely to have been victimised before turning to crime. Highlighting the impact of gender oppression, they also contend that women's violence must be contextualised in terms of their oppression and victimisation by men.

Critics of the purported relationship between gender equality and increasing crime amongst women argue that it ignores the wealth of criminological literature emphasising the impact of economic marginalisation in causing crime (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). Given the problems inherent in the emancipation hypothesis, some researchers have examined women's positions of disadvantage instead, arguing that it is women's economic marginalisation that results in criminal behaviour.

In comparing gender differences in offending over a 50-year period in Israel, Erez, Hassin and Rahav (2000) found that women's crime statistics had remained relatively stable over time. Regardless of socio-political changes women's crime did not increase significantly. In fact, the study found that women's involvement in crime was largely due their economic marginalisation, caused by unemployment, poverty and low income. While there were no noteworthy increases in violent crime, women's participation in property crimes had increased. Similarly, Karstedt's (2000) work analysed gender crime trends in Germany over a 25-year period, in order to assess whether emancipation had had a negative effect on women's crime. She found that, during this period, women's crime had not increased markedly and for the most part remained stable.

Structural disadvantage and women's violent crime

The abovementioned studies have largely accounted for women's crime in general, while treating women's violence as a peripheral issue. However, some empirical work has aimed to establish the structural factors involved in crimes such as murder. The predominant approach of these quantitative studies is to develop profiles of these offenders by considering, inter alia, the impact of race, socio-economic status, family structure and regional location on women's propensity to commit violence (DeWees & Parker, 2003; Schwartz, 2006; Steffensmeier & Haynie, 2000). These aggregate studies have predominantly analysed women's homicide rates for within-group variations as well as between-group comparisons with men.

In one such study Steffensmeier & Haynie (2000) analysed the homicide rates of 178 large American cities (populations of at least 100 000 in 1990) to ascertain the structural factors involved in women's and men's perpetration. Comparing the homicide rates of adults and juveniles in both genders, they also sought to establish whether the age of the offender was a significant factor. High levels of socio-economic disadvantage were positively correlated with high homicide rates. Thus, in cities with high percentages of poverty, unemployment, woman-headed households and black people, the rates were high for both women and men. However, even though gender differences across the sample were small, it was found that men's offending rates were more affected by socio-economic deprivation. Analyses of the differences between adult and juvenile perpetration showed that young women's homicide rates were less affected by structural disadvantage, pointing to other individual factors, which

may account for these crimes. In describing the dynamics of the victim-offender relationship, the study concluded that women were more likely to kill within the context of intimate relationships, and that their acts were in response to violence perpetrated against them. As they lived in adverse socio-economic conditions, violence also seemed to be a normative response in these communities. Women's violence was therefore intricately linked to their socio-economic status, which, in turn, pointed to how violence seemed to be endemic in particular social spheres.

The importance of women's positionality has led to an emphasis on the impact of differing social environments on the prevalence of violence. The criminological literature has explored regional differences in patterns of homicide offending to provide insights into the differences in women's status. For example, DeWees and Parker (2003) investigated the effect of regional location on homicide rates in 162 cities in the USA. The study was predicated on the idea that women's homicide rates in cities in the Southern USA would differ significantly from rates in other parts of the country. Given the strong cultural condonation of violence in the South and the socio-economic position of women relative to men, the study assessed how this affected homicide rates. It found higher homicide rates for Southern women as compared to women in other regions. Higher rates of intimate partner homicide were also indicative of high rates of domestic violence in the South and were not significantly affected by structural disadvantage. Other explanations, such as cultural factors, could account for why women engaged in lethal violence. The authors concluded that regional variations in homicide rates could be explained by a "Southern culture", in which violent resolution to conflict was viewed as acceptable.

In a departure from the prominence of aggregate data from densely populated cities, as illustrated above, some studies have sampled smaller areas to gauge the impact of structural factors on homicide rates. For example, Scott and Davies (2002) examined 44 homicide files gleaned from three counties in Georgia in the USA. Perpetrator demographics revealed that the majority were African American (68%), while 29.5% were white. The mean age of the sample was 27 years, and guns were used as the predominant method of killing for both groups. Sixty percent of the women had poorly paid menial employment, while others were unemployed. As a result, these women lived in impoverished conditions. Consistent with the general trends in women's homicide, the study determined that the majority of perpetrators (93%) had relationships with their victims, and that the homicides were precipitated by

provocation (45.4%). Interestingly, 18.2% of the women claimed that the killings were accidental and unintentional, while a further 18.2% claimed self-defence. The study concluded that the findings were consistent with national profiles of women perpetrators.

While studies such as those outlined above have addressed macro-social factors, others have explored micro-social units, such as the family. For example, Schwartz (2006) explored the impact of family structure on the incidence of women's homicide rates in 1600 counties in the USA. They also sought to establish how this factor accounted for gender differences in these rates. Family structure was defined as a configuration in which a male figure was absent and the home was headed by a woman. It was theorised that the absence of the traditional family structure led to a breakdown in social controls, greater economic pressure on the family and non-optimal socialisation. These stressors provided the context within which women were more prone to committing violence. The study concluded that family structure was strongly correlated with high homicide rates for both genders and that, in counties with high levels of family disruption, the rates were much higher. A 1% increase in family disruption increased the homicide rates for women by 11%. Marginal gender differences in the impact of family structure on homicide rates, led to the conclusion that the same criminogenic conditions could account for women's and men's violence.

Profiling women who kill

The previous examples illustrated how structural factors influence the epidemiology of homicides. Some studies have looked at the characteristics of women who kill within domestic contexts.

Gauthier & Bankston (2004) investigated the gender differences in partner killings reported in 297 cities in the USA between 1984 and 1996. The study explored the idea that the incidence of partner killing was mediated by three social institutions, namely, "legal, compositional and cultural" (Gauthier & Bankston, 2004, p. 101), and that the presence or absence of these factors could explain variations in "spousal sex ratio of killing (SROK)" (Gauthier & Bankston, 2004, p. 96) across various communities. The legal factors referred to the extent to which mandatory arrest laws and access to divorce services could be used as legal recourse, accordingly influencing homicide rates. Compositional factors referred to family structure, socio-economic status and financial independence which enabled women to

leave abusive relationships. Cultural factors referred to the degree to which high levels of violence were present in black and Hispanic communities, thereby normalising violent responses to conflict. The study found that legal and compositional factors seemed to decrease homicide rates for women, while men's violent actions were inclined to increase. For example, in cities with mandatory arrest laws, men were more likely to kill their partners as a means of reprisal, while the presence of these laws had no bearing on the homicide rates for women. In addition, greater economic independence for women created alternative options to murder, since they were financially able to leave the relationships if they chose to do so. Conversely, men's coercive control and subsequent lethal actions increased in prevalence in instances where they were economically disempowered. As hypothesised, it was found that cultural factors such as race correlated significantly with high levels of homicide. The study found that in areas with predominantly black populations, the incidence of partner killing by women was higher. This suggests that race was somehow linked to violent perpetration – however the study did not critically examine this implication.

While sociological and criminological work has predominantly analysed homicide rates to identify which structural factors are implicated, some work also examined offender populations to devise profiles of violent women. For example, in study in a Texan correctional facility in the USA, Pollock, Mullings and Crouch (2006) conducted 657 structured interviews with women upon their entry into prison. It aimed to investigate the differences between violent ($n=149$) and non-violent offenders ($n=508$), and defined the former as those women who had been incarcerated for violent crime. In addition, violent women also reported engaging in other violent behaviour, which had not been criminalised. The study found that they were more likely to be young, African American and unemployed, with histories of other criminal behaviour. These women also reported high levels of childhood physical and sexual abuse, which could account for their subsequent perpetration.

The studies outlined above point to the structural correlates of women's violence in order to explain why women are deviant. These studies show how societal factors influence women's particular social positions, predisposing them to crime and violence. While a gendered analysis is important, gender as a construct is not critically explored. Demographic profiling may result in the stigmatising of women who are poor and black, since the social forces that create gender, race and class oppression are largely ignored. In this way it may seem that

violence is intrinsically related to being marginalised. In addition, macro-level analyses are dependent on aggregate data, thereby ignoring the subjective experiences of women.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined how the work on women's violence has contributed to discourses of psychopathology, victimisation and deviance. I have shown how these discourses intersect to construct women as *mad, victimised and/or deviant*. These constructions have served the purpose of locating women's violence within aberrant femininity, thereby preserving the normative gender stereotype. In addition, these studies have largely ignored women's voices, choosing instead to impose external understandings upon their experiences.

The following chapter explores feminist understandings of women's violence. Three broad areas of analysis are identified. Firstly, it considers feminist attempts at exploring the subjective experiences of *violent women*. This body of work challenges the silences which are present in mainstream empirical work. Secondly, intersectional approaches investigate the ways in which intersecting oppressions such as race, class and gender provide a context within which to contextualise violence. Thirdly feminist analyses of media discourses of women's violence reflect how *mad, bad* and *victim* discourses have become entrenched in popular thinking.

Chapter Three: Feminist Discourses of Women's Violence

In this chapter, I focus on feminist endeavours to understand women's violence with the aim of creating a framework within which to locate my own work. I begin by briefly motivating for the importance of a feminist analysis in order to show the value of this approach compared to the mainstream approaches discussed in Chapter Two. I further substantiate my motivation by looking at the various ways in which feminist researchers have empirically addressed the phenomenon. In doing so, I consider some feminist attempts to explore the subjectivities of violent women. I also consider how intersectionality has provided a lens through which women's perpetration of violence can be viewed. I then examine some analyses of media discourses of violence in order to show how the media has entrenched traditional discourses of women as *mad*, *bad* and/or *victim*. I have chosen to examine qualitative studies herein, as these are reflective of the paradigm within which I locate my own work. These studies have predominantly deconstructed femininity and violence to challenge mainstream notions of aberrant femininity. In view of the above, I have chosen not to review quantitative feminist work. While these studies have been useful in dispelling the myth of the proliferation of this phenomenon (for example, Chesney-Lind, 2002; Kruttschnitt, Gartner & Husseman, 2008; Pollock & Davis, 2005), they investigate methodological problems inherent in epidemiological studies as opposed to exploring the various meanings attached to women's violence.

Why a feminist analysis?

In the previous chapter, I outlined some of the mainstream theorising and empirical work on *violent women*. In essence, the discourses that have emerged in the last three decades namely, the discourses of victimisation, psychopathology and deviance reflect traditional gender stereotypes of women. While each trend reflects a different aspect of aberrant femininity, the common thread running through all of this work is that violence is not consistent with normative femininity. Consequently, mainstream empirical work has sought to substantiate this belief by focusing on ostensibly plausible explanatory frameworks that construct violent women as pathological, victimised or deviant. In this way, the feminine-masculine dichotomy is maintained and violence remains consistent with masculinity. In addition, the categorisation of violence within these frameworks contributes to the silences around

women's experiences as perpetrators, thereby continuing to construct these acts as devoid of agency. Not only are these frameworks limited conceptually, but the various methodologies that have been employed by previous studies, are also limited in how they have sought to understand women's perpetration. As I have illustrated, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies employed to explore mainstream theories of violence, have largely confirmed and, indeed, reinforced these conceptions.

As I have highlighted in Chapter Two, the phenomenon of women's violence makes society feel uncomfortable, as it challenges its conceptions of femininity. This question has been similarly uncomfortable for feminists, as we too are faced with the challenge of understanding and explaining this phenomenon. Kelly (1996) argues that early feminists were loath to examine women's violence largely because it was seen as detracting from the pervasive problem of men's violence towards them. This sentiment is echoed by Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) who contend that, thus far, feminists have been relatively silent regarding the demonisation and pathologisation of lesbians and adolescent girls who perpetrate violence. They argue that, where feminists have explored this phenomenon their analyses have at times reinforced traditional discourses by locating it within a pathological framework. Consequently, mainstream empirical analyses have maintained their impetus as these have gone unchallenged (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006).

Kelly (1996) maintains that a feminist framework, that starts from the premise that gender is a "social construct" and "which recognises the variability with which gendered selves and individual biography combine, can locate women's violence within its existing framework" (p. 37). In terms of her argument, empirical analyses of women's violence are not diametrically opposed to the feminist project; in fact, they will add to feminist endeavours that are focused on challenging the normative gender hierarchy. These sentiments are echoed by Gilbert (2002) who agrees that a feminist analysis will enable us to "move toward a multilayered discourse of women and violence that will allow women to present and speak for themselves in such a way as to portray the complexities and realities of their lives" (p. 1296). Thus by investigating narratives of violence, researchers such as Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez (2006) have sought to challenge prevailing constructions of victimised, pathologised or bad women who lack agency. Their work highlights how women's accounts encompass an array of motivations ranging from "perceived disrespect or humiliation" to "self-help" (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006, p. 332). These portrayals illustrate how

women's stories largely resist traditional notions of gender and violence, thereby expanding our conceptions of women's perpetration.

With this in mind I therefore argue that a feminist analysis of women's perpetration of violence in South Africa is imperative because it provides a way of exploring the complexities of femininities as they are constructed within our context. Given my positionality as a black South African feminist (amongst others), I am concerned with how violence (and criminality) have often been equated with being black and male. For this reason, I am interested in exploring the subjectivities which women construct in their narratives of violence, with the aim of contributing to feminist endeavours focused on contesting and dislodging popular and academic discourses of femininity and violence.

The research questions which underpin my study are as follows:

1. What meanings do women attach to their act(s) of violence?
2. What identities do women construct in their narratives of violence?
3. How do women's narratives of violence oppose or take up socially constructed gendered norms?

In further motivating for the value of my own work, I now reflect on the endeavours of other feminists committed to challenging normative gender constructions. Northern hemisphere feminists have engaged in various qualitative studies to explore the phenomenon of women's violence in an attempt to challenge and dislocate dominant discourses, which construct masculinities and femininities as polar opposites. These endeavours have been located in three broad areas. Firstly, consistent with the hermeneutic turn, some feminist researchers have explored the identities women construct in their narratives of violence. Secondly, other feminist researchers have considered how structural forces such as race, class and gender shape lived experience, thereby providing a context within which to locate the perpetration of violence. Thirdly, feminist researchers have also examined how women's violence has been portrayed in popular culture. These have included film, television and print media's constructions of femininity and violence – these portrayals have largely reinforced gendered discourses of violence. While this thesis cannot address the breadth of these analyses, I will explore textual analyses as one example of how these acts are portrayed in popular culture.

The construction of subjectivities in women's accounts of violence

Since the 1990s, some feminist researchers (for example, Comack & Brickey, 2007; Day, Gough & McFadden, 2003; Pollack, 2007) have examined the subjectivities women construct in their narratives of violence. These studies largely start from the premise that language is constitutive in that it provides a medium through which individuals are able to make meaning of the world. By paying attention to the various subject positions women occupy in their narratives, we are able to see how these shape their constructions of reality (Weedon, 1997). This body of work also acknowledges the fluidity and multiplicity of identity(ies), which can also at times be contradictory – thus challenging the idea of a fixed, unitary identity. While language is held to play a constitutive role in individual meaning-making, this is not devoid of the influence of structural and social forces. Thus, the ways in which societies are structured in terms of power relations will determine the kinds of discourses that predominate (Weedon, 1997). Discourses of femininity and masculinity, for example, function to regulate gender norms, as these are central to the functioning of patriarchal power relations. On an individual level, these discourses provide subject positions that can be occupied. However, the extent to which prevailing discourses are available to individuals depends, amongst others, on their positioning in terms of race, class, gender and sexual orientation (Weedon, 1997).

In the examples provided below, I show how some researchers have explored the meanings that women attach to their acts of violence. By exploring women's constructions of their identities through narrative, these studies challenge the notion of the monolithic *violent woman* who embodies the attributes associated with aberrant femininity.

In an American phenomenological study, Jack (1999), for example, analysed the narratives of sixty women from various ethnic, class and educational backgrounds. Given her theoretical location within the relational work of Carol Gilligan, she explored the construct of aggression which incorporated a wide range of non-violent and violent behaviours exhibited by women. She examined how women defined and understood their own aggression in an attempt to ascertain how these conformed to stereotypical notions of women's aggression and violence. While none of the women had been convicted of violent offences, their narratives included accounts of extremely violent behaviour. In fact, more than half the sample reported inflicting serious physical injuries on another adult. While they did not shy away from talking about

their physical assaults on other people, their narratives centred on how they “masked” their aggression and used indirect means to express their anger. Their definitions of aggression centred on how anger was either repressed or sublimated. Jack (1999) argued that the masking of aggression was strongly influenced by societal expectations regarding the repression of women’s anger, particularly within the context of their relationships. While behaviour such as manipulation, bitchiness and deviousness was seen to be consistent with women’s stereotypical expression of aggression, it was also condemned by society, as it was evidence of their moral inferiority to men. Consequently, women were caught in a double-bind, as they were expected to express their aggression in these ways, while also being censured for doing so. Jack (1999) argued that, in spite of this, women used these strategies as means to an end: in other words, given the societal expectations that women were expected to adhere to and the inequality that underpinned their gendered experiences, the instrumentality inherent in these actions served a particular purpose. In this way, women utilised a stereotypically feminine set of behaviours as a means of achieving certain ends. Jack concluded that these strategies were constructed as expressions of power and agency: in other words, since other more direct forms of aggression were largely unavailable to them, they utilised relational aggression to assert themselves within their relationships.

While Jack’s (1999) work can be critiqued with regard to her stance on women’s inherent relationality, it does point to how women conform to stereotypical femininity as a means of asserting power and agency within their relationships. In a sense, then, her work shows how the feminine ideal is subverted to serve a powerful purpose within relationships. In exploring the phenomenology of women’s subjective experiences, her methodological approach also opens up alternative ways of understanding women and violence.

In a British study analysing women’s violence in public spaces Day, Gough and Macfadden (2003) conducted three focus groups to explore twenty-three white working class women’s discourses of their perpetration of violence while drinking during their “nights out”. While the analysis defined aggression in terms of both verbal and physical acts, it found that women largely referred to physical violence in their talk. Participants provided detailed descriptions of a range of unprovoked violent behaviour (including kicking, punching and slapping) towards other women and men. These stories were often recounted (and received) mirthfully, thereby constructing the violence as warranted and normative within their social context. In this way, women constructed themselves as “hard”, a trait deemed necessary for survival

within their particular context. It is significant that, while narratives of ‘hardness’ permeated their discussions, women occasionally drew on discourses of passivity and weakness. This often occurred in relation to their discussions about men and signified the extent to which they invested in the heteronormative discourse constructing men as protectors. In these instances, women downplayed their violent acts, as they did not want to appear to undermine or compete with men’s violence. Thus while violence was seen as a valued part of a working class feminine identity, it could not be equated with the value attached to masculine violence. The study concluded that violence could be understood in terms of the social positioning of these women, which valued public displays of toughness as a means of survival. In addition, it was argued that violent behaviour could be seen as rejection of or resistance to the white, middle class, feminine yardstick, which positioned women as passive, weak and “respectable”. It is important to point out that Day et al’s (2003) study did not seek to stereotype working class women as deviant; instead, it clearly analysed how social context contributes to the construction of gendered identities. Given that violence was constructed as a core element of white, working class, British femininities, its meaning was located within a particular gendered and socio-cultural space. In this way, the study points to useful theoretical and methodological frameworks within which women’s violence can be understood.

In response to the prevailing representations of *violent women* as mad, bad or victimised, Comack and Brickey (2007) explored how women drew on these discourses in their narratives of violence. They interviewed 18 Canadian women, the majority of whom ($n=16$) had been incarcerated for various crimes, including attempted murder and armed robbery. Women reported using a range of violent behaviour (such as smacking, shoving and assault with a weapon) in a variety of contexts. The study found that all of the women recounted stories of cumulative victimisation by men, which led them to constructing themselves as victims. However, at certain points in their narratives women explained how they initiated violence toward their partners or behaved aggressively towards other people in other social contexts. This indicated that they were in fact able to demonstrate power and agency and so challenge the salience of the victim identity. In addition, they also adopted survivor identities by focusing on how they used violence to survive racism, gender-based violence and the deleterious effects of poverty within their social contexts. Women also recounted how they had been pathologised by various psychological services from which they had sought help; at the same time, however, they rejected the diagnostic labels used to account for their violence.

Instead, they attempted to justify their acts by arguing that the perpetration of violence was the only plausible outcome of their anger. Consequently, the identities of themselves as victim or as mad were not constructed as core identities in any of the narratives. The study also found that women did not readily adopt the identity of being “bad”, and only drew on it when they spoke of behaving in tough, violent ways – this was often done in order to illustrate how being bad ensured their survival in various situations. As was the case with the other two identities (i.e. victimised or pathologised), badness was constructed as merely an aspect of identity, not an entire identity. Women therefore occupied a multiplicity of subject positions at differing points in their stories, pointing to the complexities inherent in understanding their violence. Perpetration was intricately linked to the social fabric within which these women were located; their gendered experiences thus provided a context within which such violence could be understood.

Pursuant to how discourses impact on the construction of subjectivities, Pollack (2007) explored the impact of risk discourses produced by the Canadian correctional system. Her study explored the influences of these discourses on the construction of women’s subjectivities post-incarceration. She interviewed 52 women on parole after having served sentences ranging from two years to life imprisonment. While she did not solely concentrate on women convicted of violent crime, she was interested in exploring how the correctional system “criminalised women” (Pollack, 2007, p.158) as having the propensity to commit future violence. She investigated how parole programmes focused on women’s histories of victimisation in intimate relationships and, in particular, on how women responded to violence. The central premise of these programmes was that women who had used violence in the past were more than likely to perpetrate violence in the future, largely because of the psychological deficits caused by abuse. In this way, the women were portrayed as either victims and/or perpetrators of violence, which implied in turn the need for greater penal control. By also pathologising abused women as being unable to regulate their emotions and behaviour, correctional discourses also advocated psychological intervention. Women were asked to reflect on their experiences in the correctional system and in particular on the influence of rehabilitation programmes on their perceptions of themselves. The study found that, in constructing their subjectivities, women variedly drew on discourses of victimisation and pathology. Although they readily adopted these discourses in their constructions of themselves, they also actively resisted the notion that they were emotionally disordered and therefore in need of monitoring and psychological help. Those women whose identities were

constellated around ideas of being psychologically ill, were considered more favourably by the correctional system and received a range of interventions aimed at treating them. In this way the system sought to minimise the risk of future violence. However, women resisting these discourses were thought to be at greater risk for violent perpetration and therefore required more surveillance and correctional control. Consequently, these women's relationships were monitored to prevent future violence. The study concluded that the correctional system had co-opted feminist victimisation discourses in their design and implementation of correctional programmes, thereby entrenching notions of women as psychologically deficient. As a result, women were encouraged to draw on these discourses to reinforce these conceptions and provide justification and support for these programmes. Pollack's work shows how the context of the correctional system influenced the construction of women's identities, while also highlighting the strategies they used to accept or reject dominant discourses.

The above examples show how women's subjective experiences can be explored and theorised. While Jack's (1999) study is framed within essentialist notions of femininity, I think that her attempts to explore the phenomenology of women's violence is worthy of mention. While I take issue with her theoretical framework, her methodological approach has merit. The other three studies discussed above emphasise the importance of paying attention to how language enables women to construct identities through narrative.

Since I locate my own study within the post-structuralist framework referred to above (Weedon, 1997), these studies raise some interesting points that further problematise women's violence for feminist researchers. One of the salient issues they illustrate is that subjectivities are contradictory – thus women do not construct identities that either completely conform to or reject stereotypical femininity. Their accounts do not provide one 'consistent' or unitary identity which can explain their violence. Instead, as these studies highlight, women occupy varying subject positions in their narratives as they attempt to make sense of their violence. For example, in Day, Gough and MacFadden's study (2003), British working class women constructed identities which were essentially in opposition to the white, middle class feminine yardstick. However, while they constructed themselves as tough and violent, their narratives also drew on heteronormative aspects of hegemonic femininity, creating contradictions between the hard, working class image and the deferent female image. While their narratives focused on their resistance to the normative yardstick, they also

showed how they conformed to aspects of it. These contradictions were also evident in Comack and Brickey (2007) and Pollack's (2007) studies. For example, in Comack and Brickey's study (2007), women juxtaposed micronarratives of victimisation with micronarratives of perpetration, so positing two very different identities. The contradictions between these identities were successfully interwoven into their accounts, illustrating how they occupied paradoxical subject positions. These studies showed how women drew on mad, bad and/or victim discourses in their narratives of violence. Thus even though women in both of these studies were aware of the pejorative nature of these identities, they incorporated them into their narratives to provide plausible and coherent accounts of their violence.

Contextualising violence within women's gendered experiences

Feminist criminology has challenged the salience of gender-neutral theories of crime and criminality. In particular, feminist theorists have stressed the importance of analysing how gendered experiences can account for offences committed by women. For example, some researchers have examined how women's marginalisation and oppression based on gender, race and socio-economic class (amongst others) can explain their pathways to crime (Simpson, Yahner & Dugan, 2008). These pathway theories emphasise that most women who perpetrate crime do so because of severe and protracted histories of victimisation, resulting from their positionality in terms of their gender (Marcus-Mendoza & Wright, 2004; Makarios, 2007). These experiences cannot be understood in isolation of women's positionality in terms of race, class and sexual orientation (Parker & Reckdenwald, 2008). While this body of feminist work has largely explained women's crime in general, there have also been attempts to contextualise women's violent perpetration within their gendered, racialised and class experiences (Jones 2010; Miller, 2001; Zimmerman & Messner, 2010).

By challenging the internalising discourse adopted by some of the mainstream theories, these studies have adopted an intersectional approach, i.e. how intersecting systems of oppression such as race, class and heterosexism interact with gender to influence women's lives. Collins (2000) argues that such intersections create different kinds of experiences and social realities for people, based on their particular social positions. Thus we cannot attempt to understand lived experience unless we take cognisance of the ways in which socio-historical forces interact to shape people's lives. In addition, an intersectional approach enables us to see how intersecting systems of oppression, which locate people in particular spaces, produce power

relations in society. Since social inequality shapes people's lives in material and other ways, we have to appreciate how these intersecting systems give meaning to individual lives (Collins, 2000).

In the following examples researchers have considered how structural forces interact to provide a context within which women perpetrate violence. In doing so, they demonstrate that violence is not an outcome of pathology, but rather an effect of women's marginalisation in terms of their gender, race and class positions. Unlike the sociological and criminological studies highlighted in Chapter Two, this body of work does not attempt to stereotype or profile the *violent woman*. Instead, attention is paid to structural forces to show how these cause oppression, which in turn moulds the meaning of violence within different contexts. These studies have focused on situating women's perpetration within gendered experiences, thereby illustrating how social context creates the backdrop for violence.

Wesely (2006), for example, explored the life stories of homeless women and exotic dancers to show the impact of marginalisation on violent perpetration. She aimed to contextualise women's violence within their gendered experiences, thereby stressing how agency could be located. While her work focused on non-criminalised women, she showed how violence was a very real part of their lives, both as victims and as perpetrators. She interviewed 40 women (20 in each group, which included African-American, Hispanic and white women) and explored their biographies to understand how victimisation experiences could account for their perpetration of violence. She established that cumulative victimisation, impoverished living conditions and family dysfunction (inter alia) contributed to gendered experiences that severely disadvantaged these women. Consequently, their lifestyle options were limited and they became exotic dancers or lived on the streets because there were so few other alternatives available to them. Structural inequality shaped the contours of these women's lives, marginalising them in various ways. In exploring women's perpetration of violence (which included stabbing, punching and beating), Wesely found that this mostly occurred in response to victimisation by partners or, as in the case of the exotic dancers, victimisation by clients. Thus "violent resistance" (Wesely, 2006, p. 324) served a self-protective function and was also used to pre-empt further victimisation by men. The normalisation of violent responses was therefore plausible, since women utilised it as a survival strategy.

In another American study, Mullins and Miller (2008) explored the progression of interpersonal conflicts amongst young African-American women in an impoverished community. Their interest was in how gender, race, low socio-economic status and age intersected to explain women's violence. They conducted in-depth case studies of the unfolding of violent conflicts involving three young women and focused on the contextual, sequential and relational factors influencing these conflicts. The women differed in terms of age (one was 17 years old, while the other two were 22 and 26 years old respectively), particular social locations and severity of violence. The violence of the 17-year-old within a school context was compared with the violence of the other two women in a neighbourhood context, and the events ranged from interpersonal conflicts to violent crime. All three women were involved in violent altercations (beating, punching, kicking) with other women, which had been precipitated by disrespect and/or retaliation for previous assaults by the victims. However, such violent responses were more than often not, not immediate, but they occurred after the women had either tried to avert or delay it. These acts also occurred after cumulative provocation, indicating that there had been an emotional build-up over time. The study found that the school context largely constrained young women's violence and that it therefore often occurred outside school and "on the street". In addition, it emerged that it was important for girls to maintain the impression of being willing and able to perpetrate violence to earn the respect of their peers; in other words, where violence occurred, it served to maintain reputations. The older women perpetrated violence towards people in their neighbourhoods because they needed to defend themselves, to demarcate their territories or to protect their families or partners from the onslaught of others. Violence therefore functioned as a mechanism of self-preservation that was necessary for survival within their social contexts. Mullins and Miller (2008) concluded that the violence could be understood within the context of interpersonal interactions that had occurred over time, thereby dispelling the notion that it was always a response to immediate provocation. Hence the study showed that violence was best understood as the outcome of a sequence of various interactions embedded within the broader social context.

In a study exploring the use of violence by young inner city women in America, Jones (2008) illustrated how gendered experiences influence survival on the streets. While her study foregrounded the experiences of young African-American women ($n=15$), her sample also included young men ($n=9$). In this way, she was able to show similarities in their life experiences and differences due to gendered experiences. She conducted her study in

Philadelphia, which has one of the highest poverty rates in the USA as well as one of the highest rates of violent crime. In addition, the city is highly segregated along racial lines, which further complicates the construction of violence. Jones (2008) interviewed 24 young adults who had enrolled in a violence prevention project after they became involved in violent altercations (such as beating, punching and stabbing) with other young people. The ethnographic study also included participant observation, collateral interviews with significant others and observations of spaces occupied by these young people. Her study focused on how the social context necessitated the development of survival skills that transcended gendered boundaries. Both women and men reported that violence was a normative part of their lives and that they had to find ways of protecting themselves in order to survive. The study found that the presentation of a tough image was a core element of the “code of the street” (Anderson cited in Jones, 2008, p.63). Both women and men recounted the importance of public displays of violence, both to defend themselves and to act as deterrents for any future attempts against them. In doing so, women adopted some of the elements of hegemonic masculinity entrenched in the “code”. Despite this, they did not regard the lethal violence associated with public displays of masculinity as a desirable outcome and rejected this aspect of masculinity. While women emphasised that in certain instances severe assaults were warranted, they saw this as instrumental, i.e., to demonstrate toughness, to retaliate against attacks or to avenge previous infractions against them. Despite their willingness to engage in fights, young women also wanted to be associated with cultural ideas of being strong black women. While physical strength was seen as a necessary and desirable part of this image, their aspirations also served to constrain their violence. Therefore they only used violence for instrumental purposes and did not view displays of violence as necessary or consistent with black femininity. They thus drew on racialised discourses of femininity.

The above studies illustrate how women’s positionalities account for their violent perpetration. In all the examples violent acts were constructed as survival strategies which women employed within the context of their lived experiences. By drawing attention to these experiences, these studies illustrate how their violence ‘makes sense’. Interestingly the notion of individual agency is displaced as violence is viewed as necessary for survival and therefore justifiable. Violent acts are normalised within the context of women’s lived experiences – whether it is as part of a “street code” or in the context of intimate partner violence. Thus for these researchers, the plausibility of women’s violence is evident if we consider that gender,

race and class oppressions intersect so as to shape lived experience. While gendered analyses of women's violence are extremely valuable in illuminating the complexities of their lives, they also highlight that the issue of agency is not clear-cut. The ways in which agency is located in these studies, raises several questions for feminist researchers concerned with challenging stereotypical notions of *violent women*. I will discuss these issues at the end of the chapter.

Textual analyses of women's violence

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive discussion of how popular culture portrays women's violence, I will consider how the print media's narratives reinforce discourses of aberrant femininity by demonising and sensationalising women perpetrators (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Violence perpetrated by women is portrayed as more heinous than that of men (Morrissey, 2003). The vilification of women has served to highlight how feminism has failed women and that women's perpetration is indicative of what happens when they transgress societal gender norms. The recursive relationship between media representations and traditional societal conceptions of women's violence has entrenched such beliefs, ensuring the dominance of these discourses. To challenge these notions some feminist researchers have analysed how the media (most notably, the print media) continue to construct women as mad, bad or deviant (Morrissey, 2003).

Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) argue that North American media trends demonising violent women have their roots in the backlash against feminism, which sought to discredit feminist endeavours to expose and challenge patriarchal oppression. Drawing on the work of Susan Faludi, these authors assert that the media onslaught on violent women intensified to counter burgeoning feminist work that highlighted the prevalence and deleterious consequences of gender-based violence. In charting the media's enthrallment with violent women, Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) show how early 20th century films depicted white women offenders as masculinised, lascivious and responsible for the corruption of new and younger inmates. These images prevailed until the 1980s and were solidified by the masculinisation hypothesis that attributed women's criminality and violence to their increased involvement in the public sphere. In the 1990s, the focus moved to "minority" girls who belonged to gangs, thereby also racialising these images; the construction of bad girls who were poor, black, Latino and violent, predominated in the news. The phenomenon of the

violent girl emerged at the turn of the century (i.e. after 2000), drawing attention to how girls were becoming more violent (as compared to boys) in the public sphere. This was followed by the phenomenon of the “*mean girl*” – a construction rooted in ideas about the relational aggression of white, middle class girls towards each other. The indirect aggression (such as gossiping, name calling, spreading of rumours), which girls use to achieve certain ends, was then constructed as part of normal femininity; since girls are seen to be essentially relational, they use this strategy (as opposed to physical violence) to hurt others and assert themselves. While the current study does not focus on these indirect means, it is significant that the media has been complicit in constructing relational aggression as part of a white, middle class, heteronormative, feminine discourse (Ringrose, 2006). Consequently, women and girls who are constructed as Other and who perpetrate violence are often constructed as deviant because they do not conform to the normative yardstick (Ringrose, 2006).

Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) argue that media portrayals of violence perpetrated by girls and women have several objectives. Firstly, the demonisation and sensationalisation of violent acts serve to warn women that the consequences of insisting on gender equality, is masculinisation. This in turn, could lead to violence. By juxtaposing the violence of black gang girls with the meanness of white girls, racial stereotypes regarding the relationship between race and violence are entrenched. In addition, by focusing on lesbianism as an aberrant form of sexuality, media portrayals have been successful in showing how this is a result of masculinisation, thereby preserving the heteronormative feminine ideal. In this way, media constructions provide justifications for the harsh ways in which the criminal justice system sanctions women and girls who transgress societal gender norms. The following studies exemplify how media representations of violence in the public and private spheres have drawn on gendered and racialised discourses of femininity and violence.

Morrissey (2003) provides a compelling analysis of how media and legal discourses constructed the cases of six women who had been on trial for murder. She analyses narratives about women involved in serial killing, *battered women* who killed their husbands and women who engaged in sadistic killings with their partners. She considers how these discourses produce varied subject positions for these women and how this impacts on their portrayal. Morrissey (2003) shows how narratives of *violent women* consistently construct them as devoid of agency, reinforcing the belief that women’s violence is not of their own making. The strategies include “vilification or monsterisation, mythification and victimism”

(Morrissey, 2003, p. 25). In portraying women as monsters who embody evil, they are denied any ability to act rationally and in a goal-directed manner. Similarly, by comparing women to mythical figures such as witches, societal fear and condemnation is increased – women's agency is therefore located within folkloric constructions of the evil woman. These constructions serve to justify the incapacitative function of legal punishment - the harshest penalties are reserved for these women because of their embodiment of evil. While some women are depicted as monsters, others embody victimhood thereby reinforcing ideas about their inability to exercise any volition. The victimisation focus and the impact of these experiences impel the determination of a lack of agency. Since victimisation is held to explain perpetration, media and legal narratives portrayed women as worthy of sympathy – consequently legal penalties were not as harsh because victimisation either diminished or negated criminal responsibility. Morrissey's (2003) analysis is valuable because she critically unpacks the negation and/or denial of women's agency in mainstream (and indeed in some feminist) constructions. She shows how these accounts work to reinforce stereotypes of women's violence and justify the outcomes of criminal trials.

In a comparative study by Berrington and Honkatukia (2002), media representations of violent women in British and Finnish newspapers were explored. Media coverage of Rosemary West's conviction of the murder of 10 women, which she had committed along with her husband in the UK, was compared with the media coverage of Sanna Sillanpää who murdered three men and injured a fourth in Finland. Rosemary West was portrayed as an evil, sadistic woman who had been complicit in the sexual abuse and murder of several women. During the trial, the media portrayed her as a bad mother, sexually deviant, intellectually deficient and the product of a dysfunctional family. The initial depiction was of her individual pathology, which was held to account for her monstrous acts. Upon her conviction, her evil nature was emphasised and her deviant sexuality was the central focus of various news reports. The media therefore drew on traditional discourses of women's violence by portraying Rosemary West in these terms. In contrast, the Finnish media enjoined public sympathy by constructing Sanna Sillanpää as a victim of her own pathology. The initial portrayal focused on her physical appearance, which did not seem to accord with popular conceptions of a murderous woman. Various photographs depicted her as somewhat dishevelled, unobtrusive and rather harmless. As she did not conform to the image of a killer more sympathetic explanations were sought for her behaviour. In some instances, the media defocused from her in favour of issues such as safety concerns at gun clubs. When

foregrounding her individual pathology as the cause for her actions, media speculation was reinforced by medical practitioners and other experts who had examined her. Being diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, she could not (legally or morally) be held culpable for her actions. This verdict underscored the construction of her as a sad case. Berrington and Honkatukia (2002)'s study shows how the entrenchment of traditional discourses of gender and violence result in differing portrayals. The demonisation of Rosemary West ensured that her badness would not be forgotten, and the media continued to have dalliances with her story long after her conviction. The pathologisation of Sanna Sillanpää, in contrast, was cause for sympathy and therefore her story was not worthy of continued media interest.

While the above study is an example of the representation of women's violence in the public sphere, other studies have explored the perpetration of violence in the private or domestic sphere. For example, Nikunen (2006) explored Finnish media constructions of mothers and fathers who had killed their children before committing suicide. She compared media coverage of the suicide of a father who had murdered his three children with the media coverage of the suicide of a mother who had murdered her husband and two children. Using an ethnomethodological framework, Nikunen analysed how newspapers represented the crimes, the perpetrators and their motives. She found that both crimes were categorised as extraordinary because, in one case, the father had only killed his children and not his wife, and in the second case, the mother had killed her entire family. Thus the crimes were not viewed as typical family murder-suicides. The gender of the perpetrators also determined how the crimes were constructed. Where the father was the perpetrator, the crime was described as a family killing, although he had not killed his wife. This representation was linked to traditional notions of patriarchal rights within the family. Where the mother was the perpetrator, the reporting focused on the killing of the children, while the murder of the husband was not central – thereby highlighting motherhood as being central to a woman's identity. While in both cases there were allusions to psychological difficulties as possible explanations for the crimes, the male perpetrator's substance use and bouts of aggression were not explicitly labelled as pathological. Instead, these were framed within cultural constructions of Finnish masculinity, thus normalising his behaviour. However, in the case of the female perpetrator, her psychological difficulties were constructed as individual pathology, thus reinforcing her individual deficits as a mother. The study concluded that the media coverage of these two cases illustrated how gendered constructions of parenting were reinforced such that violence had different meanings in these contexts. Where fathers killed

their children, their violence was framed within broader masculine discourses so that discourses of fatherhood were not brought into question. However, mothers who killed their children either were seen to be performing a pathological form of mothering or were demonised if their acts were incomprehensible.

As illustrated above, media representations of women who perpetrate violence reinforce traditional discourses of aberrant femininity. These representations are further exacerbated by racialised portrayals of *violent women*. As I have argued here and in Chapter Two, women's positionalities in terms of their gender, race, class and sexual orientation (amongst others), have often been used by mainstream researchers to profile violent women. This trend can also be seen in media representations that both sensationalise and normalise the violence of women positioned as Other in terms of their race. For example, Brennan and Vandenberg (2009) explored the influence of women offenders' race or ethnic background on media narratives of their offences. They conducted a content analysis of reporting on women's crime in two major American newspapers, namely, the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. Their analysis centred on reporting occurring over a one-year period and covered various crimes. They found that 52% of the stories related to violent crimes ranging from sexual offences to murder and that 24 women were identified as belonging to 'minority groups' (African-American, Latina, Native American), whereas 23 women were white. Narratives about white women were more likely to contain various justifications and excuses, thereby defocusing from their acts and diminishing their culpability. For example, some articles reporting on white women's violence, concentrated on their histories of mental illness and/or victimisation to negate their criminal responsibility. However, the violence committed by 'minority' women was portrayed as sadistic and evil and the gruesome details of their crimes were salaciously described. In addition, the overall tone of the stories was highly critical of Other women, thus communicating that they were beyond rehabilitation. Conversely, the tone of reporting on white women was much more sympathetic, reinforcing their innocence. While the study did not only examine violent crime, it found that these strategies applied to all of the articles, thereby indicating that media representations of criminalised women were highly racialised.

The preceding analyses illustrate the complicity of the media in reinforcing stereotypes about women who perpetrate violence. By paying attention to language, these studies show how *violent women* are *constructed*. With the exception of Morrissey (2003), these feminist

researchers have not gone beyond critiquing media constructions of women's violence – consequently, it begs the question as to how these acts should be portrayed. Morrissey (2003) argues for alternate ways of understanding violence which “emphasise agency rather than work to deny it” (p. 28). Her analysis therefore concentrates on finding ways in which “agentic representations” (p. 29) constitute alternate portrayals of *violent women*.

Some thoughts on feminist research on women's violence

The preceding discussion has reviewed feminists' attempts to understand women's violence. I have categorised this work according to common foci to show the trends in the literature as well as to contrast these approaches to mainstream empirical work. In arguing for a feminist analysis of women's violence I situate my own work and the work of others discussed above within a feminist framework. However, in doing so, I may have created the impression that I view feminism as a homogenous entity which holds one particular way of theorising and understanding the world. While it is beyond the scope of this study to engage in the debates regarding various feminisms, it is important to point out how the heterogeneity impacts on the theorising of women's violence.

For example Jack (1999) draws on essentialist notions of gender, particularly women's relationality and how this can explain their often masked aggression (and violence). She relies on universalist assumptions about the essence of femininity in explaining women's repression of their aggression. Jack shows how the socialisation of girls and women leads to the silencing of anger, aggression and violence. Consequently, most women introject their anger as opposed to expressing it in constructive ways. In focusing on the idea of anger turned inward, her model provides a plausible explanation as to why so many of the women in her sample had been diagnosed with depression. However, her argument is premised on cultural feminist ideas about the differences between women and men which assert that feminine and masculine qualities are directly linked to biological sex. In addition, her interpretation of depression (as an outcome of introjected anger) also represents an internalising discourse for understanding women's relationship to anger, aggression and violence. Thus the psychological lens through which she has chosen to understand this relationship also adds another angle to her positionality. Jack's (1999) ideas can be contrasted to Wesely's (2006) views of patriarchy as the root cause of women's oppression: women are oppressed because they are women and violent perpetration cannot be understood

in isolation of their lived experiences. Wesely (2006) emphasises that structural forces of gender, race and class interact to position women in ways that perpetuate their subjugation. In this sense, women's violence can be attributed to their positionality and these acts are held to be outcomes of patriarchal oppression. Wesely's perspective therefore locates women's violence within the social sphere and argues against a uni-dimensional perspective which focuses on intra-individual factors.

The examples above highlight that a gendered analysis of violence can forward different aetiological factors. As I have shown, feminist constructions of women's violence range from intra-individual to sociological analyses. Thus we are not agreed as to what 'causes' women's violence nor do we entirely concur to what extent women are culpable for their actions.

In Chapter Two one of my chief criticisms of mainstream work was their ubiquitous negation of agency in their conceptualisations of women's violence. Consequently women have largely been viewed as being at the mercy of their biology, the environment and others and violence is viewed as a plausible outcome of aberrant femininity. In light of the work reviewed in the current chapter, the question of feminist constructions of women's agency arises. It would seem that while we are highly critical of mainstream conceptualisations, we as feminists are faced with contradictions within our own accounts of women's violence. On one hand we show how gendered experiences create differing lived experiences for women and men to illustrate how patriarchy (amongst others) functions to oppress women. In this way our work challenges 'truths' around femininity and masculinity. On the other hand, we sidestep the issue of individual agency as we locate the 'causes' of women's violence within patriarchal, racial and class oppression. While I do not want to minimise the realities of oppressions which we as women (and men) have to live with, we as feminists are caught in a double-bind. While some feminists are highly critical of any empirical attempts at exploring women's agency (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006), others question the sole focus on victimisation as the primary aetiological factor in women's violence. In fact, Morrissey (2003) points out that some feminist discourses are unable to adequately conceptualise violence that does not occur in response to victimisation thereby rendering women incapable of intentional violent acts. The feminist work reviewed in this chapter reveals the ongoing debates as to what constitutes agency and how this 'fits' into our conceptualisations of violence. I cannot claim to resolve these tensions, but it is imperative to highlight that they exist. Thus, while I acknowledge that feminist research in this area is complicated,

challenging and sometimes contradictory, adding to these debates is important so that our work constructs “new tales” of women’s violence (Morrissey, 2003, p. 28).

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have motivated for a feminist analysis of women’s violence. In doing so, I have argued that mainstream empirical work has largely reinforced traditional discourses of femininity and violence, thereby buttressing the feminine-masculine binary. I have contended that a feminist analysis focused on challenging and dislocating this binary, can contribute a useful framework for exploring women’s perpetration. By reviewing three broad areas of feminist work, I have illustrated how various qualitative approaches have enabled critical explorations of femininity and violence. In this way, I further substantiated the motivation for my own work, by appealing for greater feminist engagement to challenge the salience of mainstream empirical work. In particular, I introduced the research questions underpinning my own study by locating it within an epistemological tradition that views language as constitutive of subjectivity. In the next chapter, I outline the methodological framework for my study and discuss my use of narrative theory and method as means of understanding and analysing women offenders’ narratives of violent crime.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter sets out the feminist foundations which informed the methodology and methods employed in this study. In addressing what is meant by feminist research, I reflect on its characteristics and briefly discuss the feminist epistemologies which inform research practice. My discussion then focuses on narrative as both theory and method and shows how this framework shaped the form and content of the study. In justifying my methodological choices the theoretical account is interspersed with some reflections on process so as to show how the methodological literature informed my work. I then provide a micronarrative of the study in which I explore the elements of the research process and reflect on my attendant experiences.

What is Feminist Research?

In the previous chapter I motivated for a feminist analysis of women's violent perpetration thereby illustrating how feminists have sought to challenge mainstream empirical endeavours. Since I locate my own work within a feminist paradigm, it is useful to further explore what constitutes feminist research so as to show how my work has been guided by these principles.

In addressing the question what constitutes feminist research, the focus is often on trying to establish a distinctly feminist method of inquiry. However, Harding (1987) argues that instead of a focus on method, it is more useful to consider the distinctive characteristics of these projects. Firstly, the focus on women's lives and their experiences is central to feminist empirical work. Given the androcentric bias of much of the mainstream theorising in the social sciences, feminist researchers have challenged the masculine normative yardstick and the resultant subjugation of women's experiences (Harding, 1987; Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006).

A second tenet refers to the purpose of feminist research which is to illuminate and explore issues, the outcomes of which will be of benefit to women (Harding, 1987). Thus research is conducted "*for women*" (Harding, 1987, p.8). Value is also placed on the transformative nature of feminist research in that it is seen as a vehicle for challenging the subjugation of

women's knowledges. Hence feminist research characteristically focuses on various aspects of women's lived experience with the aim of challenging the social structures that contribute to their subordination. In addition, empirical work continues to contribute to the development of theories that challenge mainstream notions of femininities (and masculinities). Thus feminist research is aimed at socio-political transformation as well as the transformation of social scientific theory and practice (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006).

Thirdly, while research outcomes are important for social and scientific transformation, feminist paradigms accord equal importance to the research process and the researcher's role within it. Feminist approaches challenge the subject-object dichotomy emphasised in androcentric scientific models. Instead the location of the researcher within the research is viewed as important in understanding and rendering visible the power relations inherent in that process (Harding, 1987). In addition, the positionality of the researcher shapes the research as her agenda frames the project and will shape how the data collection and analyses are conducted. Palmary (2006) argues that complete transparency is a "myth" because as researchers we are cast in the position of "judge, referee or universal witness" (p. 38) when it comes to collecting and assessing data. This illustrates that reflexivity is not merely a matter of disclosing subjectivity – rather it requires a reflection on how these various subject positions co-construct the dynamics of the research process. Palmary (2006) argues that reflexivity should be much more than the researcher's statement of her particular location: it requires us to analyse how our various subjectivities are evident or concealed during the research process. Consequently feminist researchers have engaged reflexively, thereby acknowledging their positionalities and their locations within their work (Harding, 1987; Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006).

I have shown how feminist research can be distinguished from traditional androcentric approaches in terms of the underlying guiding principles. However, within feminist research practice, there are differences in the way that knowledge production is construed. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to cogently address these epistemological debates, I will explore three perspectives which illustrate divergent thinking. In doing so, I also draw attention to the poststructuralist perspective informing my own work.

Gergen (2001) draws on the work of Sandra Harding by showing how feminist epistemologies have influenced the endeavours of feminist psychologists. She distinguishes

between feminist empiricism, feminist standpointism and feminist postmodernism. Feminist empiricists, while embracing the positivist tradition of mainstream psychology, are highly critical of the androcentrism inherent in the discipline. Consequently they have focused on women as *subjects* of study thus challenging the universal application of sexist psychological theory. They argue that scientific rigour must be adhered to thereby ensuring that women are not unfairly prejudiced by research outcomes. This approach therefore, does not question science or its conceptualisation of truth – instead, it adds gender to the equation so as to render women more visible in psychological theorising both as producers and *objects* of knowledge creation. Quantitative methods have been favoured by these researchers since these are more consistent with a positivist paradigm which reduces the world (and experience) to measurable units. Thus in researching women’s experience, the gender bias inherent in mainstream psychological research, is challenged. Gergen (2001) argues that the appropriation of quantitative methodologies within a gendered perspective is seen as generating valid and reliable feminist psychological research. Feminist empiricists render visible women’s lives by practicing *good science*. Thus women’s experiences are included in empirical and theoretical work, founded on traditional positivist principles.

While feminist empiricists foreground gender by challenging the bias in mainstream psychological research, feminist standpoint theorists question the positivist approach to understanding women’s experiences (Gergen, 2001). They posit the idea that women’s gendered experiences provide a qualitatively different truth about the world – the knowledge produced by mainstream studies reflects androcentric views which do not mirror women’s experiences. By using qualitative methods, these researchers aim to show how women’s view of reality vastly differs from men’s. Feminist standpoint researchers have focused on women’s universal experiences of patriarchal oppression and have sought to highlight the differences between women and men by creating new knowledge systems which speak to these differences. Thus women’s voice is understood as different (and superior?) to men’s. A central critique of the standpoint position is that it homogenises women as a group thereby ignoring the material differences which create differing lived realities (Gergen, 2001). This universalism is challenged by contemporary standpoint theorists such as Collins (2000) who argues that the very process of knowledge production has served to maintain white, middle-class, male (and female) privilege thereby obscuring and marginalising the experiences of women constructed as Other. She makes a compelling case for a “black feminist epistemology” (p. 251) in which the experiences of black women are understood within the

context of various interlocking oppressions. She draws on feminist standpoint theory to allow voice for the life experiences of black women. Her work shows how alternative epistemologies validate subjugated knowledges thereby challenging the primacy of white, Western conceptions of truth.

The essentialist foundations of feminist standpoint philosophy and the positivist underpinnings of feminist empiricism have been critiqued by researchers working within a postmodern (poststructuralist) tradition (Gergen, 2001). Gavey (1997) argues that a key element of poststructuralist thought is “its resistance to definition or even identification, presumably because such practices represent an attempt to pin down an essence that does not exist” (p. 50). This epistemological tradition questions the existence of truth and objective reality – thus the notion of essence is rejected. Realities and knowledges are therefore socially constructed and do not exist in and of themselves. Gavey (1997) asserts that language is constitutive of reality and that “(a)ny interpretation or understanding of an object or event is made through a particular discourse concerning or relating to that object or event” (p.53). In addition, language is also constitutive of subjectivity which challenges the notion of a fixed, unitary self. Thus poststructuralists reject the essentialism inherent in standpoint approaches and focus on the multiplicity of (sometimes contradictory) subject positions which women (and men) may occupy (Gavey 1997).

Gergen (2001) argues that feminist psychologists have arrogated postmodernist perspectives such as social constructionism thereby questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. In particular postmodern theorists have been instrumental in deconstructing notions of gender and gender identity thereby challenging the idea that these are fixed and inherently related to biological sex. Thus in deconstructing these categories, the masculine-feminine binary is challenged and identities are seen as socially produced. Constructionists are concerned with how “verbal designations can also be contested categories –that is, categories can be investigated as to what their social value is, how they function in society, and whether they are liberating for people – questions that centre on the politics of the category” (Gergen, 2001, p. 36). While the deconstruction of categories offers a radical approach to understanding knowledge-production, this has not been uncritically accepted by all feminists. One counter-argument has been that if gender does not exist, then how can patriarchal oppression be acknowledged and opposed. Another has argued for sustaining a relationship with embodiment so as to avoid the abstraction inherent in constructionism (Gergen, 2001).

These concerns notwithstanding, Gergen (2001) argues that social constructionist projects have several commendable features which bode well for feminist researchers: the critique of truth is central to these projects; research and activism are viewed as intricately linked; language is seen as central to constructions of the world and the researcher is firmly and openly located within her work.

The discussion above highlights the key principles underlying feminist research and illustrates the heterogeneity in feminist conceptualisations of the knowledge production process. This argument has been useful in further justifying my feminist orientation and the poststructuralist framework which my study employs to examine the subjectivities of *violent women*.

Narrative and Identity

In exploring how language is constitutive of subjectivity, I drew on narrative psychology as a framework for analysing women offenders' narratives of violent crime. Schiff (2006) cogently explores the challenges facing narrative psychology, one of which is the difficulty around definition. A plethora of meanings have been attributed to narrative and Schiff (2006) distinguishes between "narrow" and "broad" definitions of the term. A "narrow" conceptualisation concentrates on the analysis of the form and content of particular stories while a broad definition includes artistic expression as a means of communicating subjectivity. For the purposes of my study I employed the narrow conceptualisation and view narrative as stories which are significant tools for "articulating selfhood and identity" (Schiff, p. 21). Thus my focus is on individual stories in which "identities can be assembled, disassembled, accepted and contested, and indeed performed for audiences" (Riessman, 2008, p. 7).

While a range of narrative forms are of interest to both feminist and non-feminist researchers (Bamberg, 2006; Loseke, 2007), my focus is on the work of Dan McAdams (1993, 1996, 2001, 2006a, 2006b) who considers how the life story provides a means for the construction of identity. In examining women's life stories I was interested in 'holistic' accounts as opposed to smaller stories or isolated aspects of their lives. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) contend that self-narratives constitute identity and are based in fact (or reality), yet are constructed and reconstructed by the narrator.

McAdams (1996) argues that storytelling not only provides a person with means of self-representation, it also enables one to make sense of one's life and integrate it into a coherent whole. In particular he focuses on how the life story proffers the opportunity to construct "an evolving narrative of the self that incorporates the reconstructed past, perceived present and anticipated future" (McAdams, 1996, p. 307). Thus the narrator constructs a plot (or plots) in which a protagonist and other characters interact in various settings over time. While the life story may be constituted of varied and contradictory smaller stories or micronarratives, it is arranged so as to tell a story about the self. However, since identity is constructed through narrative, it is dynamic and therefore each telling and retelling represents one illustration of a life story as opposed to a unitary, fixed identity inherent in the individual (Crewe & Maruna, 2006).

Life stories therefore, are viewed as "psychosocial constructions of the self" (McAdams, 2006a, p. 16) which are also powerfully shaped by positionality. Thus race, gender, class, ethnicity and culture (amongst others) shape the form and content of the life story which in turn reflects prevailing discourses. The impact of context, also termed "culture(s)" by McAdams (1996) is significant because certain kinds of narratives make sense (and are deemed appropriate) in certain contexts. While the life story serves an integrative function for the individual, it also serves a performative function – McAdams (1996) argues that by constructing the life story in particular ways, the narrator is able to manage the impressions of the audience, especially if there is an expectation that a particular story should be told. For example, within the correctional context stories of redemption may feature strongly as inmates attempt to make sense of their incarceration and the stigmatisation accompanying it (Maruna, Wilson & Curran, 2006). In addition, given the rehabilitative function of imprisonment, such stories are valued (and indeed expected) and are therefore also shaped by the context within which they are produced.

I utilised McAdams's ideas in examining the life stories of women who were incarcerated for violent crime. I was primarily interested in probing the meanings they attached to their violence and how they had made sense of their incarceration. As I will elaborate later on (in *A story of the study*), I did not explicitly ask them to tell the story of their lives – instead, I asked them to provide an account of how they had come to be incarcerated. The women responded by locating their violent acts within the larger life narrative. These narrative interviews were open-ended and encouraged detailed accounts of women's lives (Riesmann,

2008) – thus the production of narratives was a collaborative effort as I initiated the interviews with a question while then inviting the women to direct the pace, content and flow of the interviews.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is an umbrella term for analytic methods which are used to interpret stories occurring in either, written, spoken or visual narrative form. While there different types of narrative analysis all of these are generally focused on examining the meaning and purpose of stories and go beyond a mere elucidation of content (Riessman, 2008). Thus narrative methods have “transformative potential serving to rewrite common assumptions and social scripts” (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006, p. 323).

