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Psychological Responses to Coverage of Crime in the Beeld Newspaper

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (Clinical Psychology).

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Masters of Arts (Clinical Psychology) at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

_____
Talia Thompson

_____ day of _____ 2009.

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Abstract

This research study aimed to explore the psychological impact of coverage of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper. The context of "the Afrikaner"[1] in contemporary South Africa and the media portrayal of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper were also important areas of focus in the study. Participants in the research study came from the Afrikaans speaking community in Johannesburg and included nine women and five men. Three focus groups were conducted in Afrikaans and the sessions were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then analyzed using an interpretative thematic analytic approach. The goal was to explore the psychological experiences of reading reports of crime in relation to vicarious or indirect traumatization and meaning making and understandings of crime. The main themes were identified and related to the four main areas of interest including: 1) vicarious and indirect traumatization, 2) meaning making and understandings of crime, 3) "the Afrikaner" identity in contemporary South Africa, and 4) the impressions of media portrayal of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper. Each theme is discussed in terms of how participants described their experiences in relation to the theme, various sub-categories are identified where appropriate and each theme discussion concludes with an overview and theoretical discussion. This study illustrates that exposure to accounts of crime can be emotionally distressing, especially given that South Africans are repeatedly exposed to indirect anecdotal accounts of crime in their daily lives. Meaning making processes are challenged and South Africans may find it difficult to understand why crime happens and what the underlying intentions are of those committing criminal acts. "The Afrikaner" in South Africa may be vulnerable to experiencing particular forms of emotional distress and negative cognitions due to various historical and current social factors. The way in which the *Beeld* reports on crime was viewed as contributing to indirect traumatization and as contributing to biases in the construction of crime. There was evidence of a capacity to engage thoughtfully and critically with the material and the topic and this highlighted the active role that readers may play in engaging with media coverage of crime.

[1] For the purposes of this study, an Afrikaner is defined as a white person whose first language is Afrikaans and who identifies with the idea of being an Afrikaner.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the study

In the South African context, people are exposed to reports of crime in their personal lives and in their engagement with the media. Crime has become a significant concern for South Africans especially as many South Africans have had direct and/or indirect personal experience of criminal victimization (Williams et al., 2007). Research suggests that public perceptions about crime are shaped to some extent by media reports and that media coverage of crime in South Africa contributes to public concerns (Hope & Sparks, 2000; Jones, 2005). Crime statistics demonstrate an increase in crime generally in post-apartheid South Africa (Louw, 2006b) and despite reports that suggest that crime in certain categories, such as murder and robbery, has decreased, those statistics suggesting some reduction in some kinds of crime have been met with suspicion and mistrust (Altbeker, 2007; Louw, 2006b).

Given the high rates of crime in South Africa and exposure of citizens to anecdotal reports and media coverage of crime, the population as a whole may be vulnerable to forms of vicarious or indirect traumatization. Vicarious and/or indirect traumatization are related concepts, often used synonymously, and refer to the trauma responses that may be experienced by people who are not direct victims of a traumatic event but are affected by the exposure to the traumas of others around them (Lerias & Byrne, 2003; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; Pyevich, Newman & Daleiden, 2003). Vicarious or indirect traumatization may have an impact on meaning making processes since vicarious traumatization, in particular, has been linked to possible disruptions in cognitive schemas with regards to meaning (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a).

Previously, vicarious traumatization has been researched primarily with regard to the extended support system of direct victims (e.g., family members) and to people engaged in occupations in traumatic stress fields (such as trauma counselors or emergency service workers) (Lerias & Byrne, 2003; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). However, there has been little research on more abstracted or general indirect forms of exposure to traumatic stimuli (such as television documentaries, anecdotal accounts and newspaper stories) and the possibility that such exposure might contribute to vicarious traumatization. Lerias and Byrne (2003) recommend that more research be

conducted on general populations to assess the impact of a range of forms of direct and indirect exposure to trauma. Newspaper coverage of crime can be understood as a form of indirect exposure to traumatic events that may have a significant impact on the readers who 'witness' these accounts. The central questions of interest in this study pertaining to people's psychological experiences of reading about non-fictionalized accounts of crime is therefore guided by research and theory that indicates that vicarious or indirect traumatization can result from high levels of exposure to a range of traumatic material (Lerias & Byrne, 2003).

A number of non-formal hypotheses motivated the interest in this research study into the possible relationship between indirect traumatization and the reading of crime related stories as represented in the popular medium of a daily newspaper. One observation is that newspaper coverage of crime appears to influence and perhaps shape people's subjective sense of safety and personal well-being. A second hypothesis is that people build personal understandings about crime and its impact and that their explanatory systems are determined and validated to some extent by opinions explicitly and implicitly expressed in the world around them, including in newspaper articles. The study is thus predicated on the idea that newspaper coverage of crime and understandings of crime and its impact may have a psychological impact on the reader, and in particular, may be implicated in meaning making processes.

The experiences of white, Afrikaans speaking South Africans was the primary focus of the study. Newspaper coverage of crime in the daily Afrikaans newspaper, the *Beeld*, was the source of exposure to reports of crime that was the focus of interest in the study. The researcher is a participant in a white, Afrikaans speaking community in Johannesburg. Interest in this research area originated from observation of anecdotal discussions in the Afrikaans speaking community regarding crime as well as from an observation that the *Beeld* often covers detailed stories of crime on its front page. These observations suggested that a study focusing on *Beeld* readership might provide interesting information on indirect traumatization related to media exposure. Even though the focus of the study is on Afrikaans speaking people, some of the experiences of this group may be relevant to other groups of South Africans and to a wider understanding of indirect traumatization.

1.2. Aims and objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to contribute to an understanding of the psychological impact of newspaper coverage of crime. The psychological impact was explored in relation to:

- Psychological symptoms and responses related to indirect and vicarious traumatization.
- Meaning making and understandings of crime.
- The manner in which Afrikaner identity in South Africa appeared to be implicated in responses.
- The manner in which the reporting of crime material in the *Beeld* newspaper is perceived.

This study aimed to investigate the potential indirect psychological effects of exposure to newspaper coverage of crime more systematically and took as its focus a particular group of people, Johannesburg based Afrikaans speaking readers, and explored their responses to exposure to crime coverage in a particular newspaper, the *Beeld*. The study made use of a qualitative approach and focus groups allowed the researcher to get close to participants' understandings and their perspectives on these issues relevant to the aims and objectives of the study (Breakwell, Hammond, Fife-Shaw & Smith, 2006).

The research study is relevant for the South African context. It speaks to a central concern of many South Africans, namely the impact of crime, and aimed to engage in a process of understanding the complicated effects of exposure to accounts of crime in the media. The research study may contribute to a greater understanding of the potential psychological impact of exposure to newspaper coverage of crime.

1.3. Orientation of the study

The study draws upon theory and insights from both clinical and social psychology literature. This study emphasizes aspects of traumatization as located in the South African context and the experience of Afrikaans speaking people in particular and this necessitates an exploration of selected aspects of South African and Afrikaner history. South Africa has a rich and complex history. Apartheid has had far-reaching repercussion and still influences the South African context today in complex and

multifaceted respects (Altbeker, 2007; Gibson, 2002; Krog, 1998; Leggett, 2005). Crime, and its psychological impact, is embedded in the history and context of South Africa. The focus and orientation of the study remain on describing and understanding psychological responses, however, and contextual issues are discussed in order to locate the findings in a careful and meaningful way.

1.4. Layout of the report

The first section of the report, following this introduction, is the literature review. The literature review focuses on exploring material considered relevant to provide background for the study. Areas of focus are trauma, meaning making, selected aspects of South African history, the Afrikaner in South Africa, and crime and news reporting of crime in South Africa. The next chapter details the method used in the study. The fourth chapter presents an integrated account of the findings and discussion of the themes and the exploration of each major theme concludes with an overview and theoretical discussion. The final chapter provides a conclusion, highlighs key contributions and limitations of the study, makes recommendations for areas that should perhaps be researched further and concludes with a section on researcher reflexivity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Psychological Trauma

Psychological trauma can be defined and understood from many, varied perspectives (Peterson, Prout & Schwarz, 1991) and there is a vast amount of literature in this area. The work referred to in this study has been selected to systematically address the focus of this research. The review of literature related to aspects of trauma will focus mainly on defining psychological trauma with particular attention on conceptualizing and understanding the processes related to vicarious or indirect traumatization. The focus is on exposure to traumatic events related to crime as opposed to exposure to traumatic events resulting from combat, natural disasters or other kinds of events.

Psychoanalytic theory has played a significant role in informing a thorough understanding of trauma and processes related to the treatment of trauma (Garland, 1998; Rasmussen, 2005; Wilson & Lindy, 1994). Yet, it has been argued that the treatment of psychological trauma is most effective when approached integratively, particularly if using a combination of psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural understandings, as trauma affects a person at the boundary between internal functioning and external reality (Eagle, 1998). Therefore, for the purposes of the study, there will not be a focus on using one particular model exclusively to conceptualize and define trauma, as it is useful to consider trauma and its impact integratively.

The first section of the literature review will explore the definition and conceptualization of psychological trauma as in the various versions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. In the second section, the diagnostic categories of Acute Stress Disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder will be discussed. The third section will explore what is meant by indirect exposure to traumatic events and then concepts related to indirect exposure will be defined and differentiated in the fourth section. The fifth section will explore the research relating to predictors of vicarious or indirect traumatization, and finally, the potential psychological impact of vicarious traumatization will be considered and discussed.

2.1.1. Psychological Trauma in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

The concept of trauma was first introduced in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – III (DSM-III) and was defined as a response occurring in relation to an individual's experience of catastrophic events. The traumatic stressor was initially considered to be an uncommon external event (Davison, Kring & Neale, 2004). Subsequent versions of the diagnostic system of the American Psychiatric Association have furthered refined the diagnosis with the most current version being the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Friedman, 2006).

The DSM-IV-TR allows for the entertainment of traumatization as a more subjective process that is influenced by individual differences and perceptions in addition to more specific stressor criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Friedman, 2006). A traumatic event is defined not only as life threatening or threatening to physical integrity but also as overwhelming in that it creates an experience of fear, horror and helplessness in the individual. The subjective, 'internal' experience of these emotions is considered traumatic (Davison, 2004; Friedman, 2006). The symptom picture is thus accompanied by an explicit acknowledgement of affective distress.

The transition from the DSM-III to the DSM-IV-TR shifted the focus from defining trauma primarily in terms of an event to attaching significance to a person's perception of and capacity to manage an event. Trauma is therefore "an individual's psychological response to an overwhelming event" (Friedman, 2006, p. 2) and the **perception of threat** is given considerable importance. This shift is important because it recognizes that people have both common and unique or individualized responses to life experiences. An event becomes traumatic through the interaction of the event and a person's psychological strengths and vulnerabilities (Sadock and Sadock, 2003). Erikson (1995) agrees that trauma can be more meaningfully conceptualized when considering how an individual responds to an event rather than focusing on the event characteristics in isolation. Traumatic stress is thus defined by both a real, external event and an internal, individualized and subjective response to this event.

A new version of the DSM-IV-TR, the DSM-V, will be released in the next couple of years. Rosen, Spitzer and McHugh (2008) recommend that the understanding of trauma should be revised in the DSM-V. Whilst acknowledging that it is important to reflect recent findings about the impact of trauma, the authors warn that the concept of trauma may become overused in both clinical settings and everyday exchanges. Normal responses to events may become pathologized and other disorders can potentially be overlooked (Erikson, 1995; Rosen et al., 2008).

It is therefore critical to conceptualize the definition of trauma thoughtfully and to differentiate it from stress more broadly, either acute or chronic. Stress generally refers to a sustained (chronic) or sudden (acute) challenging life event or series of events, whilst traumatic stress has a more serious, unanticipated and violent quality that is more likely to have a lasting impact on an individual's life (Erikson, 1995). In other words, it may be stressful to work through a divorce, or to have an acute time of pressure and demand at work, but it is traumatic to be the victim of a violent act or to be subjected to extended periods of brutality. There is a significant qualitative difference between traumatic stress and stress as it is commonly understood in the general stress literature (Erikson, 1995).

Defining trauma is a complex process and the impact of a traumatic event is greater than the visibly identifiable sum of its parts.

2.1.2. Acute Stress Disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are classified as psychiatric disorders, precipitated by exposure to a traumatic stressor, and are categorized in the DSM-IV-TR. Within this diagnostic understanding exposure to a traumatic stressor takes the form of:

> ….. direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.
>
> (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 463)

Symptoms of ASD and PTSD are: re-experiencing of the traumatic event due to intrusive thoughts or recollections; avoidance or numbing symptoms; symptoms of hyperarousal, such as difficulties with sleeping and hypervigilance; and impairment in major areas of functioning (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Increased anxiety, hypervigilance, fear, horror, helplessness, burnout, compassion fatigue, obsession with safety, and feelings of vulnerability, are all symptoms and responses associated with psychological trauma (Davison, 2004; Friedman, 2006; Lerias & Byrne, 2003; McCann and Pearlman, 1990a; Sadock and Sadock, 2003). ASD is diagnosed within the first month after a traumatic event and also incorporates the possibility of dissociative symptoms. In order to diagnose PTSD, symptoms must be present for more than a month (Sadock & Sadock, 2003).

One of the key features of most psychiatric disorders, including ASD and PTSD, is that they cause disruptions in social, occupational and other important areas of functioning, and this disruption reaches 'clinical severity' (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). This means that a person experiences a significant level of distress which may require psychiatric or psychological intervention.

Many of the symptoms associated with ASD and PTSD are related to the adaptive and normal process of a trauma or stress response (Phoenix, 2007). The psychological processes that people go through during and after a traumatic event follow similar patterns. During a traumatic event, individuals may experience disorientation or dissociation. Alternatively, people may feel very responsible for what is happening and may experience the event acutely. After a traumatic event, there is often a process of alteration between experiences of intrusive memories and flashbacks of the event, and periods of numbing and denial about the traumatic event (Phoenix, 2007). Autonomic hyperarousal is common and can lead to sleeping difficulties and increased irritability. Emotions such as grief, sadness, anger, panic, as well as affective dissociation are common. In the process of recovery, intrusive thoughts and denial usually become less severe and, ideally, a person can integrate experiences and reconnect to life meaningfully (Phoenix, 2007). A psychoanalytic understanding of the trauma response also notes the disintegration and confusion that follows a traumatic event and understands this to be a consequence of the significant psychological disruption caused by a traumatic event (Garland, 1998). It is noted that

even when an assessment may suggest that a person has recovered from a traumatic experience, internal processes may still be at work to attempt to make sense of the traumatic event. Negative experiences from the past may be activated or reactivated by trauma exposure and powerful internal experiences, such as a sense of persecution, may need to be addressed (Garland, 1998). Thus it is important to appreciate that trauma exposure may manifest not only in observable symptoms (as outlined in diagnostic symptoms and beyonf), but also in possible alterations of meaning and intrapsychic conflicts.

2.1.3. Indirect exposure to traumatic events

For the purposes of the study, the forms of exposure to a traumatic stressor that are most relevant are exposure due to witnessing an event or learning about an event. The DSM-IV-TR acknowledges the potential impact that may result from exposure as a witness to a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). This would suggest that significant symptoms of trauma, whilst not as severe as the symptoms described in the previous section, can be experienced by indirect victims and research confirms that symptoms of post-traumatic stress are not limited to direct victims (Lerias & Byrne, 2003; Marais & Stuart, 2005; Pyevich et al., 2003). A number of authors (Friedman, 2006; Hafkenscheid, 2005; Lerias & Byrne, 2003; McCann and Pearlman, 1990a) have described aspects of the impact of indirect and/or vicarious traumatization and their resonances with direct traumatization.

The difficulty is that it is not clear what is meant by “witnessing” or “learning about” a traumatic event. “Witnessing” tends to be restricted to an individual being present or personally observing an event as it occurs. “Learning about” appears to be primarily about exposure via a closely related other who has been the direct victim of an event. One population in which the impact of indirect exposure to trauma has been explored quite frequently is that of counsellors who work with trauma (Hafkenscheid, 2005; Little, 2002; Rasmussen, 2005). The ideas proposed by McCann and Pearlman (1990a), which will be explored in greater detail in the next sections, find validation in these studies of trauma counsellors. Studies have also considered the risks of indirect exposure to trauma for nurses (Little, 2002), war correspondents (Osofsky, Holloway & Picket, 2005), and social work students (Cunningham, 2004) amongst other populations. The impact of witnessing trauma is therefore not limited to any one

population working with trauma survivors, but can potentially affect almost anybody exposed to accounts of trauma.

Herman (1992) writes that "trauma is contagious" (p.140) and it is generally accepted that people who have witnessed a traumatic event, been exposed to explicit knowledge about a traumatic event, or intervened in a traumatic event, may all potentially suffer symptoms of vicarious or indirect traumatization. This is due to the observer's perception of threat and cognitive appraisals that are made consequent on witnessing the event (Lerias & Byrne, 2003; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). It has been shown that a person can create an internal memory of an event when hearing of a traumatic event (even when they have no direct experience of the event). The event can then be re-experienced internally and associations can be made as is the case with direct exposure (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). A key and growing concern in the trauma field is that the impact of vicarious traumatization is significant and can affect people in very powerful ways (Lerias & Byrne, 2003; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). Vicarious or indirect traumatization can lead to a significant experience of distress and attention therefore needs to be directed towards this phenomenon (Lerias & Byrne, 2003; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a).

Reading newspaper accounts of crime can be viewed as a form of witnessing or learning about an event. Newspaper articles often offer very detailed descriptions of a traumatic event. Whilst it is important to be careful to not minimize the real experiences of direct trauma by allowing too many processes to be defined as traumatic (Rosen et al., 2008), it does appear to be worthwhile to explore the psychological impact of newspaper accounts of crime. By reading newspaper accounts of crime, one may be able to imagine the events, to create internal images or memories, and to think about it happening to oneself or to a close family member or friend, and there has been some speculation about the negative psychological impact of exposure to crime and violence in the media and on television (Feldman, 2001).

2.1.4. Key concepts related to indirect exposure to traumatic events

There are a number of different terms in the trauma literature that can be used to describe the impact of witnessing or learning about traumatic events. There is a great deal of confusion in the literature about the differences between the various concepts

and their relevance (Hafkenscheid, 2005; Lerias & Byrne, 2003; Rasmussen, 2005). Since both have relevance and have been used to denote the indirect impact of exposure to traumatic material, the concepts of vicarious and indirect traumatization are used interchangeably in this study. However, there are some differences in how the terminology has been used in the literature in terms of emphasis and population. Also, other related concepts such as secondary traumatization and countertransference need to be considered. This section will focus on defining and differentiating relevant concepts. Subsequent sections will explore the factors which may lead to vicarious traumatization and other psychological impacts of vicarious or indirect traumatization.

2.1.4. a) Secondary traumatic stress and secondary traumatization

Figley (1988 & 1995, as cited in Van Tuinen-Youngs, 2005) introduced the concept of secondary traumatic stress disorder to describe the emotional impact experienced by therapists working with traumatized people. Secondary traumatic stress disorder was said to have a sudden onset, could occur even after working with one traumatized person, and the symptoms were said to be similar to PTSD responses. The term 'secondary traumatization' is often used synonymously with the concept of vicarious traumatization and compassion fatigue, and it refers to the distress experienced by professionals which can impair the therapeutic process (Baird & Kracen, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Salston & Figley, 2003).

The term 'secondary traumatization' will not be employed in this study since the term can sometimes be confused with the compounding of trauma to direct victims by events occurring as a result of or subsequent to an actual traumatic event, for example, unsympathetic treatment by members of the criminal justice system. Secondary traumatization, when used in this manner, tends to have a more systemic meaning that places emphasis on the physical and emotional environment that either ameliorates or exacerbates symptoms (Peterson et al., 1991). It is apparent that the term has been used to refer to indirect traumatization by some theorists, however.

2.1.4. b) Countertransference

A very brief overview of the concept of countertransference is provided here as a basis for differentiating it from the concepts of indirect and vicarious traumatization. Countertransference is a concept that is primarily used in the context of therapeutic

processes. However, some of these ideas may be applicable to understanding the psychological impact of reading newspaper accounts of crime and a short introduction to the concept of countertransference provides a foundation for conceptualizing the concept of vicarious traumatization.

Countertransference is a concept central to the psychoanalytic school of thought and is defined primarily as the emotional responses therapists have to the material of their patients (Lemma, 2006). There are many different ideas about the origin of these emotional reactions. Some believe that countertransference stems from the therapist's unresolved psychological conflicts, whilst others maintain that it stems from the patient's stories, projections, and projective identifications (Garland, 1998; Lemma, 2006). Projection is a defence mechanism used by a patient in the therapeutic context to get rid of difficult emotions (Lemma, 2006). A patient may do this to avoid really experiencing and understanding their emotions because it feels too overwhelming and threatening to them (Garland, 1998). Projective identification can occur if the therapist then takes on and feels these emotions in the therapeutic interaction. Alternatively, countertransference can be understood to result from an interaction of the internal world and unconscious processes of both therapist and patient (Lemma, 2006).

Various authors in the trauma field (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; Garland, 1998; Herman, 1992; Wilson & Lindy, 1994) have noted that emotional responses, or countertransference, in response to working with victims of trauma are particularly powerful and trauma-specific. Wilson and Lindy (1994) defined countertransference in the field of trauma as developing out of the empathic strain resulting from work with traumatized patients. They differentiate between objective countertransference reactions, which are predictable cognitive and emotional reactions, and subjective countertransference reactions, which are specific to the therapist and originate from their own internal conflicts (Wilson & Lindy, 1994). Many writers have noted that therapists who have a personal history of trauma are more likely to experience powerful countertransference reactions when working with traumatized people (Garland, 1998; Van Tuinen-Youngs, 2005; Wilson & Lindy, 1994). Due to the process of projective identification, a therapist may feel a strong sense of identification with the emotional material presented by a client, or may become

overwhelmed by the material and wish to avoid it. This is referred to as either over-identification or avoidance, common countertransference reactions in work with trauma (Wilson & Lindy, 1994) and this may have a negative impact on the therapeutic process.

Herman (1992) writes that one of the most common countertransference reactions of therapists, who treat trauma survivors, is survivor guilt. They may feel guilty for not going through the trauma, for making the patient talk about the experience again, or for being unable to help the person adequately.

The countertransference reactions specific to work with trauma patients could lead to difficulty with enjoying life and could ultimately result in burnout or vicarious traumatization (Herman, 1992; Wilson & Lindy, 1994).

2.1.4. c) Indirect traumatization

Indirect traumatization is, as the name suggests, viewed as occurring due to indirect exposure to knowledge of trauma and is often the term used to refer to responses of partners, family members, colleagues and friends of the direct victim of a traumatic event (Friedland, 1999). For example, a mother of a son who was severely beaten at school may become visibly upset in recounting his experiences.

Particularly evident in people who have been indirectly traumatized, are symptoms of increased arousal, such as anxiety, unexplained irritability and anger. Regardless of the intensity of these symptoms, they are distressing, they impact on people's ability to engage in life at their optimal level, and they can easily be overlooked (Lerias & Byrne, 2003).

2.1.4. d) Vicarious traumatization

The concept of vicarious traumatization considers the emotional impact of working with traumatized people and focuses on the psychological and particularly cognitive effects experienced by people who work with victims of trauma (Herman, 1992; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a), for example, counsellors or paramedics. These psychological effects are noticeable in potentially long-term disruptions of cognitive schemas and interpersonal relationships. The seminal paper by McCann and Pearlman

(1990a), which introduced 'vicarious traumatization' into the traumatic stress literature, is used as the primary text to understand vicarious traumatization. More recent studies indicate that the work of McCann and Pearlman has become increasingly popular and is still current and relevant (Hafkenscheid, 2005; Little, 2002; Rasmussen, 2005).

The literature suggests that vicarious traumatization is a result of gradual and cumulative exposure to traumatic material (Rasmussen, 2005; Van Tuinen-Youngs, 2005). For example, a counsellor working with rape survivors may, over time, become increasingly fearful of contexts that are similar to the contexts in which clients have been victimized. This definition differs from how secondary traumatization and countertransference are defined, as vicarious traumatization suggests a more long-term process of exposure. In other literature, for example in Lerias and Byrne (2003), vicarious traumatization is used as synonymous with the terms secondary victimization, contact victimization, compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress. Furthermore, vicarious traumatization is linked to the concept of burnout. However, vicarious traumatization is related specifically to the impact of working with trauma whilst burnout has a more generalized applicability and tends to place somewhat more weight on physical symptoms, such as fatigue (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; Van Tuinen-Youngs, 2005).

When compared to the concept of countertransference, McCann and Pearlman (1990a) write that vicarious traumatization is a broader and potentially more meaningful concept, as it suggests that therapists may have lasting and pervasive effects derived as a consequence of their experience of engaging with victims of trauma over time and not necessarily predicated on therapist dynamics, as discussed above. However, countertransference still seems to be an important concept within the field of trauma as many of the processes of identification with victims or avoidance of traumatic material can be related to processes of projective identification (Van Tuinen-Youngs, 2005; Wilson & Lindy, 1994). Rasmussen (2005) suggests that vicarious traumatization can result from powerful countertransference reactions and, in a circular manner, vicarious traumatization can also influence the countertransference.

Symptoms of vicarious traumatization are similar to symptoms of ASD and PTSD listed before but they are usually of a lower intensity, as is the case with indirect traumatization, and are not necessarily as readily identified (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). In addition, vicarious traumatization is understood to have strong cognitive effects, in that one of its main manifestations is in the alteration of cognitive schemas or previous belief systems in the direction of greater anxiety and negativity.

2.1.4. e) Overview of concepts

The various concepts listed above indicate that there is a great deal of existing writing on how traumatic events can be witnessed and then affect the person who is indirectly exposed. The concepts of indirect and vicarious traumatization are of particular importance in this study and the symptoms associated with ASD and PTSD may serve as an indication that a person is experiencing indirect or vicarious traumatization.

