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Between the bars and between the lines

***Exploring the Meaning of Fatherhood: An Analysis of a Letter-Writing
Initiative with Male Minors in a Brazilian Juvenile Detention Centre***

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Contents

Introduction.....	p. 5
Chapter I – Framework.....	p. 7
1.1 - Psychological Construct of Fatherhood.....	p. 8
1.1.1 – Masculinity.....	p. 8
1.1.2 – Fatherhood.....	p. 17
1.2 - Journaling and Expressive Writing.....	p. 30
Chapter II – Context and Methodology.....	p. 39
2.1 - Data Analysis Method and Technique.....	p. 40
2.2 - Contextual Background and Project Presentation.....	p. 51
2.3 - Data Corpus Presentation.....	p. 58
Chapter III – Results.....	p. 67
3.1 - Research Findings.....	p. 68
3.2 – Discussion.....	p. 81
Conclusion.....	p. 89
References.....	p. 95

Introduction

The present work finds its origins in the internship experience that I had the privilege to undertake from September to December 2022 within the Detention Centre for young males, known as FUNASE CASE, located in Petrolina, Pernambuco, Brazil. This opportunity materialized thanks to the option provided by the Ulisse Grant of the University of Padua, an international mobility project to countries outside the European Union. Specifically, the University of Padua (UNIPD) established a bilateral agreement with the State University of Bahia (UNEB), named Intereurisland, a research and exchange program directed by Dr. Nicola Andrian. The Intereurisland program "promotes the development of pro-social citizenship, intercultural dialogue, and peace, especially among the younger generations, by implementing and disseminating innovative strategies of internationalization, the university's social responsibility to its community, democratic participation, and GloCal Service Learning"¹ (Andrian, 2020). In the role of an internship student, my task was to implement an activity aimed at the residents of the detention facility, following a period of observation and mutual acquaintance, as well as after approval from the entire socio-educational team. During my stay, I became aware of the absence of the paternal figure within this context, and that regardless of the various life stories present, this was an evident common denominator. Consequently, I chose to collaborate with the adolescents on a letter-writing project, while meticulously respecting the constraints imposed by the situation. This initiative was grounded in the theoretical perspective of journaling or expressive writing. Each young person was freely invited to write a letter addressed to their father and, subsequently, another to their own child. The aim of this project was to fully comprehend the complexity of the paternal role within this specific context. It is important to emphasize that throughout the execution of this project, the needs for space, silence, and privacy inherent to each individual and the act of writing were delicately observed. Nothing will be undertaken in a manner that violates their privacy. The first chapter will provide the theoretical background upon which this research is founded. The second, more technical chapter, will be dedicated to the context and methodology. The third chapter will focus on interpreting the results of this analysis.

¹ <http://intereurisland.blogspot.com/2021/09/ii-cyber-incontro-internazionale-di.html>

Chapter I

Framework

The present study aims to examine the role of the father and the experience of this parental relationship, specifically within the context of minors deprived of their liberty.

In particular, the focus is on the juvenile institution of Petrolina, located in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil.

This chapter is intended to provide an overview of the relevant literature that underlies the research.

Initially, in the first section of this chapter, the notion of masculinity and consequently, fatherhood, is discussed in more general terms. Then these themes are further explored within this specific context, including significant theoretical perspectives, such as Attachment Theory and Psychoanalytic Theory.

Subsequently, in the second section of this chapter, the theoretical framework of the Journaling methodology, or Expressive Writing, is presented, taking into account its potential, involved mechanisms, diverse functions, and the adolescent target audience on which this research concentrates.

1.1 - Psychological Construct of Fatherhood

Before presenting the literary framework of this research, it should be emphasized that discussions about the constructs of masculinity and fatherhood must recognise them as variable, changing constructs over time (history) and space (culture), within societies and across biographies and life courses (Kimmel, 2005).

Furthermore, while staying within the realm of social sciences approaches, these vary and span across different disciplines, theoretical perspectives, and methodologies. In this elaboration, psychology is, of course, the main stage, although many of the contributions remain interdisciplinary (Botton, 2007).

Many books and articles have been fundamental to the realisation of this chapter; in particular: *Masculinities* (Connell 1995; 2005), *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities* (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2004). In both handbooks, the authors initially trace the concept of masculinities back to its roots. What follows is a summary of their work.

1.1.1. – Masculinity

Since the evolutionary studies of the 19th century, the analysis of masculinity has been derived from naturalistic schemes that have considered it as a biological product of human evolution. In this approach, masculinity was essentially conceived as a sexual-biological characteristic, circumscribed by the presence or absence of a physical attribute, namely the penis. Consequently, the idea was established that men's personality and social actions were intrinsically linked to their body structure (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2004).

The first overcoming of this naturalistic conception of masculinity is Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory.

In *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities* the authors point out how psychoanalysis first demonstrated that "adult character was not predetermined by the body but was constructed, through emotional attachments to others, in a turbulent process of growth" (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2004, p. 12).