In analysing the life stories of the women, I drew on the work of Lieblich et al. (1998) and paid attention to both the form and content of the narratives. These authors provide an analytic framework that enabled me to explore how life stories constituted the identity(ies) of narrators. I decided to analyse both form and content, because the former may well be viewed as the “embodiment” of the latter (Lieblich et al., 1998). Consequently in my discussion of narrative form (structure), I will draw on the ways in which content moulds it.

In my analysis I employed several strategies suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998). Firstly, I was concerned with analysing the type of life narrative being constructed as it conveyed a particular story about the self. In particular I was interested in how women conceptualised their acts of violence and how they located these (and other) stories within the larger macronarratives of their lives. Narrative research within correctional contexts has often focused on the types of stories which offenders tell thereby conveying the identities they construct (Maruna et al., 2006; Presser, 2004). For example Maruna et al. (2006) found that incarcerated men constructed narratives which conveyed stories about personal transformation to show how they had changed as result of imprisonment. Presser (2004) found that violent male offenders told different types of narratives: some explained their violence as temporary lapses of judgement and located these within macronarratives of consistent morality. Some also told stories of personal transformation so as to show how they had changed, while others were unable to produce coherent stories with consistent themes. The study showed how these identities were co-constructed within the research context.

While not focusing on identity construction, but rather on motivations for violence, Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez (2006) explored 66 incarcerated women's narratives and found that women employed reasons ranging from "disrespect or humiliation" to "self-defence" (p. 332). These unequivocal explanations countered "anti-agentic" (p. 322) constructions of *violent women* which dominate the extant literature.

Secondly, to analyse the type of narrative recounted, I considered the progression of plot(s) over time (Lieblich et al., 1998) – thus I analysed how the protagonist was constructed and the subject positions she occupied at various points in the story. In essence the plot line refers to the central point of the story and how various themes were woven together to develop this plot. Thus by analysing the construction of life stories within the interview context, I was interested in exploring how narrators developed plots so as to communicate their identities.

Thirdly, I considered narrative coherence, i.e. the extent to which the story was plausible, intelligible and well-structured (Lieblich et al, 1998) - to what extent can the story be understood by the audience and does it 'make sense' by following a logical sequence? To tell a coherent story the narrator has to be able to construct plausible trajectories for various experiences. In the life story the plot line is developed by forging a chronology of 'events' that can account for a person's current situation. Cultural prescripts dictate how stories should be told and in the Western world this typically takes the form of a beginning, middle and end – thus the coherence of the story relies on the intelligible progression of the narrative. Even in instances where narratives do not proceed in this manner, narrators are required to furnish additional information if the stories are to make any sense. The content of the life story also contributes to its overall (global) coherence in that the causal explanations provided must convincingly explain the current juncture (McAdams, 2006b). In order to assess the global coherence of a story, it is useful to consider the extent to which it has causal coherence and thematic coherence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Causal coherence refers to the extent to which a narrative yields plausible accounts of the protagonist's life, so events must be linked together to explain how and why a person finds herself at that juncture. Thematic coherence refers to the ways in which a recurring theme(s) can be identified in the larger narrative of the self. While there is considerable debate around whether coherence is indeed necessary, desirable or dependent on the abovementioned elements (see McAdams, 2006b), I have employed the construct so as to examine how coherence is linked to meaning-making and what the implications are for understanding violent women.

Having outlined the elements of narrative coherence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) as useful analytic tools in my study, it is imperative to note that the concept also has strong “cultural” foundations. Thus, contexts will determine “what kinds of stories can and should be told in a given culture, what stories are understandable and valued among people who live in and through a given culture. And the same consideration cannot be divorced from cultural expectations regarding what kinds of lives people should live” (McAdams, 2006b, p. 123). Thus coherence is shaped by cultural expectations – with regard to my study, broader discourses of gender, femininity and violence permeating the South African and prison contexts shaped the stories told by *criminalised violent women*. By analysing the stories according to the framework outlined above, I was able to explore how the women used language to convey meaning and construct identities within the interview (and prison) context. My analysis also focused on the function of these narratives and how their construction was shaped by the institutional (and broader societal) context within which they were conveyed.

Validity of Narrative Analysis

Having outlined the methodological approach, the question of the validity of my work arises. Riessman (2008) identifies the “trustworthiness” (p. 184) of the data as well as the validity of the researcher’s interpretive narrative, as two pertinent “levels” (p. 184) constituting the validity of narrative projects. These aspects cannot be evaluated by utilising ‘objective criteria’ but must rather be considered within the larger theoretical and epistemological perspectives which underpin such studies. Riessman (2008) identifies several facets of validity which I have used to argue for the “trustworthiness” of my own work.

Firstly, the correlation between narrative and ‘reality’ may be an important means of assessing the validity of narrative projects. However, the relevance of this relationship depends on the particular epistemological framework underlying the study. Since my work was conducted from a poststructuralist perspective, my work was not focused on establishing the ‘truthfulness’ of women’s accounts and I was not concerned with comparing these stories with other ‘factual’ accounts of their lives. Given that my theoretical location challenges the existence of a fixed, knowable reality, the veracity of women’s stories was not at issue here. Instead I was interested in their truths and the meanings accorded in their stories. Riessman

(2008) argues that in social constructionist projects, establishing truth is not important rather it is the researcher's interpretive account which can be interrogated. My analytic interpretation and the resultant account of women's stories were grounded in the work of McAdams (1993, 1996, 2001, 2006a, 2006b) and Lieblich et.al (1998). I presented a detailed outline as to how I chose to analyse and interpret the data thereby showing how the analytic narrative was created. Thus the validity of my work can be judged in terms of its adherence to the frameworks forwarded by these authors.

A second issue pertains to narrative coherence: this relates to the coherence of women's narratives as well as the coherence of the account presented in this dissertation. In my discussion of the narrative methods I employed, I considered the value of narrative coherence as an analytic tool for understanding women's construction of their identities. However, this did not presuppose that women would tell coherent stories or that the lack of coherence implied that these accounts were not worthy narratives. In fact, as will be shown in Chapter Six, my understanding of women's incoherent narratives conveys a particular story about the construction of those identities. Riessman (2008) argues that incoherence in stories should be interpreted and clarified by the researcher and the coherence of the interpretive account should be judged by how (s)he has arrived at the conclusions. In this dissertation I have outlined the epistemological framework underpinning my study, the narrative methods employed and I have presented my interpretation of women's narratives in the analysis chapters. I have also included examples of women's voices in these chapters so as to show how I arrived at my interpretations and to provide evidence of my empirical work. Riessman (2008) states that the "persuasiveness" (p. 191) of the interpretive account enhances the validity of the work thus my dissertation can be judged in terms of its coherence, plausibility and intelligibility.

Thirdly, Riessman refers to the "pragmatic use" (2008, p. 193) of these projects for other researchers: does the interpretive account serve as a launch pad for future research with *violent women*? This issue can only be addressed by other researchers who will assess the validity of my work based on the "transparency" of my approach. Thus in describing and justifying my methodology and explaining how I constructed my interpretive account, I have opened my work to scrutiny.

Finally, the transformative value of narrative research has been problematised. Riessman (2008) considers whether these projects can play a role in social transformation and explores the ways in which researchers have sought to bring about personal and social change. She considers how collaborative projects enable participants to be involved in various phases of the study – thus their reflections on interview transcripts and the resultant analyses are important aspects of these endeavours. While this may be advantageous this is not always possible (as in the current study) and therefore, ultimately, researchers are accountable for their analytic accounts and have to detail how these accounts were constructed.

A story of the study

In writing a chapter on method, I am forced to comply with the conventions of this dissertation – my narrative of the study is presented as a linear representation of the research process. However, the process was fraught with many challenges in which I had to, amongst others, revisit ideas, reconceptualise my focus and exercise patience with bureaucracy. I also reflect on the ethical challenges which I faced and consider how these shaped the research and impacted on my experience as a researcher. All of this occurred within the larger narrative of my life in which my identities as a mother, wife and academic had their own demands and challenges.

Why violence?

I have a rather complicated relationship with violence – in this thesis I have made my scholarly interest very apparent and of course, my study is an academic means to an end. However, the issue of violence has a very personal meaning for me and I think that has been the major motivation for this work. Seventeen years ago my father was murdered during an attempted car hijacking and his death left an indelible mark on my life. This study imaginably represents my quest to answer some of the questions I was left with when he died. At the time of the incident I struggled to comprehend how someone could drag my father from his car and shoot him at point-blank range, in full view of on-lookers in a busy road on a balmy November afternoon. This senseless violence, unprovoked as it was, completely shattered my frame of reference and like most victims, I asked why? I could not understand why those men did not just take my father's car and his money and leave him – what caused them to kill him? In many ways these questions motivated my interest in violence and the various causal

explanations for his murder could probably be plausible: perhaps they did not want to be identified, perhaps they were desperate perhaps they were psychopathic, bad, evil... I have contemplated a plethora of reasons and yet it has not helped me to understand why. Over the years, I have integrated this devastating loss into my life and it partly motivated me to train as a clinical psychologist. My professional training sparked my interest in 'seeing' the person behind the violent acts. I do not have any romantic notions of violence or those who perpetrate it, but my personal journey conceivably led me to choosing this topic for my doctoral dissertation five years ago. I decided to focus on *violent women* largely because of the dearth of South African (and African) work in this area and also because *these* women occupy a rather uncomfortable yet challenging space in our society.

Gaining access

Given my aim to explore the narratives of women incarcerated for violent crime, I approached the Department of Correctional Services for permission to conduct research at one of the women's correctional facilities in South Africa. In January 2006 I submitted a copy of my PhD research proposal to the Department's head office in Pretoria along with the required official forms requesting permission to conduct my research. Subsequent to submission, my documents were misplaced several times and I spent countless hours on the telephone with various people at head office in an effort to locate the paperwork. I found this extremely frustrating and anxiety-provoking as I was concerned that my request would not be considered at all. In August 2006, after several months of telephone calls and two resubmissions of my documents, I received written permission from the Department and was granted access to a correctional facility in the Western Cape Province (Appendix 1). To safeguard the confidentiality requirements made by the Department, I may not identify the correctional facility other than to refer to its location in the Western Cape Province in South Africa.

Although official permission had been granted, I also had to negotiate access to the correctional facility concerned as the head had not been informed about this by the Pretoria office. I had several meetings with her in which I explained my purpose and also gave her a copy of the permission letter I had received. I was eventually given an access card and was also granted permission to speak to all of the sentenced women to see who would be interested in participating in my project. The correctional facility also furnished a list of all

the women along with details of their convictions and sentences ($n=198$). I established that 53 women were serving sentences for violent crime ranging from murder and culpable homicide to robbery with aggravating circumstances. I therefore decided to approach all of these women to see if any of them were interested in participating in my study.

Participants

Recruiting participants was quite daunting as this was the first time that I found myself within a correctional context and I was unsure how I would be received. Having generated a list of women who had been convicted of violent offences, I approached them individually or in groups to explain the purpose of my study. Originally I had hoped to speak to each of them individually but the correctional routine often impeded this. If women were in their cells I was able to speak to them on their own, but if they were working in the kitchen, laundry or sewing rooms, I had to address them in groups. My initial meetings included introducing myself and describing the purpose of my visit. I explained that I was conducting research for postgraduate study and that I was interested in the stories of women who had been convicted of “aggressive crimes”. I used this term as it is used in the correctional context to refer to lethal and non-lethal violence, specifically to distinguish violent from non-violent offences. From an academic point of view aggression usually refers to indirect and direct behaviour aimed at inflicting hurt or pain on another person (Bjorkvist & Niemela, 1992), yet I nonetheless decided on this terminology with which women were *au fait*.

I offered women the opportunity to ask any questions about the study and also asked them to consider my participation request before my return the following week. With the exception of two women who refused at the outset, all the others agreed to think about it. I returned the following week spent and several hours each day with individual women explaining the project in greater detail as well as the ethics framing my work. After this process, 24 women agreed to participate in the study and I interviewed them over a period of six months between October 2006 and March 2007.

In describing my participants I was faced with the challenge of how to (re)present them in a way which would not render them invisible. I felt that I needed to (re)present each one’s story so that they would not merely appear as data in this dissertation. Yet I was mindful of preserving confidentiality so that they were not further stigmatised by being solely defined in

terms of their offences. This dilemma was difficult to negotiate and I decided to present the following table with demographic details of the interview sample. To provide evidence and insights into the voices to which I was privy, I present an example of the interviews I conducted (Appendix 4). The analysis chapters (Chapters Five, Six and Seven) also contain detailed excerpts from various interviews thereby, hopefully, rendering the women more visible.

Below is a demographic profile of the participants:

<i>Characteristics</i>	
	(<i>n</i> =24)
Age range (Years)	
>50: 41-50: 31-40: 21-30: 18-20	1: 1: 13: 6: 3
Race	
Coloured: Black: White	15: 8: 1
Offence type	
Murder: Culpable homicide: Robbery with aggravating circumstances	19: 2: 3
Sentence (Years)	
Life imprisonment: >20: 11-15: 6-10	1: 1: 3: 19

Age

The majority of women were aged between 30 and 40 years (*n*=13). The oldest woman in sample was 54 years old and was nearing the end of an 8-year sentence for the murder of her partner's mistress. The three youngest women were between the ages of 18 and 20 years and had been convicted of murder while they were minors. They had been in prison for two to three years at the time of the interviews. With the exception of four women, the majority of women had children who were either living with relatives (*n*=18) or on the streets since their mothers' arrest (*n*=2). Two women had given birth during the period I was conducting the interviews, while a third had her youngest daughter (aged 5) living in the correctional facility with her. As will be explored in the analysis chapters, for most of these women (*n*=20) their identities as mothers constituted central aspects of their narratives of the self.

Race

The issue of race is particularly perplexing in a study of this nature. In previous chapters I underscored the frequent racialisation of crime and violence which further stigmatises women

already marginalised in terms of race, gender and class. In the South African context racial classification was part of our segregated, oppressive past and therefore referring to women's race groups is particularly thorny. I had to consider whether the inclusion of race would not further entrench notions of black and coloured (that is, those women 'who are not white') as being equated with violence and criminality. However, I have decided to include the race of the women as I think that it speaks to their particular social locations and therefore provides a context within which to understand their stories. In this study, "black" refers to women who self-identify as having an indigenous African ancestry, while "coloured" refers to women who self-identify as having mixed race ancestry. Being acutely aware that these terms are sites of contestation and debate, my definitions are based on how the women classified themselves in terms of race. As can be seen from the table, the majority of women were coloured ($n=15$), while eight were black and one was white.

Offence/Sentence

Most of the women were serving sentences for murder ($n=19$) which in terms of South African criminal law, means that they were found to have intentionally caused the deaths of other people (Snyman, 2002). The majority ($n=16$) of women in this group knew their victims and had some kind of relationship with them. The victims included family members such as children, siblings, extended family as well as friends and acquaintances. As will be illustrated in the analysis chapters, this violence was constructed as resulting from intoxication or provocation by the victim or as a result of protracted altercations between perpetrators and victims. Of the three women who did not know their victims, two killed their victims during the commission of vehicle hijackings while a third killed a woman during an arson attempt. The majority of women convicted of murder received sentences between six to ten years ($n=17$) while the other two received mandatory sentences (27 years and life imprisonment respectively). The women who received shorter sentences ($n=17$) were first-time offenders and mitigating circumstances such as intoxication and provocation were taken into account during sentencing. The two women who received mandatory sentences were sentenced along with their male accomplices who also received the maximum penalties.

Two women were incarcerated for culpable homicide - acts which unintentionally led to the death of other people (Snyman, 2002). One woman killed her brother-in-law after several years of sexual harassment while the other killed a close friend after a heated argument. In

both cases, mitigating circumstances (such as extreme provocation and intoxication) led to the court's decision to impose lesser sentences of between six and ten years.

Three women were serving sentences for robbery with aggravating circumstances - crimes in which violence was used for financial gain (Snyman, 2002). These women committed these crimes with male accomplices who subsequently perpetrated violence towards other people. One woman had been involved in a robbery in which someone was killed while the other two were involved in hijackings in which people were seriously injured. None of them were charged with the violence against the victims but their accomplices were charged with murder or attempted murder. Consequently, all three women received minimum sentences of fifteen years for their crimes.

It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the legal construction of these acts and the subtle nuances distinguishing murder from culpable homicide. However, it is important to point out how the legal system defines and frames these acts of violence and how this determined both the charges and sentences imposed on these women.

The Interviews

The interviews were conducted in an office made available to me by the head of the correctional centre. I initiated each interview by obtaining informed consent from the women - asking them to read the consent form. Two women were illiterate and I read the contents of the form to them (Appendix 2). I explained the purpose of the study as well as how I endeavoured to safeguard confidentiality. I guaranteed to change any pertinent identifying details to ensure anonymity. Given that these women were in the custodial care of a correctional facility, their identities (as well as other details of their lives) were well-known within that institution. They also had to be fetched from their cells for the interviews so their participation in the study was not completely confidential. Thus I was faced with the challenge of how best to preserve confidentiality. I discussed these issues at length with each person as I wanted to ensure that they were comfortable that their participation would not be completely anonymous. I explained that I would protect their identities in the dissertation with pseudonyms and limited descriptions of individual demographic details. I would also not provide any description of the correctional facility so as to further safeguard against identification. Since the dissertation is a public document from which I also plan to publish articles, this was important. In particular I was concerned that the publication of the

narratives should not impact on women's families or their lives post-incarceration. We therefore discussed the implications of these issues and their feelings about it. Each woman was then asked to check the boxes on the consent form if they agreed to the provisions I had set out. They were all asked to sign the form (either with a signature or an 'x') if they were agreement with the provisions. The interviews lasted between one and a half to two hours and were digitally recorded with the permission of the women.

I decided to conduct two open-ended interviews with each woman to have the time to explore their narratives in detail. I initiated the first interview by asking the following question: "Vertel my van die gebeure wat daartoe gelei het dat jy in die vrouesentrum is" ("Tell me about the events which led to you being in the female centre"). Since I wanted to elicit narratives about violence, I hoped such an open-ended question would facilitate the telling of their stories. This question was not only aimed at eliciting stories about their perpetration, but also gave them the opportunity to construct a trajectory (or trajectories) to explain their incarceration. Thus my question enabled the women to tell stories about their crimes as well as the self. For the most part they told their stories without any prompting and I very rarely asked questions for clarification. Where needed I would prompt by saying "Vertel my 'n bietjie meer..." ("Tell me a bit more...") or I would ask questions relating to specific micronarratives.

In the second interviews, a week later, I asked the women to reflect on the previous interviews and to embroider on their narratives. They all found that the experience had triggered various feelings in the intervening period. The second interviews therefore explored the emotions evoked by the first one and the meanings they attached to it. For some women it was the first time that they had spoken of their crimes in such minute detail and this induced feelings of regret and remorse. For other women, the interviews animated the sadness of the separation from their families. These reflections enabled women to embroider on various micronarratives while also expressing the emotions the narrations elicited. By encouraging and acknowledging the interconnections between thoughts and feelings, I drew on Collins' (2000) ideas about the "ethics of caring" (p. 262) as one of the pivotal dimensions of black feminist epistemology. According to her, "personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process" (Collins, 2000, p. 263). Her ideas challenge the notion that thoughts and feelings should be treated as distinct, unrelated entities in the research process. Endeavouring to impart the "ethic of caring" I provided the space for

women to share their thoughts and feelings. In turn I took care to acknowledge and be empathically responsive to the emotions that surfaced during my interactions with them.

Language

I conducted seventeen interviews in Afrikaans which is one of 11 official languages in South Africa. The other seven interviews were conducted in English. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber who is fluent in Afrikaans and who was experienced in transcribing open-ended interviews. He provided verbatim transcriptions and in two instances where some material was inaudible (due to background noise or poor sound quality) this was noted.

I decided against the translation of transcripts as I felt that given my particular feminist orientation and my keen awareness of our societal debates around language, race, ethnicity and culture, this would further ‘sanitise’ the women’s stories. I therefore analysed the Afrikaans narratives and provided my analysis in English. I felt that it would be difficult and at times almost impossible to capture the nuances of the language in the English translations. Since my analysis focuses on the form and content of the narratives and the ways in which these convey stories about the self, it was important to work with the stories in the language in which they were told. Thus my representation of these narratives is based on stories told in the vernacular and my interpretive account is filtered through both Afrikaans and English lenses – these re-representations reflect my particular subject positions as a black feminist influenced by a socio-political context in which post-colonial debates about language are ubiquitous. This decision was not taken lightly as I was torn between my socio-political standpoint and the academic demands of the dissertation which required that my work be examined by experts who were not necessarily fluent or familiar with Afrikaans.

Another issue which I faced concerned the politics of rendering women visible – given that my descriptions of the women’s lives were limited by necessary ethical obligations, I felt that working with the English translations would render them even more invisible, thereby contradicting some of the principles of this study. Hence in the analysis chapters I feature excerpts from interviews in Afrikaans to provide evidence and honour the women’s voices. Yet being mindful of that my work will not be limited to a South African audience I therefore include translations (Appendix 3) to make the women’s stories more accessible.

Reflexivity

In reflecting on my particular location within the research process, I explore how my subjectivities co-constructed the dynamics of the interviews with the women. A discussion of my role cannot be done in isolation of the context within which the process occurred – I therefore also embroider on earlier discussions of the challenges of working within the prison environment.

In defining myself as a black woman who also identifies as coloured (of mixed race ancestry), I am challenged by Palmary's (2006) contention to reflect on how these identities played a role during the research process. My identification as black is a political identity which I adopted during my student days and signified a rejection of the derogatory label of coloured ascribed to me during Apartheid. However, my re-appropriation of my coloured identity during my thirties was important in terms of locating myself culturally and recognising the historicity of an identity which had been denigrated by a label.

I am aware that my coloured identity (and the embodiment of this) may have offered a point of connection between myself and the coloured women whom I interviewed – however, this would imply that our experiences were homogenous and that in the interview context I was accepted unquestioningly. The intersection of gender and race was pertinently illustrated in one interview in which Brenda spoke about the distinction which (coloured) warders made between coloured women with straight hair versus those with kinky or curly hair – the former performed jobs in public spaces in the prison while the latter were kept hidden and performed menial tasks. The implicit assumption was that I was attuned to cultural discourses which construct hair texture as a racial marker for coloured women (Erasmus, 1997), thus denoting degrees of whiteness (straight hair) or blackness (kinky or curly hair). Because of my own history (and my relationship with my curly hair) I nodded and smiled in response to her statement thereby signifying my understanding of the ways in which hair has been constructed in coloured culture. While on one hand her statement may have indicated a point of connection, on the other it was also political as it challenged me to position myself in the interview – either as a coloured woman who embraced her blackness (as she did) or one who eschewed this identity in favour of whiteness. Within the interview context, therefore, I was required to make my racial location explicit such that she could see how I positioned myself.

Upon reflection, I realise that hair, which has traditionally been a marker of femininity, played a significant role in how some women sought to locate me as a woman. Given my cropped hairstyle, curiosity as to my sexual orientation was piqued – especially since very short hair ‘indicated’ a lesbian identity in prison. One woman asked a direct question as to my sexual orientation while others questioned my marital status and whether I had any children. Thus my identities as heterosexual, mother, wife were ‘elicited’ in the interviews – on one level, I have interpreted these questions as attempts to locate me within ideas about femininity (and perhaps how I would view them) while on the other, this may also have contributed to the shaping of some narratives –it may be that these particular identities were seen as conforming to valued aspects of femininity which in turn may have been linked to perceived expectations of their constructions of themselves. Thus the production of narratives did not occur in isolation of my participation in the research process.

Other aspects of my positionality such as being a PhD researcher and an outsider (in relation to the prison context) also contributed to power differentials within the research interviews. Thus my agenda framed the research process and determined whom I would interview and which questions I would ask. Freeman (2003) cautions that “there is a need to remain acutely aware of the conditions of production within which narratives emerge, being particularly sensitive to power differentials and the like; otherwise, one runs the risk of taking what is said at face value and thereby ignoring the relevant constraints as well as the institutional structures that give rise to them” (p. 334). The location of this study within the prison also contextualised the production of narratives in that correctional discourses framed the type of stories which were told. Rehabilitation discourses permeated the prison context and served to show how the women had been positively changed by incarceration –for the most part the women were expected to demonstrate their transformation by non-conflictual behaviour as well as a commitment to maintaining this post-incarceration. Given that successful parole hearings required evidence of change, rehabilitation (and transformation) discourses served as proof of transformation. Thus stories were not told independently of the context and were not unaffected by the power differentials between myself (as a researcher and outsider) and the women (as participants and inmates). Consequently, narratives were also shaped by my expectations and agenda as a researcher.

Upon reflection, my experience in interviewing women in the prison context challenged me at various levels. While I was not apprehensive at the prospect of interviewing *violent*

women, I found the prison context to be intimidating. In particular, my interactions with the warders were anxiety-provoking as they seemed suspicious of me and were hesitant to assist me in setting up the interviews. I was disconcerted by their treatment of the women, particularly in the way that they verbally abused them when fetching them from their cells for the interviews. My discomfort led me to discussing this with the women prior to the interviews – I felt the need to condemn the abuse so as to distance myself from them (the warders) thereby (hopefully) locating myself as different. While I discussed the issue with the women, I was unable to address it with the warders as I was mindful that it would negatively impact on my access to the prison. From an ethical point of view, I struggled with this as I felt that it amounted to collusion as I did not challenge this treatment – this represented my dilemma as to the parameters of my role as a feminist researcher and the duty of care which I had towards the women.

Chapter summary

In this chapter I discussed the feminist location of my work and situated it in a poststructuralist framework. In doing so I outlined the narrative method I employed to examine women's stories and discussed how narrative *is* identity. The next three chapters present the analysis of the narratives. I show the various subject positions which women adopted in their accounts and how these conveyed stories about their identities. In Chapter Five, I explore how life stories provide a context within which to make sense of violent perpetration. I also discuss two narrative forms, namely, conversion and stability narratives and show how these conveyed particular stories about the self. In Chapter Six, I focus on incoherent narratives and show how narrators were unable to construct plausible, intelligible and coherent narratives of the self. Chapter Seven explores how women drew on and/or rejected dominant discourses of femininity in their constructions of themselves as gendered beings.

Chapter Five: Life stories, conversion narratives and stability narratives

This chapter discusses the women's life stories as a meaning-making device. It explores how these narratives enabled women to construct identities while telling particular stories about the self. Common features of all the narratives were the influence of families of origin, adult intimate relationships, substance use and the influence of friends. While life stories were used as an explanatory context in all twenty-four narratives, three types of narratives were told: Conversion narratives centred on protagonists who were transformed from bad to good women. Stability narratives accentuated the consistency of the moral character of the narrators while incoherent narratives reflected the narrators' inability to impart coherent and plausible accounts. I will discuss conversion and stability narratives in this chapter and embroider on incoherent narratives in Chapter Six. As I have discussed in Chapter Four, I analysed the narratives in the vernacular and re-presented my interpretations in English. The translations for the excerpts used in the analysis chapters are found in Appendix 3.

Contextualising violence within the life story

A common feature of all 24 narratives was that the life story provided the context within which the crime narrative was embedded. As such, the crime narrative was one of several micronarratives and was not necessarily the central focus of the macronarrative. In narrating their life stories, the women interwove many micronarratives detailing various aspects of their lives: stories about childhood and families of origin located the protagonist within a psychosocial context; stories about adulthood focused on intimate relationships while micronarratives of the social context emphasised its influence on life choices. By drawing these aspects together women attempted to make sense of aspects of their lives, in particular their crimes which had led to their incarceration. McAdams (1993) views the life story as a "personal myth" (p. 5) which enables the narrator to construct her identity(ies). Consequently, the life story enables the narrator to "articulate a meaningful niche in the psychosocial world" (McAdams, 1993, p. 5).

Families of origin

Diana who had been convicted of murdering a drug dealer, contextualised her life story in terms of her religion and its impact on her childhood experiences - a theme that permeated her macronarrative. She started her story by saying:

Okay, ek is Muslim en ek het al die pad grootgeraak in 'n Muslim huis. Ja, en ek was lief vir Muslim skool en alles daai. (Diana)

From the outset, Diana established her identity as a Muslim and emphasised that she had embraced this way of life. However, a turning point in her life came when she found out that her biological father had raped her mother and that her mother had subsequently married the man whom she had thought was her father. She decided to leave home because she felt betrayed and therefore rejected the conservative way of life to which she had been accustomed. She detailed how she became involved in a gang, started using drugs and engaged in various crimes. A significant point in her story revolved around the crime of which she had been convicted, and this micronarrative had very strong religious undertones. In talking about the incident she grappled with the way that it had affected her ability to be a good Muslim again.

Because daai is vir my 'n problem elke keer as ek my Koran wil touch because my Koran tells these things. Die moord het alles met my gebeur. So elke keer wat ek daai sien, dit draw a hell of a reaction... daai murder stemme, dit kom net terug na my toe. So wat is die point? Ek aanvaar dit maar ek kan nie salah nie. Ek kan nie my Koran lees nie. Ja, en elke jaar... ek moet sê dit het nou baie bedaar nou. Maar elke jaar for about sewe jaar, daaiselfde tyd wat daai person vermoor gewees het, dan kom dit terug... daaiselfde maand... daaiselfde datum. (Diana)

Diana related how the murder had plagued her for several years and that it affected her ability to pray and to read the Koran. Although she had *intended* to be a good Muslim, she was haunted by the murder and could not perform the rituals that her religion required. Her frustration was evident when she asked “*so what’s the point*”: although she wanted to practice her religion, she could not, so therefore there was no point in trying.

Like Diana, Andrea also highlighted the influence of her familial environment on her decision to commit a crime. This along with the debt which she had incurred led to her conviction for robbery with aggravating circumstances. She started her story by saying:

My parents were alcoholics. They had no money; they had no food. I also got myself into debt, so my partner asked me the one Sunday morning what do I think of, if we do this crime. So I was not certain about it, but because of the pressures from my folks and also because of the crap I got myself into... obviously, I was being led down the wrong path. I initially said to him that if anybody got hurt I didn't want to be involved. He said nobody would get hurt. And the day that he actually did it, I was still in two minds. Constantly, I didn't know if I should do it. I was always doubting, but I also thought of the circumstances. And that morning, we were in the car, and my mother phoned me. John and Isaac, they got out of the car and I was still doubting. And my mother she phoned me she said, Andrea, where are you? I said, no, I'm in (place where she lived). She said, what are you doing? I said, no, I'm busy with whatever. Because now I'm ready to do what I'm going to do. So she said to me, ja, me and your dad, we've got no food and we've got no money. That was my deciding point. Now I realise that there were other ways that I could have done first. I could have gone to somebody for help. But I made the wrong decision.(Andrea)

In this excerpt, Andrea's starting point was that her parents were alcoholics, which meant that she had to provide for them. The financial pressure she experienced was the turning point that caused her to participate in an armed robbery. Andrea effectively ordered the events in a way that absolved her of responsibility. Firstly, she alluded to "the pressures" from her parents who were constructed as the primary motivation for her considering the crime. The telephone call from mother acted as the catalyst, once more forcing her into *deciding* to commit the crime. In both instances, she constructed herself as being emotionally manipulated into committing the robbery. Her lack of agency was reinforced by stating that she was "being led down the wrong path" by her partner, thereby negating her responsibility. By starting her life story in this way, Andrea constructed herself as both victim and saviour. Her victimhood resulted from her parents' alcoholism and, to some extent, her partner's influence. Her role as saviour was based on finding a way to save her parents from destitution. Paradoxically, thus, it allowed her to portray her crime as something good because it was committed for ostensibly noble reasons.

As the macronarrative progressed, the recurring theme of her parents' alcoholism, abuse and neglect formed the context within which she wanted listeners to understand her actions. In telling her story in this manner, Andrea constructed a trajectory in which her pathway to crime was understandable. The micronarratives relating to dysfunctional parenting therefore allowed her to rationalise her actions at the time. Only in retrospect was she able to reflect on any other options which might have been available. The macronarrative therefore enabled her to make links between events in her life as well as to step outside her story to reflect on and evaluate her actions.

Similarly, Brenda who was convicted of the murder of a friend related how the deaths of her parents affected her family. She said:

My familie... van my ouers oorlede is is daar nie meer... was daar nie 'n rigting in die huis nie. Ek is die oudste. Ek is die derde van nege. Toe my ouers oorlede gaan toe is daar niemand wat kan... sien, want ons het almal gedrink. Ek gee nie die wyn die skuld nie. Ek gee nie die wyn die skuld nie, want dit is nie die wyn nie – dis jyself. Ek meen, as jy 'n kind is dan sal jy dink, nee man, dit is lekker om net tekere te gaan en wild te lewe. Dis lekker. Maar as jy groot is dan... somtyds dan voel jy baie seer omdat dit lyk vir jou jou familie verstoot jou – soos vir my byvoorbeeld. Ek het 'n bitter swaar lewe deurgegaan. Hulle het altyd aan my geslaan oor onnodige dinge. Ek meen, somtyds dan weet ek ek was verkeerd, maar as ek probeer verskoning vra dan's dit net vir nul (Brenda).

In explaining how she had come to be incarcerated, Brenda linked the lack of parental guidance in their home to the deaths of her parents. Thus, with no parents to guide and supervise them, Brenda and her siblings abused alcohol. This theme permeated her macronarrative, as she constantly linked all the difficulties in her life to being orphaned. Even though Brenda was heavily intoxicated when she fatally stabbed her friend, it is significant, that at the outset, she stated that she did not blame alcohol for her actions. By stating that “*Ek gee nie die wyn die skuld nie. Ek gee nie die wyn die skuld nie, want dit is nie die wyn nie – dis jyself*” (*I don't blame the wine. I don't blame the wine, because it's not the wine – it's you, yourself*), she categorically denied that she was abdicating responsibility. However, the entire micronarrative centred on how the loss of her parents initiated the downward spiral for her and her siblings. In effect, then, she told a narrative that absolved the protagonist of responsibility. She achieved this by constructing the absence of parental care as central to her

inability to regulate herself, particularly where alcohol use was concerned. By implication, and by transferring responsibility to her parents, she could thus not be held culpable for her actions, as was reinforced by the following explanation:

En ek verlang baie na my ouers somtye as ek so in die kamer sit. Ek het weer vanoggend so gehuil. Want toe lees ek in die Bybel in en toe begint ek te huil. 'n Mens se hart breek baie. Maar ek is bly my straf is amper klaar. Ek weet my ouers sal ek nie weer sien nie. As hulle moet gelewe het sou ek nie hier gewees het nie...

She continued:

Want dis te veel familie; ons was te veel in die huis in. Almal het gedrink. Nie omgee vir mekaar nie. Daaroor sit ek vandag hier wat ek hier sit. (Brenda)

Brenda's macronarrative highlighted how her fractured family life led to her violent act. Her belief about the role her parents should have played in her family life was illustrated by referring to the lack of care and concern amongst her siblings. In essence, her story drew on cultural and psychological notions of the role that families play in socialising and regulating children's behaviour. It is significant that Brenda cast the protagonist as the perennial child who was unable to develop fully into a responsible and contained adult. In this way, her narrative achieved the purpose of absolving her of responsibility since the criminal culpability of children is questionable in legal and moral terms.

These examples demonstrate how childhood and familial experiences predisposed narrators to their crimes. The emphasis on dysfunction in primary relationships therefore provided plausible reasons for their actions. The notion that families of origin are instrumental in laying the foundations for children's psychological (and material well-being) is a cornerstone of several cultural, religious and societal discourses. It can be seen that women drew on this discourse so as to root their actions in early experiences thereby emphasising an external locus of control. By initiating life stories with micronarratives of parental or familial dysfunction, narrators were able to displace agency onto those experiences (and people) in a credible manner.

Adulthood

Having laid the foundation of dysfunctional childhood experiences, women also emphasised the impact of adult intimate relationships. These relationships were constructed as detrimental to their physical and emotional well-being as all the women had been in abusive relationships. In some instances these relationships exacerbated the effects of childhood trauma while in other instances it was in some way related to women's crimes. For example, Carla, who had been convicted of murdering her husband's mistress, started her story by saying:

*I don't know whether I must start when I met my husband – because I'm here because of my husband. I think I have to start there. I met him in 1985. We fell in love...
(Carla)*

The reason why Carla began her narrative in 1985 was because she met her husband in that year setting the scene in this manner. Carla established that her husband (rather than she) was responsible for the act that led to her imprisonment. She crafted a narrative in which her husband was the 'bad guy' whose actions provoked her into reacting violently. Her macronarrative was permeated with stories of his infidelity and ill-treatment of her, all of which provided the justification for her violent actions. She provided extensive examples of his violence towards her (such as beating and stabbing her) and outlined the ways in which she had tried to obtain evidence of his infidelity so that she could divorce him. When she talked about the crime, it was effectively portrayed as excusable, because she had caught him *in flagrante delicto*, even more so because he had repeatedly denied the affair. It is significant that stories about the husband's badness, as well as Carla's ability to survive it, seemed to overshadow the account of the actual crime. In this way, Carla tried to minimise the severity of her actions, which included seventeen stab wounds to the deceased. As the following quotation illustrates, Carla was in fact proud of her actions and saw herself as better than other inmates who had been convicted of property crimes. While she acknowledged that being labeled a murderer was indicative of a "terrible" act, she constructed it as something good, as she had killed her husband's mistress. In her eyes, this was not as bad or reprehensible as fraud or robbery, because her victim deserved the injuries inflicted upon her.

Like if I didn't come to prison, I don't know what I can do with him because... I don't know how to put it... because there are those shoplifters here, fraudsters and murderers, and the shoplifters and fraudsters think they are better than us. You've done a terrible thing if you are a murderer. Lucky for myself, I'm proud of being in prison because I murdered my husband's mistress. Although I know it's not a good thing, but lucky it was not to rob or to gain anything. It's the mistake I do. I didn't mean to kill her but it happened. I was angry and I couldn't deal with my anger. Because I don't know, if I didn't meet that husband of mine, where I should be now.
(Carla)

While Carla's narrative was crafted to justify (and glorify) her actions, at some level she did not think that she had "gained anything". This was significant because, even though a sense of bravado permeated her macronarrative, this was juxtaposed by themes of loss. Therefore, even though she had rid herself of her husband's mistress, she had in fact not 'gained anything' because she had lost her freedom, her family and her income.

Bravado aside, Carla constructed crimes such as robbery and fraud as intentional acts with tangible outcomes, while her act of violence was a "mistake" and she "didn't mean to kill her but it happened". The impulsiveness of her actions was attributed to her inability to deal with her anger. On the one hand, her anger was justified, while on the other, it overwhelmed her to such an extent that she fatally stabbed her victim. In spite of these contradictions, Carla's narrative consistently constructed the protagonist as not being criminally culpable – on the one hand, her act was noble and necessary, while on the other, it was inevitable, given the overwhelming nature of her anger. In this way, Carla's life story provided her with the means of portraying herself as a hero who had overcome many adversities and who had dealt with the enemy who had destroyed her marriage.

Environment

While childhood and adulthood experiences focused on the relational aspects of women's lives, the environmental contexts in which these occurred were also highlighted. Moving from one city to another or from a rural to an urban area was constructed as playing a seminal role in influencing the individual's actions. New friends, increased drug and/or alcohol use and aggression were all constructed as part of these new environments. The women were

drawn into new ways of life, which ultimately led to their destruction. This aspect of life stories gave primacy to the impact of the environment, thus constructing women as powerless and vulnerable to external influences. In this way agency was minimised and their violent acts were cast as inevitable outcomes of bad influences.

For example, Elsa, who was convicted of the murder of her friend, attributed her violence to the negative influence of friends, alcohol and men. On the one hand, her new friendships provided fulfilment when she moved from a rural town to the city, while on the other, it also hailed the start of alcohol abuse and fights over men. These bad influences were constructed as ultimately leading to her downfall.

Elsa: Jô. Jô! LAUGHS. My foute is vrinne, wyn en mans. Daai drie goete is die goeters wat my hientoe gebring het. Rêrig.

Adelene: En wat het hulle gedoen? Wat is die uitwerking wat hulle op jou lewe gehad het? Die drie goed, vrinne, die drank en mans?

Elsa: Is omdat... ek weet nie hoe kan ek dit nou explain nie... maar ek gaat probeer.

LAUGHS. Is omdat ek is lief vir tjomnies. Ek weet nie hoe kan ek dit explain nie. (Elsa)

As can be seen, her actions were framed as resulting from external factors and were constructed as mistakes she made: – “*My foute is vrinne, wyn en mans. Daai drie goete is die goeters wat my heentoe gebring het. Rêrig*” (*My mistakes are friends, wine and men. Those three things are the things which brought me here. Really.*).

The word “*rêrig*”(really) is used for emphasis, indicating that she was *really not* to blame for her violent act. Elsa’s life story essentially focused on how friends, alcohol and men were replacements for a life devoid of familial intimacy. She did not accept any responsibility for her actions and alternately blamed her mother for abandoning her in childhood, and her friends for drawing her into a bad way of life. Thus, the protagonist in her story was constructed as a victim of circumstance, who could not be held responsible for her actions.

The above example shows how the influence of social context could explain the narrator’s violent acts. The propensity to perpetrate violence resulted from external influences and did not stem any inherent deficit. Women therefore constructed protagonists who were moulded by their contexts thereby minimising their culpability. Thus women became deviant because

of their vulnerability in these contexts. Given the pervasiveness of discourses emphasising the role of context in the development of criminogenic behaviour, women drew on these to explain their actions. Consequently they were able to construct reasonable explanations for violence thereby locating it within the macronarrative.

By weaving various micronarratives together, life histories provided the fabric within which the crime narratives could be patterned. Thus, acts of violence were not explained in isolation of other dimensions of women's lives, but often constituted a small part of the macronarrative. While the context of the life story was common to all the narratives, the type of narrative differed across the sample. I will now discuss two narrative forms: Life stories which were structured as conventional conversion narratives, focused on the transformation of the protagonist over time. Stability narratives, in contrast, highlighted the constancy of the protagonist's goodness in spite of her violent act. A third narrative form, incoherent narratives, which constituted the majority of the narratives, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Narrative forms

Conversion narratives

Conversion narratives refer to stories that detailed how the protagonist had transformed from a bad person to a good person (Esterberg, 2002). These narratives are examples of classic Western narratives, which highlight the complete transformation of the protagonist, a process that is valued by our society (Maruna, Wilson & Curran, 2006). The significance attached to these stories is reinforced by the media, religious institutions and the correctional system as the positive transformation of an individual signals a better person who is able to conform to prescribed norms. In this study, these narratives were tales about spiritual redemption and the impact of Christian teachings on some women's lives. On a meta-level, the structure of life stories illustrated the transformation from a bad woman to a good woman. These conversion tales served to posit new identities for women who narrated them. Labels such as murderer and criminal were negated by the new identity, which they adopted once they had transformed.

While the content of the narrative shapes its form, the focus is not on the act of spiritual conversion itself. Instead, the focus is on how these women constructed their life stories in order to convey stories about transformation. This was usually done by reflecting on how various life experiences had created this bad self, which in turn became vulnerable to external influences. Consequently, violent behaviour was constructed as an inevitable outcome of the protagonist's bad self. While women acknowledged the wrongfulness of their actions and expressed remorse, the crimes were also indirectly constructed as being necessary to their transformation process. Since imprisonment had been a direct consequence of conviction, it was seen as a mechanism for saving them from themselves and their environment. Being incarcerated was viewed – paradoxically – as a positive experience because it afforded the opportunity for redemption and transformation into new beings. This redemption was characterised by a form of spiritual enlightenment, which brought about a change in character. Incarceration gave the women the chance to adopt new and better ways of being, as well as protecting them from further harm. The many facets of these women's life experiences (including the crime) were constructed as having been ordained by God, thus implying that they were predestined to end up in prison. Hence, the bad and negative elements were posited as necessary constituents of the life course in order for transformation to occur.

The progression of the conversion narrative included a description of the self before the crime, the specifics of the crime itself and a description of the self subsequent to imprisonment.

Bad girls

The macronarrative typically started with micronarratives of victimisation in which women provided detailed accounts of physical and sexual abuse in childhood and adulthood. While they acknowledged the suffering they had experienced, at certain points in their accounts, they reflected on their aggressive and violent behaviour and the ways in which they had injured other people. Stories about victimisation were thus countered with stories about victimising others. In constructing a protagonist as both victim and perpetrator, women were able to provide explanations for the development of the bad self. Given the early experiences of being victimised, the outcome of a bad and violent self was constructed as almost

inevitable. In drawing on discourses of victimisation, these micronarratives conveyed the idea that victims and perpetrators were flipsides of the same coin.

For example, Frances, who had been convicted of the murder of her sister's boyfriend, cast herself as a protagonist who had been vicariously traumatised by her father's abuse of her mother, even though she had often intervened on her mother's behalf. She felt this same obligation when her sister was assaulted by her boyfriend.

Ja, I just thought that I could stop this fight that they had. I wanted to stop it. I said to him... I was cool and calm, I can remember it like it was just now... and I said to him, look here, you must stop this, man. Because you must know, before this night I heard lots of stories that he was hitting my sister. Like he was a married man before, and he would lock her up in his house. He would go out and she must stay there for the whole weekend. But these are things that she never told us. She never told us what he was doing to her or whatever. We just heard. And I think I was also angry because of that. She never told us and I knew something was wrong. But this night I saw it and I was trying to stop it. So I told him, listen here, you must stop. And he said, ja, you mustn't interfere. This is not your business. She is my girlfriend. And I told him, this is my sister that you are beating. She might be your girlfriend but this is my sister. And she was saying I must go. I mustn't stand there. So I told her, look here, how can you tell me to go? I'm telling you, he is not going to hit you. And when I tried to pull her away, he was just picking me up and throwing me like in a corner. He was shoving me like that. That was when I stabbed him. I took out all those years... I can say that's all the anger I've ever come to know in my whole life, I took it that night and I did what I had to do. It was to protect my sister, myself and my family. (Frances)

Frances began her account by reflecting on how “cool and calm” she had been, even though she had prior knowledge of the abuse. Initially she constructed a reasonable person who was able to intervene calmly, although she knew that the deceased had a history of abusing her sister. However, she then “saw it and ... was trying to stop it”. The expectations of a reasonable person changed once she became a witness to the violence. As a result, by implication, she could not be expected to control the attendant anger. In this way, the protagonist's actions were understandable since she could not be expected to allow her sister to be beaten.

In this account, Frances's violent act was framed as justifiable because she had to defend her sister, her family and herself. The protagonist was thus cast as the protector who would defend the family at any cost. Her courage was illustrated when she took charge of the situation: *"(a)nd I told him, this is my sister that you are beating. She might be your girlfriend but this is my sister. And she was saying I must go. I mustn't stand there. So I told her, look here, how can you tell me to go? I'm telling you, he is not going to hit you."* Frances established her primacy over the deceased – it was *her* sister, thus family took precedence over the intimate relationship. She also challenged his ownership of her sister which entitled him to beat her at will. Frances therefore contested his power thereby constructing the protagonist as taking charge of the situation. She underscored her position by telling her sister that *she* was not going to allow her to be beaten. In this way, the protagonist was constructed as the fearless hero who would protect her sister at all costs. Consequently, Frances concluded, *"I did what I had to do"*.

While her defence of her sister was partially constructed as justifiable, Frances' account also adopted an internalising discourse to explain her actions. She explained that her act had been fuelled by anger, which had been welling up over a period. The protagonist was therefore portrayed as being at the mercy of her emotions, which caused her to react violently. The idea that her (well-founded) anger was so overwhelming that it led to a loss of control, provided the narrator with a plausible explanation for the protagonist's actions. By drawing on an internalising discourse, she was able to draw on socially acceptable explanations for women's violence. By constructing her violence as having internal (and possibly pathological) roots, she was able to present her actions as being understandable. Given the internal roots of her actions, responsibility for her actions was thus diminished.

Despite plausible explanations for the protagonist's actions, the narrator condemned the anger, which was an essential element of the protagonist's bad self. Frances traced its roots to her childhood and described herself as follows:

Frances: But I used to fight a lot with my friends that I played with at school. While I was still at primary school, I used to fight a lot. I was like a problem child at school. Fighting with my own friends, and then their mothers would come... and my mother won't come to school because she's always having a blue eye and scratches and things. So my mother won't come. I must fend for myself. So if the principal wants to send me home then I'll just go

home. Nothing wrong. My mother won't ask me: why are you home? So I was... I don't know why I did it, man. I was just cross with the whole world. For all my teenage years, I can remember I was never happy. I got what I wanted. We were spoiled rotten like with clothes and shoes or whatever that we wanted. But I never had what I wanted. I don't know what it is, but I wanted something that I never had. And it made me... like everyone would say she's a fighting girl. Don't play with her. She is naughty. The mother would tell them, listen here, she's going to pull your hair or whatever. You see, that was in me. But this incident really took over and...

Adelene: And that fighting, what was it about? What kind of triggered it?

Frances: I think it's just jealousy. I think it was jealousy because I was too young to really... to think otherwise. I think it was jealousy, because at school there was a girl and she came to visit. And she had everything. But she didn't have a daddy. She had a mother and they had a salon. They were just top dogs. Her hair was always nice. I had long hair but it was never combed. And she was like my victim. I used to threaten her and say she must bring me bread tomorrow with this on. She must do this and that. I had the power. And leadership of my friends, and they must just do what I say. I don't know where that comes from, but that was who... ja, I was a terrible girl. I was a terrible girl. I don't know for what reason. I was a nice girl sometimes – but I don't think so now. But I had lots of friends there – a lot. Even the people I used to fight with, then the mother would come to school to find out what is going on, and then the next day she would come to me again and then we would just play or whatever.

Adelene: And was the fighting physical?

Frances: It was physical. I used to maybe smack them or pull their hair, pushed them when we were standing in line. So I was really a naughty girl. (Frances)

In this excerpt, Frances described her physical altercations with other children during her years at school. She labelled herself a “*problem child*” who had to “*fend*” for herself. She compared herself to other children whose “*mothers would come*”, while her “*mother won't come to school because she's always having a blue eye and scratches and things. So my mother won't come. I must fend for myself.*” Thus, her physical power over other children was contrasted with the vulnerability of a child who could not rely on her mother to care for her. In this way, the protagonist was simultaneously constructed as both victimiser and victim.

While trying to explain her physical aggression towards other children, Frances initially denied not knowing why she did it. She said, “*So I was... I don't know why I did it, man.*”

However, she went on to explain that she was angry and unhappy for most of her adolescence in spite of having her material needs met. Although she could not identify which needs had been unmet, she offered this as the reason for her aggression. She alluded to some emotional deficit in childhood, which caused her to become a *“fighting girl”*. In trying to explain the reasons for fighting, she drew on gendered explanations as to why girls and women fight, for instance, jealousy regarding looks. She referred to the jealousy she felt towards another girl who had *“nice, long hair”*. She was envious of the other girl who had a *“nice”* outward presentation; she did not pity the fact that the girl did not have a father. Frances merely saw the contrast with her own situation, that is, a mother who could not care for her, and this caused her to be jealous. It is significant that she constructed *“power”* and *“leadership of friends”* as being qualities of the *“terrible girl”*. It is also significant that, while Frances placed more emphasis on the protagonist as a *“naughty girl”*, she also alluded to the *“nice girl”* who existed, though only *“sometimes”*. In reflecting on that girl, the narrator was not completely convinced of her existence. Even though the protagonist had many friends, the narrator could not accept that there were elements of a good self. This rejection of the *“nice girl”* could be understood in terms of the narrator’s need to present a coherent story of change. Thus, if the protagonist was constructed as the *“terrible girl”* whose bad self evolved out of early emotional deficits, then her crime was more understandable. In addition, the need for spiritual redemption would then become paramount.

In conversion narratives, women typically alluded to their badness pre-incarceration and often traced its roots to deficits, dysfunctions and trauma in their early childhood environments. In constructing themselves as victims and consequently as victimisers, their badness could be perceived as understandable and inevitable. As was the case in Frances’ account, other narrators typically condemned these displays of physical aggression as well as the bad self that was responsible for such aggression. The notion that aggression and violence are inconsistent with femininity is part of the dominant discourses of gendered behaviour. Conversion narratives therefore strongly centred on how protagonists rejected these behaviours as part of their transformation into good women. This contributed to the overall coherence of the conversion narrative, with the transformed (good) women being the ones narrating the stories.

Narrators also denounced female protagonists who were too masculine in childhood and adulthood. Being a bad girl was therefore equated with being uncouth, aggressive, boyish

and masculine. This was illustrated in micronarratives that revolved around undesirable (masculine) behaviour and masculine ways of dressing. Significantly, narrators explained that physical abuse by their parents often occurred in response to their masculine behaviour. In evaluating protagonists' aggressive (and thereby masculine) behaviour, narrators thus justified their parents' corporal punishment – in essence, because they were bad girls, they deserved being chastised.

For example, Brenda told several micronarratives in which she described herself as being more like a boy than like a girl. She mirthfully recounted how her parents often beat her because she acted in masculine ways.

Brenda: Ek was nie soos 'n meisiekind nie. LAUGHS. Ek was soos 'n seunskind. Baie, baie pak slae gekry. Ek klim in die hoogste boom. LAUGHS. Dan spring ek uit daai boom uit. My ouers het my baie geslaan. Maar agterna toe sê hulle ek moes 'n mannetjiesmens gewees het. My ma het mos altyd... dan maak sy vir my... nou vir ons susters... dan koop sy materiaal in die dorp en dan maak sy nou vir onse rokke. Lekker toppies en 'n skirt. Nou maak sy vir die seuns... sy koop materiaal en dan maak sy nou vir hulle 'n broek en 'n hemp. Maar myne het nooit gehou nie... Dan wag ek dat my ma so kyk! Baie gestraf en geslaan oor daai. Later van tyd toe maak my ma nie meer vir my rokke nie. Sy het vir my kort khaki broekies gemaak en 'n kortmou kaki hemp. Sy sê: ek is nou moeg want ek het 'n klomp seuns in die huis in! Want niemand se klere is stukkend nie. Niemand se klere word geskeur nie. As jy nou net deur die veld loop en hierdie hakies draad... as hy haak, ek ruk hom. Dan lê daai stuk daar. Dan sal ek sien, oe, maar jy is lelik geskraap. LAUGHS. Ek knoop vir hom vas. Ek het soos 'n mannetjieskind geleef. My bene is bont, bont, bont. Ek het nie geweet daai tyd, as jy 'n jong meisie raak en jy raak groot, dan raak jy... dan is jy skaam vir jouself met die bene wat so lyk. Oe, want jy moet nou spog! Jy moet nou mos mooi wees. Jy spog want jy is 'n jong meisie. Dan hou ek maar 'n langbroek aan. Hou maar 'n langbroek aan want hulle is te bont hier! LAUGHS. Ek het baie slae gekry. Boom klim, bicycle ry, hakies draad... ek klim oral in wat 'n seunskind nie eers sal gedink het om in te klim of op te klim nie. Alles, alles dit het ek gedoen. En hulle sê hulle gaat nie meer praat nie want hulle is moeg. Ek ry bicycle dan loop ry ek vas in daai muur. Stukkend... kniekoppe. Dan stof ek net vir my af. Die bloed kan maar loop maar ek stof my net af en dan klim ek weer op en dan ry ek weer. (Brenda)

Despite her mother's attempts to feminise her, Brenda engaged in the kinds of behaviours, which her family associated with boys. Her mother finally acquiesced and allowed her to dress like her brothers. At a certain point in the story, Brenda reflected on her actions by saying that she did not know that her scarred and blemished legs would be a source of shame once she reached puberty. She wore long trousers to hide her shame because it was indicative of her being boyish and because she was not like other (good) girls. Assuming a masculine persona, and thus being unable to behave in conventional feminine ways, justified why the protagonist could not be a good girl. Contrary to the generally condemnatory tone of the conversion narrative with regard to masculine behaviour, the tone of this excerpt conveyed some sense of wonderment at the protagonist's ability to negotiate a boy's world successfully. In some life stories then, micronarratives of masculine behaviour were related with a sense of disbelief, whereas in others, they were mirthfully recounted and offered as a source of entertainment. The protagonist's subversion of normative gender roles imbued her with power and therefore masculinised behaviour was not viewed as altogether negative. However, in retrospect, narrators reflected on how this behaviour did not accord with normative gender expectations thereby reinforcing the dichotomy.

Narrators who recounted stories about masculinised protagonists typically condemned their behaviour and linked aggressive and violent actions to masculine identities. Thus agency was firmly located within these subject positions. Consequently, responsibility for their crimes could be attributed to these identities which embodied the core traits of the bad girls prior to incarceration. By constructing protagonists as bad girls who did not conform to stereotypical notions of femininity, narrators created the foundations of the conversion narratives. Essentially, the protagonists were in need of transformation because their ways of life had led them to the point of committing violent crime.

Alcohol and friends

In tracing the development of the bad self, some narrators also referred to external factors which aided this process. Alcohol and drug use and poor peer choices were constructed as contributing factors, which exacerbated the evolution of the bad self. By tracing the development of the bad self, narrators highlighted its shortcomings, one of which was its vulnerability to substance use and/or abuse. Thus, protagonists were cast as being unable to restrain themselves as far as alcohol and drug use was concerned. In instances where

intoxication was an element of the crime, this served as confirmation that the protagonist was weak and unable to exercise control over her actions. Alcohol and drugs effectively became personified as having some control over the protagonist, thus diminishing her responsibility in some way.

Similarly, being around bad friends was viewed as fuelling the development of the bad self. These friends were seen as leading the protagonist further astray because they encouraged alcohol and drug use and often engaged them in fights. By focusing on these aspects of their stories, narrators were able to find justifications and/or excuses for their actions. Provocation was often used to justify actions, particularly where the protagonist had been goaded by the victim. Intoxication, coupled with provocation, rendered the protagonist vulnerable to violent reactions. This implied that their responsibility was diminished because external factors had affected the protagonist's volitional functioning. This, along with negative personal attributes, further diminished their culpability.