The question that still needs to be clarified further, however, is how and why vicarious traumatization happens. As noted in the earlier section on indirect exposure to traumatic events, people can create internal memories of an event when hearing about it and then make associations and re-experience it internally, this in turn affecting their behavior (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). Little (2002), for example, maintains that the main process by which therapists become vulnerable to vicarious traumatization is the process of empathic engagement with patients. Exposure to traumatic material has various potential psychological impacts and this contributes to the development of symptoms of vicarious traumatization. Also, a number of factors may make some people more vulnerable to experiencing direct and indirect forms of traumatization. The predictors of direct and vicarious traumatization and the psychological impact of vicarious or indirect traumatization will be considered in the next sections.

2.1.5. Predictors of vicarious or indirect traumatization

The definition of trauma in the DSM-IV (see section 2.1.1.) emphasizes that real events interact with the unique internal worlds of individuals. This means that exposure to traumatic material does not necessarily result in symptoms of traumatization in a predictable, linear manner and people have complex, individualized responses. It therefore is important to explore some potential predictors

of psychological trauma to understand how people become vulnerable to the impact of exposure to trauma. Predictors that have been explored in relation to both direct and indirect traumatization are included due to the similarities in the processes associated with both forms of exposure. In particular, certain categories of trauma and certain aspects of personal history have been identified as potential predictors of vulnerability to experiencing direct or indirect traumatization. Empathic capacity is another important potential predictor particularly relevant to indirect forms of traumatization.

2.1.5. a) Categories of trauma and personal history

Studies have shown that certain categories of trauma (for direct victims) lead to more psychological symptoms when compared to other trauma categories. Rape and assault have been identified as categories of trauma that lead to significant levels of distress when compared to other types of trauma, particularly because of the significant level of violation inherent to these traumas (Dinan et al., 2004, as cited in Williams et al., 2007). Studies have shown that trauma that occurs within a personal context is more distressing than violence of a political nature (Butchard & Peden, 1997, as cited in Williams et al., 2007) and a history of multiple traumas also increases distress (Williams et al., 2007). If a person experiences a traumatic event within a significant personal relationship, for example, this will generally be experienced as more traumatic than other forms of impersonal violence. Furthermore, if a person has been exposed to various traumatic experiences over a lifetime, then there is usually more distress when another traumatic event occurs. The actual nature of the traumatic event needs to be regarded as a powerful predictor of trauma and can lead to significant distress in those directly affected, especially when occurring within a personal context and within a context of a history of trauma. It is likely that in the case of indirect exposure to traumatic events, varying levels of distress will be related to whether the event occurred within a personal relationship, was a particularly disturbing type of event and followed on multiple indirect exposures to other traumatic events. The levels of distress of the direct victim as well as the ‘imagined’ traumatization of victims in such situations may resonate more strongly for ‘witnesses’ in such contexts.

A study by Pyevich et al. (2003) explored whether negative cognitive beliefs about people and the world are potential predictors of vicarious or indirect traumatization.

The study concluded that whilst negative cognitive beliefs increased vulnerability to trauma symptoms, these were not the only predictors of psychological symptoms. However, a history of previous trauma, psychological problems prior to exposure to trauma and violence, lack of social support, youth, being female, poor education, low socio-economic status, and poor coping styles have been identified as potential predictors of vicarious traumatization (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). Early developmental experiences can make individuals more or less vulnerable to experiencing events as traumatic. As mentioned in the previous section, therapists with a history of trauma are more likely to be affected personally by their work with trauma. Exposure to a traumatic event in the present can therefore resonate with unresolved traumatic experiences in the past (Garland, 1998).

2.1.5. b) Empathy

Within the context of therapeutic work, empathy is emphasized as an important tool to predict good therapeutic outcomes and is understood as the ability to understand and communicate your understanding of another's experience at a profound level (Van Tuinen-Youngs, 2005; Wilson & Lindy, 1994). Empathy can allow for identification with victims of trauma by generating a sense of understanding for the emotional impact of a traumatic experience.

Whilst empathy allows for a better understanding of the traumatic experience of another person, it is also a potential predictor of vicarious and indirect traumatization (Friedland, 1999; Little, 2002). Empathy can be difficult to manage in trauma work and can lead to over-identification (or defensive avoidance) on the part of the therapist. In other words, if you can imagine that the events you are learning about could happen to you, or if you experience a great deal of concern and understanding for a person's experience of a traumatic event and struggle to address it within the therapeutic context, you may be more likely to experience symptoms of vicarious or indirect traumatization (Wilson & Lindy, 1994). The assumption seems to be that empathic engagement with traumatic material can make the witnessing of traumatic events *feel* more traumatic (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a).

However, empathy can also serve a protective function when it facilitates nurturance of hope and growth in those who are affected (Jenmorri, 2006). Empathy thus has the

potential to generate an experience of vulnerability within the therapist but can also give a sense of meaningful agency within the therapeutic space.

2.1.5. c) Overview of predictors of vicarious or indirect traumatization

There are some general factors that can contribute to the way in which trauma and exposure to trauma is processed even though one should caution against over-generalizing potential predictors of vulnerability to vicarious and indirect traumatization. The research into what causes traumatic stress is limited and there is lack of clarity about exactly what might predispose someone to vicarious traumatization. It is evident that the types of trauma, as well as cognitive, psychological, social, and developmental processes, mediate or exacerbate the impact of exposure to traumatic events. Empathy is potentially a predictor of vicarious traumatization but can also serve a protective function if it can generate a sense of hope and meaning. Even though most of the literature cited above deals with direct exposure to events or the experiences of therapists who work with trauma, it may be that similarities can be found in predicting how readers of newspaper coverage of crime will respond when exposed to traumatic material.

2.1.6. The psychological impact of vicarious traumatization

It has been highlighted that there are symptoms of vicarious or indirect traumatization that are similar to symptoms of direct trauma and it was noted that these symptoms are usually less severe than in the case of direct trauma. There are other effects of vicarious traumatization that may be more subtle but are very important. In this section, the psychological impact of vicarious traumatization will be explored further with regards to its impact on psychological needs and cognitive schemas, defensive processes, and people's ability to connect meaningfully with others.

2.1.6. a) Psychological needs and cognitive schemas

What they term Constructivist Self-Development Theory (CSDT) forms the basis for the work of theorists (McCann and Pearlman, 1990a) whose work is central in the trauma field. The work of McCann and Pearlman (1990a) is still relevant and is often referred to in more recent writing (see, for example, Little, 2002). CSDT maintains that people build cognitive structures as they engage with life and that these structures become more complex over time (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; Pearlmann &

Saakvitne, 1995, as cited in Little, 2002). These cognitive structures or cognitive schemas then serve as points of reference which people use to understand and interpret their life experiences (Epstein, 1989, Mahoney, 1981, Mahoney & Lyddon, 1988, & Piaget, 1971, as cited in McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). This means that people have unique ways of engaging with the world and unique sets of ideas and needs related to their understandings of the world. Such cognitive structures serve an adaptive function and assist in the process of constructing meaning (Little, 2002).

Psychological needs have been identified in relation to the CSDT. Psychological needs are essential requirements that people generally feel are seminal in order to engage with life. While people have unique and individual ways of understanding and relating to the world, there are some general needs which are important to most people and assist people in relating to themselves and others meaningfully. McCann and Pearlman (1990a) argue for a set of core psychological needs and suggest that it is the disruption of needs and schemas in these areas that characterizes trauma responses. These needs are: to have a sense of s*afety* in one's life; to be able to *trust* and be *dependent* on others; to feel a sense of *power* and agency in one's life; to be able to engage in life with a sense of *independence*; to feel *esteem* and respect for self and others; to experience *intimacy* and connection with others; and to hold a meaningful *frame of reference* (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a).

According to McCann and Pearlman (1990a), psychological needs are integrally related to cognitive schemas which are the cognitive correlates of the underlying psychological needs (Little, 2002; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). People build ideas over the course of their lives about, for example, how safe they are, how dependable others are, and how they view the worth of others, and these ideas are then referred to as schemas.

It has been shown that cognitive schemas are affected by trauma and exposure to traumatic experiences (Janoff-Bulman, 1985, Taylor & Brown, 1988, & Epstein, 1989, as cited in McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). This is due to the significant challenge posed to people's longstanding cognitive schemas when faced with a traumatic event and accounts of traumatic events. For example, it is challenging to maintain a sense of trust in others and in one's safety in the world whilst being exposed to aggressive acts.

Exposure to accounts of crime may generate a sense of powerlessness, fear and alienation. The ability to maintain an independent life within a meaningful frame of reference may be compromised when living in a context in which exposure to traumatic material is common. Esteem for others is also challenged when confronted with the knowledge that people can act in cruel ways (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a).

Essentially, it has been accepted that vicarious traumatization can challenge and change fundamental beliefs people have about others and the world in a similar way that this occurs in direct victims.

2.1.6. b) Defence mechanisms

Another potential symptom of vicarious traumatization is the impact of exposure to traumatic events on defence mechanisms. The ideas relating to defence mechanisms have been develop primarily in the psychoanalytic school of thought and this section will draw on psychoanalytic understandings of the impact of trauma on defence mechanisms. The use of defence mechanisms can also be linked to cognitive schemas, as defence mechanisms can operate in an attempt to prevent the disruption of cognitive schemas. This link will be explored in this section.

Defence mechanisms are processes people employ to help them manage anxiety, protect them from pain, and to uphold a sense of self-esteem (Lemma, 2006; McWilliams, 1994). These mechanisms develop due to a variety of factors, such as the nature of stresses experienced during childhood and whether subsequent experience leads to the continued and strengthened use of these defence mechanisms or not (McWilliams, 1994). Defence mechanisms can be used in both adaptive and maladaptive ways. They may help a person to cope with difficult situations but may then be generalized to other situations which no longer require the use of these specific defence mechanisms, thereby becoming maladaptive (McWilliams, 1994).

Defence mechanisms are often divided into two levels, known as primitive as opposed to neurotic types (Lemma, 2006; McWilliams, 1994). Primitive defences are regarded as less developed mechanisms comparable to the way infants may perceive and make sense of the world. Primitive defences originate from a difficulty with knowing and understanding that people exist separately and independently. Also, there can be

difficulty with accomplishing full appreciation of the reality principle (Lemma, 2006; McWilliams, 1994). Denial, for example, is a primitive defence as it absolutely negates the existence of a powerful experience, thereby indicating lack of connection to that reality. Omnipotent thinking suggests that a person believes that control over another is possible, thereby negating the separateness of another (McWilliams, 1994). High-level or neurotic defences are regarded as more mature and indicate a more integrated personality with a greater use of verbal and other skills which are used to make sense of an experience (Lemma, 2006; McWilliams, 1994). Intellectualization, for example, allows for expression and acknowledgement of experiences and emotions, but the associated affect is not present (McWilliams, 1994). The reality of this experience is acknowledged by the person but there is still an attempt to defend against potentially painful feelings.

Defence mechanisms are not necessarily a sign of pathology and people generally tend to fluctuate between the use of primitive and high-level defences (Lemma, 2006; McWilliams, 1994).

Defence mechanisms can be linked to the concepts of psychological needs and cognitive schemas as they may be used to protect psychological needs and maintain existing cognitive schemas. When people experience traumatic events or are exposed to accounts of traumatic events, defence mechanisms are activated to help them deal with the disruption to their existing psychological functioning (Garland, 1998). Defence mechanisms in this instance may therefore serve an adaptive and protective function. They assist an individual to cope with the reality of the external event and the unique personal meaning that the event may hold for them without precipitating psychic disintegration. As noted previously, the impact of a traumatic experience is mediated by a person's individual experience of that event (see section 2.1.1.) and events may resonate with pre-existing fears and anxieties which then lead to greater distress (Garland, 1998). The experience of violence externally may therefore lead to an experience of violent and overwhelming feelings internally that can lead to distress and anxiety, and defence mechanisms may well become activated to manage this process and protect the person affected by it (Garland, 1998).

Psychological trauma can cause significant regression within the psychological functioning of an individual. One may see the operation of primitive defence mechanisms, such as denial, splitting and dissociation, which result in significant effects on general psychological functioning (Garland, 1998; Lemma, 2006). Repression, intellectualization, rationalization, and other high-level defences (Lemma, 2006) may then be more prevalent. One of the impacts of vicarious traumatization, explored in section 2.1.5.b, is related to empathic capacity. Therapists working with traumatized people may avoid engaging with the experiences of their patients, hearing the facts of the story but struggling with the emotional content, suggesting use of intellectualization on their part. Alternatively they may over-identify, signalling the high-level defence of identification (McWilliams, 1994; Wilson & Lindy, 1994). The complexity of the therapeutic process with traumatized people may activate primitive defences in the therapist (Garland, 1998). However, since vicarious or indirect traumatization is defined as less severe than direct trauma with less significant symptoms associated with it, one may assume that more high-level defence mechanisms may operate in response to indirect trauma. It is possible that high-level defences are more predominant when witnessing and learning about traumatic events, as opposed to when experiencing such events directly or working at a deep level with trauma survivors as therapists do. This may be the case with indirect exposure of the kind explored in this study, in other words, by means of media accounts and reporting.

2.1.6. c) Connecting with others

Psychological trauma can also have an impact on people's ability to connect with others (Garland, 1998; Herman, 1992). Since trauma implies an individual and subjective experience, it is understood by trauma theorists to be filtered by people through their internal worlds. However, the power of a traumatic event is also located in the emotional tone it generates and this can have a shared meaning for a group of people, with both negative, alternating effects and more potentially constructive effects. A sense of community, albeit an awkward sense of community, can be generated from the perception that a traumatic context is shared. It becomes "… a source of commonality" (Erikson, 1995, p. 186) although it does not necessarily contain the comfortable and affectionate engagement of other communities and is not necessarily a positive source of connection in traumatized communities.

Trauma can also potentially split communities. McCann and Pearlman (1990a) write that esteem for others in general can become undermined by exposure to acts of cruelty. This could result in a greater degree of splintering and separation within communities and greater levels of social mistrust and alienation.

In a contradictory way then, trauma can then both isolate and connect people.

2.2. Meaning making

Meaning has been referred to in the previous section, particularly in relation to the psychological need for a meaningful frame of reference (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). The concept of meaning making is considered in this study in a separate section as it is a specific focus of the study but it is viewed as an integral part of the trauma response and is a dimension that is often explored within the context of challenging life situations. The focus is on understanding meaning making specifically in the context of trauma and exposure to accounts of trauma.

2.2.1. Defining meaning and meaning making

Meaning is a concept fundamental to the field of existential psychology. Existential psychology theorists, Viktor Frankl in particular, assert that human beings are motivated essentially by a will to meaning, rather than a will to power or a will to pleasure (Frankl, 1969, 1985; Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003). Meaning making is related to the idea of freedom of choice and every situation in life is seen as an opportunity to find and live with a purpose (Meyer et al., 2003).

In common with an individual's psychological needs and cognitive schemas, a personal meaning system develops over time and has unique characteristics for each individual. The need for a meaningful frame of reference may be viewed as a psychological requirement for people to be able to engage optimally in life. Meaning systems are composed of cognitive schemas, including those discussed earlier. However, meaning systems would be understood to operate at an over-arching level.

Global meaning and situational meaning are differentiated from each other (Park, 2008). Global meaning refers to the fundamental schemas people use to understand

their experiences. Global meaning contains the fundamental beliefs and goals that people have about their lives (Park, 2008). Situational meaning is more specific and is the appraisal which is made of a challenging or traumatic event (Park, 2008). The situational meaning of an event is compared to the pre-existing global meaning held by a person in order to assess whether it threatens a fundamental belief or aspiration of the global meaning system (Park, 2008). Situational meaning can disrupt people's global meaning systems. In order to address these disruptions, people may change how they understand a situation, or they may adapt their global meaning systems to incorporate the differences between global and situational meaning (Frankl, 1969; Park, 2008). Attempts to address disruptions to the global meaning system are referred to as 'meaning making' (Park, 2008). Traumatic events, almost by definition, involve situational meanings that require adaptation to global meaning systems.

One of the key ideas proposed by Frankl (1969; Meyer et al., 2003) is that meaning exists in all situations, can be experienced at any time and is specific to person and situation. While no uniform universal meaning systems exist, it is important to note that groups of people can share certain meaning systems (Frankl, 1969). However, whether meaning is a product of discovery or creation is a topic of debate (Baird, 1985). If meaning is 'discovered', this suggests that meanings are pre-existing and can be accessed freely. If meaning is understood to be created purposefully by individuals and groups, then there is greater responsibility on individuals and groups to engage actively in a process of meaning making (Baird, 1985). Meaning making in response to traumatic events is likely to involve both processes of discovery (in that people draw upon a range of pre-existing or commonly held beliefs) and creation (in that for each person there is an active struggle to apprehend and comprehend what has occurred).

For the purposes of this study, meaning systems are understood not to be fixed or static and there is an assumption of active engagement and participation in the process of identifying and formulating meaning in life.

2.2.2. Meaning and vicarious traumatization

Meaning is an important construct within the context of trauma as it is the subjective or perceived meanings of events which largely determine that an event is experienced

as traumatic to an individual (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). In the process of recovering from a traumatic experience, it is challenging to make sense of the experience and events will hold unique meanings for each individual, based on their prior history and intrapsychic constellations (Garland, 1998).

Exposure to traumatic events can challenge the perception that the world is meaningful. Meaning making is affected by crime and attempts to develop policies to address crime are based on the premise, amongst others, that crime influences quality of life (Frank, 2006). One effect of vicarious traumatization is that it affects people psychologically and impacts on their ability to function at an optimal level (Lerias & Byrne, 2003), in part through impacting upon their belief system.

Experiences are perceived to be traumatic when pre-existing cognitive schemas and assumptions about the world are disrupted (Fontana & Rosenheck, 2005; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; Park, 2008). What this means is that trauma fundamentally challenges what people believe about life and the world. As discussed previously, global meaning is challenged by situational meaning. McCann & Pearlman (1990b) point out that people have a need to believe in a meaningful world. Janoff-Bulman (1985, as cited in McCann & Pearlman, 1990a) asserts that trauma disrupts the assumptions that the world is benign and meaningful, that the self is worthy, and that people are trustworthy, all core existential beliefs. Meaningfulness as understood by Janoff-Bulman is predicated on the principles of controllability and predictability, again core aspects determining one's stance to life. Trauma exposure and trauma of human origin in particular challenges all meaning systems related to the world, oneself, and others (Fontana & Rosenheck, 2005; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). If the world is perceived to be uncontrollable and unpredictable, the world cannot be experienced as meaningful.

There is an interruption in a sense of continuity in all areas of life when people face the kind of traumatic events that evoke a crisis of meaning. Alterations to meaning systems can occur along a continuum from the subtle to the dramatic, from specific to more overarching alterations (Alcock, 2003). Yet, there is a potentially positive side to being exposed to challenging events such as accounts of crime and trauma. Meaning can be tested by events but it can also be enhanced by working through the

experience of being faced by challenging life experiences (Jenmorri, 2006). The danger is that this attempt to find meaning can be disappointing and may result in a profound sense of disillusionment.

2.2.3. Meaning and aggression

Meaning making in response to aggressive acts is particularly challenging given the significant complexity associated with making sense of the underlying intention of aggression. Human aggression is widespread but it is not readily defined (Feldman, 2001; Vitacco, Neumann, Caldwell, Leistico & Van Rybroek, 2006). While actions can be defined as aggressive in and of themselves (for example, pushing or punching someone), more recently the construct of interpersonal aggression has been expanded and refined to incorporate an appreciation of the underlying intention of an act rather than viewing the action in isolation (Feldman, 2001). Determining the underlying intention of violence without direct access to the perpetrator involves a hypothetical and subjective evaluation of the motivation for an aggressive act, and the way in which an aggressive act is understood has psychological consequences for the target and witnesses (Feldman, 2001). The intention is evaluated from the perspective of the victim rather than the perpetrator and how the intention is understood can exacerbate or mediate the impact of the aggressive act for various parties involved (Feldman, 2001). Much of the popular discourse on crime in South Africa, for example, involves attempts to make sense of the nature and severity of violence enacted and how and why perpetrators are motivated to act as they do.

Aggression may be divided into various types, the most basic form being violence which is deliberate or reactive and involves physical harm but is not directly intended to cause psychological harm (Feldman, 2001; Vitacco et al., 2006). Emotional aggression on the other hand is aggression motivated by the desire to deliberately hurt someone psychologically. Instrumental aggression is motivated by the intention to obtain something of value, such as money, and/or to achieve an additional goal, such as victory or power (Feldman, 2001; Vitacco et al., 2006).

With regards to exposure to accounts of crime, the process of trying to make sense of acts of crime may produce significant disruptions in a person's meaning system and may stimulate complex responses. If acts are assumed to be motivated emotionally,

then one must try to adjust to the idea that others may want to hurt others and perhaps, by implication, oneself, psychologically. If acts are assumed to be motivated instrumentally, then, together with the financial loss incurred, one may need to consider that the intention was to achieve a psychological victory or statement of power. Such inferences may be threatening to entertain and making sense of interpersonal aggression may involve questions of group identity and why members of groups target members of other groups in particular.

The next section will explore selected aspects of South African history in order to think about traumatic events and meaning making in the South African context more specifically and comprehensively.

2.3. A brief, selective account of aspects of South African history

Since this research is situated within the South African context, it is important to provide a brief account of selected aspects of South African history to serve as a foundation for the subsequent sections. An extensive review of the social and political history of South Africa is not within the scope of this research and the summarized representation of aspects of this history provided does not claim to do justice to the rich and complex history of South Africa. The intention of this section is to provide some contextualization for the manner in which the study was framed and for understanding the data that emerged in the course of the study.

2.3.1. Some significant features of South African history

South Africa is a country with a history of racial prejudice and politically motivated violence (Abdi, 1999; Altbeker, 2007; Gibson, 2002). The first Europeans arrived in the Cape in the 17th century and since then, the interests of white people, Afrikaners in particular, have often been held above the interests of other groups in South Africa. From the 19th century, the white minority moved steadily into and across the country (during the 'Great Trek') to further economic and social interests, and, in the case of Dutch settlers and some others, to escape British rule. The progress of the Dutch settlers, or Afrikaners as they became known, was met with resistance and resulted in wars with both Zulu and British forces. The Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902 became a significant marker in Afrikaner history with the valorization of the 'Boer' commandos and profound bitterness about the internment of women and children in

‘concentration’ camps. The betrayal of the Trekkers by Zulu chief, Dingaan, has also been iconic in the history of the Afrikaners in South Africa. This early historical period was followed by the declaration of South Africa as a republic and the introduction of more modern forms of state and government (Abdi, 1999; Altbeker, 2007; Laubscher, 2005).

Even though the ideology underlying apartheid can be traced back to the 19th century, the official, state- and church-endorsed programme of apartheid was first formalized in 1948 when the National Party (NP) came to power soon after the end of the Second World War. The intention of apartheid was to further and preserve the aims of Afrikaner nationalism by using racial segregation and denying the majority of South African people (‘black’ people) freedom in many personal and public spheres of their lives (Abdi, 1999; Altbeker, 2007; Laubscher, 2005). Apartheid was fuelled by an underlying racial belief that black people were inferior. White people and black people were thought to be so different that they had to be separated (Manzo & McGowan, 1992). Under apartheid legislation, black people were denied the right to vote, white people and black people were physically separated, and black people were oppressed in many areas including with regard to access to education, and to social and economic development (Abdi, 1999).

Apartheid was enforced by violence and responded to with violence (Altbeker, 2007). Uprisings against apartheid became increasingly powerful and intensified in the 1980’s, by which time many Western countries had imposed economic sanctions on South Africa (Manzo & McGowan, 1992). F.W. de Klerk, former president of South Africa and leader of the then NP, announced in February 1990 that Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners would be released from prison, major opposition groups were unbanned, powerful apartheid policies were annulled, and the commitment was made to create a new constitution in consultation with groups representing all South Africans (Manzo & McGowan, 1992).

Further violence erupted after the announcement in 1990 and the fatalities between 1990 and 1994 accounted for 62% of the total national fatalities reported for the period from 1984 until 1994 (Kane-Berman, 1999). Fatalities were the result of shootings, massacres, car bombs, and other disturbing forms of violence, and the

victims were people of all races, so-called terrorists, national servicemen, security police, workers and civilians. In 1994, the first democratic elections were held in South Africa and Nelson Mandela, leader of the African National Congress (ANC) which was established in 1912, was elected president of the country (Abdi, 1999; Kane-Berman, 1999; Thompson, 2006).

Whilst the struggle in South Africa was predominantly about the oppression of the black minority by the white minority, the violence was not only between black people and white people. Violence also occurred between rival political parties, mainly the ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), particularly leading up to the election of 1994. The NP, IFP, Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the white right wing, and the United Democratic Front (UDF) were all held responsible for various acts of violence and terror pre-1994 and many such incidents were examined under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which operated from 1995 until 1998. The TRC was established in the spirit of nation-building with the aim of promoting a culture of human rights in South Africa and was both applauded and criticized for its work (Beall, Gelb & Hassim, 2005; Gibson, 2004; Kane-Berman, 1999). The TRC found that the NP was responsible for the majority of the violations in the period from March 1960 until May 1994 and that some of these violations had occurred in collaboration with the IFP (Jeffery, 1999).

The advances made in post-apartheid South Africa have been striking and impressive in many areas. Political rights have improved and there has been some redistribution of wealth with a rapidly growing black middle class (Beall et al., 2005; Leggett, 2005). South Africa has become an example to the rest of the African continent and the transition to democracy in South Africa was relatively smooth considering the potential for violence to erupt in the transition period. An oscillation between stability and fragility can, however, still be expected and the legacy of apartheid is still deeply etched (Beall et al., 2005). Some policies, such as the policies of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and Affirmative Action (AA) have yielded both positive and negative results. These policies have changed the face of business in South Africa and have produced much-needed change. But the policies have also deepened race and class divisions, especially within the black community, and have benefitted only a select few (Beall et al., 2005; Leggett, 2005). Even though great strides have been

made in some areas, South Africa is still overwhelmed by immense social problems such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, and HIV/Aids (Beall et al., 2005; Krog, 1998; Leggett, 2005).

