

**THE THEORY ON THWARTED BELONGINGNESS AND
ITS RELATION TO YOUTH VIOLENCE**

by

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I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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ABSTRACT

The thesis titled “The theory of thwarted belongingness and its relation to youth violence” presents the findings of a qualitative study that focussed on late adolescents who have committed physical assault and who were referred to a diversion programme by a court. The study followed a grounded theory methodology approach for which convenience sampling, purposeful sampling and theoretical sampling were used to obtain participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the data were analysed through constant comparative analysis. From the analysis the theory on thwarted belongingness emerged that explains how the adolescents attempt to negotiate a sense of belonging. The theory further explains how failed negotiations are dealt with and when one could expect violent behaviour to occur. In general, the current research study creates awareness of the psychological non-shared environment and its potential role in the development of behaviour. Future research should be focussed on the saturation of categories and dimensions that have not been fully saturated in the current study and to test the theory of thwarted belongingness since it is a newly generated theoretical stance that needs to be validated.

Keywords: adverse experiences, assault, constant comparative analysis, convenience sampling, failed negotiations, grounded theory methodology, late adolescents, main concern, negotiating belongingness, purposeful sampling, semi-structure interviews, theoretical sampling, thwarted belongingness, youth violence

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Globally in 1990, the number of deaths ascribed to violence were estimated at 1.85 million, with 30.4% of these due to homicide (Reza, Mercy & Krug, 2001). In the regions with the highest homicide rates most of the victims were young males. Worldwide in the year 2000, 1.6 million deaths were attributed to violence, with nearly a third due to homicides that occurred mostly among males aged 15 to 29 years. During this time in 2000, youth homicides globally (with youths defined as people aged 10 to 29 years) added up to around 199,000 cases. An even larger number of violence survivors were dealing with injuries as well as chronic health consequences that were not injury-related (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002). During 2015, in the United States of America (USA), 485,610 youths (in this case regarded as people aged 24 to 29 years) received treatment in emergency medical departments for violence related injuries (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.).

Statistics on violence in South Africa are not readily available, yet insightful data was obtained from the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMMS) in South Africa, for the years 2005, 2010 and 2011. At the time of finalising the thesis, updated South African data from the NIMMS were not accessible.

In 2005, the NIMMS recorded 23,541 non-natural deaths at 21 mortuaries across six of South Africa's provinces. Out of these, violence/homicide accounted for 38,77% of deaths. Violence was the main cause of death in the age groups between 15 to 24 years, 25 to 34 years and 35 to

44 years. While those in the 25 to 44 years group died mostly due to gunshots followed by sharp force injury, members of the 15 to 24 year age group largely died due to sharp force injury followed by gunshots. The data from two mortuaries in the Tshwane/Pretoria metropolitan area (in Gauteng Province) accounted for 2,373 of the non-natural deaths on record; with 23.22% of these cases being due to violence/homicide, violence was, after transport-related deaths, the second most common cause of non-natural deaths in Tshwane. In the province of Gauteng, however, deaths amongst all the groups within the 15 to 54 years age range were mostly due to gunshots. Sharp force injury was the second most frequent cause of death for those in the 15 to 24 year age group and blunt force injury for members of the 45 to 54 year age range. The second most common reasons for death for the 25 to 34 year and 35 to 44 year age groups were not provided (Prinsloo, 2007).

The 2010 and 2011 NIMMS reports for Gauteng (SAPPRU, 2012; 2013) were based on data from nine mortuaries that recorded, for the respective years, 11,084 and 10,502 non-natural deaths, with violence (2010: 31.0%; n=3440; 2011: 20.5%; n=3204) being the main reason for these deaths. In both 2010 and 2011, violence was the chief cause of death for the groups within the age range from 15 to 44 years as well as for males. In 2010, gunshots were the main reason for violent deaths, except for those in the 15 to 24 year old group who mostly died because of sharp force injury (SAPPRU, 2012). In 2011, gunshots were the major cause of violent deaths for the 35 to 54 year old age groups, while sharp force injury was the main cause of violent deaths for the 15 to 34 year old age groups (SAPPRU, 2013).

In South Africa, one of the world's most violent countries (Foster, 2012), youth violence is not an unknown phenomenon. Youth violence affects the whole eco-system and is especially disturbing as it "adds greatly to the costs of health and welfare services, reduces productivity,

decreases the value of property, disrupts a range of essential services and generally undermines the fabric of society” (Krug, Dhalberg, et al., 2002, p. 25). The effects of violence on youth as victims are devastating and far-reaching, and so are the effects of violence perpetrated by youths.

Although statistics, both from South Africa and the world, are vague on the profiles of violent youth and their victims, it could be assumed that at least a third of youth homicides were committed by youths themselves. This assumption is based on a study conducted in the USA in the late 1990s which indicated that a third of teenage homicides were committed by youths who, in that context, were regarded as people younger than 18 years of age. Overall, these teenagers were mostly killed by young people around the age of 18 years (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2001). During the same time the Ad Hoc Committee on Health Research relating to future intervention options (Ad Hoc Committee on Health Research Relating to Future Intervention Options, 1996) indicated that interpersonal violence was mostly committed by young adult men. More recent resources reflecting homicide trends in the USA indicated youths as a noticeable group both in their involvement in homicide and in being victims of homicide (Loeber & Farrington, 2011).

In the prevention of youth violence, it would be ideal to know which variables are involved in the occurrence thereof, and how the variables interact in leading to interpersonal violence taking place. In many studies researchers have indeed attempted to identify risk factors for and protective factors against youth violence. Most of these studies were based on quantitative methodologies and focussed on identifying risk factors and protective factors as predictors of, for instance, violence, gang membership, and delinquency (e.g. Dubow, Huesmann, Boxer & Smith, 2016; Farrington, Ttofi & Piquero, 2015; O’Brien, Daffern, Chu & Thomas, 2013).

Farrington, Gaffney and Ttofi (2017) identified a few studies in which meta-analyses of a wide range of risk factors were conducted, although only a few researchers attempted to construct predictive models for the occurrence of violence through the use of statistical procedures (e.g. Jennings et al., 2015; Kim, Gilman, Hill & Hawkins, 2016). Many research studies in this regard do not go beyond the development of focussed models that are only applicable to a specific context. Ideally, models applicable across a variety of settings should be developed. Fortunately, focussed models could be further developed into models with applicability to a variety of settings. One such example is a monitoring system that was designed, based on crime data, to predict future youth violence in communities, in time to implement preventive measures (Henry et al., 2014).

According to Beaver and colleagues (2014), interventions are often based on research findings for which the internal validity has not been proved. In other words, it has not been proven that the risk and protective factors identified in these studies actually contributed towards or prevent the criminal or antisocial behaviour investigated. In fact, the contrary could be the case in that the investigated behaviour actually contributed towards the so called risk factors. Therefore, basing violence prevention interventions on such research findings may result in interventions not meeting the intended outcomes. If one could understand why risk and protective factors do not always result in or prevent youth violence, prevention programmes may have more desirable outcomes. A possible approach is to identify “underlying contributors that create variation in exposure to risk and protective factors” (Beaver et al., 2014, p. 101). This could be done through behavioural genetics, which emphasises the interaction between genes and the environment. This field of genetics is aimed at determining the proportions of variance which are accounted for by heritability (genetic factors), environments shared by siblings (shared

environmental factors) and environments not shared by siblings, including their diverse responses to the same environment (non-shared environmental factors) (Beaver et al., 2014).

The psyche could be regarded as a non-shared environment. In other words, the individual's unique experience of the world and how it is made sense of, is an environment that cannot be accessed by others, unless it is consciously shared with others by the individual.

In an attempt to contribute towards understanding of this non-shared environment and its potential effect on the development of youth violence, the current study focuses on clarifying the contribution of non-shared **psychological** environments to the occurrence of youth violence, by making use of classical Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM). Classical GTM will be explained in more detail after the necessary background on violence and youth violence has been provided.

1.2 Violence

Violence, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) is the “intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (as cited in WHO, 2014, p. 84). Many definitions of violence reflect its brutal nature, portraying it as a form of aggression resulting in physical impairment (Lösel & Farrington, 2012). However, violence could also go by unnoticed, and subsequently prepares the context for more overt violence (Kumsa, Ng, Chambon, Maiter & Yan, 2013). Violence is, furthermore, categorised as self-directed (for instance suicides and suicide attempts), interpersonal (for instance homicide and assaults) or

collective (for instance war and terrorism) while its nature is described as one or more of the following: physical, sexual, psychological, or involving deprivation or neglect (Krug, Dahlberg, et al., 2002). A distinction is also made between violence committed by adult offenders and youth violence.

1.2.1 Youth violence

Various definitions of youth violence are provided, including “violence occurring outside the home among children, adolescents and young men, covering 10 to 29 years” (WHO, 2016, p. 5) and “violence that occurs among individuals aged 10–29 years who are unrelated and who may or may not know each other, and generally takes place outside of the home” (WHO, 2015, p. 5). Youths in South Africa are regarded as people between the ages of 14 and 35 years (National Youth Development Agency, 2015). It is obvious that, internationally, the ages that demarcate the boundaries for youth and youth violence differ. For instance, the WHO regards people between the ages of 10 and 29 years as youth (World Health Organization, 2014) while the United Nations refers to people between the ages of 10 and 24 years as youth (Centers for disease control and Prevention, n.d.; United Nations, 2014). In addition, in a book reflecting on youth violence in South Africa the authors (Ward, Van der Merwe & Dawes, 2012) opted to focus on people between the ages of 12 and 24 years. One should therefore, when reviewing the literature, be conscious of these differences in setting the limits for the stage described as youth and the reasons why a specific demarcation has been used.

1.2.2 Prevention of youth violence

One could assume that most people long for violence free societies. This includes a society where youth are neither victims, nor perpetrators, of violence (Krug, Dahlberg, et al., 2002). Considering the wide array of consequences of youth violence, the effort to prevent the occurrence thereof would be well worth it. On a national and international level, numerous drives towards the reduction of violence, including interpersonal violence, have been implemented (National Planning Commission, 2011). Violence can, however, both be reduced **and** prevented. James Gilligan (2000), a psychiatrist with extensive experience working with violent offenders, confirmed that violence is preventable while the Violence Prevention Alliance and Education Development Center (2011) supported this notion by stating that “violence is predictable and therefore preventable” (p. 2).

1.3 Interventions and programme theory

Violence could be prevented by focussing on and altering the factors contributing to violent responses, as well as changing the social systems in which these factors are embedded (Krug, Dahlberg, et al., 2002). Strong evidence exists that social development programmes effectively reduce youth violence (World Health Organization & WHO Collaborating Centre for Violence Prevention, 2010). Nonetheless, not all interventions will be effective in reducing the prevalence of youth violence, however, one contributing aspect that renders interventions successful is a sound **programme theory** (World Health Organization UNICEF & University of Cape Town, 2013). This term will now be explained.

A programme theory is regarded as “an explicit theory of how an intervention contributes to its intended or observed outcomes” (Funnell & Rogers as cited in Schuurs et al., 2014, p. 331). A programme’s theory could also be defined as “the conception of what must be done to bring about the intended social benefits” (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004, p. 134). Programme theory is implicit in various methodologies guiding programme development, programme evaluation, or in both. Some of these methodologies include Programme Theory Methodology (Schuurs et al., 2014), the Sidani and Braden Model of Program Theory (as cited in Huijbregts, Kay & Klinck, 2008), Theory Driven Evaluation (Renger, Bartel & Foltysova, 2013), and the Theory of Change Methodology (Taplin & Clark, 2012). Taking everything into account, a programme theory constitutes the programme’s foundation (Rossi et al., 2004) and follows the path of developing a programme logic model indicating the process (activities), the resources (inputs) as well as the aspects of outputs, outcomes and impacts in relation to the defined problem addressed by the programme (Schuurs et al., 2014). A programme theory also indicates why the programme is expected to effect the proposed changes, as well as that changes will take place in stages (Program theory and logic models: Evaluation resources from Wilder Research, 2009). Therefore, a programme theory should be well-formulated and present a realistic plan aimed at the intended outcomes (Rossi et al., 2004).

Taplin and Clark (2012) mentioned that the rationales and assumptions in theory of change (a programme theory method) are often supported, or informed, by research. This approach is confirmed by Payne (2006) who, by referring to efforts aimed at the reduction of youth violence, implied that theory should inform and guide our interventions when he mentioned that “abstract theoretical principles [...] can drive the development of a real life [...] intervention” (p. 6). Therefore, the intended programme outcomes, as previously referred to,

could be based on a theory explaining the processes involved in the phenomena targeted by the programme or intervention.

Unfortunately, implemented programmes are not always based on programme theories, which makes the evaluation of the programmes partial and frequently lacking in conclusive results. In its turn, this often leads to a post hoc development of a programme theory to ensure rigorous evaluation of the outcomes (Segal, Opie & Dalziel, 2012).

1.4 Research problem

Based on the preceding information, three assumptions are made. The **first** is that the non-shared environment, mediating the effects of risk factors on the development of youth violence, may also include processes on a psychological level or processes within the interactions between people that could be interpreted vastly differently, even by siblings within the same household. The **second** assumption is that a programme theory should form part of the developing stages of an intervention and should be operationalised as an evaluative tool during the evaluation of the intervention. The **third** is that research and theory explaining the underlying processes involved in the problem behaviour should form the foundation on which a programme theory for a violence prevention intervention is developed.

Many risk and protective factors, broadly categorised as individual factors, relationship factors, community factors, and societal factors (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002), have been identified and studied. Despite this wealth of information that has been generated on risk and protective factors, a best-fit model to explain the development of youth violence has not yet been developed. Therefore, the researcher in the current study used classical GTM in an attempt

to clarify the contribution of the non-shared psychological environment to the development of youth violence and to improve our overall understanding of violent behaviour.

1.5 Aims of the study

The **first** aim of the current study is to explore the main concern of youths involved in interpersonal physical violence (physical assault) and to generate a grounded theory explaining how this main concern could be resolved. This aim is in line with classical GTM that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. The **second** aim of the current study is to use the newly generated grounded theory to indicate how it could inform the development of a violence prevention intervention, by means of a programme theory.

1.6 Research questions and design

In line with the aims of the current study the research questions to be answered through this study are:

- (1) What is the main concern of youths involved in interpersonal violence? and
- (2) How do they go about to resolve this main concern?

The answers to these two questions are reflected in the grounded theory that is developed in this research study. The new theory is subsequently used to indicate how it could inform the development of a violence prevention intervention.

The research question is investigated within a classical GTM framework through conducting semi-structured interviews with, firstly, late adolescents (youths aged 15 to 18 years) whose interpersonal violent behaviour resulted in injuries to their victims, and, secondly, professionals working with these adolescents. In addition, secondary data were sourced via the internet and include a television interview with a youth offender and social workers as well as a written testimonial on the experiences of a youth offender. Both youths represented in the secondary data were referred to diversion programmes.

Finally, the newly generated theory is used to indicate how it could inform a programme theory used for the development of a parenting intervention aimed at the prevention of youth violence.

1.7 Theoretical framework

Classical GTM “is the systematic generation of theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method” (Glaser & Strauss as cited in Glaser, 1998, p. 3). In classical GTM, data analysis is performed through constant comparative analysis (CCA) and is driven by a search for the main concern of the substantive area – the study’s area of interest – and how the substantive area as a collective goes about resolving its main concern. Classical GTM requires that no theory or theoretical framework should guide the process of inquiry and analysis. This is because the grounded theory should first be generated from the data, after which the literature is studied and used as additional data for analysis to strengthen the theory (Glaser, 1998).

1.8 Significance of the study

This current study is significant since it focusses on youth offenders in South Africa as well as professionals such as social workers and educators involved in their lives. It adopts a qualitative approach which does not attempt to identify risk and protective factors but, rather, the underlying processes – embedded in the non-shared psychological environment – contributing towards the adolescent participants' violent actions. These processes are used to discuss the possible interaction of risk and protective factors within the context of interpersonal violence committed by youths.

The theory that emerges from the data is discussed in relation to existing research and theories related to violence as well as to the categories that emerged from the data (explained in Chapter 2). This substantive theory should, therefore, be easily transferable to other contexts where violence occurs and where researchers and professionals have a sound knowledge of that substantive area and its unique challenges.

Finally, the theory is used to indicate (with the use of programme theory methodology) how it could inform the development of interventions and contribute towards the prevention or reduction of interpersonal physical youth violence.

1.9 Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study related to accessing the substantive area, recruiting professional persons with an interest and experience in working with youths with violent behaviour as

participants as well as the researcher being a novice in GTM. These limitations are discussed in detail in Section 8.6.

1.10 Definition of terms

For the purpose of the current study the listed terms will be defined as indicated below:

Categories: The categories in the theory, of which the collective function is reflected by the core category, indicate the behaviour that resolves the main concern of the substantive area (Glaser, 1998).

Constant comparative analysis (CCA): The method of analysis used in GTM (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a; Glaser & Strauss; Glaser, 1992) and is (1) a process where incidents are compared to each other in order to identify emergent concepts or categories, followed by (2) a process where incidents are compared with the emerging concepts or categories to determine if these support a category or contribute towards the understanding of a category's properties, and (3) the final process where concepts are compared with each other (Glaser, 1992).

Core category: The core category reflects the collective function of the other categories incorporated into the theory, and speaks directly to the main concern of the substantive area (Glaser, 1998).

Dimensions: In the theory that emerged from the current study, the dimensions reflect sub-categories within the categories.

Diversion: “Diversion of cases in defined circumstances away from the criminal justice system as early as possible, either to the welfare system, or to suitable diversion programmes run by competent staff” (South African Law Commission, 1997, p. 11).

Diversion programme: Diversion programmes – also known as therapeutic programmes – are interventions aimed at meeting the goals of diversion.

Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM): For the purpose of the study GTM will refer to classical GTM, unless otherwise specified.

Incidents: These are “indicators of phenomena or experiences as observed or articulated in data” (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 212).

Khayaletu Child and Youth Care Centre is a residential youth development centre – forming part of the Bosasa Youth Development Centres – focussing on diversion of youth referred to them by courts (<http://www.bosasaydc.com>).

Khulisa Social Solutions, following a systemic approach, offers a variety of programmes to address community needs. In addition to a diversion programme, Khulisa also provides, amongst others, employment generation services, entrepreneurship development, offender rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, and parenting programmes (<http://www.khulisa.org.za/programmes/>).

Late adolescents: Youths aged from 15 to 18 years.

Main concern: The problem experienced by the study's area of interest (or substantive area) that is addressed by the participants' behaviour.

National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMMS): The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) operates intramural research units of which one is the Violence, Injury and Peace Research Unit (VIPRU). The University of South Africa is a partner in this unit. This unit hosts the NIMMS that is aimed at "providing more comprehensive information about deaths due to external causes" (SAPPRU, 2013, p. 1).

Nicro: This term refers to the South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders that is an enterprise providing four main services: crime prevention, diversion, non-custodial sentencing and offender reintegration (<https://www.nicro.org.za>). According to S. Victor (personal communication, 21 September 2015) offending youth are referred to Nicro by courts and by schools. Youth from the age of 14 and older are referred to Nicro, with most of those being from 16 to 18 years of age.

Non-shared psychological environment: The uniquely personal way in which an individual experiences and makes sense of various contexts and events.

NYDO: This term refers to the National Youth Development Outreach that is a non-profit organisation that amongst other programmes – such as drug and gangsterism prevention and parenting ones – operates an adolescent diversion/development programme (<http://www.ydo.co.za>). As per the interview with a NYDO social worker, youths are mostly referred to the diversion programme by the court, their schools or their families.

Physical assault: Interpersonal physical violent behaviour resulting in injuries to the victim.

Programme theory: Defined as “an explicit theory of how an intervention contributes to its intended or observed outcomes” (Funnell & Rogers as cited in Schuurs et al., 2014, p. 331) and “the conception of what must be done to bring about the intended social benefits” (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004, p. 134).

Substantive area: The study’s area of interest. For the current study, the area of interest is late adolescents who have committed physical assault and who were referred to a diversion programme by a court.

Youths: For the purpose of this study, youths are regarded as late adolescents aged 15 to 18 years.

Youth violence: For the purpose of the current study, youth violence is defined as violent behaviour committed by youths aged 15 to 18 years.

1.11 Summary and overview of chapters

In this chapter an awareness of the prevalence and impact of violence, with a specific focus on youth violence, is created. Furthermore, the importance of understanding the non-shared psychological environment when working towards violence prevention is indicated. This is followed by a discussion of violence prevention interventions designed by means of programme theories. The remainder of the chapter clarifies and contextualises the current research study. The importance of understanding the non-shared psychological environment of

youth offenders was indicated. Both the identified gap, and the value of research and theory informing the development of programme theories for interventions aimed at violence prevention, directed this study towards (1) exploring the non-shared psychological environment of violent youths, (2) generating a grounded theory identifying the main concern of violent youths and (3) using the newly generated grounded theory to indicate how it could inform the development of a violence prevention intervention, by means of a programme theory.

The remainder of the thesis is divided into seven chapters. In Chapter 2 the philosophical foundation of the study is discussed, while an overview of classical GTM is provided. The research design of the study is explained in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 the findings, in the form of the generated grounded theory, are presented, followed by a discussion in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, of existing research and theories in relation to the new theory. The refined theory is provided in Chapter 8, followed by an indication of how the new theory could inform the development of a violence prevention intervention, a judgement of the newly generated theory, the strengths and limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THE PHILOSOPHIC CONTEXT OF THE STUDY AND GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the philosophic context of the study is discussed to substantiate Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) as the methodology of choice, followed by an explanation of classical GTM.

The motivation for generating a theory based on this study's main concern, that of late adolescents who have committed physical assault, is **dual in nature**. The **first** component is to search for psychological processes as part of the non-shared environment to fill the gap in explaining the development of youth violence, while the **second** is to use the newly generated grounded theory to indicate how it could inform the development of a violence prevention intervention, by means of a programme theory. As the generated theory will be used to inform an intervention, it was noted that "programmes are always introduced into open systems" (Sayer, 2000, p. 22) and that, in line with critical realism, "a realist approach assumes open systems and a generative model of causation in which the outcomes of the activation of mechanisms [...] always depends [*sic*] on specific contexts" (p. 23). Therefore, this study is grounded within critical realism while classical GTM is used to develop the theory – a methodology meeting the requirements of a critical realist methodology (Oliver, 2012) and employing critical realist philosophy (Yeung, 1997).

2.2 The philosophic context: Critical realism

The philosophy of the social sciences is centred largely on positivism and interpretivism (Benton & Craib, 2011). Critical realism as a social sciences paradigm, however, incorporates both positivism and relativism (Sayer, 2000) and “challenges the current postmodernist and social constructionist vogue” (Cruickshank, 2003, p. 1). Critical realists agree that there is a real world (Cruickshank, 2003; Sayer, 2000) because reality “exists and acts independently of our knowledge or beliefs about it” (Benton & Craib, 2011, p. 121). They challenge, nevertheless, the idea of one truth as the world is known through our individual understandings of it (Cruickshank, 2003; Sayer, 2000). Furthermore, a superior alternative for knowledge about an object could exist (Sayer, 2000), which implies an openness to correction and the fallibilist nature of our knowledge and beliefs (Benton & Craib, 2011). This understanding of the world and reality corresponds with GTM’s stance that a theory could be modified if the analysis of new data leads to newly emerging insights. This is especially true when one deals with a new substantive area while working on a grand theory (Glaser, 1998).

Bhaskar is a key author referred to in critical realism literature (e.g. Benton & Craib, 2011; Bunt, 2018; Hostettler & Norrie, 2003; Jones, 2003; López, 2003; Losch, 2017; Walker, 2017). Benton and Craib (2011) described him as “the most influential critical realist philosopher of science” (p. 58). Embedded within the thinking presented in the previous paragraph, Bhaskar (1979; 2008) proposes a **stratified ontology** consisting of a real domain, actual domain and empirical domain. It is therefore a world that exists on different levels which could be divided into the areas of the **real** that include mechanisms, the **actual** that comprises events and the **empirical** that consists of experiences (Bhaskar, 2008). These domains will now be discussed.

The **real domain** or **real world** includes **mechanisms**, their powers and their tendencies (Benton & Craib, 2011). Mechanisms, also referred to as **generative or causal mechanisms** (Blom & Morén, 2011; Bunt, 2018; Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011; Evenden, 2012), are not directly observable and exist independent of our observation thereof. These mechanisms are explained as causal powers which are either active or inactive. The powers could, therefore, be latent or, when activated, overt. In other words, the hidden potentialities could be realised and present as tendencies when these potentialities are exercised (Bhaskar, 1998). When these mechanisms or causal powers **interact** with each other, new units are formed and **emergence** has occurred. These **units** could be a broad range of incidents such as higher-level mechanisms, entities, structures, totalities, constructs, properties and powers (Benton & Craib, 2011; Bhaskar, 1998). The **explanation of causality** in critical realism revolves around the identification of causal mechanisms (also referred to as generative mechanisms), their properties (how they work), the activation of these mechanisms and the conditions under which they have been activated. On the other hand, the nature of the object on which these mechanisms act, should be established as the nature of the object could explain the existence of the mechanisms. An event, therefore, depends on causal mechanisms acting on objects within a specific context. Each context also introduces causal mechanisms related to that context that then impact on the object. (Sayer, 2000).