For example, Grace, who had been convicted of the murder of her friend, explained that she had been heavily intoxicated when she stabbed the woman.

Ek het toe met Alvin gepraat en vir Alvin gesê hy moet dit nie doen nie want dis nie reg nie – sy is groot. Hy het maar altyd gesê, nee Mammie, maar Mammie wil niks van Mammie se vrinde weet nie. Mammie druk my baie af. Vra vir Mammie se pa. Meeste van die vrinde wat ek gehad het, het altyd my kind geslaan, maar sy het dit net die ergste gedoen. Sy het hom geslaan met die besem op sy rug en op sy nek. Hy het gehuil en vir haar gesê sy moet dit nie doen nie. Alvin het weggehardloop. Na dit toe kom Alvin weer in... en jy moet nie met Alvin baklei nie. En toe sê ek vir haar wat sy gedoen het was nie reg nie. Maar sy het nie opgehou nie. Sy het nie opgehou nie. Alvin het uitgegaan en toe begin ek en sy te stry. En soos ons begin te stry toe slaat sy my van agter af met die vuis. Ek het omgedraai en vir haar teruggeslaan. En soos ek ingaan in die huis in, ek was besig met iets... aandete vir die kinders maak. Die mes het op die tafel gelê. Dis toe daar wat ek vir haar gestee het. Maar ek het nie bedoel om vir haar te steek nie. Ek het regtig nie dit bedoel nie. Ons altwee was ewe dronk gewees en ek was nie by my volle positiewe nie. Ek was dronk, dronk, dronk gewees. En sy het nog saam met ons gedrink. Sy het gesê ek moet vir haar... en ons het gedrink, gedrink en gedrink. En later van tyd toe gaan slaap sy op die bed. Maar toe ek die bloed sien... ek het groot geskrik. En toe dokter ek vir haar en toe drink ons. Toe gaan lê sy op die bed, en die volgende wat ek sien toe is sy dood.(Grace)

In this extract, Grace utilised several strategies to explain her actions. Firstly, she referred to her son's distress that she had often prioritised her friends above him. She acknowledged that she had allowed them to beat him and declared that the deceased had been particularly cruel in her punishment of her son. In this way, she constructed the deceased as bad and reprehensible as opposed to being the quintessential innocent victim. Secondly, she referred to her futile attempts to cajole the deceased into desisting from beating her son, which resulted in them becoming involved in an argument that ended in a physical fight. In this way, she set the scene for the provocation of the protagonist whose reaction could therefore be seen as understandable. While she did not provide any explanation as to the time delay between the altercation and the stabbing, she referred to her intoxication as another major factor in the crime. In this way, her intoxication formed part of the context within which her crime could be understood. When viewed in this light, it was constructed as minimising her responsibility to some extent. Her agency was further diminished by her reference to the victim's intoxication – since both of them were drunk, the responsibility for the altercation and the stabbing was shared.

The focus on contextual factors served to show how protagonists could not be held completely culpable for their actions. Substance use in particular, pointed to a diminished capacity to exercise volitional control. This showed how situational factors further shaped the bad self – the focus on circumstances reinforces ideas about how violence is bred in certain environments. To this end, women drew on criminological discourses of deviance which posit the ways in which deviant behaviour is moulded by social contexts.

Imprisonment

A fundamental element of the conversion narrative was the focus on transformation. Consequently, these stories focused on the transformative experience of incarceration, which narrators believed to have been ordained by a higher power. Frequent references were made to God's hand in their fate, thus giving credence to the idea that it was predestined. By drawing on the notion of predestination, narrators constructed their fate as being out of their hands. In this way, the development of the bad self and its culmination in acts of violence were seen as inevitable. Narrators reflected that they were able to change because they had been bad and had committed bad acts. However, this transformation was only possible through incarceration because this had catalysed their conversion experience. In making

sense of their imprisonment, narrators explained that it had effectively saved them from the consequences of being bad women. By curtailing their freedom, incarceration prevented them from engaging in other violent, aggressive and/or criminal behaviour. In addition, it also protected them from further victimisation, and perhaps even death. Paradoxically, then, imprisonment was viewed as something positive; in fact, it was even construed as a lifesaver. Maruna et al. (2006) observed similar findings in their study focusing on the conversion narratives of 75 men incarcerated for either violent or non-violent crime. They found that imprisonment was reframed as a positive experience as it was posited as part of God's plan for men's lives. In this way, these men were able to hold onto positive world-views and viewed themselves as having purpose and worth. Narrators dealt with the narrative disjuncture caused by incarceration, by construing the experience in positive terms. In this way, the integrity of the self was maintained.

The meaning of incarceration in the conversion narratives emerging in the current study could best be illustrated by a Christian religious metaphor. Narrators characteristically viewed imprisonment as their Damascus experience in that they had been blinded by imprisonment, stripped of their freedom and forced to confront the consequences of their badness. The act of repentance was illustrated by acknowledging their bad selves, which then led them to transforming into new (good) women.

Helen, who had been convicted of the murder of her best friend, focused on how imprisonment may have saved her from engaging in further violent behaviour and from being killed by others. Throughout her micronarrative, she stressed that she did not regret her imprisonment, as her fate could have been much worse.

Baie sou gebeur het as ek nou nie by die gevangenis gewees het nie. Daar sal baie dinge gebeur het al. Of die jongens kon miskien vir my dood gemaak het – of ek kon miskien weer iets gedoen het. Miskien skeef geloop het of so. Of iemand wou my miskien gepoint het of so. Dan kan ek miskien nou weer iets gedoen het of 'n ander persoon kon miskien geskiet het of dood gemaak het wat ek nie nou van geweet het nie. Dan sê hulle miskien hulle kan miskien 'n plan het vir my om vir my sat te maak buite. Dan weet my ouers ook nie. En hulle weet nie watter plek is ek nie. Hulle het net gehoor ek is in (name of town) of so. Daai wat die Here vir my hiernatoe gestuur het. En ek is vandag nie spyt dat die Here my hiernatoe gestuur het nie. Nou weet ek ook mos wat beteken die moord besigheid. Ek is nie vandag spyt nie. Toe

ek hier ingekom het, ek wou nooit ander mense geverstaan het nie. As iemand my wil iets sê dan wil ek net daai een gryp. Maar nou het ek self kom beseef dat hier moet ek nou 'n bietjie stop. Maar ek is nie spyt nie, suster, dat ek hier is nie, en ek is bly, suster, ek is vandag hier. (Helen)

In reflecting on how her life might have turned out, Helen created rather grave prospects. She began by saying, “(b)aië sou gebeur het as ek nou nie by die gevangenis gewees het nie. Daar sal baie dinge gebeur het al” (*Lots could have happened if I was not in prison. Lots of things would have happened already*). By moving from a position where bad things “could have” happened, to a position where many bad things “would have” happened, Helen constructed the inevitability of bad things happening to her at the outset of this excerpt. Consequently, imprisonment was framed as infinitely more desirable, as it may have protected her from the violence of others as well as from further perpetration.

Since Helen had left her home town several years before, she had maintained intermittent contact with her parents. The fact that imprisonment located her within a particular physical space was depicted as something good, since her parents would not know where she was, if she had still been on the outside. If the worst happened, that is, if she was killed, her family would not know where to find her: “(d)an sê hulle miskien hulle het 'n plan het vir my om vir my sat te maak buite. Dan weet my ouers ook nie. En hulle weet nie watter plek is ek nie.” (*Then perhaps they say that they have a plan to kill me. Then my parents won't know. And they won't know which place I am*).

Helen therefore outlined extremely plausible reasons as to why God had sent her to prison. Thus, imprisonment was not cast as something traumatic, undesirable or punitive; instead, her micronarrative implied that it had been ordained by God and that it was therefore imbued with meaning and purpose. Helen's narrative underscored that she did not regret being sent there: “(d)aai wat die Here vir my hiernatoe gestuur het. En ek is vandag nie spyt dat die Here my hiernatoe gestuur het nie.” (*That is why the Lord sent me here. And today I do not regret that the Lord sent me here*). The notion that she had been sent to prison was central to understanding how she interpreted her experience – it focused on God's purpose for her life, thus diverting attention from the violent act which had led to her being there. In fact, the act was not central to her macronarrative, and was overshadowed by the celestial purpose for her

life. This enabled Helen to make sense of her experience and negate the stigma and trauma, which accompanied imprisonment.

Significantly, Helen stated that she came to understand the meaning of murder only after she had been sent to prison – “*(n)ou weet ek ook mos wat beteken die moord besigheid*” (*Now I know what this murder business means*). She did not refer to her particular crime but spoke in general terms – “*die moord besigheid*” (*This murder business*) – her insight thus seemed to relate to lethal acts in general, as opposed to her particular offence. By referring in general terms to “*this murder business*” she deflected attention away from her violent act in an attempt to neutralise the impact of her actions. She continued by explaining how she often misunderstood people, which caused her to become aggressive. However, she had learnt to reflect on situations and to regulate her actions. Thus, she said, “*Ek is nie vandag spyt nie*” (*I do not regret it today*), in other words, she did not regret being sent to prison, as it had helped her to change into a different person. Similar to other narrators, Helen showed how she had gained insight into setting boundaries for herself and regulating her behaviour.

This transformation experience enabled the women to access a new discourse, which counteracted prison discourse. Thus, Helen addressed me as “*suster*” (*sister*), a term referring to women who belonged to a community of faith. This served the purpose of equating us in some way, thus challenging the distance and stigma created by the label of offender. Maruna et al. (2006) found that the “conversion narrative allows the individual to maintain interpretive control over *his* life” (p. 175) to defend against being labeled negatively. By adopting a new “social identity” (p.175), transformed women were able to identify with other Christians, thus making them part of a larger, non-custodial community. In this way, women were set apart from other offenders: they were different, because they had an alternative identity. The displacement of labels such as murderer/offender by new social identities was an important aspect of these narratives.

References to the labels, such as murderer or killer, which were applied to them both inside and outside the prison, were cause for great distress. Narrators were therefore at pains to explain how these labels were not indicative of the ‘real’ person inside. Consequently, micronarratives focused on how they wanted to show the others that they were transformed individuals who were good and worthy of acceptance.

Frances's micronarrative highlighted how she had changed her perception of offenders when she was incarcerated and how she had to confront the stigma of various labels, which were accorded to offenders. Her story served the purpose of appealing to others (listeners) to look beyond her label and to acknowledge the transformed, good woman that she had become. She achieved this by casting the protagonist as having once been an outsider who had condemned offenders – a position with which listeners like myself might identify. Consequently, the story aimed to provide insight into the real person behind the label in the same way that Frances had become enlightened by her own experiences.

I just want to be a shining light to others. You see, I don't want people to see the killer in me because I will be labeled for that. But not in God's eyes and I want people to see me like He sees me. And the only way for me to do that is to work on myself. And that wasn't that I wanted to be... God wants me to be here for them to see the real me. ... like I was outside when Dina's trial went on and I didn't have my case then, for me, she was a total dinges. I was saying how can you do something like this. Even the Strangler, he's labelled you know. I was... you are a murderer, you're a killer, you're a rapist, you're a thief, you are a whatever – if you are who you are. But never did I think I was a... not even for shoplifting... Here, as ek in daai tronk for shoplifting kan gewees het, dan was dit 'n ander ding. But I'm here for the worst thing – taking a life. So me being here, I know how people see me outside. I know, because I was there. But really, it's not like that. Now I see it because I'm one of them. But how can you show people? Because they didn't show me anything. Vir my was dit soos hulle is – moordenaars – en hulle sal nooit reg kom nie. But now I am in here, so now I have to know that a murderer isn't a murderer because he's a murderer. You see, now only do I see it. (Frances)

Frances drew on a religious metaphor by describing her desire to be “a shining light to others”, so positing her new social identity as a beacon to others. In this way, she established a way of negating the label of “killer”. She emphatically stated that she was not a killer “in God's eyes” – claiming that her goodness was celestially acknowledged, and implying that it was incumbent on her to continue working on herself. In referring to God's purpose for her life, and thereby imbuing it with particular purpose and meaning, she tried to make sense of her current situation.

Frances used this micronarrative as a means of appealing to others to acknowledge her goodness. She drew on the negative views she had held prior to her own incarceration as a

way of making sense of others' opinions of her. She constructed her condemnation and labelling of Dina Rodrigues, who was later convicted of the murder of her boyfriend's baby, as being born out of ignorance, as she (Frances) was on the outside. She said – '*...like I was outside when Dina's trial went on and I didn't have my case then, for me, she was a total dinges. I was saying how can you do something like this?*' She explained that due to her lack of insight she labelled people and identified them with their acts, which prevented them from being able to show any goodness or possibilities for change: "*you are a whatever – if you are who you are*". Thus, her condemnation of offenders was predicated on her identity as a non-offender. Her awareness of the impact of stigmatisation only became apparent when she was incarcerated – "*(s)o me being here, I know how people see me outside. I know, because I was there*". Her insight into her own prejudice as an outsider thus provided her with insight into how others perceived her. While she was intent on proving that violent acts did not define the perpetrator, she still constructed offenders as Other, "*(b)ut really, it's not like that. Now I see it because I'm one of them*". Her use of the word "*them*", however, suggested that she did not willingly identify with "*them*". Consequently, she pointed out that she could not be defined in terms of her crime: "*But now I am in here, so now I have to know that a murderer isn't a murderer because he's a murderer. You see, now only do I see it.*"

Her imprisonment was therefore imbued with another purpose, namely, to teach her to look beyond the label and acknowledge the person's goodness. In telling her story in this way, Frances appealed to the listener to look beyond her label and acknowledge that there was a good person behind it. In effect, she was drawing parallels between the protagonist's judgmental views prior to incarceration and those of the listener. Hence she showed empathy for how these biases originate and drew on her own insights to appeal to listeners (like myself) to recognise their own prejudices and acknowledge her goodness.

Abstaining from violent or aggressive behaviour

While narrators drew primarily on Christian religious discourse to explain their transformation, they also drew on the discourse of rehabilitation to highlight the transformative experience of incarceration. The impact of exposure to various rehabilitation programmes in the correctional centre was evident in how they spoke about their experiences. The value placed on acknowledging their responsibility, asking for forgiveness (from the

deceased's families and their own) and focusing on how they had changed, were all central elements of these narratives.

Consequently, their macronarratives were permeated with plans to desist from future violent or aggressive behaviour. Whereas in other micronarratives there was considerable narrative distance between the narrator and protagonist-prior-to-incarceration, micronarratives focusing on their intention to desist from violence allowed the narrator to identify more closely with the transformed protagonist. The latter typified the good woman who had rejected her bad self in favour of a new way of being. This focus strengthened the coherence of the conversion narrative, as it emphasised that the protagonist had changed by adopting new ways of acting and behaving. In addition, these narratives also provided hope for the future since these women were now on a mission to help others transform – they were on a mission from God.

Elsa was emphatic about her desire to abstain from drinking alcohol, as she blamed her intoxication for her violent act.

Elsa: Ek wil nie weer wyn drink nie. Ek wil nie weer wyn drink nie. Die Here moet vir my help... oe! Want is die wyn wat vir 'n mens dryf na al hierdie dinge toe. Ek moet net 'n ouer gaan wees daar buite vir my kinders. Dis al wat ek wil hê nou.

Adelene: So al die drie goed wat vir jou probleme gegee het.

Elsa: Daai, oe!. Ek moet 'n voorbeeld gaan wees daar buite vir my kinders en vir my ma. Is hulle wat nou belangrik is in my lewe – my kinders en my ma. Ek wil my ma hê in my lewe. Ek het haar nodig. Ek het haar nodig.

Adelene: So dinge moet heel anders as vantevore wees.

Adelene: Hmm. Ek moet nou groei. Ek moet groei. Ek wil gaan wys, nee, ek het darem gegroei. Ek is 'n ander mens nou.

Adelene: En hierso het jy gesê jy het verander. Hoe sou jy sê het jy't verander?

Elsa: Ek kan nie vir die mense hier gaan sê ek is nou 'n ander mens nie; ek het nou verander. Ek kan nie vir hulle sê nie! Ek moet dinge doen wat vir hulle kan oortuig, ja, sy is nou 'n ander mens. Sy het gechange nou. Sien?

Adelene: En watter tipe dinge sal jy wil doen om dit te bewys?

Elsa: Ek soek vastige werk. Ek soek 'n werk... dan kan ek vir my kinders werk en my kinders skool toe stuur. Want ek het mos nie skool nie. Ek het nie skool toe gegaan nie. My kinders moet skool toe gaan. Ek wil 'n ouer wees vir my kinders, sien. Ek wil vir hulle alles doen wat ek nie gekry het nie. (Elsa)

Elsa acknowledged that she needed God's help to abstain from the external influences she believed were responsible for her problems. Thus, her desire to be a good example to her children and her mother was an integral part of her plans. Her reliance on God – “*Die Here moet vir my help... oe!*” (*The Lord must help me... ooh*) – and her need for her mother to play a greater role in her life, formed part of her strategy for support. She intended to rely on safety nets, which she did not have before. In so doing, her plans to abstain from external influences and desist from violence were more likely to succeed. She was keen to present tangible evidence of change and stressed that it was incumbent on the narrator to show how the protagonist was going to prove that she had changed. Mindful of others' perceptions of her as an offender, Elsa was emphatic that *telling* people that she had changed would not suffice. She said, “(e)k kan nie vir die mense hier gaat sê ek is nou 'n ander mens nie; ek het nou verander. Ek kan nie vir hulle sê nie! Ek moet dinge doen wat vir hulle kan oortuig, ja, sy is nou 'n ander mens. Sy het gechange nou. Sien?” (*I can't tell people here that I am a different person; I've changed. I have to do things which can convince them, yes, now she is a different person*). She acknowledged, therefore, that her way of life had to convince others (including myself) that she was a transformed person. In fact by imploring “*sien?*” (*see?*), she was appealing to me to see and acknowledge her as a good person not as an offender or a participant in my study.

Similarly, Brenda reflected on how aggressive and violent she had been prior to incarceration and how much she had subsequently changed.

Maar ek het uitgevinne van ek hier binne is, het ek nog nooit gebaklei nie. Ek kom agter... ek is baie kalm. Ek sal eider guy maak, en as ek sien, nee, jy raak nou te erg en jy wil nou rêrig baklei, dan sal ek nou loop. Dan sal ek nie meer guy maak nie, want dan weet ek daai... Dan voel ek ook seer hier binne die way jy nou vir my gevloek het en daai, maar ek gaan nie worry nou nie want ek sien, nee, jy is nou te erg. Jy gaan nou baklei. Dan loop ek. Ek het baie afgekom. Daar buitekant sal jy nie twee keer om my gedraai het nie of na my gepoint het of my gevloek het nie, dan het ons mekaar gevat en mekaar geslaat. Maar ek sien ek het baie afgekom, en ek dank die Here daarvoor – en groepe en goed wat ek geloop het. Ek vat dit kop toe. Ek vat dit kop toe want buite is die lewe nog swaarder as hier. Buite is die lewe nog swaarder as hier. So ek wil nie baklei nie. Soos ek nie hier gebaklei het nie, wil ek nie buite gaan baklei nie. (Brenda)

Brenda's transformation into a calm person enabled her to make light of conflict-ridden situations. She detailed how she would remove herself from explosive situations even though she was hurt by harsh words. She juxtaposed her current coping style with her behaviour in the past. Whereas before she would have reacted violently, she was now able to walk away from such situations. She ascribed this ability to God as well as to the various support groups, which she had attended. Her micronarrative thus detailed how she had learnt new ways of relating to others: "*(e)k vat dit kop toe*" (*I took it seriously*). While she had devised new ways of dealing with conflict, Brenda was cognisant of the difficulties of her external environment and that she would need to desist from violent behaviour on the outside too. Since life outside was perceived as even harder, more perilous, she might be tempted or provoked to react violently. Her reliance on knowledge gained from support groups was therefore central to her desisting from aggression and violence.

As shown above, conversion narratives enabled the women to posit new identities which negated those of murderer/offender by successfully integrating various aspects of their lives into meaningful wholes. Similar to Maruna et al. (2006), I found that these stories enabled women to overcome the stigma of incarceration as well as construct hope for a better future.

Stability narratives

A second group of life stories, namely, stability narratives, charted a plot that remained constant throughout (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998). These narratives were structured in such a way that they outlined the consistency of the protagonist's moral character over time. Whereas conversion narratives highlighted a complete change in moral character, some women told stability narratives which showed very little variation in the protagonist's character. Similarly, Presser (2004) explored the life stories of 27 violent male offenders and found that some men told stability narratives in which protagonists were depicted as "dependably good in a conventional sense – at least as good as other people" (p. 88). These men utilised various discursive strategies which justified or excused their violence so as to minimise the disruption of moral consistency. Hence the credibility of the stability narrative was reinforced and narrative coherence was maintained.

In the current study, this consistency was achieved by focusing on the protagonist's close identification with stereotypical femininity. Being good wives and mothers were central features of these stories and virtue was illustrated in various ways. Consequently, narrators closely identified with protagonists and there was little narrative distance between the two. While narrators did not shy away from talking about their crimes, these acts were constructed as out of character. In all the stories, provocation was used to explain their reactions, thereby implying that the protagonist had been pushed beyond what could be expected of a reasonable woman. Violent behaviour was therefore a temporary aberration – a blip on the otherwise perfect radar of the good wife and mother. Parallels can be drawn with Presser's (2004) work in which violent men constructed their acts as fleeting and "unagentive" (p. 89) incidents in their lives. This was achieved by showing how these acts were caused by extreme provocation in which uncharacteristic rage engulfed them.

The coherence of stability narratives in my study was predicated on micronarratives of victimisation and respectability which constructed the protagonist as long-suffering and virtuous. Stories about imprisonment also served to highlight the injustice of their incarceration and clear distinctions were made between themselves (as good women) and other bad offenders.

Putting up with it – stories of victimisation

Stability narratives typically included micronarratives of physical, sexual and/or emotional victimisation by others. Narrators recounted their histories of victimisation and highlighted their passive responses to those situations. Unlike the belligerent protagonists in conversion narratives, these protagonists highlighted their victimhood and how they had endured it. In describing the protagonist as a perpetual victim, narrators defocused attention from their identities as perpetrators. Whereas conversion narratives constructed the two identities as flip sides of the same coin, stability narratives drew attention away from the perpetrator identity.

In explaining how she had come to be imprisoned, Ingrid, who had been convicted of the murder of her brother-in-law, located her story of the crime within a micronarrative of abuse.

Dit het eintlik begin toe my kinders se pa my so beginne abuse het. Ek meen, toe ons nou begin uitgaan het was dit so moei en wonderlik, maar daarna, toe ons nou saam begin bly, toe het dit alles beginne. Hy het beginne sy hande vir my op te lig en so. Ek is mos 'n mens... ek sal nie sommer kla nie. Ek sal my pyne en my seer, ek sal dit maar vat. Ek en my swaer het een aand 'n uitval gehad. Daar het die dinge skeef geloop toe ek vir hom gesteek het met die mes. Hy is mos toe oorlede. Nou ons het 'n uitval gehad; van die Vrydag middag af het hy al beginne met my lol. Ek het net vir my... en die Vrydag aand toe was dit so... net konflik.(Ingrid)

She started her story by saying that it all began with the abuse by her partner. In explaining how she had come to be in that relationship, she described how beautiful and wonderful things had been during their courtship. However, the abuse started once they began living together. The protagonist's passive response was explained as part of her essential nature as she did not retaliate or speak out against the abuse. This was illustrated when she said, "*Ek is mos 'n mens... ek sal nie sommer kla nie. Ek sal my pyne en my seer, ek sal dit maar vat*" (*I am just human... I won't just complain. I will endure my pain and sorrow*). Thus, the protagonist's acceptance of her hurt and pain was ascribed to her inherent character. This idea of the essential nature of women permeated stability narratives and cast the protagonist as someone who conformed to the gendered dictates of society. As the excerpt illustrates, Ingrid believed that a good woman accepted her lot in life.

Ingrid's construction of the crime was framed by her story about abuse. She explained that she had had an argument with her brother-in-law when things went wrong and she then stabbed him with a knife. By stating "*(d)aar het die dinge skeef geloop*" (*There things began going awry*), she constructed a situation in which her act was unintentional, as the situation spiraled out of control. She explained how he had been harassing her since the Friday afternoon and that the murder had occurred later that evening. He had been provoking her for a long while and the crime occurred because of conflict – "*net konflik*" (*just conflict*). By using this phrase, her statement underscored the idea that there were no sinister undertones to her act. She created the scenario for provocation – "*van die Vrydag middag af het hy al beginne met my lol*" (*From the Friday afternoon he began harassing me*). This, in addition to the *argument* ("*uitval*") created a plausible reason for the offence.

While such provocation at the time of the crime was central to rationalising their acts, narrators also typically drew on stories of cumulative provocation to explain their violent behaviour. Thus, in constructing micronarratives of victimisation across their life stories, they were able to show how they had been driven to react violently, despite their usually gentle natures. Micronarratives of cumulative provocation featured a variety of victimisers and were not necessarily limited to the actions of the deceased. In all of these stories, narrators did not resist the victimisation, largely because they felt unable to do so. Violent acts were construed as having been the last straw and were therefore constructed as atypical responses, since they had experienced lifetimes of abuse. Narrators made sense of their acts by locating these within a macronarrative of cumulative victimisation. In this way, their acts could be viewed as plausible and, to some extent, justifiable.

In describing her relationship with her brother-in-law, Ingrid detailed the various ways in which he had sexually harassed her since childhood.

Hy het altyd die aanmerkings gemaak en vir my gesê dat hy moes nooit met my oudste suster getrou het nie. Hy moes met my getrou het en vir my gewag het – en so. Hy het altyd vir my gesê, ja, ek en hy kan maar saam seks hê want my kinders se pa hoef mos nie uit te vind nie – en my suster ook nie. Hy het altyd daai teen my gehad. So elke keer as daar probleme geskep word dan was ek altyd die target gewees. Hy sal altyd daai probleme by my kom soek het....Ek het al vir my suster al vertel maar hulle wou my nooit geglo het nie. Hulle het gedink ek wil nou net probeer simpatie soek. Nou so het dit beginne en beginne – en ek het nou uitgehou en uitgehou. En as ek miskien naweke uitgaan na my vriende toe, hy sal nie by sy kinders en sy vrou bly nie. Hy sal altyd kom soek waar ek is. Hy wil my net daar gehad het. Hy het my te veel in ‘n hoek ingedruk. Daar was nie eers vir my space nie. Ek het versmoor. Ek meen, dis my kinders se pa... hy abuse, en hy kom met sy verbal abuse en al die. Sien, dat hy so vir my lelik skel. So die Vrydag aand kom toe. Ek was besig om vir die kinders ‘n toebroodjie te maak. Wat hy nou vir my sommer kom gryp van agter af en beginne ruk en pluk. Toe was ek nou besig met die mes, en toe ek vir my omdraai, toe het ek vir hom gesê los my net. En ek steek hom toe in sy bors. (Ingrid)

Ingrid explained that her brother-in-law had resented her lack of sexual submission to him. He was always harassing her and she was always the “target” of his anger. In the story, the protagonist was therefore at the mercy of her aggressor, giving rise to protracted victimisation. Even though she sought help none was forthcoming, creating a situation in

which she was forced to fend for herself. The protagonist's feminine qualities were further exemplified by her tolerating his harassment – *“ek het nou uitgehou en uitgehou”* (*I put up with it, put up with it*). Consequently, she was constructed as long-suffering, a quality often accorded with stereotypical femininity.

Ingrid described feeling driven into a corner and that she felt suffocated: *“Hy het my te veel in ‘n hoek ingedruk. Daar was nie eers vir my space nie. Ek het versmoor.”* (*He pushed me in a corner far too much. There wasn't even space for me. I suffocated*). Her illustration of herself as being trapped and having no breathing space provided the rationale for understanding her course of action. In this way, Ingrid cast the protagonist as ultimately having no other alternative, as she felt boxed in by her victimiser. It is significant that she referred to her partner while talking about her brother-in-law, thereby conflating the two and it is unclear to which abuser she was actually referring: *“Ek meen, dis my kinders se pa... hy abuse, en hy kom met sy verbal abuse en al die. Sien, dat hy so vir my lelik skel”* (*I mean, that's my children's father... he abuses and he comes with his verbal abuse and everything. See, he scolds me in such an ugly manner*). She then described the stabbing which suggests that her physical act had symbolically destroyed her abusive partner.

Respectable women

A central element of stability narratives was that they focused on how protagonists held onto their respectability even while they were committing the crime. Good manners, showing higher moral character than the deceased and taking responsibility by reporting the matter to the police, were some of the ways in which narrators illustrated the consistent goodness of the protagonist. These qualities overshadowed the violent act, consolidating the idea that these women were neither inherently violent nor bad.

Helga, who had been convicted of the murder of her friend, continuously highlighted her honourable behaviour in various instances:

Sy was ‘n inkommer gewees. Sy was van die (name of town) af, maar dit was my beste vriend gewees. Maar sy en die man van my het voorheen... toe is ek ook in die gevangenis... toe het hulle ‘n ding gehad. Hulle het gejol, maar ek het nooit daarvoor gepraat nie. Ek het altyd

maar... ons het altyd saam gesit and gesels en gelag. Ek het haar nie in my hart gedra of so nie. Ek weet nie hoekom het sy vir my kom steek het daai aand nie. (Helga)

At the outset, Helga positioned her friend as an *outsider* (“*inkommer*”) who did not belong because she came from another town. Helga’s acceptance of her as a best friend despite that – “*maar dit was my beste vriend gewees*” (*But she was my best friend*) – positioned her as the good person. She juxtaposed the protagonist’s character with that of the questionable morality of the deceased – “*(m)aar sy en die man van my het voorheen... toe is ek ook in die gevangenis... toe het hulle ‘n ding gehad*” (*But she and this husband of mine previously...then I was also in prison... then they had a thing*). She pointed out that the woman had had an affair with her husband during her (Helga’s) previous incarceration. Her goodness was illustrated by the fact that she did not begrudge her friend and in fact continued their friendship – “*(h)ulle het gejol, maar ek het nooit daaroor gepraat nie. Ek het altyd maar... ons het altyd saam gesit and gesels en gelag. Ek het haar nie in my hart gedra of so nie.*” (*They had an affair but I never spoke about it. I always just... we always sat together and chatted and laughed. I did not begrudge her*). Thus, the protagonist demonstrated her higher moral character by treating her friend respectfully. By divulging her friend’s infidelity, Helga intimated that she had grounds to be angry. However, by presenting the protagonist as tolerant and non-judgmental, she countered the notion of premeditation. Helga’s construction of herself as respectable was achieved by juxtaposing her character with that of her friend. This led her to say “*(e)k weet nie hoekom het sy vir my kom steek het daai aand nie*” (*I don’t know why she stabbed me that night*) – thereby casting the friend as the aggressor who attacked her for no ostensible reason.

This juxtaposition achieved the same purpose when Helga described the crime in detail:

Dit was ‘n Donderdagaand kwart oor agt, toe Margie aan my kamer venster kom klop. My man en sy vriende het in die kombuis gesit. Ek het gekyk wie is by die venster, en toe ek nou die venster oop maak, toe steek sy vir my hier. En ek vra vir haar hoekom steek sy vir my en toe se sy vir my ‘jou ma se...’ en al die klomp goed. En ek het geskrik want toe kyk ek na my skouer en toe sien ek net bloed. Toe gaan ek uit. Toe vra ek vir haar hoekom steek sy my. Toe sê sy, sy maak my sommer vrek. En so is sy daar weg en toe kom sy weer terug. Toe gaan ek agter haar aan. Toe steek sy weer vir my die hou hier in my arm. Toe steek ek haar terug met

haar eie mes, maar dit het so simpel gebeur... ek was deurmekaar gewees na ek haar doodgesteek het.(Helga).

At the outset, the friend was cast as the aggressor as she had sought her and stabbed her for seemingly no reason. The attack was unsolicited, casting the protagonist as a victim. Helga's response was measured, and she asked her friend why she had stabbed her. This was in direct contrast to the friend's cursing "*toe sê sy vir my 'jou ma se...' en al die klomp goed*" (*Then she said to me: your mother's....and all those things*). Thus, Helga maintained her respectability even after being stabbed while the friend, in contrast, behaved in an uncouth manner. By describing how blood was pouring from her wound, Helga was also positioning herself as a victim; in addition, it meant that her state of shock was understandable. The contrast between the protagonist's response and her friend's rejoinder re-emphasised the difference between their characters. Helga once again asked her friend why she had stabbed her, and her friend replied that she wanted to kill her. The word "*vrek*" (*kill*) is usually associated with the killing of an animal, thus illustrating how the friend sought to denigrate her. In this way, the differences between the moral characters of the women were amplified. In the face of adultery, verbal abuse and stabbing, Helga had maintained her composure and behaved properly, while the friend was continuously abusive and aggressive.

Such juxtaposition of moralities was an important element of stability narratives, and narrators provided many examples of these differences. This served to defocus from the crime and concentrate on the decency of the characters. In this way the protagonist's culpability could further be neutralised, as the narrator had illustrated her consistent goodness. By interweaving micronarratives of victimhood with stories about good moral character, the protagonist's culpability was negated. In addition, by constructing the protagonist and the deceased as moral polar opposites, attention was shifted away from the crime. Similarly, Presser (2004) found that violent men often focused on "*other people as negative referents*" (p. 88) thereby drawing clear distinctions between themselves and bad people.

In a similar micronarrative, Jane, who had been convicted of the murder of her boyfriend's mistress, detailed how she had been drawn into a fight which became fatal.

She just pushed in the gate and the coffee fell on me – spilt on my overalls. I didn't say anything – but get inside the yard. But I didn't say anything. I was so shocked. I just followed her. She wants to go and see in the room. Maybe he is there – and I'm just lying to her, you see.....She just grabbed this coffee mug out of my hand and hit me with this coffee mug. It fell down and broke. I had a cut somewhere here. Blood was streaming down now. So I thought to myself, I'm on my own and alone here. I don't want to make any trouble. My mother-in-law is in church. Let me just push her out of the yard. I'm not a fighting type somebody you see. I just push her out of the yard. Now she was even shouting and shouting, but I didn't listen to what she was trying to say. But I just push her out of the yard. I get by the gate; now I want to close the gate.(Jane)

The mistress was constructed as confrontational: she had come to the house looking for her lover (Jane's boyfriend) and was angry when she could not find him. Jane related how the woman had “*pushed*” her way in and repeatedly stated that she did not respond to her. In so doing, she constructed the protagonist as non-confrontational and as being stunned by the woman's behaviour: “*she just pushed in the gate... she just grabbed the coffee mug out of my hand and hit me with this coffee mug*”. The use of the word “just” implied that the deceased's actions were unexpected and unsolicited, which explained why Jane was “*so shocked*”. The injury she sustained also added to the dramatic nature of the situation – “*(b)lood was streaming down now*” – in this way, Jane's position as traumatised victim was established. Despite her situation, the protagonist was able to reflect on her course of action; she thus decided that she did not “*want to make any trouble*”. Her response was thought-through, as opposed to being impulsive. She chose the responsible course of action and decided against exacerbating the situation. She reflected that she was on her own while her mother-in-law was at church; this suggested that she feared for her safety and was responsible for maintaining the integrity and safety of her home. She was thus duty-bound to remove the woman from the property. She reiterated that she was not aggressive – “*I'm not a fighting type somebody you see*” – which accorded with her initial construction of herself as non-aggressive. This theme was central to her narrative, as she described how she had ignored the woman's shouting and in fact maintained her composure.

In describing the crime, Jane demonstrated how she had attempted to prevent serious injury by trying to wrestle the knife away from the woman.

When she gets up, I grabbed her arm at the wrist. Now I want to take this knife away from her because I don't know what she's going to do. So I'm battling... I want to take this knife from her. Now the sharp point was out on this side. Now I can't hold it there because it's going to cut me. Now, I think she had an idea of pulling back her arm from my hand. She pulled her arm and now the sharp point is out here. Now, I didn't think that it was going to maybe stab her or hit her or something like that. I just pulled her arm back. Now my hand was off from her. Now I saw she dropped the knife. Then she goes out. And her aunt stays in the same block where we stay – but at the last door. I pick up the knife. There she goes. When she goes I see, no, mos this lady is bleeding – and I'm also full of blood. She goes to her aunt's yard. Now I'm standing; I don't know what to do. I'm alone. When I was still standing, there she comes back again. Our toilets are outside and not inside the yard. There she stands in front of our toilet door. I look at her. She is still shouting. I don't know what to do. I'm confused because I'm alone here. Must I go to the church? The church is not so far. Must I go and call the mother-in-law? What must I do? I look at her. Must I take a basin and wash her maybe? I'm not worried now about my cut because I don't know how big is this one of mine – but I'm full of blood.(Jane)

The protagonist battled the woman for the knife because she was unsure of the woman's intentions. In this way, it was constructed as a battle for survival. However, she did not portray herself as an aggressor; instead, her aim was to prevent the woman from using the weapon. In the scuffle, the woman was stabbed – thus suggesting that the action was inadvertent or accidental, as the protagonist's aim had been to remove the knife from the woman's hand, and not to stab her. The protagonist's lack of culpability was illustrated by stating – “(n)ow, I didn't think that it was going to maybe stab her or hit her or something like that. I just pulled her arm back. Now my hand was off from her”. Jane's innocent action of trying to remove the knife from the woman's hand became criminalised by the fact that she had inadvertently stabbed her. As this had happened during a scuffle, the crime was portrayed as accidental. In constructing it in this way, the protagonist's criminal intent was negated.

It is interesting that the narrator referred to the other woman as “*this lady*”, when the protagonist realised that the woman was covered in blood. Previously, she had been cast as a bad person. At that instant, though, the woman was no longer demonised and the protagonist could acknowledge that she (the other woman) had been injured. This acknowledgement illustrated that the protagonist was capable of demonstrating sympathy and compassion. Significantly, Jane also referred to her own injury, which served the purpose of counteracting

the image of the bleeding victim. Thus, the story contained images of two bleeding victims as opposed to an aggressor (Jane) and a victim (woman). The idea that the situation had overwhelmed her was illustrated by her statement that “(n)ow I’m standing; I don’t know what to do. I’m alone”. Her sense of confusion was repeatedly invoked, showing that she was not used to such situations. In other words, it was not in her nature to be involved in violent scuffles and she was therefore unsure what to do. The alternatives she considered centred on doing the right thing: “Must I go to the church? The church is not so far. Must I go and call the mother-in-law? What must I do? I look at her. Must I take a basin and wash her maybe?” Thus, the protagonist’s honourable intentions were highlighted – she considered going to tell her mother-in-law and also thought about helping the woman. In this way, her goodness was accentuated, as she did not react in the way that a guilty person would. Her focus on telling someone and on helping the injured woman was evidence of her respectability. The protagonist’s focus on doing the right thing was cemented by the reflection that she was not concerned about her own injury: “I’m not worried now about my cut because I don’t know how big is this one of mine – but I’m full of blood”. While honourable intentions were emphasised, her victimhood was also highlighted by describing herself as being covered in blood. In effect, she was an essentially good person because she did not want to hide the act, and she had even considered helping the victim while ignoring her own injury.

The notion of the respectable woman enhanced the overall coherence of stability narratives, as narrators were able to show that they ‘did the right thing’ even after they had committed the offences. By illustrating their goodness and constructing violent acts as accidental or as the result of provocation, narrators diminished their criminal culpability. In constructing their stories in this way, these acts could be seen as being out of character, thus removing moral blameworthiness from the protagonist (and the narrator).

Imprisonment

Unlike narrators in conversion narratives, narrators in stability narratives did not imbue their imprisonment with the same depth of purpose and meaning. The latter focused on the unjustness of their sentences and they compared themselves to other inmates who were viewed as bad and deserving of imprisonment. Thus, in constructing other offenders as bad, narrators were able to maintain the moral high ground, as they did not share the same amoral

characters as those around them. Since they characterised protagonists as steadfast moral beings, there was no need to change, and therefore imprisonment was viewed as retributive and not rehabilitative or transformative. Consequently, they made sense of their incarceration by relating stories in which their consistent goodness was emphasised.

Helga explained that her thirteen year sentence was unfair, as she had merely defended herself against her friend.

Ek kan nie oor my straf kom nie. Baie mense sê vir my ek moet net geduld gebruik – maar dit vreet my vreeslik. Laat hy (onder-magistraat) nou nie insien ek het myself verdedig nie. As ek nie my verdedig het nie het sy my dood gesteek. Ek het nie eers geweet ek is swanger met die kind nie.(Helga)

She began by saying that she could not accept her sentence and that it was eating at her. She blamed the prosecutor's lack of insight into her situation, as he did not accept that she had committed the act in self-defence. She viewed the sentence as harsh because it seemed to indicate that it had been a wilful act, which – in her view – it had not been. As a result, she sought to construct the act as self-defence, which cohered with her overall presentation of herself as a victim of her friend's aggression. She constructed her act as necessary and justified, because she had prevented her own death, as well as that of her unborn child. As a result, she outlined grounds for exculpation since she had saved two lives. When viewed in conjunction with her characterisation of the deceased (as described previously), her criminal culpability became questionable.

Some narrators focused on their roles in prison to make sense of the experience. Jane presented herself as the archetypal mother and housewife who recreated this role in prison. Her micronarratives about imprisonment focused on how she had remained the same person who conducted herself in the same manner as she did in her own home.

Ja. No, nothing has changed for me. I'm trying to show these young kids, because these coloured children here inside are so rude. I said, no man, moenie vloek nie. Moenie so praat nie. Jou ma se poes! We Africans respect that word poes you see. We don't use that. So they used to listen to me – even now when they say jou poes man, they are just making a joke. It's a joke to them you see. They say, sorry Auntie Jane. Then I say, okay. Sometimes they say

it. They forget I'm here maybe because they are used to using that word. But I don't like it.(Jane)

Jane began by saying that nothing had changed for her. Her reference to the rudeness of the “*coloured children*” (younger women) was juxtaposed against respectful and respectable African women with whom she shared an identity. Her elevation above “*these coloured children*” was illustrated by reference to the ostensible respect which African people held for a woman’s vagina (“*poes*”- *a derogatory term*). While coloured women denigrated the vagina with such terms, African women, like her, did not do this. By drawing on racial stereotypes, Jane differentiated between herself (as belonging to a respectable race - African) and others (coloured women who were uncouth). By identifying with a racial collective who professed to share similar values, she transcended the identity of offender as well as the negative attributes associated with it. In setting herself apart from other offenders, Jane’s maternal (and disciplinarian) role was established, as she told them not to swear and they were apologetic if they transgressed. Thus, she had taught them to move from denigrating the vagina to respecting it, such that they only joked about it. Her presence within certain settings was also important, as it helped them to curtail their behaviour. Her presence thus had the effect of regulating them: “*They say, sorry Auntie Jane. Then I say, okay. Sometimes they say it. They forget I'm here maybe because they are used to using that word. But I don't like it*”. She once more referred to their disrespect by saying that they used the swear word (“*poes*” - *vagina*) because they were so used to using it. This implied that there was something intractable about their behaviour. Jane effectively constructed herself as a role model with good values and beliefs. In this way, she also cemented her revered maternal status implying that it was incumbent on her to teach younger women more appropriate ways of behaving. Consequently, they referred to her as “*Auntie Jane*”, which suggested that she was accorded the respect she deserved.

Jane’s steadfast adherence to the stereotype of a good woman was also illustrated by how she viewed herself in prison.

I'm still the same person. Nothing changed. I'm still a quiet somebody. Ja, I'm still on my own. I just like to keep busy and to work. I take it, when I'm working here inside, I'm doing that housework I was going to do outside. Even the office and the laundry... I'm working in the laundry but I'm a cleaner. It's my own work. Nobody does that work.(Jane)

Unlike narrators in conversion narratives, narrators in stability narratives did not emphasise the impact of their crimes on their identities. This added to the coherence of the latter narratives because it signified that their unswerving moral characters outweighed temporary lapses in judgement. Thus, they steadfastly claimed that they were still the same quiet (good) women. Furthermore, the idea that women's lives were traditionally circumscribed to the home was depicted in the above excerpt. Jane saw her role as cleaner as an extension of her role at home. Her status was defined by the tasks that she performed in prison, which once more set her apart from other offenders. She had access to privileged spaces, such as the office and the laundry, and it was a job that no-one else shared. Jane's depiction of herself as a homemaker served to normalise the incarceration experience, thereby defocusing from the reason she was there. The construction of prison chores as housework furthermore served to reinforce the normality of her daily routine. In addition, her story exemplified how the central components of her life had not changed - she possessed the same quiet nature and performed the same tasks she had at home.

Stability narratives show the construction of a good self which was not defined in terms of violence. In essence women drew on discourses of femininity and violence to illustrate how their acts were uncharacteristic of their *true* selves. They used various narrative strategies to portray protagonists (and narrators) as essentially good women who did not deserve the label of offender.

Chapter summary

This chapter explored the ways in which the life story provided a context within which to convey the crime narrative. I employed the framework provided by Lieblich et al. (1998) and illustrated how narrative structure and content enable the construction of particular kinds of identities. I presented two narrative forms, namely conversion and stability narratives and showed how narrators utilised content to shape stories of the self. In conversion narratives, the central plot line was the transformation of the protagonist from bad to good. In these narratives, violence and aggression were essential aspects of the bad self which was then transformed into the good self as a result of incarceration. Thus narrators constructed themselves as transformed women whose moral character had changed. In stability narratives, the protagonist was constructed as essentially good while violence was viewed as

a temporary aberration of behaviour. These narrators drew on traditional discourses of femininity to emphasise their goodness and their identification with the normative yardstick. While there were significant differences in the development of the stories of the self, both narrative forms enabled the women to construct positive identities at this juncture in their lives.

In the next chapter I will present a third narrative form, namely, incoherent narratives, which embody narrators' inability to provide plausible accounts of their actions. I will also illustrate how these narratives convey difficulties in investing life stories with meaning or integrating various aspects into coherent wholes. As such the discussion juxtaposes the coherence evident in conversion and stability narratives with the lack of cohesiveness in incoherent narratives.

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Chapter Six: Incoherent Narratives

In Chapter Four I discussed the elements of narrative coherence and illustrated this by exploring conversion and stability narratives in Chapter Five. I will now examine the third narrative form, namely, incoherent narratives and show how this coherence was lacking in these stories. Since it was not possible to analyse these macronarratives in terms of common themes and plot lines, I explore the crime narratives in detail and show how these micronarratives are demonstrative of overall narrative incoherence.

Incoherent Narratives

Unlike the narrators in conversion and stability narratives, the majority of narrators in the study were unable to provide coherent accounts of their life stories. These incoherent narratives (McAdams, 2006b) lacked the properties that enhanced coherence in the other two narrative forms. Several writers have explored the elements of narrative coherence (Androutsopoulou, Thanopoulou, Economou & Bafiti, 2004; Dimaggio, 2006; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Linde, 1993; McAdams, 2006b; Neimeyer, Herrero & Botella, 2006). For example, McAdams (2006b) focuses on how the structure and content of a life story needs to be clear and intelligible in order for audiences to perceive it as coherent. He adds that the purpose of the life story is to provide an explanatory framework for the narrator's life. A causal account would therefore follow a logical sequence in order to explain how the protagonist arrived at a particular juncture in her life. Form and content are intricately related, as they enable the narrator to tell a story about the self. This causal coherence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) is "not only used to link episodes within a life phase and to relate life phases but also to explain changes in the narrator's values or personality over time" (p. 751). Thus, in the present study, the causal coherence found in conversion and stability narratives was evident in carefully crafted explanations for violent actions. In conversion narratives, for instance, the bad self was constructed as being primarily responsible for violence, thus contributing to the plausibility of accounts. Narrators in stability narratives, in contrast, carefully outlined stories of extreme provocation to explain temporary aberrations in their behaviour. When judged in relation to the overall macronarratives, the accounts of their actions were credible. However, this causal coherence did not manifest in the incoherent narratives, as the plot lines were thin and narrators were unable to sustain their portrayals of

the self. As will be demonstrated, even in instances where narrators attempted to provide causal accounts, it was evident that they had not internally integrated these explanations. Consequently the plausibility of their accounts was questionable, as it seemed as if they had not fully integrated an understanding of their actions. They had not clearly formulated plausible explanations and drew on various alternatives in an attempt to find acceptable explanations.

To establish well-defined plots and to tell coherent stories of the self, narrators need to interweave various themes (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). However, in these incoherent narratives it was unclear what stories they were trying to tell and what the purpose(s) of their stories were. Whereas conversion narratives focused on transformation and stability narratives focused on virtue, incoherent narratives did not have any central themes that gave them purpose and meaning. In the former two narrative forms, thematic coherence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) was produced by the similarity of themes across various aspects of the life story. In conversion narratives, for instance, the themes of transformation and redemption were illustrated both implicitly and explicitly across life stories. Similarly, in stability narratives, themes of essential goodness and adherence to stereotypical femininity were consistent across macronarratives. The progression of these stories was logical and plausible, making it possible to extrapolate subthemes to illustrate how these narratives were structured. This affected how the analysis was presented in the previous chapter as I was able to show how various subthemes were linked together to tell a story about the self. However, since consistent themes were not evident in incoherent narratives, the current chapter will focus on illustrating how the construction of the crime narratives was exemplary of the overall incoherence of these stories.

Crime narratives

The crime narratives were conveyed in three distinct ways: some narrators attempted to provide causal explanations for their crimes, but were unable to sustain their arguments. Others provided detailed accounts of their actions but were unable to adopt an interpretive stance that conveyed a clear understanding of their situation. A third group avoided talking about their crimes by deviating from the topic and focusing on other detailed aspects of their lives. While the means of communicating the crime narrative differed amongst the three

subgroups, these strategies illustrated how narrators had not made sense of their actions and were incapable of contextualising them within their life stories. While the narrators in conversion and stability narratives had fully integrated their violent acts into their macronarratives, narrators in incoherent narratives could not do so. Consequently, they were unable to draw on the explanatory context of their life stories to see meaning in their crimes or in the current junctures of their lives. Neither were they able to convey any story about the self.

Limited causal connections

Some narrators endeavoured to contextualise their crimes within their life stories with the aim of explaining their violence. Consequently, they drew on various discourses, such as the impact of early familial experiences, intimate partner violence and intraindividual factors to elucidate their crimes. However, as will be shown, narrators struggled to substantiate their portrayals of the self, as these themes were not consistent within their macronarratives. As a result, the purpose of the stories was vague, as narrators could not communicate stories about the self over time. For example, where the protagonist was portrayed as a victim who subsequently became a victimiser, narrators were unable to elaborate on these identities. The theme of victimisation was thus not adequately fleshed out so that its impact on the development of a perpetrator identity could be understood. As a result, listeners were offered only a glimpse of these identities so that the transition from the one to the other could not be fully appreciated. This affected the overall coherence of the narratives, as narrators could not fully explore the causal chain that had led to the current situation in their lives. McAdams (2006b) argues that, if life stories are to make “psychological sense” (p. 114), then they need to provide causal explanations for junctures in narrators’ lives. He states that, while the veracity of these accounts is not at issue, these narratives “still need to sound convincing” (McAdams, 2006b, p. 114).

Kate, who had been convicted of the murder of a neighbour, attempted to draw on available discourses to explain her crime. However, as the following excerpt illustrates, she was unable to sustain her understanding in a coherent manner.

Okay. I'm here for a murder. I committed my crime at (city), northwest on the R28. So the time I was doing my crime, when I'm thinking now, I think it's because of anger. Because I'm

coming from a difficult situation. When I was young my mother was in an abusive marriage. So I'm growing up in that situation. When I say to myself now, I'm big enough to look after myself, I'm getting a boyfriend here in (town). So I'm staying with him for a year. After that, he takes me for his wife. So I got married to him in 1992. So the time I'm staying with him he starts to abuse me. I'm staying with him for five years. He always used to go to work at seven o'clock in the morning and he was supposed to come back home at nine o'clock. He was late for the overtime because he worked at a shop. So when he comes back he didn't come straight to the house. He goes to smoke on the shebeen and drink there. Then he would come back to home maybe past one – after midnight. And when he comes back he starts to fight with me – and I've got child that time because I was pregnant in 1993. And I got my child and he started to beat me and stab me – things like that. And I wasn't thinking of taking him to the prison. I just always ignore. It's because he is young and he is drunk. You see, I ignored my responsibility. So I'm staying for those five years from 93 to 97. In July of 1997 I'm getting tired of him. I've got two children and I'm getting pregnant again. So I'm getting my child in November. My child was one month in December. In January he stabbed me nine wounds. And I'm starting to stop my child breastfeeding because I can't even turn if I'm sleeping. So I decided to stop breastfeeding my child. I stayed with him. I didn't go to the police station to inform the police about this situation. I just stayed because I loved him. I'm staying and staying, and then in July of 1997 I did get sick and tired of him. I told him I'm sick and tired of you. I don't want you any more now. And I take my clothes and my children's clothes and go out of his house. (Kate)

Kate began by locating her violent act within a particular physical space but made no reference to the victim or the circumstances of the crime. However, she immediately linked it to her emotional state at that time, viz. *“I think it's because of anger”*, even explaining this in terms of her background: *“(b)ecause I'm coming from a difficult situation. When I was young my mother was in an abusive marriage”*. She thus set up a seemingly plausible chain of events, which could explain why she became violent. She drew on the idea that children who were exposed to violence could suffer emotional damage, which could later manifest in anger. Therefore their violent acts could be understood in terms of their family dysfunction. However, her statement that she had been *“growing up in that situation”* was offered as self-explanatory, and she did not elaborate on the difficulties of *“that situation”*. Her initial attempt at portraying the protagonist as a victim was thus not substantiated by micronarratives regarding childhood exposure to domestic violence. This inability to flesh out the plot was a common feature amongst narrators of incoherent narratives. In those

instances where attempts were made to explain violent acts in terms of early childhood emotional damage, narrators often summed up their experiences in a single phrase or sentence. Consequently, the plot line was thin.

Kate did not elaborate on her experiences in her familial home, but skipped to her relationship with her abusive husband in an attempt to reinforce the notion of the “*difficult situation*” from which had she come. This micronarrative charted the chronological course of their relationship, which effectively helped the narrator to order events more clearly for herself. This temporal ordering of events provided an element of coherence (Linde, 1993), allowing her to locate her story in time and space. On one level, then, her story made sense, as events appeared to unfold plausibly over time. However, this focus on chronology, which was a significant feature of her macronarrative, also detracted from the explanatory aspects of her story thus influencing the overall coherence of her account. Consequently, she interspersed her account with irrelevant details about her husband’s routine, such as

“(h)e always used to go to work at seven o’clock in the morning and he was supposed to come back home at nine o’clock. He was late for the overtime because he worked at a shop. So when he comes back he didn’t come straight to the house. He goes to smoke on the shebeen and drink there. Then he would come back to home maybe past one – after midnight.”(Kate)

She presented a detailed account of his lateness, while providing only a glimpse of the abuse she had suffered: “*And when he comes back, he starts to fight with me And I got my child and he started to beat me and stab me – things like that.*” In a sense her focus on his routine overshadowed the violence perpetrated against her. Interestingly, she summed up her experiences of abuse in a short, almost dismissive phrase, “*things like that*”. Her attempt to construct the protagonist as a victim (and thus deserving of sympathy) was therefore not reinforced by detailed examples of victimisation. Even though Kate alluded to her passive response to the abuse, she did not buttress her assertion with conceivable explanations. She stated, for instance, “*(a)nd I wasn’t thinking about taking him to prison. I just always ignore. It’s because he is young and he is drunk.*” She mentioned that she ignored what had happened to her – which implied that she paid no attention to the abuse. Given his severe maltreatment of her, this apparent indifference did not make sense. By stating that she was “*just always*” ignoring the abuse, the narrator was unable to communicate successfully the

physical and emotional effects of the abuse. Significantly her lack of agency was also communicated in this statement as she had not considered addressing the situation at the time. While she was able to explain her husband's actions in terms of youth and intoxication, she could not bolster her construction of the protagonist as powerless. She was unable to unpack details of her victimhood thereby providing a weak construction of the protagonist as victim. This inability led her to temporarily step outside of the story and clarify what she had ignored. She admitted, however, "*You see I ignored my responsibility*". As a result, she moved from ignoring the abuse to ignoring her "*responsibility*". This comment on what she should have done was in direct contrast to the victimhood constructed earlier on. Her attempt at evaluating the protagonist's actions was also an attempt at communicating something positive about the narrator – by addressing me, she communicated the insight that she had gained through the telling of her story. However, she was unable to elaborate on what precisely the "*responsibility*" entailed even though she referred to it as an insight which she had gained through her narration.

This inability led her to focus once more on the chronology of her life. She focused on how long she had stayed with her husband and remembered when she became "*tired of him*". The content and meaning of these experiences were not fleshed out, however, and she progressed to talking about her third pregnancy. It is significant that she mentioned the stabbing in the context of being unable to breastfeed her baby: this was the only time that she provided some details of the abuse. Although Kate provided glimpses of the protagonist as victim, she was unable to flesh out that identity successfully. Since the plot line was thin, the narrator used chronology to impose structure on the story. However, this weakened her initial purpose of illustrating how exposure to violence and abuse could cause a victim to become a perpetrator. This inability to draw on and integrate available explanatory discourses successfully was an overriding feature of these incoherent narratives. The identity assumed by the protagonist was therefore not a "convincing" victim identity.