Sectors of the South African population have had mixed responses to the new phase in the country's history. The historical and current political context of the country shapes the lives of South Africans today and many people continue to harbour feelings of resentment, ambivalence and confusion. The impact of living in a society with a conflictual history is evident in how people think about their daily lives, their future, their identity, and their country, and in how they relate to others. People may respond to this relatively new chapter in South Africa by becoming suspicious, mistrusting and hateful, or by being open, trusting, and respectful towards others. Still, "…for blacks and whites the history of apartheid carries a tapestry of painful emotional experiences of loss, inhumanity, terror and shame" (Gibson, 2002, p.11).

South Africa has experienced the loss of many citizens through emigration to countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia. Although the statistics do not provide a consistent and accurate picture of the number of South Africans living abroad (Lundy, 2008), it has become increasingly clear that the loss of qualified professionals has had a significant impact. A new initiative, called the Homecoming Revolution, is attempting to encourage South Africans to return to South Africa and prevent the ever-growing drain of skilled people (Lundy, 2008). South Africans abroad showed their commitment to the country by insisting upon and consequently being allowed to exercise their right to vote in 2009. South Africa's fourth democratic election was held in April 2009 and the 20 million voter turnout was the biggest since the end of apartheid. The ANC has come out of the election as the ruling party for the fourth consecutive term. Jacob Zuma, the controversial leader of the ANC is now the newly elected president of South Africa (Bingwa, 2009; De Klerk, 2009).

What is apparent from this very brief overview of key political events and developments is that the history of South Africa has been marked by colonial, class and race struggles with a long period of particularly heinous racial oppression well into the 20th century. This history still colours relationships in the present. The white Afrikaans speaking population, on which this study is focused, has had to manage

dramatic transitions between positions of power and oppression and has had to accommodate to a new dispensation. The 'culture' of the Afrikaner has also been seen as under threat, in part because of the minority status of those speaking Afrikaans.

One of the perhaps not fully anticipated features of South African life in post-apartheid South Africa has been the upsurge or extension of crime of all forms. Noteworthy, however, is the very high instance of crime against persons (such as rape and sexual and other assault) and of violent crime. Many theorists have attempted to theorize the causes of crime in contemporary South Africa, some linking the origins of crime to historical factors, but most viewing crime as a complex multicausal phenomenon (Altbeker, 2007; Frank, 2006; Louw, 2006b).

2.4. 'The Afrikaner' in South Africa

This section will focus on exploring aspects of the identity and community dynamics of Afrikaners in South Africa, recognizing again that coverage of the topic in a research report is necessarily limited. For the purposes of this study, an Afrikaner is defined as a white person whose first language is Afrikaans and who identifies with the idea of being an Afrikaner. This definition is somewhat vague or broad because it is difficult to define the Afrikaner in post-apartheid South Africa (Kriel, 2000), as will be explored further in this section. A number of generalizations will be made as the intention is to consider important features that can commonly be viewed as characteristic of the Afrikaner community as a whole. However, statements are made tentatively with the aim of the discussion in this section being to raise issues that are potentially relevant to the study. Many of the issues raised here may be true for other South Africans who are not Afrikaners. However, the focus of this study is the Afrikaner experience of news coverage of crime in South Africa, with a focus on a particular sub-group of Afrikaners as will be described later.

2.4.1. 'The Afrikaner' in post-apartheid South Africa

The Afrikaner in post-apartheid South Africa is not easily defined. One can assert that the end of apartheid brought Afrikaner nationalism to an end but this is a contested observation or assertion. There appear to be Afrikaners in post-apartheid South Africa who still hold very racist viewpoints and long for the days of apartheid. Some have chosen to leave South Africa and have established Afrikaans communities in

countries such as Australia and England. Then there seem to be Afrikaners who want to embrace post-apartheid South Africa positively. Even though racist statements are less socially acceptable in post-apartheid South Africa, the notion of modern racism may hold true for many Afrikaner communities where prejudices are not expressed openly but are pervasive in subtle and unchallenged assumptions about others (Feldman, 2001).

Afrikaners have either adapted by trying to engage in the new South Africa positively, or have attempted to avoid the new structures by trying to engage almost exclusively within the Afrikaner community (Kriel, 2000). The first group is often referred to as the 'new Afrikaners' but Kriel (2000) questions this descriptor as he maintains that Afrikaner nationalism is still operating even in this group. The debate is clearly complex. However, overall it seems that many Afrikaners hold on to the conviction that their survival is dependent on the survival of Afrikaans, their language (Kriel, 2000) and that this in turn has implications for preservation of what is perceived as 'Afrikaner culture'.

Rossouw (2000, as cited in Kriel, 2000) asserts that Afrikaners in post-apartheid South Africa are looking for salvation for the wrongs of apartheid. This is explored in great detail by the Afrikaans writer, Antjie Krog, in her book, *Country of My Skull* (2008), in which she describes her experience of being a journalist at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She describes her own struggle to reconcile her disgust at what had been done in the name of the Afrikaner whilst at the same time feeling a sense of identification with the Afrikaners who perpetrated horrendous acts.

One of the major challenges within the post-apartheid context is the challenge of defining and knowing one's identity (Laubscher, 2005). Language and culture are important to Afrikaners and are closely related to a sense of identity for this group. In a study exploring the fears of prominent Afrikaners in the transition to democracy, the conclusion was that the main concerns Afrikaners had about a new dispensation was that it could compromise personal safety and pose a threat to their cultural identity and the survival of their culture (Manzo & McGowan, 1992). It has been true that many Afrikaners, and white South Africans in general, have had a high level of personal exposure to crime in post-apartheid South Africa (Altbeker, 2007). Concern

about safety, therefore, seems to be legitimate to a certain degree. However, Afrikaners and white South Africans have also profited from advances in the areas of commerce and sport in post-apartheid South Africa and in the main have maintained middle class lifestyles (Altbeker, 2007).

The need to preserve Afrikaner identity is often expressed in cultural or artistic forms and music in particular, as an expression of the underlying discourse of a group (Laubscher, 2005), has been celebrated within the Afrikaner population. In 2006, a song by a then unknown Afrikaans artist, Bok van Blerk, sparked a nationwide debate about Afrikaner nationalism. The song, titled *De La Rey*, is a tribute to General De La Rey, a respected historical Afrikaans leader and Anglo Boer War hero of the early twentieth century. The catchy chorus of the song is a call to De La Rey to lead the Afrikaners and a commitment to follow him at all costs. Many Afrikaners responded to this song with great enthusiasm and Van Blerk's concerts were sold-out. Several newspapers and television shows debated the message and meaning of the song, even though the intention of the songwriters was in all probability commercial rather than political. Van Blerk asserted that his song was merely a demonstration of his pride for his language and culture. He felt that young people in South Africa had been burdened by the legacy of apartheid and suggested that this song was a way of finding something positive to hold onto (Van Blerk, as cited in Landman, 2007). Some supported this idea and felt that the song created a sense of belonging for Afrikaners. However, others interpreted it as a worrying regression to rightwing ideology, especially since many apartheid symbols, such as the old South African flag, emerged at Van Blerk's shows. Fears were that the song could be interpreted as a call to arms against the new government. Then Minister of Arts and Culture, Pallo Jordan, did not disapprove of the song and encouraged the right to freedom of expression. Nevertheless, he did warn against the potential message of the song (Landman, 2007). It is important for people to feel that they belong to a community and meaning can be found in objects such as images and music (Alcock, 2003). The controversy around De La Rey is a good illustration of the fact that many Afrikaners are searching to define their identity in post-apartheid South Africa and that there is considerable ambivalence associated with retention or rejection of aspects of Afrikaner identity by those who self-identify or are identified as such within post-apartheid South Africa.

2.4.2. 'The Afrikaner's' relationship to crime and trauma

The later section on crime will establish that there are legitimate reasons for concern about crime in South Africa. Nevertheless it could be argued that the realities of crime may perhaps have become a container or focus for the worries of Afrikaners who may perceive that they are a particularly vulnerable group in the country (Kriel, 2000). Afrikaans speaking people may feel that they are, as a community, being threatened by factors such as Affirmative Action, punishment for the legacy of apartheid, and diminishing population numbers due to the emigration of many Afrikaans speaking people. Altbeker (2007) refers to white South Africans as "… a ruling class deprived of its power" (p. 64). Underlying discourses about how Afrikaners understand why crime is happening in South Africa suggest an interesting avenue for exploration.

The idea of loss is a useful concept to introduce in attempting to understand the Afrikaner in post-apartheid South Africa. Alcock (2003) writes about the experience of refugees and notes that loss of "…home, culture, family and status" (Alcock, 2003, p. 291) has an impact on a sense of purpose for communities and that exposure to traumatic events further compounds this sense of meaninglessness and dislocation. Whilst it would not be accurate to say that Afrikaners experience the same level of distress that may be experienced by refugees, it could be argued that the Afrikaner community has had a significant loss of cultural coherence and status in post-apartheid South Africa. Afrikaners as a community may already feel threatened, and exposure to media reporting of crime, particularly of crime affecting members of their own community or 'in-group', could then provide confirmation for their fears about vulnerability to loss at a number of levels, both literal and figurative. They are now dependent upon the protection of those they previously oppressed. An awareness of this paradox is likely to stimulate anxiety and mistrust.

As noted in the section on trauma, the challenge of exposure to trauma is that it takes on a unique meaning within the internal world of the victim based in large measure on personal history, including one's 'cultural history' (Garland, 1998; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). If one thinks of the Afrikaner community collectively in light of prior discussion, then the meaning generated within this community in response to crime related trauma will not necessarily match actual events, and responses may need to be understood in terms of insights into pervasive patterns of meaning and

history in this group. Some aspects of the history of this group were discussed briefly in the earlier section on South African history. Despite the fact that many criticisms can be levelled at Afrikaner ideologies and actions, there is also a history of collective trauma in this community which still resonates in the present. The Anglo-Boer War is an example of this, as is the experience of many Afrikaner men who were exposed to traumatic events in the army in the course of compulsory 'national service' under the apartheid system (Krog, 1998; Thompson, 2006). The history of the Afrikaner group and the experience of Afrikaners in South Africa today may therefore predispose this group in particular ways to a sense of distress and vulnerability in relation to exposure to crime. This is certainly not to argue that other groups may not have different vulnerabilities in relation to responding to the threat of and reporting of violent crime, but rather to suggest that responses to trauma exposure (both direct and indirect) will be coloured by both personal and social, group or cultural history.

Factors which may be protective for Afrikaners exposed to trauma are that Afrikaners generally have a history of good school education and a reasonably high socio-economic status (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). Challenging experiences in South Africa today are presenting a test to the Afrikaans community that may either result in greater confidence or despair for the community as a whole (Vertzberger, 1997).

The next section of the literature review will discuss crime and news reporting of crime in South Africa to provide additional information to consider in the process of exploring the psychological impact of coverage of crime.

2.5. Crime and news reporting of crime in South Africa

> There can be few South Africans who have yet to become a crime statistic. In our divided land, it is the one experience we have all shared. Whether it's a mugging or a hijacking, the burglary of one's home or a rape, a moment of high drama in a shopping centre or the banality of a stolen car, we all have a story to tell.
>
> (Altbeker, 2007, p. 17)

This quote is a disturbing reflection on crime, a central concern for many South Africans. In this section, crime in South Africa will be explored by examining crime

statistics and some exploration of the social and political context of crime in South Africa. News reporting of crime in South Africa will then be reviewed and finally, the existing theory on the psychological impact of crime and of news reporting of crime in South Africa in particular, will be explored.

2.5.1. Crime statistics

Crime statistics for South Africa show an increase of seven percent in the total number of crimes in the period from 1994 to 2006 (Louw, 2006b). This increase is considered to be mainly due to greater reporting of crime in the early days of post-apartheid South Africa and is also viewed as partially due to changes in legislation that have refined what defines criminal acts. Assault and rape in particular are now more thoroughly captured in the South African Police Service (SAPS) data base than they were previously (Leggett, 2005).

The total overall crime rate and the rate of most serious crimes peaked in the 2002/3 period. After 2002/3, decreases of six percent per year were recorded. Several types of crime appear to have decreased since 2002/3 including murder, burglary and robbery. In 2005/6, serious crimes like vehicle theft, hijacking and cash-in-transit heists increased (Louw, 2006b). Fifty three homicides per day were reported in 2006 and this statistic represented a 30% drop in murder since the mid-1990s. Robberies and interpersonal violence, however, increased dramatically in post-apartheid South Africa (Altbeker, 2007).

The types of crime that are most disturbing to South Africans are referred to as contact crime (South African Police Service [SAPS], 2008b). Contact crimes are defined as crimes against a person and are usually violent. Contact crimes are said to result in death, injury, psychological trauma, and loss of and damage to property. Crimes in this category are murder, attempted murder, rape, assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm, common assault, indecent assault, aggravated robbery, and other robberies. The South African government decided in January 2004 that contact crimes should be reduced by 7 – 10% per annum. The decision to focus on the reduction of these types of crime followed comparisons with other Interpol member countries in the 1990's which showed that South Africa's contact crime rates were exceptionally high and would need to decrease by 7 – 10% over a period of 10 years

to reach acceptable levels (SAPS, 2008b). When compared to statistics from other countries, South Africa stands out in the areas of violent crime, particularly murder and armed robbery. Property crime in which no violence is used is not higher than other countries (Altbeker, 2007).

The most recent published crime statistics are for the period from 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008 (SAPS, 2008a & 2008b). These statistics show that 33% of South Africa's recorded cases of crime fall into the sub-category of contact crime. The report states that all contact crimes have decreased overall and the murder rate is reportedly at its lowest rate since the 1994/5 period. However, robbery at non-residential premises, mainly businesses, increased by 47,4% in the period, robbery at residential premises increased by 13,5%, and carjacking increased by 4,4%. Furthermore, robbery at residential premises and carjacking mainly occurred in affluent suburbs (SAPS, 2008a).

2.5.2. Public perceptions of crime in South Africa

Crime in South Africa is a contentious issue and the public perception of crime in South Africa is significant in terms of quality of life and evaluation of government efficacy. The South African public has shown increasing interest in the release of official crime statistics. In 2005/6, for example, public interest in the release of the 2005/6 crime statistics was very high and there was considerable contestation about the assertion that the statistics suggested that, on average, crime was decreasing. Thus, while there was great interest when the crime statistics were released, they were met with scepticism and mistrust (Altbeker, 2007; Louw, 2006b).

The government's commitment to reduce crime and setting of reduction targets has stimulated suspicion about the accuracy of police records and a 2003 victimization survey suggests that reporting rates have not increased and are not as high as might be desired to gain an accurate picture of incidences (Altbeker, 2007). It is therefore likely that SAPS statistics do not reflect all incidents of crime due to decreased reporting of crime to police for a range of reasons. It seems that perceptions of crime are very powerful and cannot be understood or addressed by focusing only on statistics and prevalence patterns (Altbeker, 2007; Louw, 2006a).

South Africa needs credible statistics, consistent standards, vigilance and community buy-in in order to address the occurrence of crime, negative public perceptions of crime and crime prevention. A fair representation of the impact of crime requires that official crime statistics be complemented by surveys that assess people's reported experiences regarding crime and subjective perceptions of security/insecurity (Afro barometer, 2007). This study aims to contribute to this kind of expanded knowledge base as well as to more explicitly explore some of the psychological responses to reading about crime and more particularly about accounts of criminal incidents.

2.5.3. The social and political context of crime in South Africa

Crime is complex and cannot be understood without consideration of the context within which it happens. Crime exists within and as a result of the social, historical and political climate of a country (Altbeker, 2007; Seedat, Duncan & Lazarus, 2001).

The brief history of South Africa illustrates that violence played a very powerful role in South Africa's history and this violence still influences society today (Altbeker, 2007). Leggett (2005) writes that a crime wave following a transition to democracy is inevitable, especially in a country like South Africa where crime had become common and normalized in some environments and where the legitimacy of policing became compromised through involvement in political repression. The political transition in 1994 posed and still poses significant challenges to the criminal justice system (Frank, 2006). Furthermore, many people have been disillusioned by the realization that democracy has not necessarily brought relief and a better life to the majority of South Africans. Urbanization, the devastating impact of HIV/Aids, and many other social issues have had an impact on South Africans and particularly on impoverished communities. Given the complex nature of crime and its origins, it is important to be clear that the social issues highlighted cannot be viewed as inevitably producing crime. However, they do have a significant effect on the lives of South African people and may be amongst the factors playing a role in the high incidence of crime (Altbeker, 2007).

There has been considerable debate in South Africa about crime and crime prevention. The government has generated a number of policies and programmes to address crime focusing on improvements in the criminal justice system. However,

such interventions need to be complimented by the enforcement of good social services programmes and a thorough understanding of the factors that generate crime. Education, for example, is very important and needs to be provided in a safe setting. Education provides potential access to jobs and an opportunity to explore and develop life skills. Health care needs to be more accessible and effective, and especially needs to address the economic and social impact of HIV/Aids and the significant substance abuse problem in South Africa (Frank, 2006). The latter problem is one of the factors that has been implicated in crime and in violent behaviour. It is clear then that both multifaceted preventative measures to address the origins of crime, as well as better arrest, prosecution, investigation and conviction procedures are required to address what many perceive to be an almost intractable problem.

Altbeker (2007) writes a thought provoking account of why crime is so serious in South Africa. He acknowledges many of the contributing issues raised above but argues that income inequality, alcohol and effortless access to firearms need more consideration in our understanding of crime in South Africa. Poverty does not lead to crime. However, income inequality, the gap between rich and poor, has been identified as a potential social factor underlying crime. Studies have shown that there is a significant correlation between income inequality and the incidence of crime (Fajnzylber, Lederman & Loayza, 2002). South Africa has been rated as a country with one of the most unequal distributions of income in the world (Frank, 2006). South Africa's alcohol consumption is amongst the highest in the world and firearms, the weapons most often used in homicides in South Africa, are readily available (Viljoen, 2006). The history of apartheid provided a context within which crime flourished in some areas and many gangs developed within the confines of apartheid prisons and institutions. However, the crime wave continues to swell as young men, many of whom do not have jobs and access to education, continue to find a sense of identity and connection within the contexts of gangs (inevitably involved in crime) rather than healthier group contexts (Altbeker, 2007). This is a serious issue considering that half of the South African population is under 24 years of age and that HIV/Aids is breaking down South African family structures through the death of parents and caretakers (Altbeker, 2007).

There have been concerns about corruption in government since 1994 and initially such corruption was said to be a remnant of the apartheid government. Considerable speculation had already been made about corruption within government by 1998 (Lodge, 1998) and since then, allegations of corruption within the government and within the ranks of the ANC in particular has generated considerable interest and concern (Bingwa, 2009). A government facing allegations of crime, such as involvement in fraud or corruption, may struggle to hold legitimacy as an effective crime fighting body, in turn affecting the public perceptions of the efficiency of government departments (Frank, 2006).

There are many factors to consider when trying to understand crime and the context of crime in South Africa. The statistics show that crime is a serious issue and the literature relating to the context within which crime occurs suggests that crime is a challenging and complex matter that needs to be addressed with urgency and efficacy. However, this is a difficult task and crime remains one of the most contentious and commonly discussed features of contemporary South Africa in a wide range of communities.

2.5.4. News reporting of crime in South Africa

Since the research report is written with a psychological emphasis, it should again be emphasized that this section of the literature review is written with the aim of underpinning the psychological analysis and cannot claim to do justice to the extensive debates about media coverage, as might be expected, for example, of a student of journalism. However, this sub-section aims to introduce some key premises and debates to assist in framing the intention and analysis of the study. Also, the focus is on newspaper coverage of crime and reference will be made to 'readers' rather than 'viewers'. The section will firstly focus on how the news media is understood and perceived and will explore some factors relating to how readers of newspapers perceive reports. The news media will be explored briefly in relation to the South African context.

2.5.4. a) The news media and readers of news media

The news media plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of crime and in generating or mediating fear of crime (Dunn, Moore & Nosek, 2005; Fowler, 1991).

This is an important statement seeing as it has been noted that public perception of crime in South Africa is very significant. There are various debates about the process of news coverage and the objectivity of news reporting in relation to a wide range of different topics. Different studies have considered how the media shapes perceptions of issues such as child sexual abuse (Corbella & Collings, 2007), political conflict (Jones, 2005), and terrorism (Dunn et al., 2005). The consensus seems to be that news coverage and reporting is never entirely objective.

A complex set of criteria, often guided by ideological and political interests, is used to select what will be transformed into publication. Therefore, even though news may report on actual events, the way in which material is reported, the words that are used to report on events, and the topics that are selected to be reported on, are governed by subjective processes and are socially constructed (Dunn et al., 2005; Fowler, 1991). The manner in which matters are reported can yield both positive and negative outcomes (Corbella & Collings, 2007; Dietrich, Heider, Matschinger & Angermeyer, 2006) and may be designed not only to influence public opinion but also to reflect ideological positions of those with vested interests in controlling media outlets. News coverage of crime related events can be understood as socially constructed and as subjectively motivated in representing issues to do with crime. Crime and fear of crime has social and political implications and is located within the broader life experiences of communities (Hope & Sparks, 2000).

News media may be shaped by various conscious and unconscious motivations and interests in relation to reporting of crime. However, both writer/producer and audience/consumer of media reports are implicated in the way in which material is conveyed and received. The process of reading a newspaper is not a passive or objective one. Studies suggest that people are generally aware that news is subjective and biased but they will relate to news primarily in terms of considerations as to whether material supports or opposes their own views (Eveland & Shah, 2003). The reader of a text engages subjectively with the text, considers the credibility of the source, and uses his or her own perceived status in the society and community in order to make personal sense of reports (Brannon and Feist, 2004; Kvale, 1992; Walklate, 1998). Readers assess whether they can cope with events they learn about through a process of symbolic identification and in this respect media coverage of

crime can affect people's perception of their ability to cope with crime (Brannon & Feist, 2004).

2.5.4. b) News media in the South African context

Crime reporting has played a significant role in influencing public perceptions of crime and crime incidence in South Africa (Jones, 2005). A concern, for example, is that the media in South Africa often over-reports on high profile cases of crime which affect well-known or public figures. This does not provide a fair representation (Jones, 2005) of how many ordinary people are affected directly by large amounts of crime incidents in South Africa's townships and outside the suburbs (SAPS, 2008a). News coverage of crime in South Africa does not explore and contextualize crime and violence in a way that fairly represents the lived experience of the majority of South Africans (Jones, 2005).

The South African public has an interest in engaging with news media regarding crime and this may be motivated for many by the sentiment that the police response to crime and government leadership concerning crime is deficient (Louw, 2006a). A study has shown that when compared to other African countries, South Africans have some of the lowest levels of confidence in the police force, and do not approve of government performance with regards to tackling crime (Afro Barometer, 2007). If readers do in fact use media coverage to gauge if they can cope with crime, then news media reporting on crime may strengthen the beliefs that police and government responses to crime are insufficient.

It also seems as if more vocal and visible groups of South Africans have become more concerned about crime since it has moved into middle class suburbs (Altbeker, 2007). People are most concerned about issues that they can identify with and news reports covering incidents taking place in one's own community or type of community may be used to assess whether one is safe within one's own community. Although the poorest communities, such as township and informal settlement dwellers, experience some of the highest rates of crime (Altbeker, 2007; Viljoen, 2006) the middle class are a particularly vocal group in South Africa whose concerns about crime are reflected in many newspapers.

Perceptions of the crime problems in South Africa are both shaped by and shape news media coverage of crime. These perceptions may have a psychological impact, as explored further.

2.5.5. The psychological impact of crime and news coverage of crime in South Africa

Crime is distressing and news reporting of crime is an area that requires further exploration in terms of the psychological impact it may have.

One of the most notable psychological responses of the South African public to the threat of crime has been fear. There is a significant correlation between fear of crime and news reporting of crime because people find it difficult to insulate themselves from reports of aggression (Brannon & Feist, 2004; Feldman, 2001). This fear of crime is evident in South Africans' significant concern for personal safety, demonstrated by the booming security industry in South Africa (Altbeker, 2007). A Markinor study (Harris & Hammond, 2007), reports that people's sense of personal safety in South Africa is decreasing and public perception plays an important role in this experience. South Africans are progressively feeling more unsafe, despite that fact that the crime statistics are improving (Viljoen, 2006).

Crime generates anxiety and stress and the threat of crime may be downplayed or ignored in order to minimize anxiety (Feldman, 2001). However, it appears as if many South Africans are finding it difficult to ignore the perceived threat of crime and this may be because the distinguishing feature of crime in South Africa is its violent quality (Altbeker, 2007). Also, stressful events are interpreted by individuals in unique ways, and events such as crime are assessed to be safe or threatening based on whether an individual perceives that he or she has the means to cope with it (Lazarus, 1993, as cited in Brannon & Feist, 2004). The powerful response to crime in South Africa may then also reflect a felt sense of helplessness and powerlessness within the context of widespread and enduring crime (Altbeker, 2007).

The experience of helplessness may be influenced by the level of personal exposure to crime. A study exploring the lifetime prevalence of exposure to traumatic events in a representative population of South African citizens (Williams et al., 2007) found that most South Africans, approximately 75%, have experienced at least one traumatic

event in their lifetime. The type of trauma exposure that was most often reported was exposure to a traumatic event affecting a close other, for example the unexpected death of a loved one. The second-highest type of exposure reported was the witnessing of traumatic events, such as witnessing someone being killed or injured. Criminal victimization, partner violence, and having one's life threatened were all reported by more than 20% of the sample. An important finding of the study was that the majority of South Africans have experienced multiple traumas and that they were therefore considered to be at greater risk of psychological distress (Williams et al., 2007).