The **actual domain**, or events, are the consequences of the powers being activated, exist regardless of our experience and explanation thereof (Bhaskar as cited in Sayer, 2000), and might therefore go unnoticed (López, 2003). Even when an entity might not be observable (see generative mechanisms under Section 2.2.1), its effects or products might be (Sayer, 2000). This is clarified by Elder-Vass (2004) who, as part of a clarification of Bhaskar's philosophical work on critical realism, pointed out that events may go unnoticed in "the absence of an

observer” (p. 7) or “by virtue of operating below (or above) the perceived levels of reality” (p. 7). Objects belong to the actual domain. When talking about **objects** the critical realist does not necessarily refer to material entities but rather to anything, for example a social structure, that is concrete as a “product of multiple components and forces” (Sayer, 2000, p. 19). During research the investigator tries to comprehend how these components combine and interact to create the object. Unfortunately, these components cannot be isolated and the understanding of them is based on their abstraction and conceptualisation by the researcher (Sayer, 1992).

The **empirical domain** is entered when events that “we experience either directly or indirectly” (Blom & Morén, 2011, p. 62) are empirically captured (López, 2003). To an extent this reminds one about the operationalisation of constructs such as psychological constructs that are “intangible and cannot be directly observed [...] called hypothetical constructs” (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2016, p. 18).

The philosophers of social sciences referred to above, follow an abstract level of explanation. It seems to be up to the practitioner or researcher to actually operationalise the philosophy of critical realism and its concepts within the context of their worlds. In other words, to identify the experiences or observations of interest (empirical domain), the events and/or objects involved (actual domain) and the causal mechanisms that interact as well as the reasons why they interact (real domain). The current researcher, however, found only one reflection in research that explicitly unpacks the practical implications of following a critical realist philosophy when planning research (see Blom & Morén, 2011). The same authors suggested in 2007 that “research on generative mechanisms is very rare within the field of social work” (Blom & Morén as cited in Blom & Morén, 2011, p. 62) and for that matter the researcher would suggest, based on the (non) available resources, that the situation is not much different

in other fields of social sciences. Nevertheless, in this discussion (Blom & Morén, 2011) the focus is placed on generative mechanisms, which is probably the least understood domain in Bhaskar's stratified ontology. Generative mechanisms are clarified to be the **interdependence** of input and output: in other words, the explanation of why experiences result in the outcomes they produce. "However, the generative mechanisms that explain how and why the events happened are only accessible indirectly by developing theory in relation to those mechanisms" (Blom & Morén, 2011, p. 63).

2.3 Critical realism and the current study

From a critical realist perspective, the observations that sparked the current study related to those violent events committed by youth. Therefore, adopting a simplistic view, the objects could be the youths who committed the violence while the violence might be the events, whether observable or unobservable. The violence could form part of both the actual and the empirical world as these events might occur either noticed or unnoticed and are the result of mechanisms activating the powers of the youths (objects). However, this could be a too simplistic interpretation of the various domains. Another perspective on this might be that the violent behaviour we observe is the operationalisation of constructs in the actual domain; this implies that events which we cannot observe directly but that are manifested through violence could be observed. The current study, therefore, focusses on understanding the mechanisms (processes), and their interactions with each other, which activate the powers of the youths (objects) within specific contexts (circumstances), and create events that result in youth violence (the observation or experience).

In line with Blom and Morén's (2011) previous statement, the development of theory is used in an attempt to illuminate the generative mechanisms involved in the occurrence of youth violence. It may also assist in illuminating potential questions such as why and when generative mechanisms will interact, how they interact and what the resulting units may be, what they might look like or how they are manifested. This supports the notion that, “grounded theory exists at the most abstract conceptual and integrated level” (Glaser, 1992, p. 13).

2.3 Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM)

In line with the social science philosophy of critical realism, many different research methods could be of relevance. The choice should be determined by the nature of the research object and the information one would like to obtain about the object (Sayer, 2000). GTM is, as previously indicated, compatible with critical realism, and ideal for the development of theory because its purpose is the “systematic development of theory” (Oliver, 2012, p. 376). As a methodology, grounded theory is inductive although it includes deduction where the categories direct the researcher to the next source of data (Glaser, 1998, p. 43).

The **power of the method**, which differentiates GTM from other methodologies, is described by Hood (2007) as “constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation of categories” (p. 152). There are, however, various streams within GTM, referred to as a **family of methods** (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b). In the current study, the GTM stream known as classical or Glaserian GTM is applied as it “generates a substantive theory to be used to explain and abstractly account for a pattern of behavior” (Glaser, 2014, p. 11). Furthermore, the researcher concurred with the view that literature and theory should only be reviewed once the theory has emerged.

2.3.1 Overview of classical GTM

“Grounded theory was discovered, not invented” (Glaser, 1998, p. 21) when Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss conducted research in hospitals on patients dying there. In 1967, the book *The discovery of grounded theory* was published to explain the new method they had used in their research (Glaser, 1998), followed by numerous books written by various authors with the aim of clarifying approaches and issues related to GTM. Through these accounts the methodological differences between various researchers applying GTM became evident. Barney Glaser built upon the original GTM, creating what is today known as classical Grounded Theory or Glaserian Grounded Theory, while Strauss and Corbin’s thinking and developments, which is reflected in *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques* (1990), became known as Straussian Grounded Theory. Today two additional well-known streams in GTM are Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) and Feminist Grounded Theory (Evans, 2013). The differences between these approaches are on the levels of paradigm, philosophy, genre, approach, and method (Ralph, Birks & Chapman, 2015). Not being aware of these streams could lead to confusion as these may be interpreted as discrepancies within the methodology, while the researcher might actually be mixing different GTM approaches. Key assumptions of and approaches to GTM will now be discussed.

2.3.2 The research question

In essence, classical GTM is a process used to generate theories during which data collection is based on the questions: “What is the chief concern or problem of the people in the substantive area, and what accounts for most of the variation in processing the problem?” (Glaser, 1992, p. 4). Therefore, according to Glaser (1998), a grounded theory research study does not work

with an identified problem. Instead, the researcher proceeds towards understanding the integrated world we live in and putting forward an explanatory theory for “what is going on” (p. 189) therein.

The GTM approach dictates that an area of interest, better known in GTM as the substantive area, should be identified and the research process should focus on identifying the main concern of the substantive area and the behaviour that addresses this concern. This behaviour is referred to as **continual resolving** and is the core variable or category (Glaser, 1992; 1998).

2.3.3 Literature review

In addition to classical GTM requiring the researcher to conduct research without a specific problem to investigate, it also requires that as little literature as is possible be reviewed in advance. The literature should only be reviewed when the theory has been generated. This approach contributes towards the theory being grounded in the data, rather than in previously identified ideas and existing theories (Glaser, 1992; 1998).

Another reason for not conducting a literature review prior to the research is that, according to GTM, it is impossible to know beforehand which concepts and categories will emerge from the data during analysis. The literature review should only be conducted when the theory has emerged, and the literature should be incorporated as additional data for comparison. Literature that is indeed studied beforehand should be unrelated to the substantive area, to prevent it from impacting on the emerging theory. Researchers should, however, read literature that will improve their theoretical sensitivity, their knowledge of theoretical coding, and their understanding of how social theory is used (Glaser, 1998).

2.3.4 Sampling

Convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, and theoretical sampling are the sampling methods used during the various stages of GTM (Morse, 2007). Through **convenience sampling** the initial participant group is created (Richards & Morse as cited in Morse, 2007), while **purposeful sampling** guides the sampling process until an initial theory has emerged (Morse, 2007). The purposefully sampled respondents are interviewed to confirm this initial theory. When theory starts to emerge, the researcher engages in **theoretical sampling** to ensure theoretical completeness (Glaser, 1998). This involves a process where a variety of participants are recruited based on the researcher's perception that their experiences could inform the development of the theory (Greener, 2011; Morse, 2007). The emerging theory thus guides the formation of the research group (Stern, 2007) and representativeness is not a goal of the sampling process (Greener, 2011; Stern, 2007).

2.3.5 Data gathering

In contrast to the belief that grounded theory is a qualitative research method (Bryman et al., 2014), “grounded theory is a general method that can be used on all data in whatever combination” (Glaser, 1998, p. 42). Any data – qualitative and or quantitative – could therefore be used for CCA and to generate a theory. However, the researcher should understand the data and how it was generated, and follow grounded theory principles when working with the data (Glaser, 1998).

When qualitative data is gathered through interviews, the custom in classical GTM is to take fieldnotes – without audio-recording the conversation – and to clarify the notes as soon as

possible after the interviews. This consequently becomes the data that will be analysed (Holton & Walsh, 2017). Detailed data capturing, such as through audio-recording and transcriptions thereof, is seen as a waste of time, and as possibly restricting the turnaround time from exiting and returning to the field for data collection (Glaser, 1998). The reason for this is summarised by (Holton & Walsh, 2017) who stated that grounded theory processes attempt to “capture incidents [...] that may suggest a concept [...] that helps to explain what is going on [...] in the situation that you are studying” (p. 71). Therefore, rather than focussing on detailed accounts of interviews, the researcher should take field notes reflecting incidents. Furthermore, incidents only become significant if they contribute towards generating categories through CCA, to be discussed in the next section.

2.3.6 Data analysis

The data is analysed during the process of data collection, which implies that data is collected and analysed before new data is collected. CCA is the method of analysis used in GTM (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a; Glaser & Strauss; Glaser, 1992) and is (1) a process where incidents are compared to each other in order to identify emergent concepts or categories, followed by (2) a process where incidents are compared with the emerging concepts or categories to determine if these support a category or contribute towards the understanding of a category’s properties, and (3) the final process where concepts are compared with each other. A fully conceptualised category will have properties and theoretically coded relationships with other categories and properties and with the core category (Glaser, 1992). The core category reflects the collective function of the other categories that, in their turn, reflect different behavioural approaches towards resolving this main concern (Glaser, 1998). Only now will the literature be reviewed and become material for CCA (Glaser, 1992).

Coding in GTM follows two processes, **substantive coding** that consists of open and selective coding, and **theoretical coding** (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton & Walsh, 2017). The GTM researcher will start with **open coding** of the data to discover categories and their properties. The researcher, therefore, continuously enquires whether the incident reflects a category, or a property of a category. This is because data is continuously conceptualised as categories or as properties of the categories. During this process of open coding, incidents contained in the data are compared with each other and concepts, or categories, emerge. When categories emerge, these are compared with each other and with incidents. During these comparisons the researcher specifically works towards identifying the incident as contributing towards a category, or towards a property of a category (Glaser, 1992). This process is the stage where conceptualisation occurs. The core category is identified from patterns occurring through these conceptualisations. At this stage the researcher switches to **selective coding**. This coding is aimed at the analysis of data that is of significance to the **core category** and other categories that will form part of the theory. This part of the coding helps to conceptualise the patterns between the categories and is followed by **theoretical coding** (Holton & Walsh, 2017).

While the researcher is performing CCA, all her or his thoughts on the incidents and categories are captured in the form of memos. When all the elements that should be included in a theory, – namely categories, properties of categories, core category and theoretically coded relationships – have been conceptualised, the researcher should use the memos by means of theoretical sorting to develop the theory (Glaser, 1992).

2.4 Writing the emerging theory

Grounded theory is “an elegant and intricate approach to capturing and conceptualizing latent patterns in social settings” (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 99). To make these latent patterns visible the next step in grounded theory is **sorting**.

As indicated above, theoretical sorting of memos – the written ideas of the researcher – is used to develop the theory. Glaser (1998) explained that two randomly selected memos are compared to see how they relate to each other. The memos are then sorted based on their similarities and differences and “the integration of the theory emerges” (Glaser, 1998, p. 190). This integration is reflected by theoretical codes that indicate the relationships between the categories. When the sorted memos are conceptually combined to indicate the main concern and how it is resolved through the core category, the theory has been formulated (Glaser, 1998).

2.5 Criteria for judging grounded theory

In GTM the theory emerges from the data and not from the researcher’s pre-existing knowledge. To assess the newly generated grounded theory, four criteria should be used: fit, workability, relevance and modifiability (Glaser, 1992; 1998).

Fit could also be understood as validity. Fit is assessed when the researcher verifies that the concepts or categories reflect the data and that the data was not forced to reflect a preconceived concept or category (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). **Workability** is assessed when the researcher verifies the ability of the theory to explain behaviour (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in terms of how behaviour is used to resolve the main concern (Glaser, 1992). **Relevance** refers

to the importance of the research and is assessed when the researcher verifies that the theory has application value. **Modifiability** could only be assessed when new data is analysed. If the researcher's new insights require changes to be made to the existing categories and it is possible to adapt the theory, then the theory is modifiable. Therefore, it is important to note that the grounded theory is not proved or disproved, but modified (Glaser, 1992; 1998).

2.6 Summary

In this chapter the philosophic context of the study was discussed and GTM came forth as a suitable methodology within the paradigm of critical realism. Furthermore, an overview of GTM in general together with a clarification of specific requirements of classical GTM were provided.

The next chapter addresses the research design of the current study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a description of how the current research has been conducted within the requirements of GTM. The focus of this account is specifically on the first aim of the study, to explore the main concern regarding youths who have committed physical assault and to generate a grounded theory explaining how this main concern is being addressed by the responding adolescents/youths.

3.2 The substantive area and the research question

The substantive area for the current study comprises late adolescents (youths aged 15 to 18 years) in South Africa who have committed physical assault, and who were referred to a diversion programme by a court. Late adolescents are the focus of this study as they are included in the age range defined as youth, and are in a developmental phase during which youth develop the skill of critical thinking (Nielsen, 1996). The researcher believed that this could contribute towards rich discussions during the research interviews.

In line with the aims of the current study the research question to be answered is: What is the main concern of youths who have committed physical assault and how is the main concern resolved?

3.3 Literature review

The researcher's journey towards identifying GTM as a suitable methodology for the current research study inevitably included a literature review related to the substantive area, namely violence and youth violence. She focussed specifically on the risk and protective factors in the development of youth violence but was of the opinion that this pre-existing knowledge did not rule out the use of classical GTM. The researcher believed that the literature read would not necessarily be related to the concepts and categories that would have emerged during the interviews. This assumption was made based on the warning that a premature literature review may result in time spent on engaging with material that is unrelated to the emergent theory. However, the literature review should be guided by the emergent theory, which can only be done after the theory has emerged (Glaser, 1998). For most of the theory that has emerged during this research study, this assumption is true, as Chapters 4 to 7 indicate. In addition, the aim of the study is to identify underlying processes or mechanisms involved in the occurrence of youth violence which were not covered by the literature that had been read by the researcher. One may even argue that this literature review increased the researcher's understanding of the importance and possible uses of a theory related to the non-shared environments of violent youths.

With reference to the notion that in GTM a specific problem should not be identified beforehand (Glaser, 1992; 1998), it should be mentioned that a research problem was indeed identified in advance. This was that the psychological processes (mechanisms) forming part of the non-shared environment in the development of youth violence should be investigated in order to generate a theory that could contribute to explaining the occurrence of these events. Classical GTM was identified as the most appropriate approach for the study; the researcher

decided to continue with the study while ensuring that any theory would not be imposed but that the data would guide the emergent theory.

When the decision was made to use GTM for the study the researcher took care not to further engage with readings related to violence. The literature she read was, however, aimed at improving the understanding of GTM and its implementation. She continued with relevant readings – for example the *Grounded theory seminar reader* edited by Glaser and Holton (2007) – to improve her theoretical sensitivity and knowledge of theoretical coding as suggested by proponents of GTM (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1998).

3.4 Sampling

Access was gained to research participants through the South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (Nicro), Khayaletu Child and Youth Care Centre, and National Youth Development Outreach (NYDO). These organisations offer diversion programmes to youth offenders referred for diversion by a court. Additional data was accessed through secondary resources. One of the adolescents referred to in the secondary sources was diverted to Khulisa Social Solutions, while the diversion programme to which the other adolescent mentioned in the secondary data was referred is not noted in the relevant secondary resource.

3.4.1 Convenience sampling

Convenience sampling was used to create the initial research group. Five youths between the ages of 15 and 18 years and one of 19 years old, who were referred to Nicro's diversion

programme due to having committed interpersonal violence, were interviewed. The 19 year old fell outside the age limits for late adolescents, but the researcher decided to include him in the study as he had only recently turned 19 years old and had committed physical assault while he was still in late adolescence.

The social workers at Nicro in Pretoria, South Africa and Soshanguve, South Africa acted as gatekeepers who recruited participants on the researcher's behalf. Interviews were conducted at Nicro's facilities on the days when they held diversion sessions with the adolescents.

A secondary data source in the form of the online testimonial of a youth offender who was referred to the Khulisa's diversion programme, was included for analysis (Diversion: Transformation Story: A story of triumph, <http://www.khulisa.org.za/interventions/>) and, although not a requirement of GTM, descriptive saturation was reached at this point. In addition, the categories, their properties and possible relationships had emerged and purposive sampling could take place to further saturate and confirm these.

3.4.2 Purposive sampling

Limited access to youths in the substantive area (to be discussed in more detail in Section 8.6) forced the researcher to turn to professionals for purposive sampling to confirm the emerging theory. The brief to the organisations was to recruit professionals within their structures who are working with members of the substantive area – late adolescents who have committed physical assault – for interviews. Five professionals were interviewed at Khayaletu Child and Youth Care Centre; these included two social workers, a youth care worker and two teachers.

A social worker at Nicro referred the researcher to an interview screened on the television programme *Motswako*, SABC2, in which a youth offender, a social worker from Nicro and a spokesperson from Bosasa – the mother organisation for Khayaletu Child and Youth Care Centre – participated. Analysis of these interviews confirmed and contributed towards the emerging theory while it also enhanced the theoretical saturation of the categories.

The youth offender in the above mentioned television interview as well as some of the youth offenders referred to by the social workers during the interviews, have committed physical assault in conjunction with other offences such as theft, substance abuse, and/or sexual offences. Through the analysis it became clear that there was a motivational difference between youths who have committed physical assault and those who have committed such assault in combination with other offences. To the researcher this implied that, for these groups, the function of violent behaviour may differ. These data sources, therefore, assisted the researcher to define the boundaries of the substantive area and made the researcher aware of other areas of violence worth investigating. Research focussing on other areas of violence could either contribute towards theoretical saturation of categories in the current theory, or reveal other main concerns for these groupings. In the final instance, it might contribute towards a grand theory on violence.

3.4.3 Theoretical sampling

The categories to be included in the theory were clear, but the properties and dimensions of the categories were not saturated at this stage of the research process. The next step was to conduct theoretical sampling. For this to take place, youths and professionals were to be interviewed. The researcher managed to interview a social worker at NYPO.

3.4.4 Challenges encountered during the recruitment process

At this stage it is worth mentioning some of the challenges that were encountered by the researcher in securing interviews with adolescent research participants. Even though all formal routes to gain ethical clearance for the research study and approval from the relevant entities to conduct the study within their structures had been followed, it remained a difficult task to contact the target population. The reason for this was an apparent lack of interest from some key stakeholders to engage with the recruitment process.

The Gauteng Department for Social Development gave approval for the study; however, attempts to gain access to respondents directly through this department, with assistance from its personnel, were unsuccessful. Several email communications were sent to various stakeholders without receiving responses. On the contrary, Nicro, Bosasa and NYPO were very supportive in providing access to respondents. Obstacles in the recruitment process included, though, the small numbers of youth offenders referred for diversion due to physical assault alone, and participants for whom consent and assent to participate in the study were obtained but who had not attended the scheduled interview. Reasons for this – determined with the assistance of the social worker – were that the youth offenders simply made the choice not to attend the interviews, while parents decided that the youths should rather focus on their school work. In the end, this recruitment of research participants proved to be a very demanding exercise, with many kilometres spent travelling without interviewing participants.

The researcher realised that if she continued with attempts to recruit participants for the purpose of theoretical saturation, the chances were that it could take another couple of months to

complete the study. For this reason, sampling of data went beyond the generation of primary data to the sourcing of secondary data, as discussed under Section 3.4.1.

3.5 Data collection

Taking fieldnotes during the research interviews was a challenging task, and a skill the researcher had to develop. Therefore, while retaining the fieldnotes, the researcher decided to record the interviews to be used, in order to improve the former. However, only two adolescent participants gave permission for their interviews to be audio-recorded while only one of them gave permission for transcription of the audio-recording by a professional transcriber. All the professionals gave their permission for audio recording and professional transcription of the interviews. The transcriptions were carried out for record keeping and so as to enable the researcher to return to the original interviews, should a direct quotation be required to illustrate an idea.

As research working from recordings was not in line with the GTM methodology, the researcher guarded against going into a transcriber's mode – including too much detail – when the fieldnotes were improved. The process of incorporating recordings worked well, though, to improve the fieldnotes and the quality of the data that was analysed.

3.6 Data analysis

The research data was collected and analysed as dictated by classical GTM. The fieldnotes were coded for incidents that are “indicators of phenomena or experiences as observed or articulated in data” (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 212). These incidents were compared to each

other to identify concepts or categories, after which incidents were compared to categories to generate the properties of the categories. During this process, emerging ideas were captured in memos, which in turn were used to identify categories, the relationships between them, and ultimately the core category and main concern of the substantive area. This information was, in the end, used to generate the grounded theory through the process of theoretical sorting.

Each interview was analysed using CCA before attending to the next interview. The initial round of open coding proved to be too descriptive. This was realised when the first attempt to describe the theory explained a linear process for which the researcher had to rely extensively on the content of the fieldnotes, to describe the theory. To counteract this inclination she re-read texts explaining CCA and also read accounts of other researchers on their experiences with the different phases of data analysis. Afterwards, the researcher started afresh with analysis of the data. However, by this time a couple of interviews had already been conducted. As the GTM position is to conduct further interviews only after the most recent one has been analysed, the researcher had to consciously avoid thinking of interviews that were conducted after the interview that was analysed at that moment.

3.7 Finalising the emerging theory

Writing the emerging theory is the process whereby the “latent patterns in social settings” (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 99) are made visible by the researcher and, as explained in the previous chapter, “the writer brings out the broad problem and delimits it to a core dimension [...] which accounts for most of the variation in resolving the problem” (Glaser, 1998, p. 195).

The current researcher understood this to mean that the **core category** pulls together the cumulative goal of all the categories encapsulated by the theory, indicating that all the included categories work towards resolving the **main concern**. The description of the core category is, therefore, an overarching explanation of the combined effort and purpose of the mechanisms and behaviour described in each of the categories, while the pattern in the social setting is made explicit by integrating the categories into a theory.

At the end of the data analysis, the main concerns of the substantive area as well as the core category were clear. The remaining categories were once again compared to determine whether some categories were dimensions of an overarching category. They were also compared to the core category to determine how each worked towards resolving the main concern. Some gaps were identified, and theoretical sampling and more interviews were therefore conducted in an attempt to saturate the categories. However, it was not possible to saturate all the categories (see Chapter 4 for further information).

3.8 Ethical considerations

The starting point of the ethical consideration of this study comprises the general principles proposed by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017), followed by a reflection on the procedures for obtaining ethical clearance and approval for research.

3.8.1 General principles

Principle A: Beneficence and nonmaleficence. A study of this nature is potentially sensitive as it deals with youths who had physically assaulted their victims and underwent court

procedures before they were ordered to attend a diversion programme conducted by a social worker at an approved centre. The interviews were approached with great care, in the sense that the researcher attempted to gather data without being intrusive while she was sensitive to verbal and bodily cues, especially from the adolescent research participants, that she should not continue with a specific line of inquiry. Nevertheless, benefits to the adolescent research participants could be embedded in the opportunity to openly discuss their live experiences with someone who tried to understand them and attempted neither to judge nor to correct them. On the other hand, the exact same process of reflection could potentially retraumatise a participant or create an awareness of negative or hopeless life circumstances. Fortunately, the respondents were participating in a diversion programme where the social worker made great efforts to build a relationship with them and intervene in their lives through imparting life skills and carrying out other diversion activities. The intention was to bring any concerns about the respondents that developed during the interviews to the attention of the social worker. This would have been first negotiated with the respondents at the end of the interview to obtain their approval for such a discussion. There were, however, no cases that required the researcher to intervene on this level. No matters of concern arose during the interviews. In the worst case scenario, there could have been a potential after-effect, but as a preventative measure participants would later on be involved in the diversion program where they had support available to them if so required.

Through provision and discussion of the consent and assent forms before the interviews commenced, research participants were reminded of the confidentiality of information provided during the interviews. Anonymity was insured as the reporting of incidents had been performed in such a way that the respondent(s) were non-identifiable. The participants also had the opportunity to give or refuse consent for audio-recordings as well as for whether interviews

could be transcribed by a professional transcriber. In addition, the participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent or assent at any time during the research process, without experiencing negative consequences.