Kate's attempts to make meaning of her violent act were evident in the following:

I don't know... my life is very miserable. I'm getting in big trouble because I was fighting with my friend. It's my friend and not even maybe a girlfriend of mine or a boyfriend. No, it's my friend because she is staying next to my children. So my friend said to me she lost her meat on Friday night on the 24th of April. I say I don't know nothing about it. But she's

shouting. She always shouts at me about things. She shouted at me the whole day and night on Saturday. On the 25th of April she is starting again to shout at me. But I'm getting sick and tired about that. I'm going to confront her here, asking her what do you want because I don't know nothing about your meat. So with a klap we are starting to fight. And that day that we are fighting, we are not fighting at my own house or at her own house. We are at another friend's house. So there is a bottelkop inside of that house. It's not my bottelkop. It's not her bottelkop. It's a bottelkop... you know mos, that lady she used to drink and used to walk around at night. So it's her weapon to defend herself in her house. So the time we are fighting I see that bottelkop and I stabbed her. She was dying at that time. That is why, when I'm thinking, it's because of anger I stabbed the people who shouted at me and who fought with me – because I was in that trouble at that time. I don't know... I'm right or it's other thing... I don't know.(Kate)

Interestingly, this micronarrative both started and ended with the statement, “*I don't know*”. Although she had preceded her description of the crime with references to her victimhood, she seemed uncertain as to whether *she* herself had accepted this as a plausible explanation. Her uncertainty as to her relationship with the victim was also significant (i.e. “*It's my friend and not even maybe a girlfriend of mine or a boyfriend. No, it's my friend ...*”). I later established that the victim was a neighbour, with whom she had had limited contact. In this excerpt, however, she concluded that the victim was her friend, which was a way of giving her an identity. Her focus on the chronology of the events furthermore enabled her to counter the confusion regarding her relationship with the deceased; in this way, she was regained ‘control’ of the story. She was thus able to explain how events had unfolded. However, as soon as she started talking about the factors that had precipitated the crime, she focused on where it had occurred – “*(a)nd that day that we are fighting, we are not fighting at my own house or at her own house. We are at another friend's house*” – and whose weapon (“*bottelkop*”- *bottleneck*) it was. These details detracted from the story, and in fact drew attention away from the gravity of her act. She did not provide an explanation of her lethal act: “*(s)o the time we are fighting I see that bottelkop and I stabbed her.*” She did not offer any further details other than the fact that the woman subsequently died. She returned to her anger, as a way of defocusing attention from the stabbing: “*(t)hat is why, when I'm thinking, it's because of anger I stabbed the people who shouted at me and who fought with me – because I was in that trouble at that time*”. This ostensibly exculpatory statement was offered as a means of explaining her crime. It is significant that she referred to “*people*” as opposed to a singular victim – perhaps her anger was directed at perpetrators (such as her husband)

from her past and this fuelled her retaliation. In some ways this suggests a symbolic silencing of all the “people” who had victimised her. However, her inability to flesh out this explanation effectively was evident from her statement, ‘*I don’t know... I’m right or it’s the other thing... I don’t know*’. She did not elaborate what “the other thing” was and the uncertainty, which she expressed, was indicative of her lack of internal integration. As she had not arrived at a sufficiently integrated or coherent understanding of her actions, she was unable to narrate a sequential, causally-linked plot. As a result, she was also unable to assert her understanding of the protagonist’s actions and consequently invited the audience to provide her with the correct explanation. Providing unequivocal explanations for their actions was a common concern of this subgroup of narrators. They seemed to grasp at various available discourses to live up to the audience’s expectations. However, since they could not make meaning of their actions within the context of their life stories, their narratives did not come across as convincing.

This concern with presenting a plausible account was also evident in Elsa’s account. She was convicted of the murder of her friend and, as seen below, attempted to develop a causal account in order to explain her crime.

Ek is van die platteland nè, en ek het kom werk hier in die (city). Toe meng ek met verkeerde tjommies. En ek is ‘n mens wat ‘n baie sagte hartjie het. Ek kan alles vat. Ek kan nie praat Ek hou nie van baie praat nie en ek hou ook nie van baklei nie. Nou het dit so gekom, ek en my tjommies was hier agter in (suburb) gewees. Ons het gedrink. Daarvandaan af het twee tjommies van my baklei. Ons het afgekeer en toe agterna toe kom baklei die een meisie met my. Maar ek het haar nie geslaan nie. Ek het haar niks gemaak nie. Ek het haar net gewurg. Toe ek vir haar wurg... dis waarom is ek hier. Toe is dit ‘n moord. So toe kry ek ag jaar. Ek is nogal spyt – baie spyt. Ek kan nie gehelp het nie. Dit moet seker so gewees het. Ek raak baie kwaad. Ek is baie aggressief. Maar ek praat mos nie; ek hou net alles in, in, in. Nou in die laaste dan kan ek nie meer inhou nie.(Elsa)

She began by saying that she had come from the rural areas and had sought work in the city. By using the word ‘nè’ (*ok*) an implicit understanding regarding her background was set up, providing the foundation for the way in which I was expected to view her. In other words, coming from a rural background implied that she had a qualitatively different disposition to

that of an urbanite. The implication was that she was naïve, innocent and wholesome unlike the worldlywise city dwellers.

Her violent act was attributed to mixing with the wrong crowd, not to any personality flaw. To substantiate this, she stressed her gentle nature and constructed the protagonist as soft-hearted, tolerant, introverted and non-aggressive, in other words, as an essentially good person who embodied all the qualities of a good woman. This and her rural guilelessness made the protagonist susceptible to the influence of her reprobate friends and therefore she could not be held fully accountable for her actions. In addition, the narrator stated that they had been drinking, thereby constructing alcohol as an extenuating circumstance. In accordance with her gentle nature, she tried to stop the fight between two friends, thereby reinforcing her pacifism. The deceased then fought with her but Elsa did not retaliate: “*Maar ek het haar nie geslaan nie. Ek het haar niks gemaak nie.*” (*But I did not hit her. I did not do anything to her*). Although she did not elaborate on the nature of the deceased’s actions, she explained how the protagonist maintained her composure in the face of an unprovoked attack. Up until this point, the consistency of the protagonist’s good nature was convincingly portrayed. She continued to minimise her violence – “*ek het haar net gewurg*” (*I only strangled her*). The use of the word “*net*” signified that she had *just* or *only* strangled her friend, thus implying that her act had been neither heinous nor gruesome – i.e. it was *just* a strangling. This seemingly innocuous act was then criminalised as murder, which she stated in the third person, further detaching herself from it, i.e. “*toe is dit ‘n moord*” (*then it was a murder*).

She temporarily stepped out of the story by stating that she was *actually* regretful, before qualifying this by saying that she was *very* regretful; her exact words were: “*ek is nogal spyt – baie spyt*” (*I am actually regretful – very regretful*). As she regretted her actions, her goodness remained incontestable. However, at this point, her narrative became unstuck as she changed the way she portrayed the protagonist. She described her as being unable to control her actions and suggested that, in light of her poor impulse control, the crime could be viewed as inevitable. She qualified her assertion by saying that the protagonist was enraged and very aggressive, which was in direct contrast to the carefully constructed self of the outset. The narrator was trying to make sense of her actions *while* telling story but could not successfully explain how such a gentle protagonist was able to strangle someone. She did not provide an extensive account of the provocation that could have explained her reaction. Once again, this

indicated that she had not integrated this experience into the overall picture of the self, which she sought to present to the listener. As a result, she was unable to narrate a coherent causal account of the crime such that the actions of the ostensibly gentle protagonist could be understood. The conundrum presented by the narrative which she initially sketched, was solved by adding “explanatory arguments to restore plausibility” (Habermas & Bluck, 2000, p. 751). Consequently, Elsa explained her actions in terms of her aggressive nature, thereby seeking a more plausible explanation for her actions, as her initial construction did not cohere. She constructed the protagonist as someone who tended to bottle up her emotions until some trigger caused her to lash out: *‘(m)aar ek praat mos nie, ek hou net alles in, in, in. Nou in die laaste dan kan ek nie meer inhou nie.’* (But I don’t talk, I keep everything in, in, in. Now in the end, then I can’t keep it in anymore). This explanation seemed more credible, as it explained why she was driven to strangling her friend. It is significant that I was drawn into helping her construct this more satisfactory explanation as illustrated by the following exchange:

Adelene: En as jy dit nie kan inhou nie, wat gebeur dan?

Elsa: Ek raak mal. Ek glo daaraan, as jy aanmekaar lol en jy hou nie op nie, is all right. Ek sal vir jou los. Maar dan as ek nie kan nie, dan moet ek vir jou vasvat.

Adelene: En het dit gebeur toe jy met die meisie baklei het?

Elsa: Sy was my tjommie gewees. Ons her alles saam gedoen. Maar sy het aanmekaar vir my gekrap en gekrap, en dan vat ek haar nie kop toe nie.

I asked her what happened when she could not contain her emotions. My question enabled her to embroider on the picture of the aggressive protagonist, which she now sought to present. By phrasing it in this manner, I communicated the desirability of a psychological explanation for her actions. She depicted the protagonist as mad, tolerant as well as unable to contain her anger when pushed too far. She framed her aggressive reaction as inevitable thus it was understandable that only extreme provocation could have caused her to react violently, *“(m)aar dan as ek nie kan nie, dan moet ek vir jou vasvat”* (But when I can’t then I must sort you out). My reference to her fight with the other woman - *“En het dit gebeur toe jy met die meisie baklei het?”* (And did it happen when you fought with the girl?) - enabled her to weave in her new understanding that was more plausible than the original one she had been unable to sustain. Her reliance on external validation for her story was thus similar to Kate’s search

for the correct explanation. The stark contradictions and dependence on external validation illustrated by Elsa's micronarrative, exemplified the lack of coherence in these stories.

Lack of interpretive stance

A second sub-group of narrators gave blow-by-blow accounts which were characterised by attention to detail, but lacked the interpretative stance of narrators in conversion and stability narratives. Consequently, narrators merely told stories without offering their understanding of their actions. This sub-group lacked the implicit and explicit causal connections which characterised the other two narrative forms. Hence the stories were rather tenuous and were not held together in a cohesive manner. When talking about their crimes, narrators used conjunctions throughout their micronarratives in an attempt to link thoughts and give the macronarratives some sense of coherence. Superficially, then, these stories seemed to hang together but on closer examination, this strategy masked the narrators' inability to provide well-integrated explanations or to achieve causal coherence. It was unclear how narrators understood the factors that had led them to these particular points in their lives. While they were able to provide accounts of their crimes, they struggled to make sense of it within their macronarratives. The life story was not used as an explanatory framework and stories of the crimes were told in isolation of other aspects of their lives.

Another overriding feature of these narratives was the emotional tone. Whereas the other two narrative forms discussed in Chapter Five conveyed a sense of the narrators' dramatic involvement in their stories, these women seemed emotionally detached. Their accounts were narrated in a rambling fashion and told as if they were dissociated from their experiences. Consequently, they did not seem to know why they were in prison when asked to explain what had brought them there. This tone underscored the lack of interpretation which characterised these stories as the women merely relayed them devoid of meaning or emotional investment.

Significantly, narrators in this group were the only ones who needed to clarify the meaning of my opening question: *Can you tell me about the events which led you to being in the female centre?* For example:

Adelene: Kan jy my van die gebeure vertel wat daartoe gelei het dat jy hier in die vroue sentrum is?

Lorna: Hoe het ek hier beland?

Adelene: Ja, hoe het jy hier beland.

Whereas most women seemed to understand my question, narrators in this group seemed unsure as to what I meant. Lorna's question served two purposes – firstly to clarify what I meant and, secondly, as a statement of her own disbelief: "*Hoe het ek hier beland?*" (*How did I end up here?*). This disbelief could be understood in the context of her micronarrative (outlined below) in which she could not plausibly account for her actions.

Lorna who was convicted of the murder of a neighbour related her crime in detail. However, the broader predisposing and/or precipitating factors which could have contextualised her actions were absent.

Dit was een middag gewees en toe het ons gesels – gepraat. Ons was 'n groep gewees. En dan het ek klip gegooi. Ek het per ongeluk 'n ruit uitgegooi. En later in die dag, die persoon wat ek doodgemaak het, se dogter en ek het 'n stryery gehad. En die volgende dag... die man het niks gesê van die venster nie want ek het gesê ek gaan betaal vir dit; ek gaan dit laat insit... dan die volgende dag, ek weet nie of hy gedrink het of wat nie, but dan roep hy vir my. But ek wil nie na hom toe gegaan het nie. Dan roep hy vir my en dan sê hy vir my, kom hier jou En dan gaan ek tot by hom en dan sê ek hy moet nie vir my so roep nie. Hy kan my ordentlik roep. Dan sê hy vir my, ja Lorna, hoekom het jy my ruite uitgegooi? Dan sê ek vir hom ek kan nie gehelp het nie en ek gaan betaal daarvoor. Dan klap hy vir my. En dan raak ek kwaad en ek gryp hom vas en ek slaat hom terug. Dan agterna sien ek hy haal 'n mes uit. Dan back stand ek. Dan gaan ek huis toe. Soos ek in by die huis kom, dan sien ek daar lê 'n mes op die tafel. Dan het ek net gevat en weer uitgehardloop. En dan steek ek vir hom, but ek steek vir hom net eenkeer.(Lorna)

Lorna began by outlining the factors, which had precipitated the crime. She said she had been chatting in a group and threw a stone which accidentally broke a window. She did not explain why she was throwing stones, but said that later that day she had an argument with the deceased's daughter. Although she did not explain the content of the argument it acted as a potential motive for the crime. However, she did not make any explicit links between the various actions, nor did she embroider upon the content of the argument in such a way that

implicit links could be made. She expressed uncertainty as to why the man had wanted to speak to her the following day, as she had agreed to replace the window. She wondered whether he had been intoxicated, thereby suggesting that his behaviour may have been fuelled by alcohol. She found the way he addressed her offensive and told him to be civil. As a result, the man was constructed as (possibly) intoxicated and rude – his behaviour was undesirable and he was therefore not an innocent victim. His actions were also unreasonable as he smacked her, even though she had agreed to pay for the window. Consequently, she became angry and retaliated – a response that was understandable given that he had smacked her for ostensibly no reason. The pivotal point seemed to be when the deceased produced a knife, as this caused her to “back stand” (*step back*). She perceived it as threatening, although she did not construct herself as fleeing the scene, simply saying “*dan gaan ek huis toe*” (*then I went home*), and creating the impression that she had merely left (as opposed to running away). Up to this point in the narrative, Lorna had attempted to scaffold a context for her actions, but she was unable to adopt an interpretive stance which could convey her understanding. Hence, she attempted to recount the story in a blow-by-blow manner, creating the impression that she was relaying it as it really happened.

Lorna’s use of conjunctions at the start of almost every sentence added to the rambling quality of the micronarrative. The words “*en*” (*and*) and “*dan*” (*then*) were used to link thoughts, creating the sense that she was narrating one long sentence. This almost child-like quality of her narrative was reflected in how she sought to relay events exactly as they had happened. Even though she initially attempted to provide some causal explanation – the man had insulted her and threatened her with a knife – she did not explain why she ran back and stabbed him after she had returned home. She merely recounted that she had seen the knife as she entered the house and then ran outside and stabbed him once – “*(dan) gaan ek huis toe. Soos ek in by die huis kom, dan sien ek daar lê ‘n mes op die tafel. Dan het ek net gevat en weer uitgehardloop. En dan steek ek vir hom, but ek steek vir hom net een keer*” (*Then I went home. As I went in the house, then I saw a knife lying on the table. Then I just took it and ran out. And then I stabbed him but I only stabbed him once*). She was therefore unable to provide any explanation for her actions and recounted her story in this rambling manner. It had the effect of pacifying the listener (myself, in particular), as opposed to building up a sense of melodrama. In this way questions around what had caused her to return to the scene to commit the crime, were silenced by the periphrastic quality of the account. Her story did

not contain any aspects that could provide an understandable explanation for her actions (causal coherence), nor did it attempt to convey any particular story about the self.

Lorna continued her account of the crime as follows:

En dan loop hy op by die stairs. Ek sien nog hoe loop hy, but ek het nie bloed gesien nie; ek het niks gesien nie. Dan gaan ek huis toe. Dan is ek op my nerves. Dan bewe ek, en dan vra my pa vir my wat het aangegaan. Dan sê ek, nee, niks het gebeur nie. But hulle sien ek is op my nerves. But dan gaan ek daar in 'n hokkie in. Daar's 'n hokkie en niemand bly daar nie. Dan gaan sit ek daar in die hok. Dan sluit ek die hok van binne. En dan hoor ek die vrou hier bo by ons. Is mos in die flats wat ons bly. Dan skree die vrou vir my pa om te sê my pa moet kom kyk wat het ek gemaak. Boeta Hennie is nou dood. En dan skrik ek. Dan wil ek nie die ding oopmaak nie. Dan hoor ek niemand praat meer daar in die yard nie. Dis doodstil. Dan gaan ek agter uit en dan gaan ek na ons se neighbours toe. Dan sê ek vir hulle dat hulle moet die polisie bel en vir die polisie sê ek is hier agter. Hulle moet my hier agter kom haal. En dan kom die polisie. En dan was hulle daar voor. Dit was klomp vanne wat daar voor gewees het soos ek nou gehoor het. En dan kom speurders Alexander en Smit. Dan vra hulle vir my waar's die mes. Dan sê ek vir hulle, nee, ek het dit weg gegooi. Ek het dit nie meer nie. Ek weet nie waar is dit nie. Dan agterna dan gaan haal ek die mes uit en dan gee ek dit. Dan vra hulle vir my, het ek dit skoon gemaak? Dan sê ek ek het dit af gegee. Dan sê hulle ek moet dit self in die sakkie sit. Dan sit ek dit in die sakkie. Dan klim ek in die van en dan gaan ek polisie stasie toe. Dan kom ek by die polisie stasie en dan sit hulle my in 'n sel – ek alleen.

The dream-like quality of her account was illustrated by the description of the situation after she had stabbed the man. She watched as he walked up the stairs (as opposed to stumbling). Her innocence and oblivion were foregrounded when she said that she did not see any blood or anything else – “*but ek het nie bloed gesien nie; ek het niks gesien nie*” (But I did not see blood, I did not see anything). By implication, at that moment, her act was ostensibly not lethal, as there was no evidence that the man had been injured. When coupled with her earlier assertion that she had only stabbed him once, the impact of her action was minimised. As a result, she went home (“*dan gaan ek huis toe*”- then I went home) as opposed to rushing or running home; suggesting that she had not fully realised the extent of her actions and therefore did not act like a guilty person by fleeing the scene. Instead, she “just” went home. As her manner of recounting the incident was not dramatic, the listener (myself) was not

filled with horror or dread – instead the tone was detached, which added to the dream-like quality of her account.

Even though the cognitive realisation seemed dulled, the protagonist experienced the impact at an affective level: *“dan is ek op my nerves”* (then I was on my nerves). Her feeling of nervousness was intensified by a physiological reaction, i.e. *“dan bewe ek...”* (then I shivered). She described her anxiety in detail, thereby constructing a protagonist who was emotionally vulnerable. The focus on her emotional state changed the tone of the narrative by imbuing it with feeling. The image of a nervous, shivering girl sitting in a shack was in direct contrast to the brash, aggressive protagonist presented in the previous micronarrative. It is significant that she did not construct the protagonist as hiding in the shack – instead she merely went to sit there and locked the door from the inside. This indicated that she was not acting like a guilty person, but more like someone who had been traumatised by the incident and who was therefore responding with anxiety.

In this way, her reaction to the news that the man had died made sense, namely: *“(d)an skree die vrou vir my pa om te sê my pa moet kom kyk wat het ek gemaak. Boeta Hennie is nou dood. En dan skrik ek”* (Then the woman shouted at my father and said that my father should come and see what I have done. Boeta Hennie is dead. And then I got a fright). The news frightened her: At this point, she seemed to appreciate cognitively what she had done, and it is only then that she acted as if she was guilty. At first, she did not want to open the door. She did not explain what caused her to change her mind, but said that she waited until it was quiet before going to her neighbours. At this point, the protagonist acted rationally (as opposed to the traumatised state presented earlier on), and told the neighbours to call the police. This transformation from dissociation to rationality was presented without any explanation, and the narrator did not offer any insights into what may have brought this about.

Her interpretation of events was lacking throughout her narrative, and the account of the protagonist's actions was offered with little substantiation. Whereas before she was unable to appreciate her actions cognitively, the protagonist now acted as if she was guilty: when she was questioned by the police, she denied having the knife and said that she had thrown it away. However, she then fetched the knife and admitted that she had wiped it clean. The narrator did not explain her actions – she did not explain why she had changed her mind and fetched the weapon. She did not provide any justifications, excuses, rationalisations or

explanations which could indicate her interpretation of events. Instead the excerpt suggests that she was telling the truth, as it is.

Lorna's detachment from her story was evident in the rambling tone and in her inability to flesh out a coherent story about herself. The protagonist was brash and argumentative on the one hand, while also traumatised and confused by her act on the other. In addition, she acted guilty on the one hand, while also noble and accepting of her fate on the other. These contradictory aspects of the self were linked concretely by her use of conjunctions and not interpreted or processed within an explanatory framework. Instead, she moved seamlessly from one scene to another without providing explanations for these paradoxes in her story. As with other macronarratives in this subgroup, contradictory accounts were not inherently problematic but narrators' lack of elucidation reduced their overall coherence.

Margaret, a sex worker, who along with three other people had been convicted of the murder of a client, cast the protagonist as someone who was dissociated at the time of the crime. She provided a detailed account of the antecedent events.

Okay, ek kan nou nie eintlik sê watter spesifieke redes wat vir my hier laat beland het. Maar ek sal die hele storie vertel. Dit was in Aprilmaand gewees. Ek is nie seker watter datum nie, maar dit was op 'n Saterdag. Ek en een vriend van my het op die... ek het prostitusie gedoen. Ons het op die pad gestaan, en dan het die kar gestop om vir my te vra of ek besigheid doen – prostitusie doen. En toe sê ek vir hom ja. En hy het vir my gevra wat is my bedrag; ek het dit vir hom gegee. En hy het gesê ek moet net so vir 10 minute wag; hy gaan weer terug kom. Ek het gewag, en in die tyd het daar weer 'n ander kar gestop. Ek is saam met hom weg. En ek het terug gekom, en toe het die een vriendin van my daar gestaan en ek het saam met haar gerook. My boyfriend was aan die anderkant van die pad. Ja, toe het die man nou teruggekome. Maar die eerste keer toe hy gestop het het hy 'n cloak aangehad. Ek het gedink hy's miskien 'n prokureur of 'n judge of so. En toe kom ek en toe klim ek saam met hom. Maar daar waar ek gestaan het is ons in die bos in. Ons het daar die heelyd net gepraat. Die vriendin van my het gekom en ek het gesien dat sy het 'n bril op. Nou die bril het ek ook altyd gedra, dit was John s'n gewees. En ek dink altyd hy soek moeilikheit uit en so. En dan kom sy daar en dan vra sy vir die man of hy nie miskien vir haar 'n condom het nie. Dan sê die man nee. En dan vra ek vir haar waar kom sy aan die bril, want vroeër toe ons op die pad gestaan het, toe het sy nie die bril gehad nie. Toe sê sy my, nee, sy het die bril van verlede week af al. Maar ek het dit so gevat, ek weet sy lieg vir my, maar ek het nie nog

daarop uitgegaan om die verduidelikings daarvan te hoor nie. En terwyl sy nog gepraat het het sy omgedraai en 'n endjie van die kar afgeloop. En die twee, my boyfriend en die jong, hulle twee het aangekom. Dan het die een na die driver se kant toe gegaan en die mes teen aan hom gehou. Hy het vir hom gevra of hy 'n gun, cell phone en geld het. En dan antwoord die oorledene vir hom en hy sê hy het nie. So het my boyfriend die man uit die bestuurder kant uitgehaal en agter tussen my en my vriendin gesit. En ons het daar gesit, die heelyd die man in die middel van ons. En my vriendin het die man net so out of the blue begin kap met die appel op die kop. En ek was geskok. Ek kon nie gepraat het nie. Ek kon niks gedoen het nie. Ek het net daar gesit amper soos iemand wat nie 'n sê het oor die hele ding nie. En so het dit gekom dat ons dieper in die bos in ry. En hulle het die man se motor gevisenteer om te kyk miskien wat hy het en wat hy nou nie het nie... wat kosbaar is vir hulle om te kan gebruik om te verkoop en so. En met die tyd het hulle op sy bankkaartjie afgekome. My boyfriend het gevra vir die pinnommer, en later het ons uitgevind dit was die verkeerde pinnommer wat hy gegee het. En toe het die een outjie nou gesê ons moet na sy oom toe gaan en sy neef toe sodat ons daar kan kom en dan kan ons Mandrax rook ook daar en drink saam met hulle. En ek het net stil gesit. Oral gegaan, en is amper soos ek het toestemming gegee vir alles wat hulle aanvang. En ons het die man vasgebind – sy hande en sy voete en sy mond. Eerste het ons hom in die boot gelaai. Daarvandaan af is ons deur na die ander ou se oom toe. Ons het daar gekom en my boyfriend en hy het uitgeklim en na die huis toe gestap. Ek en my ander vriendin, ons het net daar gesit. En hulle het daarso gepraat; ek kon nie hoor wat hulle praat nie. Hulle het daar gepraat en teru gekom na die kar toe. En van hulle huis af is ons na Pick 'n Pay toe. By Pick 'n Pay gekom het hulle probeer geld trek, maar elke keer het net 'n slippie uitgekom en so. Daarvandaan af is ons na die ander lokasie toe om die Mandrax te koop. Daar gekom, ons het Mandrax gekoop en ons is terug na die bos toe. (Margaret)

Margaret remarked that she did not know the specific reasons for her imprisonment: “*Okay, ek kan nou nie eintlik sê watter spesifieke redes wat vir my hier laat beland het*” (*Okay, I can't actually say which specific reasons brought me to prison...*). Despite being able to provide a detailed account of the crime, she did not link her actions to her imprisonment. However, she decided to tell the *whole* story – “*maar ek sal die hele storie vertel*” (*but I will tell the whole story*) – that she would be truthful. By listening to the whole story, however, perhaps I would arrive at my own understanding (since she was not forwarding one) of what had led to this juncture in her life. Her preoccupation with telling the whole story started with her attempt to locate the events in time. She and a fellow sex worker were in the street when she was approached by a prospective client. It is interesting that she clarified what the term “*besigheid doen*” (*doing business*) meant – this clarification was for the benefit of the

listener (myself), such that it was clear that she was not trying to hide anything – this was part of telling the whole story. In addition, it also suggested that she assumed that I was not familiar with language of the street and therefore she needed to clarify the phrase.

She said that the man left, after which she went with another client. At this point, her friend and her boyfriend entered the story as bystanders, although her actions were linked to theirs. While the protagonist was constructed as free from any criminal intent, the presence of the other two characters intimated that they were ‘up to something’. She then returned her focus to the protagonist who had wondered whether the client had some social status, namely, whether he was a judge or a lawyer because he had worn a robe. The victim was therefore given a more specific identity and his ostensible social status (and perhaps questionable morality) seemed to be meaningful in some way. However, she did not elaborate, presumably the value judgment was left up to me.

Margaret related how they then had spent some time together, as this was part of the usual order of business. Her friend, who seemed to represent the criminal intent, approached them at this point. Margaret then focused on how she questioned her friend about her sunglasses, thus portraying herself as oblivious of anything untoward. She then described how her boyfriend and another man threatened the victim: they held a knife to his neck and questioned him as to whether he had a gun, a cell phone and money. The protagonist disappeared from the story and her reactions and feelings were not relayed. The knife threat was thus recounted as if she was watching from a distance and she only reappeared when the boyfriend put the man between her and her friend in the back seat - *“(s)o het my boyfriend die man uit die bestuurder kant uitgehaal en agter tussen my en my vriendin gesit. En ons het daar gesit, die heelyd die man in die middle van ons”* (So my boyfriend took the man out of the driver’s side and put him at the back between my friend and I. And we just sat there the whole time, the man between the two of us).

That they were just sitting there created the sense that they did not quite know what to do next. The protagonist was oblivious of their intentions and was taken aback when her friend hit the man on the head with an apple – it happened ‘out of the blue’. She was shocked and was unable to talk or do anything. This description of the protagonist’s traumatised state plausibly explained her absence from the critical point in her story (the knife threat). She said, *“(e)n ek was geskok. Ek kon nie gepraat het nie. Ek kon niks gedoen het nie. Ek het*

net daar gesit amper soos iemand wat nie 'n sê het oor die hele ding nie” (And I was shocked. I could not speak. I could not do anything. I just sat there like someone who did not have a say about the whole thing). She was constructed as not having any control over what had happened and as being paralysed by the situation. In this way her initial statement as to why she was in prison was understandable: if she was traumatised and dissociated then it was reasonable for her to question why she had been incarcerated.

She then described her boyfriend’s attempts to gain access to the deceased’s bank account and the other man’s suggestion to go to his family to smoke Mandrax (a sedative-hypnotic drug) and drink alcohol. The protagonist was not a part of this discussion and the narrator once more described being in an automaton state: *“en ek het net stil gesit. Oral gegaan, en is amper soos ek het toestemming gegee vir alles wat hulle aanvang”* (And I just sat quietly. Went everywhere and it was almost as if I gave them permission for everything that they got up to). By being silent, she implicitly gave the others permission to attack her client – while this suggests a sense of culpability, her automaton state diminished her responsibility.

However, the change from passive to active participant came about in the next line: *“En ons het die man vasgebind – sy hande en sy voete en sy mond. Eerste het ons hom in die boot gelaai”* (And we bound the man – his hands and his feet and his mouth. First we put him in the boat). Although participating in binding and gagging the man, represented a drastic change from how she portrayed herself initially, she offered no rationale for this. Her previous automaton responses were suddenly replaced with goal-directed, intentional acts. Her micronarrative did not explain this about-turn and she was unable to make sense of it in terms of her understanding of herself. She described how they went to the other man’s uncle but said that she was not privy to the discussion between her boyfriend and the man. She once more depicted the protagonist and her friend as detached and uninvolved: *“ek en my ander vriendin, ons het net daar gesit”* (My other friend and I, we just sat there). This statement reinforced her construction of the protagonist as an automaton who “just sat there”. It is significant, though, that she subsequently identified with the other perpetrators, thus contradicting the idea that she was a passive participant – she used the word “ons”(our) to refer to their collective actions. In this way, the protagonist was therefore constructed as one of the perpetrators who tried to steal money from the man’s account and who went to buy Mandrax. While Margaret did not explicitly give drug use as an extenuating circumstance,

she mentioned it as an antecedent factor in the crime. However, the meaning that she attached to its role was unclear and it was merely presented as one of the elements of the story.

In the first part of the micronarrative, Margaret provided an extensive account of the antecedent events, thereby setting the immediate context for the whole story. She continued her account as follows:

.... So ons was nou aan die anderkant in die urban bos gewees. Ons het daar gekom. Ons het eers 'n bietjie gerook en gesit en gesels. En ek het nie gesien dat my vriendin en die outjie die man uit die boot uit het nie. Maar toe ek weer sien toe was hy op die gras. En hulle het aan hom beginne slaan. Hulle het hom gesteek. Die een vriendin van my het hom net begin kap met die dinges. En in die besigheid in het die outjie vir hom gevra waar bly hy. En dan sê hy, nee, hy bly in (suburb) in (town). En het hy 'n vrou en het hy kinders? En die man het geantwoord, ja, hy het 'n vrou en kinders. En ek persoonlik het gekom en ek het die mes uit my vriendin se hand uit gegryp en ook net die man beginner steek. Maar ek het hom net een hou gesteek. Ek het hom in sy nek gesteek. En vir my was dit amper soos 'n shock, want die moment toe ek sien wat ek doen – toe dit my byval wat ek doen – het ek net die mes gelos en omgedraai en geloop terug na die kar toe. En ek het by die kar gekom en ek het gesit in die kar. En my boyfriend het gekom en hy het gepraat saam met my. Ek was vol bloedspatsels en hy het vir my afgevee en so. Maar ek was die heelyd net stil gewees. Ek het niks gepraat nie.
(Margaret)

She described how they returned to the forest and then smoked and talked. By using the pronoun “ons”(our), she included the protagonist in the group rather than divorcing her from them. However, she was oblivious to the fact that her friend and the other man had removed the victim from the car. Despite being part of the group, she was not entirely complicit, as she was unaware of their intentions. It is significant that she seemed to slip in and out of two roles – on the one hand, she was dissociated and her actions were not volitional, while on the other she was participative and engaged. However, the way she described these roles underscored the notion that her acts were not intentional – even when she participated, she described herself as being oblivious of her accomplices' criminal intent. In this way, she sought to diminish responsibility for her actions.

Margaret's description of the way in which the deceased was assaulted and stabbed was relayed without any emotion (she later told me that he had been stabbed 54 times). This

dulled the listener's reaction to the crime and defocused from the gravity of their actions. She went so far as to describe the multiple stabbing as "*die besigheid*" (*this business*), minimising the actual physical violence. One of the accomplices questioned the victim about his family; this question seemed out place, given the violence perpetrated against the victim. However, Margaret did not comment on the nature of the question or what subsequently led her to participate in the stabbing: "*(e)n ek persoonlik het gekom en ek het die mes uit my vriendin se hand uit gegryp en ook net die man beginne steek. Maar ek het hom net een hou gesteek. Ek het hom in sy nek gesteek*" (*I personally came and grabbed the knife out of my friend's hand and then also began stabbing the man. But I only stabbed him once. I stabbed him in the neck*). She said that she grabbed the knife from her friend's hand and began stabbing him. The use of the word "*persoonlik*" (*personally*) reinforced her involvement. Walking to her friend and grabbing the knife indicated that the subsequent act (stabbing) was volitional. Despite stating that she started stabbing him, she quickly qualified her statement by saying that she stabbed him only once, in the neck. Her single stab contrasts sharply with the numerous stab wounds inflicted by the others showing that although she was an active participant, her act was not as odious as those perpetrated by her accomplices.

The transition from active to dissociated participant occurred surreptitiously, as the cognitive appreciation of her actions shocked her and it was only then that she realised what she had done. This realisation caused her to drop the knife and walk back to the car: "*(e)n vir my was dit amper soos 'n shock, want die moment toe ek sien wat ek doen – toe dit my byval wat ek doen – het ek net die mes gelos en omgedraai en geloop terug na die kar toe*" (*And it was almost like a shock to me because the moment I saw what I was doing – when I realised what I was doing – I left the knife and turned around and walked back to the car*). It is understandable that Margaret utilised this strategy to provide an acceptable and plausible explanation for her actions. The involuntary act of a dissociated automaton was more plausible than the intentional violence of a young woman. Yet she was unable to fully flesh out the conflicting identities she presented in her narrative. She could not step outside of the story to account for her behaviour and therefore seemed to rely on the dissociated protagonist; in other words, if the protagonist *just sat there* and was largely oblivious, then the narrator did not have to make sense of her actions. She therefore stated: "*(e)n ek het by die kar gekom en ek het gesit in die kar. En my boyfriend het gekom en hy het gepraat saam met my. Ek was vol bloed spatsels en hy het vir my afgevee en so. Maar ek was die healtyd net stil gewees. Ek het niks gepraat nie*" (*And I got to the car and just sat in the car. And my*

boyfriend came and spoke to me. I was full of blood spatter and he wiped it off. But the whole time I was just quiet. And I did not speak). The use of a dissociated protagonist also served the purpose of silencing any questions, which I might have had. If she was oblivious as to what led her to stab the victim, then the narrator was in some way absolved of providing any explanation. This inability to adopt an interpretive stance was a common feature of these incoherent narratives. The preoccupation with telling the whole story without providing plausible contextual frameworks affected the overall coherence of these stories.

Margaret's story exemplifies the drug-induced trance-like state depicted in this subgroup of narratives: There were moments of lucidity when she realised what she had done but for the most part was in a daze. Therefore, the tone of the story made sense as it portrayed an intoxicated protagonist. However, as with other narrators, Margaret was neither able to interpret her actions in the re-telling nor was she able to coherently locate it within the explanatory context of her life story.

Circumventing violence

The third sub-group of narrators avoided talking about the crime by concentrating on other aspects of their lives. It is significant, that narrators in this subgroup had long criminal histories and that they had been involved in other violent offences. Consequently, they utilised this to defocus from their current convictions. By attending to dramatic examples of their involvement in other violent crimes and interweaving different crime narratives, the boundaries between crimes became fuzzy and it was unclear which particular crime they were talking about. In addition, narrators were also adept at circumventing any explanations of the acts leading to their incarceration by resorting to melodrama and suspense when portraying the protagonists as powerful. These narratives were typified by attention to detail and dramatic tones which captivated the listener while diverting attention away from the crime. While masculinised protagonists were at the heart of these stories, narrators were unable to successfully create causal connections between experiences and it was therefore difficult to extrapolate specific themes which related to their stories about the self.

Noleen, who was convicted of the murder of a rival gang member, interwove various stories when attempting to relay her crime narrative. Although she could identify her primary motivation, she was unable to outline clearly what had happened. She tried to explain how

traumatic loss and growing up in a violent milieu almost made it inevitable that young people like herself would end up in gangs. This represented an attempt at contextualising and even justifying her behaviour but she was unable to sustain this plot line in her macronarrative. As with other narrations in this subgroup, protagonists evolved from victims to powerful aggressors relatively quickly which suggested an inability to develop a trajectory which plausibly explained this evolution.

My oudste broer was geskiet. Ek was klein toe is hy geskiet. Ek het groot geraak met die gedagte ek gaan revenge vat. Ek het vir niemand gesê nie. Ek en my Boeta was beste vrinne. Dan join ons die gang. Maar voor ons die gangs join het een van my nefies 'n vrind gehet met 'n gun. En dan bring hy die gun vir my. But die gun is 'n ander gang se gun, en dan soek hulle die gun vir homself want ek het nie die gun terug gegee nie. Dan gee ek die gun vir die mense vir wie ons nou join. Nou is die gun by hulle. En so kan hulle mos nou glo in ons; ons is jonk en wat het ons 'n gun. En wat ons nou uitgaan, dis nice en dis lekker. Ons het gerook. En dan skiet hulle ene met die gun dood. En dan is ek mos nou in die gang. Dan vat ons revenge en dan kry ons weer een van hulle. So hier tienuur die oggend... ons was vier gewees... toe gaan ons daar. Dan kry ons vir hom daar. Toe skiet ons vir hom mos dood. Die drie was gearrester, en ek was nog vir twee maande vry gewees. Hulle het ons aangekla vir aanranding en poging tot manslag. Maar die gedagte was net daar, ek gaan die ou kry wat my broer geskiet het. Maar hy het toe straf gekry. Maar dit het so gewerk dat ek in die tronk beland het vir 'n poging tot manslag. Toe ek in die tronk is, en dan gaan my ma dood. En toe ek uit gaan toe voel ek net is me against the world. Toe kom ek uit, my baby broer is op sy eie. Maar ek is daar vir hom. Toe begin ek met drugs. En ek het 'n meisie, ek se vir haar daar by ons bly. Ek was deurmekaar. Ek het geworry van niks nie en niemand nie. Toe het ek my girls se harte seer gemaak. Ek speel met die vroumense. Toe is ek nog ernstig in die ding; net laat hulle vir my kan supply. Ja, en so het dit aangegaan. Toe het hulle my gearrester vir die saak. En my eie nefie het getuig in die saak. En hy was ook gearrester. Hy het my so evil gemaak laat hy op veilige bewaking sit – laat die mense moet dink ek is so gevaarlik. Want die anders is in nie in die trunk nie. Ek is die enigste een wat in die trunk sit. So hy is bang. Hy is nou in veilige bewaring. En dan arrester hulle my. Dan word ek onskuldig bevind op die ander poging tot moord sake. En toe kry ek straf in die saak. Toe gaan my baby broertjie ook dood. Ek is 'n mens so... ek is amper so, ek het nog nie die mense vergewe nie. Want ek weet hoe sterk het ek gevoel oor my oudste broer. En toe ek nou binne is, toe kom dit my baby broertjie ook oor. Toe word hy ook doodgemaak.(Noleen)

Noleen began her micronarrative by stating that her brother had been shot – introducing her primary motivation for violence. She qualified it by saying that she had been young when it happened and that she had grown up with the intention of taking revenge, thereby providing a historical context for her actions. The notion that she had harboured this feeling was reinforced by her saying that she had not told anyone about it. The protagonist's vengeful action was understandable to an extent, as she had been a young child who had lost a sibling in a violent manner. She then referred to her relationship with “*Boeta*” – a term usually used to refer to a brother, though not necessarily signifying biological kinship. “*Boeta's*” importance in her life was highlighted throughout her macronarrative, as he seemed to be symbolic of her murdered brother. In addition, she also strongly identified with “*Boeta*”, as she sought to assert a masculinised identity.

She said that she and “*Boeta*” joined a gang. Prior to that one of her cousins had given her a gun that had belonged to someone else. The significance of the ownership of the gun became clearer when she explained that it had belonged to a rival gang and that she had not returned it. Effectively, by owning the gun, she claimed some kind of power and it also gave her some credibility with her own gang: “*(d)an gee ek die gun vir die mense vir wie ons nou join. Nou is die gun by hulle. En so kan hulle mos nou glo in ons; ons is jonk en wat het ons 'n gun?*” (*then I gave the gun to the people who we were joining. Now the gun is with them. And now they can believe in us; we are young and why do we have a gun?*) In spite of their youth they owned a gun which made the gang trust them. In terms of her story the gun was cast as a way of impressing her gang, but on another level, it was also meant to impress (and perhaps even alarm?) me. Here she was, a slightly built, attractive young woman who wanted to show me how dangerous she was. This masculine bravado was pervasive in her macronarrative, as she sought to challenge stereotypical perceptions, which others (including myself) may have had of her. She described her experience in the gang as “*dis nice and dis lekker*” (*it's nice*). So gang life was enjoyable – a statement underscoring willing participation.

She then referred to her involvement in gang warfare and said that one of her gang members was shot by a rival gang, whereupon they retaliated. She explained how they shot and killed a rival gang member and how they were charged with assault with intent to commit grievous bodily harm and attempted culpable homicide. It is interesting that she used the term “*poging to manslag*” (attempted culpable homicide – a crime which does not exist in law) as opposed to murder. While on the surface the narrator's masculine bravado was clear, at a deeper level

her slip of the tongue may have reflected her unease regarding her actions. In addition, the lack of intention embodied in the misnomer “attempted culpable homicide” may have reflected an attempt to minimise the seriousness of her act.

Noleen recovered from her ambivalence by referring to her desire to avenge her brother’s death: “*ek gaan die ou kry wat my broer geskiet het*” (*I am going to get the guy who shot my brother*). She said that the man who had shot her brother was incarcerated, but that “*things worked out*” (“*maar dit het so gewerk*”) so that she was in prison for “*poging tot manslag*” – once more referring to “attempted culpable homicide”. She explained that she was unable to avenge her brother’s death, as both she and her intended victim were incarcerated at the same time. At this point in the story, she digressed, seemingly to explain her early sense of isolation and vulnerability which predisposed her to violence.

Previously, the micronarrative was imbued with masculine bravado, but now it focused on the emotional impact of her life experiences. She explained that her mother died while she was in prison and presented this as a pivotal point triggering a downward spiral: “*(t)oe ek in die tronk is, en dan gaan my ma dood. En toe ek uit gaan toe voel ek net is me against the world*” (*when I was in prison, my mother died. And when I was released I felt that it was just me against the world*). Her mother’s death changed her and she started using drugs and became involved with a girl. The self prior to the mother’s death had not been judged by the narrator and was portrayed as normal. She therefore relayed the details of her gang involvement with a sense of bravado. However, the narrator constructed the death of the mother as having a significant influence on the protagonist. She described this period in her life as confusing – “*ek was deurmekaar*” (*I was confused*). She seemed to be testing my reaction to her lesbianism, which she was not conflicted about in the rest of her macronarrative. The implication was that, if she described herself as “*deurmekaar*” (*confused*), then her lesbianism was understandable, and I had no right to judge her. Yet she reverted to the masculine bravado illustrated earlier on and said, “*(ek) het geworry van niks en niemand nie*” (*I did not worry about anything or anyone*), in other words, she did not care what people (or I) thought of her. She explained how she hurt her girlfriends and played around with women. She used them to provide her with drugs. Her behaviour was therefore justified in terms of her mother’s death, thus offering a plausible explanation for her perceived recklessness.

Noleen then spoke about her arrest for the crime, of which she was later convicted. Interestingly, she did not explain what had happened, but rather focused on the way her cousin had described her in court: “(h)y het my so evil gemaak laat hy op veilige bewaking sit – laat die mense moet dink ek is so gevaarlik” (He portrayed me as so evil such that he is in protective custody – so that people can think that I am very dangerous). In other words, he made her seem so evil which led other people to believe that she was very dangerous. The details she presented served to concretise the image of the dangerous protagonist, as the courts deemed it necessary to place her cousin in protective custody. In this way, she avoided talking about her crime and focused on how she had been perceived. The fact that her own nephew portrayed her as evil and provided evidence that she was dangerous disturbed her.

It is significant that she then referred to her acquittal in other attempted murder cases. Interestingly she now used the term “*poging tot moord sake*” (attempted murder cases) – thus acknowledging that she had been charged with attempted murder as opposed to “attempted culpable homicide”. Using the plural word “*sake*” (cases) implied that she had been involved in other cases and that, despite others’ portrayal of her as evil, she had successfully evaded conviction. Yet she was convicted on the current murder charge. She did not explain the details of the case, as it may have undermined her story of the omnipotent, masculinised protagonist. Consequently, she focused on the death of her younger brother and her inability to forgive the people who had killed him. It is noteworthy that she started the micronarrative by referring to the murder of her older brother and ended it with the murder of her younger one. Thus, her inability to forgive or to forgo her vengeance was presented as justified and, given the bravado exhibited by the protagonist, her intentions were understandable.

Noleen’s presentation of the protagonist diverted attention away from the details of her current conviction. Her account was filled with details of her heady lifestyle and, while she gave details of her involvement in other crimes, she steered clear of the act that had led to her incarceration. Her avoidance may be because it challenged the notion of the invincible protagonist – an image she had spent substantial effort creating. This evasion was typical of narrators who fell into this subgroup, as their convictions seemed to represent the overpowering of their invincibility. It was therefore more expedient to focus on those instances where they had managed to evade successful prosecution as it reinforced their portrayal of themselves.

It is significant that Noleen attempted to draw on available discourses to evaluate her actions. However, this did not cohere with her overall presentation of the protagonist as invincible.

Ek weet nie wat gaan ek nou maak nie want ek weet nie of die Here dit so bestuur het laat hy my baby broertjie ook laat hy kan oorkom.....Ek weet nie of alles toetse is vir my nie... of ek nou weer dieper gaan nie. Maar ek het mos programme nou gedoen hierso.

In spite of her steadfast resolve to avenge her brother's death, she drew on religious discourse to understand why he had been killed. She considered that it might be celestially ordained and questioned whether she was being tested. However, she was unsure whether that was indeed the case or if she was delving too deeply. This religious interpretation was attributed to the rehabilitation programmes she had attended, and offered an acceptable and expected way of framing her life experiences. This excerpt was appended onto the previous micronarrative, however, and represented her attempt at interpreting why both her brothers had been killed. It also seemed as if her endeavour was to fulfil the listener's expectations and for this reason, it did not cohere. Her macronarrative was overwhelmed with images of the invincible masculinised protagonist, and the attempt to locate her interpretation within a religious discourse was not convincing. These weak attempts at adopting interpretative stances were indicative of the narratives in this subgroup, as narrators tried to offer acceptable and plausible explanations for their actions. However, this did not cohere with the overall portrayal of the omnipotent protagonist whose life experiences were self-motivated rather than God-ordained.

The use of melodrama was also clearly illustrated by Diana's macronarrative, as she avoided talking about her participation in the gang murder of a drug-dealer. Her story was saturated with details of her life such that the plot line was difficult to establish and had the effect of overwhelming the listener. For example she initiated her story with a detailed account of her family background, constructing it as a precursor to prison thereby making a substantial leap from her early experiences to her current situation.

So sy was r rig overprotective. Daai tyd toe ek nou groter begin raak. So sy het altyd die houvas op my gehet. In my hart het ek altyd soos 'n prisoner gevoel. That's why, om tronk toe te gekom het, vir my was dit nie 'n verskil om alleen te wees nie because ek is used to that. Ek het voor dit gehad. En die oggend toe gaan ek nie skool toe nie. Dai hele dag het ek

rondgehike. Ek het nie geweet waarnatoe nie. En ek moet geduck het ook all over the show because ek was so bang ek gaan 'n taxi sien of my pa of my uncles en so. Iemand wat weet ek is nie by die skool nie en wat vir haar kan phone.

She sketched a picture of restrictive authoritarian parents who controlled every aspect of her life. She said, for instance: *“(s)o sy het altyd die houvas op my gehet. In my hart het ek altyd soos 'n prisoner gevoel. That's why, om tronk toe te gekom het, vir my was dit nie 'n verskil om alleen te wees nie because ek is used to that. Ek het voor dit gehad”*(*She always had a hold on me. In my heart I felt like a prisoner. That's why, for me to come to prison was no different as I am used to being alone. I had that before*). Imprisonment, therefore, did not represent a disruption in her story of the self; it was merely a manifestation of the psychological imprisonment which she had experienced in childhood. With this powerful statement she interpreted her incarceration as an extension of her earlier lived experience. She continued with details of how she left home when she discovered that her biological father had raped her mother. Her sense of betrayal and the punishment she received when she confronted her mother caused her to leave home. She constructed this as an escape from her restrictive parents, thereby heightening the drama: *“(e)n ek moet geduck het ook all over the show because ek was so bang ek gaan 'n taxi sien of my pa of my uncles en so... My ma het 'n paar spies orals...”* (*I had to duck all over the show because I was so scared that I would see a taxi or my father or uncles etc. My mother has spies all over...*). Her imagery was vivid and commanded the listener's attention. She explained how she became involved with a gang and started using drugs and participating in various crimes. Diana said she became involved with a respectable man who later fathered her child. Their marriage only lasted for a few months, as he was unable to deal with her gang involvement. Her inability to care for her infant son was communicated graphically, as she recounted how she nearly drowned him while bathing him. She captured my attention and defocused from her conviction. She then focused on her gang involvement and gave extensive accounts of their crimes, and of an abusive relationship that she had with a gang member. She also described how she participated in the hijacking and robbery of tourists, but had evaded convictions for those crimes.

Diana narrated all these experiences in the form of a soliloquy: her story was told dramatically, and she provided intricate details of her life. It is significant that the only point at which I appeared in the interview was when she referred to her current conviction. She

began in a melodramatic manner by explaining that it had been a high profile case and that she could not really talk about it.

... tot die laaste saak – die moord saak. Dit was 'n baie lelike moord saak gewees. Dit was 'n high profile saak. Dit het baie lank geloop. Dit was in die koerante en in die news. So dit was 'n baie hectic saak. Ek dink nie ek wil baie daar in gaan nie. As die ding moet geskrywe raak gaat baie mense die hel in raak. Ek wil nogal rêrig nou weer daai vertel het van die saak.

In one sense, the tone was boastful, as Diana explained that the court case was widely reported in the media. She linked the wide reportage to the case being “*hectic*” – hence she focused on the attention, which the court case received and not on the incident itself. She avoided detailing the crime, explaining that she did not want to talk about it, as it would anger many people. She contradicted this sentiment by later expressing a desire to talk about the case. However, she prefaced this need with an air of risk as the publication of details would make many people livid: “*(a)s die ding moet geskrywe raak gaat baie mense die hel in raak*” (If this thing has to be written down, many people would be helluva angry). Her ambivalence was clear, but by creating the threat of danger, she placed the decision to continue in my hands. This was interesting because up until this point she had dictated the pace, tone and content of the interview. I was drawn into her melodrama and responded by asking if she wanted me to stop the recording. In this way, the potentially perilous situation she constructed was validated, and she was able to avoid describing the crime.

Adelene: As u nie wil hê dat dit geskryf moet word nie dan sal ek die band afsit.

Diana: Ja, because weet jy, die saak is mos 'n high profile saak. Die saak was mos all-over. Die saak het vir my 'n mal mens gemaak! Die saak het vir my heeltemal 'n mal mens gemaak. Die saak het vir my op hierdie psychiatric treatment... pille en medications en goed hier in die tronk laat drink. En dit het vir my laat... ek het vier of vyf suicide attempts gehet. Ek kan net nie gelewe het hier nie. En ja, dit is past en ek het elke jaar past 'n problem om te kan pass because die saak seems to be altyd na my terug te kom wanneer ek my Koran wil touch. Okay, daarvan weet sielkundiges; daarvan weet baie mense.Vir drie dae dan sal ek die moeilikste gevangene wees in die tronk for no reason. En daai laat my wonder because ek weet nie hoekom voel ek so nie. Ek weet nie hoekom doen ek die snaakse dinge nie but ek is reg om charges op te tel hier binne deur die drie dae se dinge wat ek doen. But it's like a force you know. It's like iets wat my dryf tot die dinge. But dit het maar eerste latere by my

known geraak dat dit actually die saak is because omdat dit elke jaar dieselfde tyd gehappan het.

My question enabled her to embroider upon the “*high profile*” nature of the case, thereby creating an aura of suspense and danger. This was consistent with the tone of the rest of the macronarrative, as she sought to hold my attention with dramatic statements or explanations, but without really stepping outside of the story. Consequently, the shock value of the narrative was more important than trying to make sense of the act for which she had been imprisoned.

It is significant that at the point when I was allowed in, the micronarrative focused on her psychopathology. Diana’s awareness of my training as a clinical psychologist was evident in the way that she described her mental state subsequent to the crime: “*(d)ie saak het vir my ‘n mal mens gemaak! Die saak het vir my heeltemal ‘n mal mens gemaak. Die saak het vir my op hierdie psychiatric treatment... pille en medications en goed hier in die tronk laat drink. En dit het vir my laat... ek het vier of vyf suicide attempts gehet. Ek kan net nie gelewe het hier nie*” (*The case made me crazy! The case made me completely crazy! The case caused me to receive psychiatric treatment...pills and medications and things here in prison. And it made me... I had four or five suicide attempts. I could not survive here*). She thus emphasised that the case had caused her to become *completely mad*. She presented the protagonist as traumatised to the degree of mental illness or insanity. She emphasised the extent of her pathology by referring to the subsequent psychiatric treatment and her several suicide attempts. In other words, her incarceration had clearly snuffed out her will to live. This pathologised identity explained how the case had impacted on her.

Diana was haunted by the *case* – her use of the word “*saak*” referred to the court case – which is interesting, as she did not allude to being haunted by her actions. Her reference to psychologists’ knowledge of her mental state validated her assertions – her pathology had been confirmed and was well-known to others. Diana’s focus on the impact of the court case on her psychological well-being defocused from any discussion of the crime. By telling the story in this manner, I was expected to draw my own inferences. Since I was a psychologist, I was expected to deduce the severity of the impact of the crime based on the protagonist’s purported pathology. Therefore it was not necessary for Diana to share the details of the case, as the repercussions of her actions spoke volumes. This effective strategy enabled her to

embroider on the psychiatric discourse, which could provide some insight into the protagonist's fragile nature. Her violent outbursts in prison could be explained as the result of haunting thoughts so providing a plausible explanation for her actions. In this way, Diana justified her aggression and violence in prison. This was also significant as she did not link it to the protagonist who had perpetrated other crimes prior to incarceration. Whereas before her violence represented her participation in her new family life (gang), her violence in prison was justified in terms of psychopathology. Violence was alternately attributed to her gang identity and her pathologised identity. However, the focal point of her story was unclear, as she avoided an evaluative stance. Instead, she chose to immerse herself in dramatic details, and her soliloquy provided an appropriate vehicle to convey intricate aspects of her life.

Baie mense weet nie die waarheid van die saak nie. My familie weet nie die waarheid van die saak nie. Ek en my ma-hulle – my family – ons het nie 'n lekker band nie. Ek voel dat daar is nie genoeg sorries in die wêreld wat ek kan vra vir my ma-hulle nie vir wat ek gedoen het om hiernatoe te gekom het nie. Specifically, mainly daai saak. Al daai goed wat ek nou genoem het en vir die mense wat vir my grootgemaak het, daar is net nou way wat jy kan meen dat daai kan actually so gehappan het nie. Nie vir daai way wat ek grootgemaak gewees het nie. But daai deel was ook nie ek nie. Daai is ook 'n deel wat gekos het ek moet op die einde van die dag 'n klomp jare in die tronk moet kom sit het.

Having explained all her actions except the crime itself, Diana once more reiterated that the no-one really knew the truth about the case. In this way, she increased the suspense once more, as she implicitly alluded to the questionable veracity of evidence led at the trial. Her story assumed a conspiratorial air, as not even her family knew what had happened. At this point, she closed off the narrative about the case by focusing on her relationship with her family. She expressed her inability to sufficiently apologise for what she had done: “(e)k voel dat daar is nie genoeg sorries in die wêreld wat ek kan vra vir my ma-hulle nie vir wat ek gedoen het om hiernatoe te gekom het nie”. (I feel that there are not enough sorries in the world which I can ask my mother-them for what I have done which led me to being here). This was the first time she mentioned her actions, as opposed to the case. Yet she did not elaborate on these actions, and then once more referred to it as the case: – “Specifically, mainly daai saak.” (Specifically, mainly that case). She invited me to consider all the things which she had told me so that I would arrive at the conclusion that the crime could not have occurred in that way (as purported in the case):– “Al daai goed wat ek nou genoem het en vir

die mense wat vir my grootgemaak het, daar is net no way wat jy kan meen dat daai kan actually so gehappem het nie. Nie vir daai way wat ek grootgemaak gewees het nie.”(All those things that I have mentioned and those people who reared me – there is just no way that you can say that it actually happened that way. Not in the way that I was reared). She stressed that her strict upbringing and her fervent Muslim background were at odds with her actions. Her role in the crime was therefore questionable. She constructed the protagonist as the virtuous Muslim girl who had existed at the outset of the macronarrative. Her return to her initial construction obviated the other portrayals of the protagonist – the active gang member, the violent inmate, the pathological offender were now overshadowed by the good Muslim girl. Having discarded the initial portrayals of the protagonist, she attributed her violence and aggression to someone else i.e. *“(b)ut daai deel was ook nie ek nie. Daai is ook ‘n deel wat gekos het ek moet op die einde van die dag ‘n klomp jare in die tronk moet kom sit het.”*(but that part was also not me. That is also a part that, at the end of the day, caused me to come and sit for a lot of years in prison) She thus rejected the part of herself that had caused her to be incarcerated and implied that it was not who she really was (the virtuous Muslim). She did not elaborate on what constituted *“daai deel”* (that part) indicating that she had not made sense of it. Diana was unable to explain that part of herself which had caused her to commit the “hectic” crime.