To date little research has been conducted on the impact of trauma exposure at the level of indirect exposure via media reports despite the fact that anecdotal reports suggest that such accounts do have psychological impacts. When newspaper reports focus on crime, this makes every reader a witness. As noted in the section on trauma, people can create internal memories of events they hear about. This is a powerful observation and suggests that traumatic and negative accounts of crime may have a significant impact on readers in terms of some degree of absorption in experiences of others. Whereas therapists ideally have access to supervision and theoretical grounding to support them in their work with trauma survivors, readers of newspaper reports of crime do not have the opportunity to process these accounts with foresight or support and to identify coping strategies. Although they may have some choice as to whether to continue or discontinue reading an account or story, readers are unlikely to be fully cognisant of the possible impact of material at the time of exposure. Accounts are also often written so as to be gripping and compelling. Readers therefore are not only witnesses but are often powerless witnesses, an experience which may create some degree of helplessness. Readers are in a sense passive or impotent, if more distant, witnesses to the victimization of others, and have no agency in terms of responding to or ameliorating distress or chastizing or punishing perpetrators. This may pose subtle difficulties in terms of processing trauma related material, particularly that related to acts of interpersonal violence such as violent crime. Therapists also have opportunities to witness growth and resilience in their clients (Salston & Figley, 2003) which readers do not. These are important matters to consider in understanding the psychological impact of crime and its coverage in the news.

2.6. Summary

The first section of the literature review focused on defining trauma, indirect and vicarious traumatization. The complexity of trauma was highlighted in this section, particularly since the experience of both direct and indirect trauma is mediated by subjective aspects of the person who is affected. The symptoms of direct and indirect trauma were highlighted and the presence of these symptoms was discussed as illustrating or indicating that processes of traumatization have taken place. The most important argument in this section is that indirect exposure to trauma can have real effects in people's lives and that such impacts are worth exploring further. It was also suggested that trauma cannot be understood without consideration of the unique contexts within which events take place. Some key psychological impacts of vicarious traumatization were highlighted and will serve as a foundation for exploring the psychological impact of newspaper coverage of crime.

The second section explored how meaning and meaning making is often challenged by exposure to adversity or difficult contexts. Traumatic experiences and exposure to trauma or accounts of crime have been shown to challenge personal views about whether the world is meaningful. Even though this challenge to meaning systems is not necessarily wholly damaging, the risk is that people may become increasingly disillusioned by being continuously exposed to a context that challenges notions of life being meaningful in the way they have previously understood.

Given the focus of this research study, the third section of the review aimed to provide a very condensed historical overview of some key features of the South African context. South Africa has had a conflictual history with deep racial divisions. Many advances have been made in post-apartheid South Africa, however, the history still influences the context today and there are still many issues affecting the daily lives of citizens that need to be addressed. Crime, violent crime and various permutations of cause and impact are amongst the serious issues that need to be addressed.

The fourth section of the literature review focused on the Afrikaners as a group in South Africa today. This particular South African group is not easily described. There are different views concerning how Afrikaners are engaging in post-apartheid South Africa. Afrikaners seem to be looking for a sense of identity and belonging either

within their community exclusively or by engaging openly with other communities beyond their in-group. Afrikaners may feel that they are a vulnerable group in South Africa and may have experienced the end of apartheid as a distressing loss at various levels. Given exposure to crime, Afrikaners may feel that their fears and subjective experience of being threatened are validated. Although it is a very real issue in South Africa, crime may also be understood in a way that confirms underlying Afrikaner discourses and Afrikaners may be at risk for developing symptoms of indirect trauma via particular mechanisms or routes because of their own history as a group. Understandings of why crime happens are an area of focus of the research study since such understanding may exacerbate experiences of feeling threatened, thereby increasing the risk of vicarious or indirect traumatization.

Crime and news reporting of crime in South Africa was the focus of the final section of the literature review. Statistics show that crime is a serious issue and in attempting to consider the implications of the extent of crime in South Africa there are many related social issues that need attention. The South African public has shown interest in crime statistics and news reporting of crime has affected perceptions about crime in the country. Crime has a psychological impact and news coverage of crime can exacerbate experiences of fear and helplessness. The experience of indirect trauma is very common in South Africa and news coverage of crime makes everyone a witness to traumatic material. However, the impact of this kind of indirect exposure has received little systematic attention in the trauma literature.

Having provided the theoretical background to the study the following chapter describes the method used to conduct the research study.

Chapter 3: Research method and design

3.1. Aims of the research study

The aim of the study was to explore the psychological impact of exposure to newspaper coverage of crime. The focus was on the experiences of white, Afrikaans speaking South Africans, and the study explored their psychological experiences of reading reports of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper. The psychological experiences were explored particularly with regard to:

- Psychological symptoms and responses related to indirect and vicarious traumatization.
- Meaning making and understandings of crime.
- The manner in which Afrikaner identity in South Africa appeared to be implicated in responses.
- Responses to and perceptions of the manner in which crime material is reported in the *Beeld* newspaper.

3.2. Research questions

Four questions, related directly to the aims of the research study, were posed to explore the way in which Afrikaans people respond to newspaper coverage of crime:

1) What are participants' psychological responses to particular accounts of crime in respect of *indirect and vicarious traumatization*?
2) What are participants' psychological responses to particular accounts of crime in respect of *meaning making and their understandings of crime*?
3) How is the experience of reading particular accounts of crime by this particular group discussed and explored in relation to *Afrikaner identity in the South African context*?
4) What are participants' responses to and perceptions of the *media portrayal of crime* in the *Beeld* newspaper?

3.3. Research paradigm

The research study aimed to explore the psychological impact of newspaper coverage of crime. A qualitative approach to social enquiry was chosen as it was seen as in keeping with the nature of the research aims because it allows for the exploration,

description and interpretation of people's lived experiences and personal understandings (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 2006; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). Within a qualitative framework, perspective is given precedence over an assumption of truth, perspectives are understood to be the result of social interchange, and understanding tends to emerge out of some dialogue (Banister et al., 2006; Kvale, 1992). A key feature of the qualitative approach is that the researcher is viewed as a significant part of the research process and the research process is conceptualized as a conversation between the researcher and the researched (Banister et al., 2006; Morgan, 1983).

The field of qualitative research is complex and diverse and there are various models that are categorised under the umbrella of qualitative approaches (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). This research study employed an interpretative/phenomenological approach to the design of the study and analysis of the data. An interpretative/phenomenological paradigm offers the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of people and emphasizes and legitimizes the context within which people generate meaning in their lives (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). The investigation of potential aspects of indirect traumatization, vicarious traumatization and meaning making in response to exposure to accounts of traumatic events lends particularly well to an interpretative approach.

The exploration of aspects of the Afrikaner identity in the South African context and perceptions of the media portrayal of crime could also be explored by using an interpretative approach, as an interpretative approach allows for the description and interpretation of people's experiences within a meaningful social context (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). However, implicit in the third and fourth research questions was an assumption that participants might have responded to discursive constructions of the Afrikaner in South Africa and discursive elements in the media portrayal of crime. If the study had been conceptualized primarily within a social constructionist framework, then these discourses might be understood by engaging in a process of discourse analysis (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Given the more clinical focus of the research study, however, any dominant discourses relating to the Afrikaner in South Africa and media portrayal of crime was described and interpreted as part of the interpretive process of the

participants in order to understand potentially hidden meanings and constructions of meaning (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). However, the primary use of a more realist interpretive approach to the study does not preclude commentary on some discursive elements.

The interpretative approach was prioritized in the study (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). A social constructionist approach, whilst compatible with an interpretative approach (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002), would have created critical distance which would have distracted from the main aim of the study, namely to explore the psychological impact of newspaper coverage of crime from a clinically informed perspective.

3.4. Research design and procedure

3.4.1. Data collection

3.4.1. a) Focus groups

Qualitative research can be conducted with both individuals and with groups (Hedges, 1985; Wilkinson, 2003). Focus groups are semi formal group discussions in which participants engage with each other around some focus or stimulus material (Millward, 1995; Wilkinson, 2003). Focus groups provide a unique opportunity to explore how personal and social factors interact and allow the researcher to get close to participants' understandings and perspectives on certain issues. Group dynamics can be observed together with the content around which the group process develops (Hedges, 1985; Millward, 1995; Wilkinson, 2003). Group participation allows for a potential diversity of views and understanding of points of debate and/or contestation.

Given the nature of the impact of crime, the importance of contextualizing the experiences of trauma and the construction of meaning, and the emphasis on Afrikaner identity, a group process was chosen as the means of collecting data for the study. The requirements for an interpretative approach were met in that focus groups produce qualitative data rich in participants' own words (Hedges, 1985; Millward, 1995; Oates, 2000).

Focus group research has been criticized for not being sufficiently sophisticated (Breakwell et al., 2006; Hedges, 1985). It is, however, distinctly qualitative and can

provide answers to both process and content questions (Breakwell et al., 2006). It is a method of data collection often chosen when dialogue and interchange around a particular topic are of interest, as is the case in this study. Both individual and group responses were of interest.

Three focus groups were conducted for the purposes of data collection and allowed many themes to be identified and for themes between the groups to be compared.

3.4.1.b) Role of the researcher in focus group processes

The researcher plays an important role as moderator or facilitator of the focus group process (Millward, 1995; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Wilkinson, 2003). The researcher is required to create a permissive and non-critical atmosphere by engaging with the group whilst attempting to remain as far as possible neutral and detached. The researcher is also responsible for ensuring that all the members of the group are encouraged to participate in the discussion (Millward, 1995; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

For most focus groups processes, few fixed questions are posed (beyond the initial stimulus) and the group is left to express themselves freely. Probes are used to direct the group discussion when necessary (Oates, 2000).

3.4.2. Participants

3.4.2. a) Recruitment

Focus groups generally consist of between 4 – 12 participants to allow for optimal engagement (Hedges, 1985; Millward, 1995; Wilkinson, 2003). It can be difficult to identify and bring participants together for focus groups (Wilkinson, 2003). Various approaches were used to recruit participants for the three focus groups, but in the main a form of snowball sampling was used.

A letter was printed in the newsletter of a Johannesburg-based Afrikaans High School. This letter gave a brief overview of the nature of the research and contact details for the researcher were included. One person responded to this letter and agreed to participate in the research. Given the somewhat disappointing response, an e-mail with the same information and the participant information sheet was sent to

acquaintances of the researcher to request suggestions of potential participants. Two potential participants were identified and contacted via this outreach method. They agreed to take part in the research. A text message was subsequently sent to the researcher's Afrikaans-speaking acquaintances requesting further suggestions of potential participants. Five participants were identified, contacted, and agreed to take part as a result of this process. An Afrikaans school teacher known to the researcher offered to find a group of participants and reported that it was very difficult to find people willing to participate. Two participants were found through this process. The third focus group was arranged by an acquaintance of the researcher who offered to set up a focus group with four people on condition that the focus group was hosted at her own house. This condition was made as a result of the prospective participants' reluctance to meet at a stranger's house. It is interesting to note that recruitment proved considerably more difficult than anticipated and that this in itself perhaps suggests some aversion to thinking and talking about crime as well as perhaps some reluctance to engage with aspects of Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid South Africa as it was clear that Afrikaans speaking participants were being sought. The researcher had to display considerable persistence in the recruitment process.

3.4.2. b) Composition of groups

Three separate focus groups were run and there were different participants in each group. The first focus group consisted of three women and two men, and participants ranged between the ages of 25 and 50. The second focus group consisted of five women ranging between the ages of 25 and 57. The third focus group consisted of one woman and three men, between the ages of 28 and 35. Thus there were 14 participants overall.

Participants were from the middle- to upper-class Afrikaans speaking community in Johannesburg and were readers of or were familiar with the *Beeld* newspaper. The snowball sampling produced a fairly representative sample within this socioeconomic group with diversity in terms of age, gender, and occupation. However, women were represented more than men (9 women and 5 men in total).

3.4.3. Focus group process

3.4.3. a) Focus material: *Beeld* newspaper articles

For the purposes of this study, a popular Afrikaans newspaper, called '*Beeld'*, was used as a source of newspaper accounts of crime. The strap line of this newspaper, *Jou wêreld, Jou koerant,* translated as *Your world, Your newspaper*, suggests a commitment to represent the Afrikaner world and the editorial mission statement emphasizes a focus on an objective and reliable account of newsworthy stories and reporting in good faith. *Beeld* does not overtly support any particular political party or ideology and the editorial group state that they are committed to the truth and the interests of their readers. Press freedom, a multi-party democracy, human rights, economic freedom and a peaceful South Africa is supported. The first edition of *Beeld* appeared on 16 September 1974 (*Beeld*, 2000). *Beeld* (2007) sells approximately 105 363 newspapers on weekdays and 88 299 newspapers on Saturdays.

Focus groups use various stimuli as focus objects to form the platform for the group discussion (Millward, 1995; Oates, 2000). For the purposes of the study, three *Beeld* newspaper articles (Keppler 2008a & 2008b; Mouton, 2008) were selected to focus the group conversation and stimulate group engagement (see Appendix D). The focus was therefore on something external, namely the articles, in an attempt "… to capture understandings, perspectives, discourses, and experiences not meaningfully expressed by number" (Breakwell et al., 2006, p. 277). The articles were not selected because they were particularly emotive or descriptive. They were selected purely on the basis that they were featured on the front page of the newspaper in the same month and presented accounts of contact crime.

3.4.3. b) Language and focus group setting

The focus group sessions were conducted in Afrikaans. The comfort and convenience of communication in focus groups is important (Millward, 1995) and this was the main reason for conducting the focus groups in Afrikaans. Furthermore, the Afrikaans language is important for Afrikaners, as noted in the literature review, and due to the researcher's fluency in Afrikaans, this could be respected in this research study by allowing participants to reflect on their experiences in their own language.

The focus groups were held at private homes, participants were seated comfortably and snacks were provided. A digital recorder was used to record the sessions and each focus group session lasted for one and a half hours. All three groups were facilitated by the researcher, a trainee clinical psychologist.

3.4.3.c) Group process and probes

At the beginning of each focus group, participants were welcomed and informed that the group would last one and a half hours. Participants consented to participate in the study and agreed to the focus group being recorded by signing consent forms. Participants were encouraged to communicate and express themselves freely and they were informed that the researcher would guide the group at certain points if necessary.

Participants were asked to spend a couple of minutes reading the three newspaper articles. After reading the articles, the researcher opened the discussion by asking the group to reflect on their first impressions after reading the articles. The discussion continued with very little further probing by the researcher and the researcher observed the group. Probes that were used attempted to explore how the articles left people feeling about themselves, their lives and their environment. The following probes were used:

- How do you *feel* when you read these articles?
- Are there particular things that you will *remember* about these articles?
- How do these articles make you feel about your *personal safety*?
- Do you think these articles influence how you live your *daily lives*?
- Do they impact on the way in which you think you can live a *meaningful life* (in South Africa)?

Aspects of how the Afrikaner was defined by the groups and participants' reactions to the *Beeld*'s portrayal of crime were also explored as it came up in the conversations as well as discussions about the nature and manner of the reporting of the material.

3.5. Research analysis

The recorded material from the three groups was transcribed to create a set of texts for analysis. The transcripts were written up in Afrikaans to ensure that the nuances of

meaning in Afrikaans would not be lost, although for the purposes of discussion English translation of relevant material is provided.

Analysis of qualitative data can be approached in various ways and refers to the process of organizing and interpreting the research material (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Wilkinson, 2003). Interpretation involves both the description of experiences and an attempt to understand experiences (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). For the purposes of this research study, transcripts of the focus group sessions were analyzed in order to identify meaningful themes pertaining to how people respond to newspaper coverage of crime. Behavioural observations and the manner in which ideas were communicated in the groups contributed further to the understanding of the verbal content and were also considered in the process of analysis (Millward, 1995; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The data from the three focus groups were analyzed by identifying themes and then reflecting on the themes in order to interpret the data relevant to each research question (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002).

The steps of the interpretative approach to analysis as described by Terre Blanche & Kelly (2002) were used in this study. These steps were not imposed strictly but were rather meant to guide the process of analysis. The process combined identification of categories or themes and a process of immersion in the data aimed at generating interpretations (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). The literature review provided a theoretical framework for understanding the data. The data was approached by describing themes as they appeared in the transcribed texts and the themes were then linked back to the literature and to the research questions.

The following steps, based on Terre Blanche and Kelly (2002), were followed broadly in the research analysis:

1) Familiarize and immerse

In this step, the data was approached afresh, transcripts were read and re-read and notes were made during the focus group and during the analysis process in order to get to know the material and formulate initial ideas.

2) Induce themes

The second step of the analysis used a bottom-up approach to induce themes as they came up in the data (Wilkinson, 2003). The material was approached with the intention to identify themes which were present in the data and considered the group process as a whole. In this step, various themes were considered and revised in order to find the most useful categories. The research questions were used as a guide for identifying relevant themes and additional themes were explored as the data was examined (Millward, 1995).

3) Code

At the same time as themes were induced in step 2, the data was coded to indicate the sections that were relevant to the themes. Coloured highlighters were used to indicate sections relating to the various themes. Useful quotations and interchanges were also identified (Millward, 1995).

4) Elaborate

In this step, the related sections were considered together to explore how themes were represented in the texts and sub-themes were identified. At this stage, the structure and coding system was adjusted and re-evaluated.

5) Interpret and check

In the final step of the analysis process all the themes were interpreted and written up. In the process of interpretation, the context in which remarks were made was considered in order to note consistencies and inconsistencies and to consider aspects of the group process (Hedges, 1985; Millward, 1995).

As mentioned before, the researcher plays a significant role in qualitative work. Throughout the process of analysis, the researcher was the analytical instrument and the researcher was required to interact with participants and to try to apprehend their understandings from their world and through their eyes (Seedat et al., 2001; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). The researcher took care to not force or find meaning in the data that was not there (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008).

3.6. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process used by researchers to make subjectivity explicit in order to prevent the possibility that unconscious processes undermine the quality of a study (Banister et al., 2006). The idea underlying reflexivity is that both researcher and participants in a study approach a study with preconceived ideas and engage in a process of producing knowledge and understanding. The implications of this on data generation and interpretation need to be considered. A reflexive process is important in qualitative research and can assist in transforming these preconceived ideas and prejudices into a valuable part of the research process (Banister et al., 2006).

In this research study, various factors may have influenced the manner in which the research study developed and the way in which the participants engaged in the focus groups. The researcher's history of being a part of the Afrikaner community in Johannesburg may have positively influenced the way in which participants engaged in the focus groups. It is possible, for example, that the participants would have engaged differently if the focus groups were facilitated by an English-speaking researcher. Also, the participants were not informed of the exact focus of the research study and may have assumed that the study was focused on exploring how *Beeld* writes articles rather than on their personal and psychological experience of reading newspaper stories about crime.

The researcher's interest in this research area originated as a result of conversations about crime in the Afrikaans community noted by the researcher. The researcher therefore had a vested interest in trying to understand the psychological experience of Afrikaners in particular to crime and news coverage of crime. The researcher's personal criticisms of some traditional Afrikaner ideologies, aversion to certain aspects of Afrikaner history and concerns about the way in which stories of crime are reported may have affected how the study was initially approached and may have unconsciously influenced the focus group processes. However, the notion of reflexivity also allows for the possibility that engagement with participants can lead to personal change in the researcher (Banister et al., 2006) and this will be explored further in the discussion. As far as possible the researcher attempted to remain neutral in terms of influencing the direction of the conversation beyond ensuring that the discussion focused on the research questions of interest.

3.7. Ethical considerations

All the participants consented to the recording of the focus group sessions and consented to participation in the focus groups by signing consent forms. Confidentiality was discussed with the group and the researcher committed to confidentiality in terms of protecting participants' identities. The researcher requested that the participants agree to keep the content of the focus group and details of other participants and their views confidential but she indicated that she could not guarantee that participants would honor this request.

The research study does not present overt ethical concerns, as the participants were consenting adults discussing material that was experience-distant in content. Participants were not asked to discuss their own personal traumatic experiences and were not selected on the basis that they had prior personal experiences of trauma. However, given the high levels of crime in South Africa, it is possible that participants may have been exposed to some personal trauma and these experiences may have been re-evoked by the research process. Given this possibility, contact details for two counseling centers were handed out to all participants at the end of the focus group sessions.

Please refer to Appendix A, B, C and D for the participant information sheet, the consent forms and the three newspaper articles selected for use in the study.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

This chapter consists of a presentation of the themes that were identified in the focus group data together with an analysis and discussion of these themes in relation to theoretical considerations and the research questions. The synthesis of findings and discussion into a single chapter offered the most coherent means of presenting the analysis and is common practice in many qualitative research studies.

Illustrative quotations are used throughout this chapter. There were three focus groups and they were marked from 1 to 3. Each participant was assigned a letter. Quotations are cited by combining the focus group number and the participant's assigned letter, e.g. 1A. The quotations are provided in the original Afrikaans text followed by the English translation in brackets.

The focus group data was analyzed (as described in Chapter 3) and various main themes were considered. After due consideration the four research questions were transformed into four main themes, two of which contained various sub-categories, as this seemed to provide the most meaningful way to present, analyze and interpret the data:

Theme	Sub-categories

1. Indirect and vicarious traumatization	- Affective responses
	- Symptom-related responses
	- Alterations to schemas
	  - Safety
	  - Mechanisms of engagement with others
	- Additional features
	  - Anger-related responses
	  - Additional defensive styles and coping strategies
	  • Intellectualization and rationalization
	  • Humour

2. Meaning making and understandings of crime	- A meaningful life in South Africa
	  - Making sense of implications for daily life in South Africa
	  - Understandings of crime

3. The Afrikaner in South Africa
4. Impressions of media portrayals of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper

4.1. Theme 1: Indirect and vicarious traumatization

The first theme relates to the first research question:

1) What are participants' psychological responses to particular accounts of crime in respect of *indirect and vicarious traumatization*?

It was apparent from observation and careful reading of the transcripts that reading the newspaper articles in the context of the focus groups aroused a ranged of marked emotions and symptom-related responses that could be correlated with features of indirect traumatization. Participants furthermore described alterations to schemas, a feature of vicarious traumatization, particularly in relation to safety and their mechanisms of engagement and connection with others. There were a number of other features in addition to the affective, behavioral and cognitive elements linked to indirect and vicarious traumatization. Anger-related responses were observed and in addition common defensive processes such as intellectualization, rationalization and use of humour were noted in the groups and emerged as important in the analysis of the data.

The following sections elaborate on the affective responses, symptom-related responses, alterations to schemas and the additional features related to the first theme.

4.1.1. Affective responses

In the case of direct trauma, affective distress is often marked by feelings of fear, horror and helplessness (Davison, 2004; Friedman, 2006) and those affected by indirect traumatization are expected to present with similar features but at a more toned down level (as discussed in the literature review). The affective responses

equivalent to fear, horror and helplessness are the primary focus of the exploration of this sub-category.

Participants were asked to read the three selected *Beeld* newspaper articles at the beginning of each focus group meeting. The participants were then asked to reflect on their first impressions subsequent to reading the articles. In each focus group, the participants expressed an immediate emotional reaction to the articles. The initial affective responses were followed by various discussions about, for example, the motivation of *Beeld* in publishing accounts of crime (explored in detail later). The initial strong affective responses were therefore not sustained throughout the focus groups. However, some participants referred back to their affective responses and the emotional quality of the groups, expressed in part by additional features such as tone, silence, emphasis and body language, suggested some degree of emotional distress and anxiety for the duration of the focus group discussions.

The affect associated with fear was noted and discussed in each focus group. It was the most prominent emotional response explored and described by the participants. Subsequent to reading the three newspaper articles, participants reflected that they were left feeling scared and afraid:

> *"Dit maak jou bang" [1D].*
> *(It makes you scared).*

> *"… daai vrees kom onmiddellik vir my" [2B].*
> *(That fear comes to me immediately).*

> *"Dit maak mens bang" [3A].*
> *(It makes one scared).*

Furthermore, participants described having a sense of shock (*"skok" [1D]*), feeling *"horrified" [2C]* and feeling panic-stricken (*"angsbevangendheid" [2D]*).

The articles seemed to evoke normal fear and some level of horror because they described disturbing events. However, the participants described further that their

emotional distress stemmed mainly from their perception that the articles suggested that the events could happen to them. The articles therefore appeared to pose a **perceived personal threat** to the participants that seemed to increase the level of emotional distress, particularly in relation to fear. The following quotations illustrate this process:

> *"Mens moet mooi dink. Dis 'n skokkende storie. Nou moet jy dink, hoe gebeur dit? Hoe gevaarlik is dit vir my?" [1D].*
> *(You have to think carefully. It's a shocking story. Now you have to think, how does it happen? How dangerous is it for me?).*

> *"Ek dink nogal vrees. En ek dink vrees omdat, as mens dit lees besef jy dit kan met jou gebeur" [2B].*
> *(I think it's fear. And I think fear because, when you read it, you realize that it can happen to you).*

In addition to prominent descriptions of fear and evidence of perceived personal threat, participants described a significant sense of helplessness and an experience of profound powerlessness:

> *"En daai ongelooflike magtelose gevoel na jy dit gelees het van, dit kan nie wees nie, dit kan mos nie elke dag so gebeur nie" [1B].*
> *(And that unbelievable feeling of powerlessness after you read it that, it can't be, it cannot happen like this every day).*

> *"… met daai tipe beriggewing voel ek magteloos" [3B].*
> *(… with that type of reporting I feel powerless).*

The above quotations illustrate the feelings of impotence participants felt when reading the articles and the first quotation, in particular, indicated that the sense of powerlessness occurred not only in response to the exposure to the three articles but also from the fact that reports resonated with daily, repeated exposure to other accounts of crime.