Finally, the researcher guarded against introducing her own experiences and views, so as to influence neither the progress of the interviews nor the analysis and presentation thereof. This was guarded against as a theory based on forced assumptions about violent behaviour and the prevention thereof, could contribute towards ineffective interventions or interventions causing harm to the participants.

Principle B: Fidelity and responsibility. To build a relationship of trust with research participants before or during a once-off interview is not achieved automatically. Trust therefore had to be instilled by means of a thorough introduction of the researcher and a clear explanation of the study, followed by the opportunity to ask questions for the purpose of clarification. During the interview the researcher aspired to make use of proper interview skills and to clarify any uncertainty regarding participant responses. This served as proof of the researcher's professional and scientific approach in being responsible towards her participants.

Principle C: Integrity. Research as a science of psychology was practised with integrity as the participants were not deceived in any way, and the process was aimed at accurately interpreting the content of the interviews by ensuring understanding of what the participants were trying to convey.

Principle D: Justice. The researcher ensured that the research was practised in a just manner through proper preparation for the interviews, a deep understanding of the study's methodology

and the identification of potential personal biases that might impact on the interview and analytical processes. Furthermore, the researcher was cognisant of the fact that the theory should be true to the data and do justice to the experiences and accounts of the research participants.

Principle E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity. The research participants were treated with respect: the opinions and observations they communicated were not disregarded, but valued as unique contributions towards understanding the main concern being studied. Their privacy and the confidentiality of the content of the interviews were respected and protected.

3.8.2 Ethical clearance and approval of research

Ethical clearance was obtained from Unisa's Ethical Committee (see Appendix 1) and approval was received from the Gauteng Department of Social Development (see Appendix 2) to conduct research within its structures. Both the ethical clearance from Unisa and approval from the Department of Social Development were prerequisites for approval to conduct research within the structures of Nicro, Bosasa, and NYPO. For minors informed consent for participation was obtained by the social workers from their parents, while the minors also gave their assent (see Appendices 3 and 4 for examples of the information provided and the forms signed). All the professionals who participated in the research study provided informed consent (see Appendix 5 for an examples of the information provided and the forms signed).

3.9 Summary

Regardless of this specific challenge and other challenges experienced, CCA, previously included in the reflection on the power of GTM, assisted the researcher in identifying an emerging theory which could be coherently described and discussed along existing research and theory. In Chapter 4 the emerging theory, the theory of thwarted belongingness, will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

THE EMERGING THEORY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theory of thwarted belongingness that has emerged from the research participants' accounts of their life experiences, is presented. While data has been gained from adolescent research participants, professional research participants working with youth offenders and secondary data resources – including a television interview and online testimonial – the extracts included in the text below were mostly retrieved from the interviews with the adolescent research participants. The majority of them were unwilling to allow the researcher to audio-record the interviews. At times, though, she captured in her fieldnotes the verbatim words of an adolescent research participant, of which some of these are quoted in this chapter as direct quotations and indicated with a “P”. Quotations that were derived from the fieldnotes but that were not the verbatim words of the adolescent research participants, are indicated with an “F”.

According to the social workers who were participating in the research and who were presenting the diversion programmes, there was not a distinct difference between the various types of youth offenders they work with. In other words, as with other types of youth offenders such as those who have committed, for instance, sexual violence, rape, robbery and theft, those who have committed physical assault often struggle to deal with, for example, anger, short temperedness, family relationship issues and identity issues. What the social worker research participants may not necessarily realise is that the same experiences or circumstances of, and the same behaviour observed among, the various youth offenders, may fulfil different functions

for each type of youth offender, or substantive area. Therefore, if these social workers perceive the youth offenders as belonging to different substantive areas, of which each area may have its own main concerns and ways to resolve it, they may interpret the same circumstances, experiences and behaviour as fulfilling different functions, depending on the type of offender they are working with at that stage. This is not to disregard their observations but to clarify that these might be embedded in a grand theory on delinquency, and to clarify the importance of building grand theories from substantive theories. The discussion will therefore start with a discussion of the substantive area of the current study, as described earlier.

4.2 Overview of participants

The professional research participants from whom data were obtained included four social workers, two educators, and one youth care worker, all who are employed at diversion centres.

A common denominator across all the adolescent research participants in this study was that they came into conflict with the law after committing an assault and were then referred to a diversion programme by a court. To reach the participants, the researcher was completely reliant on the diversion programmes' staff and the demographic profile of the participants, who were therefore reached randomly. The group of adolescent research participants from whom data were obtained, either through interviews or data sourced via the internet, included one black female, one coloured male and six black males. The majority of these adolescents came from lower socioeconomic areas, with the adolescents interviewed living in and around Pretoria, South Africa.

Most of the adolescents who were interviewed had, on the surface, ordinary lives as they read books, played sport, enjoyed being with friends, watched movies and assisted with chores in the home. Only through interrogation of their lives in more detail did it become clear that their lives were anything but ordinary. One adolescent, for example, left his mother to stay with his father but finally lived with his grandmother. Another adolescent lived with his grandparents but saw his mother, who lived nearby, on a daily basis. A third adolescent whose parents had passed away lived with his uncle but had previously moved around between two aunts. The other adolescent research participants came from, what one could term ordinary households, in the sense that they lived with their parents and reported good relationships with them.

None of these participants reported that they were academically strong; nor were all of them attending school. One of them attended a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college to complete his matric while working for his grandfather over weekends; another worked fulltime with the intention of continuing with schooling later on.

4.3 Main concern: A thwarted sense of belonging

The reflections that the adolescent research participants shared with the researcher during the interviews revolved around their childhood experiences, social interactions, schooling, recreation and family life. These responses were elicited by initial questions about what they liked and disliked, and whom they regarded as the important people in their lives. The follow-up questions were based on clarifying the issues and investigating the life experiences the research participants brought to the table.

The conceptual analysis of the data revealed the main concern for the substantive area to be a **thwarted sense of belonging**. A sense of belonging that has not been thwarted emerged as a positive state of mind, created through the experiences of satisfactory involvement of a significant primary caretaker in the life of the adolescent, sufficient support and guidance, and positive social-worth. A thwarted sense of belonging, therefore, refers to a negative state of mind that is created by adverse experiences of aspects that should actually instil a sense of belonging. This negative state of mind was manifested through various emotions coded as **feeling victimness**. These included feeling bad, feeling worried, fading happiness, sadness, disappointment, shame and being short tempered. Feeling victimness is mirrored in the following quotation from a description found on the Khulisa webpage of the successful diversion of an adolescent offender, which stated that: “This is the story of a young man who was abandoned at birth and whose heart had been filled with hurt and anger” (Retrieved October 16, 2017, from <http://www.khulisa.org.za/interventions/>). These feelings flowed from an adverse experience, relevant to the current study.

The adolescent research participants in the current study seem to attempt to resolve this thwarted sense of belonging through the core category of **negotiating belongingness**, which consists of three strategies: **managing reality**, **setting boundaries**, and **weighing the self**. A second group of strategies emerges when the main concern is not successfully resolved through the core category. This group of strategies, labelled **dealing with failed negotiations**, includes the strategies of **acting** and **changing**. These categories and strategies form the core of the theory (see Figure 4.1) that will be discussed in this chapter.

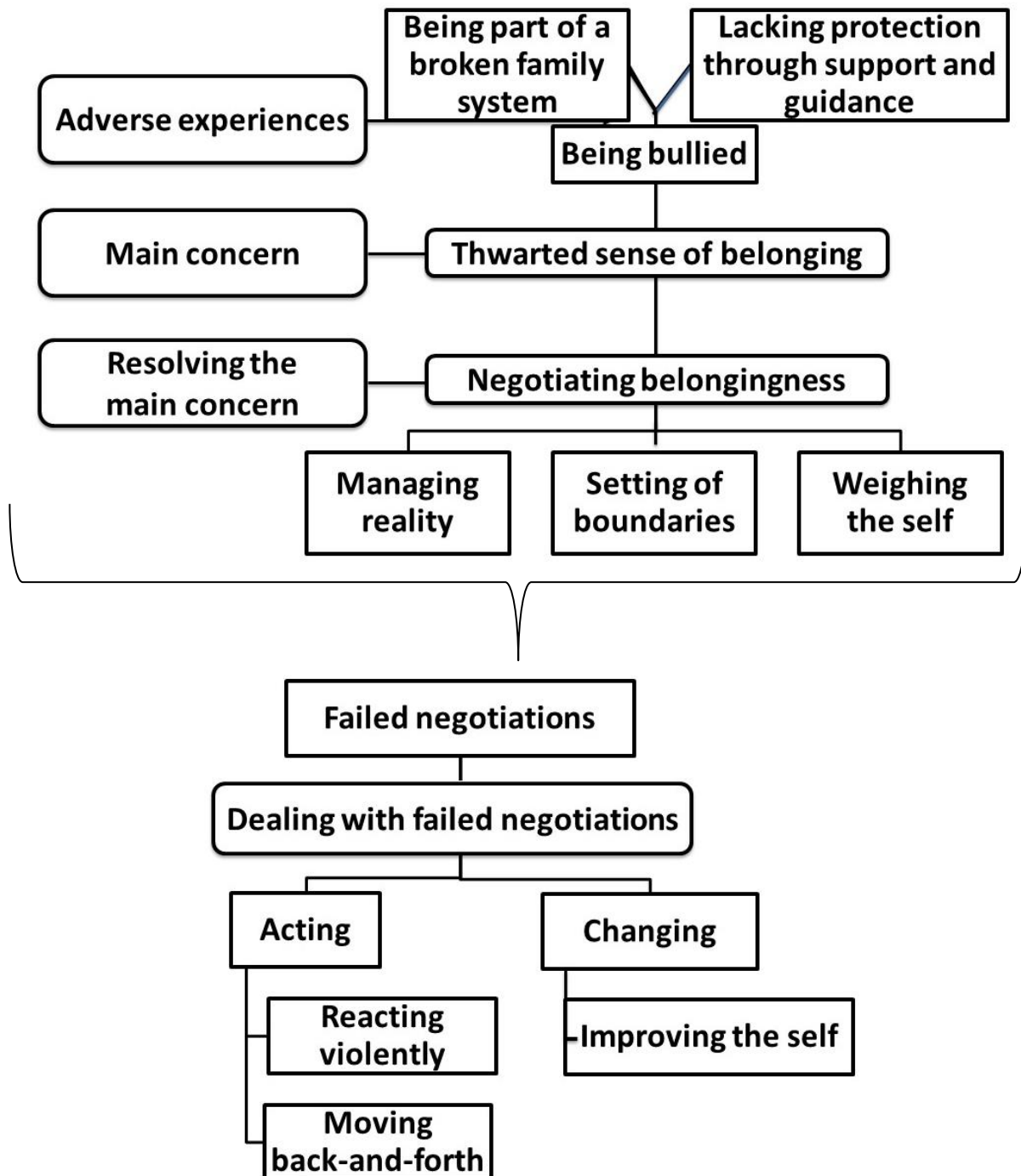


Figure 1: The theory of thwarted belongingness

To properly contextualise the proposed theory, the adverse events experienced by the adolescent research participants will firstly be reflected upon, followed by reflections on the various components of the theory.

4.3.1 Adverse experiences

The adverse experiences the adolescent research participants reported on are not of a passing nature, but consist mainly of events or a series of events that have significantly impacted emotionally on them. These emotions are therefore manifestations of the thwarted sense of belonging that they are required to deal with, so as to regain healthy emotional experiences and a sense of belonging.

The adverse experiences that led to a thwarted sense of belonging are events or actions the adolescent research participants were exposed to, over which they had no control and that impacted on their lives in ways that left them with negative feelings and resultant behaviours. These adverse experiences are ongoing either in the sense that they form part of the adolescent research participants' daily course of life, or in the sense that once-off events result in lasting negative effects, as they were not dealt with constructively in the first instance. For the research sample included in the current study, the adverse experiences mostly took on three forms: being part of a broken family system, lacking support and guidance and being bullied. However, adverse experiences that have the potential to significantly affect a person's state of mind might possibly take on other forms that could become apparent either through further research or reviewing the literature. However, based on the adverse experiences reflected in the current data, **belongingness** is impacted upon by the involvement, or the lack thereof, of significant others in the lives of the adolescents (specifically parents and parental replacements where parents were physically absent), the provision of support and guidance, and social-worth. These adverse experiences and their impact on the adolescent research participants' **sense of belonging** will now be discussed.

4.3.1.1 Being part of a broken family system

Single parenthood, divorce, death and abandonment at birth reflected the broken family systems to which some of the adolescent research participants belong. The fieldnotes of the interview with one of the adolescent research participants record this as follows:

When he was young he had a good life. He was living with his parents and brothers, but his father passed away when he was six years old. Two years later his mother passed away. (F5.6)

Such broken family systems impact on the adolescents' sense of belonging, as parental involvement is absent or limited while the gap it creates is not sufficiently catered for where new primary caretakers are involved:

Even if the person I am living with is not my mother but treating me like a mother. (F3.14)

Experiences following the initial adverse experience of an adolescent often seem to further pull the system apart, adding to the thwarted sense of belonging, such as the events described by one of the educators at Bosasa:

Most of the young ones, are brought up by the single parents [...] the mum goes early to work, even before they go to school, and she comes late, and she will not even notice that this young boy does not go to school at all [...]. When she comes home, she just goes to the bathroom, wash herself, eats something, goes

to bed, not even seeing her son because her son will only [...] pop up after eight [...]. In the morning, she will leave while her son is still sleeping. (P10.81)

4.3.1.2 Lacking support and guidance

The data analysis of the current study indicated that a lack of support, or sufficient support, contributes towards the breakdown of a sense of belonging for the adolescent research participants. The contrary is also true – sufficient support strengthens a sense of belonging. A lack of support emerged where support systems are not available at home, no responsibility is expected from the adolescents and therefore no guidance and/or support are provided, or where adolescents are not protected when experiencing adversity. One such example was that of an adolescent research participant who is allowed much room for his own decision making. When he dropped out of school he did not receive support in the sense that someone insisted that he go back to school or urged him to do so. He then stayed away from school until he decided to complete his schooling through a TVET college. In addition, even a direct request from this research participant to his parent for support was not met:

Just like the last day I've dropped out of school. They told me to come with my father, my parent. I called my father, but he didn't come. This isn't support from him. I never had support from him. (P3.51)

These kinds of events seem to instil a longing for support on the part of the adolescent research participants and an interpretation of not being worthy enough to belong to that context both physically and psychologically. In other words, in events where the primary caretakers do not support the adolescents when they need support or where the said caretakers are not available

to them on a day to day basis, they may feel as if they are not cared for. Often where physical care is lacking, it is interpreted as a lack of emotional care from the side of the primary caretaker, which affects the sense of belonging felt by the adolescent research participants involved. The same effect occurs where the adolescent has to meet the expectations of the primary care taker without his/her own expectations being met.

4.3.1.3 Being bullied

A similar effect, on the sense of belonging, to that in the previous examples of adverse experience is experienced by adolescent research participants who were bullied. In these situations, the parent-child relationships are intact, meaning that the parents are supportive, but the **not-belonging** seems to manifest through the subtle messages from bullies such as: “I do not care about you” and “Those caring about you are not significant”.

The bullies would speak about his parents or personal things or compare him with his sister. (F1.11)

Through verbal means these bullies either attacked the adolescent research participants or separated them from their social structures as they targeted the image of parents or people close to the adolescents (attacking), drew comparisons between the adolescents and ‘superior’ peers (separating), or teased and backchatted the adolescents (separating). As social structures are sources of belongingness for the adolescent research participants, the effects of the attacks and separations played out as a thwarted sense of belonging.

Through investigating these adolescent research participants' main concern, a thwarted sense of belonging, **negotiating belongingness** emerged as the core category that seems to pull together the various strategies they use to resolve the main concern. This core category will now be discussed.

4.4 Core category: Negotiating belongingness

The importance of owning a sense of belonging was demonstrated by incidents that indicate the adolescent research participants' needs for being loved and taken care of (they wanted someone to take responsibility for them), to feel like being someone's child (they wanted to feel like family to someone), to have someone providing direction to them, and to have people who are interested in their lives and are proud of them. They want to be known (to be important in someone's eyes) and not to be judged. Two adolescent research participants specifically mentioned that it is not a proper life when you are allowed to do whatever you want, whenever you want to. This might have been a very conscious phrasing of how many of these adolescents subconsciously feel. Another conscious phrasing of what is occurring, and indicating the importance of a sense of belonging, is:

I thought no one cares about me, so why do I have to care about people? (P5.28)

As mentioned before (in Section 4.3), these adolescents' sense of belonging may have been thwarted and they may have attempted to resolve this issue through the core category of **negotiating belongingness** that consists of three strategies, namely managing reality, setting boundaries and weighing the self. These strategies will now be discussed.

4.4.1 Managing reality

Managing reality refers to how the adolescent research participants deal with their adverse experiences of **being part of a broken family system, lacking support and guidance** and **being bullied**. They seem to manage their individual realities in order to deal with their thwarted sense of belonging, in a variety of ways that fit into the two dimensions of **avoiding reality** and **dealing with reality**. An example of how these dimensions emerged during the interviews includes two adolescent research participants who both use physical exercise to deal with their adverse experiences. One adolescent research participant utilises exercise to avoid dealing with his adverse experiences and the emotional impact thereof, while the other exercises to psychologically work through his adverse experiences and their emotional impact.

The choice between **avoiding reality** and **dealing with reality** seems to be context specific. The same individual confronted with similar experiences may in one instance **avoid reality** and in another **deal with reality**. A possible determinant for avoiding reality is that if reality is avoided one could forget the adverse experience or pretend that it does not exist. Then, for all practical purposes, the adverse events are not real; this consequently creates an illusion that the adverse experience does not exist. Alternatively, if reality is not dealt with, the possibility that things may change is still alive. If it is dealt with without positive results, an outcome has been reached and the situation may never change.

4.4.1.1 Avoiding reality

This dimension emerged in instances where the adolescent research participants were not equipped to effectively deal with the adverse experiences in their lives. When they attempted

to deal with adverse experiences they did not feel equipped to handle, they risked experiencing yet another disappointment that could draw them further away from the goal of improving their sense of belonging. This subsequently seems to manifest through ignoring the problem-causing person and/or the existence of the problem, and blocking unpleasant events and the resulting emotions from their consciousness. Reasons provided by the adolescent research participants, for why they at times avoid reality, include advice from parents to ignore the problem, lack of their own confidence to ask for help, not feeling comfortable to ask for assistance, and perceiving support seeking behaviour as bothering another:

One could argue that **avoiding reality** is a way of making peace with the status quo – life is what it is there is nothing I can do about it. I just have to live with that. (P3.31)

This acceptance with the status quo could, however, either be **giving up** on life,

Honestly, it makes me feel hopeless. It makes me wanna give up on life (P3.32)

or **moving on**,

Life goes on (F6.11)

or possibly **avoiding** further disappointment.

Avoiding reality could relate back to the perceived lack of support and guidance experienced by the adolescent research participants as a contributor to the development of the main concern,

namely dealing with a thwarted sense of belonging. Some of the adolescents indicated that they do not talk to parents or teachers about their adverse experiences (i.e. they avoid communicating about it), even when an opportunity was created by a concerned parent or teacher, but they instead seem to bottle up their emotions. They, furthermore, often appear to have difficulty opening up towards adults who are supposed to be in their circle of trust. As one of the social workers indicated:

They avoid their issue and pretend to be happy. (P7.21)

In these cases, the lack of support was self-created by the adolescent research participants when they refused support, but in other cases there are physical and biological barriers to accessing the primary support system or the people that are supposed to be the closest to them emotionally. A physical barrier that surfaced in the current study is, for example, the physically absent father that literally prevents the adolescent research participant from having a father-child relationship. An example of a biological barrier is biological gender differences between the parent and child that left the male adolescent research participant feeling that he cannot discuss his problems with his mother.

One adolescent research participant's mother advised him to ignore people and things that bothered him, and this strategy reportedly works for him. Yet, he experienced anger and acted violently when a friend insulted him by referring to his mother in a negative way. These incidents, and his reflections on them, are accounted for by the theory; however, the possibility emerges that long-term success in avoiding reality could be dependent on the resilience of the involved adolescent. A more resilient adolescent may choose not to deal with the adverse event(s) without experiencing a negative effect on his/her sense of belonging. However, the

analysis of the interviews conducted with some of the other research participants indicated that the continuity of the adverse experiences may also impact on the long-term success of avoiding reality (regardless of resilience). Continuous exposure to adverse events requires a more resilient adolescent in order to prevent avoiding reality from becoming a suppression of thoughts and emotions, with a negative impact on the adolescent's sense of belonging:

He built up anger over time. Anger because of things being stolen. It happened over times; different times. (F4.10)

4.4.1.2 Dealing with reality

Dealing with reality is a strategy used by some of the adolescent research participants as part of managing their realities, and a conscious choice to handle experiences affecting their sense of belonging. It is a constructive process chosen when the individual either feels equipped to handle the adverse experiences or seems to have sufficient support in this regard.

The adolescent research participants who chose to face their realities mostly had someone available whom they could approach for support: a brother, girlfriend, grandfather, parent, friend or cousin. Unfortunately, the people who were approached by the adolescent research participants were often themselves young and/or ill equipped to support them and provide guidance to them, and the advice received was often superficial and even worsened the situation in some instances.

Nikita dealt with the back chatting by telling her parents who said she should stay at home; inside the house. (F2.49)

Before, when he involved his parents, they would call the other person's parents in an attempt to resolve the conflict, but it made things worse. (F1.17)

In other instances, the adolescent research participants did not follow up on superficial advice that previously did not help, or avoided seeking support when the results of previous experiences were undesirable. They, therefore, did not pursue the issue of dealing with reality.

4.4.2 Setting boundaries

The second dimension in the process of negotiating belongingness is the setting of boundaries. Amidst the desire to belong, the adolescent research participants also expressed a contradictory desire, namely, **not** to belong. Thus, the setting of boundaries is a form of access management through which the adolescents either allow contact between themselves and people they experience positively, or through which they block exposure to people they experience negatively.

People were afraid of me. I felt like a boss. (F3.70)

Boundary setting takes on various forms that are either physical processes, psychological ones, or both. The most explicit form of boundary setting that the adolescent research participants revealed in the interviews, namely communicating to others to leave them alone, is on a physical level. This is done through, for instance, building muscles to gain respect and create the image of:

do not mess with me. (F1.6)

Another more complex form of physical boundary setting that refers to membership in social groups, was coded by the researcher as **squading**. Even though some adolescent research participants do not have many friends, group or squad activities are evident. Squads have their own identities and rules, which consequently suggest boundary setting. In addition, squads create safe spaces where the adolescents are taken care of to a certain extent. Squading may, however, be either positive or negative. Positive squading is reflected through groups of adolescents playing games or practising a sport. Negative squading is, as one social worker research participant explained, just fitting in where ever they believe they fit, which often ends in wrong behaviour:

In the sense of not knowing who I am, what I want to do as a child, where I belong, what I'm supposed to be doing, so I just fit in wherever I think I fit in, I just go with the flow. And it lands in wrong behaviours in the end. (P14.5)

On a psychological level, the emotion of **anger** is used to set boundaries, and the display of anger is often the first line of boundary setting. Those who know the adolescents are therefore aware that there could be dire consequences if they do not leave the angry adolescent alone.

The people bothering him made him to lose his temper and to fight. His beating is not just beating. It could be killing because of the uncontrollable anger. (F5.23)

If the initial boundaries are not respected and negotiations fail (discussed below), physical boundary setting seems to follow. Values function as a form of boundary setting by the

adolescent research participants as these determine the behaviour that is allowed and not allowed in these relationships:

Judging makes him angry. He selects people he wants to talk to. (F5.32)

If these standards are not adhered to, the perpetrator is not regarded as someone that may be allowed to come close to the adolescent's inner circle. Alternatively, some adolescents would **withdraw** from the social setting or group when they do not approve of these.

Relaxed boundaries occur for some of the adolescent research participants where they have reached a point of indifference. This **lack of caring** leads them to no longer being bothered by others' behaviour and values. The adolescents then seem to withdraw behaviourally and psychologically from their environments:

They can do whatever they want. I do not care. I do not fight. Even if they can tell me words I just leave them. (P3.48)

This may be an indication that boundary setting, as a way to negotiate belongingness, has failed for these adolescents.