Her struggle with the details of the crime was indicative of a struggle with a problematic aspect of herself. Her story of the self was sensationalised in this way to avoid dealing with this difficulty, and the incoherence of her narrative was understandable. Her struggle was pertinently illustrated by the following,

En many times, ja, dan brand my hart because ek wil sometimes mos vir iemand sê, ek kon nie daai ding gedoen het nie, because ek voel dat daai is die enigste tyd wanneer ek reg gaat van daai is wanneer ek die waarheid van die saak myself... want ek myself weet nie die waarheid van die saak nie. En ek kom net nie so ver nie...

Diana vividly illustrated how she grappled with the crime: her heart burnt because she wanted to tell someone that she could not have committed the act. This desire for exoneration resulted from her inability to develop an understanding of that part of herself (*“daai deel”* that part) which had committed the crime. Consequently, she expressed disbelief – *“ek kon nie daai ding gedoen het nie”* (I could not have done that thing). In spite

of the various violent stories peppering her macronarrative, she was unable to integrate this particular crime within it. Her inability to integrate the micronarrative into the larger life story stemmed from an inability to internally integrate *that part* of herself. She acknowledged that the only way in which she could heal (“*wanneer ek reg gaat*” when I become alright) was when she established the truth – on the surface, then, the truth about the case needed to be established but at a metalevel, she needed to establish the truth about herself. Her story therefore embodied this incompleteness, as she had not arrived at the point where she had assimilated her truth. She poignantly stated “*en ek kom nie so ver nie....*”(And I don't get to that point).

Diana's story was illustrative of how narrators in this subgroup had not been able to integrate difficult parts of their selves. Consequently, their narratives were not internally integrated and stories of the self were unclear. As illustrated above, these macronarratives had a sense of incompleteness. This affected the overall coherence of the stories as narrators struggled to locate and interpret their violence within larger stories of the self.

Chapter summary

This chapter explored the third narrative form which emerged in the study, viz., incoherent narratives. I looked at the ways in which this group of narrators were unable to convey credible, coherent and comprehensible stories about the self. Since it was difficult to extrapolate common themes or establish consistent plotlines, I concentrated on the crime narratives as exemplifying the lack of meaning-making in these life stories. I showed narrators' inability to use the macronarrative as a vehicle for constructing identity.

The following chapter presents an analysis of how narrators constructed gendered identities in their life stories. Narrators in all three narrative forms constructed these identities in their accounts thereby highlighting the centrality of gender in their stories of the self. I show how they drew on discourses of femininity and masculinity to convey stories of gendered protagonists.

Chapter Seven: Gendered identities

Building on the discussion of the three narrative forms in the previous two chapters, the final chapter of the analysis centres on how women constructed their gender identities and explores how they either took up or resisted stereotypical gendered roles. Gender identity played an important role in these conversion, stability and incoherent narratives, as women sought to either counter or validate the identities of offender and murderer, which had been conferred upon them. Since violent perpetration has historically been considered to be inconsistent with stereotypical femininity, this study explored how women constructed these acts within their stories of gendered selves. While most women clung to notions of conventional femininity and ultimately portrayed protagonists as good women, some women rejected it in favour of masculine identities who perpetrated extreme violence. Thus, by assuming masculine identities, protagonists (and narrators) could show how they had resisted the normative feminine yardstick and successfully achieved aspects of masculinity which were valued in their social contexts.

Archetypal feminine identities

The majority of women strongly identified with the archetypal feminine identity and used it to minimise their roles in their crimes. In conversion narratives, women clearly manifested how they had been transformed from bad girls into good women and ascribed their crimes and negative behaviour to their bad selves. The narrative distance between the bad protagonist and the good narrator was lucidly demonstrated thereby constructing a coherent account of the self. In stability narratives protagonists (and narrators) were portrayed as archetypal good women who steadfastly fulfilled their roles as mothers and wives. Violence was constructed as a temporary aberration and narrators were able to justify, excuse and rationalise their actions in plausible ways. Thus there was little narrative distance between protagonists and narrators as the good woman was a consistent identity. In these two narrative forms women drew on discourses of hegemonic femininity to present coherent accounts of their selves. As was illustrated in the previous chapters, these women posited stereotypical feminine identities to demonstrate that they were able to conform to societal expectations in spite of their acts. By attesting to their femininity, narrators hoped to influence others' perceptions of them and to counter the identities (or labels) of murderer or

offender, which had been imposed upon them. Juxtaposing stories of violence with narratives of stereotypical femininity, narrators dealt with the dilemma that violent women pose to society. Since their narratives of violent crime confounded traditional beliefs about femininity, narrators restored the natural order by constructing protagonists who embraced stereotypical femininity. While the narrators in these two narrative forms successfully drew on these discourses in their accounts, some narrators of incoherent narratives were unable to do so. As illustrated in Chapter Six, these women attempted to construct protagonists who were good women but were unable to sustain these accounts. For example, I examined how Kate (see p. 127) tried to present a wholesome protagonist who was gentle and non-aggressive but was unable to make sense of her violence within this context. She could not present clear causal connections between life experiences nor was she able to successfully sustain her portrayal of a stereotypical feminine protagonist. In this group of narratives, the themes underpinning the construction of good women were notably weak or absent thereby weakening the gendered portrayal of these protagonists.

Micronarratives of motherhood and sexuality were the pertinent ways in which the women communicated narratives of gendered identities. In concentrating on their maternal identities, the women spoke about being primary caregivers and providers and emphasised the importance of sustaining contact with their children. In articulating the heteronormative identity associated with femininity, the women rejected same-sex relationships which they viewed as *de rigueur* within the prison context.

Stories of motherhood

Many women bolstered their feminine identities by elevating their roles as mothers. Some narrators portrayed protagonists as good mothers who always put their children's needs first. In other narratives, women justified their crimes in terms of providing for their children's material needs, so highlighting their maternal responsibilities. Most women worried about the impact of their identities as offenders/murderers on their children's emotional well-being. These stigmatised identities were a source of personal distress, which in turn was compounded by the humiliation and embarrassment their children also experienced. To deal with this trauma women concentrated on life post-incarceration and constructed protagonists who sought to transcend their prison identities and to be good mothers who would focus on their children's needs once they were released from prison.

Good mothers

In these micronarratives of motherhood, women constructed themselves as good mothers even in instances when their behaviour seemed questionable. Being a good mother was neatly intertwined with being a housewife, thus reinforcing the identity of a good woman. Narrators tried to counteract the negative image of the hard, drinking woman by casting protagonists as willingly housebound and concerned about their children. For example Ingrid who was convicted of murdering the man who attempted to rape her, stated that her concern for her children was paramount:

So lank sy weet... my kinders kom eerste. Ek sal eerste vir my kinders uitsort. As ek nou weet ek gaan na 'n huisvriend en ons gaan nou miskien 'n biertjie gaan drink, dan sal ek my suster vra, kyk, hou vir my my kinders. Ek kom nou. Want ek sal nooit my kinders blootstel om saam met my by sulke plekke te loop nie. (Ingrid).

Ingrid emphatically stated that I should know that her children came first. So she constructed herself as the quintessential, self-sacrificial mother. She placed their needs before her own and ensured that they were cared for when she went to have a drink with a friend. In this way, she overlaid the image of a drinking woman with that of the caring mother. In addition, she had a beer with a “*huisvriend*” (*housefriend*) – someone familiar in her home. The event was therefore akin to a visit. It is also significant that she used the diminutive when referring to drinking “*'n biertjie*” (*a small beer*). The diminutive suggested a negligible amount of alcohol, so her drinking sounded insignificant and therefore she could not be reviled. Thus having “*'n biertjie*” (*a small beer*) with a “*huisvriend*” (*housefriend*) was communicated in the same way as if she was talking about having tea with a friend. Ingrid also said that she would not be away for long (i.e. “*(e)k kom nou*”- *I will be back soon*), implying that it was a brief visit. She furthermore left her children in her sister’s care as she would never expose them to unsavoury places where alcohol was served. Hence Ingrid’s image of the good mother superseded that of the drinking woman, thereby reinforcing her maternal identity.

In a similar vein Grace juxtaposed her alcohol abuse with being a good mother:

Ek het gedrink. Ek was 'n heavy drinker. Ek en my man, ons het nog altyd gedrink, maar ek was altyd daar gewees vir my kinders. (Grace)

She began her micronarrative in a confessional style, “(e)k het gedrink”(I drank), before qualifying her statement by ‘admitting’ that she was a “heavy drinker”. In this way she constructed herself as someone who did not hide her alcohol use (and abuse), implying that listeners could therefore perceive her as honest. She tempered her admission by adding that her husband also drank, but that nonetheless, she (as opposed to him) was always there for her children. Even though her alcohol abuse may have been questionable, this did not limit her ability to provide for her children. In this way, Grace constructed herself as the good mother, whose drinking did not interfere with her mothering. She continued with this construction of herself as a good wife and mother by saying:

Buite... ek was ‘n stil persoon gewees. Maar as ek gedrink het dan was ek daai meisie. Maar ek was altyd in my huis gewees. Jy sal nooit vir my... jy sal my werk toe sien gaan en terug in die huis in. Of ek gaan werk toe en ek trek library boeke of films vir die kinders; bly in die huis. Jy sal nou en dan vir my buite sien as my familie kom. Dan is daai enigste tyd wat jy my buite sal sien. Of ek gaan na my broer toe. Maar tipies, ek het maar altyd in die huis gebly soos ‘n huisvrou. My man het meeste uitgegaan naweke.(Grace)

She explained that, prior to incarceration, she had been quiet-natured but that she changed when she became intoxicated: she became “daai meisie”(that girl). This phrase created distance between the narrator and that girl, implying that the identity was undesirable and not indicative of the person that Grace really was. Alcohol was constructed as the catalyst accounting for her negative (and unfeminine) behaviour. Consequently, she could not be held fully responsible for her actions when inebriated. This was significant, as Grace had been heavily intoxicated when she murdered her friend – thus her construction of “daai meisie” suggested that that girl and not Grace had committed the crime. It is significant that she referred to the protagonist as a girl, rather than as a woman, when intoxicated: the irresponsible and irrational behaviour of the child was, after all, understandable. By implication, Grace the woman would never behave in that way.

Grace furthermore emphasised that her life was circumscribed to her home, thereby underscoring that she was not like “daai meisie” (that girl) who could be construed as a bad mother. In contrast, she was a homemaker who only ventured out of her house for valid reasons. She willingly confined herself to her home because she was a “huisvrou” – a housewife. So Grace cemented her identity as a good wife, mother and housewife, which

countermanded the negativity of her alcohol use and her identity as that girl. She buttressed her assertion by juxtaposing her husband's behaviour with that of her own. While she stayed home like a typical housewife, he went out like a typical man. Her distinction between their behaviour also served to cast the protagonist in a positive light – the good mother stayed at home, while the husband went out on weekends.

Maternal responsibilities

Some women focused on their roles as primary caregivers and providers for their children's material needs. In these micronarratives, women justified their crimes in terms of their roles as providers. Thus, they were forced to commit their crimes because of poverty and the resultant suffering it caused their families. While narrators carefully constructed protagonists as being compelled to commit crimes for material gain, they struggled to explain the violent acts that accompanied them. They dealt with this difficulty by underscoring their roles as mothers and the impact their children's suffering had on them. Narrators therefore used strongly emotive language to tell their stories, drawing attention away from the seriousness of their crimes and attempting to elicit sympathy from listeners.

Penny, a sex worker and drug-dealer who had been convicted of murder of a client, crafted a narrative that attributed all her actions to her maternal concern for her children. She explained how she and two male accomplices carefully planned the robbery of a man who had solicited her for sex.

Mevrou, in my verlede het ek gesmokkel, en toe het ek baie geld gehad. En toe sterf my man, en toe kan ek nie meer die geld kry wat ek altyd gehad het in my lewe nie. En toe sê ek een aand vir my twee mansvriende, jong, ek het nie geld nie. Die kinders het nie kos in die huis nie. Ek weet nie hoe gaat ek my skuld betaal nie. Toe het ek vir die twee seunskinders gesê – hulle is jonger as ek – ons moet nou 'n pak gaan ruk laat my kinders net kan eet en kan drink. Laat ons iets soos koffie of enige iets in die huis kan drink. En toe is hulle gewillig om saam met my te gaan.(Penny)

Her formal manner of addressing me as Ma'am, was meant to convey her respectful attitude and contrasted with the protagonist, who engaged in drug-dealing. At the outset, then, the present self was juxtaposed with the past self. The protagonist prior to the crime had access to

money but this changed when her husband died and her access to money was curtailed. She constructed a clear causal chain, which had led to the crime: her husband died, she had no income, her children did not have food, and she did not know how she was going to settle her debts. In order to provide for her children, she decided to commit a robbery. Not only was her crime ascribed to her maternal responsibilities but she also inhabited that role vis-à-vis her accomplices. She initially described them as “*twee mansvriende*” (*two male friends*) implying a sense of equality, but later called them “*twee seunskinders*” (*two young boys*), as they were younger than her. The protagonist was the mastermind who encouraged the ‘boys’ to help her. Their willingness to assist her was linked to her plea on her children’s behalf – she wanted to commit the robbery so as to put food on the table. The protagonist’s criminal intent was therefore motivated by noble reasons and the boys agreed to help because of these reasons. By constructing her micronarrative in this way, Penny provided sound justifications for her actions and correspondingly communicated the notion that this is what any normal mother would do.

She continued by explaining how she had lured the deceased into a bush, abducted him in his car and then she and her accomplices took turns shooting him. They stole R8 000 from his bank account, and found R40 000 in cash in his car. This money had been hidden from the police when she was arrested and she did not disclose its whereabouts to them. Following her arrest, Penny told her sister to spend her share on her children. She said:

En toe sê ek net vir my suster, kyk mooi na my kinders. Koop vir my kinders wat hulle toe kom. Want ek was kaal, en dit was deur dit wat ek die misdaad loop pleeg het. Want ek kon nie geaanskou het hoe swaar my kinders kan gekry het nie.

Penny accentuated her maternal concern by instructing her sister to care for her children. She told her to use the money to buy anything that was *due* to them. Given their impoverished lifestyle, Penny viewed the money as being due to her family, and consequently it was not tainted by her crime. She reinforced her justification by explaining that she was “*kaal*” (*penniless*), - she did not possess anything of material value. In addition, she could not endure her children’s suffering and therefore she committed the robbery. As a single mother, the protagonist was constructed as having no other choice than to perpetrate a crime. Penny attributed the violence accompanying the robbery to aggression with vengeful overtones. She described it as follows:

Die aggressiwiteit wat ek gehad het, is net dat ek kan nie aanskou het hoe swaar my kinders moet gekry het nie. Ek wil nie loop steel het nie, want ek was te bang om in winkels te gaan steel. Ek wou net 'n ou van die pad af trek en dan wil ek hom doodmaak net vir sy geld. Nou, dit is so wraak wat in my opgekom het. Nou, ek kan nie sê hoe dit in my kom nie. Maar dit voel net vir my, ek kan nie aanskou hoe my kinders moet swaar kry nie. En ek het nie meer daai klomp geld om vir hulle elke dag te gee het nie. Voorheen het my kinders elke dag ordentlik geëet. Naweke het ons in die Spur gaan eet. Dit is toe ek nog die klomp geld gehad het. Maar dis nou na my man dood is laat ek net daai aggressiwiteit in my begin kry het. Ek kan net nie aanskou het hoe swaar my kinders gekry het nie.(Penny)

Penny linked her aggression to her inability to endure her children's suffering. It is significant that she was *afraid* of shoplifting and preferred to lure a man from the road and then kill him for his money. Her violent intentions were explained in terms of revenge (“*wraak*”), but she did not account for the origins of these feelings. Nor could she explain why she displaced this vengeance onto this victim. As she could not satisfactorily elucidate this seemingly arbitrary transposition, she reverted to her children's suffering. In this way, she distracted listeners and avoided a plausible explanation for her vengeance. Her sense of desperation was powerfully illustrated by her reference to her lack of income and lack of food for her children. Her decision to commit the crime was therefore understandable as the ensuing hardship gave rise to her aggression. She emphasised her desperation by saying that she could not bear to see her children suffer - reinforcing the notion that she had no other alternative.

Those women, who ascribed their crimes to their maternal concern, expressed remorse for their deeds, but continued to justify their actions. In other words, their crimes were justified as a means to an end and they accepted their incarceration as part of the sacrifices, which they, as mothers, had to make. In this way, their noble intentions could not be questioned, as they had committed their crimes for the sake of their children. Penny continued her story by saying:

Ek voel spyt vandag. Want dieselfde moment as jy geld sien of jy wil iets doen, jy dink nie wat die nagevolge gaan gebeur na dit nie. Verstaan Mevrou? Maar om eerlik te wees, ek is net bly my kinders het al van daai geld gekry. Ek het dit nie gemors nie. Hulle het darem genot daaruit gekry. En ek moet nou maar my straf uitdien. Ek is spyt oor wat ek gedoen het, maar dit was vir my kinders se wil. Dit was vir hulle.(Penny)

She expressed remorse and admitted that she had not given any forethought to the consequences of her actions, but that she had been motivated by indigence. She appealed to me by asking whether I understood how circumstances could cause one to act without considering the repercussions. This was her way of eliciting empathy as she asked me to place myself in her position. She buttressed this by saying that she had to be honest and to say that she was glad that her children had benefited from the money she had stolen. Her honourable intentions were illustrated by her statement that she did not waste the money and that her children were able to ‘enjoy’ it. So she accepted her fate and although she was remorseful, her actions were justified as she had committed the crime for their sake. She reiterated that this was her *sole* motivation, saying “(d)it was vir hulle” (*it was for them*). Hence her desire and commitment to provide for her children were at the heart of her actions. On one level, Penny constructed a clear causal chain that was fairly plausible in terms of the robbery. However, she could not offer a plausible explanation for her *violence* – she could not reconcile her portrayal of the protagonist as the quintessential mother with the protagonist as ‘vengeful murderer’ who had pre-meditated the killing of a man. While she attempted to utilise an internalising discourse (i.e. revenge) to explain her actions, she did not flesh out the plot line to provide a coherent and persuasive story of her violence.

Maternal separation

Women expressed their sadness caused by the separation from their children and concern for their welfare. Their micronarratives were laden with emotion and narrators demonstrated the protagonists’ ‘softer’, ‘maternal’ qualities. It is significant that imprisonment was constructed as punitive because it separated them from their children and prevented them from being good mothers. In addition, they spoke about how their children were taunted because their mothers were incarcerated for murder. These taunts acted as reminders that to others, that these women were murderers which, in effect, superseded their maternal identities.

Grace who was convicted of the murder of a friend expressed her distress at being separated from her children and how they were affected by her prison identity.

Dit affek my baie. Ek bel huis toe naweke en dan hoor ek by my vriende, ja, hulle label my as ‘n moordenaar – die vroumense – (name of town) se vroumense. Ek het aanvaar, maar dit het my seergemaak ook. En die process is nie net vir my nie maar vir my kinders ook – want

my kinders is buite. So hulle label my kinders ook van, ek is in die tronk. En dit is nie reg om my kinders te label as... vir die daad wat ek gedoen het nie. So ek blameer myself nog steeds. Want as ek nie gedink het van beter nie, dan sal ek nie vandag hier gewees het nie. Of as ek geweet het daai is nog een van my grootste swak punte in my lewe, dan sou ek dit nie gedoen het nie. Maar jy weet nooit drank is jou swak punt as jy nie 'n ding oo kom nie. So ek het op die harde manier geleer. En ek het besef, ek like nie meer vir my nie. En ek gaan 'n beter persoon word want my kinders het my nodig. (Grace)

Grace explained that she was affected by how she was labelled by other women from her home town. This distanced her from them, as she no longer belonged there. It was not only this distancing that affected her children, but also the fact that they were labelled as children of a murderer, by virtue of being related to her. She expressed her remorse and blamed herself for her children's suffering. She constructed her ignorance as being responsible for her fate: in other words, if she had known better, she would not have ended up in prison. In hindsight, she was able to identify alcohol as a problem only because it had caused her to commit a violent act. Thus, she constructed her experience as learning a hard lesson, which helped her to realise that she did not like herself. This appraisal motivated her decision to become a better person, as her children needed her. It is significant that she did not perceive this motivation as a need to be a better mother; instead, she wanted to improve on other aspects of herself. This declaration was consistent with the rest of her macronarrative, in which she constructed herself as a good mother in spite of her alcohol abuse.

The rest of Grace's micronarrative was laden with emotion, as she grappled with being separated from her children, which prevented her from fulfilling her maternal role.

So dit is moeilik om jou kinders elke naweek hier te sien... en jy moet goodbye sê – die afskeid is te erg. En dan vra hulle: “Wanneer kom jy huis toe?”. Dis moeilik. En nou gaan die kind volgende jaar skool toe en ek is nie daar nie! Dit maak my seer! So ek het baie verloor in die tyd in. Ja, hulle gaan aan met hulle skoolwerk, maar ek is nie daar nie! Ek is nie by die skool soos ek altyd gedoen het nie. (CRIES). Dis moeilik. My seun wil nie eers skool toe gaan nie want ek is in die tronk! Dis moeilik! Ek weet nie wat ek dink nie en wat ek meer voel nie. Ons het so goed oor die weg gekom, maar maybe daai bond is gebreek. Dis moeilik om dit weer bymekaar te maak.(CRIES). (Grace).

She spoke in the second person by using the words “*jou kinders*”(your children) and “ *jy moet goodbye sê*”(you must say goodbye). These pronouns served to universalise the feelings mothers purportedly experience when separated from their children. In this way, I too could imagine what it would be like to be separated from my child and that this would evoke my maternal empathy (and the empathy of other listeners who were mothers). Her statement “*dis moeilik*”(it’s difficult) summed up the emotions evoked by this experience. Having set this emotional tone for her story, Grace focused on her absence when her daughter started school and her son’s school refusal. The maternal bond was constructed as the primary relationship that kept her family together, and thus her absence disrupted the family cohesion. She asked whether the bond had been broken and whether it would be possible to rebuild it. Grace’s micronarratives about motherhood focused on the ways in which imprisonment prevented her from providing for her children’s psychological needs. The focus on the centrality of the maternal role in children’s lives and the ways in which incarceration impeded this, was typical of several micronarratives of motherhood.

Similarly, Samantha, who had been convicted of the murder of an acquaintance who attempted to rape her, was concerned about the impact that her identity as an offender was having on her children.

So ek weet nie hoe gaan ek my kind in die gesig kyk nie as ek hier uitgaan nie. Baie mense gaan aanmekaar dit doen. Want hy het Sondag gekom en toe sê hy vir my, Mammie, die mense sê Mammie is ‘n moordenaar. Nou hoe voel hy nou oor daai woorde? Daar is mense wat dit teen my gaan hou. Maar ek vra vir die Here dat die mense net uit my pad uitbly. Hulle moet my net los as ek die dag uitkom. Hulle moet ook nie na my toe kom nie – na my huis toe kom nie – hulle moet wegbly van my. Want daar is nie ‘n vrou wat van my hou nie. Hulle hou nie van my nie omdat ek nooit met hulle meng nie. Ek drink nie saam met hulle nie. As ek wil drink dan koop ek vir my twee biertjies en dan sit ek in die huis. Of ek sit in die jaart dan kan hulle solank in my huis speel of TV kyk. Ek het nooit ander mense gepla nie. Ek bly maar net... of ek was wasgoed. As my ma nie by die huis is nie dan maak ek my ma se kos en ek maak huis skoon. Ek voel ek wil nie weer dieselfde wees as ek uitgaan nie. Ek kan verander as ek uitgaan. En ek voel, ek as ouer wil vir my twee kindertjies gaan werk. Want dit is ‘n ouer se plig om vir haar kinders te werk. So ek vra maar net vir die Here vir genade, dat as ek my voete uit die plek uitsit, dat ek nie weer terugkeer nie om hier te beland nie – want dit akkordeer nie met my nie.(Samantha)

Samantha was apprehensive of facing her child upon her release. This unease extended to the ways in which others would remind her of her status as a murderer. When her son told her that people had labelled her in this way, she wondered how it affected him. Her question, “*(n)ou hoe voel hy nou oor daai woorde?*” (*now, how does he feel about those words?*) was meant to draw me in, as I was expected to consider how such statements could affect a young child. In addition, it enabled Samantha to avoid reflecting on his feelings herself, and she therefore focused on how she would practically deal with such situations. Her micronarrative was devoid of the affect that was evident in Grace’s story, as Samantha struggled with integrating her own feelings about her identity as a murderer.

She was aware that some people would hold her violent act against her and therefore summoned divine intervention to keep them away from her. This appeal to God was interesting as it suggested that He was her protector. It is significant that, like Grace, Samantha constructed other women as being her worst critics – “*(w)ant daar is nie ‘n vrou wat van my hou nie*” (*because there isn’t a woman who likes me*). She was disliked because she had chosen to exclude herself from the community of women. In the same way that Grace had tried to make it seem as if she was not drinking that much alcohol, Samantha also trivialised her actions by focusing on how she drank her “*twee biertjies*” (*two small beers*) at home. So she remained the good mother who was around while her children played or watched television. By circumscribing her life to her home, Samantha depicted herself as a good mother and daughter – thus ostensibly fulfilling all the expectations of what it meant to be a good woman. Yet she contradicted these statements by professing that she wanted to change and that she did not want to be the same person. While she readily acknowledged that she wanted to change, she did not focus on those aspects of the self that were in need of transformation. In portraying the protagonist as a good mother, she established a positive identity that seemed socially acceptable, but she was nonetheless unable to embroider on those aspects of herself, which she deemed unacceptable. Consequently, she focused on her parental duty, which was to earn an income for her family. It is significant that she focused on the practicalities of being the primary provider as opposed to being the source of the primary emotional experience. This was consistent with the rest of her macronarrative, in which she struggled to make sense of the affective aspects of her experience and was unable to integrate various aspects of her life into a meaningful whole.

Those women who strongly asserted a maternal identity in their stories, attempted to transcend the identity of being an offender and, in particular, the label of murderer. They focused on how they would be even better mothers upon their release. They therefore outlined ways in which their children would become the foci of their lives and that mothering would be central to their identities. In this way, the women clearly aligned themselves with hegemonic femininity, emphasising the centrality of the maternal role. In addition, the women were intent on being good mothers by being virtuous examples to their children, such that their identities as mothers superseded the negative identities previously imposed upon them.

However, as illustrated earlier in this section, the women had to find ways of dealing with disjunctures in their stories of motherhood. Thus, Grace and Samantha dealt with their alcohol abuse by accentuating their ability to mother in spite of their behaviour. However even in instances where a woman's actions blatantly confounded traditional notions of motherhood, narrators sought to reinforce these stereotypical ideas.

Rachel's narrative was unique since she was convicted of participating in the ritual killing of her child. Her macronarrative focused on how she was a good person and was an involuntary participant in the murder of her one-year old daughter. Since her purported actions challenged the essential notions of motherhood, she had to find ways of convincing listeners that she was maternal.

Rachel's lover and his uncle had received life sentences for the murder of her child, whereas she had received a five-year sentence. She said she had been drugged at the time of the murder and that her child's organs had been used for a potion to help her lover find employment. She described herself as being dissociated during the incident but was nonetheless able to give details about how they had drugged her child, removed her intestines and cooked them to use as *muti* (a potion). She declared that she was unable to intervene, as she was a zombie and was under their control. She also explained that she had stayed with them for a few months after the murder, as she had been drugged. She was only able to leave when her brother came to look for her. Rachel's macronarrative was filled with reflections on what others thought of her. She felt that most people did not believe her version of events and that her siblings, in particular, questioned the veracity of her story. In recounting the crime narrative, Rachel constructed herself as a victim of her lover's heinous plans. She had been

misled, manipulated and drugged, and was therefore not culpable. To counter this micronarrative of violence, Rachel focused on her plans to be a good mother to her older son.

You know, I didn't stress for months. So after two months, I think about the sentence. I think about my child – the eldest one. How is he going to take this of his mother and being in prison? Because there is a time for me to make myself happy with my child. There is a time to make... to have a second chance. Because I told myself, I will still have the confidence with myself. I'll still have dignity. I'm still a woman who can show other people what is right and what is wrong. To show other women outside... I'm not scared to tell the people I had to come to prison for this thing. It's because the men are jeopardising our happiness, our mind, our heart, our body. And... how can I say... they don't want us to be happy, you know. They only want us to cry all the time.(Rachel)

She began by saying that after her incarceration she did not “*stress for two months*” – because she had constructed herself as not guilty of murder, she was not plagued by worry. In this way, Rachel established her innocence as she did not have any reason to feel guilty. However, upon contemplating her sentence, she thought about how her incarceration had affected her son. It is significant that she did not consider how her crime had affected him – instead she focused on the resultant separation. She constructed her life after release from prison as a “*second chance*”. On one level, she might have referred to a second chance to have a relationship with him since he had always lived with his father. At a meta-level, moreover, it was a second chance to be a mother as she had ‘failed’ both him and his sister. Thus, Rachel articulated her intention to be a good mother despite what others thought of her. Her identity as a good woman was therefore established, as her confidence and dignity remained intact and her offender identity did not curtail her ability to be a “*woman who can show other people what is right and what is wrong*”. She constructed the protagonist as being able to teach other people about morality. In this way, she aligned herself with women, who were the moral compasses in society. Men, in contrast, were constructed as the common enemy responsible for “*jeopardising our happiness, our mind, our heart, our body*”. Thus, the common plight of all women was their oppression by men, and Rachel considered herself as part of this collective. Hence she was not ashamed to tell others why she had been imprisoned, as she was clearly there because of her lover. Rachel’s role in the crime could be understood as resulting from victimisation, which exonerated her from guilt and responsibility.

Having established her identity as a good woman, Rachel embroidered on her intention to be a good role model for her child. It is significant that Rachel only mentioned her murdered daughter when narrating her crime narrative. The rest of her macronarrative focused on her intention to be a good mother to her son. While on the surface her daughter and Rachel's mothering of her was noticeably absent from her life story, this micronarrative was peppered with references to her children. She made reference to both her children in the present, suggesting her difficulty in accepting her daughter's death as well as her role in it. Rachel constructed herself as intending to be a good mother to both her children, thereby negating any perception of herself as a bad mother who had contributed to the death of her daughter.

I can teach my children. I can tell them, if they are doing wrong things, my child, it's your choice. I can say to you, stop that thing you are doing. But you are going to end up in jail. You see?And my child, I don't want him to come here. I think about that a lot – but I don't want him to come here. The reason why is that he's too young to come here. After that, he can come here. But I'm going to be teaching him outside when he is doing the wrong things. Because he is going to see me here in this clothes. I'm looking beautiful. I'm wearing a tracksuit. I've got everything in jail. So he's going to say, oh Mommy, she's happy there. There's nothing wrong mos. I can go there in prison and I will be happy like my mommy. Tomorrow he is going to do wrong things because of seeing me here. But what am I going to do about that when he comes here. What teach me inside of my heart if my child do the wrong things. I must tell my children that this place is not good. And I'm going outside of this place, I'm going to sit down with my child and talk to him, no matter the people are talking about me. He is going to believe me as a mother then. Also my child, he is going to believe me. No matter what his father says to him, he is going to believe me. He is going to give me love the way he gave it to me before. (Rachel)

Rachel began by saying that she was going to teach her “children” and that she would tell “them” if “they are doing wrong things...”. She thus portrayed herself as being responsible for helping both of her children to regulate their behaviour. However, she then reverted to speaking about her son and the reasons why she did not want him to visit her in prison. Her concern was that he would perceive incarceration as something positive since she looked “beautiful” and had “everything in jail”. It is significant that Rachel did not construct incarceration as negative, as she could be perceived as being “happy”. Still, she wanted to tell her children that the “place is not good”. She did not elaborate on the negative aspects of

imprisonment; instead, she focused on how prison could seem attractive to her son. In essence, Rachel's micronarrative served the purpose of illustrating how she would teach her son (or children) about right and wrong. Since she constructed the protagonist as having dignity, confidence and a sense of morality, this also implied that she possessed the qualities of a good mother. Consequently, her son would believe her because she was his mother - in spite of what other people said about her. The fact that she was his mother would negate any negative identity attributed to her. She contrasted the status of the mother with that of the father – her son would believe her rather than his father. As a result, their bond would be restored.

In order to deal with the challenges posed by this story, Rachel concentrated on her passive role in the crime, thus bringing into question her culpability. In addition, in order to restore her identity as a mother, she centred on her intentions to be a good mother to her son. In this way, her story echoed the narratives of other women who transcended their identities as murderers, offenders and bad women by focusing on their intentions to be chiefly identified by their maternal roles once they were released from prison.

Stories of sexuality

Most of the women drew attention to their femininity by rejecting lesbian identities as representative of an aberrant feminine identity. These women closely identified with the heteronormative ideal and condemned same-sex relationships which were seen to be engendered by the prison context. While some women had engaged in these relationships, they fervently defined themselves as heterosexual. These same-sex relationships were constructed as arising out of emotional and material needs and were rationalised in various ways. Some women traded sexual favours for material goods such as soap, deodorant or cigarettes while others were vulnerable to sexual temptation. Micronarratives of sexuality were conveyed within the macronarrative of the good woman and narrators successfully interwove these into the overarching story. Protagonists in stability narratives strongly denounced same-sex relationships and closely identified with heteronormativity. This was consistent with their portrayal of themselves as good women who were unchanged by the prison context. In conversion narratives, same-sex relationships were constructed as consistent with the bad self and narrators were able to validate their engagement in terms of immorality.

Frances who was convicted of the murder of her sister's boyfriend, narrated her micronarrative in the form of a confession, thereby constructing same-sex relationships as something wrong.

No, I need to confess... it's not a confession, I already did. But okay, when I first came to prison everything changed for me because of prison. I was set free... I was free of my fear because I didn't have to go to court again. So I came to prison. Now for the time I had this trial I never had a boyfriend. So that was for two years before I came to prison. Say about a year-and-a-half before I came to prison, no boyfriend. Just me myself, my family and church... we had to go to church and counselling sessions. So ja, I came to prison and the first person I saw was a broekie – one of these outjie/meisies. She was looking like a boy. I'm thinking, I also had a friend but that is a boy – a sexy boy. And I thought to myself, Frances, waar is jy nou? Is jy nou by die manne of is jy nou by die vroue? But it was a lady. And always this lady was looking at me. She is making eye contact and she would give me butterflies! Really, she did. And it was going on and so, and I think I was flirting with her without me knowing. I think I was doing that. Because she knew that she could come to me

and skiet me a kaart and I would... whatever. But that is how it almost got me you see. But then she stopped and someone else came – another mooi ene. And this person and I were making out. ... You know, there my integrity was stolen because I was doing this skelmpies. But I was crazy about this girl man! She was like a boy; a real man. Nothing about her is a girl. So I was like... my mind was opgemors. So she went away to Worcester prison and I was still here. We were still writing to each other, but then my walk in prison was closer to God because of my friends. So I was with them, and they helped me to the point where I had to confess, not only what I did was wrong all these years, but no one... they didn't know about this lesbian flingy that I had for five days I can say. They didn't know about that and they were shocked. And when I said I was free, I could lift my head again up high. Because some of the people were having stories because they found out so and so – but never the real story. But then I gave the real story. It really confused me – what I did. You know, and I'm asking God and not them because people can't do anything for you. And so ja, it's been good for me now.

Frances began by saying that she had already confessed her same-sex encounter, implying that she had already sought forgiveness for her acts. She contextualised her liaison by saying that *“everything changed for me”* when she became incarcerated. This made sense within the larger context of her macronarrative, which focused on her transformation from a bad girl to a good woman. To lay the foundation for her story, she explained that she had not been involved with a man for two years prior to her incarceration. Her attraction to a woman could therefore be understood, as she was vulnerable to her sexual attentions. She described the woman as *“the first person”* she saw and stated that she was a *“broekie”* (a woman who dresses in a traditionally masculine manner). As Frances's life had been confined to church and counselling, she deemed it understandable that she had mistaken the woman for a boy. The fact that she was reminded of a friend who was a *“sexy boy”* reinforced the idea that she was mistaken. However, the situation caused her to contemplate her attraction – *“Frances, waar is jy nou?”* (Frances, where are you now?). Firstly, this was a reflection on the context of the prison, which exposed her to an unfamiliar life. Secondly, it was also a reflection on her emotional state, namely, an attraction to another woman. She therefore asked herself, *“Is jy nou by die manne of by die vroue?”* (Are you with the men or with the women?), which illustrated her own confusion about her sexual identity. As if it offered an answer, she continued, *“but it was a lady”*. By recognising the *“broekie”* as a *“lady”*, a certain savoir-faire as well as (carnal) worldliness could be attributed to her. Calling her suitor a lady offered extenuating circumstances thereby appealing to the listener to condone the liaison.

The other woman was constructed as the one who pursued her by always making “eye contact” which caused her to have “butterflies”. Her next statement was meant to counter any misgivings which I might have had about the constant eye contact and her resultant butterflies – “Really she did”. Frances constructed her response to the attraction as unwitting: “I think I was flirting with her without me knowing. I think I was doing that.” Consequently, I (as well as other listeners) could not judge her, as she was not in control of her actions but was reacting unconsciously. It is significant that she depicted the other woman as having such an effect on her that she would do “...whatever”. This effect was so overwhelming, in fact, that she concluded that “it almost got me you see”. She accordingly constructed her same-sex encounter as something into which she was ensnared and which threatened to consume her.

When that encounter ended, “someone else came – another *mooi ene*” (...another pretty one) – this statement linked her new love interest to the previous one: both women were attractive and the implication was that their beauty enticed her. Linking the two partners with this phrase also extended the aforementioned mitigating factors into the current scenario, strengthening the appeal to appreciate her lack of resistance. She once more portrayed herself as being at the mercy of the woman as her “integrity was stolen”. Her relationship was conducted on the sly, adding to her loss of integrity. By using the word “*skelmpies*”, a diminutive and a euphemism for an affair, she disarmed their surreptitious behaviour. Frances justified her attraction to the other woman by describing her as looking “Like a boy, a real man. Nothing about her is a girl”. This masculinisation served to justify Frances’s attraction. Since there was no vestige of the woman’s femininity, it was understandable that (s)he appealed to her. This masculinisation protected Frances and the listener from questioning her heterosexuality, as she had for all intents and purposes, found herself “a real man”.

However, even though Frances portrayed her partner in this way, she reinforced her own lack of agency by saying that her “mind was *opgemors*” (my mind was messed up). Her reference to being psychologically “messed up” served the purpose of persuading listeners that she was not in control of her mental faculties. As a result it would be understandable that she would fall prey to the advances of the “*mooi ene*” (pretty one). Frances described how her Christian conversion enabled her to confess the wrongs she had perpetrated, including her same-sex encounters. As her “lesbian flingy” had only lasted five days, it could be dismissed as insignificant. By naming it as a “flingy” as opposed to a relationship, its triviality was underscored. Her conversion to Christianity helped her to free herself from her past so that

she could lift her “*head again up high*”. This also meant, however, that her same-sex encounter was constructed as something shameful, although she was now able to tell people the “*real story*”. In this way she was able to dispel any misconception people may have had of her.

Frances continued by condemning lesbianism as something wrong:

Adelene: So you see that as something that is wrong.

Frances: That is wrong. I see that as wrong – very wrong. You are so mixed up when you come to prison. If it’s your first time, you are so mixed up. And you sometimes think this is normal. This is prison. This is not the outside world. Inside is normal – but it’s not. Because prison can either make you a better person or it can make you a bad person. And lesbianism is one of the things that Satan takes and he turns you and makes you a person that you are not. He makes you so confused. At the end of the day, people don’t even want to go home when they are in these relationships. Hulle las hulle straf om hier binne te bly. And it’s not right what Satan does because you know I see now, ja, it’s just not right.

She emphasised that newly incarcerated women were “mixed up” (as she initially was) and that they would therefore view lesbianism as normal. She attributed this thinking to the prison context, which caused women to view prison life in general (and lesbianism more specifically) as normal. In this way, she constructed heterosexuality as consistent with values in the “*outside world*” which was normal. She regarded the prison’s impact as indelible – it could either make one “*a better person*” or a “*bad person*”. The pressure of prison life made one vulnerable to Satan’s wiles, for instance, turning one into a lesbian. Frances explained that some women even found ways of extending their sentences to remain in prison. In this way, they were portrayed as having been caught in the web of lesbianism, all at the behest of Satan. With hindsight, she was able to reflect on Satan’s power to control women’s sexuality.

Frances’s use of the second person “*you*” throughout this micronarrative was her way of indicating that anybody (including myself) could fall prey to Satan’s powers in prison – as a result, she could (or rather should) not be judged, for she had been powerless. In this way, her story mirrored the stories of other women, such as Andrea, who stated that same-sex relationships were “*not a natural thing*”. In these narratives, the prison context was viewed as responsible for the development of ‘unnatural’ sexual proclivities: “*you become tronk-dronk*”

(*Andrea: you become prison-drunk*). Narrators were therefore able to successfully elucidate these sexual experiences as stemming from the bad self as well as the prison context thereby constructing credible causal connections as well as consistent themes of badness versus goodness.

Masculine identities

While the majority of the women in this study drew heavily on discourses of femininity in their macronarratives, a few women recounted stories with masculinised protagonists. These women had long histories of violent and criminalised behaviour and were active gang members prior to their incarceration. Significantly, they were seen and treated as equals in these (male) gangs in which violence was necessitated and normalised. Unlike narrators in conversion and stability narratives (and several in incoherent narratives) who sought to reaffirm their femininity subsequent to incarceration, some narrators in incoherent narratives emphasised their difference in terms of their masculinisation. This difference was expressed in two ways: some narrators focused on the stigmatised nature of masculine identities thereby highlighting the difficulties which they experienced in integrating it into their macronarratives; other narrators revelled in their displays of power and aggression to show how they had successfully achieved gang masculinity.

Stigmatised identities

Given their adherence to a particular masculine yardstick (viz. masculinity evidenced in gangs), narrators described masculine protagonists in terms of their appearance and behaviour and contrasted them with other (feminine) characters in their stories. While they were accepting (and proud) of their identities, these narrators struggled with the stigma surrounding them. Masculinised protagonists were not perceived as completely unproblematic as narrators were aware that they did not portray the feminine identity desired (and valued) within the prison (as well as societal) context. Consequently, narrators felt prejudiced by these expectations and struggled to transcend this stigmatisation.

For example, Diana who was convicted of the murder of a drug-dealer explained how her “*tomboy*” identity set her apart from other women who were “*ladies*”.

At all times... almal in my klasse... ek is die enigste een wat tomboy is. Die anders is eitherrulle is ladies because hulle is ladies by nature – jy kan dit sommer sien – en dan is daar die stoutes en die gruwelikes maar jy kan sien hulle is vroulik. Hulle sit, staan, praat – hulle ways – hulle alles is vroulik. So is net ek wat heeltemal 'n outsider is.

Diana explained that she was “*at all times*” the only one in prison who was a “*tomboy*”. Interestingly she used the word “*tomboy*” to label and present herself: a euphemism to allude to her masculine identity; an acceptable label for her unacceptable presentation. She asserted a masculine identity, comparing herself to others who were “*ladies by nature*”. There were two types of “*ladies*”: those who behaved in feminine ways and those who retained their femininity despite being mischievous. Those women who were naturally feminine showed it in the ways in which they sat, stood and spoke – “*jy kan dit sommer sien*” (*you can definitely see it*). Diana referred to a second group of women, “*die stoutes en gruwelikes*” (*the naughty ones and the mischievous ones*) who, in spite of their naughty and mischievous behaviour, could still be identified as feminine. She regarded herself as an outsider because she was a “*tomboy*”. She described her “*tomboy*” identity as evident in her dress (she preferred trousers, dungarees and t-shirts and hair which was cut very short) and behaviour (she walked with a swagger, was confrontational and outspoken, used gang language and often engaged in physical fights) - these signalled that she was unfeminine and not one of the “*ladies*”.

Diana articulated her “*tomboy*” identity as an inherent:

Is mos nou my siel daai. Is wie ek is en wat ek is... Daai is die enigste lewe wat ek ken.

Being a tomboy was part of her soul and therefore defined her: “*Is mos nou my siel daai. Is wie en wat ek is*” (*This is my soul. It's who I am and what I am*). She declared: “*Daai is die enigste lewe wat ek ken*” (*That is the only life that I know*) – this implied that her “*tomboy*” identity was not a choice, rather, it had its roots in a social context in which a masculine identity meant her survival.

While on the one hand Diana accepted her “*tomboy*” identity, she also found the label problematic, as she felt that others judged her for not subscribing to being “*vroulik*”

(feminine). She likened herself to a gangster who tried to show that he was a good person but who could not escape his label because he still wore his gang tattoos. She focused on how outward presentation did not necessarily mean that the person was bad. Consequently, her “tomboy style” was often judged as indicative of badness.

Sien jy nou hoekom daai bra is gelabel nou. So voel ek. Is net ek is 'n man in die tronk. En vir my om te gesurvive het, ek het gedoen wat dit kos by die tronk om te kan survive – al is dit hoe gewees. Because die is nie 'n plek vir angels nie. Hier is nie 'n angel wat sal survive in die tronk nie. No matter hoe groot or hoe klein die ding is wat jy gedoen het nie, is illegal gewees. Is onwettig vir die Staat. So whether jy nou 'n tjap het, jy het 'n skoon vel, jy's 'n lesbian en jy's 'n gangster, hoekom julle met die skoon velle wat nie gangsters en lesbians is nie, julle word nie gelabel nie. Maar julle is net so fokken skelm soos ons. Julle smokkel net soos ons smokkel, maar ons is nou al een wat gelabel is. Julle raak outomaties die tronk se VIP bandiete because jou vel is skoon. Sy loop nie soos 'n gangster nie en sy doen nie gangster goed nie – so sy is skoon. Verstaan jy wat ek try om te sê? So elke keer, jy wat try en jy wat 'n lewe wil maak uit jou gemors lewe wat jy gelewe het, jy kry nie daai kans om daai te kan doen nie. Verstaan jy nou? Because jou past repeat homself at all times in jou appearance of buite jou appearance.

Diana's reflection on the experiences of a reformed gangster served the purpose of mirroring her own experience. While she steadfastly clung to her “tomboy” identity, she was angered by how others judged her. She categorically stated that she was a man in prison and that she had done all she had to in order to survive. Her masculine identity had enabled her to survive, as prison was not a place for “angels”. She distinguished between those women with “tjaps” (tattoos) and those with “skoon velle” (clean skin - no tattoos), but emphasised that all of them were in prison for committing crimes. The latter could not be ‘better’ than the former. She questioned why those with “skoon velle” (clean skin - no tattoos) were not labelled, but that women like her, who were gangsters, were stigmatised. Those women who appeared more feminine were “outomaties die tronk se VIP bandiete” (automatically the prison VIP bandits), as they were “skoon” (clean).

Her exasperation was evident when she asked me whether I understood what she was trying to convey. Her efforts focused on explaining that, regardless of gender identity, all the women were incarcerated for committing offences. Clearly, she wanted me (as well as other listeners) to understand that “ladies” were not necessarily morally superior to “tomboys”.

This led her to say that the label (“tomboy”) was imbued with negative qualities and therefore she was not afforded the opportunity to make a life for herself. In many ways being “*n man in die tronk*” (*a man in prison*) was viewed negatively, and she found it difficult to transcend this stigma. She asked once more whether I (as well as others) understood her predicament. Even though being a “tomboy” was “*die enigste lewe wat ek ken*” (*the only life that I know*), her outward appearance elicited prejudice. Her “tomboy” identity, which had previously also been consistent with her gangster identity, was now viewed only in terms of the latter. Although she was no longer part of a gang, her “tomboy” identity made it impossible to escape the prejudice.

Diana’s micronarratives focusing on her tomboy identity mirrored the experiences of other women who clung steadfastly to their masculine identities yet also struggled to transcend the stigma associated with it.

Real men

Whereas some women felt caught in a double-bind, others revelled in their accounts of the masculinised protagonist. Gang warfare, sexual exploits as well as alcohol and drug abuse were highlighted in these accounts and the protagonist’s masculine prowess was emphasised. Unlike the previous group of narrators (see *Stigmatised identities*), this group did not contrast itself with feminised women to assert their identities. Instead, validation by other men (within the gang context) was highlighted and their virility in relation to women was stressed. Consequently they showed how they had effectively attained gang masculinity thereby establishing their masculine identities.

Noleen’s macronarrative focused on the ways in which the protagonist negotiated her world, and she delighted in her account. The purpose of her story was to illustrate how she had successfully achieved masculinity, and she provided several narratives of her exploits as a gangster. Noleen, who was convicted of the murder of a rival gang member, highlighted her close relationship with her “*boeta*” and how they had been partners in crime.

Ek was mal vir hom. Hy was vir my 'n boeta. Dis amper soos ek het vir hom geaanbid. Hy het gesmokkal. Ek was die lookout. Ek moet gaan kyk – Is daar genoeg drugs om aan te gaan met daai mense. Ons was mal oor mekaar. Ons gaan haal nou miskien die twee girls. Dan

kom ons terug. All the time is sy meisie bevrind met my meisie. Oral wat ons gaan het ons twee meisies. Alles wat ons doen, ons doen dit saam. But die ou van die yard, enige tyd as ons daar kom, dan phone hy die boere en sê die gangsters is alweer hier. Hy was bang. Dan kom die boere nou en dan kom soek hulle nou vir ons. Right. Hulle soek nou net my boeta. But dan sit ons die hele girls af. But ek was die enigste een wat 'n gun op my gehet het. Ek was lief vir 'n gun. Dis amper soos, vir my het dit gevoel almal respek vir ons. Ja, daar wat ons gaan, ons word gerespek.

Noleen's idolisation of her "boeta" pervaded her macronarrative. She considered him a brother and, in this way, he symbolically replaced her older brother who had been murdered. She explained that he was a drug-dealer and that she was the lookout; she was his 'right-hand man', as she helped him to run his business. She constructed their admiration as reciprocal in that her "boeta" viewed her in the same light as she viewed him. To reinforce her role as his younger brother, she recounted how they would fetch their girlfriends together. The two "brothers" and their girlfriends "all the time" constituted a foursome. This bond was also underscored when she said "alles wat ons doen, ons doen dit saam" (everything that we do, we do together). Since she was like her "boeta", she was also one of the "gangsters" who instilled fear in the yard owner. Initially, she said that the police came looking for both of them but then changed it, saying they were only looking for "boeta". The strategic modus operandi which the masculine protagonist then adopted was illustrated by: "But dan sit ons die hele girls af" (But then we discouraged the girls) – in other words, they 'got rid' of the girls as they were a liability when the police arrived. Her masculine bravado in their fight against the police was expressed in her statement, "ek was die enigste een wat 'n gun op my gehet het" (I was the only one who had a gun). The gun symbolised her power, as she and not her revered "boeta", carried it. As she loved weapons, carrying a gun held intrinsic meaning. Her "boeta", by virtue of his status (in her eyes as well as in those of others) was respected, whereas Noleen commanded it by being armed.

Noleen's macronarrative was also peppered with accounts of her exploits with women. She constructed the protagonist as the pursuer who always 'got the woman'. Noleen had engaged in lesbian relationships since the age of fourteen and described these as follows:

Noleen: Ja. Maar is maar net dat ek was betrokke by groot dinge. Ek wil gou grootgeword het.

Adelene: Watter tipe dinge was jy betrokke mee?

Noleen: Soos, ek wil ook met girlies is... by die House of Fun wat ons het... one night's dance with the girlies... drink ook en so. But almal die girlies is mal oor my, daar was die een girly wat ek net weekends gehet het. Sy was net weekends daar. But ek was haar eerste ook, maar ek was nie nog ernstig met haar nie. Sy het dit geweet – ek het 'n meisie by die huis... nie by die huis nie, maar sy het geweet ek het 'n vaste meisie.

Noleen: Ek het 'n meisie hier binne. Ons is mal oor mekaar maar dit gaat net as jy hier binne is. Daai is wat so seer maak. Sy het ook 'n klomp burks hier in die tronk. Ek het altyd gegaan vir girlies wat nog nooit burks gehet het nie. Of wat nog nooit in relationships gewees het nie – so was ek. Dit het my verbaas hoe ek gegaan het vir die meisie geval het. En ek is mal oor haar. Sy is ouer as my maar ons is mal oor mekaar.

Adelene: En die ander girlies wat jy nou buite gehad het, was daar 'n rede hoekom jy nooit iemand gevat het wat 'n relationship gehad het nie?

Noleen: Ja, net maar gaat hulle terug – en so! But ek het girlies gehet wat bi is. But daai is wat ek gehoor het, maar toe ek dit sien... die een girly se burk kom daar, en toe sê ek sommer, kyk hierso, kies nou. Is nou ek of dis hy. Jy moet kies. Toe wil sy haar onder die karre gooi! LAUGHS. Want sy weet nie watter kant toe nie want ek sit haar nou in 'n ding in. Ek het dit aanvaar toe sy hom kies. But vandag is sy getroud en sy is baie gelukkig. Sy het al hier gekom met haar man. Hulle is 'n happy family.

Adelene: So dit was okay toe jy daarvan geweet het, maar toe jy nou gesien het...

Noleen: Toe ek hom sien toe dink ek, nee, ek kan nou vir hom klap, hy's 'n office boy! Hy het niks nodig nie man. Hy het dan alles. Hy kom, hy trek op met sy kar. Hy is gesuit en getie. Hy lyk sommer soos hy daar hoort... so wat gaat nou aan?

Noleen said that she had wanted to grow up quickly and therefore became involved in “groot dinge” (big things), such as “girlies” and drinking, which signalled that she had entered the adult (and masculine) world. She highlighted her popularity amongst the “girlies” and that she did not take them seriously. In this way, she constructed the protagonist as the quintessential playboy. She referred to her current girlfriend and stated that she was hurt by the fact that the relationship was limited to their stay in prison. She expressed amazement that she had fallen for someone who had other boyfriends while in prison, as she had always chosen girls who had not had other intimate liaisons because they would not have a relationship to go back to once they were released. Nonetheless, Noleen said that she had been involved with “girlies” who were bisexual, and that she had forced them to choose between her and their boyfriends.

In one instance, a “girly” wanted to commit suicide when Noleen forced her to choose. She recounted this mirthfully, as if she enjoyed the predicament in which she had placed the girl. This episode demonstrated the girl’s attachment to Noleen and evinced that she was sought after and popular. Although the girl married her boyfriend she still visited Noleen in prison, which suggested that she (Noleen) still had an effect on her. Noleen’s description of her rival (the husband) was filled with derision and it was clear that she found such men detestable. He was an “office boy” who was “*gesuit en getie*” (*with a suit and tie*), and this made Noleen want to “*klap*” (*smack*) him. It is interesting that the husband was seen as having the trappings which such men aspire to (and which women traditionally value): “*hy het dan alles*” (*he has everything*) – a suit, a tie, a job and a car, but she was scornful and did not equate this with her constructions of masculinity. This depiction of the husband contrasted with the protagonist who was powerful, respected, popular and violent. In this way, she bolstered her construction of herself as having successfully achieved those aspects of masculinity which were associated with power, respect and control. She distinguished between hegemonic masculinities which are shaped by social context – thus for her gang masculinity was the normative yardstick while the husband aspired to the middle class, coloured, masculine yardstick.

Noleen’s bravado was typical of those stories in which women sought to show that they had successfully negotiated masculine identities. These stories illustrated how they were better than “office boys” as they were feared, violent, sexual conquerors. In this way narrators juxtaposed strong, powerful men with weaker, inconsequential men. These portrayals can be contrasted with narrators like Diana who compared “ladies” with “tomboys” thereby showing the differences between feminised and masculinised characters. Thus in asserting masculine identities narrators used various strategies to construct protagonists in relation to women and men.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored how women constructed gender identities in their macronarratives. It drew together the threads presented in Chapters Five and Six in which women portrayed the self in various ways. It showed how women either drew on or rejected discourses of femininity and violence in their constructions of themselves.

Chapter Eight draws the dissertation together and revisits the research questions which underpinned this study. It discusses the pertinent findings, considers its limitations and makes recommendations for future research.

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Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have presented a narrative of the study starting with an engagement with the literature, proceeding to the research process and culminating in the presentation of findings. The final chapter draws the narrative to a close by revisiting the research questions which have underpinned this research. In doing so, I locate my work amongst other feminist endeavours and draw out the contributions which I have made to this body of work. I then discuss the broader implications of this study and also consider some of the limitations of the work. I conclude this dissertation with some recommendations for future research.

What meanings do women attach to their acts of violence?