Powerlessness was described verbally and articulated explicitly but was also evident in a somewhat emotionally depressed tone in the groups at times. Powerlessness seemed related to the sense of having to bear or tolerate frequent anxiety and feelings of fear and frustration. The expression of this kind of impotence was common and central to the groups and suggested an underlying sense of sadness and extreme frustration, as illustrated in the following extract in which the sense of being unable to intervene is very powerfully challenged:

> *"… dis daai magteloosheid van, weet jy wat, there is nothing I can do about it. Nothing. Nothing … dit maak my hartseer. Dit maak my verskriklik hartseer" [2C].*
> *(It's that powerlessness of, you know what, there is nothing I can do about it. Nothing. Nothing … that makes me sad. That makes me incredibly sad).*

The experience of powerlessness was closely related to the dominance of fear in response to the accounts of crime. The following interchange occurred after a description of intense fear by a participant:

> *"2C: Dit gaan vir my oor magteloosheid. [Almal sê 'ja' en dui aan dat hulle saamstem]. Jy voel maar jy kan nie teen 'n geweer baklei nie, jy kan nie teen iemand baklei wat drie keer so groot is soos jy nie. Of vir jou voel drie keer so groot soos jy nie.*
> *2D: En dis hoe mens voel, hulpeloos.*
> *2C: Ek wonder net hoekom, en vir my gaan dit oor hoekom, why do we take it? Hoekom moet ons in vrees lewe? Why?"*
> *(2C: For me it is about powerlessness. [Everyone says 'yes' and they indicate that they agree with nodding]. You feel that you cannot fight against a gun, you cannot fight against someone who is three times bigger than you. Or feels three times bigger to you.*
> *2D: And that's how one feels, helpless.*
> *2C: I just wonder why and for me it's about, why do we take it? Why must we live in fear? Why?).*

This conversation illustrates that the intense experience of fear within the groups seemed to generate a sense of powerlessness and helplessness and that these sets of emotions were interrelated. Felt powerlessness is also likely to intensify fear.

The analysis of the affective responses to exposure to the accounts of crime demonstrates that participants displayed the affective features associated with direct trauma but at a less severe level, as in the case of other forms of indirect traumatization. Significantly, participants perceived that the newspaper accounts of crime suggested a personal threat to them and their loved ones. Participants described fear, some degree of horror, and helplessness expressed mostly as an experience of powerlessness, and these affective responses were also noted in the emotional tone of the groups at certain points. The next sub-section explores the symptom-related responses identified in the analysis of the data.

4.1.2. Symptom-related responses

In addition to the affective responses described above, participants also described and displayed features of hyperarousal, avoidance and intrusion, again responses that are considered to be symptoms of psychological trauma (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Blunted affect appeared to be an additional symptom-related response related to avoidance and the numbing of emotions in response to trauma (Sadock & Sadock, 2003).

As already discussed, participants responded with affective distress to the accounts of crime and the accounts were interpreted as suggesting a personal threat to them and their loved ones. The participants acknowledged and described their affective distress and furthermore explored the behavioral and physical consequences of the distress, for example hyperarousal and anxiety. There were descriptions of hyperarousal in the form of hypervigilance that were closely related to the process of understanding the articles as suggesting personal threat:

> *"As ek nou huistoe ry, as ek nou hier uitloop, moet ek nou versigtig om die hoek kyk" [1D].*
> *(When I go home, when I walk out of here now, I must look around the corner carefully).*

"So ek weet eintlik na ek hierdie gelees het, dink ek miskien as ek vanaand gaan slaap gaan ek dalk net eenuur se kant gou uitkyk by die venster om te check… ek is nie veilig nie" [3B].
(So I actually know after I've read this, I think maybe when I go to sleep tonight I am going to look out of the window around 1:00 to check … I am not safe).

In addition to the content of what was discussed, there were times that significant anxiety was noted in the emotional tone of the groups. Participants referred to their own anxiety-laden experiences, such as the following:

"Dit laat my hart klop sommer" [2A].
(It makes my heart beat).

"Maar ek slaap nie meer lekker in die aande nie. Ek gaan in die aande met vrees bed toe" [2B].
(But I don't sleep well at night anymore. I go to bed at night with fear).

"Ek raak frantic" [3C].
(I become frantic).

Whilst participants described and displayed features of hyperarousal and anxiety-laden responses, they also described a sense of emotional numbing or blunted affect:

"Dit word naderhand, naderhand afgestomp, wanneer jy dit elke liewe dag lees. Dit voel maar eintlik bietjie kragteloos." [1A].
(It becomes eventually, eventually emotionally blunted, when you read it every single day. It actually feels a bit powerless).

"Jy sny af" [2C].
(You cut off).

"Ek lees ook nie hierdie goed nie … die rede hoekom ek dit nie lees nie is mens is al afgestomp. As iemand vir jou vertel, Daai persoon is verkrag, dan kan jy sê, Wel, ek's bly sy's nie dood nie" [3D].
(I also don't read this stuff… the reason why I don't read it is that one is already emotionally blunted. When someone tells you, That person was raped, then you can say, Well, I'm glad she isn't dead).

The blunted affect described by the participants was explicitly recognized to be a consequence of powerlessness and over-exposure to accounts of crime. Participants expressed a sense of saturation of even over-saturation with such stimuli and struggled to understand how there could be reports of crime-related events every day:

"Jy kan amper nie nog daarvan absorbeer nie … Dit kan nie wees nie, dit kan mos nie elke dag so gebeur nie" [1B].
(You can almost not absorb any more of it … It can't be, it surely cannot happen like this every day).

"Ons is versadig" [3C].
(We are saturated).

"Ons wil nie meer daarvan hoor nie" [3A].
(We don't want to hear any more about it).

Participants therefore seemed to respond with blunted affect or some form of emotional numbing to mitigate the affective impact and the hyperarousal they experienced when reading the accounts of crime. A related and prominent feature of the focus groups was avoidance. Some participants expressed an active and conscious desire to avoid any accounts of crime. Avoidance seemed to be used as a defensive style or coping strategy to mitigate the consequences of reading newspaper articles of crime every day. One participant could not finish reading the three newspaper accounts of crime at the beginning of the focus group session, indicating an active refusal to engage with the content. There were various descriptions of active avoidance, and denial in some instances, in the groups:

"As jy dit lees, en jy's bang, dan vlug jy weg daarvan, jy vermei dit half totdat jy dit weer lees. En dan's dit half 'n vermeiding, 'n ontkenning wat plaasvind" [1E].
(If you read it and you're scared, then you flee away from it, you kind of avoid it until you read it again. And then it's a kind of avoidance, a denial that happens).

"Dis mislik. Ek, ek, ek weet nie, dit laat my net … Ek wil dit nie lees nie. Ek wil dit nie weet nie. Ek wil nie daarna kyk nie. Ek wil nie. Ek wil nie. I don't want to be aware of it, ek wil nie daarmee lewe nie" [2C].
(It's terrible. I, I, I don't know, it just lets me … I don't want to read it. I don't want to know it. I don't want to look at it. I don't want to. I don't want to. I don't want to be aware of it, I don't want to live with it).

"Ek probeer redelik op hoogte bly van wat in die land aangaan, maar as ek ooit so 'n opskrif sien, vermei ek dit … Dit maak mens bang, dit maak mens negatief oor die land, dit laat mens se gedagtes hardloop en later raak jy paranoid" [3A].
(I try to stay relatively up to date with what is going on in the country but whenever I see this kind of headline I avoid it… It makes you scared, it makes you negative about the country, it makes your thoughts go and later you become paranoid).

Each of the above quotes indicates an awareness of the emotional impact of allowing oneself to think or feel about crime combined with a verbalization of a wish to avoid or forget the material that generated the emotional response. Avoidance was therefore visible in various forms and it was interesting to note that all of the participants in the three focus groups left the three newspaper articles behind at the end of the focus groups. Most participants had turned the articles with the blank back-pages facing up in order to avoid looking at the actual written material during the conversation.

Even though participants displayed and described features of avoidance, the attempts to avoid did not protect them completely from the emotional impact of the newspaper accounts of crime and there was evidence of intrusion in the groups. In the first focus

group, one participant suddenly interrupted the group conversation and expressed emotional distress about a description in the one article of a dog that had been shot in the upper lip during a murder:

> *"Ek is verskriklik omgekrap oor daai koeël in die bolip" [1B].*
> *(I am incredibly upset about that bullet in the upper lip).*

Another participant reflected that it was difficult to deal with disturbing emotions when alone:

> *"Dis wanneer ek alleen is waar daai gedagtes… daai persoonlike gedagtes is waarmee ek sukkel" [2B].*
> *(It's when I'm alone that those thoughts … those personal thoughts are what I struggle with).*

Thus at points it appeared that images or anxiety-related responses became so powerful that they needed to be vented or shared in the group. Cycles of avoidance and intrusion are characteristic of the trauma response (Phoenix, 2007). As discussed in the literature review, traumatic events are often followed by a process of alternation between experiences of intrusive memories and flashbacks of the event, and periods of numbing and denial about the traumatic event (Phoenix, 2007). The exposure to accounts of crime in the newspaper articles seemed to lead to emotional responses that participants wanted to reason away or avoid. However, due to the detailed descriptions of the crimes in the newspaper articles, intrusive images, associations and recollections seemed to follow and suggested some degree of indirect traumatization. This feature of participants' responses to the vivid stimuli provides some substantiation for the view put forward by Lerias and Byrne (2003) that internal memories and associations can be made and re-experienced when one is indirectly exposed to traumatic material. In other words, participants appeared to respond affectively to their indirect exposure to the traumatic material, presented symptom-related features of indirect traumatization in response to the exposure, then displaying attempts to avoid the impact which were constrasted with intrusive recollections related particularly to the level of detail in the selected articles.

The exploration of the sub-category of symptom-related responses has illustrated that participants experienced features of indirect traumatization such as hyperarousal, blunted affect, and a kind of cycle of avoidance and intrusion subsequent to being exposed to the focus group stimuli. The next section explores the alterations to schemas identified in the analysis of the data.

4.1.3. Alterations to schemas

The discussions on affective- and symptom-related responses suggest that participants displayed affective and symptom-related features due to the immediate emotional impact of exposure to the accounts of crime, thus suggesting some degree of indirect traumatization. In addition to these processes, and in light of the fact that participants had varying degrees of prior exposure to traumatic material, it is important to acknowledge that some of the affective- and symptom-related responses may have been aggravated by prior exposure to accounts of crime. In addition, to these responses there appeared to be a challenge to pre-existing schemas. One of the defining features of vicarious traumatization is that it is related to gradual and cumulative exposure to traumatic material (Rasmussen, 2005; Van Tuinen-Youngs, 2005) and in all the groups participants spontaneously reflected on the additional emotional strain of reading the accounts in light of regular exposure to crime in their daily lives. The focus of this sub-category is thus to explore whether features related particularly to vicarious traumatization were evident in the analysis of the data.

It could be argued that each of the psychological needs, as proposed by McCann and Pearlman (1990a), appeared to be affected to some extent by the exposure to the accounts of crime. For example, the profound experience of powerlessness may have posed a challenge to participants' need to have a sense of power and agency, and accounts of crime may have had an impact on their ability to trust others or engage in life with a sense of independence. However, the most prominent disruptions to schemas noted in the data were in relation to safety, experiences of intimacy and connection with others and a meaningful frame of reference. The alterations to shemas relating to safety and mechanisms of engagement with others will be discussed next. (The aspects related to a meaningful frame of reference will be explored under the discussion of theme 2).

4.1.3. a) Safety

Participants in the groups discussed the topic of personal safety, in particular fears about their own safety and the safety of their loved ones, in detail:

> *"Dit maak jou worry oor veiligheid" [1D].*
> *(It makes you worried about safety).*

> *"… vir myself, dit maak my bekommerd oor my ouers" [3A].*
> *(For myself, it makes me worried about my parents).*

The articles therefore generated a great deal of concern for personal safety. The feelings of fear described by the participants seemed to be more pronounced in light of this concern for personal safety. Concerns about personal safety appeared to threaten the participants' psychological need for a sense of safety and challenged the cognitive assumption that they were safe, thus resulting in increased levels of emotional distress.

Participants appeared to use the articles as a source of information about the level of security one needs at home to feel and be safe and participants were interested in where the reported crimes took place, using this as a backdrop against which to assess the safety of where they themselves lived:

> *" Jy lees dit en dan dink jy aan my eie huis. Kan iemand net daar inloop? En dan dink ek, Nee, en dan is ek nie so geworry nie. Dan lees jy die volgende een, dan dink jy, Jirre, hulle het dalk. Dit lyk of iemand wel kan inloop. Jy weet, dit maak jou bang" [1D].*
> *(You read it and then you think of your own house. Can someone just walk in? And then you think, No, and then I'm not so worried. Then you read the next one and then you think, Gosh, maybe they did. It looks as if someone can just walk in. You know, that makes you scared).*

> *"Ek let net op, okay, dit het in Pretoria gebeur" [3D].*
> *(I just note that, okay, it happened in Pretoria).*

The topic of personal safety introduced some disagreement amongst the participants. Some of them expressed that they had resigned themselves to the idea that their safety was not guaranteed and they had to take responsibility for their own security, thus apparently accepting that their cognitive schemas in relation to safety had to be adjusted to incorporate the perception that they were not safe. Other participants resisted this idea, perhaps in an attempt to protect their need for a sense of safety, and felt that they should not need to worry about their own safety and to take so much responsibility for their personal security. The following exchange illustrates this dynamic:

> *"1A: … daar's in die eerste plek nie veronderstel om iemand te wees wat in my huis wil kom met gewere en my goed wil steel nie.*
> *1B: Nee, maar dis 'n gegewe … Ek aanvaar al dis die alledaagse lewe."*
> *(1A: … there shouldn't be someone, in the first place, who wants to come into my house with guns and steal my stuff.*
> *1B: No, but it's a given … I've already accepted that it is part of everyday life).*

The following quotation illustrates another participant's view that one has to take personal responsibility to ensure one's safety, thus suggesting that this participant did not hold an assumption that safety is something that is guaranteed:

> *"'n Mens moet vigilant wees en mens moet kyk as jy uitgaan en jy moet kyk as jy inkom en jy moet die deure sluit en die alarm en die elektriese drade en daai goed. Jy weet, dit is 'n realiteit. En jy maak planne" [2A].*
> *(One has to by vigilant and you must look when you go out and you must look when you come in and you must lock the doors and the alarm and the electric fences and that stuff. You know, it's a reality. And you make plans).*

While participants held different views in relation to safety, it was apparent that their exposure to crime in their daily lives and in the context of the focus groups challenged their assumptions that they were safe and posed a threat to their cognitive schemas in relation to the need to feel safe.

4.1.3. b) Mechanisms of engagement with others

Emotional numbing or blunted affect was a feature of participants' symptom-related responses subsequent to the exposure to the accounts of crime. It appeared that participants not only responded with blunted affect to their experience of reading the accounts of crime but also related to the victims in the stories with a sense of emotional detachment and absence of empathy. This striking feature of participants' engagement with the accounts of crime suggested interesting processes in relation to mechanisms of engagement and connection with others.

Given that the accounts of crime were descriptions of events that had happened to other people, it was quite remarkable that the participants made no reference to the fear that the actual, direct victims may have experienced. The fear-related responses were self-referenced and did not reflect empathy for the experiences of the victims. Participants related the accounts of crime to their own personal contexts and in instances of identification with the victims, participants expressed a greater degree of fear due to an increased perception of **personal** threat:

> *"Jy verplaas dit aan wat naaste aan jou is" [2D].*
> *(You relate it to that which is nearest to you).*

> *"Daai kleuterskoolonderwyseres wat my ouderdom is, dan dink ek, dit kon ek gewees het. Ek is ook 'n onderwyseres. Dan dink ek nou, hoe sou dit nou my gesin, my familie geraak het as dit nou ek was, jy weet? Julle, dis baie erg" [2D].*
> *(That primary school teacher is my age, and then I think, it could've been me. I'm also a teacher. Then I think, how would it affect my family if it was me, you know? It's very bad).*

Participants seemed to either identify with the victims, as described above, or disengage totally from the stories of the victims and focus only on the question of 'can it happen to me?' One participant described this dynamic as follows:

> *"Dis sad vir daai person, maar niemand anders worry daaroor nie" [3D].*
> *(It's sad for that person but nobody else worries about it).*

There were therefore instances of both identification and disidentification in participants' responses to the accounts of crime.

Empathy is understood to be a predictor of vicarious traumatization (Friedland, 1999; Little, 2002) potentially resulting in over-identification or avoidance in therapeutic work (Wilson & Lindy, 1994). In the process of reading the articles, the participants clearly displayed instances of over-identification and avoidance even though their way of engaging with the experiences of the actual victims did not reflect an empathic stance. Participants may have been defending against the emotional impact of full engagement with the accounts of crime and the manner in which the articles were written and received (to be discussed later) may have incited fear rather that empathy. The experience of disconnection with the actual victims and emotional detachment may have served a defensive function with the aim of shielding participants against the emotional impact of reading newspaper accounts of crime and allowing themselves to fully engage with others' suffering. However, the presence of fear for personal safety in the absence of empathy for the victims is striking and the manner in which emotional detachment was discussed indicated that this manner of responding was different to participants' previous ways of interpersonal engagement. Several participants perceived themselves as having changed in responsiveness over time. The following extract shows the distress of one participant in relation to feeling emotionally blunted:

> *"Maar dis vir my sleg dat mens so … dat ek so afgestomp is … Dat ek nie, ek het nie emosie teenoor daardie berigte nie. Ek voel nie jammer vir die mense of sad vir hulle nie" [3D].*
> *(But it's bad that one feels so … that I feel so emotionally blunted … That I don't, I don't have emotion towards those articles. I don't feel sorry for the people or sad for them).*

This quote seems to suggest that the participant may have previously been more emotionally connected to the experiences of others. Thus, the capacity for empathy and connection with others seemed to be threatened by emotional detachment and emotional detachment appeared to be the result of repeated exposure to crime and a

sense of powerlessness rather than only to the exposure to the three accounts of crime in the context of the focus groups.

It is difficult to establish whether participants' lack of empathy was related to their experiences of repeated exposure to crime resulting in some type of 'empathic fatigue', or if reading accounts of crime was simply different to therapeutic engagement, in which empathy is prioritized.. Yet, it appears as if some people who prioritize a need to empathize and connect with the experiences of others, even when reading about it at a greater emotional distance, struggle to sustain this need or cognitive schema when repeatedly confronted with detailed accounts of crime.

There were therefore interesting processes in relation to mechanisms of engagement with others. Identification and disidentification, emotional detachment and a lack of empathy and connection with the actual victims were observed. It seems as if emotional detachment may be the reason for the striking lack of empathy in the focus groups since emotional connection with others appeared to become compromised in the interest of emotional self preservation.

The alterations to schemas suggest some correlation with the manner in which vicarious traumatization is defined. However, there seems to be some significant differences in the way in which therapists experience their encounters with trauma victims and the way in which readers responded to their exposure to victims' experiences. Even though a number of schemas were challenged, participants did not appear to present with profound shifts in their pre-existing schemas and did not relate to the accounts primarily from a position of empathy. It therefore seems that while some features related to vicarious traumatization were observed in the groups, it cannot be concluded that participants truly presented with vicarious traumatization in its fullest sense. There was an awareness of alterations to pre-existing schemas but perhaps not at the same level of profundity as observed in therapists, for example.

4.1.4. Additional features

In addition to the responses and alterations to schemas already discussed, participants presented with anger-related responses and particular kinds of defensive styles in response to trauma-saturated media accounts.

4.1.4. a) Anger-related responses

Anger-related responses were identified in all three focus groups. It was observed that anger was secondary to the more dominant emotions of fear, powerlessness and frustration:

> *"Jy word kwaad, want jy's die heeltyd bang" [2B].*
> *(You get angry because you are scared all the time).*

> *"2B: Maar, en ek, en ek dink, ag, as ek nou so gesit het en so geluister het, ek dink 'n woede het in my gekweek, net, net, net bloot oor die goed wat 'n mens hoor. Net 'n woede, absoluut net 'n verskriklike woede.*
> *2D: Maar waar kom die woede vandaan? Waar kom die woede vandaan? Magteloosheid?*
> *2B: Dit … en frustrasie."*
> *(2B: But, and I, and I think, well, as I sat here and listened, I think an anger has developed in me, just, just, just simply because of the stuff one hears. Just an anger, absolutely just an terrible anger.*
> *2D: But where does the anger come from? Where does the anger come from? Powerlessness?*
> *2B: That … and frustration).*

Anger therefore found expression in the groups but remained secondary to emotional experiences of fear and powerlessness. The acknowledgement or assertion of powerlessness seemed to activate coping strategies and defensive styles, a key expressive route being the vocalization of outrage and anger. Powerlessness and aggression also appeared to be quite closely tied in the discussion. In instances where there was significant expressed anger, anger was directed primarily at the journalists who write the crime-related articles, at *Beeld* journalism and at perceived governmental failures, rather than at the actual perpetrators of the violence:

> *"Ek dink joernaliste is stupid. Hulle is dom. Hulle is dof. Hulle is … [sug]… Ek het 'n probleem met die joernalistiek … Ek het 'n groot probleem" [1E].*

(I think journalists are stupid. They are dumb. They are thick. They are … [sigh] … I have a problem with journalism … I have a big problem).

"...toe ek daai lees, toe voel ek nogal vies. Om sulke detail te gee beteken nogal dat, ek kry die gevoel dat hulle (Beeld) emosie probeer opwek" [3C].
(When I read that, I felt quite angry. To give such detail means to some extent that, I think that they (Beeld) want to evoke emotion).

"Maar ek voel heeltemal kwaad. Jy weet, ek voel, my, ek blameer die regering dat hulle nie iets daaromtrent kan doen nie. En dat die regsstelsel so swak is. En dat, uhm, ek dink meeste van die rooftogte is as gevolg van onwettige immigrante en die werkloosheid" [2E].
(But I feel totally angry. You know, I feel, I blame the government that they don't do anything about it. And that the justice system is so bad. And that, uhm, I think that most of the robberies are due to illegal immigrants and unemployment).

The articles were either understood as intentionally sensationalistic, or seen as legitimate and used to confirm existing negative beliefs about the government and judicial system. Whilst some degree of anger at journalism and the government may be viewed as justifiable, anger at these targets may have been used in a defensive attempt to protect against an overwhelming sense of fear and powerlessness. The apparent displacement of anger onto these targets suggests a primary disappointment in and antagonism towards those who are meant to protect against violence rather than against those who actually commit violence. The sense of loss of containment will be explored more fully under theme 3.

Anger was therefore an emotional response noted in addition and in relation to the other affective responses already discussed. Additional defensive styles observed in the groups will be discussed next.

4.1.4. b) Additional defensive styles and coping strategies

Adopting a somewhat clinical interpretive stance, the researcher noticed that a range of defensive styles and coping strategies were employed in the management of the

responses that came up in relation to the articles and the discussion. These mechanisms and strategies were a striking and prominent feature in the processes of all three focus groups. In the previous sections, various features of participants' responses were considered in relation to its potential defensive function, for example anger was discussed as a response to defend against a feeling of fear and powerlessness. Also, avoidance has been discussed as a symptom-related response suggestive of some degree of indirect traumatization and could be considered a coping strategy in response to exposure to traumatic material. In this section, additional defensive styles and coping strategies will be discussed in relation to their apparent aim to protect participants against the full affective impact. Whilst it is important to appreciate that the concepts used in this section are derived from psychoanalytic literature, the terminology or constructs are used in a more general sense for the purposes of this study as is often the case in the broader clinical literature. The defensive styles and coping strategies will be discussed under the headings of intellectualization and rationalization, and humour.

4.1.4. b i) Intellectualization and rationalization

Participants in the focus groups expressed significant emotional distress after reading the newspaper accounts of crime and responded to their emotional distress by expressing a desire to avoid the material or to disengage emotionally (as already discussed). Many of the participants also tried to mediate the emotional impact by engaging with the newspaper accounts of crime at a cognitive distance. In other words, participants in all three focus groups immediately responded with expressions of affective distress in response to reading the articles but then quickly made use of various cognitively oriented strategies in an apparent attempt to cope with the emotional impact.

Intellectualization is a defence mechanism that allows for the acknowledgement of experiences and emotions without the associated affect and is evident when people try to engage at an abstract or conceptual level in emotionally distressing contexts (McWilliams, 1994). Rationalization is a closely related defence mechanism that is used to transform difficult experiences into more acceptable or tolerable experiences (Lemma, 2006; McWilliams, 1994), usually by introducing some form of theorization or argumentation.

Participants were actively engaged in transforming their immediate negative emotional response to the articles by attempting to intellectualize and gain a more abstracte view:

> *"… jy moet soortvan terugsit vir 'n oomblikkie en probeer perspektief kry" [1D].*
> *(You have to sort of sit back for a moment and try to get perspective).*

> *"Ek wil net sê dat 'n mens moet net hierdie goed in perspektief sien" [2A].*
> *(I just want to say that a person must just see this stuff in perspective).*

Participants spoke about the challenges of crime in South Africa, reflected on crime statistics, considered the impact of apartheid on crime in South Africa today and considered the *Beeld's* motivation for publishing newspaper accounts of crime. Such topic discussion was employed to assist them in the process of some degree of rationalization and intellectualization. Participants also discussed serious problems faced by other countries to illustrate that South Africa is not the only country in the world with significant difficulties. It seemed as if participants began to argue that other places are equally unsafe in order not to deal with their fear and ambivalence about being located in a context perceived as dangerous. This kind of response could be understood as rationalization.