4.4.3 Weighing the self

Through the data analyses, it became clear that the adolescent research participants moved between weighing the self as being good and being bad, although these outcomes were not mutually exclusive. In other words, they could at the same time weigh themselves as both good

and bad based on different characteristics, actions and emotions. The outcomes of being good and being bad therefore existed simultaneously with, at any given moment, the participant experiencing the self as either being more good or being more bad. This phenomenon was coded as **weighing the self** and can be explained as a process through which the adolescents internally deal with their adverse experiences to maintain or regain their self-worth and to be worthy of belonging. It can also be explained as giving themselves permission to own a sense of belonging. Weighing the self is, therefore, essentially movement between valuing and devaluing the self – an internal process the adolescents use to determine their own worth, which is based on their own characteristics, actions and emotions. There is, however, an interplay between positive and negative results. Ideally, the weighing should escalate towards a positive end-result that is an improved self-worth. However, for these adolescent research participants who engaged in weighing the self, this process often moves towards negative end-results.

In the adolescent research participants' accounts of what happened after the interpersonal violence occurred, it became clear that various emotions emerged after these events. The violence, coded as **reacting violently** and discussed in Section 4.5.1.1, is a dimension of the **acting** strategy that forms part of **dealing with failed negotiations**. Even though **acting violently** falls outside the strategies that form part of **negotiating belongingness** the resulting emotions are linked with **weighing the self**. These emotions were coded as **feeling consequences** and are contextualised dimensions of **weighing the self** that are directly linked to the violent acts. This link emphasises the emotional impact of the adolescents' actions on themselves, no matter whether the actions are regarded as right or wrong. In a sense, the violent acts give weight to the self and the adolescents' self-worth through being visible. Still, the adolescent research participants did not approve of their own violent behaviour, which robbed the acts of their potential impact toward **being good**.

We have to be mindful that the adolescent research participants, as was demonstrated in terms of the strategy of managing reality, do not necessarily have the skills that are required to deal with their adverse experiences. They probably possess the knowledge that there should be better ways to deal with their circumstances, otherwise they would not have been able to weigh themselves as **being bad**.

Feeling consequences is often accompanied by the justification of actions to positively influence the weighing of the self. Weighing of the self perhaps not just as being good, but also, sometimes, as being less bad. They therefore justified their behaviour with explanations such as self-defence, acting from a point of anger or that they were struggling with their own problems. In other words, the adolescent research participants explained their actions as being reactions to actions from other people who wronged them, or as being in a bad personal space which caused them to act violently. Even the professional research participants justified the actions of the adolescents they work with by blaming parental shortcomings, peer pressure and the adolescent stage of development.

The adolescent research participants, as a reflection of their satisfaction with how they dealt with their internal anger through interpersonal violence, reported several experiences that are either positive, negative or neutral, and that reflect a form of weighing the self.

Negative weight experiences are reflected by indications that, directly after the incidents took place, the adolescent research participants felt regretful and wished the interpersonal violence had never happened, felt upset and cried, did not regard the action as worth it and felt like bad people.

After fighting he would feel upset with himself as he did not like fighting. He would cry after a fight. (F1.10)

The incident made Nikita to feel like a bad person. (F2.42)

These acts, therefore, added an additional burden on the adolescent research participants, which seem to hamper their ability to move on, and or even to deal with the original challenges that lead to the interpersonal violence in the first instance. An example of this is expressed in the statement, “he regrets the fight and he should have ignored him [the victimiser]” (F6.13). The consequences of his action led the adolescent to think that he should have ignored the perpetrator, which illustrates **avoiding reality**. Therefore, weighing the action of addressing reality by means of a fight combined with the consequent impression that the situation should have been ignored, may have brought about a devaluation of the self.

Positive weight experiences were less frequently reported and often combined with **negative weight experiences**. These are reflected by the adolescent research participants’ accounts that respect is gained through reacting violently and in this sense, violence had a generally positive effect on life, as well as that fighting often made them feel better.

Richard gained respect from everyone ... This action ... has had a positive effect on his life in general. (F1.28)

After fighting he feels better. (F5.19)

Neutral experiences are reflected in incidents where the offender was indifferent after the violent act. The act did not resolve the anger, but neither was there any remorse; they reported that they:

just [felt] the same. (P3.43)

4.5 Dealing with failed negotiations

When the main concern, which is a thwarted sense of belonging, is not successfully resolved through the core category, namely **negotiating belongingness**, a second loop of strategies emerges. This category – that could be regarded as a core category in its own right – is labelled as **dealing with failed negotiations** and consists of the strategies of **acting** and **changing**. These are the results of failed negotiations, but they feed back into the strategies for negotiating belongingness which will be explained in the sections to follow.

4.5.1 Acting

Acting refers to explicit strategies that flow from failed negotiations and which are preceded by triggers. Acting, for the participating adolescents, includes the dimensions of **reacting violently** and **moving back-and-forth**.

4.5.1.1 Reacting violently

When the adolescent research participants reacted violently this mostly manifested through fighting without any weapons being involved. Only one adolescent research participant

reported the use of a broken beer bottle during the violent act. Reacting violently, therefore, seems to be more of an **emotional** deed, as is illustrated by one of the professional research participants:

They bottle up their anger and take it out on somebody else (P11.7)

Specific events often trigger this emotion-driven violence which relieves the emotions born from the failed negotiations. The emotions that precede the fighting or lashing out are mainly those of anger accompanied by frustration, feeling bad, not worrying anymore, or extensive worries.

He was just angry every day. (F4.15)

Sogika experiences different types of anger; big and small angers. (F6.14)

They develop anger [...] and they easily get frustrated. (P8.3)

The triggers are mostly **provocative** in nature. One adolescent research participant explained that he would go out on the street, burdened by his own problems, and then take his anger out on the wrong people:

And now he starts poking me and I start fighting. (P3.33)

While another indicated that she did not want to become angry but the other girl was pushing her, she (the participant) got angry and a fight broke out. **Pushing** is understood to be consistent irritating behaviour of a provocative nature, interpreted as bullying behaviour.

Reacting violently resembles an extreme form of boundary setting that attempts to force a sense of self-worth. Unfortunately, this impacts negatively on the adolescent research participants' weighing of the self as it flings them back to a devaluation of the self. Therefore, **reacting violently** as a dimension of the acting strategy, can be regarded as a form of boundary setting that impacts on **weighing the self**. One could argue that it forms part of the dimension of **dealing with reality** (see Section 4.4.1.2); nonetheless, dealing with reality has emerged as a conscious choice while the violent behaviour is a reaction that instead set a boundary, albeit in an extreme form, while feeding back into **weighing the self**.

4.5.1.2 Moving back-and-forth

Moving back-and-forth is another explicit strategy that is activated by triggers. For the substantive area – late adolescents fitting the criteria described – moving back-and-forth manifested through **leaving home periodically**, which is an action activated by triggers and an extreme form of boundary setting.

One of the adolescent research participants, who lives with extended family, indicated that when he was younger he would disappear for periods whenever his caretakers annoyed him. A social worker reported that adolescents from a variety of substantive areas she works with, will go to their friends when the family situation becomes unbearable. This group of adolescents at times stays over at friends' homes without their parents' permission and knowledge, but they always return home.

The social worker further indicated that the adolescents mostly associate with people with whom they have things in common, and friendships are based on these similarities. Unfortunately, some adolescents associate with people from whom they could get a quick fix, referring to people who provide them with illegal substances. This could indicate a route to, and the beginning of, substance abuse for some of these adolescents.

4.5.2 Changing

The strategy of changing is more directive than **weighing the self**, because instead of moving between the weighing of the self as being either good or bad to determine worthiness to belong, the adolescent research participants act **intentionally**. This speaks of an imbalance between “who I am” and “who I want to be” that emerges, and in a sense answers the question: **Who do I want to be?** Either socially acceptable changes or unacceptable ones are used to resolve this imbalance. The actions taken to accomplish change provide new material for **weighing the self**. Nevertheless, this process of working towards an ideal self is subjective and does not have to conform to healthy standards. It might therefore result in socially acceptable or unacceptable changes.

In the current study the most prominent change that emerged is **improving the self**.

4.5.2.1 Improving the self

Improving the self positively influences the adolescent research participants' self-worth. Still, this was often only embarked on after the adolescents came into conflict with the law. The

initial drive to change is thus not motivated by choice but imposed by a court through referral to diversion programmes. In such programmes, social workers play guiding roles and when the adolescent research adolescents realised that there are alternatives when dealing with adverse experiences, they gradually took responsibility for their own lives. The insight and improvement in their lives have a positive impact on their sense of belonging when they implement the strategies to negotiate belongingness more effectively.

In addition to the above, **improving the self** differs from dealing with or avoiding reality as it focusses on **developing a new view of, and approach to**, life. This is a dimension of **changing** that enables the adolescents to turn away from the adverse experiences on an emotional level and not to live in the legacy of these. This is not to say that the adverse experiences do not exist any longer. The causes of the adolescents' thwarted sense of belonging do not necessarily vanish but while they have an impact on the present they are no longer a driving force. The dimensions of improving the self and the responsibility the adolescent research participants take for their lives are now becoming the **driving forces**.

4.5.3 Saturation of dealing with failed negotiations

In the current study, limited sampling opportunities and the limitations imposed by the demarcation of the substantive area prevented theoretical saturation of the category of **dealing with failed negotiations**. Consequently, the properties and dimensions of this category could change as and when further research is conducted.

It is foreseen that the categories of **joining gangs** and **abusing substances** – which have emerged through data analysis but that did not earn their way into the theory as it was not

saturated categories and did not prove to address the main concern of the current study – could possibly belong to the strategy of **dealing with failed negotiations**. Hypothetically, **joining gangs** and **abusing substances** could turn out to be dimensions of **changing** that are not socially acceptable and that do not assist the individual to develop a healthy view of, and acceptable approach to, life. It is foreseen that, if included in the theory based on future research, these categories will not be dimensions of **actions**, as gangsterism and substance abuse imply gradual involvement in unacceptable environments that requires lifestyle and behavioural changes. However, further research and working towards a grand theory could shed more light onto substance abuse and gangsterism and how these categories are used to resolve the main concerns identified for the substantive areas studied at that time.

4.6 Categories of note not included in the theory

Three potential categories, namely finding pseudo-families, abusing substances and the influence of the environment, were not included in the theory. These three categories and the reasons for their omission are discussed below.

4.6.1 Finding pseudo-families

It emerged from the accounts of social workers that some adolescents become street children by choice, which, in an advanced form, could result in their joining gangs actively and permanently. Further, it emerged that violence related to gangsterism cannot be merged with **reacting violently** as described in this emerging theory, as it seems that the former may be linked to different main concerns. Hence, youth involved in gangs are excluded from the substantive area.

While some level of previous involvement in gangs was mentioned, none of the adolescent research participants interviewed are or were active gang members, and their interpersonal violence was therefore not due to gang-related activities. Gang-related violence could be a more advanced form of setting boundaries – and therefore, fall outside the normal range of the strategies of negotiating belongingness – or a means to address thwarted belongingness.

With further research, gangsterism could emerge as a dimension of **changing** but could also be embedded in another main concern with another core category resolving the concern.

4.6.2 Abusing substances

Most of those who use substances are also involved in violent behaviour, but not all violent children used substances. (F14.10)

Some of the adolescents interviewed for this study, occasionally used substances. However, the substance use is not regarded by the researcher as abuse of a substance, and therefore it does not play a determining role in their lives. From the interviews with professionals, substance abuse emerged as a possible **more advanced form of avoidance** and that other factors impact on the interpersonal violence, and therefore could be embedded in another main concern with another resolving core category. Simply stated, it seems as if substance abuse often leads to violent behaviour as a means of obtaining money to buy substances. For this reason, substance abusing offenders were not included in the current study.

4.6.3 The influence of the environment

The influence of the environment on the behaviour of the adolescent research participants cannot be ignored. This emerged more prominently from the interviews with the professionals as they could look beyond the immediate circumstances and environments of these adolescents due to their broader worldview.

In the case of **acting**, the adolescent research participants faced failed negotiations and reacted to triggers by either **reacting violently** or **moving back-and-forth**. The choice between these two possibilities seems to be based on their environmental exposure that normalises these actions. Stated in another way, the behavioural options selected by the adolescent research participants seem to be influenced by the options their environments offer them. If violence occurs regularly in their environments, the environment normalises such behaviour, which then becomes an option in the behavioural repertoire of the adolescent who has to deal with failed negotiations. The same factor accounts for moving back-and-forth which is normalised by environments where the adolescents encounter many other children and adolescents who choose to live on the streets or to stay somewhere else than in their parents' homes for some time.

I think communities, the communities that the kids live in, is a big factor. The communities that we live in are quite rough. Eersterust, for example. It's quite a normal thing for every fifth house in one street to sell drugs. So, people could go there and buy drugs, and everyone knows about it, or it's quite a normal thing for people to fight, people shoot at each other, and it's sort of children grow up

internalising that thing as normal. So, even when they grow up, they see fighting as a normal thing. So, community definitely does play a role. (P14.16)

With this being said, the adolescent research participants' direct environments were not a main concern for them. However, this should be taken into consideration when contextualising the substantive area and its main concern, as well as the interventions that may follow from this study.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter the newly emerged theory, the theory of thwarted belongingness, is discussed. In the discussion the categories, strategies and dimensions are defined and explained while evidence is provided of incidents that lead to the emergence of these categories, strategies and dimensions.

In the next chapter the components of the newly emerged theory will be discussed by means of considering existing literature.

CHAPTER 5

A THWARTED SENSE OF BELONGING

5.1 Introduction

When studying the literature [...] expect mostly to see a description of something that people already intuitively know, but which has not been conceptually formulated to give theoretical control. The grounded theorist will generate this conceptual formulation as he/she constantly compares it as data to his theory (Glaser, 1998, p. 79).

The purpose of the literature review was to investigate how the strategies and categories embedded in the theory of thwarted belongingness are portrayed within the existing literature. In addition, the researcher was curious to see how this theory compares with other theories on violence and the development of violence. This data, in the form of existing literature, served as data for Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) in order to enhance the theoretical saturation (Glaser, 1998) of the emergent theory. Furthermore, it improved the relevance of the latter. This was achieved through a comparison between the conceptualisation of the categories as embedded in the emergent theory, and their conceptualisations within the existing literature. Similar conceptualisations supported the relevance of the categories, while differences alerted the researcher to further details to be considered. These observations led to certain changes that are reflected upon in this discussion. The changes are mostly related to the terminology used to describe the theory and to a broadening of the definitions of the categories to make these more inclusive. This approach contributed towards preventing an increase of terminologies used for the same phenomenon, and likewise an increase of phenomena linked to the same

terminology. This was necessary as the researcher is of the opinion that consistent use of terminology could ease the process of obtaining information relevant to a specific phenomenon.

In this chapter, existing literature is investigated and compared with the emergent theory on thwarted belongingness. The focus is specifically placed on the thwarted sense of belonging, while the negotiations concerning it, and on dealing with failed negotiations, are attended to in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8.

5.2 Belongingness

The theory of thwarted belonging is a substantive theory, which means that it was developed “for a substantive area, or empirical, area of [psychological] enquiry” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 32). To reiterate: the substantive area for the current study is late adolescents in South Africa who committed assault, and who were referred to a diversion programme by a court. As reflected by the name of the grounded theory that has emerged from the study – the theory of thwarted belongingness – the core of the main concern of the substantive area, was belongingness. The latter, which emerged at the centre of the main concern after CCA of the data, is defined in the current study “as a positive state of mind created through the experiences of satisfactory involvement of a significant primary caretaker in the life of the adolescent, provision of support and guidance, and positive social-worth” (Section 4.3).

5.2.1 Belongingness defined

Maslow (1958) described the desire for belongingness as a “desire to be a practicing, functioning accepted member of a group of some kind” (p. 35), while Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer,

Patusky, Bouwsema and Collier (1992), after a concept analysis, defined a sense of belonging as “the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (p. 173). In addition, Hagerty et al. (1992) identified two dimensions of sense of belonging: (1) the value of the individual’s involvement (feeling valued, needed and accepted) and (2) the fit of the individual’s characteristics with the environment. Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that the need to belong represents consistent interactions – with the same people – characterised by care and concern, which result in emotional joy.

The emergent theory’s definition of belongingness is in line with these definitions and explanations. **Positive state of mind**, as explained in the said theory, relates to the overarching positive quality of these definitions as well as to the emotional joy that results when belongingness is experienced. **Satisfactory involvement** refers to being a practising, functioning member of a group, personal involvement in a system or environment, and consistent interactions with the same people. **Support and guidance** relates to the characteristics of care and concern. **Positive social-worth** alludes to being an accepted member of the group and to the valued involvement of the individual. There is also a striking resemblance between the aspects of belongingness that emerged through CCA and Yuval-Davis’ (2006) explanation of belonging that includes emotional attachment (satisfying involvement), feeling at home (positive social-worth) and feeling safe (being supported and guided).

The reader will recall that the focus of the current study falls on late adolescence, a stage during which transition between childhood and adulthood takes place (Bailey, 2006). In the light of this transition, the desire of the adolescent research participants for belongingness, and

specifically for the involvement of primary caretakers in their lives, may seem unusual and perhaps a form of fixation. However, Deci and Ryan (2000) proposed relatedness, together with **autonomy** and competence, as a fundamental or innate human need which specifies the conditions for optimal psychological health, integrity and well-being. Relatedness is equivalent to belongingness as these terms are used interchangeably in reference to the work of Deci and Ryan (see for instance Van Ryzin, Gravely & Roseth, 2009). A study conducted by Inguglia, Inguglia, Liga, Lo Coco and Lo Cricchio (2015) on autonomy and relatedness supported the conceptualisation of these as fundamental needs for adolescents. Furthermore, it supports the observation in the current study, that the thwarted sense of belonging stood in the way of the development of autonomy. This could explain why close interaction instead of autonomy is desired by the adolescent research participants. Note, however, that autonomy is not a direct result of relatedness; instead, the link between the two “involves a dialectical process along two developmental lines in which progress in a [one] line is essential in order to have progress in the other” (Inguglia et al., 2015, p. 1). This reminds us that the theory on thwarted belongingness forms part of a larger theoretical sphere which would only become visible through further investigations.

5.2.2 Belongingness as human motivation (behavioural)

Within the context of human motivation, Maslow (1943; 1958) proclaimed belonging as a need that forms part of the **love needs** together with the need for love and affection. In his hierarchy the love needs follow after the fulfilment of physiological needs and safety needs as fundamental to human motivation. Baumeister and Leary (1995), expressing the view that “the human being [is] naturally driven toward establishing and sustaining belongingness” (p. 499), proposed that Maslow’s “need to belong” was a mere hypothesis because systematic empirical

evaluation thereof was lacking. Therefore they tested the need to belong as a fundamental human motivation by evaluating empirical evidence in terms of meta-theoretical requirements. Finally, they concluded that the need to belong sufficiently meets the requirements for being a basic human motivation.

To be “naturally driven toward establishing and sustaining belongingness” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 499) may be associated with the view that the individual’s sense of belonging shapes his or her behaviour (Gao, Liu & Li, 2017). This is confirmed by the notion that a sense of belonging is influenced by “the effect of the external environment on the individual” (An & Liu as cited in Gao et al., 2017, p. 348), while a sense of belonging affects “the individual’s behavior in the external environment” (An & Liu as cited in Gao et al., 2017, p. 348). Furthermore, this need motivates human behaviour that promotes relationship building (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1958). In terms of this understanding – and also evident from studies focusing on depression (e.g. Kruse, Hagerty, Byers, Gatien & Williams, 2014), suicide (Maxwell, 2005), relationships (e.g. Adamczyk, 2018), addiction to social networking sites (e.g. Gao et al., 2017), immigrants (e.g. Dusi, Messetti & Falcón, 2015), citizenship (e.g. Kenyon, 2018) – it appears that a sense of belonging might relate to various contexts depending on the substantive area, or area of interest, and may be a driver of behaviour or, stated differently, of human motivation.

5.2.3 Belongingness and well-being

The data from which the theory emerged, includes incidents specifically related to the belongingness within the parent-child relationship. A search for literature, on associations between a sense of belonging within the context of the parent-child relationship and specifically

adolescent well-being, did not produce the desired results. Little research on the association between a sense of belonging within the context of families and child well-being has been conducted. This association, however, extends beyond the parent-child relationship because a family includes other members in addition to the parent and child (King, Boyd & Pragg, 2018).

5.2.4 Failed belongingness

The adolescent research participants seem to experience a thwarted sense of belonging which they have tried to salvage through various strategies of negotiating belongingness. From several examples provided by the adolescents it emerged that the sense of belonging existed along a continuum that could range from the least to the most desirable sense of belonging. Initially, the term **lost sense of belonging** was used by the researcher to describe a less desirable sense of belonging. Due to “sense of belonging” being on a continuum the word “lost”, however, seemed to be too limited as belongingness could only be perceived as being lost, if it had been previously experienced. As this is not true for all the adolescent research participants – an example would be the child who was abandoned at birth – a lost sense of belonging is not a suitable term; the researcher therefore turned to the literature in search of one.

Within the interpersonal theory of suicide, the term **thwarted belongingness** is used to represent “a dynamic cognitive–affective state [...] influenced by both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors” (Van Orden et al., 2010, p. 582), which is a feeling that one is not interpersonally linked to others (Joiner, 2005). Thwarted belongingness was a term to consider, however, in a review of Joiner’s publication, where the reviewer (Maxwell, 2005) refers to thwarted belonging as a **little sense of belonging**. Joiner (2005), the original theorist of the interpersonal theory of suicide, himself later refers to his theory as the interpersonal-

psychological theory of suicidal behaviour and, instead of referring to thwarted belongingness, he replaces the term with a **sense of low belongingness** or **social alienation**. He then defines **low sense of belongingness** as “the experience that one is alienated from others, not an integral part of a family, circle of friends, or other valued group” (Joiner, 2009, para. 5). The same construct is also referred to as a failed sense of belonging (Timmons, Selby, Lewinsohn & Joiner, 2011).

The explanations above resonate with the emergent theory’s definition of belongingness, although the terms associated with these explanations are used interchangeably. An opportunity was therefore created to use a term that fits the data from which the theory emerged, without compromising the relevance of the emergent theory on the basis that it did not use existing terminology. With this in mind, the term **thwarted** was considered. There was no indication that a **theory on thwarted belongingness** existed. In fact, no theories on belongingness could be found in the literature. “Thwarted belongingness” is, however, used in conjunction with perceived burdensomeness as a predictor of suicide in the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behaviour (Joiner, 2005; 2009). This association caused the researcher to doubt whether the term **thwarted** is the most suitable term to use in the theory; alternative terms including “low, little, compromised, and failed belongingness” were therefore considered. The researcher settled on the term **thwarted**, to develop the theory of thwarted belonging, as it would contribute towards the consistent use of terminology in the literature. In other words, an increase of terminology linked to belongingness has been prevented, which might also facilitate the development of an understanding of this phenomenon.

Supporting this decision was Maslow's (1943; 1958) own references to thwarted belongingness which indicated the unsatisfied, unfulfilled or ungratified state of this need. During the

literature review it further appeared that many of the emergent theory's categories are potential risk factors for suicide. This makes the association with the interpersonal theory of suicide not too farfetched, especially when scholars and researchers wish to expand their understanding of the concepts used in understanding the phenomenon of suicide.

5.3 Adverse experiences

In the theory of thwarted belongingness, the failed sense of belonging is the effect of external experiences, which was coded as **adverse experiences**. Such experiences are clarified as

events or actions the adolescent research participants were exposed to, over which they had no control and that impacted on their lives in ways that left them with negative feelings and resultant behaviours. These adverse experiences are ongoing either in the sense that they form part of the adolescent research participants' daily course of life, or in the sense that once-off events result in lasting negative effects, as they were not dealt with constructively in the first instance. (Section 4.3.1)

In the data from which the theory of thwarted belongingness emerged, adverse experiences were mostly encountered from a very young age, through being part of a broken family system, lacking support and guidance and or being bullied. In general, many experiences could be labelled as being adverse and therefore match well with the definition provided above. Additional adverse experiences may indeed become apparent upon further research or while studying relevant literature. However, the specific adverse events expressed by the adolescent research participants triggered their main concern, a thwarted sense of belonging. Investigation

of additional forms of adverse experiences should therefore adhere to how belongingness is perceived and to how the subjective experiences of events contribute towards a thwarted sense of belonging. With this in mind, literature related to the adverse experiences has been reviewed and will now be discussed.

5.3.1 Broken family systems and lack of support and guidance

Being part of a broken family system is depicted in the current study (Section 4.3.1.1) as the physical day-to-day absence of a parent or both parents. Single parenthood was due to divorce while the absence of both parents was the result of death or abandonment at birth. This resulted in limited or absent parental involvement, such a gap not being sufficiently catered for where alternative primary caretakers became involved. Even though the participants in the current study are adolescents, their family statuses impacted upon them prior to this developmental stage.

Lack of support and guidance, “emerged where support systems are not available at home, no responsibility is expected from the adolescents and therefore no guidance and/or support are provided, or where adolescents are not protected when experiencing adversity” (Section 4.3.1.2).

The incidents from which the adverse experience of broken family systems have emerged, in the literature are linked to several adverse outcomes. One could consider various other demographics including unemployment of parents and lower socioeconomic status, that are of relevance to the adolescent research participants and are linked to adverse outcomes such as

mental health (Jelkić et al., 2018). However, these demographics did not seem to affect the adolescent research participants' sense of belonging.