This study seeks to locate women's violent crime within the larger hypothesised "culture of violence" which permeates South African society. As discussed in Chapter One, a key challenge facing local researchers has been an analysis of individual mechanisms underpinning violent crime. Consequently, a central aim of the study was to examine women offenders' narratives of violent perpetration. The analysis revealed that they situated their acts within the context of their life stories. This finding was consistent with other feminist studies which have showed how women use life stories to explain and make sense of the violence (see Comack & Brickey, 2007; Jack, 1999; Wesely, 2006). For example, Comack and Brickey (2007) found that women offenders located their acts within their experiences of cumulative abuse. Similarly, Wesely (2006) found that homeless women and exotic dancers contextualised their violence within their experiences of marginalisation. These studies found that violence was understood as serving a protective function and was employed as a survival strategy. This meaning was located within broader stories of women's experiences of gender-based violence. Consistent with the extant feminist literature on *violent women's* narratives, the current study illustrated that, for women these acts could not be understood in isolation of other life experiences. As discussed in Chapter Four, the life story was used to represent the self (McAdams, 1996) – it enabled women to make sense of various life experiences and to integrate it into a meaningful macronarrative. Thus the interpretation of women's crimes was firmly located within the overarching stories which they conveyed about themselves.

While some narrative studies have focused on the explanatory context of the life story (for example, Jack, 1999), this study was also concerned with how the account was structured. Thus the type of narrative was important in understanding the meaning attached to the current juncture in women's lives. These macronarratives differed in their form and content but a common feature was that micronarratives of violence did not occupy central positions within these accounts. Three narrative forms were identified: Conversion narratives concentrated on the transformation of the protagonist from a bad woman into a good woman. Stability narratives centred on the consistent goodness of the protagonist while incoherent narratives were typified by a tenuous and fragmented account of the protagonist's life. The life story as narrative device was used to make causal connections between life events so as to construct plausible accounts of women's lives. Where successful, these macronarratives enabled the women to imbue acts of violence with particular meaning.

In conversion narratives, narrators constructed their crimes as a vital part of their transformation. These acts were indicative of the behaviour of the bad women which existed prior to incarceration. Imprisonment, in turn, was the catalyst which enabled the protagonist to transform into a good person. In these stories, violent offences were constructed as predestined by God: thus they were infused with celestial meaning and served the purpose of radically transforming protagonists' lives. On a symbolic level, the taking of a life meant that the protagonist's life was saved as she was transformed by incarceration.

Stability narratives focused on protagonists who embodied stereotypical femininity. These stories showed the high moral character of women even while committing the offences. Victims were constructed as bad people who had provoked violence while protagonists had attempted to avoid retaliation thereby maintaining their respectability. Violence was constructed as a temporary aberration and inconsistent with the protagonist's disposition. Consequently, these acts were defensive or retaliatory and occurred in response to victimisation. When juxtaposed with multiple experiences of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, the gravity of these offences was minimised and justified. Thus within the macronarrative of the good woman, these acts represented a temporary lapse in judgement.

The majority of women in the study were unable to recount coherent, plausible stories of their lives. These incoherent narratives were characterised by attempts to situate their offences within the life story. However, the causal chain which was successfully achieved in

conversion and stability narratives was not accomplished in these stories. Narrators struggled to integrate micronarratives so as to provide a conceivable explanation for the current juncture in their lives. Significantly all of these narrators had extensive criminal convictions and had belonged to gangs. Thus to some extent, the meaning of violence was attributed to their *criminal* identities as they were expected to behave in violent ways so as to prove themselves within the gang context. Yet they also attempted to draw on other causal frameworks such as family honour and duress so as to counter the centrality of these stigmatised identities. However, they were unable to integrate these into a particular story about the self and therefore lacked the interpretive stance necessary to attribute meaning to their acts.

What identities do women construct in their narratives of violence?

Mainstream research has largely labelled violent women as pathological, victimised or deviant (for example, Goldenson et al. 2007; Stuart et al., 2006; Swan, et al., 2005; Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2003). These theoretical constructions have reinforced ideas that violence is inconsistent with femininity and therefore these women constitute aberrations of the gendered norm. The methodological approaches adopted in these mainly quantitative studies, have largely silenced women, thereby denying their understanding of their acts.

In keeping with the feminist orientation underpinning the current study, the second aim was to explore the identities which women constructed in their accounts of violence. The analysis revealed that the women occupied a multiplicity of subject positions which served to tell particular stories of the self. This finding was consistent with other feminist studies which have established that women construct various identities in their accounts of violence (see Comack & Brickey, 2007; Pollack, 2007). For example, Pollack (2007) explored how women parolees drew on discourses of victimisation, pathology and rehabilitation in their constructions of themselves. She illustrated how these discourses served to justify parole programmes: women who posited victim or pathologised identities received greater compassion while those who resisted these identities were subjected to greater correctional control. Thus most women readily adopted these subject positions as it was in their best interest to do so.

The current study also demonstrated how women attempted to provide plausible, socially acceptable accounts of their acts thereby constructing agency in varying ways. In conversion narratives, the bad girl identity served to illustrate the self prior to incarceration. Thus violent acts were located within this identity and enabled the women to construct plausible causal accounts. In constructing badness, these narrators also drew on aspects of a victim identity to illustrate how it had contributed to the development of the bad self. However, victimisation was not a central focus of these narratives and served to show how the women had become perpetrators. The construction of the bad girl identity therefore enabled women to make meaning of their crimes (and other violent acts) thus integrating it into the macronarrative of transformation. The primary identity which was asserted in these stories was that of the changed woman – thus narrators were at pains to show how they had transformed into good women and how their current identities differed from the other subjectivities posited in their stories.

In stability narratives, the identity of the good woman was consistent throughout the accounts and the women drew on discourses of stereotypical femininity to bolster this identity. Unlike conversion narratives, these stories emphasised the victim identity as an integral part of their life stories. Victimisation experiences bolstered their constructions of themselves as powerless to fight back. They also emphasised the constancy of their moral characters even during the commission of their crimes. In these micronarratives respectability was a key feature of the good woman identity as narrators juxtaposed their characters with the amoral characters of their victims. They demonstrated how they were provoked into defending themselves from attacks by bad people thereby reinforcing their victimisation. The victim identity was central to understanding what had driven them to that particular point as their detailed accounts of cumulative provocation illustrated how much they had endured. Thus victimisation was crucial to understanding what had led to a temporary lapse in the otherwise impeccable judgement of the good woman. This served to minimise agency in these stories.

While the narrators in conversion and stability narratives occupied various subject positions to tell plausible stories of the self, narrators of incoherent narratives struggled to integrate identities in their stories. They attempted to posit various identities but could not successfully bolster these constructions – thus it was unclear what stories they were trying to tell or the meaning which they attached to their acts. In some instances they constructed themselves as victims but could not make sense of it within the context of their macronarratives. In others,

protagonists were dissociated and distanced from their acts reinforcing the lack of interpretive stance adopted in these accounts.

How do women's narratives of violence oppose or take up socially constructed gendered norms?

Violent women pose particular societal challenges in that they disrupt culturally defined scripts of femininity. Thus they are constructed as “‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ beings who fail to conform to the gendered norms of our culture” (Gilbert, 2002, p. 1274). Consequently they are pathologised or maligned thereby locating them on the periphery of normative femininity. While mainstream research has viewed violent women through these lenses, some feminist endeavours have sought to explore the identities which women construct in their accounts of violence. Various South African studies have shown that *violent men's* investment in criminalised identities is related to valued aspects of their masculinities (CSVR, 2008; CSVR, 2010; Stevens, 2008). Constructions of gender have therefore been found to be fundamental in understanding men's violent perpetration in this country. Consequently the current study investigated *violent women's* gendered constructions of themselves within the context of their life stories.

The majority of women compellingly identified with the archetypal feminine identity thereby underscoring their identities as good women. In conversion and stability narratives women drew on dominant discourses of femininity to illustrate that they conformed to societal expectations despite their crimes. While in conversion narratives the archetypal feminine identity was achieved through transformation, this was consistently maintained in stability narratives. Thus narrators provided convincing arguments about their femininity so as to assure listeners of their adherence to societal norms. However, in incoherent narratives, some narrators were unable to sustain their portrayal of the quintessential woman thereby presenting weaker constructions of their gendered identities.

In portraying their adherence to gendered norms, narrators focused on motherhood and heterosexuality as markers of femininity. Since motherhood has traditionally been considered to be intrinsically linked the normative feminine role (Stoppard, 2000), this discourse featured very strongly in women's gendered portrayals. The women emphasised that they were good mothers despite ‘evidence’ to the contrary. For example, most of the women

counteracted micronarratives of heavy alcohol use with assurances that their children were not disadvantaged by their behaviour. Some women minimised their drinking while others emphasised that their lives were circumscribed to their homes despite their drinking. The responsibilities of being the primary caregiver were also highlighted thereby showing that the women had stayed true to their gendered roles. Coupled with the distress caused by the current separation from their children, these micronarratives illustrated the centrality of their maternal identities. They drew heavily on societal discourses which value the role which mothers play in the welfare of their children (Stoppard, 2000) thus counteracting the contradictions posited by the identity of the hard drinking, violent woman. The focus on the maternal identity also served to counteract the offender identity which women strongly rejected. Thus they did not posit the latter as a subject position and presented it as something which had been ascribed to them by the prison system and society at large.

The archetypal feminine identity was reinforced by narrators' close identification with the heteronormative ideal. They strongly denounced lesbian identities and viewed these as pathological or indicative of aberrant femininity. Where women had engaged in same-sex relationships, these were attributed to the prison context. Thus women engaged in these relationships to fulfil particular material and emotional needs – however they still clung to their heterosexual identities and viewed these relationships as context-bound. For example, in conversion narratives, same-sex encounters were demonised and viewed as consistent with the bad self, while the transformed good woman now fully embraced her heterosexual identity. In stability narratives these relationships were categorically denounced when women presented protagonists who strongly identified with heteronormativity.

The focus on motherhood and heterosexuality strengthened the identity of the good woman and challenged the stigmatised labels of bad woman, murderer or violent offender. While some studies have found that violent perpetration is a performance of particular kinds of masculinity in South Africa (CSVR, 2008; CSVR, 2010; Stevens, 2008), this study found that micronarratives of femininity served to highlight the innate non-violent disposition of women. Thus violence was constructed as out of character and not a natural inclination of good women. These constructions showed that women drew on dominant discourses of stereotypical femininity and interwove contradictory subject positions into the broader story of the self.

While the majority of the women in study posited archetypal feminine identities, a few women posited masculine identities in their stories. These identities were portrayed by women who had been active in male gangs prior to incarceration. On one level, these identities challenged narrators as they were stigmatised while on the other, they were gleefully presented as narrators showed how they had successfully achieved gang masculinity. Given the rehabilitative focus of the prison context and the emphasis on developing good women, in some accounts masculine identities were shown to be strongly stigmatised. Masculinised protagonists were therefore compared with those good girl characters valued in the prison context. While they clung to their identities, narrators grappled with the prejudice elicited by this. However, some narrators did not experience this conflict and illustrated how they had successfully negotiated their masculine identities. These stories demonstrated how sexual prowess and violent engagement were noteworthy markers of gang masculinity. The masculine identities presented by all of these women served to show how they had survived in violent contexts and that in fact violent behaviour was a pre-requisite for survival.

This finding echoes other work focused on women's survival on the streets (Day, Gough & Mc Fadden, 2003; Jones, 2008; Mullins & Miller, 2008; Wesely, 2006). For example, Jones (2008) found that young inner city women in the America used violence both to protect themselves and to deter future attacks. They embraced some aspects of hegemonic masculinity as these were seen as necessary for survival. While my study found that women unquestioningly engaged in lethal violence within the gang contexts, Jones's work shows how discourses of black femininity constrained women's engagement in this type of violence. Similarly Day et al. (2003) found that white women in Britain situated their non-lethal violence within their socio-economic locations. Toughness and public displays of violence were essential to survival within these contexts and were constructed as intrinsic to the working class feminine identity. This finding contrasts the current study which found that a small proportion of women strongly rejected the feminine ideal in favour of a masculine identity. It may be that in communicating multiple instances of lethal violence, masculinised protagonists plausibly accounted for these acts. Perhaps within our South African context, where a "culture of violence" is predominantly perpetuated by men, the perpetration of such violence by *masculinised women* is more conceivable. In stating this, I do not take issue with the authenticity of these identities. Instead I draw attention to their performative function: in

these stories, lethal violence was firmly located within a masculine identity and therefore presented as more credible.

Implications of study

In Chapter Three I explored the motivations for embarking on this study. Given the predominance of pejorative constructions of *violent women*, this work has aimed to challenge these notions. By focusing on violent perpetration, which was not limited to intimate partner violence, I have acknowledged women's capacity (and propensity) to commit violence. In particular I have considered how agency has been constructed in these stories to contribute to feminist endeavours aimed at destabilising "anti-agentic" (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006, p. 322) constructions. The narrative forms identified in the study illustrated that agency was attributed to protagonists in various ways. In conversion narratives responsibility for violent acts was firmly located within the bad girl identity. In stability narratives, the agency of the protagonist was diminished because of extreme provocation by the victim. In incoherent narratives, agency was variedly attributed: the dissociated protagonist was not fully culpable for her actions because of her mental state at the time of the offence while the masculinised protagonist acted purposefully and in a goal-directed manner. This illustrates that the women posited a range of identities within which agency could be ascribed. The findings suggest that the women did not construct stories which were completely devoid of agency – rather they located it within various subject positions thereby showing differences in how they understood and interpreted it. Thus this study illustrates that agency is articulated in complex and differing ways thereby challenging dominant notions of *violent women* as unagentic.

The three narrative forms which were identified highlight how the women attempted to make sense of their violent offences – what then, are the implications of these differences in narrative structure?

As I have illustrated in Chapters Five and Six, narrators aimed to present particular stories about the self – firstly, to derive personal meaning and secondly to present an acceptable story to the audience. Thus on a psychological level these narratives served a particular integrative function for individual narrators. Where stories cohered (as in conversion and stability narratives) it suggests that narrators drew on psychological resources to make sense

of the past and present and were therefore able to construct positive outcomes for their future. By making causal connections between life experiences and piecing together particular themes across the macronarrative, they were able to step outside of the stories and present the lessons which they had learnt from their experiences. This enabled them to construct optimistic possibilities for their lives post-incarceration. In some sense, this suggests a metacognitive stance assumed by these narrators and shows how their reflexive capacities enabled them to think about their past, present and future thereby assimilating it into a coherent whole. This has implications for how women may use their insights post-incarceration as they reflect on the meaning attributed to various life experiences.

Given the preceding discussion, how does this account for incoherent narratives? As discussed in Chapter Six, narrators attempted to construct life stories so as to draw meaning from their experiences. However, the global coherence evident in the other two narrative forms was notably absent in these narratives. It may be that the reflexive capacities harnessed by other narrators were not readily available to these narrators – this was manifested in stories which did not hang together and which did not exhibit narrators' reflexivity. Thus they were not able to extrapolate insights gained through the telling of their stories, nor were they able to synthesise various identities into a particular story of the self. The fragmented and tenuous structure of these accounts suggests that the psychological resources required to adopt a metacognitive stance, may not have been accessible to these women. This may also explain why these women did not focus on their lives post-incarceration as the lessons learnt were not apparent and therefore could not be used to construct possibilities for the future. The differences in narrative form, as illustrated in this study, may therefore be attributed to differences in psychological resources underpinning narrative construction.

Narrative structure (as shaped by its content) may therefore be a useful indicator of the psychological resources available to narrators and has implications for interventions with incarcerated women. Given that incoherent narratives may indicate underlying difficulties, narrative interventions may well be of use in helping women develop or enhance these abilities. Where women are able to construct coherent stories which demonstrate insights, these resources may be harnessed particularly when addressing issues surrounding violent engagement. These reflexive capacities can also be called upon when asking women to contemplate the meaning of their strong identification with the archetypal feminine identity. While the findings show that this identification contributed to narrative coherence in some

stories, the implications are that the metacognitive stance adopted in relation to understanding violence, may well be of use in reflecting on their gendered ideas. In particular, this may be used to reflect on the content of dominant cultural discourses of gender (as well as race, class and sexual orientation) and how these shape women's lives.

The narrative approach which I adopted points to a useful method for exploring women's experiences. The life story enables women to provide subjective perspectives on their lives thereby giving insights into how they make sense of their acts. This approach is particularly useful for informing work with incarcerated women as their stories embody the identities which they posit at particular points in time. The examination of macronarratives allows for the exploration of hegemonic cultural narratives of gender and violence which may influence how women perceive themselves and their acts. This may be of use in interventions with women particularly in instances where their material life circumstances are unlikely to change post-incarceration. Having said this, I am aware that throughout this dissertation I have problematised the gender binary and therefore do not wish to advocate for programmes aimed at developing *good women*. Instead, I am suggesting that narrative research can inform narrative interventions focused on challenging and destabilising dominant cultural scripts. Ultimately such work may contribute to addressing violent crime in our country.

Limitations of the study

From the outset, I have stated my interest in exploring women's narratives and have concentrated my analysis on the form and content of these stories. However my interpretation may be limited by this narrow focus and may be criticised for not incorporating a contextual analysis of women's experiences. While I have demonstrated the utility of an individual focus, my work has not addressed the social circumstances of women's lives. Consequently, I have not located women's narratives within the broader socio-economic environment which contributes to a "culture of violence" in South Africa. It may be argued, that any investigation of violence in this context must include an analysis of the social circumstances which contribute to this phenomenon. A contextualised approach is indeed useful and necessary but my work has aimed to focus on women's subjective experiences thereby illustrating how they understand their acts. An in-depth examination of women's narratives has added to scholarly analyses of this phenomenon and has shown how such analyses can incorporate women's constructions of agency.

I have also not critically engaged with women's gendered, racialised and classed experiences as evidenced in their stories. My interpretations were limited to the meaning and purpose of narratives and women's experiences were understood within this framework. Thus I have not commented on what these stories say about women's lives in South Africa – this broader story requires telling. While my commitment to narrative is apparent, I concede that there are other methodological strategies which could have been adopted. For example, a pathway approach could have analysed how women's experiences contribute to violent perpetration. This kind of analysis could be useful in revealing how intersecting oppressions function to locate women in particular ways. Certainly an intersectional approach is pertinent within the South African context – however this study has analysed how individuals construct identities within their life stories. In doing so, close attention was paid to their stories and their understandings as opposed to framing their experiences within the larger socio-political context.

My professional background as a clinical psychologist may beg the question as to why I did not analyse women's stories from this perspective. On one hand, I am deeply critical of how women's violence has often been pathologised at the expense of other interpretations. On the other, I am aware that perhaps a clinically-oriented analysis may help to account why women structure stories in particular ways. Such an approach may explain the causal mechanisms underpinning the ability (or inability) to tell coherent stories. While useful, I think that such an analysis would have been at odds with my critique of a purely pathological model. Thus my work has focused on analysing and interpreting their truths instead of imposing a clinical lens.

Recommendations

This study has closely examined women's narratives of violent crime thereby providing insights into individual stories. A narrative approach along with a contextual analysis of women's lives would greatly add to understanding this phenomenon. Thus an investigation of both the intra-individual and environmental *factors* involved in these crimes would be a useful avenue for future research. In this way, a more holistic understanding of women's violent perpetration within the South African context can be gained. Such an analysis may also lay bare the racialised and classed experiences (amongst others) of women thereby commenting on their positionalities within our context. The location of women's violence

within the larger hypothesised “culture of violence” can benefit from an intersectional analysis which also includes an examination of women’s stories.

Although I am critical of a solely clinical lens, I do think that an analysis of the mechanisms underlying narrative construction would be useful. I therefore suggest that future research should focus on the nature of these mechanisms and what influences and/or impedes their development. In this way the differences between coherent and incoherent narratives can be more substantially accounted for. A focus on intrapsychic factors along with an examination of the ‘reality’ of women’s life experiences can provide valuable insights into how the latter impacts on the ability to tell coherent stories about the self. This may also point to the protective factors necessary for current functioning as well as women’s lives post-incarceration. While this suggests a strongly clinical psychological focus, I do think that it is beneficial in deepening our understanding of the individual factors implicated in the construction of identities.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this dissertation ironically signals the starting point seventeen years ago. As a daughter the immensity of my loss has not been tempered by this research experience but the process has deepened my understanding of how perpetrators account for their acts – to some extent those vexing questions have been put to rest. I have come to understand that violent perpetration can be explained and interpreted in a multiplicity of ways. I have also come to realise how traditional notions of gender can be used to explain these acts. In particular, this dissertation has illustrated how differing interpretations of agency can be articulated within the larger explanatory context of the life story. This study has shown that *violent women* are much more than just that – they are partners, wives, mothers, gangsters... they are angry, sad, remorseful, vindictive, boastful, violent, aggressive, loving.... Their stories have posited various identities and have shown how they attempt to make sense of the “polyphonic novel” which is their lives by “giving full expression to a complex and shifting dialogue among the many voices of the self” (McAdams, 2006b, p. 119).

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University of Cape Town

Appendix 2:

Consent form

Researcher: Adelene Africa
Department of Psychology
University of Cape Town

Consent to participate in research project: 'Women offenders' narratives of violent crime'

I understand that this project aims to explore the events which lead to my being in the female centre.

I understand that the information which I share will be confidential and that any identifying information will be changed so as to protect my identity.

I agree to the interview being tape recorded and understand that the data will be stored in a safe place. I understand that the researcher and transcriber are the only people who will have access to the recordings.

I understand that the information which I share will form part of a doctoral study and that academic articles and conference presentations may also stem from this.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any time.

Participant

Researcher

Appendix 3: Translations of excerpts in Chapters Five, Six and Seven

Translations Chapter 5

Diana (p.86)

Okay, ek is Muslim en ek het al die pad grootgeraak in 'n Muslim huis. Ja, en ek was lief vir Muslim skool en alles daai.

Okay, I'm Muslim and I grew up in a Muslim home all the way. Yes, and I loved Muslim school and all that.

Diana (p.86)

Because daai is vir my 'n problem elke keer as ek my Koran wil touch, because my Koran tells these things. Die moord het alles met my gebeur. So elke keer wat ek daai sien, dit draw a hell of a reaction... daai murder stemme, dit kom net terug na my toe. So wat is die point? Ek aanvaar dit maar ek kan nie salah nie. Ek kan nie my Koran lees nie. Ja, en elke jaar... ek moet sê dit het nou baie bedaar nou. Maar elke jaar for about sewe jaar, daaiselfde tyd wat daai person vermoor gewees het, dan kom dit terug... daaiselfde maand... daaiselfde datum.

Because that's a problem for me every time I want to touch my Koran, because my Koran tells these things. The murder all happened to me. So every time I see that, it draws a hell of a reaction.... those murder voices, it just comes back to me. So what's the point? I accept it but I can't salah. I can't read my Koran. Yes, and every year.... I must say it has now calmed down a lot. But every year for about seven years, that same time that person was murdered, then it comes back.... that same month.... that same date.

Brenda (p.88)

My familie... van my ouers oorlede is is daar nie meer... was daar nie 'n rigting in die huis nie. Ek is die oudste. Ek is die derde van nege. Toe my ouers oorlede gaan toe is daar niemand wat kan... sien, want ons het almal gedrink. Ek gee nie die wyn die skuld nie. Ek gee nie die wyn die skuld nie want dit is nie die wyn nie – dis jyself. Ek meen, as jy 'n kind is dan sal jy dink, nee man, dit is lekker om net te kere te gaan en wild te lewe. Dis lekker. Maar as jy groot is dan... somtyds dan voel jy baie seer omdat dit lyk vir jou jou familie verstoot you – soos vir my byvoorbeeld. Ek het 'n bitter swaar lewe deurgegaan. Hulle het altyd aan my geslaan oor onnodige dinge. Ek meen, somtyds dan weet ek ek was verkeerd, maar as ek probeer verskoning vra dan's dit net vir nul.

My family.... since my parents passed away there was no longer..... there was no direction in the house. I am the eldest. I am the third of nine. When my parents passed away there was nobody that could... because we all drank, you see. I don't blame the wine. I don't blame the wine because it is not the wine's fault – it's you. I mean, when you're a child you'll think, no man, it's nice to just carry on and go wild. It's nice. But when you're grown up then... sometimes you feel very hurt because it looks like your family pushed you away - like me for example. I had a terribly difficult life. They always hit me about unnecessary things. I mean, sometimes I knew I was wrong, but if I try to apologise then it's no use.

Brenda (p.89)

En ek verlang baie na my ouers somtye as ek so in die kamer sit. Ek het weer vanoggend so gehuil. Want toe lees ek in die Bybel in en toe begint ek te huil. 'n Mens se hart breek baie.

Maar ek is bly my straf is so ver klaar. Ek weet my ouers sal ek nie weer sien nie. As hulle moet gelewe het sou ek nie hier gewees het nie...

Want dis te veel familie; ons was te veel in die huis in. Almal het gedrink. Nie omgee vir mekaar nie. Daaroor sit ek vandag hier wat ek hier sit.

And sometimes when I sit in my room like this I miss my parents so much. This morning again I cried so much. Because I read the Bible and then I began to cry. One's heart breaks terribly. But I'm glad my sentence is done this far. I know I won't see my parents again. If they'd still been alive, I wouldn't have been here...

Because there was too much family; we were too many in the house. Everyone drank. Did not care about each other. That's why I'm sitting here today.

Elsa (p.92)

Jô! Jô! [Laughs] My foute is vrinne, wyn en mans. Daai drie goete is die goeters wat my hientoe gebring het. Rêrig.

Adelene: En wat het hulle gedoen? Wat is die uitwerking wat hulle op jou lewe gehad het? Die drie goed, vrinne, die drank en mans?

Elsa: Is omdat... ek weet nie hoe kan ek dit nou explain nie... maar ek gaat probeer.

[Laughs] Is omdat ek is lief vir tjomnies. Ek weet nie hoe kan ek dit explain nie.

Yo! Yo! [Laughs.] My mistakes are buddies wine and men. Those three things are the things that landed me here. Really.

Adelene: And what did they do? What influence did they have on your life? Those three things, buddies, the drink and men?

Elsa: Is because... I don't know how to explain it now... but I'm gonna try. [Laughs.] Is because I love buddies. I don't know how to explain it.

Brenda (p.99)

*Ek was nie soos 'n meisiekind nie. [Laughs] Ek was soos 'n seunskind. Baie, baie pakslae gekry. Ek klim in die hoogste boom. [Laughs] Dan spring ek uit daai boom uit. My ouers het my baie geslaan. Maar agterna toe sê hulle ek moes 'n mannetjiesmens gewees het. My ma het mos altyd... dan maak sy vir my... nou vir ons susters... dan koop sy material in die dorp en dan maak sy nou vir onse rokke. Lekker toppies en 'n skirt. Nou maak sy vir die seuns... sy koop material en dan maak sy nou vir hulle 'n broek en 'n hemp. Maar myne het nooit gehou nie... Dan wag ek dat my ma so kyk! Baie gestraf en geslaan oor daai. Later van tyd toe maak my ma nie meer vir my rokke nie. Sy het vir my kort kakiebroekies gemaak en 'n kortmou kakiehemp. Sy sien ek is nou moeg want ek het 'n klomp seuns in die huis in! Want niemand se klere is stukkend nie. Niemand se klere word geskeur nie. As jy nou net deur die veld loop en hierdie hakiesdraad... as hy haak, ek ruk hom. Dan lê daai stuk daar. Dan sal ek sien, **oe**, maar jy is lelik geskraap. [Laughs] Ek knoop vir hom vas. Ek wil nie saamgebring nie. Ek het soos 'n mannetjieskind geleef. My bene is bont, bont, bont. Ek het nie geweet daai tyd, as jy 'n jongmeisie raak en jy raak groot, dan raak jy... dan is jy skaam vir jouself met die bene wat so lyk. Oe, want jy moet nou spog! Jy moet nou mos mooi wees. Jy spog want jy is 'n jongmeisie. Dan hou ek maar 'n langbroek aan. Hou maar 'n langbroek aan want hulle is te bont hier! [Laughs] Ek het baie slae gekry. Boomklim, bicycle ry, hakiesdraad... ek klim oral in wat 'n seunskind nie eers sal gedink het om in te klim of op te klim nie. Alles, alles dit het ek gedoen. En hulle sê hulle gaat nie meer praat nie want hulle is moeg. Ek ry bicycle dan loop ry ek vas in daai muur. Stukkend...*

kniekoppe. Dan stof ek net vir my af. Die bloed kan maar loop, maar ek stof my net af en dan klim ek weer op en dan ry ek weer.

I wasn't like a girl. [Laughs] I was like a boy. Got many many hidings. I climbed into the highest tree. [Laughs] Then I jumped out of that tree. My parents gave me lots of hidings. But afterwards they said I should've been a man. My mother used to always...then she made me...now for us sisters...then she bought material in town and then she made us dresses. Nice tops and a skirt. Now for the boys she made... she bought material and then she made them a pair of pants and a shirt. But mine never lasted. Then I waited for that look from my mother! Punished a lot and smacked for that. Later on my mother didn't make me dresses anymore. She made short khaki pants and a short sleeve khaki shirt. She says I am tired now because I have a lot of boys in the house. Because no-one's clothes were tattered. No-one's clothes got torn. If you just walk through the veld and this barbed wire... if it hooks, I pull it. Then that piece stays there. Then I'll see, oh, but you are badly scratched. [Laughs] I tied it ... I did not bring along. I lived like a boy child. My legs were blotchy blotchy blotchy. At that time I didn't know that when you become a young woman and you grow up, then you become.... then you're embarrassed that your legs look like that. Ooh, because now you've got to prance! You've got to be pretty. You prance because you're a young woman. So I stuck to pants. Stuck to pants because they're too blotchy here! [Laughs] I got many hidings. Climbing trees, riding bicycle, barb wire... I climbed everywhere, in or on things that a boy wouldn't even have considered. I did everything, everything. And they said they're not going to talk anymore, because they're tired. Riding my bicycle, I crashed into that wall... shattered... kneecaps. Then I just dusted myself off. The blood could flow, but I only dusted myself off and then I got back on and rode again.

Grace (p.101)

Ek het toe met Alvin gepraat en vir Alvin gesê hy moet dit nie doen nie want dis nie reg nie – sy is groot. Hy het maar altyd gesê: “Nee Mammie, maar Mammie wil niks van Mammie se vrinde weet nie. Mammie druk my baie af. Vra vir Mammie se pa.” Meeste van die vrinde wat ek gehad het het altyd my kind geslaan, maar sy het dit net die ergste gedoen. Sy het hom geslaan met die besem op sy rug en op sy nek. Hy het gehuil en vir haar gesê sy moet dit nie doen nie. Ashton het weggehardloop. Na dit toe kom Alvin weer in... en jy moet nie met Alvin baklei nie. En toe sê ek vir haar wat sy gedoen het was nie reg nie. Maar sy het nie opgehou nie. Sy het nie opgehou nie. Alvin het uitgegaan en toe begin ek en sy te stry. En soos ons begin te stry toe slaat sy my van agter af met die vuis. Ek het omgedraai en vir haar teruggeslaan. En soos ek ingaan in die huis in, ek was besig met iets... aandete vir die kinders gemaak. Die mes het op die tafel gelê. Dis toe daar wat ek vir haar gesteek het. Maar ek het nie bedoel om vir haar te steek nie. Ek het regtig nie dit bedoel nie. Ons altwee was ewe dronk gewees en ek was nie by my volle positiewe nie. Ek was dronk, dronk, dronk gewees. En sy het nog saam met ons gedrink. Sy het gesê ek moet vir haar... en ons het gedrink, gedrink en gedrink. En later van tyd toe gaan slaap sy op die bed. Maar toe ek die bloed sien... ek het groot geskrik. En toe dokter ek vir haar en toe drink ons. Toe gaan lê sy op die bed, en die volgende wat ek sien toe is sy dood.

I then spoke to Alvin and said to him he mustn't do it because it's not right – she's big. He always just said, “No Mommy, but Mommy doesn't want to know anything about Mommy's friends. Mommy puts me down. Ask Mommy's dad.” Most of the friends I had always smacked my child, but she just did it the most severely. She hit him on his back and on his neck with a broom. He cried and told her not to do it. Ashton ran away. Afterwards Alvin came in again... and you mustn't fight with Alvin. And then I said to her what she had done

wasn't right. But she didn't stop. She didn't stop. Alvin went out and then she and I began to argue. And as we started arguing she hit me from behind with her fist. I turned around and hit her back. And as I went into the house, I was busy with something....making supper for the children. The knife lay on the table. It's then that I stabbed her. But I didn't mean to stab her. I really didn't mean to. We were both equally drunk and I wasn't in my right mind. I was drunk, drunk, drunk. And she even drank with us. She said I must...and we drank, drank and drank. And later she went to sleep on the bed. But when I saw the blood.... I had a huge fright. And then I doctored her and then we drank. She then went to lie on the bed, and the next thing I saw, she's dead.

Helen (p.103)

Baie sou gebeur het as ek nou nie by die gevangenis gewees het nie. Daar sal baie dinge gebeur het al. Of die jongens kon miskien vir my dood gemaak het – of ek kon miskien weer iets gedoen het. Miskien skeefgeloop het of so. Of iemand wou my miskien gepoint het of so. Dan kan ek miskien nou weer iets gedoen het of 'n ander persoon kon miskien geskiet het of doodgemaak het wat ek nie nou van geweet het nie. Dan sê hulle miskien hulle kan miskien 'n plan het vir my om vir my sat te maak buite. Dan weet my ouers ook nie. En hulle weet nie watter plek is ek nie. Hulle het net gehoor ek is in [name of town] of so. Daai wat die Here vir my hiernatoe gestuur het. En ek is vandag nie spyt dat die Here my hiernatoe gestuur het nie. Nou weet ek ook mos wat beteken die moord-besigheid. Ek is nie vandag spyt nie. Toe ek hier ingekom het, ek wou nooit ander mense geverstaan het nie. As iemand my wil iets sê dan wil ek net daai een gryp. Maar nou het ek self kom beseft dat hier moet ek nou 'n bietjie stop. Maar ek is nie spyt nie, suster, dat ek hier is nie, en ek is bly, suster, ek is vandag hier.

Lots would have happened if I wasn't in prison now. Many things would already have happened. Either the guys may perhaps have killed me – or I could maybe have done something again. Maybe slipped up or something. Or someone might have pointed me or something. Then maybe I could've done something again or another person could perhaps have shot or killed that I didn't know about now. Then they maybe said they might have a plan to finish me off outside. Then my parents also wouldn't know. And they wouldn't know where I am. They'd only hear I am in [name of town] or so. That's why the Lord sent me here. And I don't regret that the Lord sent me here. Now I also know what this murder business means. I don't have regrets today. When I came in here, I never wanted to understand other people. When someone wanted to tell me something then I just wanted to grab that one. But now I came to realise that I've got to stop a bit now. I don't regret being here, sister and I'm glad, sister that I'm here today.

Elsa (p.108)

Ek wil nie weer wyn drink nie. Ek wil nie weer wyn drink nie. Die Here moet vir my help... oe. Want is die wyn wat vir 'n mens dryf na al hierdie dinge toe. Ek moet net 'n ouer gaan wees daar buite vir my kinders. Dis al wat ek wil hê nou.

Adelene: So al die drie goed wat vir jou probleme gegee het.

Elsa: Daai, ooe. Ek moet 'n voorbeeld gaan wees daar buite vir my kinders en vir my ma. Is hulle wat nou belangrik is in my lewe – my kinders en my ma. Ek wil my ma hê in my lewe. Ek het haar nodig. Ek het haar nodig.

Adelene: So dinge moet heel anders as vantevore wees.

Elsa: Hmm. Ek moet nou groei. Ek moet groei. Ek wil gaan wys, nee, ek het darem gegroei. Ek is 'n ander mens nou.

Adelene: En hierso het jy gesê jy het verander. Hoe sou jy sê het jy verander?

Elsa: Ek kan nie vir die mense hier gaan sê ek is nou 'n ander mens nie; ek het nou verander. Ek kan nie vir hulle sê nie! Ek moet dinge doen wat vir hulle kan oortuig, ja, sy is nou 'n ander mens. Sy het gechange nou. Sien?

Adelene: En watter tipe dinge sal jy wil doen om dit te bewys?

Elsa: Ek soek vastige werk. Ek soek 'n werk... dan kan ek vir my kinders werk en my kinders skool toe stuur. Want ek het mos nie skool nie. Ek het nie skool toe gegaan nie. My kinders moet skool toe gaan. Ek wil 'n ouer wees vir my kinders, sien. Ek wil vir hulle alles doen wat ek nie gekry het nie.

I don't want to drink wine again. I don't want to drink wine again. The Lord must help me... ooh. Cause it's the wine that drives a person to all these things. I must just go and be a parent there outside for my children. That's all that I want now.

Adelene: So all these three things that gave you problems.

Elsa: Those, ooh. I must go and be an example out there for my children and for my mother. They are important in my life now – my children and my mother. I want my mother in my life. I need her. I need her.

Adelene: So things must be totally different than before.

Elsa: Uh huh. I must grow now. I must grow. I want to go and show, no, I did grow after all. I'm a different person now.

Adelene: And you've changed here, you say. How would you say you've changed?

Elsa: I can't go and tell the people here I'm a different person now; I've changed. I can't say that to them! I must do things that can convince them, yes, she's a different person now. She did change now. See?

Adelene: And what type of things do you want to do to prove that?

Elsa: I want a steady job. I'm looking for a job.... then I can work for my children and send my children to school. Because I don't have schooling. I did not go to school. My children must go to school. I want to be a parent for my children, see? I want to do everything for them that I didn't get.

Brenda (p.109)

*Maar ek het uitgevinne van ek hier binne is, het ek nog nooit gebaklei nie. Ek kom agter... ek is baie kalm. Ek sal eider guy maak, en as ek sien, nee, jy raak nou te erg en jy wil nou rêrig baklei, dan sal ek nou loop. Dan sal ek nie meer guy maak nie want dan weet ek **daai**... Dan voel ek ook seer hier binne die way jy nou vir my gevloek het en **daai**, maar ek gaan nie worry nou nie want ek sien, nee, jy is nou te erg. Jy gaan nou baklei. Dan loop ek. Ek het baie afgekom. Daar buitekant sal jy nie twee keer om my gedraai het nie of na my gepoint het of my gevloek het nie, dan het ons mekaar gevat en mekaar geslaat. Maar ek sien ek het baie afgekom, en ek dank die Here daarvoor – en groepe en goed wat ek geloop het. Ek vat dit kop toe. Ek vat dit kop toe want buite is die lewe nog swaarder as hier. Buite is die lewe nog swaarder as hier. So ek wil nie baklei nie. Soos ek nie hier gebaklei het nie, wil ek nie buite gaan baklei nie.*

But I found out since I've been inside, I've never fought. I'm realising....I'm very calm. I'll either make guy, and if I see, no, now it's getting beyond a joke and you really want to fight now, then I'll leave now. Then I won't make guy anymore because then I know that.... Then I feel hurt inside about the way you swore at me now and that, but I'm not going to worry, because I see, you're too worked up now. You're going to fight now. Then I leave. I have calmed down a lot. Out there you wouldn't have looked at me twice or pointed at me or swore at me, then we would've grabbed each other and hit each other. But I see I've calmed down a lot and I thank the Lord for it – and groups and things that I attended here. I take it to

heart. I take it to heart because outside life is even harder than here. Outside life is even harder than here. So I don't want to fight. Like I didn't fight here, so I don't want to go and fight outside.

Ingrid (p.112)

Dit het eintlik begin toe my kinders se pa my so beginne abuse het. Ek meen, toe ons nou begin uitgaan het was dit so mooi en wonderlik, maar daarna, toe ons nou saam begin bly, toe het dit alles beginne. Hy het beginne sy hande vir my op te lig en so. Ek is mos 'n mens... ek sal nie sommer kla nie. Ek sal my pyne en my seer, ek sal dit maar vat. Ek en my swaer het een aand 'n uitval gehad. Daar het die dinge skeefgeloop toe ek vir hom gestee het met die mes. Hy is mos toe oorlede. Nou ons het 'n uitval gehad; van die Vrydagmiddag af het hy al beginne met my lol. Ek het net vir my... en die Vrydagaand toe was dit so... net konflik.

It actually started when my children's father started abusing me like that. I mean, when we began dating it was so nice and wonderful, but afterwards, when we started living together, then everything started. He started raising his hands against me and such. I'm the kind of person you know... I won't complain easily. I'll take my pains and my hurt, I'll just take it. My brother-in-law and I had a fall-out one evening. There things went wrong when I stabbed him with the knife. He in fact then died. Now we had a fall-out ; he'd already started messing with me since the Friday afternoon. I only... and the Friday evening then that was that... just conflict.

Ingrid (p.113)

Hy het altyd dié aanmerkings gemaak en vir my gesê dat hy moes nooit met my oudste suster getrou het nie. Hy moes met my getrou het en vir my gewag het – en so. Hy het altyd vir my gesê, ja, ek en hy kan maar saam seks hê want my kinders se pa hoef mos nie uit te vind nie – en my suster ook nie. Hy het altyd daai teen my gehad. So elke keer as daar probleme geskep word dan was ek altyd die target gewees. Hy sal altyd daai probleme by my kom soek het....Ek het al vir my suster al vertel maar hulle wou my nooit geglo het nie. Hulle het gedink ek wil nou net probeer simpatie soek. Nou so het dit beginne en beginne – en ek het nou uitgehou en uitgehou. En as ek miskien naweke uitgaan na my vriende toe, hy sal nie by sy kinders en sy vrou bly nie. Hy sal altyd kom soek waar ek is. Hy wil my net daar gehad het. Hy het my te veel in 'n hoek ingedruk. Daar was nie eers vir my space nie. Ek het versmoor. Ek meen, dis my kinders se pa... hy abuse, en hy kom met sy verbal abuse en al die. Sien, dat hy so vir my lelik skel. So die Vrydagaand kom toe. Ek was besig om vir die kinders 'n toebroodjie te maak. Wat hy nou vir my sommer kom gryp van agter af en beginne ruk en pluk. Toe was ek nou besig met die mes, en toe ek vir my omdraai, toe het ek vir hom gesê los my net. En ek steek hom toe in sy bors.

He always made these comments and told me that he should never have married my eldest sister. He should've married me and waited for me – and so. He always told me, yes, he and I can have sex because my children's father doesn't have to find out – and neither does my sister. He'd always come to me to look for that kind of trouble... I had already told my sister but they never wanted to believe me. They thought I was just looking for sympathy. Now so it began and began – and I'd just grin and bear it. He'd always come and look where I was. He wanted to have me just there. He backed me into a corner too often. There wasn't even space for me. I suffocated. I mean, it's the father of my children... he abuses, and he comes with his verbal abuse and all that. See, that he called me such ugly names. So the Friday evening came. I was busy making a sandwich for the children. He just came and grabbed me

from behind and started pushing and shoving. I was busy with the knife, and when I turned around, I told him, “Just leave me.” And then I stabbed him in his chest.

Helga (p.114)

‘Sy was ‘n inkommer gewees. Sy was van die [town] af, maar dit was my beste vriend gewees. Maar sy en die man van my het voorheen...toe is ek ook in die gevangenis... toe het hulle ‘n ding gehad. Hulle het gejol, maar ek het nooit daarvoor gepraat nie. Ek het altyd maar...ons het altyd saam gesit and gesels en gelag. Ek het haar nie in my hart gedra of so nie. Ek weet nie hoekom het sy vir my kom steek het daai aand nie’

She was an a newcomer. She was from town, but she was my best friend. But previously she and that husband of mine had... I was in prison then too... they had a thing then. They messed around, but I never spoke about it. I always just... we always sat together and chatted and laughed. I didn't have hard feelings or anything. I don't know why she came to stab me that evening.

Helga (p.115)

‘Dit was ‘n Donderdagaand kwart oor ag, toe Margie aan my kamervenster kom klop. My man en sy vriende het in die kombuis gesit. Ek het gekyk wie is by die venster, en toe ek nou die venster oopmaak, toe steek sy vir my hier [points]. En ek vra vir haar hoekom steek sy vir my en toe sê sy vir my ‘jou ma se...’ en al die klomp goed. En ek het geskrik, want toe kyk ek na my skouer en toe sien ek net bloed. Toe gaan ek uit. Toe vra ek vir haar hoekom steek sy my. Toe sê sy sy maak my somer vrek. En so is sy daar weg en toe kom sy weer terug. Toe gaan ek agter haar aan. Toe steek sy weer vir my die hou hier in my arm [points]. Toe steek ek haar terug met haar eie mes, maar dit het so simpel gebeur... ek was deurmekaar gewees na ek haar doodgesteek het’

It was a Thursday evening quarter past eight, when Margie came to knock on my bedroom window. My husband and his friends were sitting in the kitchen. I looked who's at the window, and when I opened the window, she stabbed me here. [points] And I asked her why she's stabbing me and she then said “your mother's...” and such things. And I had a fright because when I looked at my shoulder I only saw blood. Then I went out. I then asked her why she stabbed me. She then said she'll just kill me. And so she left and came back again. I went after her. Then she stabbed me again this slash here in my arm [points]. Then I stabbed her back with her own knife, but it happened in a silly way. I was confused after I stabbed her to death.

Helga (p.120)

‘Ek kan nie oor my straf kom nie. Baie mense sê vir my ek moet net geduld gebruik - maar dit vreet my vreeslik. Laat hy [onder-magistraat] nou nie insien ek het myself verdedig nie. As ek nie my verdedig het nie het sy my doodgesteek. Ek het nie eers geweet ek is swanger met die kind nie.’

I can't get over my sentence. Many people tell me I must just be patient – but it seriously eats away at me. That he [deputy-magistrate] just can't see I was defending myself. If I didn't defend myself she would've stabbed me to death. I didn't even know I was pregnant with the child.

Translations Chapter 6

Elsa (p.131)

Ek is van die platteland nè, en ek het kom werk hier in die [city]. Toe meng ek met verkeerde tjommies. En ek is 'n mens wat 'n baie sagte hartjie het. Ek kan alles vat. Ek kan nie praat Ek hou nie van baie praat nie en ek hou ook nie van baklei nie. Nou het dit so gekom, ek en my tjommies was hier agter in [suburb]gewees. Ons het gedrink. Daarvandaan af het twee tjommies van my baklei. Ons het afgekeer en toe agterna toe kom baklei die een meisie met my. Maar ek het haar nie geslaan nie. Ek het haar niks gemaak nie. Ek het haar net gewurg. Toe ek vir haar wurg... dis waarom is ek hier. Toe is dit 'n moord. So toe kry ek ag jaar. Ek is nogal spyt - baie spyt. Ek kan nie gehelp het nie. Dit moet seker so gewees het. Ek raak baie kwaad. Ek is baie aggressief. Maar ek praat mos nie; ek hou net alles in, in, in. Nou in die laaste dan kan ek nie meer inhou nie.

I am from the rural area, okay, and I came to work here in the [city]. Then I mixed with the wrong friends. And I'm a person with a very kind heart. I can take everything. I can't talk... I don't like talking a lot and I also don't like fighting. Now it so happened, my friends and I were here behind/down? in [suburb]. We were drinking. There two of my friends started fighting. We headed off and afterwards the one girl came to fight with me. But I didn't hit her. I did nothing to her. I just choked her. When I choked her.... that's why I'm here. It turned out to be murder. So then I got eight years. I'm rather sorry – very sorry. I couldn't help it. It probably had to be. I get very angry. I'm very aggressive. But I don't actually talk; I just keep everything inside, inside, inside. Then in the end then I can't keep it in anymore.

Elsa (p. 133)

Adelene: En as jy dit nie kan inhou nie, wat gebeur dan?

Elsa: Ek raak mal. Ek glo daaraan, as jy aanmekaar lol en jy hou nie op nie, is all right. Ek sal vir jou los. Maar dan as ek nie kan nie, dan moet ek vir jou vasvat.

Adelene: En het dit gebeur toe jy met die meisie baklei het?

Elsa: Sy was my tjommie gewees. Ons het alles saam gedoen. Maar sy het aanmekaar vir my gekrap en gekrap, en dan vat ek haar nie kop toe nie.

Adelene: And if you can't keep it in, what happens then?

Elsa: I go crazy. I believe, if you hassle me all the time and you don't stop, it's all right. I'll leave you. But then if I can't, then I've got to sort you out.

Adelene: And this happened when you fought with the girl?

Elsa: She was my friend. We did everything together. But she constantly pestered and pestered me, but then I didn't take her seriously.

Lorna (p.134)

Adelene: Kan jy my van die gebeure vertel wat daartoe gelei het dat jy hier in die vrouesentrum is?

Lorna: Hoe het ek hier beland?

Adelene: Ja, hoe het jy hier beland?

Adelene: Can you tell me about the events that led to you being here in the women's centre?

Lorna: How I ended up here?

Adelene: Yes, how you ended up here?

Lorna (p.135)

Dit was een middag gewees en toe het ons gesels – gepraat. Ons was ‘n groep gewees. En dan het ek klip gegooi. Ek het per ongeluk ‘n ruit uitgegooi. En later in die dag, die persoon wat ek doodgemaak het, se dogter en ek het ‘n stryery gehad. En die volgende dag... die man het niks gesê van die venster nie, want ek het gesê ek gaan betaal vir dit; ek gaan dit laat insit... dan die volgende dag, ek weet nie of hy gedrink het of wat nie, but dan roep hy vir my. But ek wil nie na hom toe gegaan het nie. Dan roep hy vir my en dan sê hy vir my: “Kom hier jou..” En dan gaan ek tot by hom en dan sê ek hy moet nie vir my so roep nie. Hy kan my ordentlik roep. Dan sê hy vir my: “Ja Lorna, hoekom het jy my ruite uitgegooi?” Dan sê ek vir hom ek kan nie gehelp het nie en ek gaan betaal daarvoor. Dan klap hy vir my. En dan raak ek kwaad en ek gryp hom vas en ek slaat hom terug. Dan agterna sien ek hy haal ‘n mes uit. Dan back stand ek. Dan gaan ek huis toe. Soos ek in by die huis kom, dan sien ek daar lê ‘n mes op die tafel. Dan het ek net gevat en weer uitgehardloop. En dan steek ek vir hom, but ek steek vir hom net een keer.

It was one afternoon and we were chatting – talking. A group of us. And then I threw a stone. I accidentally broke a windowpane. And later that day, the person I killed, his daughter and I had an argument. And the next day... the man didn’t say anything about the windowpane because I said I’d pay for it I’m going to have it put in.... then the next day, I don’t know whether he’d been drinking or what, but then he called me. But I didn’t want to go to him. Then he called me and then he said to me, “Come here you....” And then I went up to him and then I told him not to call me like that. He can call me nicely Then he told me, “Yes Lorna, why did you break my windows?” Then I told him I it was an accident and I’m going to pay for it. Then he slapped me. And then I got angry and I grabbed him and I hit him back. Then afterwards I saw him taking out a knife. Then I backed off. Then I went home. As I entered the house, I saw a knife lying on the table. Then I took it and ran out again. And then I stabbed him, but I only stabbed him once.

Lorna (p.137)

En dan loop hy op by die stairs. Ek sien nog hoe loop hy, but ek het nie bloed gesien nie; ek het niks gesien nie. Dan gaan ek huis toe. Dan is ek op my nerves. Dan bewe ek, en dan vra my pa vir my wat het aangegaan. Dan sê ek, nee, niks het gebeur nie. But hulle sien ek is op my nerves. But dan gaan ek daar in ‘n hokkie in. Daar’s ‘n hokkie en niemand bly daar nie. Dan gaan sit ek daar in die hok. Dan sluit ek die hok van binne. En dan hoor ek die vrou hier bo by ons. Is mos in die flats wat ons bly. Dan skree die vrou vir my pa om te sê my pa moet kom kyk wat het ek gemaak. Boeta Hennie is nou dood. En dan skrik ek. Dan wil ek nie die ding oopmaak nie. Dan hoor ek niemand praat meer daar in die yard nie. Dis doodstil. Dan gaan ek agter uit en dan gaan ek na onse neighbours toe. Dan sê ek vir hulle dat hulle moet die polisie bel en vir die polisie sê ek is hier agter. Hulle moet my hier agter kom haal. En dan kom die polisie. En dan was hulle daar voor. Dit was klomp vans wat daar voor gewees het soos ek nou gehoor het. En dan kom speurders Alexander en Smit. Dan vra hulle vir my: “Waar’s die mes?” Dan sê ek vir hulle: “Nee, ek het dit weggegooi. Ek het dit nie meer nie. Ek weet nie waar is dit nie.” Dan agterna dan gaan haal ek die mes uit en dan gee ek dit. Dan vra hulle vir my, het ek dit skoongemaak? Dan sê ek ek het dit afgevee. Dan sê hulle ek moet dit self in die sakkie sit. Dan sit ek dit in die sakkie. Dan klim ek in die van en dan gaan ek polisiestatie toe. Dan kom ek by die polisiestatie en dan sit hulle my in ‘n sel – ek alleen.

And then he walked up the stairs. I can still see him walking, but I didn't see blood; I saw nothing. Then I went home. I was nervous. I was trembling and then my dad asked me what was going on. Then I said, no, nothing happened. But they saw I was nervous. But then I went into a wendyhouse. There's this wendyhouse and nobody lives there. I went to sit there in the wendyhouse. I locked the door from inside. And then I heard the woman here above us. 'Cause we live in the flats, actually. She shouted at my dad to say he must come and see what I'd done. Brother Hennie is dead. Then I got a fright. I didn't want to open the thing. Then I didn't hear anymore talking there in the yard. It was dead quiet. Then I went out the back and went to our neighbours. I told them they must phone the police and tell them I'm here at the back. They must come and fetch me here at the back. And then the police came. And they were there in front. There were many of them in front there, the way I heard it. And then detectives Alexander and Smit came. Then they asked me, "Where's the knife?" I told them, "No, I threw it away. I don't have it anymore. I don't know where it is." Then afterwards I went to get the knife and gave it (?to them). Then they asked me, had I cleaned it? I told them I wiped it. Then they said I must put it in the bag myself. I put it in the bag. Then I got into the van and went to the police station. Then I got to the police station and they put me in a cell – on my own.

Margaret (p.139-140)

Okay, ek kan nou nie eintlik sê watter spesifieke redes wat vir my hier laat beland het. Maar ek sal die hele storie vertel. Dit was in Aprilmaand gewees. Ek is nie seker watter datum nie, maar dit was op 'n Saterdag. Ek en een vriend van my het op die... ek het prostitusie gedoen. Ons het op die pad gestaan, en dan het die kar gestop om vir my te vra of ek besigheid doen – prostitusie doen. En toe sê ek vir hom ja. En hy het vir my gevra wat is my bedrag; ek het dit vir hom gegee. En hy het gesê ek moet net so vir 10 minute wag; hy gaan weer terugkom. Ek het gewag, en in dié tyd het daar weer 'n ander kar gestop. Ek is saam met hom weg. En ek het teruggekom, en toe het die een vriendin van my daar gestaan en ek het saam met haar gerook. My boyfriend was aan die anderkant van die pad. Ja, toe het die man nou teruggekom. Maar die eerste keer toe hy gestop het,, het hy 'n cloak aangehad. Ek het gedink hy's miskien 'n prokureur of 'n judge of so. En toe kom ek en toe klim ek saam met hom. Maar daar waar ek gestaan het is ons in die bos in. Ons het daar die heelyd net gepraat. Die vriendin van my het gekom en ek het gesien dat sy het 'n bril op. Nou die bril het ek ook altyd gedra, dit was John s'n gewees. En ek dink altyd hy soek moeilikheit uit en so. En dan kom sy daar en dan vra sy vir die man of hy nie miskien vir haar 'n condom het nie. Dan sê die man nee. En dan vra ek vir haar waar kom sy aan die bril, want vroeër toe ons op die pad gestaan het, toe het sy nie die bril gehad nie. Toe sê sy vir my, nee, sy het die bril van verlede week af al. Maar ek het dit so gevat, ek weet sy lieg vir my, maar ek het nie nog daarop uitgegaan om die verduidelikings daarvan te hoor nie. En terwyl sy nog gepraat het, het sy omgedraai en 'n entjie van die kar af geloop. En dié twee, my boyfriend en die jong, hulle twee het aangekom. Dan het die een na die driver se kant toe gegaan en die mes teenaan hom gehou. Hy het vir hom gevra of hy 'n gun, cell phone en geld het. En dan antwoord die oorledene vir hom en hy sê hy het nie. So het my boyfriend die man uit die bestuurderkant uitgehaal en agter tussen my en my vriendin gesit. En ons het daar gesit, die heelyd die man in die middel van ons. En my vriendin het die man net so out of the blue begin kap met die appel op die kop. En ek was geskok. Ek kon nie gepraat het nie. Ek kon niks gedoen het nie. Ek het net daar gesit amper soos iemand wat nie 'n sê het oor die hele ding nie. En so het dit gekom dat ons dieper in die bos in ry. En hulle het die man se motor gevisenteer om te kyk miskien wat hy het en wat hy nou nie het nie... wat kosbaar is vir hulle om te kan gebruik om te verkoop en so. En met die tyd het hulle op sy bankkaartjie afgekom. My boyfriend het gevra vir die pin- nommer, en later het ons uitvind dit was die verkeerde

pin-nommer wat hy gegee het. En toe het die een outjie nou gesê ons moet na sy oom toe gaan en sy neef toe sodat ons daar kan kom en dan kan ons Mandrax rook ook daar en drink saam met hulle. En ek het net stil gesit. Oral gegaan, en is amper soos ek het toestemming gegee vir alles wat hulle aanvang. En ons het die man vasgebind – sy hande en sy voete en sy mond. Eerste het ons hom in die boot gelaai. Daarvandaan af is ons deur na die ander ou se oom toe. Ons het daar gekom en my boyfriend en hy het uitgeklim en na die huis toe gestap. Ek en my ander vriendin, ons het net daar gesit. En hulle het daarso gepraat; ek kon nie hoor wat hulle praat nie. Hulle het daar gepraat en teruggekome na die kar toe. En van hulle huis af is ons na Pick ‘n Pay toe. By Pick ‘n Pay gekom het hulle probeer geld trek, maar elke keer het net ‘n slippie uitgekome en so. Daarvandaan af is ons na die ander lokasie toe om die Mandrax te koop. Daar gekom, ons het Mandrax gekoop en ons is terug na die bos toe.