The various understandings of crime and issues raised in relation to the reporting of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper will be discussed and elaborated later. However, suffice to say that in all the groups participants moved to the discussion of the context and causes of crime spontaneously without any prompting by the researcher and that in many respects this kind of discussion, although not easy, appeared more appealing than staying with their affective states and responses. Intellectualization and rationalization were used to try to mediate the overwhelming initial emotional impact of the newspaper accounts of crime, generating cognitive distance and introducing rational thinking processes. However, one participant described that it was difficult to think rationally in the context of exposure to accounts of crime:

"… ek moet soos 'n rasionele mens dink, maar ek moet aanvaar dat daar mense is wat nie rasioneel is nie. Daar is mense wat nie rasioneel kan dink nie" [2C].
(… I have to think like a rational person but I must accept that there are people who are not rational. There are people who cannot think rationally).

The above quote suggests that it is difficult to maintain the defensive or coping strategies of intellectualization and rationalization. This seemed to be related to the experiences of intrusion, suggesting that avoidance of the affective impact could not be sustained indefinitely. The participants seemed to work very hard cognitively to sustain these reasonably high-level defensive processes of intellectualization and rationalization in the groups and the researcher found herself prompted to reflect on this:

"Wat ek hoor, wat eintlik vir my interessant is, is hoe, hoe hard almal moet werk selfs vandag om te probeer sin maak van hierdie artikels. Dit verg dat mens so kan dink en perspektief hou" (Researcher, Focus Group 1).
(What I hear, I actually find it interesting that, how, how hard everyone has to work even today to try keep perspective).

"Ek dink, ek dink wat ek hoor is, dit klink na verskriklike harde werk om sin te maak van als" (Researcher, Focus group 2).
(I think, I think what I hear is, is sounds like very hard work to make sense of everything).

The reflections by the researcher that the impression that the participants were working very hard to make sense of the articles and keep perspective indicated that this was both unexpected and noteworthy. Participants agreed that it felt like hard work by nodding in response to the reflections and by continuing to employ cognitive effort in response to the articles. The effort expended in making intellectual and rational sense of the emotional meaning of the articles was such that it seemed logical to conclude that some people would choose to avoid exposure to accounts of crime altogether.

4.1.4. b ii) Humour

Humour appeared to be a coping strategy (with some level of defensive function), that was employed by the participants as yet another mechanism to avoid the emotional impact of the newspaper accounts of crime and it was an interesting additional feature of the focus groups considered worthy of a brief discussion.

In the focus groups, participants often used exaggeration to emphasize their views and to be ironical. For example, one participant described how he would 'get his gun' if the police could not help him and the group laughed when they realized that he was exaggerating and did not own a gun. The laughter lifted the mood in the group and briefly distracted the participants from the serious topic of conversation. In another instance, a participant used humour to describe how she goes outside to get the *Beeld* every morning:

> *"Ek is die een wat in die oggende uitgaan. Ek kyk baie mooi, ek gaan sommer so uit in my pyjamas … ek sluip eintlik half uit my eie huis uit, en haal die Beeld (almal lag)" [2D].*
> *(I am the one who goes out in the morning. I look out very carefully, I just go out in my pyjamas … I sort-of creep out of my own house and I fetch the Beeld [everyone laughs]).*

In this description, it seemed that humour was used to avoid and defend against the considerable underlying anxiety motivating the described behavior. There were other instances of humour and laughter when participants made fun of themselves, of some features of Afrikaner culture, and of Afrikaans-speaking people in general. Overall, humour was used to avoid an apparent tendency to despair in the groups. Given that the participants did not know each other, humour may have also been used as a means of engaging with each other positively and aspects of this humour relied on common 'Afrikaner' cultural practices and custom, thus also performing a possible 'joining' function.

4.1.3. Overview of theme 1 and theoretical discussion

The focus group participants read the three selected newspaper articles at the beginning of each of the three focus group meetings. The newspaper articles of crime

thus provided the participants with what could be viewed as indirect exposure to three accounts of traumatic events. Indirect exposure to traumatic events has been shown to result in symptoms of psychological trauma at a less severe degree than is seen with direct trauma exposure (Lerias & Byrne, 2003; Marais & Stuart, 2005; Pyevich et al., 2003). An internal picture of a traumatic event can be formed (Lerias & Byrne, 2003) and the three *Beeld* newspaper articles detailed descriptions of traumatic events that could be imagined vividly and re-experienced internally.

When assessing whether a person is displaying features of psychological trauma, emphasis is placed on the key affective responses related to psychological trauma, namely fear, horror and helplessness (Davison, 2004; Friedman, 2006) and the perception of threat (Friedman, 2006; Sadock & Sadock, 2003). The affective responses of the participants and their symptom-related responses were considered in order to determine whether there appeared to be evidence of indirect traumatization subsequent to reading the newspaper articles.

After their initial reading, the participants immediately responded with affective distress. Fear, some degree of expression of horror, and powerlessness were identified. Fear was the most dominant expressed emotion in the three focus groups and the affective responses seemed to originate mainly from participants' understanding that the articles suggested the potential of personal threat to themselves and their loved ones. Helplessness was described in relation to a significant sense of powerlessness that was related strongly to repeated exposure to accounts of crime and was closely associated with an intense experience of fear, perceived personal threat, and a sense of impotence in reducing or minimizing the threat.

Features of hyperarousal, blunted affect (similar to emotional numbing), avoidance and intrusion were expressed and displayed by the participants and are consistent with symptom-related features of traumatic stress (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Participants described features of hypervigilance and anxiety-laden experiences. They also reflected on their experiences of emotional numbing, and of alternating experiences of avoidance intrusion. The symptom-related responses observed provided some validation for the view that indirect exposure, even at the level of newspaper accounts, may produce affective distress and contribute to a cycle of avoidance and

intrusive recollections, parallel to the experiences described by direct victims (Lerias and Byrne (2003).

The findings thus far suggest that reading the three *Beeld* newspaper accounts of criminal events therefore had some level of psychological impact, though not of clinical severity, and there is evidence that the participants displayed some affective responses and 'symptoms' of indirect traumatization, consistent with a 'trauma response'.

Participants experienced immediate emotional responses to the accounts of crime. However, their emotional responses seemed more powerful due to their association of the accounts with other forms of repeated indirect exposure to crime that they spoke about of their own accord. This correlates with the finding of Williams et al. (2007) that repeated exposure to crime increases distress. Whilst the finding of Williams et al. (2007) was related to direct exposure, it seems that emotional distress also increased for the research participants due to ongoing exposure to multiple accounts of crime.

Vicarious traumatization is defined as resulting from cumulative exposure to traumatic material and repeated exposure to trauma can have a lasting effect on psychological needs and cognitive schemas (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). Descriptions of personal changes in relation to psychological needs and cognitive schemas were volunteered in the groups and seemed to be related to the cumulative impact of exposure to accounts of crime. In particular, participants discussed alterations in their schemas related to *safety* and their *connection with others*, particularly in relation to their empathic capacity. (The need for a meaningful frame of reference was also referred to frequently in the focus groups and this is an important focus of the study that will be explored in greater detail in the section on the findings regarding meaning making and understandings of crime.) Participants' fears regarding their personal safety and the safety of their loved ones demonstrated that the articles posed a threat to their psychological need for a sense of security in their lives.

The participants also discussed their mechanisms of engagement with the material and identification, disidentification, emotional detachment and a striking lack of empathy

implied some threat to the capacity for connection with others. There may be a difference between the impact of therapeutic work with trauma as compared to reading or learning about crime incidents indirectly. A sense of empathy may not be required when reading articles because an understanding for the experiences of the victims is not necessary as in the case of therapeutic and other kinds of direct engagement. However, it seemed as if the lack of empathy served a defensive function to a large extent and this absence of empathy may preclude the opportunity for the kind of facilitation of hope and growth that can result from an empathic stance in the therapeutic encounter (Jenmorri, 2006). A further difference, however, is that therapists have evidence of the effects of their empathy on trauma survivors whereas this contact is lacking in the case of readers. When considering all the factors discussed thus far, it seemed as if some features similar to but also other features quite different from those observed in vicarious traumatization were evident in participants' responses. Participants' responses seemed to derive from their perception of personal threat, varying levels of identification or disidentification, and a stance reflecting cognitive distance rather than empathic connection.

Another factor to consider when engaging with individuals' responses to psychological trauma is whether they have the psychological capacity to manage and integrate the traumatic event (Friedman, 2006; Sadock & Sadock, 2003). In addition to the affective responses and symptom-related reponses to the accounts of crime discussed already, participants expressed anger that seemed to represent a defensive attempt to protect against and cope with an overwhelming sense of fear and powerlessness. Disruptions to psychological well-being can result in the operation of defence mechanisms and defensive styles to manage the emotional impact of difficult situations (Lemma, 2006; McWilliams, 1994). Some defensive styles and coping strategies were noted in the focus groups and appeared to be evoked an in attempt to protect the participants' existing cognitive schemas and to avoid extreme emotional distress. High-level defensive styles, such as intellectualization and rationlization, were observed and were a very striking feature of all the focus groups. The attempts to engage at an intellectual distance or to consider factors rationally appeared to involve mental effort and seemed emotionally tiring. In addition to this, participants made use of humour to lift the emotional mood of the groups at certain points.

It is important to consider whether the symptoms described are best referred to as stress rather than trauma-related responses. Traumatic stress has a more lasting impact and a particular violent quality when compared to normal stress, which is related to more general challenging life events (Erikson, 1995). The exposure to the three newspaper articles was possible outside the scope of normal challenging life events and seemed to pose a threat to pre-existing needs and schemas. One could argue that the focus group setting was artificial and that people would generally not read three articles reporting on crime at once. However, participants reflected on that themselves and there were participants who said that they read these types of articles every day. Those who usually did not read newspaper articles on crime said that while they usually avoided such exposure they remained affected. The important factor was therefore that repeated exposure to accounts of crime had an evident psychological impact. There was a suggestion therefore that features of the response (such as fearfulness and powerlessness) had much in common with a diluted traumatic stress response.

4.2. Theme 2: Meaning making and understandings of crime

The second theme relates to the second research question, namely:

2) What are participants' psychological responses to particular accounts of crime in respect of *meaning making and their understandings of crime*?

In order to explore participants' psychological responses in respect of meaning making, the first sub-section discussion on theme 2 will explore how participants reflected on whether one can have a meaningful life in South Africa. The next sub-section will explore understandings of crime and will focus on how participants made sense of the origins of crime. These two themes capture the dominant preoccupations of group members with regard to meaning making in response to the media exposure.

4.2.1. A meaningful life in South Africa

In light of the discussion of theme 1, the focus group data suggested that it may be challenging to engage in a meaningful life in South Africa when exposed to indirect accounts of crime. This section will explore how participants described their daily lives in South Africa in light of exposure to the three newspaper articles and subsequent discussions. The three newspaper articles provided a representation of an

aspect of life in South Africa and this clearly influenced the discussion of particular meaning-related issues. (It may be that the newspaper articles did not provide a fair representation of the South African context as a whole. However, this will be explored in the later section on participants' responses to *Beeld*'s coverage of crime.)

4.2.1. a) Making sense of implications for daily life in South Africa

One of the probes prepared by the researcher was: Do you think these articles influence how you live your *daily lives*? This probe was used in all three focus groups to explore specifically what the impact of exposure to newspaper accounts of crime was on participants' daily lived experiences. Although it was thought that the question might prompt elaboration about possible behavioral effects, the predominant dimension that emerged was a focus on grappling to make meaning of lived location in South Africa.

Participants reflected in all three focus groups that the newspaper articles suggested a personal threat to them and their loved ones. This had an impact on their daily lives and it resulted in a significant concern for personal safety. Feeling unsafe was very distressing for the participants, as already discussed, and it seemed to pose a significant challenge to engaging meaningfully in South Africa on a day-to-day basis. Thus, in the context of the focus groups, the most significant description of daily life in South Africa was that it was marked by concerns about safety. In an attempt to deal with these concerns, some participants reflected that they consciously attempted to maintain 'normal' daily routines as as not to allow indirect exposure to accounts of violence to influence their daily lives:

> *"Ek moet môre-oggend opstaan, ek moet werk toe gaan, ek moet my rekeninge betaal, daar's sekere dinge wat moet aanhou gebeur. En hierdie berigte gaan dit nie verander nie" [1A].*
> *(I have to get up tomorrow morning, I have to go to work, I have to pay my bills, there are things that have to go on. And these articles are not going to change that).*

> *"Ek wil nie so lewe nie… ek braai nog met my deure oop en al daai goed" [1B].*

(I don't want to live like that … I still braai with my doors open and all of that).

The above quotations illustrate that some of the participants had a desire to maintain a normal routine without being affected by the impact of the perceived personal threat and concerns about safety. Yet, in needing to assert that they wanted to continue with their daily lives without being affected by accounts of crime, the participants seemed to sense and also to imply that crime could potentially threaten their normal routines. It seemed to require effort from the participants to keep perspective, remain positive and to protect their need for a meaningful frame of reference:

"Dit vat net baie van die leser om perspektief te hou" [1D].
(It just takes a lot from the reader to maintain perspective).

"Ek hoor wat almal sê van positief en negatief en ek dink daar kom 'n stadium wat ek sê baie jammer, maar ek kan nie meer positief of negatief redeneer nie. Jy kan dit nie vir jouself positief maak nie, nie in enige opsig kan jy regverdig wat gebeur nie" [2B].
(I hear what everyone is saying about positive and negative and I think there comes a point where I say I am very sorry but I cannot argue positively or negatively anymore. You cannot make it positive for yourself, not in any way can you justify what is happening).

One participant expressed a desire to be informed and to live his life in keeping with a realistic assessment of personal risk but found this very challenging:

"Ek wil probeer om my alledaagse lewe in konteks te plaas. En as alles so lyk, hoe op aarde wil ek my lewe in konteks plaas?" [1A].
(I want to place my daily life into context. And if everything looks like this, why on earth would I like to place my life into context?).

Other participants described that they had made the decision not to read accounts of crime in order to continue to live without much anxiety in their daily lives.

"Ek kies om nie met hierdie goed in my daaglikse lewe te lewe nie" [2A].
(I choose to not live with this type of stuff in my daily life).

"As ek laat dit my beïnvloed in my daaglikse lewe, dan gaan ek dit nie maak nie" [2C].
(If I let this influence my daily life, then I am not going to make it).

"Om dit elke dag te moet lees gaan my laat uit die land wil gaan" [3A].
(To read this every day will make me want to leave the country).

"Ek dink ek kies so half in my agterkop om bietjie ignorant te wees … as ek in sulke detail myself inlig, dan, dan gaan ek dit probably nie kan tolerate om hier te wees nie, want dan gaan ek frantic raak" [3C].
(I think I choose sort-of in the back of my mind to be a bit ignorant … if I inform myself in such detail, then I probably will not be able to tolerate being here, because then I will become frantic).

The quotations illustrate that some of the participants engaged in decision-making and related behavioral practices in their daily lives in order to protect themselves from the impact of exposure to accounts of crime. Avoidance seemed to have multiple aims and uses in the context of this study. Firstly, as already discussed, it appeared to be a symptom-related response suggestive of attempts to cope with indirect traumatization. Secondly, as described in this instance, avoidance seemed to characterize some participants' general style or approach to their life in South Africa and a degree of 'ignorance' was almost cultivated in order to reconcile themselves with continuing to live in South Africa. Other participants wanted to be informed and be able to place their lives in context, as discussed earlier, but this desire to be informed carried an intellectual emphasis and there was still a desire to avoid emotional engagement with the implications of violent crime.

Participants reacted strongly to their perception that the accounts of crime suggested that other people's humanity and worth, and by implication their own, was not respected in the South Africa context. Two participants expressed this directly:

"Dis net, dis net dat jy nie voel jy het waardigheid as mens nie" [2A].
(It's just, it's just that you don't feel that you have worth as a person).

"Dis die onmenslikheid van alles" [2D].
(It's the inhumanity of everything).

Participants thus felt unsafe, made decisions in their lives to defend themselves against the impact of exposure to accounts of crime and drew the conclusion that their worth was not respected when they could not avoid such material. Full awareness of the kind of information contained in the newspaper accounts of crime therefore posed a threat to the possibility that participants could engage fully with what it meant to live their lives in a committed and aware manner in South Africa. The need for a meaningful frame of reference was threatened by the indirect exposure and protection of a meaningful frame of reference appeared to require deliberate and ongoing effort.

A question that seemed to result from reading the articles and worrying about safety was: ' Should I stay in South Africa or should I leave?' Participants seemed to link exposure to accounts of crime fairly automatically to consideration of the decision as to whether to emigrate. Participants reflected on the actions of people who had emigrated or were considering emigration due to the impact of direct and indirect exposure to crime in South Africa. These conversations about others seemed to reflect their own ambivalence or need to engage with this issue:

"Daar is mense wat net sê tot hiertoe en nie verder nie. Dis te veel …. Jy dink maar, my kind, ek gaan nie dobbel met my kind se lewe nie… kom ons vat nou die pad" [2D].
(There are people who just say enough and no more. It's too much… You think, but, my child, I am not going to gamble with my child's life … let's leave).

"Ek dink, wel, meeste mense wat ek ken in elk geval, uhm, dink aan emigrasie. So of, óf jy besluit om te bly for now, óf jy besluit om te gaan" [3C].
(I think, well, most people who I know, uhm, are thinking about emigrating. So either, either you decide to stay for now, or you decide to leave).

These reflections on emigration were related to the exploration of implications for quality of life in South Africa given engagement with newspaper accounts of crime. The decision to leave South Africa was perceived by some participants as the ultimate act of avoidance and as reflecting a deep despondency and alienation. Participants expressed a significant sense of distress about the idea of leaving South Africa. They reflected on the impact on families, identity, and the 'cultural cost':

> *"As lede van die familie oor die wêreld versprei, dan is daai familie eintlik daarmee heen … en dan kultureel is daar 'n groot koste" [1D].*
> *(If members of a family divide all over the world, then that family is actually gone … and then culturally there is a great cost).*

> *"Dis my identiteit. My hele gesin is hier. My taal is uniek tot hierdie land. Dis my huis die. As ek gaan oorsee trek, dis sleg en ek moet vrede maak. Dit gaan weg wees. En vir my op hierdie stadium is dit te groot 'n opoffering. Dis te groot" [1A].*
> *(It's my identity. My whole family is here. My language is unique to this country. This is my home. If I move overseas, it's bad and I have to make peace with it. It will be gone. And for me at this stage it's too big a sacrifice. It's too big).*

A striking sense of sadness and love for South Africa was also expressed:

> *"Dis hartseer dat jy 'n wonderlike land moet wegvlug, né? Dis die hartseer. Wie't gedink dit sal ooit so erg raak?" [2D].*
> *(It's sad that you have to flee away from a wonderful country, isn't it? That's the sadness. Who would've thought that it would ever get this bad?).*

> *"As jy 'n Westerling is en jy soek eerstewêreldstandaarde, dan gaan dit, dan gaan hierdie artikels jou uit die land uit dryf, dink ek. En as jy 'n African by heart is, en jy kan nie die blou lug, en die sonskyn, en die layered cultures in Suid-Afrika verlaat nie, dan gaan jy hier bly. En dan gaan jy, dan gaan jy jouself moet distansieer van sulke tipe beriggewing" [3C].*

(If you are a Westener and you want first world standards, then it will, then these type of articles will drive you out of the country, I think. And if you are an African by heart, and you cannot leave the blue sky, and the sunshine, and the layered cultures in South Africa, then you are going to stay. And then you will, then you will distantiate yourself from this type of reporting).

Given that participants were faced with concerns about safety and the decision to stay in South Africa or to leave, the defensive strategies and coping styles employed and already discussed in theme 1 appeared to have an additional function. It seems as if the various strategies used in the focus groups not only protected participants from emotional distress and despair about South Africa but also appeared to be used in an attempt to find some equilibrium, a sense that they could reconcile themselves with the implications of what they read without collapse. Participants described that they could not allow crime to 'get to them' and expressed a need to maintain a sense of hope and withstand feelings of fear:

"As ek my dit gaan laat onderkry, dan moet ek regtigwaar soos wat my man elke dag sê, 'kom ons waai'. Weet jy wat? Nee, verstaan jy? Dit kan nie. Jy moet jouself net afsny" [2C].
(If I let this get to me, then I must really as my husband says every day, 'let's leave'. You know what? No, you understand? It can't. You just have to cut yourself off).

"Maar jy sien, ek dink dis 'n keuse. Of jy in vrees lewe, en of jy, ek weet nie, hoe kan mens sê, hoop. Ek dink dis 'n persoonlike keuse van hoe jy lewe" [2D].
(But you see, I think it's a choice. Whether you live in fear, or whether you, I don't know, how can one say, hope. I think it's a personal choice of how you live).

"Ek, as ek nie meer hoop vir die land het nie, dan sal ek nie meer hier kan bly nie. So ek het hoop vir die land en ek sal heeltyd probeer om die goeie te sien" [3A].

(I, if I don't have hope for the country anymore, then I will not be able to stay here. So I have hope for the country and I will always try to see the good).

Hopefulness was therefore an important factor and a mental position that participants wished to sustain in the process of trying to engage in a meaningful life in South Africa.

In analyzing this aspect of the data, the researcher repeatedly noted the presence of an underlying sense of sacrifice and compromise in the responses of the participants in relation to their descriptions of daily life in South Africa. As discussed in the literature review, trauma exposure and trauma of human origin can challenge people's meaning systems in relation to the world, oneself, and others (Fontana & Rosenheck, 2005; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). If people desire to preserve a sense of meaning and hopefulness, it is important to maintain their assumptions that the world is benign and meaningful, the self is worthy and people are trustworthy in addition to the idea that the world is controllable and predictable (Janoff-Bulman, 1985, as cited in McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). It seems that exposure to accounts of crime challenged the participants particularly in relation to the idea that the world was controllable, predictable, benign and meaningful and the participants felt that they had to sacrifice a desire for full engagement in South Africa if they were going to stay in the country. Participants either had to avoid any information about crime or they had to distance themselves emotionally whilst remaining informed.

Daily life in South Africa was marked by worries about safety and attempts to remain hopeful. Whilst these attempts to remain hopeful are certainly encouraging, the accompanying sense of sacrifice and compromise to protect meaning is distressing. Participants seemed to feel that they had to attempt to find truth and meaning by relying on their own initiative and appeared to have little emotional energy left to consider, for example, whether they could make positive contributions to South Africa.

A second broad theme that emerged in the groups in respect of meaning making was the attempt to understand the origins and manifestations of crime.

4.2.2. Understandings of crime

Participants discussed their understandings of crime in the focus groups in an attempt to identify the potential causes of crime and the underlying intention of criminal acts. The emphasis in this sub-section is to explore what participants' perceptions were about crime, as this appeared to contribute to the psychological impact of indirect exposure to accounts of crime. Some of the participants did not express their views on crime and in some instances, conversations about how to make sense of crime resulted in disagreement when participants did not share the same views about the origin of crime and intention of criminals. The conversations about crime emerged spontaneously and without any prompting from the researcher.

A prominent understanding of crime expressed in the groups was that crime was the result of government and police failures, particularly in relation to controlling illegal immigration from South Africa's neighbouring countries. The participants responded with anger, frustration and a sense of powerlessness in putting forward this understanding:

> *"… dan word jy kwaad vir jou regering, want jy neem aan die polisie doen niks" [1D].*
> *(… then you get angry at your government because you assume that police is doing nothing).*

> *"Ek blameer die regering dat hulle nie iets daaromtrent kan doen nie. En dat die regsstelsel so swak is … Ek dink meeste van die rooftogte is as gevolg van onwettige immigrante en die werkloosheid. En die werkloosheid is as gevolg van die onwettige immigrante. So eerlikwaar, ek dink dis die regering" [1E].*
> *(I blame the government that they do nothing about it. And that the judicial system is so useless … I think most of the robberies are as a result of illegal immigrants and the unemployment. And the unemployment is due to illegal immigrants. So honestly, I think it's the government).*

> *"Daar is geen political will nie" [2C].*
> *(There is no political will).*

"Hulle (die regering) is nie bereid om saam te staan om te kyk of hulle nie die situasie hier kan verbeter nie" [2E].
(They [the government] are not willing to stand together and see if they can improve the situation).

"Dis die onwettige immigrante wat hier is … die probleem hier is met ons regering, omdat hulle nie beheer het nie, of wil hê nie. Hulle wil weet wat die probleem is, maar hulle doen niks nie" [2E].
(It's the illegal immigrants that are here … the problem is with our government because they don't have control, or want it. They want to know what the problem is but they don't do anything).

Other participants contested this view that crime was primarily related to governmental and police failures. They reflected instead on social issues, such as poor education, economic problems and the gap between the rich and the poor as underpinning high crime levels:

"Na 10 jaar van demokrasie is die finansieël gesonde mense in hierdie land nogsteeds wit mense. So as jy wil diefstal pleeg en jy wil steel, by wie gaan jy steel?" [1A].
(After 10 years of democracy, the financially secure people in this country are still white people. So if you want to rob and you want to steal, who are you going to steal from?).

"Ons het baie ernstige sosiale probleme … daar's so 'n sosiale gap tussen arm en ryk" [2C].
(We have very serious social problems … there is such a social gap between rich and poor).

"Dis omdat hulle nie skoolgegaan het nie en nie opleiding kry nie" [2D].
(It's because they didn't go to school and didn't get training).

"Hulle is magteloos soortvan ook teen 'n regime. Hulle weet nie hoe kan hulle enigsins, uhm, kom ek sê, uhm, bo kom nie" [2D].

(They are powerless sort-of also against a regime. They don't know how can they, in any way, uhm, how can I say, uhm, get to the top).

"Die klasse division moet, moet kleiner raak en die, die rykdom moet bietjie afplat" [3C].
(The class division must, must get smaller and the, the wealth must come down a bit).

"My filosofie is as jy die mense gaan educate en as die ekonomie beter doen dan gaan crime ook afneem" [3D].
(My philosophy is that if you go and educate the people and if the economy does better, then crime will also come down).