The insight gained from the literature review forced the researcher to argue that a broken family system is a demographic variable potentially influencing the support and guidance adolescents receive. In other words, support and guidance are influential experiences as regards the development of a sense of belonging, with family structure being a risk factor for, or a protective factor against, the occurrence of poor support and guidance. Conceptualising broken family systems, support and guidance in this way better accounts for those adolescent research participants who came from two-parent families but had a thwarted sense of belonging due to a lack of support and guidance.

Earlier on, adverse events linked to broken family structures were referred to. Many studies focus on family structure and its relationship to various psychological and behavioural patterns, offering valuable insight into the possible impacts of a range of family structures on the well-being of children and adolescents. Children from intact families generally experience better psychological well-being and social adaptability (Elmaci, 2006; Maurya, Parasar & Sharma, 2015) and are less prone to exhibiting anti-social behaviour than children from other family structures. For instance, adolescents in orphanages seem to possess less social maturity than those from single parent and intact families (Upreti & Sharma, 2018).

Links are made between parental separation and the mental health of children (Jelkić et al., 2018), while single parent families are linked with emotional and behavioural problems (Maurya et al., 2015), higher immaturity in comparison to adolescents from intact families (Upreti & Sharma, 2018), and delinquent behaviours such as anti-social behaviour (Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2006; Neumann, Barker, Koot & Maughan, 2010). Findings from a study on

incarcerated male adolescents that were specifically relevant to the current study, link three circumstances to adolescent delinquency (Erdelja et al., 2013): single parent families, exposure to violence at home or in the community, and poor self-image. None of the adolescent research participants in the current study were incarcerated, but all exhibited delinquent behaviour, while most were male adolescents. Furthermore, all three of the said circumstances manifested in some way in the emergent theory – single parenthood as part of a broken family system, exposure to violence in the community as an environmental influence and poor self-esteem as part of weighing the self. Environmental influences at this stage do not receive much attention in the theory on thwarted belongingness but, based on the data analysis, constitute an aspect that should receive more attention from a grounded theory perspective.

A further group of studies creates awareness of differences as to how adolescents from various backgrounds diverge in ways in which they feel the impact of the family structure in which they grew up, influenced them. In the study by Kowaleski-Jones and Dunifon (2006), delinquent behaviour associated with single parent families was found for white Americans but not for black Americans, while single parenthood did not significantly impact on the emotional well-being of black American youth in comparison to white American youth. This differed from the current study because the participants were mostly black African adolescents who engaged in delinquent behaviour, while single parenthood indeed affected their emotional well-being.

It is noteworthy that the studies reported on, up to this point, focussed either on single-cause single parent families (i.e. considering only one specified cause of the single parent family) in studying the effect of such families on adolescents or on the effect of single parent families, as a collective (i.e. without considering the cause of the single parent family), on adolescents. One

study (Abu Bakar, Wahab & Islam, 2016) established that single parent families, caused by divorced parents, were more predictive of children's anti-social behaviour than were intact families and single parent families, caused by death and living apart, for reasons other than divorce. The explanations for this occurrence seem to be continued parental relationship problems, the process of adjustment and emotional challenges experienced by the children. In another study, children from single parent families, resulting from either divorce or death, were compared but significant differences in the children's psychological well-being were not found. Differences in the psychological well-being of the children were, however, attributed to parenting style (Sahu, 2016). **Family structure** in itself seems not to relate significantly to children's well-being but instead to family factors such as the **parent-child relationship** and the **perceived closeness of the parent and child** (Sharma & Singh, 2016), while higher levels of **parent-supervision** were found to protect adolescents from developing problem behaviour. In addition, parent-supervision is lower in single parent families, especially where fathers are the custodians (Cookston, 1999). Rattay et al. (2018) proposed that **family cohesion** is of more significance to adolescent health, including emotional health, than family structure itself. Ketisch, Jones, Mirsalimi, Casey, and Milton (2014) made a statement of considerable relevance to the current study, which was that "in healthy family systems, parents offer necessary support and guidance to their children" (p. 439). These healthy family systems are not based on the structure of the family but on the family systems' **internal dynamics**.

Thomson, Schonert-Reichl, and Oberle (2015) explained parental support as "being available and showing interest in each other's lives" (p. 892) and deduced from their own literature review that, together with discipline, this factor contributed to the positive development of adolescents. The importance of perceived parent support during adolescence has been highlighted in several studies and is linked with optimism, depressive symptoms (Thomson et

al., 2015), suicidal ideation, with parent support being a moderator between depression and such ideation (Brausch & Decker, 2014), online bully behaviour (Balas Timar, Ignat & Demeter, 2017), subjective well-being and autonomous self-development (Kocayörük, Altıntaş & İçbay, 2015). Perceptions of social support by parents also moderate the effect of family structure on levels of personal and social adjustment and on depression (Elmaci, 2006). An explanation for this finding could be that support from within the family builds resilience which protects adolescents from developing depression (Yee & Sulaiman, 2017). Parent support may relate to many other positive outcomes; however, the search for a link between perceived parent support and a sense of belonging did not yield satisfactory results. An exception is the study by Inguglia et al. (2015), which was initially discussed under the theme of belongingness, that confirmed a positive relationship of both autonomy and relatedness with parental support and psychological health. This finding confirms the lack of parental support as an adverse experience that contributes towards a sense of failed belongingness, and the importance of parental support for the psychological health of adolescents.

At this stage, the argument is that the emergent theory should not necessarily ignore family structure but that it should be regarded as a risk factor. The focus should, however, be on the lack of support and guidance. Having said this, it is noteworthy that guidance is rarely mentioned in the literature and seems to form part of support. A concept that emerged in the literature and which seemed to be closely linked to support and guidance as explained in the emergent theory, is that of **parental monitoring**, defined as “a set of correlated parenting behaviors involving attention to and tracking of the child’s whereabouts, activities, and adaptations” (Dishion & McMahon, 1998, p. 61). Parental monitoring was manifested as a protective factor against delinquent behaviour (Cheng & Li, 2017). Furthermore, all these aspects, namely support, guidance and parental monitoring, seem to belong to the broader

category of family management practices. Family management is linked to the current emergent theory in an article by Beckmeyer and Russell (2018). Their study focussed on family structure, family management and the well-being of youth. The findings imply differences between family management practices across family structures (biological-parent, single-mother and stepfather families) and also that family management practices impact on the well-being of youth. The greatest differences in terms of such practices were between biological-parent and single-mother families, possibly because duties could be shared where two adults are involved. The significance for the current study is that family structure is not the determining factor in the outcome for the adolescents. Therefore, regarding the adverse experience of broken family systems as a causal factor of the thwarted sense of belonging may skew reality in general because family management practices are more determining of the well-being of adolescents. The broken family system as an adverse experience is also not applicable to all the adolescent research participants since some of them come from two-parent families. Therefore, the lack of support and guidance is a stronger determinant of the well-being of the said participants, while the broken family system should rather be regarded as a risk factor for poor family management practices.

5.3.2 Being bullied

In the current study the adolescent research participants who were bullied experienced the absence of involved parenting in the sense that they did not receive proper guidance from their parents. This forms part of poor family management practices, contributing towards a thwarted sense of belonging. However, in these cases this sense of belonging is instead related to the subtle messages communicated by the bullies that downplayed both these participants' social-

worth and the value of the primary structures they belong to. These messages caused non-physical separations between them and their social structures.

Bullying behaviour by youth is classified as youth violence (Krug, Dahlberg, et al., 2002; World Health Organization, 2015). The type of youth violence depends on the type of bullying because it could take on many forms, for instance **physical violence**, **verbal bullying** including threats of physical violence, starting rumours, name-calling and teasing, and **cyberbullying** (Corby et al., 2016). Therefore, it is noteworthy that verbal bullying by peers separated the adolescent research participants from their significant others while the mere act of bullying, by peers, separated them from their peers (see Section 4.3.1.3). In a study on students' perceptions of their own victimisation (Corby et al., 2016), bullying was experienced as being hurtful when the victim knew the bully or regarded the bully as a friend. In addition, if bystanders during a bullying event reacted negatively towards the victim, the victim experienced the incident as hurtful as he/she felt that he/she had lost friends, and that no one was willing to help. These are only some ways in which bullying behaviour was found to be hurtful, but these examples indicate the social exclusion that took place and the worthlessness that was felt, which is an indication of how bullying can impact on the sense of belonging experienced by the victim.

Teasing is the form of bullying that surfaced in the current study, as well as in other studies (Corby et al., 2016; Horner, Asher & Fireman, 2015). However, the researcher could not unearth a study where the actual content of the teasing is discussed. It could be that the content may only be of importance during research studies when a specific issue related to bullying or a specific substantive area is investigated, such as in the current study. Furthermore, there is no direct indication in the literature reviewed that bullying affects belongingness. This could, though, be assumed as indicated above. An interesting finding in a particular school was that

when staff focused on developing a sense of belonging, a decrease in bullying amongst learners was also observed (Solomon, Battistich, Kim & Watson as cited in Casas, Ortega-Ruiz & Del Rey, 2015). Nevertheless, with the information at hand one could deduce that any experience impacting upon a relationship with a significant other could compromise a sense of belonging.

5.4 Summary

More adverse experiences may contribute towards a thwarted sense of belonging. For the adolescent research participants in the current study the adverse experiences manifested as broken family systems, lacking support and guidance, and being bullied. In terms of the findings in the literature considered, an adjustment was made in the emergent theory, that is, family structure is no longer regarded as an adverse experience, but rather as a risk factor for, or a protective factor against, the experience of certain family management practices as adverse experiences. Many experiences may impact on the relationship with a significant other and affect one's sense of belonging. The only such experience that surfaced from the data for the current research is that of being bullied; therefore it is retained as an adverse experience. Other related experiences might well be revealed by further research.

In the emergent theory, the thwarted sense of belonging refers to the effect of external experiences which were labelled as adverse experiences. Reflecting upon the literature reviewed up to this point, the researcher positions the emergent theory as a needs theory, explaining the interaction between environment and behaviour within the domain of relationships and with the aim of achieving an optimal sense of belonging.

The current chapter has analysed belongingness and it being thwarted. The researcher found that the adolescent research participants' social environments impacted on relationships because these drove them towards the negotiation of a sense of belonging through certain behaviours. This behaviour, which comprised the strategies used to negotiate a sense of belonging, was coded as **managing reality**, **setting boundaries** and **weighing the self**, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

NEGOTIATING A SENSE OF BELONGING

6.1 Introduction

Belongingness, a thwarted sense of belonging and the adverse experiences that lead to the development of this thwarted sense of belonging in the adolescent research participants were discussed in the previous chapter. In the current chapter the researcher focuses on the negotiation of belongingness. This is not a foreign concept. Reference is, for instance, made to the negotiation of the complexities of belonging in a study of Vietnamese Americans returning to Vietnam (Nguyen-Akbar, 2017). In the theory of thwarted belongingness, a sense of belonging is negotiated through three strategies: (1) managing reality, (2) setting boundaries and (3) weighing the self. These strategies will now be discussed in terms of the literature.

6.2 Negotiation through managing reality

In the theory of thwarted belongingness, managing reality comprises the method(s) by which the adolescent research participants deal with their adverse experiences of **being part of a broken family system, lacking support and guidance** and **being bullied**. They seem to manage their individual realities to deal with their thwarted sense of belonging, in a variety of ways that fit into the two dimensions of **avoiding reality** and **dealing with reality** (Section 4.4.1).

Literature related to managing reality leads towards studies on coping, specifically approach coping and avoidance coping. Definitions of coping seem to cover three components: the

stressor, **stress** resulting from the stressor and the **strategies** used to **cope** with either the stressor or the stress. One of the works on coping most frequently referred to is a 1984 publication by Lazarus and Folkman (see for instance Blomgren, Svahn, Åström & Rönnlund, 2016; Fields & Prinz, 1997; Forns et al., 2013; Kirchner et al., 2017; Skinner, Edge, Altman & Sherwood, 2003; Weiss, Duke & Sullivan, 2014). In this publication Lazarus and Folkman define coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (as cited in Lazarus, 1999, p. 110). This interpretation of experiences as being overwhelming is what is known as stress (Flynn & Chow, 2017), while coping is “the behavior or intrapsychic efforts a person uses to prevent or manage a situation that is perceived as difficult or distressing” (Carver & Connor-Smith as well as Taylor & Stanton as cited in Blomgren et al., 2016, p. 85). Coping is therefore related to stressors and is aimed at either the stressor or its effects on the individual (Fields & Prinz, 1997), mediating the psychological output resulting from stressors (Kirchner et al., 2017). Furthermore, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguished between coping and coping functions since these should not be confused: “A coping function refers to the purpose a strategy serves; outcome refers to the effect a strategy has” (p. 149).

With the above definitions in mind the researcher proposes that the stressor is not what the individual is exposed to but, instead, the effect of the experiences on the individual. Therefore, in the current study the adolescent research participants’ thwarted sense of belonging is the stressor, rather than their adverse experiences. If this sense is the stressor, the ways it is dealt with comprise the coping strategies. In the emergent theory, thwarted belongingness is dealt with or negotiated through managing reality. Hence, the latter is the overarching coping strategy that consists of avoiding reality and dealing with reality. The **demands** and **resources**

as referred to by Lazarus and Folkman (as cited in Lazarus, 1999) are, then, equivalents to **stressors** and the **coping strategies** used to deal with these. If this coping has the ability to negotiate belongingness, one would expect the outcome to be a healthy sense of belonging. The function of managing reality, as a coping strategy, is to negotiate belongingness, while the intended effect is a healthy sense of belonging. However, the real outcome depends on the strategy used and the context in which it is employed. If the strategy and context do not effectively address the stressor or resulting emotion, the outcome does not contribute towards a sense of belonging. In the current study, the ways in which the strategies were employed did not yield positive results.

The thwarted belongingness of the adolescent research participants was manifested through various emotions that could be signs of the resulting stress. Furthermore, when the resources or coping strategies did not yield the required results this worsened the stress which implied failed negotiations, and which was manifested through anger (to be discussed in the next chapter).

In this section the negotiation of belongingness through managing reality, as it emerged from the interviews with the adolescent research participants, will be investigated in relation to its constituent dimensions, namely avoiding reality and dealing with reality.

6.2.1 Avoiding reality

Avoiding reality was displayed “through ignoring the problem-causing person and/or the existence of the problem and blocking unpleasant events and the resulting emotions from their consciousness” (Section 4.3.1.1). This is in line with Fields and Prinz's (1997) explanation of

coping as directed either towards the stressor or the effects thereof. Avoiding reality is also in line with avoidance coping as being withdrawal, denial or avoiding direct confrontation of the stressful situation in an attempt to reduce negative emotions (Johannessen, Engedal & Thorsen, 2016; Taylor & Stanton, 2007). Furthermore, the strategies discussed in the literature such as those labelled as avoidance coping (Stemmet, Roger, Kuntz & Borrill, 2015; Weiss et al., 2014), disengagement coping (Blomgren et al., 2016; Roubinov & Luecken, 2013) and expressive suppression (Larsen et al., 2012) relate to either the stressor or the emotions. However, the current study's explanation of avoiding reality – which focuses on the problem-causing person and/or the existence of the problem, and blocking unpleasant events and the resulting emotions – seems to be contradicting the preceding discussion. This discussion concluded that the adverse experience is not the stressor but how the experience impacts on the adolescents' sense of belonging. At face value the adverse experiences, as well as the people or circumstances creating those experiences, are the stressors; however, psychologically it is the effects of these experiences that are avoided. Therefore, within the context of the study the adverse experiences could be regarded as the stressors as since these instilled a thwarted sense of belonging in the adolescent research participants.

Considering that approach coping (also referred to as problem-focused coping, engagement coping (Kirchner et al., 2017) or adaptive coping (Chen, 2015)) yields more positive results than avoidance coping (Kirchner et al., 2017), one could ask why the adolescent research participants would engage in avoiding reality. This may relate to the function of this specific strategy. Even though the function of managing reality is to negotiate belongingness, the specific strategy of avoiding reality may serve another function within the broader context. In line with this thinking, avoidant coping was found to be, within specific circumstances, a protective factor (Johannessen et al., 2016). Where there are increasing encounters with adverse

experiences, avoidance coping becomes more prominent as adolescents display learned helplessness in response to a situation where they are not in charge of their life circumstances (Kirchner et al., 2017). Although this example depicts a non-constructive process, it reflects the protective function under these circumstances. The possibility of positive results achieved through avoidance coping is supported by Weiss et al. (2014) who indicated that in relation to the context, avoidance coping could be an adaptive process. A study conducted by Larsen et al. (2012), within the context of parental support of youth with depressive symptoms, provided support for the assumption that relationship difficulties may be managed through the use of [emotional] suppression, which is an emotion regulation strategy.

From the perspective of the theory of thwarted belongingness and considering that the adolescent research participants were negotiating belongingness, avoiding reality could be interpreted as a protective or adaptive process. The data on which the theory of thwarted belongingness is based indicated that avoiding reality yielded positive results where the adolescent research participant in question showed signs of resilience. Therefore, even though this participant was not necessarily equipped to handle the situation, he or she had a psychological strength that helped him or her to effectively ignore the adverse experiences. The remaining adolescents did not show signs of resilience; nor has avoiding reality been a positive or protective process for them.

6.2.2 Dealing with reality

As the researcher has remarked, “dealing with reality is a strategy used by some of the adolescent research participants as part of managing their realities, and a conscious choice to handle experiences affecting their sense of belonging. It is a constructive process chosen when

the individual either feels equipped to handle the adverse experiences or seems to have sufficient support in this regard” (Section 4.3.1.2). This strategy is equivalent to approach coping; it is, as reflected in the term “engagement coping”, an engagement with the situation or resulting emotions (Johannessen et al., 2016; Taylor & Stanton, 2007).

If one looks at **dealing with reality** through the lens of adaptive coping or approach coping it could potentially be an effective strategy for negotiating belongingness (e.g. Blomgren et al., 2016). This is especially the case where a close bond exists between parents and child, as this bond predicts the use of adaptive coping strategies (Blomgren et al., 2016). However, in the current study the family situation or the lack of support and guidance provided to the adolescent research participants contributed towards their thwarted sense of belonging and was resulting in situations requiring the use of coping strategies.

Resilient poly-victim youths – adolescents who are exposed to multiple incidents of victimisation – had family support as a protective factor; the indication was that the youth seek this support (Kirchner et al., 2017). It was, however, noted in Section 4.3.1.2 of the current study that the people to whom the adolescent research participants turned were often young and/or ill equipped to support and provide guidance to them. Therefore, even though the adolescent research participants sought the support, it did not yield the required results. In congruence with this finding, research indicates that friends provide support on an emotional level but not on an instrumental one, rendering it insufficient (Kirchner et al., 2017). Yet, in the adolescent research participants’ realities even the adults were not able to assist them effectively on an instrumental level, which rendered this approach ineffective for these participants.

6.2.3 Summarising managing reality

Because thwarted belongingness emerged as a stressor, one could argue that all three negotiation strategies in the theory of thwarted belongingness ought to be forms of coping. The validity of this argument should, however, be determined in terms of the discussions on the other negotiation strategies: setting boundaries and weighing the self. To support this assumption, thwarted belongingness should surface as a perceived stressor from the perspectives of these negotiation strategies. Nevertheless, within the negotiation strategy of managing reality the theory of thwarted belongingness moves into the domain of coping theories. In the said theory, the focus is not only on dealing with the stressors or the resulting emotions, but on negotiating a change in the form of a sense of belonging. It should, therefore, be noted that managing reality was directed towards belongingness since the adolescent research participants dealt with the stressor or the resulting emotions as part of negotiating a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, it did not yield the required results, but contributed towards failed negotiations.

6.3 Negotiation through the setting of boundaries

Similar to Vietnamese expatriates negotiating belongingness through the use of boundaries (Nguyen-Akbar, 2017), the adolescents negotiated their belongingness through the setting of boundaries. In the current study this is a form of access management through which the adolescent research participants either allow contact between themselves and people they experience positively, or block exposure to people they experience negatively. Boundary setting takes on various forms including physical processes, psychological processes, or both: “The most explicit form of boundary setting that the adolescent research participants revealed

in the interviews – namely communicating to others to leave them alone – is on a physical level” (Section 4.4.2). Relaxed boundaries were found where the adolescent research participants reached a point of indifference and withdrew behaviourally and psychologically from their environments (Section 4.4.2).

6.3.1 Boundaries reflected in the literature

Psychological boundaries could be distinguished as bodily, territorial, social and value-based boundaries, which implies that all boundaries serve a psychological function (Filippova & Pivnenko, 2014). However, the ways in which we understand boundaries could differ as we conceptualise the mind differently (Hartmann, 1991) which indicates the importance of clarifying the implicated boundaries. To understand the concept of boundaries, various aspects related to boundaries, and setting them, will now be discussed.

The boundaries reflected in the literature include, but are not limited to, body boundaries, boundaries as defence mechanisms, boundaries between the conscious and unconscious, boundaries in organising one's life, boundaries related to thoughts and feelings (Barbuto & Plummer, 1998), ego boundaries (Baran-Łucarz, 2012; Swart, 2016), interparental boundaries (Fosco, Lippold & Feinberg, 2014), interpersonal boundaries (Barbuto & Plummer, 1998; Norvig, 2008; Schredl, Bocklage, Engelhardt & Mingeback, 2008), intergroup boundaries (Kumar, Seay & Karabenick, 2015), intrapsychic boundaries (Norvig, 2008), mental boundaries (Barbuto & Plummer, 1998; 2000), parent-child boundaries (Ketisch et al., 2014), psychological boundaries (Beaulieu-Prévost & Zadra, 2007; Bentley, Greenaway & Haslam, 2017; Goldner, Abir & Sachar, 2016; Norvig, 2008; Schredl et al., 2008), social boundaries

(Filippova & Pivnenko, 2014; Nguyen-Akbar, 2017) and value-based boundaries (Filippova & Pivnenko, 2014).

Boundaries could be regarded as a dimension of personality (Hartmann, 1991; Kunzendorf, Deignan, Galva, Latorre & Masotta, 2006) which may be either tangible (for instance, violent behaviour clearly indicating that one should not approach) or abstract (such as an attitude). These boundaries are often not easily separable (Phillips, 1983): for instance, fearfully crossing a rope bridge demonstrates the crossing of a tangible boundary as well as a psychological boundary. On a more abstract level, psychological boundaries are defined as “the level of connection between the mind’s different functions, processes and structures” (Beaulieu-Prévost & Zadra, 2007, p. 51) and could be defined as either thick or thin, which refers to the permeability of boundaries as well as the simultaneous separateness and connectedness of the content of our minds (Hartmann, 1991). Various boundaries referred to in the literature could, at a first glance, relate to the boundaries set by the adolescent research participants. To clarify the type of boundary reflected in the theory of thwarted belongingness, it is necessary to investigate the boundary contexts, processes and functions.

6.3.2 Boundary contexts, processes and functions

The majority of the examples above indicated **where** the boundaries occurred, which implies the **context** of the boundary setting. Most of these boundaries seem to occur on a physical level but they also exist in our minds, no matter whether the former function or manifest in the outside world or the temporal world (Hartmann, 1991). In the current study, the adolescent research participants’ setting of boundaries had an **interpersonal context**, which is the outside world, while the **function**, as will be evident below, was in the temporal world.

Probably, in its simplest form, the setting of boundaries is a **process** of inclusion and exclusion (Norvig, 2008; Phillips, 1983) which requires management by cognitive processes (Bentley et al., 2017) but might not always be consciously performed (Phillips, 1983). This process of boundary setting is consistent with how it is conceptualised within the theory of thwarted belongingness because people and experiences are included and excluded from the realities of the adolescent research participants. Furthermore, the process is closely linked to the setting of the boundary. Looking beyond the **context** and probing deeper into the **process** of boundary setting clarifies the **functions** of the boundaries.

Some boundary **functions** identified in the literature include serving as defence mechanisms (Barbuto & Plummer, 1998), separating the self from others (Bentley et al., 2017; Norvig, 2008) and as indications of how we relate to others and how we perceive ourselves (Rosenberger, 2011). Furthermore, boundaries function as non-absolute separations, impacting on how one's relationships with others are sensed and also on how these relationships play out in terms of body boundaries (Hartmann, 1991) or "barriers between the self and the outside world" (Hartmann, 1991, p. 3). A similar understanding of boundaries is reflected by the explanation of psychological boundaries as flowing from mental boundaries into interpersonal boundaries that ensure "an emotional distance between [the] self and others" (Barbuto & Plummer, 1998, p. 424). On a more concrete level, professional boundaries might perform protective and role model functions. They could protect practitioners who develop sexual feelings towards their clients, while the boundaries could also demonstrate healthy intersexual relationships to the adolescent clients (Okamoto, 2003). Another example of a boundary function would consist of ego boundaries that, in relation with self-esteem, could function as a protective factor and a predictor of success in a competitive environment (Swart, 2016).