Okay, I can't really say which particular reasons landed me here. But I'll tell the whole story. It was the month of April. I'm, not sure of the date, but it was a Saturday. A friend of mine and I ... I did prostitution. We stood in the road, and then the car stopped to ask me whether I did business, did prostitution. And I told him yes. And he asked me what my fee was; I told him. And he said I must just wait for about 10 minutes; he's going to come back. I waited and in that time another car stopped. I left with him. And I came back, and then this one (girl-)friend of mine stood there and I smoked with her. My boyfriend was across the road. Yes, then the man came back. But the first time he'd stopped, he wore a cloak. I thought maybe he's a lawyer or a judge or something. And then I came and got in with him. But there where I'd been standing we went into the bush. We just talked there the whole time. This (girl-)friend of mine came and I saw she was wearing a pair of glasses. Now these glasses I also always used to wear, they were John's. And I always thought he's looking for trouble. And then she came there and asked this man if he didn't perhaps have a condom for her. Then the man said no. And then I asked her where she got the glasses, because earlier when we were standing in the road, then she didn't have the glasses. Then she told me, no, she's had the glasses since last week already. But I just left it, I knew she was lying to me, but I didn't bother to still go into explanations. And while she was still talking, she turned around and walked a little bit away from the car. And these two, my boyfriend and this guy, they arrived. Then the one went to the driver's side and held the knife against him. He asked him if he had a gun, cell phone and money. And then the deceased answered him, telling him he didn't. So my boyfriend took the man out the driver's side and put him in the back, between me and my girlfriend. And we sat there, the man in the middle of us all the time. And just out of the blue my girlfriend started hitting the man on the head with an apple. And I was shocked. I couldn't speak. I couldn't do anything. I just sat there almost like someone that doesn't have a say in the whole thing. And so it came that we drove deeper into the bush. And they searched the man's car to see perhaps what he had and what he didn't have... what's valuable for them to use to sell or something. And after a while they found his bank card. My boyfriend asked for the pin number which he gave. And then the one guy said we should now go to his uncle and his cousin so that we could get there and then we can smoke Mandrax there too and drink with them. And I just sat quietly. Went everywhere, and it was almost as if I gave permission for everything they got up to. And we tied the man up – his hand and his feet and his mouth. First we put him in the boot. From there on we went through to the other guy's uncle. We arrived there and my boyfriend and he got out and walked to the house. My other girlfriend and I, we just sat there. And they talked there; I couldn't hear what they said. They just talked there and came back to the car. And from their house we went to Pick 'n Pay. At Pick 'n Pay they tried to draw money, but each time only a slip came out or so. From there on we went to another township to go and buy Mandrax and we went back to the bush.

Margaret (p.143)

....So ons was nou aan die anderkant in die urban bos gewees. Ons het daar gekom. Ons het eers 'n bietjie gerook en gesit en gesels. En ek het nie gesien dat my vriendin en die outjie die man uit die boot uit het nie. Maar toe ek weer sien toe was hy op die gras. En hulle het aan hom beginne slaan. Hulle het hom gesteek. Die een vriendin van my het hom net begin kap met die dingeses. En in die besigheid in het die outjie vir hom gevra waar bly hy. En dan sê hy, nee, hy bly in [suburb] in [town]. En het hy 'n vrou en het hy kinders? En die man het ge-antwoord, ja, hy het 'n vrou en kinders. En ek persoonlik het gekom en ek het die mes uit my vriendin se hand uit gegryp en ook net die man beginne steek. Maar ek het hom net een hou gesteek. Ek het hom in sy nek gesteek. En vir my was dit amper soos 'n shock, want die moment toe ek sien wat ek doen – toe dit my byval wat ek doen – het ek net die mes gelos en omgedraai en geloop terug na die kar toe. En ek het by die kar gekom en ek het gesit in die kar. En my boyfriend het gekom en hy het gepraat saam met my. Ek was vol bloed spatsels en hy het vir my afgevee en so. Maar ek was die heelyd net stil gewees. Ek het niks gepraat nie.

So we were now on the other side in the urban bush. We'd arrived there. We first smoked a bit and sat and chatted. And I didn't see that my girlfriend and the guy had taken the man out of the boot. But the next thing I saw he was on the grass. And they started hitting him. They stabbed him. The one girlfriend of mine just started hitting him with the thingy. And in the to-do the guy asked him where he lived. And then he said, no, he stays in [suburb] in [town]. And does he have a wife and does he have children? And the man answered yes, he has a wife and children. And I personally came and grabbed the knife from my girlfriend's hand and also just started stabbing the man. But I only stabbed him one shot. I stabbed him in his neck. And for me it was almost like a shock, because the moment I saw what I was doing – when it occurred to me what I was doing – I just dropped the knife and turned around and walked back to the car. And I got to car and I just sat in the car. And my boyfriend came and talked to me. I was full of blood stains) and he wiped me down and so on. But I was quiet all the time. I said nothing.

Noleen (p.146)

My oudste broer was geskiet. Ek was klein toe is hy geskiet. Ek het groot geraak met die gedagte ek gaan revenge vat. Ek het vir niemand gesê nie. Ek en my boeta was beste vrinne. Dan join ons die gang. Maar voor ons die gangs join het een van my nefies 'n vrind gehet met 'n gun. En dan bring hy die gun vir my. But die gun is 'n ander gang se gun, en dan soek hulle die gun vir homself,(insert comma) want ek het nie die gun teruggee nie. Dan gee ek die gun vir die mense vir wie ons nou join. Nou is die gun by hulle. En so kan hulle mos nou glo in ons; ons is jonk en wat het ons? 'n Gun. En wat ons nou uitgaan, dis nice en dis lekker. Ons het gerook. En dan skiet hulle ene met die gun dood. En dan is ek mos nou in die gang. Dan vat ons revenge en dan kry ons weer een van hulle. So hier tienuur die oggend... ons was vier gewees... toe gaan ons daar. Dan kry ons vir hom daar. Toe skiet ons vir hom mos dood. Die drie was gearrester, en ek was nog vir twee maande vry gewees. Hulle het ons aangekla vir aanranding en poging tot manslag. Maar die gedagte was net daar, ek gaan die ou kry wat my broer geskiet het. Maar hy het toe straf gekry. Maar dit het so gewerk dat ek in die tronk beland het vir 'n poging tot manslag. Toe ek in die tronk is, en dan gaan my ma dood. En toe ek uit gaan toe voel ek net is me against the world. Toe kom ek uit, my baby broer is op sy eie. Maar ek is daar vir hom. Toe begin ek met drugs. En ek

het 'n meisie, ek sê vir haar sy kan daar by ons bly. Ek was deurmekaar. Ek het geworry van niks nie en niemand nie. Toe het ek my girls se harte seer gemaak. Ek speel met die vroumense. Toe is ek nog ernstig in die ding; net laat hulle vir my kan supply. Ja, en so het dit aangegaan. Toe het hulle my gearresteer vir die saak. En my eie nefie het getuig in die saak. En hy was ook gearresteer. Hy het my so evil gemaak laat hy op veilige bewaking sit – laat die mense moet dink ek is so gevaarlik. Want die anders is in die tronk. Ek is die enigste een wat in die tronk sit. So hy is bang. Hy is nou in veilige bewaring. En dan arresteer hulle my. Dan word ek onskuldig bevind op die ander poging-tot-moord sake. En toe kry ek straf in die saak. Toe gaan my baby broertjie ook dood. Ek is 'n mens so... ek is amper so, ek het nog nie die mense vergewe nie. Want ek weet hoe sterk het ek gevoel oor my oudste broer. En toe ek nou binne is, toe kom dit my baby broertjie ook oor. Toe word hy ook doodgemaak.

My eldest brother had been shot. I was young when he'd been shot. And I grew up with the idea that I was going to take revenge. I didn't tell anybody. My brother and I were best friends. Then we joined the gang. But before we joined the gangs one of my cousins had a friend who had a gun. And then he brought the gun to me. But the gun was another gang's gun, and then they looked for the gun from him, because I hadn't given the gun back. Then I gave the gun to the people we now joined. Now the gun was with them. And so they could actually believe in us; we are young and what we do we have? A gun. And when we went out, it was nice and it was cool. We were smoking. And then they shot one dead with the gun. And then I was in fact now in the gang. Then we took revenge and then we got one of them again. About ten o'clock in the morning... there were four of us... we went there. Then we got him there. Then we shot him dead, actually. The three were arrested, and I was still free for two months. They charged us with assault and attempted culpable homicide. But the thought just remained, I'm going to get the guy that shot my brother. But he got sentenced. But it worked like that that I landed in jail for attempted culpable homicide. While I was in jail, my mother died. And when I went out it felt like it's just me against the world. Then I came out, my baby brother was on his own. But I was there for him. Then I started with drugs. And I had a girlfriend, I told to stay there with us. I was confused. I didn't worry about nothing or nobody. Then I broke my girls' hearts. I played with the women. Then I was still seriously involved; just so they could supply me. Yes, and so it went on. Then they arrested me for the case. And my little cousin gave evidence in the case. And he was also arrested. He made me out to be so evil that he ended up in safe custody – so that people must think I'm so dangerous. Because the others were in jail. I was the only one who sat in jail. So he was scared. He's now in safe custody. And then they arrested me. Then I was found not guilty on the other attempted murder cases. And then I got sentenced in the case. Then my baby brother also died. I'm a person that... I'm almost like, I hadn't forgiven the people. Because I know how strongly I felt about my eldest brother. And now while I was inside, then it happened to my baby brother as well. Then he was killed too.

Noleen (p.150)

Ek weet nie wat gaan ek nou maak nie, want ek weet nie of die Here dit so bestier het laat hy my baby broertjie ook laat hy kan oorkom... Ek weet nie of alles toetse is vir my nie... of ek nou weer dieper gaan nie. Maar ek het mos programme nou gedoen hierso.

I don't know what I'm going to do now, because I don't know if the Lord intended for it to also happen to my baby brother... I don't know if these had all been tests for me... or if I am now going deeper again. But I did in fact do programmes here now.

Diana(p.150)

So sy was r rig overprotective. Daai tyd toe ek nou groter begin raak. So sy het altyd die houvas op my gehet. In my hart het ek altyd soos 'n prisoner gevoel. That's why, om tronk toe te gekom het, vir my was dit nie 'n verskil om alleen te wees nie because ek is used to that. Ek het voor dit gehad. En die oggend toe gaan ek nie skool toe nie. Dai hele dag het ek rondgehike. Ek het nie geweet waarnatoe nie. En ek moet geduck het ook all over the show because ek was so bang ek gaan 'n taxi sien of my pa of my uncles en so. Iemand wat weet ek is nie by die skool nie en wat vir haar kan phone.

So she was really overprotective. That time when I got bigger. So she always had a hold over me. In my heart I always felt like a prisoner. That's why, to come to prison, for me it wasn't different to be alone because I was used to that. I had that before. And that morning then I didn't go to school. The whole day I hiked around. I didn't know where to go. And I also had to duck all over the show because I was so scared I was going to see a taxi or my dad or uncles. Someone who knows that I am not at school and who can phone her.

Diana (p.152)

...tot die laaste saak – die moordsaak. Dit was 'n baie lelike moordsaak gewees. Dit was 'n high profile saak. Dit het baie lank geloop. Dit was in die koerante en in die news. So dit was 'n baie hectic saak. Ek dink nie ek wil baie daar in gaan nie. As die ding moet geskrywe raak gaat baie mense die hel in raak. Ek wil nogal r rig nou weer daai vertel het van die saak.

... till the last case, the murder case. It was a very ugly murder case. It was a high profile case. It ran very long. It was in the papers and in the news. So it was a very hectic case. I don't think I really want get into it. If these things get written many people will get the hell in. I'd actually really like to talk about the case again.

Diana (p.152)

Adelene: *As u nie wil h  dat dit geskryf moet word nie dan sal ek die band afsit.*

Diana: *Ja, because weet jy, die saak is mos 'n high profile saak. Die saak was mos all-over. Die saak het vir my 'n mal mens gemaak! Die saak het vir my heeltemal 'n mal mens gemaak. Die saak het vir my op hierdie psychiatric treatment... pille en medications en goed hier in die tronk laat drink. En dit het vir my laat... ek het vier of vyf suicide attempts gehet. Ek kan net nie gelewe het hier nie. En ja, dit is past en ek het elke jaar past 'n problem om te kan pass because die saak seems to be altyd na my terug te kom wanneer ek my Koran wil touch. Okay, daarvan weet sielkundiges; daarvan weet baie mense.Vir drie dae dan sal ek die moeilikste gevangene wees in die tronk for no reason. En daai laat my wonder because ek weet nie hoekom voel ek so nie. Ek weet nie hoekom doen ek die snaakse dinge nie but ek is reg om charges op te tel hier binne deur die drie dae se dinge wat ek doen. But it's like a force,(insert comma) you know. It's like iets wat my dryf tot die dinge. But dit het maar eerste latere by my known geraak dat dit actually die saak is because omdat dit elke jaar dieselfde tyd gehappen het.*

Adelene: If you don't want it to be written, then I'll switch off the tape recorder.

Diana: Yes, because you know, the case is actually a high profile case. The case was in fact all over. The case made me a crazy person! The case totally made me a crazy person. The case got me on this psychiatric treatment...had me drink pills and medications and stuff here in jail. And it let me I had four of five suicide attempts. I just couldn't live here. I have a

problem to pass because the case seems to always come back to me when I want to touch my Quran. Okay, psychologists know about it; many people know about it... For three days I'll be the most difficult prisoner in the jail for no reason. And that made me wonder because I didn't know why I felt like that. I didn't know why I did the strange things but I was ready to pick up charges here inside for the things I did in those three days. But it's like a force, you know. It's like something that drives me to these things. But it only became known to me later that it's actually the case because it happened every year at the same time.

Diana (p.154)

Baie mense weet nie die waarheid van die saak nie. My familie weet nie die waarheid van die saak nie. Ek en my ma-hulle – my family – ons het nie 'n lekker band nie. Ek voel dat daar is nie genoeg sorries in die wêreld wat ek kan vra vir my ma-hulle nie vir wat ek gedoen het om hiernatoe te gekom het nie. Specifically, mainly daai saak. Al daai goed wat ek nou genoem het en vir die mense wat vir my grootgemaak het, daar is net no way wat jy kan meen dat daai kan actually so gehappien het nie. Nie vir daai way wat ek grootgemaak gewees het nie. But daai deel was ook nie ek nie. Daai is ook 'n deel wat ek moet op die einde van die dag 'n klomp jare in die tronk moet kom sit het.

Many people don't know the truth of the case. My family doesn't know the truth of the case. My mother-and-them and I – my family – we don't have a good bond. I feel there's not enough sorries in the world for me to say to my mother-and-them for what I did to come here. Specifically, mainly that case. All those things I mentioned now and for the people who raised me, there's just no way that you could've imagined that it actually could've happened that way. Not for the way I was raised. But that part wasn't me either... At the end of the day that's also a part for which I had to come and spend many years in jail.

Diana (p.155)

En many times, ja, dan brand my hart because ek wil sometimes mos vir iemand sê, ek kon nie daai ding gedoen het nie, because ek voel dat daai is die enigste tyd wanneer ek reg gaat van daai is wanneer ek die waarheid van die saak myself... want ek myself weet nie die waarheid van die saak nie. En ek kom net nie so ver nie...

And many times, yes, then my heart aches because I actually want to tell someone, I couldn't have done that thing, because I feel that's the only time that I'm going to get right when the truth of the case .. Because I myself don't know the truth of the matter case. And I just cannot bring myself to....

Translations Chapter 7

Ingrid (p.159)

So lank sy weet... my kinders kom eerste. Ek sal eerste vir my kinders uitsort. As ek nou weet ek gaan na 'n huisvriend en ons gaan nou miskien 'n biertjie gaan drink, dan sal ek my suster vra: "Kyk, hou vir my my kinders. Ek kom nou." Want ek sal nooit my kinders blootstel om saam met my by sulke plekke te loop nie.

As long as she knows... my children come first. I'll first sort my children out. Now if I know I'm going to a family friend and we're perhaps going to drink a little beer, then I'll ask my sister, "Look, mind my children. I'm coming now." Because I'll never expose my children to go with me to such places.

Grace (p.159)

Ek het gedrink. Ek was 'n heavy drinker. Ek en my man, ons het nog altyd gedrink, maar ek was altyd daar gewees vir my kinders.

I was drinking. I was a heavy drinker. My husband and I, we've always been drinking, but I was always there for my children.

Grace (p.160)

Buite... ek was 'n stil persoon gewees. Maar as ek gedrink het dan was ek daai meisie. Maar ek was altyd in my huis gewees. Jy sal nooit vir my... jy sal my werk toe sien gaan en terug in die huis in. Of ek gaan werk toe en ek trek library boeke of films vir die kinders; bly in die huis. Jy sal nou en dan vir my buite sien as my familie kom. Dan is daai enigste tyd wat jy my buite sal sien. Of ek gaan na my broer toe. Maar tipies, ek het maar altyd in die huis gebly soos 'n huisvrou. My man het meeste uitgegaan naweke.

Outside... I was a quiet person. But when I'd been drinking I was that girl. But I was always in my house. You'd never... you'd see me going to work and back into the house. Either I go to work or I get library books or films for the children; stay at home. Now and again you'd see me outside when my family came. Then that's the only time you'd see me outside. Or I'd go to my brother. But typically, I always just stayed at home like a housewife. My husband went out most on weekends.

Penny (p.161)

Mevrou, in my verlede het ek gesmokkel, en toe het ek baie geld gehad. En toe sterf my man, en toe kan ek nie meer die geld kry wat ek altyd gehad het in my lewe nie. En toe sê ek een aand vir my twee mansvriende: "Jong, ek het nie geld nie. Die kinders het nie kos in die huis nie. Ek weet nie hoe gaat ek my skuld betaal nie." Toe het ek vir die twee seunskinders gesê – hulle is jonger as ek: "Ons moet nou 'n pak gaan ruk laat my kinders net kan eet en kan drink. Laat ons iets soos koffie of enigiets in die huis kan drink." En toe is hulle gewillig om saam met my te gaan.

Ma'am, in my past I used to deal [drugs] and then I had lots of money. And then my husband passed away, and then I couldn't get the money I'd always had in my life. And then one evening I told two of my male friends, "Guys, I don't have money. The children don't have food in the house. I don't know how I'm going to pay my debt." Then I told the two boys – they're younger than me, "We have to go and rob a suit so that my children can just eat and drink. That we can drink something like coffee or anything at home." And they were willing to go with me.

Penny (p.162)

En toe sê ek net vir my suster: "Kyk mooi na my kinders. Koop vir my kinders wat hulle toekom." Want ek was kaal, en dit was deur dit wat ek die misdaad loop pleeg het. Want ek kon nie geaanskou het hoe swaar my kinders kan gekry het nie.

And then I just told my sister, “Look after my children. Buy my children what they need.” (Because I was penniless and because of that I went to commit crime. ‘Cause I couldn’t bear seeing how my children could’ve suffered.

Penny (p.163)

Die aggressiewegeit wat ek gehad het, is net dat ek kan nie aanskou het hoe swaar my kinders moet gekry het nie. Ek wil nie loop steel het nie, want ek was te bang om in winkels te gaan steel. Ek wou net ‘n ou van die pad af trek en dan wil ek hom doodmaak net vir sy geld. Nou, dit is so wraak wat in my opgekom het. Nou, ek kan nie sê hoe dit in my kom nie. Maar dit voel net vir my, ek kan nie aanskou hoe my kinders moet swaarkry nie. En ek het nie meer daai klomp geld om vir hulle elke dag te gegee het nie. Voorheen het my kinders elke dag ordentlik geëet. Naweke het ons in die Spur gaan eet. Dit is toe ek nog die klomp geld gehad het. Maar dis nou na my man dood is laat ek net daai aggressiewegeit in my begin kry het. Ek kan net nie aanskou het hoe swaar my kinders gekry het nie.

The aggressiveness I had, is just that I couldn’t see how my children had to suffer. I didn’t want to go and steal, because I was too scared to go and steal in shops. I just wanted to pull a guy off the road and then I wanted to kill him just for his money. Now, such is the vengeance that welled up in me like that. Now, I can’t say how it came into me. But it just felt like I couldn’t bear how my children had to suffer. And I no longer had the loads of money to give to them every day. Previously my children ate well every day. Weekends we used to eat in the Spur. That was when I still had lots of money. But it was now after my husband’s death that I just started getting that aggressiveness in me. I couldn’t bear how my children had to suffer.

Penny (p.163)

Ek voel spyt vandag. Want dieselfde moment as jy geld sien of jy wil iets doen, jy dink nie wat die nagevolge gaan gebeur na dit nie. Verstaan mevrou? Maar om eerlik te wees, ek is net bly my kinders het al van daai geld gekry. Ek het dit nie gemors nie. Hulle het darem genut daaruit gekry. En ek moet nou maar my straf uitdien. Ek is spyt oor wat ek gedoen het, maar dit was vir my kinders se wil. Dit was vir hulle.

I’m sorry today. Because that same moment when you see money or you want to do something, you don’t think what consequences are going to happen afterwards. Do you understand, Ma’am? But to be honest, I’m just glad my children got all that money. I didn’t waste it. At least they got use out of it. And I must now just serve out my sentence. I’m sorry about what I’d done, but it was for the benefit of my children. It was for them.

Grace (p.165)

En mense het begin om vir my kinders te skree, jou ma is a moordenaar. Dit was hard.

Dit affek my baie. Ek bel huis toe naweke en dan hoor ek by my vriende, ja, hulle label my as ‘n moordenaar – die vroumense – [name of town] se vroumense. Ek het aanvaar maar dit het my seergemaak ook. En die process is nie net vir my nie maar vir my kinders ook – want my kinders is buite. So hulle label my kinders ook want, ek is in die tronk. En dit is nie reg om my kinders te label as... vir die daad wat ek gedoen het nie. So ek blameer myself nogsteeds. Want as ek nie gedink het van beter nie, dan sal ek nie vandag hier gewees het nie. Of as ek geweet het daai is nog een van my grootste swak punte in my lewe, dan sou ek dit nie gedoen het nie. Maar jy weet nooit drank is jou swak punt as jy nie ‘n ding oorkom

nie. So ek het op die harde manier geleer. En ek het beseft, ek like nie meer vir my nie. En ek gaan 'n beter persoon word want my kinders het my nodig.

And people started shouting at my children, your mother is a murderer. That was hard.

It affects me a lot. I phone home on weekends and then I hear from my friends, yes, they label me as a murderer – the women – [name of town]'s women. I've accepted (it), but it also hurt me a lot. And the process is not just for me but also for my children – because my children are outside. So they label my children too since I'm in jail. And it's not right to label my children as... for the deed I've done. So I still blame myself. Because if I had known better, then I wouldn't have been here today. Or if I'd known that was another of my greatest weak point in my life, then I wouldn't have done it. But you never know alcohol is your weak point if nothing happens to you. So I learnt the hard way. And I realised, I don't like myself anymore. And I'm going to become a better person because my children need me.

Grace (p.165)

So dit is moeilik om jou kinders elke naweek hier te sien... en jy moet goodbye sê – die afskeid is te erg. En dan vra hulle: “Wanneer kom jy huis toe?” Dis moeilik. En nou gaan die kind volgende jaar skool toe en ek is nie daar nie! Dit maak my seer! So ek het baie verloor in die tyd in. Ja, hulle gaan aan met hulle skoolwerk, maar ek is nie daar nie! Ek is nie by die skool soos ek altyd gedoen het nie. [Cries]. Dis moeilik. My seun wil nie eers skool toe gaan nie want ek is in die tronk! Dis moeilik! Ek weet nie wat ek dink nie en wat ek meer voel nie. Ons het so goed oor die weg gekom, maar maybe daai bond is gebreek. Dis moeilik om dit weer bymekaar te maak. [Cries].

So it's difficult to see your children here every weekend... and you have to say goodbye – the farewell/parting is too much. And then they ask, “When are you coming home?” It's difficult. And now the child is going to school next year and I'm not there! It hurts me! So I lost a lot in this time. Yes, they carry on with their school work, but I'm not there! I'm not at school the way I always used to be. [Cries] It's tough. My son doesn't even want to go to school because I'm in jail! It's difficult! I don't know what I'm thinking or what I'm feeling anymore. We got along so well, but maybe that bond is broken. It's difficult fixing it again. [Cries]

Samantha (p.166)

So ek weet nie hoe gaan ek my kind in die gesig kyk nie as ek hier uitgaan nie. Baie mense gaan aanmekaar dit doen. Want hy het Sondag gekom en toe sê hy vir my: “Mammie, die mense sê Mammie is 'n moordenaar.” Nou hoe voel hy nou oor daai woorde? Daar is mense wat dit teen my gaan hou. Maar ek vra vir die Here dat die mense net uit my pad uit bly. Hulle moet my net los as ek die dag uitkom. Hulle moet ook nie na my toe kom nie – na my huis toe kom nie – hulle moet wegbly van my. Want daar is nie 'n vrou wat van my hou nie. Hulle hou nie van my nie omdat ek nooit met hulle meng nie. Ek drink nie saam met hulle nie. As ek wil drink dan koop ek vir my twee biertjies en dan sit ek in die huis. Of ek sit in die jaart dan kan hulle so lank in my huis speel of TV kyk. Ek het nooit ander mense gepla nie. Ek bly maar net... of ek was wasgoed. As my ma nie by die huis is nie dan maak ek my ma se kos en ek maak huis skoon. Ek voel ek wil net weer nie dieselfde wees as ek uitgaan. Ek kan verander as ek uitgaan. En ek voel, ek as ouer wil vir my twee kindertjies gaan werk. Want dit is 'n ouer se plig om vir haar kinders te werk. So ek vra maar net vir die Here vir

genade, dat as ek my voete uit die plek uit sit, dat ek nie weer terugkeer nie om hier te beland nie – want dit akkordeer nie met my nie.

So I don't know how I'm going to look my child in the eye when I get out of here. Many people are going to do this all the time. Because he came on Sunday and then he said to me: "Mommy, the people say Mommy is a murderer." Now, how does he feel about those words? There are people who are going to hold this against me. But I ask the Lord that the people must just stay out of my way. They must just leave me (alone) when I get out one day. They also mustn't come to me – come to my house – they must stay away from me. Because there's not one woman that likes me. They don't like me because I never mix with them. I don't drink with them. If I want to drink then I buy two small beers and I stay in the house. Or I sit in the yard then they can play in the house or watch TV so long. I never bothered other people. I just stay... or I do laundry. I feel I don't just want to be the same again when I get out. I can change when I get out. And I feel, as a parent I want to go work for my two little children. Cause it is a parent's duty to work for her children. So I just ask the Lord for his grace, that when I step out of this place, that I don't slip back to end up here again – because it does not agree with me.

Diana (p.176)

At all times... almal in my klasse... ek is die enigste een wat tomboy is. Die anders is either, hulle is ladies because hulle is ladies by nature – jy kan dit sommer sien – en dan is daar die stoutes en die gruwelikes maar jy kan sien hulle is vroulik. Hulle sit, staan, praat – hulle ways – hulle alles is vroulik. So is net ek wat heeltemal 'n outsider is.

At all times... everyone in my classes... I'm the only one that's tomboy. The others are either, they're ladies, because they're ladies by nature - you can just see it - and then there are the naughty ones and the mischief-makers, but you can see they're feminine. They sit, stand, talk - their ways – their everything is feminine. So it's just me who's a total outsider?

Diana (p.177)

Is mos nou my siel daai. Is wie ek is en wat ek is. Is hoe ek dink ek is vir meer as hoe lank nou. Daai is die enigste lewe wat ek ken.

Sien jy nou hoekom daai bra is gelabel nou? So voel ek. Is net ek is 'n man in die tronk. En vir my om te gesurvive het, ek het gedoen wat dit kop by die tronk om te kan survive – al is dit hóé gewees. Because dié is nie 'n plek vir angels nie. Hier is nie 'n angel wat sal survive in die tronk nie. No matter hoe groot or hoe klein die ding is wat jy gedoen het nie, is illegal gewees. Is onwettig vir die staat. So whether jy nou 'n tjap het, jy het 'n skoon vel, jy's 'n lesbian en jy's 'n gangster; hoekom julle met die skoon velle wat nie gangsters en lesbians is nie, julle word nie gelabel nie. Maar julle is net so fokken skelm soos ons. Julle smokkel net soos ons smokkel, maar ons is nou al een wat gelabel is. Julle raak outomaties die tronk se VIP bandiete because jou vel is skoon. Sy loop nie soos 'n gangster nie en sy doen nie gangster goed nie – so sy is skoon. Verstaan jy wat ek try om te sê? So elke keer, jy wat try en jy wat 'n lewe wil maak uit jou gemors lewe wat jy gelewe het, jy kry nie daai kans om daai te kan doen nie. Verstaan jy nou? Because jou past repeat homself at all times in jou appearance of buite jou appearance.

It's actually my soul... It's who I am and what I am. It's how I think I am or a long time now. That's the only life I know. Do you see why that brother is labelled now? That's how I feel. It's just like I'm a man in jail. (I might as well be a man in jail). And for me to have

survived, I did what it takes to survive in jail – no matter what. Because this isn't a place for angels. No angel will survive in jail. No matter how big or small the thing is you've done, it was illegal. It's illegal for the state / government. So whether you have a tattoo identifying you as a member of a gang, or a clean skin, you're a lesbian and you're a gangster; why you with clean skins who aren't gangsters and lesbians, you don't get labelled. But you're just as fucking shady as us. You deal just like we deal, but we're the only ones being labelled. You automatically become the jail's VIP prisoners because your skin is clean. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? So each time, you who try and you who want to make a life out of the screwed-up life you've lived, you don't get that chance to do that. Do you understand now? Because your past repeats itself at all times in your appearance regardless of your appearance.

Noleen (p.179)

Ek was mal vir hom. Hy was vir my 'n boeta. Dis amper soos ek het vir hom geaanbid. Hy het gesmokkel. Ek was die lookout. Ek moet gaan kyk - is daar genoeg drugs om aan te gaan met daai mense. Ons was mal oor mekaar. Ons gaan haal nou miskien die twee girls. Dan kom ons terug. All the time is sy meisie bevriend met my meisie. Oral wat ons gaan het ons twee meisies. Alles wat ons doen, ons doen dit saam. But die ou van die yard, enige tyd as ons daar kom, dan phone hy die boere en sê die gangsters is alweer hier. Hy was bang. Dan kom die boere nou en dan kom soek hulle nou vir ons. Right. Hulle soek nou net my boeta. But dan sit ons die hele girls af. But ek was die enigste een wat 'n gun op my gehet het. Ek was lief vir 'n gun. Dis amper soos, vir my het dit gevoel almal respek vir ons. Ja, daar wat ons gaan, ons word gerespek.

I was crazy about him. He was a brother to me. I almost worshipped him. He was dealing. I was the lookout. I had to go and see – are there enough drugs to trade with those people. We were crazy about each other. We might go and fetch these two girls. Then we'd come back. All the time his girlfriend was a friend of my girlfriend. Everywhere we went we had two girlfriends. Everything we did, we did together. But the guy of the yard, anytime we arrived there, he'd phone the cops and tell them the gangsters are here again. He was scared. Then the cops came and then they'd come and look for us. Right. Now they'd only be looking for my brother. But then we'd ditch all the girls. But I was the only one with a gun on me. I loved a gun. It was almost, for me it felt everyone respected us. Yes, wherever we went, we were respected.

Noleen (p180.)

Noleen: Ja. Maar is maar net dat ek was betrokke by groot dinge. Ek wil gou grootgeword het.

Adelene: Watter tipe dinge was jy betrokke mee?

Noleen: Soos, ek wil ook met girlies is... by die House of Fun wat ons het... one night's dance with the girlies... drink ook en so. But almal die girlies is mal oor my; daar was die een girly wat ek net weekends gehet het. Sy was net weekends daar. But ek was haar eeste ook, maar ek was nie nog ernstig met haar nie. Sy het dit geweet – ek het 'n meisie by die huis... nie by die huis nie, maar sy het geweet ek het 'n vaste meisie.

Noleen: Ek het 'n meisie hier binne. Ons is mal oor mekaar maar dit gaat net as jy hier binne is. Daai is wat so seer maak. Sy het ook 'n klomp burks hier in die tronk. Ek het altyd gegaan vir girlies wat nog nooit burks gehet het nie. Of wat nog nooit in relationships gewees het nie – so was ek. Dit het my verbaas hoe ek gegaan het vir die meisie geval het. En ek is mal oor haar. Sy is ouer as my maar ons is mal oor mekaar.

Adelene: *En die ander girlies wat jy nou buite gehad het, was daar 'n rede hoekom jy nooit iemand gevat het wat 'n relationship gehad het nie?*

Noleen: *Ja, net maar gaat hulle terug – en so! But ek het girlies gehet wat bi is. But daai is wat ek gehoor het, maar toe ek dit sien... die een girly se burk kom daar, en toe sê ek sommer: “Kyk hierso, kies nou. Is nou ek of dis hy. Jy moet kies.” Toe wil sy haar onder die karre gooi! [Laughs.] Want sy weet nie watter kant toe nie want ek sit haar nou in 'n ding in. Ek het dit aanvaar toe sy hom kies. But vandag is sy getroud en sy is baie gelukkig. Sy het al hier gekom met haar man. Hulle is 'n happy family.*

Adelene: *So dit was okay toe jy daarvan geweet het, maar toe jy nou gesien het...*

Noleen: *Toe ek hom sien toe dink ek, nee, ek kan nou vir hom klap, hy's 'n office boy! Hy het niks nodig nie, man. Hy het dan alles. Hy kom, hy trek op met sy kar. Hy is gesuit en getie.*

Hy lyk sommer soos hy daar hoort...so wat gaat nou aan?

Noleen: Yes. It's just that I was involved with big things. I wanted to grow up quickly.

Adelene: With what kind of things were you involved?

Noleen: Like, I also wanted to be with girlies... at the House of Fun that we had... one night's dance with the girlies... drinks too and stuff. But all the girlies were crazy about me; there was this one girly that I only had on weekends. She was only there on weekends. But I was her first too, but I was not serious about her. She knew it – I had a girlfriend at home... not at home, but she knew I had a steady girlfriend.

Noleen: I've got a girlfriend in here. We're crazy about each other but it only lasts while you're in here. That's what hurts so much. She also has a lot of boyfriends here in jail. I always went for girlies who never had boyfriends. Or that have never been in relationships – that's how I was. It surprised me how I went and fell for this girl. And I'm crazy about her. She's older than me but we're crazy about each other.

Adelene: And the other girlies you had outside, was there a reason why you never took someone who'd been in a relationship?

Noleen: Yes, what if they go back – or something! But I did have girlies who were bi. But that's what I heard, but when I saw it... the one girly's flame arrived there, and then I said, “Look here, choose now (now you choose). It's either me or it's him. You've got to choose.” Then she wanted to throw herself under the cars! [Laughs]. Because she didn't know which way because I was putting her on the spot. I accepted it when she chose him. But today she's married and she's very happy. She even came here with her husband. They're a happy family.

Adelene: So it was okay when you knew about it, but when you saw...

Noleen: When I saw him, I thought, no, I can slap him now, he's an office boy! He doesn't need anything, man. He's got everything. He came, he pulled up in his car. He was all dressed up. He just looked like he belonged there... so what's going on now?

Appendix 4: Interview 1: Jane

Adelene: Can you tell me about the events which led to you being in the female centre?

Jane: I am a married woman. I am mother of four children. I am not divorced from my married husband but then my husband left home. He left... we had a good life all the years. But then after many years, I don't know which year, he moved out of the house. Then he left me with the four children in the house. The children were still young then, they were still at school. I was not working. I didn't know where he went to because all the years that I was with my husband, he never left home. But that year, he just moved out of the house and I don't know where he was living. Left me with four children. Then I phoned my sissy. Then my sissy told me- this is my eldest sister – then she said, I know that you love your husband but report him for child maintenance. But then I couldn't tell my sissy, no, I can't do that because it would look like I didn't want my husband here. So I just said yes. But she did not go further with that and she took the four children and they went to live with my other sister. Then I sat at home alone. The years that I was with my husband, I was never with another man. So when my children were living with my sister, I lived alone in the house. Then my husband would make a turn at the house before he took the train to work. Makes a turn at the house every morning. I think perhaps he came to check if there is anyone else at the house. You see, I am thinking about that now. But I don't ask him a thing. When he comes in, he finds all the room doors open. We had a four bedroom house. Then one day he said to me, ok, he came to fetch all of his clothes – I don't know where he went to or where he was staying. And then one morning he came to the house and then he said to me, you can find yourself another man. So it means that he isn't interested in me anymore. But then I said nothing. Then I just looked at him. It was about seven o'clock in the morning. I was still in bed that time. Then I just looked at him. Then I just said thank-you that he gave me that opportunity, but I would maybe take my own time to get that man. But somebody who can help to support me because my children were still small. Then I met my boyfriend that I lived with – the one who got me into this trouble. Ok, so I met this man. So I told him this story of mine. I am a married woman. I still live with my husband. But my husband sleeps out now. I don't know where he sleeps. But if you want to come to me, you can maybe come any day you want to. Then early in the morning when my husband makes a turn at the house you must know you must be out of the house. Ok, sometimes Fridays then the man comes to sleep with me. Until the other day then my husband asks me – do you have something with Ladu? Then I said yes, because you gave me permission. You can't argue and say no. Then he said- Ladu is not the man for you. You could have told me to get you a man. But then that was strange to me! Then I said to him – it doesn't matter what he looks like. It's my choice. Ok, that other day, early that morning, then Ladu did not wake up. Then my husband came in, then I woke him – here comes my husband. No, then he doesn't wake up. Here my husband comes. My husband isn't.... he is not a violent somebody. Then he came in. Then I got up and out of the room, then I went to the children's room. Then I stood there. Now I am worried maybe trouble will happen. But I know my husband is not a trouble person. But this one must please not lift a hand towards my husband – I think this inside. Then I listen, then my husband is in the house. Then I hear him talk to him in the room. Then my husband say to him – 'ok, I don't want you here in my house anymore. You two must not sleep in this house again'. Ok, then my husband walks out. Then he opened the door and walked to the station. He can't make trouble because he gave me permission. He said I must get me a man – and he is out of the house. He is gone, I don't know where he lives. Then my husband left and Ladu stayed behind. After that, this boyfriend of mine, I don't see him every day. I just had him on weekends... maybe Friday he comes to me. He comes to fetch me and then maybe he sleeps once a week. Another day, then my husband came back. He first lived in Jacksonville but he is also from Porterville. I didn't ask him anything about where he is or stuff like that. But I just got a man – like my husband told me, you can get yourself a man. Ok, then he came back from Jacksonville and then when he fetches me on Sundays then I go sleep at their place. Then I come home every day in the morning. The other day then he said to me, ok, you must come and live here with me because I don't know in the week when I am not there what you are doing at the house. Then I said all the years I stay in my house. Nobody did...I did not do those funny things so how can you say this to me? Ok, if you want it like that then I will come and live with you people. Ok, I know that I am alone. The children

were with my sister. Ok, then I went to stay with him. Every morning then I come home. On the way I meet my husband, my husband is going to work and I am now going home. Ok, now I think, my husband does not like it. Then he said, ok, I must go and live with him. Then I went to live with him. Ja, that was my big mistake – to move out of my house and go and stay with him. Now he is also back from where he was staying. He is now staying with his mother. He's not a married guy. Ja, he stays with his mother. I stayed with him. I brought my clothes there and I'm staying with him and his mother. We've got a room at the back. Now he is doing these funny things. Sometimes he sleeps out, which is something my husband had never done. But I didn't say anything. I had to keep quiet because I can't go to this man to another man and to this man and another man. In other words, I needed that particular time. I needed someone to help me out because I was out of work at that time. Actually, I'm not a woman who is going around. Ever since I've met my husband in the seventies, I've never had another man. Even the four children are my husband's children. He sleeps out then. Sometimes he brings a girl there at his home. Then I told his mother. His mother said, no, you can come here inside and open up the couch and sleep on the couch. So I just sleep in the house and I just keep quiet and sleep on the couch. Then in the morning he just took this girl out. Sometimes when he's drunk he hit me. Even now I've got these knife scars where he stabbed me. My husband never stabbed me. In the first place, he first stabbed me here in my breast in my house before I moved out. I've got this one and the other one here. And he hit me a lot but I couldn't do anything. Anyway, I have to stay because now he knew that I can't go back to my house because I moved out from my house. And he kept on doing this. He slept with girls. Sometimes he slept out – but I didn't say anything. I just keep quiet because I don't want to argue because I'm a married woman. I still maybe want to go back to my husband one day. Because I still love my husband. Even now, in the letters I wrote to him, I always ask him that I wanted to see him. I wanted him to come and visit me. I want to speak to him, but he doesn't want to come to this place. Even me, it's my first time in prison. I've never been in prison, and I'm not a violent somebody also. But until one day... I think '99 or '98... he used to go and drink in the other shebeen house there. So always during the day, I go and look at my house there when my husband is not there – he's at work – I've got my own keys. I can open up and see everything is all right. Then I lock up and I go back. So I think he had those things because the street people are looking. You see, they are so curious. So he said one day to me he doesn't want to see me any more to come there in the house. Okay, I never go again. I stay there, and this chap hits me and hits me. And one day, when I went back in the afternoon, I go and check at the house at his place – his mother's. When he is not there I know where he is. He's in his special quarters where he used to go and drink. When I get there, okay, I just sit there. Maybe sometimes, he also bought me some beer. Then I drink until later on in the afternoon, and then we go back home again. There was a girl... and I'm not a talkative somebody... there was a girl there. I didn't know this girl. This girl used to shout, shout, shout... performing and doing these funny things. And I didn't know this girl. So when we go home I always tell his mother, mummy, there's another lady there. She is always shouting at me. He shouted at me although he doesn't mention my name, I can hear the shouting. And this girl's uncle, he's the one who is selling liquor. Now he just take her out and push her out and lock the door until we get finished – then we go home. I said, no, I think you've got something to do with this girl. Her name was Angela. He said, no, no, I've got nothing to do with her. Until one Sunday afternoon, I just go and look where he is. I couldn't find him where he was, and they told me, no, he's gone to the swimming pool. He bought a case of beer and he goes with the other girl to the swimming pool. So I just went to look at him there at the swimming pool. So I couldn't find him and I just go back home. I didn't want to go and look for him around town. It was night and he didn't come back. I just wake up early – about 7 o'clock on the Monday morning – and we went to that lady's house and look for him. Luckily I met him on the way that morning with this girl. He said, no, he's got nothing to do with her. So the other one is the owner of the house. They sleep there in that Lady's house. Now I just check it so I've seen what I wanted to see, so I turn my back and go back home. When I get home I tell his mother, mummy, I'm upset. You've got something to do with Angela because I met him; they were sleeping at Rose's house. So like that. The other day... it was on a Monday... ja. On the Tuesday when I past by in the other street, I saw this girl. They were sitting in the other house there. Shouting and shouting at me, but doesn't mention name. And I get home; I always tell this guy's mother everything. I say, mummy, Angela is always passing remarks at me. So it was right the word I was telling. On Wednesday, on was on my

way back from work, I met this girl on the way. I just pass by. So she saw by the back. She said, Jane? I turned back and I look at her. I think she wanted to see, maybe, am I not going to say funny things because the previous day she slept with this guy. Maybe I'm going to shout at her or say anything. I just turn back. She asked me, don't you want a beer? I can buy you a beer. I said, I'm a person who doesn't like to drink everyday. That day was a sunny day – that Wednesday. I said, okay, you can buy me – and I'm from work. I don't like to go now. But I didn't say anything because maybe... I don't know if she wants to try me on what I'm going to say. So she said, okay, I'm going to buy you this beer and then I'll leave it with you. I said it was okay. When we get at this place she bought two beers instead of one beer as she said. Okay, she drank two glasses and then she left me behind. So I waited until she went out. I drink about two or three glasses and then I left the others to the other people who were sitting there. I said, okay, you can have this beer. I'm from work you see. I've got a lot to do at home. I told the mother when I get home. I said, mamma, I met Angela - and so and so. But then this guy's mother said to me, no, she is trying to ask an apology the other way because she shouted at you yesterday. I said to his mother, I said no, I also thought the same thing. That was on the Wednesday. On the Thursday now, the day this murder happened, I was sitting in the back of our room. I was reading the papers that I had brought that previous day – the Wednesday – from work. So this mother-in-law of mine is in church now – afternoon church on Thursdays. Now this guy isn't back yet. I'm alone here reading the paper. I hear the noise at the back of the houses here. We've got a gate at the back. We locked up the gate. At night we lock. Now I'm sitting listening to this noise going on here. I thought to myself, maybe it's drunk people shouting and fighting. I didn't take any notice. Maybe somebody is coming. But I hear the noise is coming nearer and nearer. I thought, let me stand up and look. Only to find that, no, the person who is shouting and standing at our gate is this girl. I just went out with this coffee mug. I was drinking coffee and reading this paper. I just went out to her at the gate there. I just open up the bolt and stand in – and she was outside. I said to her, don't shout. Don't make noise because I won't hear what you want to say. Because maybe she's coming to ask something... to say something you see. I've never seen her there in that place. Now she keeps quiet. So I ask her, now, what is your problem? What do you want? She said, no, she was sent by another guy to call this one of mine. They had a special quarters where she knows they used to drink there. I said, no, he's not back yet. I'll tell him when he comes back to go through. And she knows he will go there because that's where he used to cool down and have some beers in the afternoon. Then he comes back. He is a gambler. He is not working. I thought maybe I'm finished with her. Maybe she's going to go. She just pushed in the gate and the coffee fell on me – spilt on my overalls. I didn't say anything – but get inside the yard. But I didn't say anything. I was so shocked. I just followed her. She wants to go and see in the room. Maybe he is there – and I'm just lying to her you see. But I didn't say anything. I just followed her. Then I came to the door and I stepped one side. I waited. Maybe she's going to peep in or get inside. And it was not even a big room. It was just a coffee table like this, and a bed and an armchair. Everything we are doing inside the house because it's only three of us, the mother, the guy and myself. So I'm just standing with this coffee mug in my hand. I was waiting to see what action she was going to take. She didn't even look inside. She just grabbed this coffee mug out of my hand and hit me with this coffee mug. It fell down and broke. I had a cut somewhere here. Blood was streaming down now. So I thought to myself, I'm on my own and alone here. I don't want to make any trouble. My mother-in-law is in church. Let me just push her out of the yard. I'm not a fighting type somebody you see. I just push her out of the yard. Now she was even shouting and shouting, but I didn't listen to what she was trying to say. But I just push her out of the yard. I get by the gate; now I want to close the gate. I'm full of blood. My eyes are closed and I just wipe my eyes with my hand and onto my overalls. I see down in the sand on the ground a knife. It's a table knife with a beige handle. Now I bend slowly... I want to pick up because I can't go quickly because my eyes are closed and full of blood. Now I bend slowly to pick up this knife. So I thought maybe the knife fell out from her because by the time I went to the gate there was no knife there. So she just bend down quickly and pick it up. I thought, she felt it when it fell out, but maybe she didn't see it because she was making a noise. When she gets up I grabbed her arm at the wrist. Now I want to take this knife away from her because I don't know what she's going to do. So I'm battling... I want to take this knife from her. Now the sharp point was out on this side. Now I can't hold it there because it's going to cut me. Now, I think she had an idea of pulling back her arm from my hand. She pulled her arm

and now the sharp point is out here. Now, I didn't think that it was going to maybe stab her or hit her or something like that. I just pulled her arm back. Now my hand was off from her. Now I saw she dropped the knife. Then she goes out. And her aunt stays in the same block where we stay – but at the last door. I pick up the knife. There she goes. When she goes I see, no, mos this lady is bleeding - and I'm also full of blood. She goes to her aunt's yard. Now I'm standing; I don't know what to do. I'm alone. When I was still standing, there she comes back again. Our toilets are outside and not inside the yard. There she stands in front of our toilet door. I look at her. She is still shouting. I don't know what to do. I'm confused because I'm alone here. Must I go to the church? The church is not so far. Must I go and call the mother-in-law? What must I do? I look at her. Must I take a basin and wash her maybe? I'm not worried now about my cut because I don't know how big is this one of mine – but I'm full of blood. Now I thought to myself, she's still rude and she's still shouting, let me leave her. She is shouting and I am looking at her. I think she gets tired. She sits in front of the toilet door. I thought to myself, ag, let me go to the church and call my mother-in-law. But I was worried that maybe the street people are going to see me running down the street full of blood. But, ag, never mind. Let me go to church. The church is not so far. On the way I met this guy of mine. He comes back from town now you see. He saw me. He said, who hit you? I said, no, Angela again come and make trouble with me. And where's mummy? I said, no, mummy is in church. I'm going now to mummy. Now he turns back with me and we go to church to mummy. At the church I stand outside and he goes in at the door. Mummy saw him and came out. She was so shocked to see me. I've still got this knife on me. I think maybe the mother thought maybe we both were fighting. I said, no mummy, Angela was there; come to make trouble with me. Mummy said, no, we can just go to the police station. The police station is opposite the church. So the mother-in-law did even go back now inside the church. I think she just goes and fetches her jersey and the bible. Then she goes home. And I go to the police station and I report this case to the police station – to the policemen there – and there was an ambulance standing there outside the police station. Now I tell this policeman, and this policeman said to me, if you feel like that you can go to a hospital. There's an ambulance standing outside. I said, no, I don't want to go to a hospital. Because now I'm scared that maybe they're going to stitch me... now I'm going to have a cut like this – a mark like this on my forehead when I get stitches. I said, no, I'm not going to the hospital. I'm going to get myself some ointment to take this off. He said, okay, if you see it does get worse, here's a paper and you can go to the day hospital. I said, let me take this paper – and I went home. When I got home I got the mother; they were busy cleaning my blood here inside the house. I told my mother, mummy, I'm not going to go to hospital. They gave me this paper – I just throw it in the dustbin. Now she said, just go and undress yourself and soak those clothes of yours in the water and go and wash yourself. I ask mummy, when you come back from church, did you get Angela here at the back? Because she was sitting there at the toilet door at the back. She said, no, she was not there. I think she was gone already. While I was busy preparing a meal for supper now, I'm telling this story of Angela. It's me and this guy and his mother now. I'm talking of this happening with Angela here. While we are sitting there, comes this other girl who stays in this Angela's aunt's yard. I was busy cooking and standing and standing on the stoep, and I was listening because she was chatting with the mother. She said, I've just come to tell you that Angela died on the way to hospital. Mmmm, the spoon just fell out of my hand. I get shock now because she died maybe of that cut! Now I am so shocked. I put my hands on the *deck* and I just collapsed and fainted there. So they picked me up and go and put me in the bed. I don't know what happened after that. My mother-in-law tried to get me right. But it takes a time so I could get to my senses. And that night we didn't sleep at the back. So she said, no, we must come and sleep in the dining room. We'll pull out the couch. Maybe they will burn us. Her brother is a violent somebody you see. So we slept that night in the house. The next day, during the day, there came a private car. It's CID with this girl's uncle. Where's Jane? They said, no, here is Jane. They said, come Jane. I must just go with them. Mother said, no, just take your jersey with you. Maybe you'll not come back now. So I go and fetch my jersey. I took my jersey. They took me to the police station. They put me behind a counter. I was sitting there. Now I see the time is going on now. It goes, goes, goes. It's getting late now. I ask this policeman, are you going to lock me up? He said, yes... this is 99's case... I ask this policeman, are you going to lock me up? He said, yes, sissy. I said, why don't you tell me so that I can phone my people so they go and let my children know? Then my children can go and tell my family in Cape Town. So can I use the phone?

They said, yes, I can use the phone. I phone the mother-in-law. I ask her to tell this guy to go and tell my children in my house to go and tell my sister. So I was locked up. I was out of my nerves! I didn't know which police station they'd locked me up that time, but it was about a week. I appear in court in Parow. They lock me up. They brought me here. That is where I was locked up. So my sister paid the bail. They took me out on bail. So my sister get me a lawyer. So I appear in court. I had to go to the lawyer and make a statement. So I appear in court. So I won the case in '99. This was finished in '99. So in 2001, came the CID and the paper again. The case is up again. I was so shocked with this mother-in-law. I said, no, I must let my sister know. My sister is in Porterville. So I go to my sister and let my sister know. So my sister didn't have money for a lawyer again, so I had a state lawyer this time. So I appear in court. This was in 2001. The first appearance in court they said, no, they postpone the case. This was in December. They said, no, they postpone the case to 2002 on the 28th of January because they can't find the death certificate of this lady in the docket. But it sounds so funny to me. Where is the death certificate? Don't they keep that docket themselves there? How can you just get... I was just thinking that to myself. My sister was thinking the same thing. She was talking now about that. So my sister said, no, I must also tell the lawyer about that. So that was in 2001. So I think they've planned this already – I must have Christmas and New Year and everything outside. So the 28th of January I appeared in court. This was 2002. Now, I've never been in court before. This is my first time. Now there's another guy who helps this lady's father in this case – so now they've brought a private doctor. So this private doctor... he is the one who dragged me into this case. He said, no, I did mean to kill that lady so I stabbed her; the knife goes down the spinal cord. Now, this state lawyer of mine, he was sitting there. Now I just shook my head and looked at the magistrate because I don't know if I can talk myself or what – because I've never been in court. You did mean to kill this girl. The knife went down the spinal cord. How can a table knife like this... down from here, because it was a cut here down... how can it go to the spinal cord? And the magistrate, prosecutor and this guy who help this lady's father, they go there in this other door where the magistrate is. They go and stand there and speak one side there. I was standing here in front. They call me mos to appear. But there they go to stand one side to chat. But the doctor just made his own statement. So he was paid to come and make this statement – he must come and drag me into this case you see. So that is why they said they couldn't find the death certificate. So they brought this private doctor. So when he's finished giving his statement he just goes – left. So now this prosecutor, magistrate, this lady's father and this guy were standing there chatting one side. When they come back they said, okay, and they come and sit there in their places. Now I had the state lawyer this time. So this lawyer didn't stand for me as that one before you see. He just comes to me and says, the magistrate says you must go and stand there. You must just cry so that they feel sympathy for you. Now I look at this lady. What must I cry for! I'm saying that inside me. Now, she also knew that I was going to be sentenced. She knew that. Now they say, if I have something to say, I must go and stand in the witness box. So I went to stand in the witness box. I just said, no, I've got a child. My daughter had a baby that year. I'm looking after my daughter's child. My daughter is going back to school. They just said to me, the daughter is old enough. She herself can look after the child. So I was so embarrassed inside because the court was so full. Because the family came with their friends – they came with the *darkies*. Full of people, and they knew that I was going to be sentenced. So I stand there and stand there waiting to be sentenced. The magistrate was just summarising. He talks about 15 years – someone who kills somebody – about 15 years. So now he makes as if he's got sympathy for me for giving me these 8 years – which is the thing that they were discussing there one side. So he just said to me, 8 years. But that day I just pray inside for the Lord to keep me strong, and I was so strong I didn't even have tears that time. So it was 8 years. I don't like to talk about this because it makes me sore inside. Because I have never been in prison. After that – when I was sentenced – my sister get shocked; she died. You see, I've lost my family now. And she is my second eldest sister and she's everything to us because I've got no mother and father any more. So she is the one who is looking after us.

Adelene: Is she the one who was shot?

Jane: No, she was the one who get shocked and she died when I was going to be sentenced. And she is the one who paid for the lawyer for me...

Adelene: For the first time.

Jane: Ja, for the first time.

Adelene: So did she get shocked by it?

Jane: Ja, she was a sick person, and now she get shocked. And that first week when I was here in prison they tell me she is in hospital. During the week they came to us to go to the funeral. She died. So I couldn't go to the funeral. They didn't allow me to go because they say I'm still new so I can't go.

Adelene: It must have been very painful that you couldn't go to her funeral.

Jane: Tjsoe! And even after that, I told the social worker about my story and how I don't separate with my husband you see. I want to get my husband back. We are not divorced. We are just separated because he left me in the house. He goes out and he tells me that I can get myself a man. So I met this man. So now I want to ask for an apology for my husband. I want to go back to my husband when I get out of here. So they said, Jane, just keep on inviting your husband. Ever since that year, I keep on writing, writing, writing to my husband – but I never get any reply from that year. I thought to myself, maybe he gets these letters but he doesn't even read these letters. Maybe he throws these letters away in the dustbin. That is what I'm thinking because I don't get any reply. One time my eldest daughter came to visit me. I asked her, did your father get my letters? I always write to him. She said, ye mamma, even the card you sent him. I asked the other lady to make me a card you see for my husband. She said, no, the card you sent to daddy, he hangs it up in the room. So I was so glad inside. I felt relief to see... even the letters, she said, no, he keeps all the letters ever since I came in here. I wrote him the letters, asking him to come and asking for an apology. So she said, no, he keeps the letters. And my eldest son – my first-born – he stays with my sister ever since I was separated from my husband. My sister mos took the children. So she said, no, he also gives my son these letters to read. Read what your mother is writing. So I ask my daughter, why does your father keep his letters? She said, no, he wants you to see what you've been writing in these letters when you come back. But he doesn't want me in the house because in the beginning he said, no, I must give my sister's address. So I gave my sister's address. But I'll try on my own when I'm outside to try and get contact with him. Because I want to go back to my husband you see. I still need my husband. I still love my husband – and I couldn't do anything because I needed somebody at that time because I was also out of work. I needed somebody to support me because I didn't want to put my husband for this support business for the children you see. Now, if I do those things it will sound as if I don't want him any more. But I didn't say that to my sister. My sister was giving me advice you see. So that is how it happened. And since that time, this guy only came in 2002 – that first year I was in here. He came only that year. After that, he never came back again. I never saw him again. But I've heard he's got another girl out here and he's got a baby now with that girl. So I never get any more worried about them and phone as I used to phone those years. I would phone his mother. But I didn't even phone his mother – because I used to phone his mother. Weekends mos we phone our families you see.