There was some implicit understanding in the groups that there were people in South Africa who considered crime to be an issue that only affects white, middle-class South Africans. In order to address this perception, some participants reflected that black men and poor people suffered most because of crime:

"95% van die moorde in die land, is die slagoffers swart mans …. Daar is 10 000 moorde 'n jaar. 300 of so is wit mense, 200, 300" [1D].
(95% of the murders in this country, the victims are black men …. There are 10 000 murders a year. 300 or so are white people, 200, 300).

"Die mense wat die swaarste kry onder crime is die, is die armer mense" [3D].
(The people who suffer the most as a result of crime are the poorer people).

The legacy of apartheid was discussed in relation to crime, the idea that crime could be understood as a form of revenge was explored, and one participant spoke directly about racial tension:

"Dit is direk die legacy van apartheid, direk, direk … eweskielik kom 'n nuwe regering in en nou moet hy sorg, nie net vir 5 miljoen mense nie, nou moet hy sorg vir 40 miljoen mense" [2C].

(It is the direct legacy of apartheid, direct, direct … suddenly there's a new government and he must now provide, not only for 5 million people, now he must provide for 40 million people).

"Ek weet nie noodwendig of al hierdie aanvalle op die blankes, of dit noodwendig net wraak is nie. Dalk is hierdie aanvallers, die perpetrators, dalk is hulle ook so gedensitiseer … miskien is dit nie vir hulle 'n werklikheidservaring nie" [1E].
(I don't know necessarily whether all the attacks on the whites, whether it necessarily is just revenge. Maybe these attackers, the perpetrators, maybe they are also desensitized … maybe it's not a real experience for them).

"Ons het 'n legacy en 'n legacy sal daar seker maar altyd wees. Maar, maar ek dink dis, dis so diep gesetel, die apartheid ding [3C].
(We have a legacy and there will probably always be a legacy. But, but I think it's, it's so deeply entrenched, this apartheid thing).

"Daar's 'n haatsinnigheid van weerskante … daar's spanning onder jou koshuis wit studente, daai tipe goed, en onder jou jong swartmense … Dit gaan nie oor armoede nie. Dit gaan, dis, daar's ander redes daarvoor" [3A].
(There is a sense of hatred from both sides… there's tension amongst your white university students, that type of stuff, and amongst your young black people … It is not about being poor. It's about, it's, there are other reasons for it).

It seemed difficult for participants to speak about racial tension in relation to crime. The idea that some criminal acts could be primarily racially motivated seemed particularly distressing for participants. One participant spoke about an Afrikaans book that had described crime in South Africa as an attempt to get rid of Afrikaners and another participant responded strongly to refute this statement:

"1E: Daar is 'n subtiele waarneming dat hierdie gestruktureerde geweld, hierdie struktuele misdaad, soos mens tereg sê, is uiteindelik maar net 'n politiese ding, en ja, dit raak ontslae van jou mark.

1D: Dis die perspesie van dit by mense en dit is 100% verkeerd".
(1E: There is a subtle observation that this structured violence, this structural crime, as people rightly say, is actually just a political thing, and yes, it gets rid of your market.
1D: That is the perception that people have and it is 100% wrong).

The possibility that there might be a racial motivation for some crime was therefore touched on but not fully explored in the groups. (Participants felt that the *Beeld* intended to stir racial tension in the way that they reported on crime and this will be explored in a later section.)

Participants tried to make sense of crime by considering the underlying intentions of those committing criminal acts. The participants reflected that some crimes were random and not intented to cause psychological or physical harm and other crime was perceived as 'organized' and premeditated:

"Meeste van die voorvalle is maar ook soos jy sê, random … Dis nie, dis nie asof daar bendes om kerse sit en beplan watter spesifieke slagoffers hulle nou gaan uitroei en moor nie. Dis ouens wat in die straat afloop. En dan kry hulle 'n huis waar die deur oop is en die hek is oop. Of hy kan oorspring. En dan kies hy daai huis, want langsaan is 'n draad, 'n elektriese draad" [1D].
(Most of the incidents are as you also said, random … It's not, it's not as if there are gangs sitting around candles and planning which particular victims they are now going to wipe out and murder. They're guys who are walking down the street. And then they find a house where the door is open or the gate is open. Or he can jump over. And then he chooses that house because next-door there is a fence, an electric fence).

"Daar is 'n paar voorvalle waar dit direk voorbedag is. Maar gewoonlik gebeur dit soortvan per ongeluk" [1D].
(There are a few incidents that are directly premeditated. But usually it happens sort-of by accident).

"Hulle het êrens 'n baas wat vir hulle die oggend gesê het, 'hoor hierso, julle modus operandi vandag is, julle volg iemand, as julle 'n gap sien, dis julle modus operandi'" [2C].
(They have somewhere a boss who told them that morning, 'listen here, your modus operandi for today is, you follow someone, when you see a gap, this is your modus operandi').

"Daar's twee groepe eintlik. Die ouens wat professioneel is en die ouens dink ek, in Pretoria, is 'n heeltemal ander situasie" [2E].
(There are two groups actually. The guys who are professional and the guys I think, in Pretoria, are a totally different situation).

The participants therefore reflected on the political, social and racial factors that contribute to the nature and prevalence of crime in South Africa and also tried to understand the underlying intentions in criminal acts. In general, the understandings of crime and why crime happens in South Africa seemed insightful and thoughtful. While these attempts to understand crime might be considered to represent a retreat into intellectualization, the active engagement with issues could be regarded as a hopeful attempt to find meaning in the presence of frightening stimuli.

Even though participants tried to make intellectual sense of crime, the emotional impact of crime was still powerful. Participants tried to understand why crime in South Africa was experienced as so very disturbing. Some explanations for this were proferred. The following quotations illustrate that participants were upset by the violent quality of crime and the idea that crime could happen in their own homes:

"Daar's meer moorde op normale, middelklas wit mense wat in 'n huis sit soos hier. Dis wat jou senuwees, jy weet, ondermyn … Dit gebeur met normale families" [1D].
(There are more murders on normal, middle-class white people sitting in their house like here. That is what undermines, you know, your nerves … It happens to normal families).

> *"Want die een ding van crime is, dis senseless, ek meen … Crime is een ding. Ek kan nie 'n ou blameer as hy by my huis inkom, my aanhou, en hy vat, jy weet, die bietjie juweliersware en bietjie geld wat hy kan vat … Maar nou kom hulle in en vermoor en goed. En hulle vat selfone of sulke goed. En daai violence van die crime is die, is die een ding wat my maag eintlik omkrap" [3D].*
>
> *(Because the one thing about crime is, it's senseless, I mean … Crime is one thing. I can't blame a guy that comes into my house, holds me up, and he takes, you know, the little bit of jewelery and the little bit of money that he can take … But now they come in and murder and stuff. And they take cellphones and that kind of stuff. And that violence of the crime is the, is the one thing that makes me upset to my stomach).*

The various understandings of crime and attempts to explore the intentions of criminals, as described in this section, co-existed with the emotional impact and the awareness of the violent nature of crime in South Africa. Most of the participants tried to understand crime in order to mediate the emotional impact and maintain some level of hopefulness. Yet, the affective distress resulting from exposure to accounts of crime was not entirely alleviated.

4.2.3. Overview of theme 2 and theoretical discussion

In the theoretical discussion of theme 1, it was argued that the participants in the study displayed features of indirect traumatization and some features of vicarious traumatizaion related to the exposure to the three newspaper articles in the context of prior exposure to indirect accounts of crime. Meaning is closely related to post-trauma adjustment as challenging life situations activate meaning making processes and the psychological need for a meaningful frame of reference can be threatened by exposure to traumatic events (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a).

The question that appeared to arise for participants as a consequence of exposure to accounts of crime was whether one can have a meaningful life in South Africa. Attempting to address this question resulted in a dynamic and challenging exploration of various factors that seemed to influence how the participants thought about their daily existence in South Africa. It seemed as if exposure to indirect accounts of crime

challenged participants' meaning systems, as described in the literature review (Fontana & Rosenheck, 2005; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a). The basic assumptions, as understood by Janoff-Bulman (1985, as cited in McCann & Pearlman, 1990a), that the world is benign and meaningful, the self is worthy and people are trustworthy in addition to the idea that the world is meaningful seemed to be challenged particularly in relation to the ideas that the world was controllable and predictable, and therefore meaningful. However, participants were willing to defend their need to feel that life in South Africa could be meaningful by working hard and using reasoning skills and coping strategies to assist them in sustaining a sense of trust in meaning. Freedom of choice is an important component in meaning making (Meyer et al., 2003) and participants spoke about making a decision to live in hope rather than in fear and choosing to avoid reports that will make them want too despondent and to entertain the idea of leaving South Africa.

Global meaning relates to the underlying beliefs people have about their lives (Park, 2008). There seemed to be a shared belief in the groups that life in South Africa could be meaningful. However, the impact of the newspaper articles and thinking about crime in South Africa appeared to challenge this underlying belief. Situational meaning, the appraisal that is made of challenging events, can disrupt global meaning (Park, 2008). The experience of reading the newspaper accounts of crime and then engaging in a conversation about it appeared to challenge the participants' shared belief that life in South Africa could be meaningful. Participants tried to understand the discrepancies between their longstanding belief that life in South Africa is meaningful in a number of important respects (global meaning) in the context of exposure to accounts that suggest that they are not safe in South Africa and might need to find a meaningful context somewhere else (situational meaning). Participants then engaged in active meaning making processes and the defensive styles and coping strategies that they employed appeared to assist in the process of finding reasons for believing that life in South Africa can continue to be meaningful.

While participants appeared to succeed to some extent to sustain a level of hope in South Africa, this seemed to come at a cost. Indirect and vicarious traumatization, irrespective of the severity, is partly defined by its impact on the ability to function at an optimal level (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). Participants' descriptions of their affective

responses, symptom-related responses, alterations to schemas, and their coping and defensive styles suggested some threat to full engagement in the South African context.

The question remains whether any positive outcomes were evident at all in the participants' conversations. Meaning making can be enhanced by challenging events (Jenmorri, 2006) and participants seemed to hope that there could be a positive outcome for South Africa. However, there was also a level of disillusionment and participants appeared to be focused on surviving on a daily basis rather than approaching the difficulties posed by living in a crime intense country with optimism. While there was evidence perhaps of resilience, determination and thoughtfulness, there was little evidence of a more transcendent engagement.

The evaluation of the underlying intention of displays of aggression in any society is an important part of meaning making and is a challenging process that participants engaged in as they reflected on daily life in South Africa. The participants reflected that crime resulted mainly from the desire to obtain valuable goods and there were references to both random and organized acts of crime. Instrumental aggression (Feldman, 2001; Vitacco et al., 2006) was therefore considered the main form of aggression in South Africa and the perceived intention of crime was that of obtaining something of material value. The other feature of instrumental aggression is that it can be motivated by a desire to make a statement of victory or power (Feldman, 2001; Vitacco et al., 2006) and participants referred to the idea that some people considered crime in South Africa to be an act of revenge by black people against white people. Considering a possible racial motivation as underlying crime was more distressing than the thought that crime was motivated only by material gain. There was therefore some reference to the idea that aggression in South Africa may be racially motivated to make a statement of power and the desire to hurt people, white people in particular, psychologically (Feldman, 2001; Vitacco et al., 2006), but this view was attributed to others outside of the group and was quickly refuted.

In general, participants' understandings of crime were insightful and reflected an appreciation of the complexity of crime in South Africa. Some of the participants reflected on perceived governmental and police failures and expressed very little trust

in the government's ability to fight crime. Others reflected on the social issues that influence crime and education was highlighted, together with income inequality and economic distress. The legacy of apartheid was also explored in relation to crime. The most distressing feature of crime for the participants was its violent quality and the idea that it could happen in their own homes and this correlates with existing literature on this subject (Altbeker, 2007).

There were therefore various meaning making processes and attempts to understand crime in the focus groups. Exposure to the newspaper accounts of crime and other repeated indirect exposure accounts of violence seemed to challenge meaning making and motivated a desire to understand crime. The attempts to understand crime and engage in meaning making seemed encouraging to a certain extent but also indicated the significant level of distress that results from living in a society with high levels of crime. Even though participants generally engaged in a determined effort to make sense of life in South Africa, the emotional impact and intellectual effort to manage this appeared substantial.

4.3. Theme 3: 'The Afrikaner' in South Africa

The third theme relates to the third question, namely:

3) How is the experience of reading particular accounts of crime by this particular group discussed and explored in relation to *Afrikaner identity in the South African context*?

In this section, the various descriptions of Afrikaner identity will be explored in order to contextualize the participants' experiences of crime. The participants were not prompted by the researcher to explore Afrikaner identity but spontaneously engaged in conversations related to the *Beeld* newspaper and its Afrikaans speaking readers.

The participants in the focus groups generally seemed to be invested in maintaining a sense of optimism for South Africa and the experience of reading the accounts of crime was therefore influenced by this motivation. Participants expressed what could be understood as 'liberal views' and appeared to want to create a sense of shared constructive Afrikaner community. However, the participants also expressed critical

views regarding some Afrikaners and appeared to want to distantiate themselves from these kinds of people:

> *"Die Afrikaner is geneig om the hou van sensasie. Smartlap … Die Puritanisme van die Afrikaner, en sy Kalvinistiese skuldskompleks, het nou omgekeerd geraak in die sin dat enigeiets is enige tyd moontlik en beskikbaar en ons lewe in 'n oop samelewing" [1E].*
> *(The Afrikaner tends to like sensationalism. Attracted to sorrow and grief … The Puritanism of the Afrikaner, and his Calvinistic guilt, has now become its opposite in the sense that anything is possible at any time and is available and we live in an open community).*

The idea that Afrikaners are drawn to sensationalism was echoed in the participants' ideas that most Afrikaners would like to read the *Beeld* newspaper because they were attracted to the level of sensationalism in the newspaper:

> *"Ek dink die koerante skryf vir die smartvrate … Ek dink nie ons is die gemiddelde Suid-Afrikaner nie. Ek dink die gemiddelde Afrikaner wil daai lees. Want hulle wil so graag sê, 'ag shame, kyk hoe swaar kry ons'" [1B].*
> *(I think the newspapers write for the people who are addicted to bad news … I don't think we are the average South African. I think the typical Afrikaner wants to read that. Because they are keen to say, 'oh shame, look at how we are suffering').*

> *"Die Afrikaanse mense wil half nie die positiewe hoor nie. Hulle wil hierdie ander glo: die polisie is useless, jy weet, soos dit gaan alles half buite beheer, ons land gaan in die afgrond in" [3A].*
> *(The Afrikaans people kind of don't want to hear the positives. They want to believe this: the police are useless, you know, it is all going sort-of out of control and our country is going down the drain).*

The newspaper articles were therefore viewed as feeding into existing Afrikaner negativity. Afrikaners were described as attracted to bad news because it confirms for them that their sense of struggling in post-apartheid South Africa is legitimate. It

seemed as if these participants felt that Afrikaners over-stated problems in South Africa and they were described as a negative population group (*"'n reeds negatiewe populasiegroep"* [1A], an already negative population group). Participants seemed to hold the view that some Afrikaners would experience the process of reading accounts of crime as confirmation for their pre-existing negative views about the country. There also appeared to be an underlying view that Afrikaners may perceive themselves to be a specially vulnerable group in South Africa.

One participant described some features of Afrikaners who have views that are more liberal:

> *"… mense wat bietjie meer liberal en oopkop na die, na die goed kyk. Wat nog, wat al bietjie aanbeweeg het. Wat nie meer vashaak by, by, by rugby en by boeremusiek en by, by daai klas van goed nie … wat ook verstaan hulle moet bietjie vashou aan hulle kultuur" [3D].*
> *(…people who look a bit more liberal and open-minded at this, at this stuff. That still, that have moved on a bit. That are not stuck at, at, at rugby and traditional music and at, at that class of stuff… who also understand that they must hold onto their culture a bit).*

Most of the participants in this study seemed to identify with the portrayal of a liberal Afrikaner, the Afrikaner who has "moved on a bit", as described above. Culture and identity were important to the participants, as referred to in the discussion of theme 2 and it seemed important for participants to protect their culture, identity and a sense of place in South Africa. There were a few participants who appeared to feel less optimistic about South Africa, held views that were more negative and could be considered more traditional. However, they did not express their opinions directly as the liberal views were expressed with greater dominance in all three of the groups. Although this would necessitate a different form of investigation, it did appear that issues of cultural identification were implicated in how participants responded to accounts of crime and particularly in meaning making processes.

At points, there was a sad expression of a sense of loss for the Afrikaner in South Africa. Participants' descriptions portrayed a sense of estrangement, loss of community, a desire for leadership and loss of status:

> *"Ons is so desperaat op soek na 'n leier of 'n held" [1A].*
> *(We are so desperately in search of a leader or a hero).*

> *"Daar is 'n gevoel van vervreemding onder die Afrikaner … hy was in die huis. Die huis het heeltemal inmekaargestort … Dis baie moeilik vir 'n Afrikaner om soortvan 'n gevoel te hê van gemeenskap. Hulle is soortvan vreemdelinge in hulle eie land. Ek dink hulle smag na 'n president, swart president, Mbeki of enigeiemand wat, wat eendag net 'n paar woorde Afrikaans sê, en vir mense sê, 'man, moenie worry nie, julle is ook deel van die land'" [1D].*
> *(There is a feeling of estrangement amongst the Afrikaners … he was in the house. The house has totally collapsed … It's very hard for an Afrikaner to sort-of have a feeling of community. They are sort-of strangers in their own country. I think they yearn for a president, black president, Mbeki or anyone who, who one day just says a few words in Afrikaans, and says to the people, 'man, don't worry, you are also part of the country').*

> *"Ons worry elkeen maar net vir homself" [3D].*
> *(We all worry just about ourselves).*

These quotations suggest that some Afrikaners may feel that there is very little containment for them in South Africa and no safe place to turn for guidance, connection and a sense of shared purpose. Participants reflected that Afrikaners had lost their ability to face challenging situations and take action:

> *"Daar was 'n tyd wat mense bereid was om oorlog te veg en verskriklike leiding deur te gaan, om dit wat hulle voel hulle s'n is te beskerm. Maar nou, nee, dis nie meer so nie. Nou probeer jy 'n groener weiveld vind" [1A].*

(There was a time when people were willing to fight a war and go through terrible suffering to protect what they felt was theirs. But now, no, that's not how it is anymore. Now they try to find greener pastures).

"Dis blanke Suid-Afrikaners het nie 'n social action manier nie" [3D].
(The white South Africans don't have a social action approach).

The above quotations seem to suggest that the participants held the view that if Afrikaners could stand together with others in the country against crime, the crime situation could change. However, their sense of estrangement and perceived lack of leadership seemed to prevent them from engaging in collective action.

It was interesting that reading the articles led to various spontaneous conversations about Afrikaner identity in South Africa. The three *Beeld* newspaper articles of accounts of crime seemed to interact with existing perceived vulnerabilities, such as loss of culture, feelings of estrangement and lack of containment and therefore yielded a strong response. It seemed as if crime could provide reinforcement for the more negative or cynical view of some that Afrikaners have no place in the country. The sense of powerlessness, already discussed, and challenges to meaning, may culminate further in a belief for Afrikaners that they cannot make a meaningful contribution to the country and may lead to some social distancing. The discussion in the groups indicated considerable debate about Afrikaner identity and how this might be implicated in understanding, dealing with and responding to crime in South Africa. As suggested previously, the data pointed to the fact that meaning making processes cannot be divorced from issues of cultural identity and historical context.

4.3.1. Overview of theme 3 and theoretical discussion

Participants described the Afrikaner population as a negative group and said that they were attracted to sensationalism. The participants generally did not identify with this in-group characterization and were invested in being positive about South Africa. They expressed a desire to connect with 'the new South Africa' and, at the same time, were eager to continue to ensure the survival of the Afrikaner, as described by Kriel (2000). Afrikaner culture was important to participants but they seemed to identify with a new definition of the Afrikaner, the Afrikaner who has "moved on a bit". The

participants reflected on some Afrikaners who they perceive as negative and attracted to bad news. These Afrikaners may feel that the accounts of crime confirm their negative views about South Africa and crime may take on a particular collective meaning for them. Positioning themselves as concerned about crime and yet as not exploiting accounts of crime for political purposes as evidenced by 'conservative Afrikaners' thus proved quite a delicate balancing act for participants.

The study of the fears of prominent Afrikaners in the transition to democracy (Manzo & McGowan, 1992) concluded that Afrikaners were worried about personal safety, the threat to their cultural identity and the survival of their culture. These factors certainly seemed to be concerns that were relevant for the participants even at this point some fifteen years on. In the focus groups and in the analysis of the data, the researcher observed a sense of confusion in the participants' conversations about Afrikaner identity and culture. While they felt that culture and identity were important, it was not clear exactly how the culture and identity of the Afrikaner was defined in post-apartheid South Africa and there seemed to be ambivalence in relation to the retention or rejection of aspects of this Afrikaner identity.

The significant expression of loss of community, leadership, status and a perceived sense of estrangement are factors that appeared to make these Afrikaners more vulnerable to the emotional impact of indirect exposure to crime. These experiences of loss seemed to be a remnant of apartheid and its dissolution and resonate with the description of the Afrikaner as "… a ruling class deprived of its power" (Altbeker, 2007, p. 67). The description of loss by Alcock (2003) resonates with the findings of the study as it seems that participants felt a sense of loss that was compounded by traumatic events, resulting in a threat to meaning, a potential sense of dislocation and an intensified emotional reaction to exposure to crime.

4.4. Theme 4: Impressions of media portrayals of crime in the Beeld newspaper

The fourth theme relates to the fourth research question, namely:

4) What are participants' responses to and perceptions of the *media portrayal of crime* in the *Beeld* newspaper?

In all three focus groups, participants reflected a great deal on the portrayal of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper. Participants were informed that the research study aimed to explore the experience of reading newspaper accounts of crime in the *Beeld* (see Appendix A) and this prompted a lot of discussion on the media portrayal of crime in general and in the *Beeld* in particular.

Participants viewed *Beeld*'s reporting of crime as intentionally sensationalistic, expressed distrust in journalism and felt that articles on crime were given prominence in order to sell more newspapers:

> *"… as jy nou 'n vergelykende lees doen, dan kom jy agter hoe sensasiebelus die Beeld is in vergelyk met ander koerante" [1E].*
> *(… if you do a comparitive reading, then you realize how sensation-driven the Beeld is in comparison with other newspapers).*
>
> *"Dit gaan oor sirkulasie" [1A].*
> *(It's about circulation).*
>
> *"Ek het 'n probleem met die joernalistiek … hierdie is bucks. Dit verkoop" [1E].*
> *(I have a problem with journalism … this is bucks. It sells).*
>
> *"Die manier wat hierdie goed geskryf is, is so sensasioneel" [2A].*
> *(The way in which this stuff is written is so sensationalistic).*
>
> *"Ek wil nie dit lees nie, want dis net 'n klomp sensasie … die Beeld vergroot verskriklik" [2C].*
> *(I don't want to read this because it's just a lot of sensationalism … the Beeld exaggerates incredibly).*
>
> *"Hulle kan driekwart van die sensasie uithaal" [3D].*
> *(They can take out three quarters of the sensationalism)*
> .
> *"… dis sensasioneel" [3C].*

(… it's sensationalistic).

Subsequent to their immediate emotional reaction to the newspaper accounts of crime, participants reflected on the way in which the articles were written and felt that the detailed descriptions of the crime and the overall style and tone of the articles generated considerable emotional distress:

> *"… ek weet nie regtig of dit nodig is om dit in, in soveel detail te beskryf nie … die detail raak net te erg" [1B].*
> *(… I don't really know if it's necessary to put it in, to describe it in so much detail… the detail just gets too much).*

> *"… sulke stories behoort eintlik hartseer en simpatie te kry …. Maar die manier hoe hierdie goed geskryf is, is vreesaanjaend" [1A].*
> *(… these types of stories should actually get sadness and sympathy … But the way in which this stuff is written is frightening).*

> *"… met daai beriggewing voel ek magteloos" [3B].*
> *(… with that reporting, I feel powerless).*

The accounts of crime were experienced as emotionally overwhelming in their own right but seemed to be even more distressing due to the way in which *Beeld* reported on incidents. The way in which the articles were written seemed to aggravate participants' feelings of fear, powerlessness and anger.

The detail of the articles may have made them more vivid and memorable and the participants tried to understand *Beeld*'s motivation for regularly placing these types of detailed accounts of crime in prominent positions in the newspaper:

> *"Dis … elke dag, hoofberig Beeld, is 'n moord in Pretoria-Oos, of 'n rooftog … Wat's die punt? Net om wit mense nog banger te maak en meer te ontstel en 'n reeds negatiewe populasiegroep nog meer negatief te maak … ons hou aan te glo hierso is swart mense wat wit mense vermoor" [1A].*

(It's … every day, main story Beeld, is a murder in Pretoria-East, or a robbery … What's the point? Just to make white people more afraid and more upset and to make a negative population group more negative … we keep on believing here are black people who are killing white people).

"Afrikaanse beriggewing … dit propagate rasisme ongelooflik, altyd" [3A].
(Afrikaans journalism … it propagates racism unbelievably, always).

"Ek kry die gevoel dat hulle emosie probeer opwek" [3C].
(I get the feeling that they are trying to stir emotions).

Participants therefore felt that the *Beeld*'s reporting of crime was motivated by a desire to make white people scared and negative, to create a false impression that crime only affects white people and is perpetrated by black people, to propagate racism and to stir emotions. One participant expressed that the *Beeld* provided a representation to Afrikaners of their context in society:

"… dis die koerant wat verkoop en wat vir ons sê wat gebeur in die samelewing … Beeld is 'n Afrikaanssprekende se koerant, sy mondstuk" [2D].
(… it's the newspaper that sells and that tells us what's happening in society … Beeld is the Afrikaans-speaking person's newspaper, his representative).