Note that the **function of boundaries** differs from the **function of boundary setting**. In simpler terms, **boundaries** separate and are contextual, whereas **boundary setting** is a process of separation. As previously indicated, the boundary setting within the theory of thwarted belongingness takes place in an interpersonal context through a process of inclusion and exclusion. In addition, the specific **function** of the boundary setting is to negotiate a sense of belonging. This function is noteworthy as it is aimed towards resolving the main concern of the adolescent research participants.

With boundary setting in the current study being a process of managing exposure to people and experiences in order to negotiate belongingness, it is important to see how it relates to the existing literature. However, adolescent boundary setting appeared to be infrequently investigated; more focussed upon were hierarchical parent-adolescent boundaries or boundaries directed by parents (e.g. Mayseless & Scharf, 2009). Furthermore, the interpersonal boundaries being studied covered hierarchical relationships, for instance between lecturers and students (Schwartz, 2011; Yamashita & Schwartz, 2012; Zieber & Hagen, 2009), therapists and clients (Baer & Murdock, 1995) and nurses and patients (Whaite & Catlin, 1999) that reflected both psychological and bodily interactions. These examples are similar to the previous illustrations of boundaries, indicating the **context** of the boundary setting.

Findings on the function of adolescent boundaries that supported **boundary settings** within the context of belongingness also linked horizontally with **weighing the self** (see Section 6.4). One example was that “boundaries can function in dysfunctional environments as protective structures within which students can maintain a positive sense of self” (McHugh, Horner, Colditz & Wallace, 2013, p. 33), while another study related ego boundaries to self-esteem (Swart, 2016). In these instances, negotiation through the setting of boundaries created space

for weighing to take place. This is an indication of the relationships that exist between the categories as part of the integration of the theory (Glaser, 1998).

6.3.3 Boundaries and the theory of thwarted belongingness

A deeper understanding of boundaries was needed to **identify and define** the boundaries set by the adolescent research participants, to clarify the **context** in which the boundary setting takes place and to determine the **functions** it serves. In addition to the context and function of boundaries, aspects such as the types, dimensions, permeability and process of boundary setting became evident. Not all these qualities are identifiable from the data obtained for the current study. Nevertheless, the boundaries relevant to the theory of thwarted belongingness were conceptualised as far as it was allowed by the available research data and will now be discussed.

The boundaries reflected in the theory are laid down by the adolescent research participants and are mostly set on the same level or upwards in terms of hierarchy, which reflects the **context** of the boundary setting. These boundaries are put in place on an individual level and mediate the interaction between the adolescents and others on both the psychological and the physical levels (reflects **function**), even though the need for boundary setting originated on a psychological level. Therefore, boundaries have a **psychological function** – which is the negotiation of belongingness – while manifesting as observable behaviour. The boundaries that are both abstract and tangible, create unique relationships. The abstract boundaries include internalised values that serve, either consciously or subconsciously, as the inclusion-exclusion criteria. The tangible boundaries in the form of appearance, anger and group association, are used to manage, by means of inclusion and exclusion (reflects **process**), exposure to others to protect them psychologically from a thwarted sense of belonging (reflects **function**). The end-

products are boundaries on two interpersonal levels. The first mirror the extent to which others' actions and presence are allowed to affect the adolescent research participants' sense of belonging on an intangible level. The second express the tangible boundaries that direct the level of interaction between the adolescent research participants and others, to allow or prevent experiences that could affect their sense of belonging.

The need to belong versus not to belong, as evident from their inclusion and exclusion of people in their personal spaces, suggests the permeability of the boundaries. The indication here is that the adolescent research participants tend to develop thick boundaries or, if regarded as a personality trait, may be inclined towards thicker boundaries which now serve the function of negotiating a sense of belonging. The relaxed boundaries could be related to thin boundaries. However, as the adolescent research participants withdraw from their environments both behaviourally and psychologically, they might have thick psychological boundaries that in combination with indifference do not manifest themselves in tangible interpersonal boundaries.

6.4 Negotiation through weighing the self

Weighing the self was explained in Section 4.4.3 as “a process through which the adolescents internally deal with their adverse experiences to maintain or regain their self-worth and to be worthy of belonging. It can also be explained as giving themselves permission to own a sense of belonging. Weighing the self is, therefore, essentially movement between valuing and devaluing the self”. Weighing could end either in positive or negative results in terms of self-worth.

In terms of weighing the self (Section 4.4.3), feeling consequences was discussed separately as it is situation specific and occurred only after the violent acts were performed. It is, nevertheless, a form of weighing the self which does not warrant a separate discussion in the current chapter.

As belongingness linked the emergent theory to needs theories through the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000), weighing the self therefore links the emergent theory to human motivation through Maslow's (1958) conceptualisation of self-worth as a fundamental human need. In his hierarchical theory, the satisfaction of the need for self-worth follows after the physiological, safety and love needs have been satisfied, while it precedes the need for self-actualisation. He defined the need for self-worth as the need for “respect and recognition from others” (p. 43), but Strahm (2007), with reference to the previous quote, added that “it can also refer to the need for a feeling of respect and confidence in one’s being that can be attained through achievement or mastery. Ultimately, it is the need for an unconditional positive opinion of the self and for a sense of purpose” (p. 66).

6.4.1 Self-worth and self-esteem

Understanding the concept of self-worth is, however, not a simple task and the constructs of self-evaluation, self-worth and self-esteem came to the fore during the literature review. While the process of self-evaluation is connected with both self-worth and self-esteem, self-worth is either conceptualised as a dimension of self-esteem or used synonymously with self-esteem.

In the mid-nineteen hundreds, the construct of self-esteem was “vague and subject to manifold interpretations” (Coopersmith, 1959, p. 87). Since then much research has been conducted to

explore this construct, yet at present it seems as if Coopersmith's statement is still valid. This is important to note as the reader will be taken through the literature to demonstrate the complexities associated with the constructs of self-esteem and self-worth, and to clarify how self-esteem links with self-worth as a product of weighing the self within the context of the emergent theory.

Defining self-esteem is a problematic endeavour (Mruk, 2013). This concept, according to Rosenberg (1989), is "a positive or negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self" (p. 30). It is postulated that a high self-esteem means respect towards the self and considering the self as worthy. It is not about positioning oneself against others, but about appreciating one's limitations with the intention of developing oneself further. Self-esteem is also conceptualised as the "evaluative component of the self-schema" (Campbell & Lavalley, 1993, p. 4), "the positivity of the person's evaluation of the self" (Baumeister, 1998, p. 694) and "feelings of self-worth, liking, and acceptance" (Rosenberg, Savin-Williams as well as Demo as cited in Kernis, 2002, p. 59).

Initially, Rosenberg (1989) regarded self-esteem as unidimensional, a view that was shared by Marsh (as cited in Tafarodi & Swann, 1995) who proposed self-judgments as being foundational to global self-esteem, which in its turn was indivisible. Based on their literature review Tafarodi and Swann (1995) conceptualised global self-esteem "as an overall positive-negative attitude toward the self" (p. 322), which implied a unidimensional conceptualisation. They were, nonetheless, not in favour of this unidimensional approach, while later on Rosenberg himself agreed with the multidimensional approach to self-esteem, as is evidenced by Rosenberg, Schoenbach & Rosenberg (1995). In this publication the authors refer to global

self-esteem as well as specific self-esteem, respectively predicting psychological well-being and behaviour.

Within this contemporary understanding of self-esteem, and even though many differences exist between the conceptualisation of its dimensions, self-worth seems to be a constant, which positions it as an accepted dimension of global self-esteem. Examples of the proposed dimensions of self-esteem include self-worth, authenticity and self-efficacy (Benoit et al., 2018) as well as competence and worthiness (Mruk, 2013).

Nevertheless, even though the dimensionality of self-esteem is widely accepted (see for example Benoit et al., 2018; Mruk, 2013; Yang, 2018), instances could be found where a unidimensional view of self-esteem is followed and where self-esteem and self-worth are used synonymously with each other (e.g. Harter & Whitesell, 2003). This complicates the process of reviewing literature and one should be aware of the author's conceptualisation of terms such as self-worth and self-esteem. However, a number of authors do not explicitly discuss their understanding of these concepts, so that while it is possible to determine the point of view of some authors, this is not always the case.

To further complicate this review process, Mackinnon (2015) proposed **self-sentiment** (also referred to as global self-feeling) to replace **self-esteem** as a global construct. Within this approach, the dimensions of **self-sentiment** are self-esteem, self-competence and self-activation, while **self-esteem** could also be understood as self-worth, and **self-competence** as self-efficacy. He further indicated that Rosenberg's understanding of **self-acceptance** and Owen's use of **self-confidence** as a component of self-esteem were synonymous with **self-worth**. Mackinnon (2015) also refers to the work of Franks and Marolla who distinguished

between **outer self-esteem** and **inner self-esteem**. The former refers to “feelings of self-worth based on the reflected appraisals of significant others in the form of social approval in an interpersonal environment” (p. 50) and the latter to “feelings of competence and potency arising from an individual’s perceptions of her or his effectiveness in operating on an impersonal environment” (p. 50).

In their turn, Tafari and Swann (1995), who did not share the view that self-esteem was unidimensional, focussed their research on confirming self-liking and self-competence as dimensions of self-esteem, and their findings were in favour of this dichotomy. Their discussion on self-liking and self-competence led the researcher to understand **self-liking** as the experience of ourselves as acceptable-unacceptable, as being socially dependent, and ultimately as “our approval or disapproval of ourselves, in line with internalized social values” (p. 325). **Self-competence** was understood as the experience of ourselves as strong-weak, or alternatively as our sense of ourselves as capable, effective and in control. In their interpretation of this study by Tafari and Swann, Geng and Jiang (2013) portrayed the dimensions of self-competence and self-liking as evaluative processes involving the self, which positions global self-esteem as a process evaluating the global self.

6.4.2 Self-evaluation in the theory

Returning to the emergent theory, one could argue that **weighing** might be synonymous with evaluating, which implies that **weighing the self** is synonymous with **evaluating the self**. Therefore, in the emergent theory the individual is engaging in self-evaluation in an attempt to determine self-worth, while the latter gives the individual permission to belong. The question now is whether the **weighing** in the emergent theory was a global evaluation, or one of the

evaluating dimensions (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995): in other words, whether it was equivalent to global self-esteem, or to one of its dimensions, either self-liking or self-competence. Going back to the data, the researcher conducted comparative analysis between the definitions and explanations of the constructs of self-esteem (self-competence and self-liking) and the data coded into the categories which formed part of weighing the self. This comparison indicated the occurrence of both self-liking and self-competence, with self-competence emerging more frequently. This signalled that the adolescent research participants' action-based self-evaluation (weighing the self) was intended rather to evaluate their own capabilities than to pitch these against internalised standards of social-values [also referred to as social-worth by Geng and Jiang (2013)]; however, neither of the two approaches could be excluded. One should note that self-liking and self-competence (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995) are similar to **outer self-esteem** and **inner self-esteem** (Franks & Marolla's theory as cited in Mackinnon, 2015).

6.4.3 Self-worth

It seemed more useful to apply the understanding of the literature to improve the conceptualisation of self-worth within the emergent theory, instead of attempting to position the said theory's use of self-worth within the theoretical discourse. Therefore, it is argued that an improved understanding of the **processes** followed to determine self-worth is of more importance than positioning self-worth within the broader theoretical discourse around self-esteem and self-worth. In other words, the discourse assists with better formulation of the theory. An improved formulation of the theory, and specifically that of self-worth within the theory, will make it possible to compare the construct with related findings without being limited by the other studies' theoretical positioning of the constructs of self-worth and self-esteem.

The **process** of weighing the self may therefore be defined as an evaluation of the self, against both internal and external measures, to reach a conclusion about the worthiness of the self with the desired outcome of a healthy sense of belonging. Conceptualising the self as such steers the conceptualisation of self-worth away from either being equivalent to self-esteem or a dimension thereof, to the specific **processes** followed to determine self-worth and the intended **function** of the self-worth for the substantive area. This approach is not intended to disregard a broader conceptualisation, but once again, to truly understand this construct as relevant to the theory of thwarted belongingness.

With the emergent theory's concept of self-worth now being positioned within the context of the process of self-evaluation and the function of the end-result, the focus will now be placed more strongly on understanding self-worth.

Self-worth seems to fulfil different functions. In the current study, self-worth may be regarded as a need, as explained by (Maslow, 1958). In the current theory it is, however, not a need that should be fulfilled before the love needs – of which belonging forms part – could be fulfilled. It is a need that should be fulfilled because it functions as a permission to belong. Furthermore, the process of self-evaluation followed to determine self-worth forms part of the negotiation of belongingness. Nevertheless, from the data informing the theory of thwarted belongingness, it seems as if the self-worth of the adolescent research participants fluctuated. This reminds one of state and trait characteristics that are also related to self-esteem. Crocker and Wolfe (2001) explained global self-esteem as being a **trait**, also known as a general self-esteem, and being a **state**, which is a self-esteem that is reliant on the evaluation or judgement of the self within a specific moment. The fluctuating self-worth as incorporated in the theory of thwarted belongingness seems therefore to be a state. Crocker and Wolfe (2001), however, went further

and postulated that self-esteem relates to specific domains that are not contributing equally to an individual's self-esteem when they indicated that "only self-evaluations in those domains on which self-esteem is contingent will inform judgments of one's overall self-worth, or global self-esteem" (p. 594). Similarly, Maroiu, Maricutoiu and Sava (2016) stated that "a person's view of [their] own value depends on perceived successes or failures of adherence to self-standards in that domain. From this perspective, success or failure might influence one's [self-esteem] only if it occurs in domains of contingencies that are relevant for that person" (p. 235). Furthermore, it is suggested that a contingent self-worth is a global self-worth that is, to some extent, based on performance within a specific domain (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Crocker and Wolfe argued that contingencies of self-worth [originally proposed by James (as cited in Chen-Bouck & Patterson, 2016), and Crocker and Wolfe (2001)] may be of more importance than trait self-esteem when one is trying to understand the link between self-esteem and behaviour.

In this discussion one can perceive that self-esteem and self-worth are used as synonyms, but the process is an evaluation of the self with which the current study's data corresponds. One should therefore look further at the contingencies of self-worth. The seven domains reflected in the *Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale* (developed by Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper & Bouvrette, 2003) are: physical appearance, academic competence, competition with others, others' approval, family support, virtue, and God's love (Chen-Bouck & Patterson, 2016; Crocker et al., 2003; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). These contingencies of self-worth (CSW) are further divided into internal and external CSW. The internal CSW are virtue and God's love, while the remaining contingencies – appearance, competence, competition, others' approval and family support – constitute external CSW (Maroiu et al., 2016). The specific self-esteems referred to earlier on (see discussion on Rosenberg et al. (1995) under Section 6.4.1), rely on

the value the individual attaches to that area of functioning. This is in line with global self-esteem and contingencies of self-worth on which the individual bases his/her own value.

Culture could not be ignored as all the adolescent research participants in this study were African South Africans. Research into Chinese participants, also a collectivist society, supported the relevance of contingencies of self-worth and identified virtue as a relevant domain for adolescents (Chen-Bouck & Patterson, 2016). Based on the data and in relation to the emergent theory, the external contingencies of self-worth that were relevant to the adolescent research participants were physical appearance, others' approval, and family support, while the internal contingency of self-worth was virtue. The CSW are, therefore, the specific criteria on which the adolescent research participants based their self-evaluation as part of negotiating their belongingness.

6.4.4 Contextualising self-worth during adolescence

Self-worth is linked with delinquency and violence (Church et al., 2012; Paschall & Hubbard, 1998) as well as with subjective stress (Flynn & Chow, 2017). The link of self-worth with delinquency and violence supports the connection between self-worth and possible violent behaviour as reflected in the emergent theory. The link with subjective stress is another indication (see Section 6.3.2) of the interactions that exist between the categories, and forms part of the integration of the theory (Glaser, 1998). Not only is there a link between self-worth and stress but, as indicated previously, thwarted belongingness is a stressor while the strategy of managing reality relates to stressful experiences. One could therefore hypothesise that managing reality, and specifically employing approach strategies, may be a mediator between self-evaluating and stress, or more specifically between self-worth and stress.

The protective value of high self-worth is reflected by the finding that this type of self-worth during adolescence is desirable for future mental health (McAdams et al., 2017). Furthermore, adolescents' relationships with their parents relate positively with their self-worth. Specific aspects of this parent-adolescent relationship which are of importance for adolescent self-worth include the closeness of the relationship, the affection received from parents and the parent-adolescent attachment (Chen, 2017; McAdams et al., 2017). These sources in the literature strengthen the link between support and guidance provided by parents, self-worth and a sense of belonging.

Being a victim of bullying is associated with low self-worth in middle childhood and adolescence (Bogart et al., 2014; Noser & Steele, 2016), where teasing is a specific bullying behaviour identified as impacting on self-worth (Noser & Steele, 2016). Furthermore, resilience seems to be a mediator between bullying and self-worth (Noser & Steele, 2016). On the other hand, it was found that self-worth moderates the effects of bullying and poor parental practices (Garber, Robinson & Valentiner, 1997; Liu, 2003; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013), while high self-worth was reported to be a psychosocial mechanism that could contribute towards resilience (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick & Sawyer, 2003).

A possible interpretation is that these examples could be indications of how trait and state self-worth function as variables, with self-worth affected by bullying being state self-worth, and self-worth acting as a mediator or an independent variable being a trait self-worth. As for the emergent theory, evaluation of the self forms part of the process of negotiating belongingness while the resulting self-worth seems to be a state characteristic. Yet, in the light of the seemingly conflicting evidence from other studies one should be mindful that self-worth could play multiple roles in the occurrence of bullying and being a bully victim.

6.4.5 Conclusive thoughts

The reflections above do not indicate the position of self-worth, as used in the emergent theory, within the broader theoretical discourse of the self; however, neither do many other published studies reflect on the philosophical stance towards the conceptualisation of self-worth. One should, though, be cognisant that self-worth within the theory of thwarted belongingness is an evaluation of the self, in terms of specific domains which include internalised standards of social values and their own capabilities to determine a (state) self-worth. This understanding is of importance to the emergent theory because theories often drive interventions and therefore affect the activities and desired outcomes.

The literature supports the strategy of weighing the self as discussed in the emergent theory, as a process that is used to determine self-worth. Weighing the self, as reflected in the theory of thwarted belongingness, is equivalent to self-evaluation since many resources referred to the incidents in the data coded as weighing the self, as self-evaluation (e.g. Campbell & Lavalley, 1993; Kernis, 2002; Rosenberg, 1989). Therefore, the strategy of weighing the self will be referred to in the theory of thwarted belongingness as evaluating the self.

6.5 Summary

In the current chapter the negotiation strategies of managing reality, setting boundaries and evaluating the self were discussed. The strategy of managing reality is reflected as a coping strategy in reaction to thwarted belongingness as the stressor. It was indicated how setting boundaries influence interpersonal relationships. The strategy of setting boundaries is related to the strategy of weighing the self wherein boundaries create space for weighing to take place.

The strategy of weighing the self is reflected as a process with the function of contributing towards a healthy sense of belonging. An interaction between the strategies of weighing the self and managing reality exists, although there is no clarity on this interaction within the context of the theory of thwarted belongingness. Based on the literature review, weighing the self in the theory of thwarted belongingness will be replaced with evaluating the self. Finally, self-worth and its importance in negotiating a sense of belonging were highlighted

Failing to negotiate a sense of belonging for the participants resulted in consequences that emerged as acting and changing. The next chapter will focus on clarifying these consequences of failed negotiations of belongingness.

CHAPTER 7

DEALING WITH FAILED NEGOTIATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The main concern of the adolescent research participants has been identified as a thwarted sense of belonging that is dealt with through the negotiation strategies of managing their reality, setting boundaries and evaluating the self. For these adolescents, this thwarted sense was, however, not successfully dealt with, which implied a continuation of this sense, accompanied by emotions of which the most notable is anger. Due to the said sense of belonging not being dealt with successfully, the adolescent research participants were obliged to deal with their failed negotiations by making use of the strategies that emerged as acting and changing.

7.2 Acting

Acting as a strategy for dealing with failed negotiations has explicit dimensions coded as **reacting violently** and **moving back-and-forth**. These dimensions are preceded by events that function as triggers for their occurrence. The triggers consist of either deliberate provocation or seemingly insignificant events such as an insulting comment or unintentionally asking questions the adolescent research participant does not like being asked.

7.2.1 Reacting violently

The violent reaction of youths towards others was the initial point of interest that sparked this research. GTM, however, directed the researcher to search for the main concern of the

substantive area, which turned out to be a thwarted sense of belonging. If the adolescent research participants do not successfully deal with this sense, this could result in violent behaviour, which is the dimension of reacting violently included in the strategy of acting that forms part of dealing with failed negotiations.

Reacting violently can be seen as emotion-driven violence triggered by specific events (see Section 7.2) with the function of relieving the emotions that result from the failed negotiations. The emotions that precede the violent reactions consist mainly of anger accompanied by frustration, feeling bad, not worrying anymore, or having extensive worries. Violent reactions are extreme forms of boundary setting through which the adolescent research participants attempt to forcefully create a sense of self-worth. Unfortunately, this impacts negatively on how the adolescent participants evaluate themselves as it results in a devaluation of the self.

As the substantive area comprises late adolescents who have committed assault, it was considered necessary specifically to consider literature on the development of youth violence and theories on violence, so as to better understand the dimension of reacting violently and to serve as data for CCA with the theory of thwarted belongingness.

7.2.1.1 South African literature on youth violence

The specific focus of the literature search was to locate theories on the development of youth violence. The point of departure was South African literature on this topic: in particular, *Youth violence: Sources and solutions in South Africa* (Ward, Van der Merwe, et al., 2012) and *Child and youth misbehaviour in South Africa* (Bezuidenhout, 2013) were consulted.

In their chapter on the development of youth violence Van der Merwe, Dawes and Ward (2012) follow the ecological approach of Bronfenbrenner when they discuss the risk factors related to this development. They present, true to the nature of most literature on crime and delinquency that includes violence and youth violence, an explanation of the risk factors as these appear in the various levels of the ecological system theory (such as Jonson-Reid, 1998; O'Brien, Daffern, Chu & Thomas, 2013; Pederson, Rathert, Fite, Stoppelbein & Greening, 2016; Ward, Artz, et al., 2012).

A distinction is seldom made between various forms of violence since the word covers, under the umbrella term of antisocial behaviour, “a broad range of contra-normative behaviours occurring during childhood and adolescence” (van der Merwe et al., 2012, p. 55). Therefore, theories discussed by these authors did not differentiate between types of violence, and consequently did not consider the possibility that the same type of behaviour might be motivated by different underlying processes, or different main concerns.

Furthermore, Van der Merwe et al. (2012) referred to a 1998 publication by Hawkins et al. in which they indicate the scarcity of studies that address violence development. For this reason, studies done prior to 1998 and from 1998 to 2015 explaining the development of youth violence, could not be found or were very scanty. However, the current researcher disagrees with their approach to countering the lack of information, which is built on the assumption that “it is [...] useful to conceptualise violent behaviour as one aspect of a constellation of moderate to serious antisocial behaviours that tend to co-occur” (van der Merwe et al., 2012, p. 55) and, furthermore, to study it as part of the umbrella concept of antisocial behaviour. Such an approach may hide the functionality of various forms of violence for various groups of interest, or various substantive areas.

On the contrary, studying violence through GTM makes it possible to identify the function of violence as a strategy towards a specific goal. This approach diverges from previous attempts that explain the development of violent behaviour mostly through environmental influences and the interaction of risk and protective factors, without clarifying the potential psychological use or psychological benefit the violence may have for the offenders. This is not to say that risk factors, protective factors and environmental influences should be completely disregarded when explaining violent behaviour. It is, nevertheless, clear that the developmental process of violence cannot be explained by risk factors, protective factors and environmental influences alone.

In the second resource, the chapter titled *Criminogenic risk factors for youth offenders* (Maree, 2013), also discusses risk factors for youth offenders on various ecological levels. In addition, this resource adopted an inclusive approach to youth offending, not a specific focus on youth violence as in the current study. However, in contrast with the above discussed resource, the chapter in the second resource titled *Contemporary theoretical explanations for youth misbehaviour* (Joubert & Bezuidenhout, 2013), provides a comprehensive overview of theories related to youth offending. Of particular interest is the section on integrated theories on crime explaining how a variety of theories could together contribute towards explaining crime and delinquency. Although the theories are specifically focussed on explaining youth offending, this opens a space for theories such as the theory on thwarted belongingness — that do not specifically focus on the prediction of violence but that shed light onto the occurrence of youth violence under certain circumstances — to contribute towards theories on crime and/or violence.

Under the discussion of youth misbehaviour in South Africa, Joubert and Bezuidenhout (2013) refer to “strain owing to social risk factors” (p. 139), asserting that the majority of risk factors in South Africa are of a social nature. This is notable as general strain theory is discussed later on in this chapter under the heading *Violence as a functionality* (Section 7.2.1.3).