Adelene: So you still used to keep contact with her – but not any more.

Jane: Not any more. Because even his mother didn't tell me the truth on the phone. When I asked her, why does Ladu not come and visit me any more? She just said to me, no, he doesn't have money. You know how the gambling business goes on. But my children told me, no mummy, he is involved with another girl and that girl is pregnant. So I phoned the mother and I told the mother, why did you lie to me? You are not telling me the truth. Because you know mos, I know boet Ladu likes girls. So I was not going to worry myself because many people used to get those things – their husbands, when they are in trouble, they don't visit each other. And I am a married woman still. So I'm not worried myself. One thing I'm going to do, I'm just going to try and go back to my house. So if there's problem I can go back to my husband. He never came to visit me. Even his mother never came to visit me. Even my children, I don't have any visits. I don't get any visits because my children were young... they were still schooling mos those years. They weren't working. But they both have got children.

Adelene: And the older two, do they come?

Jane: No. So I don't get any visits here. By this December, maybe I'll be out.

Adelene: And then you will go and stay with your sister.

Jane: I'm going to stay with my sister but I'll try...

Adelene: To get back to your husband.

Jane: To get back to my husband again. He didn't make any means maybe to try and divorce me while I'm here, so I don't know what is his mind you see.

Adelene: You said earlier you were together since the seventies and that you were very happy.

Jane: With my husband. Oh yes, a happy life.

Adelene: So what do you think happened? Because he just walked out.

Jane: He just moved out, and I never caught him with another girl ever since we were together. I don't know. I don't know what I've done. I don't know. You see, we had good times together. He used to work, and Fridays, when he got his wages, he would come back to home and give his wages to me. I was also working. And anything I wanted to buy, he doesn't mind. He said he'll pay. He's got everything. You can do what you like. So we were a happy family. I don't know what happened.

Adelene: So you didn't have any indication that he was going to move out? No signs?

Jane: No. And we did never fight. He only once smacked me – only once. And he knows that I also drink and he does also take drink. So we were a happy family with our kids. We had two girls and two boys, so after the fourth child, no, can get sterilised because we don't need any more children you see. So I don't know what happened.

Adelene: And even through all of that, he didn't make any move to divorce you.

Jane: No, not at all. He was involved with this lady. I don't know this girl, but I got a letter in the letterbox because his letters and my letters, I open once you see. So it made an account for this girl. This girl is also from Guguletu. I saw in the letter that she stays in Guguletu. But I saw this letter in his jacket. He was away – I don't know when – and this lady was in Ciskei. They slept in a hotel, the Amatola Inn. I've never heard about that hotel Amatola Inn until I saw it in the letter in my husband's jacket. And he opened an account for this lady at *De Bruin* in Cavendish Square. It's a ladies' shoe shop. It is an expensive shop; that pair of shoes was 395. And I still opened up that account. I put it there so that he can get it when he comes back. I don't know what's taking place. When I asked him, are you involved with this girl – this Sandra. Because he knows that I saw this girl's name on that letter. Now I asked him, what is her surname? Now, he also tells me – he didn't hide anything.

Adelene: Was that the time when you were still together?

Jane: Yes, we were still together. It was before I moved out, yes. I thought, maybe he has gone away to stay with this girl. I don't know. I didn't know where he was staying by the time he moved out of the house. But every morning he comes back. I don't think he had to travel from Guguletu to make a turn in the house in Langa and back to Guguletu – it's a lot of money. I think maybe he was still around in Langa... I don't know. I don't even know till now where he was staying that time.

Adelene: But he would just come back every morning.

Jane: Ja. And until the two boys get into trouble – my two sons... they were at my sister's place. My sister took them mos. They were staying with my sister now. My sister put them in school. So they came and complained to me. They said, mummy, we don't get enough everything that is needed at school. We are going to make our own meals ourselves to see what we can do. I thought, yes, my children were spoiled. They got everything they wanted. I opened anything I wanted. My husband didn't mind. He gave me the money and I can do anything I want with the money in the house. Until these two boys got into trouble. They were caught... some old man send them to go and steal cars and they got into trouble. They were in jail. The place is called *Siakhatala*. I think it's in Stellenbosch. I have never been there. Even when my children were still under age they were there, and I've never been there. Even then my sister was nice to me to make plans to get them out of there. The second eldest one, he was supposed to be thirty this year if he was still alive. He was stabbed in Guguletu. He was chased by other boys and they caught him and stabbed him – so he died that year. I don't know what year, but before I came to prison. It was between '99 and 2000. So my husband arranged for the funeral at my sister's place. So the funeral was at my sister's place. The eldest one was still in prison that time.

Adelene: Was it also for stealing cars?

Jane: Yes, the cars. The old man used these children. Then my sister found out who used the children to do this. So she found out that it was another man from Porterville. She was the one who was looking after them. Now they said that they wanted to try and use their own means to do their own thing because they not getting everything they want at school. Only to find out that they were going to steal cars. They are going to be used by somebody else to steal these cars. He is making business for the children.

Adelene: But it seems like your sister really sort of... she was almost like a mother to you.

Jane: That was what I was saying – she was a mother... she was everything to all of us since we were young. She was the eldest now; she was the second eldest who was left. And she's got her own six children mind you.

Adelene: So she looked after you and after your children.

Jane: After my children, and her children too. But ja, she died.

Adelene: It must have been quite difficult, because she was so important to you.

Jane: Tsjoe, she was very important. Very important. And I don't even know what is her daughter doing now. When I left her and came to prison she had three children. My sister's second son died also. He was also stabbed there in Cape Town. But I don't know where is the third one. I think he stays on his own with his girlfriend – I don't know – because they never came to visit me. Because I knew there wouldn't be anybody for me when my sister died you see. Our parents' house is in Jacksonville also, so my brother who came after me, when he was six my sister took him. He stays with my sister. My sister is trying to get some medicine – something to get him ready. But I don't know what was wrong with his brain. So my sister took some people to lodge there in the house while there's nobody. So now I don't know if those people are still there – or my brother goes back there. I don't know.

Adelene: Because now that your sister is gone you don't have contact.

Jane: No contact. Nothing.

Adelene: It's quite difficult to be in here and then not know what is happening with your family.

Jane: Ja, your family. I never thought of coming to prison at my age! I came in on the 28th of January 2002. The next month, the 20th of February, it was my fiftieth birthday. At my age coming to prison... I've got four children to look after... my children was growing so nicely. I had plans for my children – the future for them – and then I came to prison. And I'm not a person who likes to go around – I'm a quiet somebody. I don't like to talk and I don't like friends. You see, I'm a quiet somebody staying at home. I'm a housewife actually. Even when I've got something to drink at home, I just stay at home. Even when I had parties for my children, do it at home with my husband and get a few friends. He didn't mind, as long as what I wanted pleased me. So now there our life goes.

Adelene: So what made you happy was to be involved with your family.

Jane: Yes, with my family.

Adelene: And be a housewife.

Jane: Ja, a housewife. Now everything was messed up.

Adelene: And that's difficult.

Jane: Mmm. I start afresh now. I don't know what's going to get right or what's going to go... I don't know what's going to happen. I really don't know. And I know it's difficult for my children to come and visit me because they are not working. Even last December, my daughter came to visit me. She came with two children of them – a child and my other daughter – the younger sister. She didn't have money to go back. I had to draw money here from my savings. We do get a little money here. We are doing some work here inside. So I had to draw... and another church lady put a fifty Rand back here for me and my property. They know that I don't get any visitors – so I've got nothing... so I had to draw that fifty Rand for my daughter on that Sunday to go back with the two children. I asked her, how did you come here? She said, no, we get a train without tickets. I said, and if you were caught with these two children? So I had to ask for the member here to make me a form so I can draw that fifty Rand. So that's last year I saw her. She came to visit me.

Adelene: When was that? Last year?

Jane: Last year.

Adelene: And the other daughter, when last did you see her?

Jane: Before that. She told me, mummy, daddy said to Sally (this one now), she said that her father said to her she is not her child. She can go and ask me. This is the younger one – that one – she must come and ask me who the father is. I said, no my child, he is your father – all of you! How can he say that to you? After that, the sister now came alone the other time. She said, no, she's gone from home. She doesn't know where she is. And I think she got pregnant now. She gave birth to that child. I don't know which home she left that child. I said to her sister, don't worry. I'll see to that. I'll go and take that child from where she left it. I don't know if she's going to work because I don't

have any contact. I don't have any visit with her. That was the last time she came and visited me, she came with this story of what the father said to her.

Adelene: And then she moved out after that.

Jane: And now she moved out. She goes to another home. I don't know where she is – if she's back or what. You see, because I don't have any contact... no contact.

Adelene: And as a mother it must be difficult.

Jane: It's difficult.

Adelene: Not knowing where your children are.

Jane: Oh! And I'm sitting here. I really don't know. It makes me sick here inside. Even the church people at the service. They know. I told them to love me and pray and pray. Even today there was another church sister who came here. I never thought my life would be like this. When this happened, even the township people couldn't believe it. They said, no, it can't be Jane because they know what type of person I am. I'm a quiet somebody and not a violent somebody. And I don't like friends. I like to be busy in the house. Even here I'm working in the laundry – the cleaner there – always keeping myself busy to see what I can do. I don't need to be told do this or do that. I just do it on my own as if this is my house.

Silence.....

Jane: I am finished talking now.

Adelene: Thank-you for talking to me...

END OF INTERVIEW

Follow-up interview Jane

Adelene: Last week you spoke about what had brought you to the female centre. I was wondering whether you had anything to add or if you had any thoughts about what we spoke about?

Jane : I was thinking about what will happen when I leave here. I have to go and stay with my sister's children because my husband didn't want to sign for me. But sister Jenny is doing her best to try and make my husband talk to him because they are going to bring us together there. But I don't know... how can I say... my husband is such a stubborn soul. It's as if he did have something against me. Maybe before he didn't have a way to get rid of me, so now he's agreed to get rid of me. Also since we separated now. But I don't know what makes him so hard now to accept it and forgive me... and to come and give himself a chance – or maybe even when I'm outside, to give himself a chance to listen to my side of the story. Because he's the cause that let me out of the house. So I wasn't strong enough to just... I'm not going to have a man. I'm going to stay with my kids although I'm not working. If he said to me, okay, get yourself a man... well, I'll get myself... I'll wait till that man comes to me. I'm not going to go to a man. He knows me – I'm not that kind of a person. I'll wait until a man approaches me, then I'll take that man... at least for... I needed somebody to give me help since I was not working and my husband was not with me. You see, I needed help from a man to support me. That was the main thing I needed at that time. To know that such... to be interested in another man because I was so disappointed when he said you can just get yourself a man. I was really disappointed. But I keep myself strong. I got this guy, and this guy in the house the first time after he heard that I'm divorce with this guy. So I said, oh well, you don't sleep in my house again. Well, I slept out. When the guy sends somebody to call me, I just go to him and come home in the morning. Because I never used to sleep out of my house. Never. It was the first time since my husband give me that opportunity to get another man. Then that guy also said, no, I want you to come and stay with me because I don't know what you're doing there at your house during the day when you are not here. I said, well, you found me like this. I married a man before. You're just upset. You're lucky you got me. Okay, keep on going back. I think it's because I know from where you are. Because I was

staying in Khayelitsha and he wanted me now to stay with him. So I moved out of my house because the children were with my sister and I was alone in the house. Okay, I'm free. I can go and stay with them. I stayed with him. That's when he got the chance of hitting me and stabbing me. So the kids are making me worried because I'm going back to my husband maybe. Maybe I'll decide, okay, he has accepted me again. These marks, you see?

Adelene: Yes.

Jane: There's another one here. Out of the blue he just stabbed me. Maybe in the afternoon, when I'm free, I want to go and visit my children on our side of the location. I just go to him where he is with his friends and I just let him know that I won't be at home. I finished cooking and doing everything, so I'm just going home. He just jumps up from the chair where he sits and just stabs me. So I had to go back again to tell his mother what had happened. But I thought to myself, I'm not going to make myself rubbish and chase men. What are my children going to think about me. I stayed with this man. I stayed with him until this thing happened. He got this girl and I didn't know he was involved with this girl. I think in my mind, since I've been here in jail, I think this lady couldn't have this boldness of coming and shouting at me and hitting me. She gave him that opportunity... those grounds... okay, you can just do what you want. You can hit everybody. Since I'm a quiet somebody, maybe you can go away because he doesn't need me now any more. Because I can't get another girl in and out there. He wants to sleep with another one – because I'm always there. I'm staying there now you see. So now he can't get rid of me. So I think he uses that lady. That lady, when she's had a drink, she is a violent somebody. That day I didn't know about the drinking because I didn't know her so much. You see, then she came and hit me. She hit me with the coffee mug. You can see I've got this mark. I think she drank a lot. So when she saw me when I past by and she called me. She told me, no, she was there with a friend. She wanted a nip of brandy and a beer. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning. I still remember, it was on a Thursday, because my mother-in-law was in church and that's why I was alone at home. Now, she heard them discussing because she was with a friend. While they were waiting for this brandy and beer, she had some discussion about me. Now she saw to them. A big mistake because I... she should have approached me in another way. You see, in a different way. Even the guy I was staying with, he was the one who was supposed to approach me in a decent way because I... as he didn't need me any more to stay there. I should have maybe gone to stay with my sister. But first he took me out of my house to come and stay with him. He can't just insult me out like that, bringing girls. Because they used to bring girls and sleep with girls there in the hokkie at the back. Then I'm sleeping with him. Then I tell his mother, mommy, I don't know what's going on here. He's got a girl here. Mother said to me, no, come and sit here in the lounge in the front my child. Take some linen and make up a bed for you. So I wasn't worried. I stayed there. Because I don't know what makes me not go and stay with my family. But I needed to go back to my husband but I didn't know how to approach my husband for that. He didn't want me you see. I don't know for what good reason. Because he is the cause of all the shit that I'm in - and being in jail. Because I'm not a trouble maker. I didn't grow up like that. Even when I was with my husband, we never had a fight. So really, I don't know what happened.

Adelene: So how would you describe yourself? What kind of a person were you when you were growing up and later when you got married?

Jane: I can say I grew up as a sweet, quiet child. My sisters and brothers... we used to play together. When I grew up I didn't have friends because we were a lot of brothers and sisters. So we were playing together. Maybe we were playing on the street, but when the lights come on we know that we must be inside the house. Don't play outside until late. If maybe I'm sent to the shop by my mother, I know I have to go straight to the shop. I don't go and play around with friends. So I just go to the shop and come back again. School time... I was schooling at Jacksonville one because we moved to Porterville... Bantu areas. We stayed in Portlands Estate and did our schooling in Porterville. So after school I have to catch a bus straight to Portlands and go home. So even then at my age... even at school I didn't like friends. Even here inside I don't have friends. I like to stay in my room just quiet and read. I don't like to talk a lot. Even when outside I used to drink... but I didn't even have friends.

Adelene: So you were the type of child who just kept to yourself and played with your brothers and sisters.

Jane: Ja.

Adelene: And what were your parents like?

Jane: Oh, sweet parents. We never had a fight you know. Even in front of us, I never saw my mother and my father argue, not even a single day. Maybe when my father used to go out on weekends to a meeting with other fathers, when he comes back... maybe he had a drink at that meeting... he never had a fight with my mother. I can't tell a lie. That's how we grew up.

Adelene: And when you moved from Portlands, what was that like?

Jane: Ja. So we were separated now with the apartheid. We moved to the location – we moved to Jacksonville. So now, I *went* to boarding school. I wanted to be in boarding school because I wanted to learn what other countries are like. I've never been to Transkei or Ciskei. So I decided I wanted to go to boarding school. So my parents were willing to send me to boarding school. It was me and my brother after me. So we were in Transkei at boarding school. It was a Roman Catholic school. So that is where we grew up. Holidays... we only came home in December because it was too far to travel by train. We traveled by train those years. So it's too far to come back in June and back again in December, so we used to stay there in the June holidays. We go home in December and come back in January again. After that, I went to Durban. It was still a Roman Catholic boarding school. So I went there up to standard 8. So my brother was not there that time. He was on the farm. So a lot of children went to Johannesburg – and the others, all places you see. So even there I didn't like it because I was not with friends. But we were playing together – started together. But we never had a fight, no. Until I decided... my father died and I had to go back again. I said, Mommy, I'm not going back to school this year. I'll find work for myself and get some pocket money. In my mind I wanted to help my mother... my father had died you see. So my mother said, okay, if you want to work... we'll see next year that you're going back to school. So my mother let me. I found work for myself. I didn't choose what kind of work. I found a sweeping job. So I stayed there. I've got a boyfriend – I met a guy there. So I stayed with this boyfriend. My mother didn't know that I had a boyfriend. But weekends I'm off. I'm at home weekends. So until I got pregnant... I couldn't go back to school. So I told this guy, no, I'm pregnant now. I'm supposed to go back to school next year. He said, no, don't worry. Just tell your mother and then I'll marry you. This is the guy... now my husband. So my mother was happy and I was married to this guy. We stayed together with his mother. His mother and father were separated, so he was with his mother. His mother was an assistant cook in the hospital. So I stayed with them at Langa. That house of mine in Langa is mother's house. So my mother bought another house in zones when zones opened. So my mother bought herself a house there. They gave the other house to us. They put the house in our name. Otherwise... I had a family. I've got four children, two boys and two girls – lucky. So we decided, two boys and two girls are enough for us. So I got sterilised so I wouldn't have any children any more. It was fine. Life kept going on. Our children grew up nicely. Until one day we decided... you know what happened... and he said make a birthday party for our children. I had everything I wanted. Even when he got his wages, he just gave his wages to me. I do everything, housework, groceries and buy clothes for the children. Sometimes we go together and do shopping. And sometimes I find myself some drinks in the street. He didn't mind. We were a happy family. But I don't know what got into his mind. He just left me with his children. The children were still very young. He never slept out one day since we were together, and there was no girl who disturbed my life with my husband. But in 1997 or 1998... because this trouble of mine when I came to jail was in 1999, he left me I look at the wardrobe and I see my husband's clothes are not there. Where's he gone! Where's he staying! When he comes in in the morning he opens up with his own key. I just phoned my sister: Sissy, I don't know where's my husband gone. He doesn't stay in the house any more. So the children are still young and I'm out of work that time. Because the people I was working for had gone overseas so I'm out of work. So my sister said, no, I'll take the children. I'll take that responsibility, then you can be alone and find another job for you. And he always comes in the house in the morning before he goes to get the train at the station. He just opens up the house with his own key. I think maybe he thought he would catch somebody with me in the house. But I'm not that kind of person who worries about boyfriends and things. I slept alone in that four-room house – and I'm not joking. And I'm not used to go and ask something from neighbours. I've never done that because I've never seen my sister or even my mother do that. So how can I come... I was happy in my life and in my marriage. I had everything I needed in my house. My fridge is always full. So there is nothing worrying me. So

now I'm not used to that. So I had nothing to eat in the house, but my sister said, okay, just give me the children. I will take the children. She stays in New Township. So she took the children and I was now staying alone. I locked myself up in the house, day and night, thinking where is this man? Where does he come from early in the morning before he goes to the station? I didn't think... I realised afterwards, oh, he's looking that there's no man maybe in the house who comes and sleeps with me there. But I didn't think it then. I thought that afterwards. But one day, he came in and he just stood in the middle of the door. Because I don't close my bedroom door at night because I'm alone. He stands there and then he goes, why don't you get yourself a man? I thought to myself, can it be my husband saying those words to me? That was because I used to love my husband. Even now I still love my husband. They weren't talking about my husband in my... They said, it looks like you are separated from your husband. I said, I don't know. I told them the story – what happened you see. But if he didn't say to me, get yourself a man, I wouldn't get myself a man. I was just going to stay there and wait for him until he comes. But I thought to myself, oh, now he doesn't want me any more. Now he says I must get myself a man. And now I'm out of work I needed somebody to help me... until I met this guy who puts me now in trouble. When I met this guy... I didn't know this guy and where's he from. But this guy approaches me. I was in the other house there in Langa. I used to maybe bring beer there and drink in the afternoon sometimes there – and then go back. I met this guy. I don't know this guy and where he's from. Maybe he's from Jacksonville or Porterville or wherever. This guy calls me and speaks to me. Okay, I greeted this guy but I don't know him. I left him that day. I thought, okay, you saw me. The next time, it was on a Friday, he came and visited me. He sent another girl – the neighbour – to call me. I came out of the house. I used to lock the doors and stay inside! No friends, no nothing. I opened up the door. This lady said, no, this other boetie is calling you. I look and see it's the guy I met there last time. I said, no, he can come because I'm alone now. So I explained to this guy what's happened between me and my husband. So he mustn't come in the house when he wants me – he must send somebody because my husband will be there. But when he comes he wants me to go with him. I said, no, I can't go and leave my house. I never leave my house. So if you want me out maybe for the day, you can sleep in my house that night, but you must know, in the morning you must wake up early because my husband comes early in the morning. Okay, he understands me. Until somebody told my husband... maybe somebody around here saw this guy one morning as he went out. My husband came into the house one day and called me into the bedroom. Why is he calling me now? He said, no, just sit here next to me on the bed. He asked me, "are you involved with Ladu?" So he knows this guy! He heard about this guy. He's also from there in Langa. So I didn't grow up in Lady Grey. I'm from Jacksonville and I'm there in Porterville because I'm married. He asked me, are you involved with Ladu? I said, yes, I'm in love with him. He said, "oh, he's not the type of guy you can be involved with." My husband is telling me that! Why did you say I must get me a man. You are my husband – how can you ask me to get a man. I said, no, it doesn't matter if he's a skollie or what. It's my own choice. So I'm alone with myself now... down you see. Because he's not a working person. He is a gambler. I didn't know his job. Because I thought, my husband left me and my husband won't come back again. I don't know where he is staying with another woman. So till my husband caught us in the house. So he is just speaking *gently* to this guy. I said, okay, you don't sleep in my house any more. So he just goes out. He is going to the station to go to work. I said to the guy, "I did wake you up in the morning, but why didn't you get up?" Because I had to get up and go early in the morning. I thought to myself, maybe he wanted to sleep so my husband must catch him maybe. That is in my mind. Then after that, I used to go when he comes and go to sleep... he stayed with his mother and would come back in the morning. When I go home to my house in the morning I just meet my husband when he goes to the station. He just passes by me. You can't say it's my husband if you don't know me. He just behaves as if he doesn't know me. He doesn't even look at me or greet me – or say anything. I just go to the house and he goes to the station. Until he decided I mustn't come in the house any more. I mustn't go in that house any more during the day. So I go again into the house. I just stayed there until my children – my two girls – came back from my sister and they stayed there with their father. Because their father mos came back now from where he was. He came back to the house now. He's staying in the house. Now I'm staying there with that man. You see, he doesn't want me now in the house. So the children always come there to me. Then I make lunch for them. Sometimes their father has a girlfriend there. This girlfriend is just... the younger daughter of mine tells me, Mommy, Daddy's

girlfriend she is abusing me and so and so. I said, no my child, just tell me where she stays and I'll see to her one day. But I didn't. I didn't know how to get hold of my husband and then I can speak to him. She must leave my children. Now, only to find that this man was involved with this girl who wants to make trouble. I won this case in '99. I won this case because my sister got me a lawyer. Because I did explain to my sister what happened. You see, this girl comes and hit me. So I was called, only to find out that this girl died on the way. They came and picked her up and she died on the way to hospital. I didn't know she had a drink before she came to me to make trouble. She was trying to be bold. She hit me. I was full of blood. I had a cut here. But when I went to the police station, I didn't want to go to hospital because they're going to stitch me now and it's going to hurt maybe. I didn't want a scar on my face you see. Because I didn't take it serious maybe that she's going to die. That afternoon, I came back from the police station and I stayed with this mother-in-law of mine. They were busy with this guy. They were cleaning my blood here in the house because I came from the back into the house you see. She said, no, just go in your room my child and wash yourself. Soak those clothes in the water. After that, we talked about what happened, but still this guy didn't say anything... sorry or what happened. Or say, no, I know that you didn't know that I was involved with Angela. I think he just wanted to get rid of me. That is what I think now while I've been here. But he didn't know how. He didn't have a chance to get another girl there... to stay with another girl because I'm staying there. But he did bring girls there. When he brings girls there I go and sleep with his mother in the lounge there in the house. Because I told him, I'm not moving from here. I'm not going anywhere. He took me out of my house to come and stay with him – and now he is doing funny things. He's playing with me fool now, so I can't change man and go from this man to another man. What are my children going to think about me? And the next thing, when my husband hears these things, how is my husband going to take me as his wife. Because I need to go back to my husband maybe one day. So if I change men my husband won't respect me any more.

Adelene: And that changing men, what is there...

Jane: it's your dignity you see, because then the men are talking bad about women after they have used us. They say, ah, that woman is a rubbish. So I'm not used to that to change men. Ever since I met my husband I never had another man. He was not my first boyfriend. But if I have a man, I don't have a second man on the side you see. I just stick to that person, until maybe whatever happens, separates us.

Adelene: And the boyfriends that you had before you met your husband, what were they like?

Jane: Oh, They were fine. They were okay. We just got separated without any trouble. They never hit me you see. I was never hit by another man before I met my husband. Because I'm not a violent person. I'm a quiet person you see. If he said to me do this, I can't say no I'm not going to do this – and shout and do. Just like my husband... my husband never hit me. Even if I had a drink and I go opposite to another... even if I go to the shebeen opposite my house, I come back to my house. My husband just says, no, you are drunk. Where did you go? He knows that I'm doing my housework properly everyday, so there's no problem. There are no friends around or anything. I didn't give him the trouble – but he didn't like me to drink. But I had to take time now to stop drinking. So we separated before I stopped drinking.

Adelene: So he didn't like the fact that you were drinking.

Jane: No. But I told him mos, you met me and you knew that I'm drinking. But now I'm married and have got children as well, when the children are older now they didn't mos like me to drink. So he wanted me to stop drinking.

Adelene: And what about the drinking didn't he like?

Jane: To drink?

Adelene: Yes. Did he tell you why he didn't want you to drink?

Jane: He didn't tell me why he didn't want me to drink. Because I'm doing my housework properly and looking after my children properly. You see, there wasn't any excuses like you didn't do the housework or you're just wasting the money. You know, that kind of thing. So then maybe he knows the reason why he left me for another girl – I don't know. Because even when he left me, he didn't say it's for such and such a reason. No, he didn't tell me. He just says, I'm involved with Nonsama. He even told me the girl's name.

Adelene: And up until that point when he got involved with Jacqui, what was your relationship with him like?

Jane: With my husband?

Adelene: With your husband.

Jane: What's the relationship like?

Adelene: With him, yes, before he left, what was your relationship like with him?

Jane: No, we were fine. It was okay. Because he didn't show me any signs that he was involved with another girl. But there were letters that got to the house. You see, I received an account. I never had an account for shoes or for clothes even for my children. I always buy lay-by or pay cash. The only account I used to have furniture account, and with those accounts I make it a point to pay within a year because then it's the cash price. Within a year I finish my account. So he can't say, no, I wasted money on drinking because everything I wanted in the house. I used to say that I want to buy this now, and he was free. "You can buy what you want." And I'm having the money, so he can't say we are wasting the money on drinking. So I don't know what was the reason why he left me. And he's got an account for this Jacqui and it came to the house. He is working, so why didn't he give his work address? Then he can't receive it privately. So I used to open his letters. You see, I'm married now – it's my husband. I opened up the letter and saw it was from Cavendish Square, De Bruin Shoes. De Bruin shoes are so expensive. I know the brand. It's R295 for one pair of shoes. It's under my husband's name but it's ladies' shoes. Who are these shoes for? Because my husband never bought me shoes. I just put the letter on top of the table until he came back from work. I said, there's an account for you. Who did you buy the pair of shoes for? Because I know he hasn't got sisters. He didn't give me an answer. Okay, I didn't argue or ask him a lot. Until one day I got a letter from... I checked in the wardrobe. I don't know what made me do it because I never fetch my husband's letters. I got a letter here. It's my husband's letter. This lady's name is Jacqui. When he came back from work I asked him, Daddy, what is this girlfriend's name? Now he was so proud of telling me! He didn't even say Jacqui but he said Jacee. I was so hurt! Because he was just bragging in front of me you see. I asked him what is her surname and he said Adams. He didn't hide anything from me. I also found a card from Amatola Inn. It's a hotel now. Was my husband in Ciskei? Maybe this girl is from Ciskei. When did my husband go to Ciskei? Even when he takes his clothes out of the house – I don't know where – because I was never out of my house. I don't know when was he supposed to have gone. He was in Ciskei, and I don't know what this girl is doing in Ciskei... schooling or what. But this Amatola Inn is a hotel. I found out from people, yes, Amatola Inn is a hotel in Ciskei. I don't know what happened in that time, honestly. Even when I told my section member about my husband's story... because I'm married so this trouble puts me... this guy puts me in trouble. It's not my husband. It's just a boyfriend I met since I was separated from my husband. Now, how can I make contact with my husband and apologise - because I want my husband back. I still love my husband. I just want somebody to advise me. So I ask from my section member. He said, no Jane, just keep on writing to him. Just keep on writing. I write letters to my husband, asking for an apology. I wanted him to come and visit me. I know he was never in jail – and this is also my first time in prison. I asked him to come and visit me. I want to speak to him. He never wrote me back. I don't know how many letters I wrote from last year. No answer. I thought to myself, maybe he is not reading the letters. Since I'm in prison he just throws the letters away. Until my daughter came and visited me last year... she said, "no Mommy, Daddy has got that card." You see, I asked the other guard to make me a card. "Daddy has the card in his bedroom." And he called my other son, who is still staying with my sister in Crossroads, he called him there and he just gave my son this letter to read. "And Daddy is keeping those letters in the house," my daughter tells me. I said, no, but he doesn't want me in the house now. How can I go there. How is he going to show me these letters because he doesn't want me there. He didn't even sign for me for the parole. But my daughter told me that he keeps the letters. But I thought to myself, no, maybe he threw the letters away because I didn't get any response. I keep on writing and writing. So I was relieved when I heard that. I was relieved to know that he still keeps the letters. Like even this sister Jenny, she is still going to make a plan to get us together.

Adelene: And what did you want to apologise to him for?

Jane: Ja, for what happened and makes me to come to prison. I just wanted to explain to him how did it happen. Okay, maybe he did hear that it was not my fault. And I won the case in 99, but those people got a private doctor to drag me in. So they wanted me to be jailed. And so I heard the story while I was in prison and when I was phoning my mother-in-law of this boyfriend of mine. She told

me, no, we heard that you won that case – and the people in the township heard that. And the people they did say, no, they don't believe it was me who killed that lady. They know me, that I'm a quiet somebody. You see, I'm not a troublesome body. And I don't talk outside. I'm better here now. I even tell the inmates here. I say, I'm better here. They will be so surprised outside if I can talk like this. Because outside I'm quiet. I don't talk. I don't like friends. My friend is my husband. Even that boyfriend... my friend is my boyfriend. I used to be with him. Maybe, when he goes to drink, I'm always with him then. We are drinking together maybe. I don't have a next person... a friend of mine... no.

Adelene: So you didn't really have other friends apart from your boyfriend.

Jane: Yes. Even when I was staying in my house and I wanted to take myself out, I used to take a bus and taxi to go to New Cross to go to my sister to spend maybe the Sunday there. Then I would come back again. I don't go around in the township with friends.

Adelene: And when you go out to the shebeen for a drink?

Jane: I'm always alone. Maybe if my boyfriend isn't with me, I'm alone. I'm maybe just sitting at that table and having a few glasses. Maybe when I had enough, I just leave it for the next person to find.

Adelene: So you always keep to yourself.

Jane: To myself. I don't even share my problems with the next person.

Adelene: Have you always been like that?

Jane: I grew up like that. Even when I was separated from my husband, because nobody knows in that area. Maybe we had a fight. My husband is gone and I'm alone. Maybe they see when my husband comes in the morning and then goes again. They see maybe some other man coming to my place. I grew up like that. So I'm too old now. I can't start doing funny things.

Adelene: So what happened with Angela... I mean, from what you are saying it seems out of character for you...

Jane: Because when I heard... that lady came and told this guy's mother – because I was standing by the stove busy cooking supper. Now I was listening to what they were talking. I just heard the girl say, no, I've just come to tell you that Ntombosi died on the way to hospital. The spoon just fell out of my hand. I'm standing in front of the four-plate electric stove. So I was busy there. "She died on the way to hospital." The spoon just fell out of my hand. I just put my head into my hands. I was now going out of the back to my room. I just collapsed there because I got so dizzy. Because it was not my intention. I had nothing against her. But I was trying to defend myself because she hit me first. Because I tell her, no, Ladu is not here. When she comes she's shouting and making noise. I said, no, don't make noise.

Adelene: What was she saying?

Jane: No, I didn't even listen to her because I don't know her you see. Maybe she's talking to somebody coming or behind me or what. So now I just wanted to listen why did she want to come here. I just opened the gate because she was outside. So I'm inside. I just open the bottom there. I said, no, just keep quiet. Then she kept quiet, and I said, okay, I'm listening now. She said, no, I was sent by another body to call Lado. I said, well, I'll tell boet Lado when he comes here to go there to the special quarters where he used to *live* –because she met him there. It's his uncle's joint where he used to drink. So I thought maybe I'm finished with her; she's going to go now. Then she just pushed in the gate. Now, I had a coffee mug here because I was drinking coffee and reading my Argus I brought from work yesterday. She just pushes in the gate and the coffee spills on me. I didn't shout because I was so surprised. There she goes through, inside now. I just followed her. I followed her. I didn't even ask her where are you going to now. Who told you to come here in the yard. So I just followed her. I just want to deal with her. What is this girl doing in front of the kids there. I thought that maybe she's going to look inside – but there was no need to get inside because there's only a bed, a coffee table and an armchair. So she's just going to stand in the door and look. So now I stand like this, holding this coffee mug and watching what she's going to do. Maybe she'll go in and look. Now she didn't even do that. She just grabbed this coffee mug out of my hand and hit me with it. I didn't say a word. I just pushed her. I don't want any trouble because I'm alone and mother-in-law is in church. So I just tried to push her out of the yard. And I was bleeding... I was full of blood. I just wipe the blood out of my eyes with my hand. She was checking; she didn't even want to go out of there. And she was shouting ba-ba-ba. I didn't take any notice. She had a drink

you see. I met Ladu here you see. I thought, no, I'm just trying to chase her away. She goes away. I said when she goes, no man, this lady is bleeding. I'm standing now inside the yard. I didn't even go out. She's going now... her aunt stays in the same block, the last door. She goes there. Now I'm standing there holding this knife and thinking, what's happened now? And I'm alone here. mommy is in church. While I'm still standing outside, here comes this lady again. She's making that noise and shouting. She's bleeding. Now I look at how she is bleeding. Take a basin maybe and wash her? I thought, maybe she is not bad. Now she is standing in front of our toilet because our toilet is outside and behind the gate you see. There she's standing. I thought to myself, oh, she is still shouting. Let me leave her. She is standing there bleeding and I was also full of blood. I had to wipe my eyes. I look at her, thinking now how can I go to church and call mommy. I can't go out because she's still screaming. I thought to myself, oh, there she sits now in front of the toilet. I think now she is tired of shouting. I thought to myself, let me go to church. The church is not so far. Let me go. I go inside the house I'm going to church now On the way I met this boyfriend of mine. He said, oh, who hit you? I said, no, it's Angela. She was there, coming to make trouble with me. Where is she now? I said, no, she's sitting there in front of our toilet. Our toilet door is locked during the day so you need a key to get in. And he asked me, where is mommy? I said, no, mommy is in church. He just goes with me to the church to mommy. When we get to the church we just go in. Mommy saw him at the door. Mommy comes out. Mommy was so shocked when she saw me full of blood. She said, oh, what happened! She thinks now that her son hit me. I said, no mommy, it's Angela again. Because I used to tell his mother about Angela. I go there to her uncle when my boyfriend used to drink. Angela always shouted there – but I don't know this girl. Always when I go there she has a few tots of brandy and then she starts shouting ba-ba-ba. Then her uncle used to lock her out. I didn't know that there was something between her and this boyfriend of mine. But I think her uncle knew. But I'm quiet because I can't answer her back and she's not pointing at me. She is not referring to me and she is not mentioning my name, so I can't answer her back. But I was suspicious. Because when I get home I always tell my mommy, mommy, I think Ladu is involved. There's something with Angela and Ladu. Because when I go there she is always shouting and passing remarks. Until one Sunday he didn't sleep there. I went to look for him. I met them in the morning. But I just turned back and went back home. I didn't say a word because I know he is not my husband – he is a boyfriend. So I've got nothing to do with him. I can't fight for him, because the person I can fight for is my husband. I'm not divorced from my husband. I can't fight for another man you see. I took it that way. When I stayed with him I never fought with my husband's girlfriends and I never met his girlfriends. So you can do anything you want because you will tell me that I'm not married to you. You've got your own husband. Until I was in court again. I was locked up. My sister was still alive. I got out in '99 on bail. My sister got me a lawyer and she told the lawyer what had happened. We won the case. The second time... I think there was a plan with another guy from Porterville. He used to be my husband's friend. Because this guy used to go to my house when I was still with my husband. So this guy bought a doctor who was going to drag me in this case. So this case was picked up for the second time. So they bought a private doctor. And this private doctor, he is the one who dragged me in this case. So now I didn't have a private lawyer because my sister didn't have money now. So I had a state lawyer. The state lawyer, he also knew about this case. He was also involved with them because he didn't say a word for me in court. He just came in front of me when I was standing there and said, you must stand in the witness box yourself and you must just cry so that the magistrate can have sympathy. I said, for what must I cry? Because even in court we just go and stand there on one side in the corner. It's the magistrate, the prosecutor and this guy, Lado's father, and then there's the girl's father. They just go and stand there. Because I was so shocked when I saw this guy in court because thought, what is he in this family? Because he is not related to this family. Only to find out that he's the one who helped the lady's father in this case. That's how I get in here.

Adelene: Do you know why he did it?

Jane: Because this lady's father wanted me to be jailed. So they didn't like the fact that I had won the case and was free. And this guy, he used to be my husband's friend because he used to go to my house before. So maybe he was also against me you see. I can put it that way. But I don't know what makes this guy to be involved in this case. So I think he was also paid by this lady's father to do the job you see. Because they picked up the case in 2001. They postpone... they arranged everything and let me have Christmas and New Year outside. Because when I appeared when that case was

picked up again, I went to court and they said, no, they can't find the death certificate amongst the dockets. So the case was postponed till the 28th of January in 2002. So I must enjoy myself over Christmas, but I must know that after New Year I'm coming to jail. That is how I got here.

Adelene: And now you've got a date.

Jane: Now I've got a date. But all these years I was not happy because I used to get sick because I think of this thing that has happened to me. And I look at these walls around me... when am I going to see the outside world! When am I going to finish these 8 years. I ended up... there's a clinic here inside... they sent me to hospital. I cry every day until they said to me, what worries me? I said, no, I've got no worries. I'm not even guilty of what happened because I didn't plan it. It was an accident I can say, because I didn't have a grudge against that girl. Because I didn't know her you see. But they arranged... they made an appointment with the social worker. Maybe there is something inside me and I maybe speak to the social worker. But when I met the social worker I also told the social worker the same thing. I said, no, nothing worries me. It's only the building... when I look at these walls around me. When am I going to finish these 8 years! I'm thinking of these 8 years. So that's why my sister... when I got this 8-year sentence she died. She thinks as my mother's child, how is she going to take this prison life and when is she going to finish those 8 years. But now I'm 5 years. So I'm going to be three years outside. My sentence is going to finish in 2009.

Adelene: And you're going to stay with your sister's children.

Jane: Yes, my sister's children. But I don't know... maybe things will go right with my husband. Jenny is also making plans to meet my family and my husband. But I will also try and call my husband when I'm there. My son is still there. Maybe my husband will hear that I'm there at my sister's place and maybe he will come – I don't know. Because when my second oldest son died my sister buried my son there at my sister's place. He didn't want to bury my son at his house in Langa. So he made arrangements for my sister's house. He didn't even come to speak to me after the funeral – nothing. I didn't even see him after the funeral. I don't know what is in that husband's mind. Because if he can think back, he is the cause of this. But I was also weak you see. It was easy to get a man, but it was not my intention to get a man. But I thought to myself, I needed someone to help and support me. That was my intention, not to jol. Because I never do that before and so I can't practice that now. And he said to me before... because he knew the guy... are you in love with Lado? I said, yes, I am. He said, he's not the type of man for you. But why does he say I must get a man! Those were my husband's words. How can your husband say those words to you if he loves you? He can't say that to you. He can't tell you to go and get a man. He can just leave you like that, and then it's your decision to get yourself a man. He can't say get yourself a man. I don't know what happened to that man, really. Because there is one thing I want to ask him maybe one day if he talks with me: what was in your mind those years when you said to me get yourself a man? He should have just left me like that until maybe he'll see what action do I take. And he didn't even make any move maybe to divorce me while I'm in prison. You see, I should have maybe got divorced while I was here.

Adelene: And he didn't do that.

Jane: He didn't do that.

Adelene: And what do you think that means?

Jane: I don't know. I'm still lost. I don't know. He should have divorced me while I'm behind bars. It's a clean divorce for him. Because they didn't put me in jail; another man put me in jail. And you know what worries me now? It's my marriage. That guy drinking, I don't know where he is now. I'll have to lie to my husband and say the ring got lost in prison. Because I took it out of my thing... maybe I had a drink or maybe I was sleepy... because all these years he said, I don't want this ring. Take this ring off. I said, no, I can't take it off. This is my wedding ring. I can't take it off. And the people know me... they know I'm married. So I can't take off my ring. I think the day he took it off my finger I was asleep. Because in 2002 he came... he was visiting and he is still visiting me that day. He just brings me this rubbish. He brought me this rubbish, and to prove that he took my ring. Because I never asked him about my ring, because when I saw my ring wasn't in my room, I thought, oh, he took my ring. Nobody else. He brought me this rubbish. So now my husband is going to see because I had a double ring. I'm going to say, no, it got lost in here. I have to lie now you see. Now I worry again. All my clothes are there with his mother. Now even my marriage certificate is also there. But I will put him into trouble if he breaks my things. He has already broken my watch. This is not my watch. I got the watch from another man. I gave him my watch in 2002 when I was here.

My clothes and my shoes I gave to him to give to his mother to keep for me. When I was still phoning those years his mother told me, no, you know what Jane, your watch's glass is broken and Lado was wearing it. It's not like he broke it purposely because all the years he wanted to get the watch out of my house but he didn't get a chance. I said to his mother, don't worry. I'll fix it up when I get out. But now I'm worried about my clothes... will it still be there when I get out. I'll put him in trouble. I'll put him in trouble because they've got nothing to do with my clothes.

Adelene: And he is still with his mother.

Jane: He is still staying with his mother. He stole my R300. I was paid because his mother put me in church in a mission and I was working there. I was working in the house there. Now I wanted to buy myself false teeth because mine was broken. Now I thought to myself, I'm going to buy me another set you see. He stole that R300 because I hid it there in the draw. He took it... he stole it. Now he brought me a pair of sandals that day. I didn't know that he stole that money because I saw the money was still there when I looked. Now he bought himself another watch. I think that watch he bought from the parade in town. That is where he gambles mos. I think he bought it from those coloured guys who are selling the watches. I saw the watch and I said, oh, you've got a nice watch. Then he brought me this pair of new sandals. It's snakeskin sandals with maroon and brown patches. I was so excited. I didn't know then that it was my money. I took the sandals and showed it to his mother: oh, look what boet Ladu brought me. His mother said, oh, he must also buy me. Only to find that it was my money. He stole my money. At the same time I'm saying, thank God I'm here because it gave me off from him. Because I don't know, maybe if these years I was still going to be alive, or how my face was going to look like you see. Maybe there is something that makes me to be here.

Adelene: And how do you think having been in prison has affected you? Are you the same person you were when you came in? Have you changed recently?

Jane: I'm still the same person. Nothing changed. I'm still a quiet somebody. Ja, I'm still on my own. I just like to keep busy and to work. I take it, when I'm working here inside, I'm doing that housework I was going to do outside. Even the office and the laundry... I'm working in the laundry but I'm a cleaner. It's my own work. Nobody does that work. I'm cleaning Mrs Jacobs's office, the public toilets and our toilets. So I'm always mopping there with that because I like that fresh smell. There's laundry there... I myself like that fresh smell. Because all the dirty clothes come in that section. So I must get that fresh smell. I'm mopping every day. I can't say, no, today it's still clean so I'm just going to sweep. I want that fresh smell everyday you see. But I'm still the same. Even in my room, I like my bed must be clean. Nobody sits on my bed. We are 8 in that room. It's a small room. It's as big as this or smaller than this. But double bunks. So it's two, two, and then it's my bed and another one here. So there is only one who sleeps on top of me. So my bed is always neat and nobody must sit on my bed or touch my things... they know how am I. In the shower there must be soap and Jik. I'm scrubbing the shower you see. So I'm still the same. Nothing has changed with me here. I'm just particular with food because I can't get used to this. I used to cook for myself when I was outside. Before, I couldn't take this food here. I used to vomit every time I eat this food. Because the food here was bad, but it is much better now. There are some foods I can eat now. There is food that I can't take. I can't eat mealie rice. Even outside I didn't eat... although we Africans like samp, but I didn't even eat it outside. But here, I did take a spoon. I said, okay, dish me a spoon of samp. But in my room in my house. I just want to get used to samp so that I know when I'm outside that I do eat samp. At least I'm still the same you see. Nobody touches my cup. Although they share... anyone takes... I'm friends to most of them also. From the other room, they take anyone's cup. So my cupboard is separate. Nobody touches my things. So I don't let anyone use my spoon or my cup. So I'm still the same.

Adelene: Were you like that outside?

Jane: Ja, outside. So nothing has changed for me here. Even the members they know me. I can't change because that's the way I grew up. I can't change. So I have to work. I like to even clean the windows. They take it, they are in jail, so there's no need to clean the windows. So that's what I do. I like to work mos. Even the one sink... the basin here... they was their dishes in there. They still wash their kids there. Everything is done there except to wash themselves in the shower in the bathroom. So I used to take soap from the office – because we always wash our dishes there. At the

same time we wash our things there. Now it is stinking also. So now I want to clean that. So I'm still that person.

Adelene: You were like that in your house also.

Jane: Ja. No, nothing has changed for me. I'm trying to show these young kids, because these coloured children here inside are so rude. I said, no man, moenie vloek nie. Moenie so praat nie. Jou ma se poes! We Africans respect that word poes you see. We don't use that. So they used to listen to me – even now when they say jou poes man, they are just making a joke. It's a joke to them you see. They say, sorry auntie Jane. Then I say, okay. Sometimes they say poes. They forget I'm here maybe because they are used to using that word. But I don't like it.

AA: And the way these young coloured girls speak, how is that different to how young African girls speak? Or do they all speak the same?

Jane: No. there's a difference between coloureds and us. You see, they are doing this sleeping with another girl. There's also *this thing* here. But they don't do that, especially in that room of mine. It's a small room. They don't do that. There were another two children... they were juveniles... but the member said she wanted them to be there. So they came to stay with me. They would try to do funny things in front of me. So she put those ones there. So I'm a non-smoker but these children are smoking, so I can't take that smell of tobacco. The tobacco they're smoking is strong so I can't take that smell. But what can I do. This is in jail you see. Then the others are rude and they're saying, dis die trunk die. Ons het nie 'n ma in die tronk wat vir ons kan sê nie. That's the way they are rude you see. So they take it, nobody can tell them what to do. "As jy 'n groot vrou is, wat kom soek jy?" Sometimes they are not referring to me but to the other one, but at the same time those words are coming to me. "As jy 'n groot vrou is wat kom soek jy in die tronk?" Ja, the way they are rude.

Adelene: And when they say things like that, how do you react? How do you feel?

Jane: I feel bad. I feel bad because those words are also to me. So they are children and they are supposed to be here, but if we are mothers we are supposed to be out and not here. So now we can't control them and tell them this is wrong. Don't do that, do this. Now De Jager separates them when there's a 21. So she brought in those two boys – those two girls there. They are acting like boys mos. So she said, "ouma Jane, ek wil hê die twee, Heidi en Anna moet hier slap. Ek wil nie hê hulle moet daar in dai groot sel gaan slap nie want hulle baklei te veel daarso. Hier by jou gaat hulle leer. Hulle gaat bang wees om verkeerde dinge te doen hierso." Maar dan dink ek hier binne, ek wonder as hulle nie bang is vir julle wat lede is nie, hoe sal hulle vir my bang wees? Maar hulle respek vir my.

Adelene: And what do you think she's hoping that they will learn from you?

Jane: Respect. Because they see the way I am – my character. I'm a quiet somebody. I don't talk. I'm always quiet. And I don't go around... if I come from work I just sit in my room. I go out when it's time to go and draw food. I come back and sit in my room. I don't go around. If I've got washing I'll just go and do my washing. I'm a quiet somebody.

Adelene: So she's hoping they will learn from you.

R: Learn from me. If I say, no, this is wrong. Don't do this – they will listen.

Adelene: It's almost like you must be a mother.

Jane: I'm the mother. There are also other mothers, but I think there's a difference that she can see between me and the others.

Adelene: How would you say you are different to the other mothers?

Jane: I think there is a difference you see, because the others, although they are Africans and some coloureds, they don't care. They are used to being in jail. They talk the way they want to talk.

Adelene: And you are not like that.

Jane: I'm quiet.

Adelene: You are quiet. It's interesting, because you are saying that these young girls come in and they have ideas in their heads about how you must be in jail.

Jane: Mmm.

Adelene: And that you are very different to them.

Jane: Mmm.

Adelene: Ja, in the hope that they will learn from you.

Jane: Ja, learn from me. So even sometimes they are playing music. They've got music centres mos they brought back. So then I say, no man, just turn it down. Just turn it down – even the TV.

Adelene: And the ones who dress to look like boys, what do you think of them?

Jane: No, they're fine. The toilet and shower is in one you see, but they don't... the others must knock: kan ek inkom. Ek wil toilet toe gaan. Ek wil gaan pee. No! Wag, laat ek klaar shower. Hulle steek weg. Kyk, hulle is meisies maar hulle holle is vuil. Maar ek gaat nie sommer maklik in toilet nie. Ek gaat nie aanhou en aanhou om te pee nie. Maar as ek daar ingaan, hulle is nie geworry nie. En as ek in die shower is, ek is nie geworry as hulle inkom nie. Is my kinders. As ek daar klaar is, ek trek nie daar aan in die shower nie. Ek kom staan hier met my handdoek rondom my. Is my kinders mos. Ek is nie geworry nie. Wat moet ek wegsteek voor hulle. But they've got the respect you see.

Adelene: Yes. And they also don't feel embarrassed in front of you.

R: No.

Adelene: It's like they see you as a mother.

Jane: Ja. Maybe when they are kissing these other girls, they are like girlfriends to them. Dan sê ek, hibu! Then Heidi says, I'm so sorry ouma Jane. Because now I'm mos used to it that they are acting like men. They have girlfriends you see.

Adelene: What do you think when they act like that?

Jane: It's bad, but I can't do nothing. Kissing and romance in front of the members you see. Even the members know that they are doing this thing. But for me, it's hard to take it because I'm not used to that. And they are still young... what about their future. I'm just thinking about their future. The others are acting like men but they've slept with men before. But there are others who have never met a boyfriend. I think those who never had boyfriends before... they've got no children. I think it's better for them than those who've got children and who do that.

Adelene: Why do you think it's better for them?

Jane: The way they feel they want to do it. You can't be a mother and then all of a sudden you changed to be a man and you have just girlfriends. Telling yourself that this is my girlfriend and kissing and doing things. What will your children think about that. Mommy, mommy... you see, you're the ma and now you're acting like a man. It's those things that I don't like here. A body just feels like... you can't do nothing. Even those who've got children who are married outside, they are doing the same thing. They are sleeping with other girls. And their children know that: mamma, jy is 'n man in die tronk.

Adelene: And do they dress like men?

Jane: Hulle trek aan jeans mos. So hulle trek nie rokke aan nie. Just jeans and tops... and their hair cut just like men. That is what I don't like in prison. Because when I first came here I saw that in this section... it's the first section you get in when you come here... now, I was sitting with the other coloured lady called Crystal. When I was crying she was trying to comfort me. The bed opposite was covered with a duvet cover that went right down. Now I hear some noise like cats here. So I'm scared of cats. Ek vra vir Crystal, Crystal, is hier katte hierso? Wat se mau-mau is die? Crystal sê vir my, nee, hier is nie katte nie. Sy sê dat hier by die kooi wat langes haar is is die toegemaak. Ek weet nie daar's mense agter die kooi nie. Is die twee vroumense wat daar slap en wat dinge doen wat ek nie weet hoe doen hulle dit nie. Nou wat is die gerasery? Nou ek praat hard mos. Ek vat dit, ek gesels mos met Crystal. Nou ek hoor die gerasery. Ek wil weet of hier katte in die tronk is. Crystal sê... sy wys my net met die kop so. Daar is mense agter dai gordyne. Maar ek het nie die mense gesien nie. Toe sê ek vir Crystal, hi Crystal, ek kan nie hier sit nie. Ek kannie hier bly nie. Wat maak hulle daarso? Ek wil nou weet want ek sien daar is mense. Toe praat Crystal met my buite. I saw it when I came here. Ja, the girls are acting like boys or men. The girls have girlfriends, and they introduce them to their families when they come to visit them. They are visiting with both of them introduced – so they are used to that. It's not a surprise to their family because they are doing it even outside. But to us Africans it's not... it's not our thing man. But now, some of them when they come here in jail, they learn those dirty things you see. They change. Even when maybe they see our Africans do that, they hide it from the members. The members must not know that she is acting like a man. Maybe if one of the members know and then the member asks, now, are you doing this? Hi adjutant, adjutant. Because they know, we Africans... it's not our thing. But what can you do. And the smoking... some of them are smoking dagga. They get it in their own ways. I don't know where and how. But at night, when it's lock up time, then they smoke. But I can't tell the member they're smoking here in the toilets. They spray in the toilets so you can smell nothing. So it's not my job to

tell the member. They are supposed to see that when maybe they're taking rounds. But otherwise, nothing has changed with me.

Adelene: You are still the same person.

Jane: I'm still the same person, but there's a life for me here inside. So even the members can see me. Sometimes they say, why are you so quiet? I say, no, I'm just quiet. I'm just like this. I don't talk. I don't like to talk to people. But I have changed a bit because I can talk now. I even say to the inmates there, my family outside will be surprised that now I can talk now. Because on the outside I didn't use to talk. I'm a quiet somebody. I get tired quickly of talking. Just leave me alone. Or sometimes, I just go steady as if I'm going to look for something. Then I just want to get rid of them. But I never thought I would come to jail one day. When I got my fiftieth birthday in 2002, I got in here... I was sentenced on the 28th of January in 2002. The following month, on the 20th of February, I was fifty. Yooo! I cried that day. It's my first time in jail. I cried the whole day that day. *SHE CRIES A LITTLE*. I've got two grandchildren and they don't know me. Maybe they just hear, jou ouma is in die trunk. They came once to visit. It was Mother's Day and sister Jenny made a surprise. They were still small at the time. Two girls of mine, they've got two boys. I want to take them on my skirt, but they don't even want to come to me. I was so sad. I asked them, how do you call your daddy? They say, no, Tata. I know... don't they ask where's mommy? But they were still small. But now they are grown up now. They never saw mommy again. I think they heard mommy is in jail. So I will explain to them one day when I get out what happened and what made mommy come to jail. You see, I have to sit down with them now that they are grown up. They will understand. I lost my sister, my sister's son, my mother-in-law... because my mother-in-law was up in Johannesburg other sister's children. My husband had to go there. But my daughter told me that I'm behind bars. My sister died when I got sentenced. I could not go to the funeral. I can't go. And yet, it's not my parents – it's my sister. But there are things that I will never forget. Even when I'm outside, I'll never forget. Even this boyfriend of mine, his mother... I was everything to his mother. I took her as my mother. Because I was doing everything in the house. I was running the house as if it's like my house, doing the washing, doing the cooking, cleaning the house – everything. Even this neighbour – another old lady – she said, oh my child, Sera will miss you one day if you'll go. Because the other girls who used to stay with her, they never do these things. Do you think she will come one day and visit me? She never came. Even now when I will go to fetch my clothes I won't say anything. I'll just greet her and take my clothes. Even when I heard that her son has got a girlfriend and this girlfriend is pregnant, she never tells me that. I phoned her in 2002 or 2003 and asked her, why is Lado not coming any more to visit me? But she was just making excuses. "You know mos that he is a gambler and now the money is not like before. But maybe this weekend he will come." Then comes the weekend and he doesn't come. He doesn't tell me he's involved with Meisie – the other girl. I met that girl in places. My children told me. And my children told me, mommy, Meisie is pregnant. I phone his mother and I told his mother, mommy, Meisie is mos pregnant? Then she's starting... yes... Because my children told me mos. Even the neighbours – that old lady – when I phoned her she told me the other day, ai, that girl has dumped the child there now. Now the man is taking the child to the crèche everyday. And I think his mother is paying for that because he is not working. And he's got so many children from many girls – big boys. His first son from another girl in Langa, he's also from Lado. He's got about six or seven children. And he wanted a child from me. Am I mad! I'm not so stupid! Let's hope my life will change. I never thought one day my life would be like this. One day I wanted to see the social worker – the African social worker – so I was speaking to her. I was discussing with her my life situation you see. She said, you know, that is why you feel like that. Because you are too soft for life here. When you grew up you didn't have tough times – not even in your marriage. Now this one affects you. They are your ups and downs you see. I didn't expect that one day I would be in such a situation like this.

Silence.....

Adelene: It must be hard.....

Jane: Yes, because I don't belong here.

End of interview

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