While participants expressed the view that the *Beeld* represents Afrikaner issues, they felt that it did not necessarily speak to the majority of South Africans. Participants expressed interest in the experiences of other groups in the country:

"Ek wil weet wat gebeur met die meerderheid van die land" [1A].
(I want to know what happens to the majority of this country).

"… ek sal dit waardeer om in die Beeld ook te lees van die mense in die townships wat ook seerkry" [3A].
(… I would appreciate it to also read in the Beeld about the people in the townships who are also hurting).

The participants thus defined the *Beeld* as a newspaper for Afrikaans speaking people that did not necessarily represent the experiences of other groups in the country. This had a political link for the participants in the groups and the discussion of *Beeld* reporting and South African politics were closely linked. One participant felt that *Beeld*'s reporting style affected him politically:

> *"Dit het 'n politieke impak op my" [1D].*
> *(It has a political impact on me).*

In the process of considering their perceptions of the *Beeld*'s reporting of crime, participants thus considered factors relating to the motivations underlying the way in which crime is reported, the representation of the country for Afrikaans speaking readers, and potential political consequences. Some of the participants recognized that reporting on crime was newsworthy but felt that the *Beeld* could have a more positive orientation:

> *"Maar dis die moeilike ding, jy weet. Mens moet maar seker dit publiseer, hierdie tipe goed. Dis nuuswaardig. Dit vat net baie van die leser om perspektief te hou" [1D].*
> *(But that's the difficult thing, you know. You probably have to publish this, this type of stuff. It's newsworthy. It just requires a lot of the reader to keep perspective).*

> *"Ek dink die koerante het nogal 'n groot rol daarin te speel, van opbouing, positiewe moraal skep" [1B].*
> *(I think the newspapers have quite a big role to play in it, of constructing, creating positive morale).*

> *"… is daar nie 'n behoorlike geleentheid vir redakteurs om 'n rol te speel in die welsyn van sy lesers nie?" [1E].*
> *(Isn't there a proper opportunity for editors to play a role in the well-being of his readers?).*

The media portrayal of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper seemed to face participants with a dilemma. Participants expressed that they would like to be informed and would like to feel that they could continue reading their newspaper in Afrikaans. However, they felt that reading the *Beeld* would expose them to sensationalistic and negative accounts of crime with a perceived intention of propagating racism and stirring emotions. If the *Beeld* is a representation of the world of the Afrikaner in South Africa, then it seems as if the accounts of crime, as illustrated in the study, paint a very disturbing picture for Afrikaans-speaking readers.

4.4.1. Overview of theme 4 and theoretical discussion

Participants responded strongly to the media portrayal of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper and generally did not approve of the tone and perceived motivation of *Beeld*'s reporting of crime. Participants' responses are in line with the discussion of news media in the literature review (see section 2.5.4. a). Participants' responses indicate that their perceptions of crime were shaped to a certain extent by the media portrayal of crime and that while they recognized the writing as deliberately evocative they were nevertheless emotionally caught up in and affected by the accounts. Participants tried to assess what the underlying social constructions were that motivated the reporting style of the *Beeld* journalists and attempted to evaluate the credibility of *Beeld* as a source of information about crime. They also attempted to understand the articles within the context that they were presented as suggested in the literature review (Dunn et al., 2005; Fowler, 1991). In this respect, it was apparent that they were active rather than passive recipients of the material they read. Such active engagement may be helpful in counteracting the negative impact of exposure to violent media images or stories since it allows for a degree of discrimination and reflection, creating some distance from the material. The meaning making processes and understandings of crime, as discussed earlier, may have been influenced by the way in which crime is reported on in the media. The participants expressed significant concerns about the idea that *Beeld*'s reporting of crime propagated racism and represented a skewed view of the South African context, playing to a particular Afrikaner audience.

In terms of the psychological impact of news coverage of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper, there were some indications in the groups that participants' emotional

responses to accounts of crime were heightened because of the way in which *Beeld* reported on the incidents. The exploration of participants' responses to the media portrayal of crime in the *Beeld* seemed to confirm that the news media plays an important role in shaping perceptions of crime and generating or mediating fear of crime (Dunn et al., 2005; Fowler, 1991).

The participants in the study seemed to hold views that might not necessarily represent the views of the majority of *Beeld* readers and those who consider the newspaper to offer an accurate reflection of life in South Africa.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1. Central findings

There were a number of important findings in the study.

Firstly, participants' affective- and symptom-related responses suggested that they had features of a diluted 'trauma response', thus suggesting that some degree of indirect traumatization is possible in response to media representations of crime. Participants described experiences of fear and powerlessness. Hyperarousal, emotional numbing, avoidance and intrusion were also described and observed.

Participants reflected that some of their responses related also to previous repeated indirect exposure to crime in South Africa, through, for example, anecdotal accounts. Their responses therefore needed to be considered in relation to the impact of repeated previous exposure to crime. Participants described that some of their existing cognitive schemas were challenged by indirect exposure to crime. Challenges to two psychological needs or cognitive schemas were prominent in participants' conversations, namely to thoughts about safety and about their connections (mechanisms of engagement) with others.

Vicarious traumatization is predicated on some empathy for the actual direct victims, for example, as observed in the context of therapeutic engagement. A striking feature of the study, however, was that participants presented with some features of identification and avoidance in relation to the accounts but appeared to engage with the actual victims in the accounts at a cognitive distance rather than from an empathic position. Participants made use of various defensive styles and strategies such as intellectualization and rationalization. It is possible that responding to media reports is different from other forms of exposure to anecdotal accounts as given that it is presented in written form the material lends itself to some degree of analysis and cognitive distance that might reduce the impact of this kind of exposure. However, some of the participants seemed to feel that they had a desire to connect with the experiences of others, even when reading about this in newspapers, but expressed that they had become emotionally blunted in response to a sense of over-exposure to emotionally distressing accounts of crime. These participants seemed to be aware of

and describe what in other literature might be referred to as a degree of compassion fatigue and empathic failure.Others did not necessarily prioritize connection with the experiences of others and were able to maintain a distance without concern.

The difference in the way that therapists respond to their patient's material as compared to the way in which participants responded to the written accounts of crime may be located in the underlying intention of the two levels of engagement. The aim of therapeutic work with victims of trauma is situated in the perception that witnessing another person's story and engaging with the person from a position of empathy can assist the person to integrate and make sense of their experience. The focus of therapy is thus on the 'other' but can result in quite distressing alterations to schemas and challenges for the therapist. Reading or witnessing accounts of crime in a newspaper is vastly different as the focus seems to be on 'self' as opposed to other. Participants related to the articles by gauging the personal threat for themselves and their loved ones and seemed to analyze the material from a cognitive distance to avoid the emotional impact and to assess their own situations in respect of their safety in comparison to the newspaper accounts. It thus seems that vicarious traumatization is not an entirely accurate description of the dynamic observed in the responses of participants even though they certainly presented with interesting features that seem to call for a particular theoretical description that captures some degree of indirect traumatization. There is perhaps greater evidence of indirect traumatization than vicarious traumatization given that the mechanism of identification or over-identification seemed to play a less significant role in the context of media exposure. There was nevertheless evidence of some kind of trauma response and a defensive attempt to deal with this.

Another finding of the study is that participants engaged in meaning making processes to sustain a sense of hope and optimism for South Africa and to reconcile with living in an evidently dangerous context. The defensive styles and coping strategies noted in the study seemed to function to sustain a 'balanced', optimistic outlook and participants used various attempts to distance themselves emotionally from the accounts of crime. However, there seemed to be a sense of sacrifice, compromise and disillusionment in participants' descriptions of daily life in South Africa that left little emotional energy for participants to think about how they could contribute

meaningfully to positive development in South Africa. Participants tried to understand why crime happens, tried to assess the underlying intention of criminal acts, and offered multiple explanations in this regard. This aspect of the discussion brought up most disagreement in the groups and there appeared to be some censoring of what might be considered overly racist or politically conservative views.

The participants' descriptions of Afrikaners suggested that there was confusion and ambivalence in respect of Afrikaner identity but it seemed that reading about crime evoked questions about identity and place. It seemed as if Afrikaners as a group could be considered vulnerable to the psychological impact of exposure to crime due to the potential threat to meaning that crime seems to provoke. It was apparent that Afrikaner identity and culture appeared to shape the meaning and attributions made by the participants about reported crime.

The participants responded strongly to the portrayal of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper. They expressed concerns about the level of sensationalism and detailed reporting of criminal incidents in *Beeld*, and worried that the articles propagated racism and misperceptions about the realities of crime in South Africa. Participants felt that *Beeld* misrepresented elements of society to its Afrikaans readers and deliberately stirred indignation and disquiet. It also seemed that participants were concerned that negative understandings of crime could be validated by the way in which *Beeld* reported on crime.

Thus, exposure to the three accounts of crime in the context of the focus groups resulted in features of indirect traumatization and processes that resonate with but are different to vicarious traumatization. Participants seemed keen to engage in discussions related to meaning making and understandings of crime in the South African context but there appeared to be some features of disillusionment and emotional depletion in the quality and tone of their responses. Factors related to Afrikaner identity and the portrayal of crime in the *Beeld* newspaper were explored spontaneously in the groups and appeared to result in additional strain in the process of understanding the emotional impact and making sense of crime in the country.

5.2. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

There are a few of limitations that need to be considered in relation to the study. The first limitation is that the study made use of a small sample and for this reason the findings, as is the case with much qualitative research, are not easily generalizable even within the population group that was the focus of the study. Furthermore, the use of focus groups did not allow for the exploration of individual dynamics. Another limitation of the study is that the participants were generally representative of 'liberal' rather than 'traditional' Afrikaners and were invested in being positive about South Africa. Whilst they reflected on traditional Afrikaner views, they did not generally engage in the kind of anecdotal discussions previously observed by the researcher. It was challenging to find participants for the study and it may be that the people who hold more 'traditional' or less hopeful views about South Africa were not willing to spend time to talk about crime in a structured setting. The setting of the focus groups and the use of three articles may have been a further limitation in the study as the task was somewhat artificial in that people would generally not necessarily read three accounts of crime in detail and then proceed to reflect intensely on such content. However, the groups were exposed to 'real' stimuli in the sense that these were accounts of crime that had appeared in *Beeld* in a particular month and were typical of such reports.

The limitations do not seem to detract from the possible strength of this study in that it aimed to systematically understand the psychological impact of media exposure to crime, an experience shared by many South Africans. Future research is recommended to continue to explore the impact of different forms of indirect exposure to accounts of crime in South Africa for a range of groups. There may also be some benefit in adopting a longitudinal design that attempts to understand ongoing and cumulative impacts and the duration of responses to such accounts of traumatic events.

5.3. Reflexive commentary

It is important to consider the impact of the researcher in the process of qualitative research. The researcher is Afrikaans-speaking and the participants seemed to be comfortable to engage openly and honestly in the focus groups because of their perception that the researcher shared their experiences and understood their language

and culture. Participants may have responded unconsciously to the researcher's vested interest in making sense of the Afrikaner experience of crime in South Africa and the researcher's personal criticisms of some traditional Afrikaner views and ideologies and this may have contributed to the more 'liberal' tone of the group discussion. However, the researcher did attempt to convey as little overt judgment as possible.

The notion of reflexivity allows for the possibility that engagement with participants can lead to personal change in the researcher (Banister et al., 2006). This has certainly been the case in this study, as the researcher's exploration of crime, South African history and Afrikaner identity has resulted in deepened insights. It has been both interesting and disturbing to consider the impact of exposure to crime and the researcher was struck by the potential negative impact of crime on the ability of South Africans to engage meaningfully with each other. The loss of skilled people due to emigration is a very visible impact related to crime and emerged as a consideration in the groups. However, the researcher found the threat of emotional disinvestment of those who are still in the country, the most disturbing apparent impact of crime. Also, even though the researcher's views in respect of Afrikaner history and traditional ideologies have not changed, the researcher found herself feeling a greater sense of empathy for the experiences of the Afrikaner group in South Africa at the present time.

One hopes that the problem of crime can be addressed, not only because it has a political and social impact, but also because of its psychological impact on the people of South Africa.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participation information sheet



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Dagsê

My naam is Talia Thompson en ek doen navorsing ten einde my Meestersgraad in Kliniese Sielkunde te verwerf. Die doel van my studie is om Afrikaanse mense se ervaringe van *Beeld* artikels wat verband hou met geweld te ondersoek. Ek wil u graag nooi om deel te neem aan hierdie studie.

Deelname in hierdie navorsing sal beteken dat u vir omtrent ‘n uur-en-‘n-half beskikbaar moet wees om deel te neem aan ‘n fokusgroep. ‘n Fokusgroep is ‘n gesprek tussen vier tot agt mense. Die fokusgroep sal gereël word in ‘n tyd wat almal pas op ‘n weeksaand of ‘n Saterdagoggend. Die fokusgroep proses sal, met jou toestemming, opgeneem word om akkuraatheid te verseker. Deelname is vrywillig. U mag besluit om sekere vrae nie te beantwoord nie en kan enige tyd van die studie onttrek. Al u insette sal vertroulik beskou word en geen identifiserende informasie sal in die navorsingsverslag ingesluit word nie. Ek sal al die deelnemers vra om tot konfidensialiteit in te stem, maar ek kan nie waarborg dat deelnemers konfidensialiteit sal waarneem nie.

Die gevolgtrekkinge van die navorsing sal in ‘n navorsingsverslag uiteengesit word en ‘n opsomming van die bevindinge sal beskikbaar gemaak word aan enige deelnemers wat dit graag wil hê. Reëlings in hierdie verband kan gemaak word deur my te kontak. Ek sal ‘n elektroniese of harde kopie van die opsomming stuur aan die wat dit versoek. Die gevolgtrekkings kan ook in ‘n joernaalartikel of konferensievoorlegging gebruik word.

U deelname in die studie sal opreg waardeer word. Hierdie navorsing sal bydra tot ‘n beter begrip van die gevolge van artikels oor geweld. Indien u instem om deel te neem in die studie kan ek gekontak word telefonies, 073 205 1364, of per e-pos, talia@iburst.co.za.

Vriendelike groete
Talia Thompson

Appendix B: Consent form (to participate in the focus group)

Ek _____ gee toestemming vir my deelname in die fokusgroep waarin Afrikaans mense se ervaringe van *Beeld* artikels wat verband hou met geweld ondersoek word deur Talia Thompson. Ek verstaan dat:

- Deelname in die studie vrywillig is.
- Ek mag weier om vrae te beantwoord as ek dit verkies.
- Ek enige tyd van die studie mag onttrek sonder enige negatiewe gevolge vir my.
- Geen informasie wat my kan identifiseer in die navorsingsverslag ingesluit word nie.
- Ek die artikels wat ek gaan lees ontstellend mag vind.
- Ek geen voordeel gaan trek uit deelname nie.

Handtekening _____

Appendix C: Consent form (recording of focus group)

Ek _____ gee toestemming dat my deelname in die fokusgroep onderhoud met Talia Thompson, waarin Afrikaans mense se ervaringe van *Beeld* artikels wat verband hou met geweld ondersoek word, opgeneem mag word. Ek verstaan dat:

- Die kasette en transkripsies net deur die navorser and haar opsiener prosesseer sal word en sal veilig toegesluit word in ‘n kabinet by die universiteit.
- Alle opnames sal vernietig word na die navorsing voltooi en eksamineer is.
- Geskikte aanhalings van die onderhoude mag in die navorsingsverslag ingesluit word, maar identifiserende informasie sal uitgesluit word.

Handtekening _____

Appendix D: Three selected Beeld newspaper articles

The three articles chosen for the focus groups reported on real life crime incidents, rather than commentary on policy, standards and statistics, and were all featured on the front page of the *Beeld* newspaper over the course of one month (Keppler, 2008a & 2008b; Mouton, 2008). No photographic material was used.

Man voor kinders geskiet

7 Januarie 2008

Virginia Keppler

’n Pa van Waterkloofrif in Pretoria is eergister sowat ’n kilometer van die huis van die nasionale polisiehoof komm. Jackie Selebi voor sy kinders en vrou in ’n huisrooftog doodgeskiet.

Mnr. Fred Picton-Turbervill (46) van Ariesstraat is enkele ure later op sy oudste seun, Jamie, wat in Engeland woon, se 21ste verjaardag dood.

Selebi woon in Delphinusstraat en dit loop dood in Ariesstraat.

Picton-Turbervill, ’n direkteur van ’n meubelvervaardigingsmaatskappy, sy vrou, Ursula (41), en hul kinders Samantha (10), Bryony (9), Natasha (6) en Gregory (3) is eergisteraand om 21:30 deur twee gewapende rowers tuis oorval.

Die rowers het ’n skootrekenaar, vier selfone en sowat R1 000 kontant gesteel.

Picton-Turbervill het gister by ’n vriendin, me. Kim Tucker, se huis in Waterkloofrif gesê die rowers het “my kinders se lewens vir flippen selfone verwoes”.

Picton-Turbervill het gesê die kinders het in en uit die huis gehardloop en sy en haar man het televisie gekyk toe die rowers toegeslaan het en hulle beveel het om plat te lê.

“Hulle het geskreeu ‘slaap, slaap!’ en ‘geld, geld’. Ons het almal in die eetkamer plat gaan lê.

“My man het vir hulle gevra om asseblief nie die kinders seer te maak nie. Hy het ook gevra of die kinders nie na ’n ander kamer kan gaan nie, maar die rowers wou nie,” het sy hartseer gesê.

“Een van die rowers het skielik my man, wat half opgetrek agter my gelê het, deur die oog in die kop geskiet.

“Hy het op my neergesak. Samantha het huilend klein Gregory se oë toegedruk sodat hy nie moes sien hoe hul pa hom doodbloei nie, terwyl Bryony en Natasha net doodstil gelê het.

“Hulle het my toe deur die huis na ons kamer geneem waar ek vir hulle my juwelekissie en my man se beursie gegee het.”

Die rowers het haar terug na die kinders geneem voordat hulle gevlug het.

“Nadat hulle weg is, het ek die kinders in die motor gelaai en na Kim se huis gejaag vir hulp. Ek het die kinders daar gelaat en terug na my huis gejaag om by my man te waak terwyl ons op die polisie gewag het,” het sy huilend vertel.

Mnr. Hugo Minnaar, ’n nooddienswerker van LifeMed, het gesê toe hulle op die toneel kom, het Picton-Turbervill in ’n bedenklike toestand op die eetkamervloer gelê.

“Ons het hom op lewens- ondersteuningstoerusting geplaas en hom na die Little Company of Mary-hospitaal geneem waar hy later dood is,” het Minnaar gesê.

Picton-Turbervill het gesê haar man se hele regterbrein is beskadig. “Daar was niks wat hulle vir hom kon doen nie.”

Sy het gesê Jamie vlieg vandag na Suid-Afrika om by hulle te wees.

Dit was gister nie duidelik of Selebi bewus was van die voorval so naby sy huis nie. Dir. Sally de Beer, nasionale polisiewoordvoerder, kon nie sê of Selebi by die Picton-Turbevill-gesin gaan aanklop om te simpatiseer nie, maar het gesê “as hy dit wel sou doen, sal hy verkies dat dit privaat gehou word”.

Kapt. Lucas Sithole, polisiewoordvoerder, het gesê die polisie ondersoek die voorval.

Kleuterhoof in hart geskiet

29 Januarie 2008

Virginia Keppler

’n Kleuterskoolhoof van Pretoria is Saterdagnag met ’n enkele skoot in die hart doodgeskiet nadat drie gewapende rowers haar en haar gesin tuis oorval het.

Die rowers het met net ’n selfoon uit die huis in Aquilastraat, Waterkloofrif, gevlug.

Mev. Rinda Abraham (55) se man, Eric (60), en twee van hul seuns, Reggie (35) en Christo (34), het vergeefs probeer om haar aan die lewe te hou terwyl hulle op ’n ambulans gewag het.

Mev. Abraham, hoof van die Kleutermaatjies-kleuterskool in Centurion, se dood volg nadat mnr. Fred Picton-Turbervill (46) van Ariesstraat, Waterkloofrif, vroeër vandeesmaand voor sy vrou en kinders in die kop geskiet is. Hy is enkele ure ná die aanval dood.

“Ek gaan my poppietjie nooit weer terug kry nie,” het mnr. Abraham gister huilend gesê.

Christo en sy vriend, mnr. Theunis Claassen (34), het in die televisiekamer gesit en gesels toe die rowers toegeslaan het.

“Die volgende oomblik het iemand sy kop by die skuifdeur ingesteek en gesê ons moet stil en kalm bly.

“Nog twee het hom gevolg. Twee van hulle was gewapen,” het Christo gesê.

Christo se hond het op een van die rowers afgestorm, waarop ’n ander rower ’n skoot afgevuur het wat die hond rakelings op die bolip getref het.

“Nog ’n skoot het afgegaan en het die televisie en DVD-speler getref.

“Een van die rowers het voor my en Theunis gestaan en sy vuurwapen op ons gerig terwyl die ander een by die DVD-speler gestaan het en geprobeer het om dit uit te kry,” het Christo vertel.

Sy ouers het intussen van die skote wakker geword. Mev. Abraham het in die gang afgehardloop terwyl sy na Christo geroep het.

Reggie (35), wat ook al in die bed was, het ook by sy kamerdeur uitgekom.

“Ek het in my kamer teruggegaan om my vuurwapen te kry.

“Skielik was daar ’n rower in die gang wat agter my ma weggekruip het. Toe gryp hy haar aan haar nek en skiet haar in die hart,” het Reggie gesê. Christo het ook gesien hoe sy ma geskiet word. “Haar laaste woorde was ‘Christo, ek is geskiet’ en toe sak sy inmekaar,” het hy vertel. Die rowers het daarna met Christo se selfoon gevlug.

“Ek weet die lewe moet aangaan, maar vir my het dit tot stilstand gekom. Die liewe Here weet alleen hoekom hulle haar vir ’n selfoon doodgeskiet het,” het mnr. Abraham gesê.

Die Abrahams se jongste seun, Eric jr. (30), het gesê sy ma se dood is die hartseerste ding wat ooit met hom gebeur het.

“Ek mis my ma,” het hy gesê en toe in sy hande gesnik.

Kapt. Prince Mokhabela, polisiewoordvoerder, het gesê die polisie ondersoek die voorval.

Mev. Abraham word Vrydag om 12:00 uit die Lede in Christus-kerk in Centurion begrawe.

- Hilda Fourie berig die drie verdagtes in die moord op Picton-Turbervill het gister vlugtig in die hof verskyn en die saak is uitgestel tot 15 Februarie.

Verkrag ná moord-trauma

30 Januarie 2008

Carla Mouton

Skaars vier maande nadat sy op haar vermoorde verloofde se lyk afgekom het, is ’n jong vrou in haar woonstel in Lydenburg in Mpumalanga aangerand en verkrag.

Me. Mariska Louw (22) sê ’n man het haar Vrydagaand in haar woonstel in Lydenburg ingewag toe sy van ’n partytjie teruggekom het.

Louw het gesê Beeld mag haar naam publiseer, maar wil nie dat ’n gesigfoto van haar in die koerant verskyn nie omdat sy nie op straat herken wil word nie. Sy het verlede maand van Centurion na Lydenburg getrek om ’n nuwe begin te maak ná die trauma waardeur sy verlede jaar was.

Louw se motor is in September verlede jaar gekaap. Tien dae later het haar verloofde, mnr. Werner van Jaarsveldt, mense met die motor sien ry. Hy het die polisie gebel en die motor agternagesit, maar is deur vermoedelik die kapers doodgeskiet. Louw het op sy lyk in Midrand afgekom. Hulle sou in November getrou het.

Oor die verkragting sê sy: “Ek het so 00:20 huis toe gegaan. Die voordeur was gesluit toe ek daar kom. Ek het dit weer gesluit en ’n asbak saam met my boontoe (die eerste vloer van die duplekswoonstel) gevat. Toe ek die badkamerdeur oopmaak, het ’n man kaal daar gestaan. Hy het my aan my keel gegryp.”

Louw, wat talle skraap-, byt- en kneusplekke op haar lyf het, sê sy het hom met die asbak oor die kop geslaan. Ná ’n hewige bakleiery het die man haar aan die hare badkamer toe gesleep en haar parfuumbottel teen die bad se kant stukkend geslaan.

“Hy het gesê: ‘Shut up or I will kill you.’ Hy het my klere wat hy uit die wasgoedmandjie gegooi het, geskeur en my mond, bene en hande vasgedraai.”

Nadat hy haar op haar bed verkrag het, het hy haar kop ook met geskeurde klere toegedraai en haar aan die bad se pyp vasgemaak. “Ek het gehoor hy sluit my kamer se deur. Ek kon nie asem kry nie.”

Louw het haar later losgewoel en by die venster om hulp gaan roep, net om te sien hoe die man uit haar Toyota Yaris klim en weghardloop. Uit vrees dat hy sou terugkom, was sy te bang om weer te skree. Die man is met haar selfoon weg.

Sy het in haar kamer gewag tot sy later die oggend (Saterdag) werkers op die perseel se selfoon geleen het om haar ouers en ’n vriendin met ’n spaarsleutel vir haar woonstel te bel.

Mnr. Pieter Louw, haar pa, sê wat hom die meeste pla is dat die polisie nie opgedaag het nie toe die bure hulle Vrydagaand gebel het tydens die voorval. Hulle het sy dogter se geskreeu gehoor.

“Die bure is later self na die polisiestasie toe en het hulle gaan haal. Die polisie het toe net op die woonstel gelig en rondom gestap en toe weer gery. Die verkragter was toe nog in die woonstel.

“My kind kon dood gewees het en die polisie kon haar gered het,” het Louw gesê. Sy dogter kry antiretrovirale behandeling.

Supt. Abie Khoabane, polisiewoordvoerder in Mpumalanga, het die verkrag- en aanrandingsaak bevestig. Volgens hom het die polisie geen klagte van swak dienslewering ontvang nie.