7.2.1.2 Risk factors, protective factors and the environment

Where do risk and protective factors as well as the environment fit into the theory of thwarted belonging? Risk and protective factors may act as either adverse or favourable experiences and events which could either contribute towards or prevent the development of main concerns. These concerns will depend on the substantive area a researcher focuses on. This assumption is based on risk and protective factors that are related to the occurrence of youth violence and that resemble the adverse experiences as portrayed in the current study: lacking support and guidance, and being bullied (e.g. Elliott, 1994; Hawkins et al., 2000; Maree, 2013; Saner & Ellickson, 1996).

7.2.1.3 Violence as a functionality

In Section 7.2.1 it is mentioned that violent behaviour could be serving a specific function, and this is also portrayed by the theory of thwarted belongingness. Studies and theories covering the functionality of youth violence are, however, scarce. Possibly an overall drawback for understanding the occurrence of youth violence and developing relevant theories is that aggression and violence are either too often studied under an umbrella term or investigated in relation to risk factors, protective factors and the environment, instead of the researcher(s) establishing the inherent function that violence performs for the offenders within their specific

circumstances. If the focus could shift to start with substantive theories and working towards grand theories on violence or even crime and delinquency, one may see a completely new picture unfold with the same variables, namely risk factors, protective factors and environmental conditions, still being involved.

Three resources reflecting the functionality of violence and that are comparable to the theory of thwarted belongingness were identified. One resource is a research study on violence and two resources provide theories on violence. An overview of each of these resources will be presented, after which they will be reflected upon in relation to the current study.

7.2.1.3.1 Violence as a healing process

The research study which was related to the functionality of youth violence and was comparable to the current study was conducted within the context of racialised minority youths between the ages of 16 and 24 years in Canada (Kumsa et al., 2013). The part of the main research study reflected upon in the published article, concentrated on understanding both violent behaviour and healing as a consequence of previously experienced violence. Although the substantive area of, and purpose of, this study differed from that of the current study, one argument is particularly noteworthy, namely that violent behaviour and healing are “simultaneous relational processes” (Kumsa et al., 2013, p. 851) and therefore, that the violence observed is also part of the healing that takes place inside the offenders.

7.2.1.3.2 General strain theory (GST) as an explanation of crime by Robert Agnew

Criminological theory tends to account for a wide variety of antisocial behaviour as a collective, often not considering the sub-categories of crime and delinquency such as assault, robbery and substance abuse. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to look at GST as proposed by Agnew (1985; 1992; 2001; 2013). Prior to 1985, strain theories predicted delinquency among adolescents when acceptable goal-seeking behaviour was in some way prevented (Agnew, 1985). Agnew proposed a revised strain theory that predicted delinquency when acceptable pain-avoidance behaviour – with pain understood to be the result of unfavourable situations – was not possible. Furthermore, anger came to the fore as a mediator between the unfavourable situations that could also be regarded as adverse experiences, and delinquent behaviour. Therefore, the emotion of anger played a role in the occurrence of such behaviour when unfavourable situations were encountered.

In 1992, when many researchers became aversive to strain theories, Agnew (1992) once again argued in favour of a revised strain theory, taking the stance that strain theory could be a noteworthy contributor to the understanding of delinquent behaviour. He then proposed GST which employed a broader perspective on strain and which was more inclusive of conditions that could be regarded as straining, and described the effect of strains as increasing the occurrence of negative emotions. In their turn, the negative emotions elicit corrective actions that could include criminal behaviour (Agnew, 1992). In short, “certain strains or stressors increase the likelihood of crime” (Agnew, 2012). Examples of strains, provided by Agnew (2001), that relate to the current study’s adverse experiences are parental rejection and abusive peer relations. However, to explain the possibility of crime as a response to stressors, the following quotation is of value:

Individuals must experience the criminogenic strains listed in GST; interpret such strains as high in magnitude and unjust; be in circumstances conducive to criminal coping [...]; and possess a set of characteristics that are conducive to criminal coping. (Agnew, 2013, p. 667)

There is much more to strain theory; however, for the purpose of the current study the information provided is sufficient.

7.2.1.3.3 The Germ Theory as an explanation of violent behaviour by James Gilligan

The psychiatrist James Gilligan (2000) approached violence from the perspectives of public health and preventive medicine. He built his theory on his experiences of working in the mental health hospitals of prisons, trying to understand the reasons for violence and talking to severely violent people about their violent behaviour. He referred, probably satirically, to his theory as the Germ Theory where emotions are the pathogen and violence the pathology. By referring to emotions as the pathogen he reduced the contributing power of biological factors towards violence.

Pathogens, however, have to be acquired in some way: in the case of violence the ways in which emotions as a psychological pathogen are transferred have been identified as being social, economic and cultural in nature. Combined with certain preconditions (to be elucidated shortly) “the emotion of shame is the primary or ultimate cause of violence, whether toward others or toward the self” (p. 110), with pride being the intended outcome of the violence. This implies that one of the preconditions in terms of which shame causes violence, is shame itself.

The difference is, however, that the violence causing shame is an acute form of shame, while the shame as a precondition for violence is chronic shame.

The preconditions that should accompany the chronic shame are (1) violent behaviour as, from the perspectives of the offenders, this is the only option left to fend off shame and achieve pride, and (2) lacking love for and guilt towards other people. In other words, the continuously ashamed person, confronted by an event that is experienced as shameful, who cannot find alternative ways to restore his/her pride and “lacks the emotional capacities or the feelings that normally inhibit the violent impulses that are stimulated by shame” (p. 113), is a good candidate for acting violently.

Chronic shame was instilled in the offenders Gilligan worked with by means of child abuse — “the clearest possible way of communicating to the child that the parent does not love him (or her)” (Gilligan, 2003, p. 1153). The examples of the child abuse which the seriously violent offenders he worked with underwent are described by Gilligan (2003) as follows:

One after another of the most violent men I have worked with over the years have described to me how they had been humiliated repeatedly throughout their childhoods, verbally, emotionally, and psychologically (taunted, teased, ridiculed, rejected, insulted). They had also been physically humiliated by means of violent physical abuse, sexual abuse, and life-threatening degrees of neglect (such as being starved by their parents, or simply and totally abandoned, as in coming home to find that their parents had absconded from the family's apartment, leaving them behind). (p. 1153)

7.2.1.3.4 Reflection

In GTM terms, the substantive areas on which the above study on violent behaviour as well as GST and the Germ Theory were based, differed from each other. However, all three of these focuses on violence support the current study's approach, to understand violence as serving a function for the violent offender. The first is that of healing, the second of coping and emotional relief and the third of fending off shame and achieving pride. Ultimately, the violence in the theory of thwarted belongingness forms part of the negotiation for belongingness; however, at that particular moment it acts as an emotional relief. This consequently reflects both a healing function and a function of emotional relief.

GST indicates the emotion of anger as a moderator between strains and delinquent behaviour. This resembles the theory of thwarted belongingness where unresolved thwarted belongingness combined with anger, together with a trigger, could result in violent reactions (Section 4.5.1.1). Furthermore, GST includes "circumstances conducive to criminal coping" (Agnew, 2013, p. 667) as contributing to crime being a response to stressors. This relates to the influence of the environment on the occurrence of violent behaviour (Section 4.6.3) that, although not formally part of the theory, could contribute to the violent behaviour which is a result of thwarted belongingness.

What is noteworthy about the Germ Theory in describing the causes of violent behaviour, is that one could phrase it from a grounded theory perspective. For instance, the **substantive area** of the Germ Theory could consist of seriously violent offenders in custody, the **main concern** identified could be to restore pride and the **main strategy** to address the main concern could be the restoring of pride by venting off feelings of shame through violent acts. The Germ

Theory, furthermore, reflects **adverse experiences** that instilled chronic shame as well as a process of self-evaluation.

While the adolescent research participants in the current study desired a sense of belonging, the violent offenders in the Germ Theory wanted pride. While the adolescents negotiated belongingness, the violent offenders fenced off shame to restore their pride. Finally, it is clear that both these theories investigated adverse experiences that direct researchers towards the issue of undesirable family management practices. However, an important difference between the Germ Theory and the theory of thwarted belongingness, is that in the current study the adolescent research participants felt guilty after the violent acts while this seemed not to be the case with the imprisoned violent offenders (Gilligan, 2000). One may argue that the Germ Theory could be an indication of (1) what a thwarted sense of belongingness could lead to should it not be resolved, or (2) what the end-result could be in cases where the adverse events are experienced in their worst form thinkable, which is that, in these latter cases, the continued thwarted sense of belonging could develop into a sense of chronic shame.

The theory of thwarted belongingness was aimed at understanding the main concern of late adolescents who committed assault, and how this concern is resolved. Nonetheless, although the theory of thwarted belongingness is not aimed at explaining the occurrence of violence as such, an explanation of the occurrence of violence is embedded in the theory as an explanation of the pathway to violent behaviour – a pathway that ends in the dimension of acting violently. One could reason that theories on the occurrence of violent behaviour as well as crime in general, are embedded in overarching main concerns. Therefore, a better understanding of these main concerns may, on the whole, add to the predictive value of theories on the occurrence of violent behaviour and crime. Furthermore, with the required effort and rigour, it may be

feasible to work towards a grand theory on the development of both youth violence and violence in general.

7.2.2 Moving back-and-forth

Moving back-and-forth is another explicit dimension used by the adolescent research participants in the current study to deal with failed negotiations. This dimension is also activated by triggers (see Section 7.2) and manifests through the adolescent research participants leaving their home periodically, which could be regarded as an extreme form of boundary setting. The available literature with regard to adolescents doing so focuses either on children in late adolescence and young adults leaving their home as an age norm and developmental milestone (e.g. Billari & Liefbroer, 2007; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006) or on homeless children (e.g. Bender, Brown, Thompson, Ferguson & Langenderfer, 2015; Mallett & Rosenthal, 2009). The content in the abovementioned resources did, however, not relate to moving back-and-forth as described in the theory on thwarted belongingness. Nevertheless, as moving back-and-forth is a form of boundary setting the discussion of the negotiation of belongingness through the setting of boundaries in Section 6.3 is of relevance at this stage. In this regard, it is noteworthy to emphasise that the context of boundary setting in the current study is interpersonal and the function thereof is to negotiate belongingness. The process of boundary setting in the current study takes place, directly, to exclude people from the adolescent research participants' lives by moving out of their immediate environments and, indirectly, to create a space where negative experiences could be avoided.

Moving back-and-forth is, however, not a theoretically saturated dimension and, therefore, requires more attention in future research studies. Nevertheless, it is not excluded from the

current theory of thwarted belongingness (as were actions such as substance abuse and gangsterism), because the emerging properties of moving back-and-forth resonated with the theory of thwarted belonging and specifically with boundary setting. Furthermore, the influence of the environment on the behaviour of the adolescent research participants (see Section 4.6.3), as with acting violently, could not be disregarded. The researcher recognises that most of the adolescent research participants in the current study did not engage with moving back-and-forth. However, the substantive area of the current study specifically included youth with violent behaviour – all the adolescent research participants, therefore, acted violently. The indications of moving back-and-forth and its alignment with the theory of thwarted belongingness could, however, not be ignored. The inclusion of moving back-and-forth in the theory of thwarted belongingness is based on the assumption that violent youths are not the only group to whom this theory may be applicable because acting violently is only one of a number of possible outcomes resulting from failed negotiations of belongingness. Therefore, just as a violent environment may influence the behavioural choices of youths who failed in their negotiation of belongingness, so may an environment where moving back-and-forth is normalised.

7.3 Changing

Changing is described as a more directive strategy for dealing with failed negotiations (see Section 4.5.2) than evaluating the self is for negotiating belongingness (see Section 4.4.3), because this changing is an **intentional** process. Changing does not entail an evaluation of the self but is, rather, a process of change that provides new material or incidents for youth offenders for self-evaluation. Changing is, therefore, a process of working towards an ideal self. This ideal self and how it is evaluated are subjective and do not necessarily conform to

what is generally accepted as a healthy ideal self. Therefore, depending on the individual, the process could result in socially acceptable or unacceptable changes, with either positive or negative results.

Changing as a strategy links with the multi-dimensional theoretical approach to self-esteem, and specifically with the dimension of **self-liking** – the experience of ourselves as acceptable-unacceptable, being socially dependent and ultimately as “our approval or disapproval of ourselves, in line with internalized social values” (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995, p. 325) – and **outer self-esteem** – “feelings of self-worth based on the reflected appraisals of significant others in the form of social approval in an interpersonal environment” (Mackinnon, 2015, p. 50). Changing as a strategy to deal with failed negotiations of belongingness also links with “theories of possible selves [that] focus on gaps between who we are and who we might be” (Granberg, 2006, p. 110).

7.3.1 Improving the self

Improving the self is an **intentional** process pursued to positively influence **self-worth**. It involves the adolescent research participants becoming aware of alternative ways to deal with adverse experiences, by gaining insight and experiencing improvement in their own lives, and more effective implementation of strategies to negotiate belongingness. **Improving the self** and the responsibility these adolescents took for their own lives replaced the adverse experiences as driving forces in their lives. As mentioned earlier (Section 4.5.2.1), the adolescent research participants’ initial drive to change through improving the self, was not by choice but, instead, imposed by a court through referral to diversion programmes. This implies

that an intervention took place which led the adolescents to a decision to embark on positive self-change.

The initial literature search on self-change mostly yielded information on **self-change** related to addictions and weight loss. In this literature the researcher came across references to intentional self-change and it seemed appropriate to replace, in the theory of thwarted belongingness, **improving the self** with **intentional self-change** which is understood to be “the effort to create a particular ‘kind’ of self” (Kiecolt as cited in Granberg, 2006, p. 109). The reasoning behind this is based on the question whether someone would exert great effort to instil negative change. Attempts to change positively are usually met with considerable challenges (e.g. Belding, Naufel & Fujita, 2015; MacPherson & Myers, 2010; Polivy & Peter Herman, 2002; Wagner, Hospital, Graziano, Morris & Gil, 2014); therefore the argument is that **intentional** self-change implies **positive improvement**.

“Groups that provide us with a sense of place, purpose, and belonging tend to be good for us psychologically [...]. They enhance our self-esteem and sense of worth” (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & Haslam, 2009, pp. 2-3). This stance is embedded in social identity theory and is a powerful piece of information with regard to the current study as it confirms the interaction between **self-worth** and **belongingness** even though the nature of this interaction is not clear. Furthermore, Haslam et al. (2009), in their explanation of social identity theory, postulate that **social identity** positively influences **self-worth**.

Furthermore, Granberg (2006) referred to the concept of identity transformation and maintenance, which may indicate that the adolescent research participants who engaged in intentional change actually engaged in a process of identity transformation. Although various

identities have been discussed in the literature (e.g. Dobrescu, 2013), the relationship between **self-worth**, as discussed under evaluating the self (Section 4.4.3), and **identity transformation**, as discussed under intentional self-change, seems to be of relevance. It may be that the adolescent research participants reporting on their intentional change, following their involvement in a diversion programme, have embarked on a process of identity transformation.

The process may impact not only on their self-worth but also on their sense of belonging. However, in the theory of thwarted belongingness, self-worth is initially embedded in the negotiation strategy of evaluating the self that is aimed towards improving the adolescent participants' sense of belonging. This self-worth, however, is identified as a state self-worth that reflects on contingencies of self-worth (see Chapter 6) and which may be an indication of a weak self-esteem (Heppner & Kernis as cited in Soenens, Berzonsky & Papini, 2016). The researcher, therefore, hypothesise that the process of intentional change towards a transformed identity may impact on the adolescent research participants' trait self-worth, which may contribute more sustainably to a sense of belonging, and therefore a positive social identity.

Note that the above approach to change reflects a process where the influence of social identity and self-worth is a reciprocal process and not unidirectional. Therefore, it may be that the adverse experiences in the current study, through their impact on the adolescent participants' sense of belonging, contributed towards a lower social identity which lowered their self-worth and caused them to rely on state self-worth.

Furthermore, if one accepts that belongingness is embedded in social identity, self-evaluation that impacts on state self-worth will not be successful as a strategy to negotiate belongingness, but instead identity transformation will be, as part of intentional self-change that contributes

towards trait self-worth. Therefore, the process of self-evaluation to negotiate a sense of belonging in response to their thwarted belongingness could partially explain why the negotiations failed. In other words, instead of focussing on a trait self-worth the adolescent research participants focussed on a state self-worth that did not affect their sense of belongingness. This accentuates the importance of identity transformation in dealing with a thwarted sense of belongingness. Finally, the identity transformation should impact on the adolescent research participants' social identity as well, since the adverse experiences originally affected their social identity. With all this information in mind, intentional self-change that resulted from the adolescent research participants' participation in diversion programmes, may be an indication of the potential success of such programmes.

7.4 Summary

Embedded in dealing with failed negotiations as part of the theory of thwarted belongingness, is a contribution towards the occurrence of youth violence which emphasises the function of such violence as primarily a psychological one. Acting violently is nonetheless not the only result of failed negotiations and, at this stage (because the theory may be further developed in future), is accompanied by moving back-and-forth, and changing the self intentionally. Foundational to acting violently, moving back-and-forth and changing the self intentionally – which are the dimensions of acting and changing – is that these dimensions embarked on options which the environment made available to the adolescent research participants. These options include: firstly, to act violently as a result of most of these participants being exposed to violence in their communities and, secondly, to leave home periodically as a result of their being used to children staying on the street or going to another house when they were agitated. Change was the third option that the environment offered these participants, as a way of dealing

with failed negotiations. This last option emerged from the diversion programmes they had involuntarily attended. These examples support the view of the physical environment as a possible risk factor for, or protective factor against, violent behaviour. The researcher would, however, propose that other environments such as the individual's biological environment, which includes genes, syndromes and illnesses, as well as the psychological environment, be identified as possible environmental risk factors for violence since these also provide the individual with the option to react violently.

In the next chapter, reflections on the study, the final theory, and possible application of the theory will be included.

CHAPTER 8

THE THEORY OF THWARTED BELONGING AND INTERVENTIONS

8.1 Introduction

The **research problem** and **first aim** of the current study are based on the **first assumption** of the study (Section 1.4) which is that the non-shared environment, mediating the effects of risk factors on the development of youth violence, may also include processes on a psychological level or processes within the interactions between people that could be interpreted vastly differently, even by siblings within the same household.

The **first aim** of the current study is to explore the main concern of youths involved in interpersonal physical violence (physical assault) and to generate a grounded theory explaining how they go about to resolve this main concern. The research questions that guided the study are derived from the first aim and were indicated to be (Section 1.6):

- (1) What is the main concern of youths involved in interpersonal violence? and
- (2) How do they go about to resolve this main concern?

To address the first aim and answer the research questions, classical GTM was used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six adolescent participants who had committed assault and who had been referred to diversion programmes by a court, and with six professional persons working with youths in diversion programmes including social workers, educators and a youth worker. Two sources of secondary data – which were an online testimonial of a youth offender and a television interview with a youth offender and a social

worker – were also included for analysis. Following the principle of CCA and the GTM approach to theory generation, the theory of thwarted belongingness was generated. Through comparison with existing literature and theories the said theory was adapted, of which an outline is presented in Section 8.2.

The theory of thwarted belonging clarified some aspects of the non-shared psychological environment and its possible contribution to youth violence. Furthermore, it clarified mechanisms involved in the real domain that impacted on the actual and empirical domains (see Section 2.2).

The **second aim** of the current study is to use the newly generated grounded theory to indicate how it could inform the development of a violence prevention intervention, by means of a programme theory. This aim was derived from the second and third assumptions that are addressed in Section 8.3. The **second assumption** is that a programme theory should form part of the developing stages of an intervention and should be operationalised as an evaluative tool during the evaluation of the intervention. The **third assumption** is that research and theory explaining the underlying processes involved in the problem behaviour should form the foundation on which a programme theory for a violence prevention intervention is developed. (Section 1.4)

The theory is judged in Section 8.4, the strengths and limitations of the study are presented in Sections 8.5 and 8.6, while suggestions for future research are discussed in Section 8.7.

8.2 The theory of thwarted belongingness

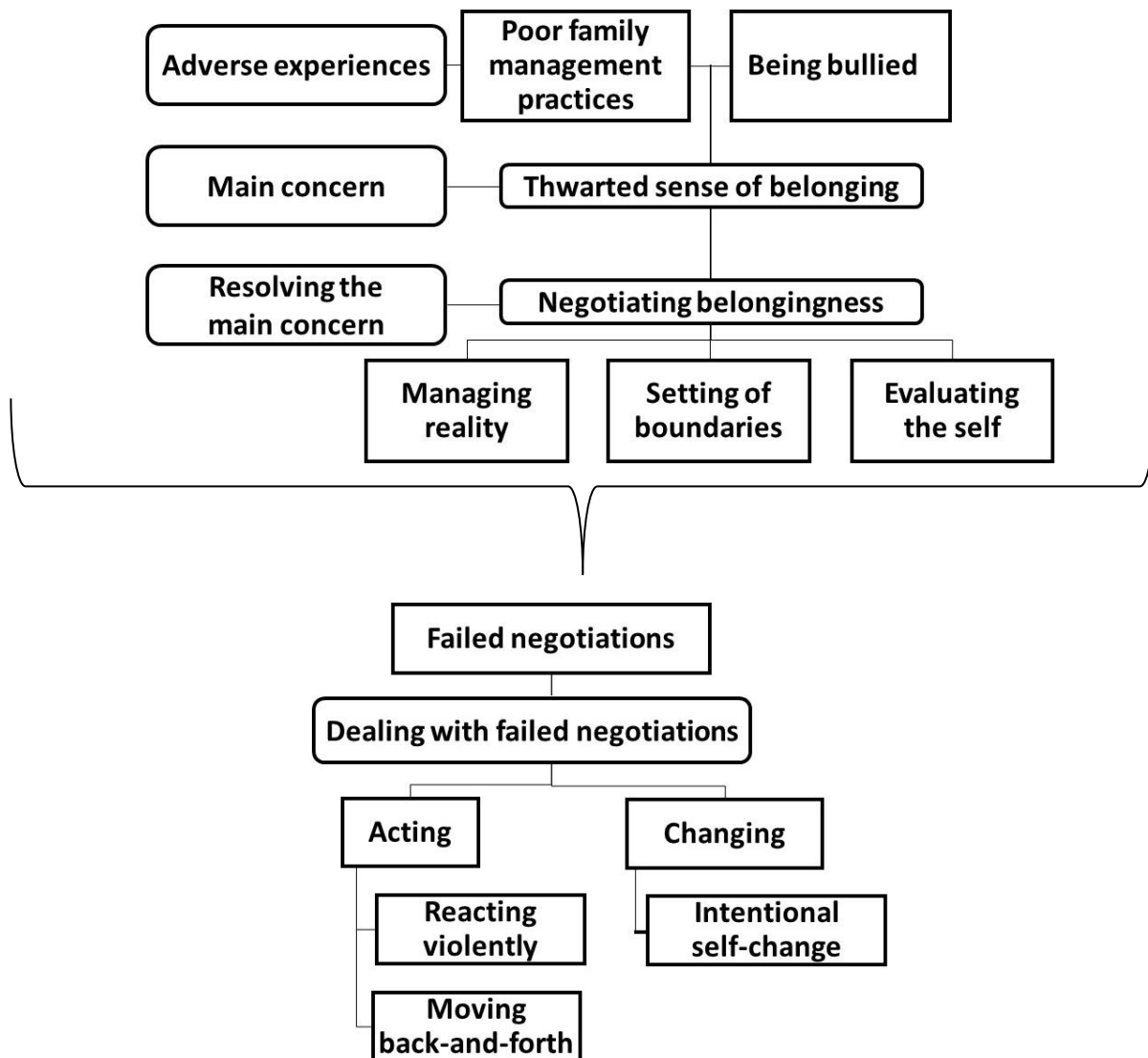


Figure 2: The theory of thwarted belongingness

The main concern of the substantive area – youths who met the criteria – is a **thwarted sense of belonging**. Two categories of adverse experiences are the main contributors towards this thwarted sense: **poor family management practices** and **being bullied**. The core strategy used by the substantive area to resolve the main concern is the **negotiation of a sense of belonging** through the strategies of **managing reality**, the **setting of boundaries** and **evaluating the self**. Managing reality takes place through avoiding reality and dealing with reality, while the setting

of boundaries takes place through **physical** or **psychological processes** and, finally, evaluating the self occurs through movement between **valuing** and **devaluing the self**. For this substantive area, the negotiation of a sense of belonging failed, and resulted in an additional main strategy called **dealing with failed negotiations**. This strategy consists of the strategies of **acting** and **changing**. Acting included **reacting violently** and **moving back-and-forth**, while changing included **intentional self-change**. The latter is the only strategy under the current circumstances with the potential to effectively deal with the adolescent respondents' thwarted sense of belonging.

8.3 A violence prevention intervention

At this stage the researcher would like to note that the theory of thwarted belongingness is indeed still a hypothesis that might be modified by means of additional research. The intention at this stage, however, is to indicate how a grounded theory could contribute towards a programme theory for the development of an intervention. The researcher will, therefore, indicate how the theory of thwarted belongingness could inform a violence prevention intervention. This section will shed light onto considerations to be kept in mind when designing an intervention for violence prevention and arguing how a grounded theory could significantly contribute towards the quality and success of such an intervention.

The ultimate goal of a violence prevention intervention should obviously be to **prevent violence**. The decision to use the theory of thwarted belongingness for this purpose should be based on an understanding of the theory and knowledge of the substantive area. This is of importance as the newly generated theory is not aimed at explaining the occurrence of youth violence, but at elucidating the main concern of the substantive area and how these youth

proceed to resolve this main concern. The theory of thwarted belonging, therefore, directs the focus of the violence prevention intervention towards the main concern reflected in the theory, the adverse experiences that contributed towards the main concern and the categories included in the theory itself.

Furthermore, one should consider the day-to-day **environment** of the intervention's target group. The environment is a widely accepted risk factor for violence (Clark, 2012). Although the environment did not emerge as a specific category within the theory of thwarted belongingness, it continuously surfaced during the various stages of the current study as a significant factor to consider when studying violent behaviour. One such example of where it surfaced is that the environment – in the form of adverse experiences – contributed towards the thwarted sense of belonging. Another example is that the theory of thwarted belongingness reflects an interaction between environment and behaviour. A last example is that the adverse experiences of the adolescent research participants took place within environments shared by others such as family members and friends. Finally, the environment in which a youth offender lives may give cues to the developers of interventions, that is, insight into possible alternative reactions of youth offenders that may result due to a thwarted sense of belonging.

8.3.1 The intervention: A parenting programme

Youth violence is often rooted in family dynamics (Foster, 2012), which is a finding supported by the theory of thwarted belongingness. The adverse experience of lacking support, therefore, may relate to the criminogenic risk factor of family risk (Beaver et al., 2014), as the family is either the origin of the thwarted belongingness, or part of the failed negotiations for belongingness, of the youth offender. Furthermore, parents play a key role in the psychological

development of their children and it is, therefore, relevant to focus on parents as the target group for a fictional intervention programme.

Not all parenting programmes will be effective in **reducing and/or preventing** the prevalence of youth violence (World Health Organization UNICEF & University of Cape Town, 2013). An important contributor towards the effectiveness of parenting programmes in the prevention of youth violence is, amongst other contributory factors, a sound programme theory. The main activities for the evaluation of parenting programmes for the prevention of youth violence also include the assessment of a programme theory (World Health Organization UNICEF & University of Cape Town, 2013). In addition to Wessels et al. indicating that a sound programme theory could contribute towards a successful parenting programme, other researchers also demonstrated improved success of programmes which were based on well-explained theories (Noar & Zimmerman as cited in Segal, Opie & Dalziel, 2012).

Parenting programmes seem to have the most impact when attended by parents of children aged 0 to 5 years (Krug, Dahlberg, et al., 2002). The evidence indicated that programmes which enhance the relationships between children and parents (or caregivers) involving adults or both adults and children, programmes improving parenting skills, and those developing life-skills in children and adolescents may act as prevention against youth violence (World Health Organization & WHO Collaborating Centre for Violence Prevention, 2010; World Health Organization UNICEF & University of Cape Town, 2013). The intervention programme that is the focus of this discussion will, therefore, target parents of children aged 0 to 5 years old. The specific target(s) of the intervention – whether, for instance, relationships, parenting skills or life-skills – will depend on how the theory of thwarted belongingness will be translated into specific programme goals and activities. For this translation, programme theory could be used.

8.3.2 Programme theory

A programme theory is regarded as “an explicit theory of how an intervention contributes to its intended or observed outcomes” (Funnell & Rogers as cited in Schuurs et al., 2014, p. 331). A programme’s theory could also be defined as “the conception of what must be done to bring about the intended social benefits” (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004, p. 134). Various programme development and evaluation methodologies implicate the use of a programme theory (Eaves & Gnich, 2013; Huijbregts et al., 2008; Renger et al., 2013; Rogers, 2008; Rossi et al., 2004; Schuurs et al., 2014; Sharpe, 2011; Taplin & Clark, 2012). A combined framework, developed from the **theory of change methodology** (Taplin & Clark, 2012) and **programme theory** as described by Rossi et al. (2004), is used to demonstrate how the theory of thwarted belongingness could be employed to inform the development of a violence prevention parenting programme.

In developing a theory, backwards mapping is followed: the first step in the process is to determine the **long-term** or **programme goal** (Rossi et al., 2004; Taplin & Clark, 2012). In essence, this is the reason for developing the intervention in the first place. This goal is operationalised through indicating the various **programme objectives** or **outcomes** (Rossi et al., 2004; Taplin & Clark, 2012) that should be achieved in order to prevent youth violence. These outcomes or objectives are “concrete statements that specify the condition to be dealt with together with one or more measurable criteria of success” (Rossi et al., 2004, p. 89). To accomplish these outcomes, interventions should be initiated. Therefore, the process also includes **a description of the intervention(s)** that should be implemented for each outcome to be reached. An outcome is reached if **changes** take place **according to the indicator(s) of success**, which should be identified by the developer(s) of the programme theory (Taplin &

Clark, 2012). Programme theory and the development thereof are much more complex than described above; however, for the purpose of indicating how the theory of thwarted belonging could inform a programme theory for a violence prevention intervention, this information should be sufficient.

8.3.3 The intervention

The target group of the fictional intervention is the parents of young children aged 0 to 5 years who live in a violent community. The programme goal is the prevention of youth violence during adolescence. One could assume that it would be very difficult to determine whether the intervention will make a significant difference in the occurrence of youth violence 10 to 15 years down the line. The researcher, therefore, suggest that a well-developed and tested theory should be foundational to an intervention that should have an impact 10 to 15 years after the implementation of the intervention, but that it should also effect changes that are measurable in the short term and that are predicted to have the desired long term effect.

With this in mind, the theory of thwarted belongingness – supposing it to be a well-developed and validated theory – comprises key areas that could be used during the design to determine the **programme outcomes** that should affect the **programme goal**, the prevention of youth violence during adolescence. The first key area in this regard is poor family management practices that cause adverse experiences, contributing towards a thwarted sense of belongingness. The other key areas are the strategies used to negotiate belongingness. One could argue that if family management practices are well-addressed, negotiation of belongingness would not be necessary on the part of adolescents. However, should there be additional adverse events contributing towards a thwarted sense of belonging, an individual

might still be in a position where a thwarted sense of belonging develops and negotiation of a sense of belonging might take place. Therefore, the developers of the intervention should consider the negotiation strategies adolescents may need, which are managing reality (which in essence comprises coping strategies), the setting of boundaries and evaluating the self (essentially self-worth).

Based on the theory of thwarted belongingness and the discussion above, the developers of the intervention could consider **healthy family management practices** as a suitable programme outcome. It should be noted that the future negotiation strategies of adolescents cannot be measured as an outcome for a parenting programme. Therefore, the intervention programme developer should investigate, by means of existing research and literature, what the **parents** could do, starting while their children are still young, to contribute to the development of their children's future coping skills, their ability to set boundaries and the positive perception of their self-worth. This information could be used to translate the negotiation strategies into programme outcomes that are of relevance to parenting and that may result in the long term goal of the programme being accomplished. In essence, therefore, the theory of thwarted belongingness has guided the developers of the programme theory to search for information on which programme outcomes could be developed and further translated into specific activities.

8.4 Judging the grounded theory

With all the aims of the current study having been addressed, the theory that has been generated should be judged. GTM proposes that a grounded theory (see Section 2.5) should be judged according to fit, workability, relevance and modifiability. A discussion of these criteria follows:

- **Fit.** CCA has been used for analysis of the data, which is said to improve fit. Furthermore, after the concepts (categories) were described, the researcher returned to the coded data to confirm that the descriptions were true reflections of the categorised data, albeit on a conceptual and not a descriptive level. The researcher kept in mind that not all concepts might occur in every interview, but that the categories included in the newly generated theory should be relevant to incidents reflected in the research interviews.
- **Workability.** As with fit, the researcher returned to the research interviews to determine the extent to which the explanation of the newly generated theory reflected reality. The categories, their interaction and how they related to the core category in the process of resolving the main concern, were therefore measured against the original accounts of the research participants. As with fit, the theory is not a glove that fits each account perfectly in every category. The theory does, however, account for the reality reflected in each of the research participants' accounts.
- **Relevance.** The research is deemed relevant as it addresses the main concern of the substantive area. In addition, the demonstration of how the newly generated theory could inform the development of a programme theory for a violence prevention intervention, partially proved the relevance of the theory. The implementation of the intervention, and its monitoring and evaluation according to the programme theory that is based on the theory of thwarted belonging, would be additional proof of the relevance of the theory, should it yield significant positive results.
- **Modifiability.** The modifiability of a theory could only be demonstrated once new data for comparison has been generated. This has already been done to some extent, when the theory

was modified after the comparison with existing literature and theories. Furthermore, during the discussion of the theory of thwarted belongingness, areas that were, for various reasons, not yet saturated were indicated as possible areas for modification.

8.5 The strengths of the study

As indicated in Chapter 1, violence in its various forms remains a worldwide challenge in all levels of society. Youth violence, that seems to be on the increase, is especially disturbing due to its impact not only on the perpetrators and their victims, but also on health and welfare services, productivity, the value of property, essential services and the fabric of society (Krug et al., 2002).

The first strength of the current study is that it creates awareness of the non-shared psychological environment and its potential role in the development of behaviour, including violent behaviour. Through this focus on the non-shared psychological environment, the theory offers a unique approach to understanding the occurrence of youth violence.

The emergent theory of thwarted belongingness furthermore contributes towards the understanding of why the same environment does not lead to the same behaviour for everyone living therein. That is, in addition to the physical environment posing certain risk factors for violent behaviour to occur, the non-shared psychological environment also contributes towards the occurrence of violent behaviour.

This study could be replicated for a wide range of substantive areas related to violent behaviour with the aim of developing a grand theory on violence. Replication is possible as a clear

approach to classical GTM and its application in the current study is provided. Together, these substantive theories could contribute towards the generation of a grand theory on violence.

8.6 The limitations of the study

This study is considered as adding a valuable contribution to the understanding of violent youth offenders. However, specific limitations need to be recognised.

A major limitation of the study was the challenge encountered in accessing the substantive area. Due to the small number of suitable adolescent research participants, it was not always possible to retrieve clear dimensions and properties from the research interviews. Furthermore, due to the difficulty encountered in reaching and recruiting suitable adolescent research participants, the process of theoretical sampling offered a challenge. However, the categories that form part of the theory of thwarted belongingness emerged convincingly and within a clear pattern. This is attributed to the process of CCA that demanded a comparison and critical evaluation of the emerging categories. The researcher also, throughout the process of CCA, asked whether analyses for emerging patterns was taking place or whether ideas was imposed onto the data. This was to ensure that the theory followed the data and that the data was not forced into a pre-meditated theory or pattern. Further research may contribute towards saturation of more categories, which will inevitably lead to the modification of the theory. An important point to note when undertaking research according to GTM, is to carefully consider the sampling possibilities within the substantive area. This is not to say that GTM should not be used within a limiting environment, but rather to create awareness that theoretical saturation might not be achieved and that the researcher should work intelligently and ethically when presenting the generated theory.

The process of recruiting suitable professional persons to participate in the study was a limitation as the researcher wished to interview professional persons with an interest and experience in working with youths with violent behaviour exclusively. Professional persons dealing with youth offenders, however, work not only with youths who display violent behaviour but also with those who have committed sex offences, robbery, theft and substance abuse, for instance. It was therefore difficult for the professional research participants to distinguish between the behaviour and experiences of the different groups of youth offenders during the interviews. The interviews with the said participants were, however, of great importance. They highlighted and created awareness of aspects of importance that did not emerge from the data obtained during the interviews with the adolescent research participants, such as the influence of the environment in the occurrence of youth violence.

Furthermore, the researcher had to listen carefully for shifts between responding from a platform of true experience and responding from a platform of theoretical knowledge. This was important as the professional research participants at times spoke from a theoretical perspective and not necessarily from what they had truly experienced. This was distinguishable from their change in terminology and theoretical vocabulary that the researcher was familiar with. It could be the case that training within a specific framework could lead one toward packaging experiences and incoming information to fit that framework, without consistently considering alternative explanations.

Since the researcher was a novice in GTM, this was another limitation. The robust description by Glaser (1998) of the grounded theorist's experience when applying GTM, which is "...feeling stupid, young, out of control, and like one doesn't know anything" (p. 50), provides an accurate description of the current researcher's own feelings experienced in working with

GTM. It became evident that the mastering of GTM is a process that will continue beyond the finalisation of this thesis. Helen Scott (personal communication, 20 October 2016), indicated during a GT workshop presented by her, that each time one starts with a new step in GT one should return to the GT literature relevant to that step. This advice proved to be most useful during times of confusion and transitions from one step to the following. Further reading clarified many aspects and also helped to conceptualise the approach to, and writing up of, that specific phase.

8.7 Future research

The current research study sought to explore the main concern of youths involved in interpersonal physical violence (physical assault) and to generate a grounded theory explaining how they attempt to resolve this main concern. Some recommendations for future research can, however, be made.

The three main suggestions in this respect are (1) to saturate categories and dimensions that have not been fully saturated in the current study, (2) to further investigate potential categories and dimensions that have emerged but were not included in the theory of thwarted belongingness, and (3) to test the theory of thwarted belongingness since it is a newly generated theoretical stance that needs to be validated.

The unsaturated categories and dimensions that warrant future research include **dealing with failed negotiations** (see Section 4.5.3), **moving back-and-forth** (Section 7.2.2) as well as **changing** (Section 7.3) that currently only have one dimension, namely improving the self.

Potential categories and dimensions that require further investigation to justify its inclusion in or exclusion from the theory of thwarted belongingness are **finding pseudo-families** (Section 4.6.1) combined with **joining gangs** (Section 4.5.3), **abusing substances** (Sections 4.5.3 and 4.6.2) and **the influence of the environment** (Section 4.6.3).

Future research could also focus on the identification of additional adverse experiences that may impact on adolescents' sense of belonging and their violent behaviour. One could expect that alternative adverse experiences may bring to the fore additional strategies used by adolescents to negotiate a thwarted sense of belonging; these could then become a new focus for future research on the topic of youth violence.

Within the context of the current study the adverse experiences could be regarded as stressors that contributed towards a thwarted sense of belonging in the adolescent research respondents. However, as the current study also focuses on the non-shared psychological environment of youth offenders, one should remember that for another individual similar experiences may not be perceived as adverse, as this depends on how they are interpreted by the individual involved. Future research could, therefore, investigate the conditions under which certain events may act as stressors and be experienced as adverse in their contribution to youth violence.

The current research was intended to fill a gap that was identified based on the work of Beaver et al. (2014), specifically the contribution of the non-shared psychological environment to youth violence. The theory of thwarted belongingness is therefore a psychosocial contribution intended to address this gap. However, the true value of the theory of thwarted belongingness will lie in the possibility of integrating it into a grand theory of violence with the aim of extending this theory. For this, additional research will be required.

8.8 Summary

The theory of thwarted belongingness is a mere hypothesis that could contribute towards a better understanding of violent behaviour among youths. To fully develop its potential contributory power in understanding youth violence, further research with the aim of modifying the theory and integrating it into theories of violence, is of utmost importance. It is the hope of the researcher that the current research study will generate interest in this field in order to offer adolescents from violent communities a chance to develop into responsible, violence free adults.

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Appendix 1: Ethical clearance obtained from Unisa's Ethical Committee



Ethical Clearance for M/D students: Research on human participants

The Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at Unisa has evaluated this research proposal for a Higher Degree in Psychology in light of appropriate ethical requirements, with special reference to the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Psychologists of the HPCSA and the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics.

Student Name: Helena Catharina Erasmus **Student no.** 41080866

Supervisor: Prof. I Ferns **Affiliation:** Dept. of Psychology, Unisa

Title of project:

Towards a programme theory for a parenting programme aimed at the prevention of violent youth behaviour

The proposal was evaluated for adherence to appropriate ethical standards as required by the Psychology Department of Unisa. The application was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology on the understanding that –

- Participants will be invited to volunteer for the study through intermediaries (such as Nicro), and no confidential information will be used to identify potential participants;
- Signed letters of informed consent is to be obtained from the parents/guardians of any minors who participate in the study;
- Because of the potential sensitivity of the information being sought it is required that ethical principles related to informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and the right of participants to withdraw from the research should be strictly adhered to;
- If further counseling is required in some cases, the participants will be referred to appropriate counseling services.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P Kruger".

Prof P Kruger
 [For the Ethics Committee]
 [Department of Psychology, Unisa]

Date: 20 October 2015

Appendix 2: Approval obtained from the Gauteng Department of Social Development



Enquiries: Dr. Sello Mokoena
Tel: (011) 3557855
File no.: 2/9/67

MS HELENA CATHARINA ERASMUS

Dear Ms Helena Catharina Erasmus

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Thank you for your application to conduct research within the Gauteng Department of Social Development.

Your application on the research on **"Towards a Programme Theory for a Parenting Programme aimed at the Prevention of Violent Youth Behaviour"** has been considered and approved for support by the Department as it was found to be beneficial to the Department's vision and mission. The approval is subject to the Department's terms and conditions as endorsed on the 22nd of August 2017.

May I take this opportunity to wish you well on the journey you are about to embark on.

We look forward to a value adding research and a fruitful co-operation.

With thanks


Mr. M MAMPURU
Acting Head of Department
Date: 25/8/17

Appendix 3: Consent and assent form for participants who are minors



1 November 2017

Good day

I am Helena Erasmus and I would like to better understand why children sometimes act in ways that may hurt other people. If I understand this better I can help adults to understand children better and if adults understand children better we can work together to better support children. Therefore I would like to talk to youth aged 15 to 18 years, who is has been referred to Khayaletu Child and Youth Care Centre because they have physically hurt someone else. If you are such a person, please continue reading as I am interested in talking to you about the things you have experienced in life.

Everything you tell me will be kept confidential, in other words, I will neither tell anyone that you spoke with me nor what you have told me. The things you tell me will be used together with the things *other* children told me to better understand why children hurt other people.

It will only be you and me talking to each other and no one else will listen to our conversation. I will write things down while we talk to help me remember what I have heard. Your name will not be on the notes and only two ladies who make sure that I do this study in the best way I can, might read it.

If you agree to be part of this study, but later decide to withdraw, I will not use any of your information in this study. Your parents may also decide to withdraw you from the study. Withdrawing from the study will not have negative consequences for you.

Sometimes it hurt when we talk about our lives. If this happens and it hurt too much, please tell me and I will make a plan to help you.

Will you get anything from this study? No, unfortunately I may not give you anything. Being part of this study may though help adults to better understand children and how to help them to act in better ways. I will get this information to other adults through writing a doctoral thesis (the book in which I write about this study), training, writing articles that get published in books, talking to people at conferences, and through teaching students, to name only a few ways.

If you want to be part of this study, I will be very glad. Please ask your parent(s) or legal guardian if you may be part of this study, and to sign the *consent form*. You also have to sign an *assent form* to show me that you agree to be part of this study and that no one has forced you to be part of it.

Please note that this study is performed with the permission and support of Bosasa Youth Development Centres as well as the Department of Social Development.

Sincerely Yours

Helena Erasmus



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INFORMED CONSENT FROM PARENT / LEGAL GUARDIAN

I, _____ (name and surname), with ID
 _____ is the _____ (mother / father / legal guardian)
 of _____ (name and surname of child) with ID
 _____.

I have read the information provided by Ms Helena Erasmus about her study on Youth Violence and understand that

- she will conduct an interview / interviews with my child that will focus on his/her life experiences;
- during the interview(s) Ms Erasmus will take notes for the purpose of analysis;
- only Ms Erasmus and her supervisors will have access to these notes;
- my child's identity will be kept confidential at all times;
- I may at any time withdraw consent for my child to take part in the research without having negative consequences for my child;
- the results of the study will be used for the completion of a doctoral study, writing journal articles, presenting at conferences, training, and for other relevant academic exercises.

I confirm that I understand the aim and the nature, as well as the potential risks and benefits of the study as well as the content of this letter. I therefore give consent that my child may participate in this study if he is willing to do so.

Signed at _____ (place) on _____ (date)

 Parent / legal guardian

 Witness

 Name, surname and position of witness

 Helena Erasmus



INFORMED ASSENT FROM INTERVIEWEE (MINOR)

I, _____ (name and surname), with ID
 _____ I have read the information provided by Ms Helena Erasmus about her
 study on Youth Violence and understand that

- she will conduct an interview / interviews with me that will focus on my life experiences;
- during the interview(s) Ms Erasmus will take notes for the purpose of analysis;
- only Ms Erasmus and her supervisor will have access to these notes;
- my identity will be kept confidential at all times;
- I may at any time withdraw my permission to take part in the research without experiencing negative consequences;
- the results of the study will be used for the completion of a doctoral study, writing journal articles, presenting at conferences, training, and for other relevant academic exercises.

I understand what this study is about and that there are possible risks and/or benefits involved with this study. I also understand everything that is written in this letter. I am willing to be part of this study, and MS Erasmus may interview me.

Signed at _____ (place) on _____ (date)

 Signature

 Name and surname

 Witness

 Name, surname and position of witness

 Helena Erasmus



Appendix 4: Information for parents/legal guardian of participants who are minors



1 November 2017

Dear parent / guardian

The purpose of the study, explained in more detail in the information letter, is to develop a better understanding of why children commit interpersonal violent acts. This *understanding* is on a psychological, cognitive and emotional level which focuses on how children are thinking about and interpreting important life events as well as the world they are living in.

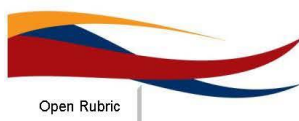
As a parent I know that we often blame ourselves for our children's undesirable behaviour, and often we are blamed by others. My intention is though not to look for a system or person who can be blamed but to truly understand the dynamics behind violent youth behaviour. With this information we may understand how to better deal with these children and help them and others *not* to divert to violence but to use more constructive ways in dealing with life.

If your child is willing to participate in this study, I would really appreciate your consent for his participation. I will try my best to make this interview a positive experience for your child.

Sincerely Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "HELENA ERASMUS".

Helena Erasmus



Appendix 5: Consent form for professional participants



1 November 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

I would like to invite you to participate in the Ph.D. study "**Towards a programme theory for a parenting programme aimed at the prevention of violent youth behaviour**". The purpose of this cross-sectional, qualitative study is to explore through grounded theory methodology (GTM) the processes contributing towards the development of violence among South African youth. This information will then be used to develop a grounded theory to inform the development of a violence prevention parenting programme.

I have conducted interviews with children in a diversion programme and a theory on the development of violent youth behavior has emerged. In order to saturate the theory I have to interview professionals working with children who have committed interpersonal violence.

If you agree to participate in the study, please note that:

- I will take fields notes during the interview and, with your permission, audio-record the interview for transcription by professional transcribers. These transcribers are fully aware of the ethical aspects related to working with research data.
- the interviews will be confidential and the data generated during this study will be protected from free access. Only the researcher, and possibly two of her supervisors, will have access to the data.
- the anonymity of all participants will be ensured at all times.
- you may withdraw from this study, without any negative consequences, as long as it is practical to do so (generally speaking, before data analysis has commenced).
- no incentives are given for participation.
- the results of the study will be used for the completion of a doctoral study, writing journal articles, presenting at conferences, training, and for other relevant academic exercises.

Sincerely Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "HELENA ERASMUS".

Helena Erasmus



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INFORMED CONSENT FROM PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPANT

I, _____ (name and surname), with
ID _____ is involved at Bosasa in the capacity of
_____.

I have read the information provided by Ms Helena Erasmus about her study on Youth Violence and understand that

- she will conduct an interview based on my interaction with youth who have committed interpersonal violence;
- during the interview Ms Erasmus will take notes for the purpose of analysis;
- with my consent Ms Erasmus will audio-record the interview for transcription by professional transcribers;
- only Ms Erasmus and her supervisors will have access to the data;
- my identity will be kept confidential at all times;
- I may at any time withdraw my consent without experiencing negative consequences;
- no incentives are given for my participation;
- the results of the study will be used for the completion of a doctoral study, writing journal articles, presenting at conferences, training, and for other relevant academic exercises.

I confirm that I understand the aim and the nature, as well as the potential risks and benefits of the study as well as the content of this letter. I therefore give consent for my participation in this study.

Ms Erasmus may audio-record the interview.

The audio-recording may be transcribed by professional transcribers.

Yes	No
Yes	No
Yes	No

Signed at _____ (place) on _____ (date).

Participant signature

Witness signature

Name, surname and position of witness

Helena Erasmus