Freud, although he never wrote a systematic discussion of masculinity (Connell, 2005), understood that sexuality and gender were not fixed by nature, but were constructed through a long and conflictual process, of which the *Oedipus Complex* was the key moment (Freud, 1905).

Freud describes the Oedipus Complex in *On sexuality: Three essays on the theory of sexuality and other works* (1905). He identifies the Oedipal crisis as a formative moment of masculinity based on family relationships, particularly when the child develops a sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex and may perceive the parent of the same sex as a rival. According to this theory, a key step in masculinity is the stage of fear of castration that the child experiences towards his rival, after the latter discovers his son's love for his mother and wishes to take revenge on his son. The Oedipus complex would only find resolution when the child accepts his role, renouncing his desire for his mother and accessing the male world (Freud, 1905).

In addition, Freud developed the concept of *superego*, which is formed as a result of the Oedipus complex, due to internalised parental prohibitions. Freud gradually came to see that the superego had a gendered character, as norms and expectations regarding gender roles are often strongly internalised during the Oedipus complex. Relationships and experiences with parents and primary attachment figures play a key role in shaping gender identity in the individual and the formation of the superego. Consequently, the superego reflects cultural norms concerning gender and social expectations on male or female behaviour (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973).

In summary, Freud made a fundamental contribution providing an initial map of the development of masculinity, emphasising both its limitations and complexities, and accepting that it is impossible to define it purely. This is because each personality is a complex structure and cannot be considered as a transparent unit, in which emotions and aspects coexist and often contradict each other (Connell, 2005).

In the next generation, anthropologists such as Bronisław Malinowski and Margaret Mead brought attention to culture and social context as key factors in the formation of human identities and behaviour, and to emphasise the importance of social structures, cultural norms and social expectations in shaping gender behaviour (Connell, 2005).

For example, in her book *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1963), Mead showed that gender roles are not universal or biologically predetermined, rather

they are constructed and influenced by the culture and social context in which people live (Mead, 1963).

In the second half of the 20th century, feminist scholars, such as Judith Butler, played a central role in challenging the idea of essentialism related to sexuality, pointing out that it is not biological characteristics that determine the ways in which people behave in society, but rather gender concepts, which are cultural and social constructions, just as the construct of masculinity itself (Connell, 2005).

According to *Sex Role Theory*, masculinity has been understood in the psychological, sociological, and anthropological fields as an internalised identity that reflects the specific norms or values of a particular culture (Kimmel, 2005), rather than an intrinsic or biologically determined characteristic.

The first significant attempt to create a social science of masculinity focused on the concept of a *male sex role*. The use of role as a technical term in the social sciences provided a practical way to link the idea of a place in the social structure to cultural norms. Being a man or a woman implies adhering to a general set of expectations related to one's sex - the sex role. According to this perspective, in any cultural context there are always two sex roles, one male and one female. Masculinity and femininity can be seen as *internalised sex roles*, the result of social learning (Connell, 1995).

Connell argues that an advantage of role theory over psychoanalysis is that it views masculinity as an internalised masculine sex role, thus allowing for the possibility of internal conflicts in masculinity arising from conflicting or difficult to meet social expectations, and allowing for social change (Connell, 1995).

Then, as authors Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell (2004) write, over the decades, studies on masculinity, although modest in the 1950s and 1960s, gradually gained relevance in the 1970s and 1980s. During a phase called the *masculinity crisis*, questions emerged about the universality of alleged male supremacy. In addition, hypotheses were put forward based on qualitative analyses, particularly of a psychological nature, which highlighted a sense of male vulnerability in the face of issues such as violence, emotional indifference and suffering linked to the social construction of masculinity (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2004).

This theory found opposition in the theory of *male dominance* (Bourdieu, 1990).

On the one hand, then, there is the man of a sensitive nature, the victim of the degrading

processes and rituals linked to the construction of the ideal of masculinity, and on the other hand, the man considered virile who resorts to physical or symbolic violence, either consciously or unconsciously, to preserve his dominant status (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2004).

The fundamental next step in overcoming the social determinism of sex role theory was taken by Raewyn Connell, the author named at the beginning of the chapter in *Masculinities* (2005); she conceptualised masculinity as "a configuration of practice around men's position in the structure of gender relations" (Connell, 2005; p.112), referring to how men behave, identify and interact in society in relation to gender expectations and social roles. 'Practice configuration' refers to the concrete actions and behaviours that men adopt to conform to or resist socially imposed models of masculinity. 'Position of men in the structure of gender relations' refers to the location of men within power structures and gender dynamics. Both are not fixed, but change according to the cultural, social and economic context.

Connell in *Masculinities* (2005), using the plural form in the title of her book, refers to different socially and historically constructed masculinities that interact.

In general, masculinities cannot be studied or understood on their own, and "to understand gender, we must constantly go beyond gender" (Connell, 2005; p.104). Her theory is arguably the most influential in the field of men and masculinities (Wedgwood, 2009).

She starts from Freud's thought that masculine and feminine currents coexist in both men and women and that gender is constructed in a long and conflictual process (Connell, 1995), and from here she inserts individuals into broad social structures (such as gender), making them real and living persons. Thus, even bodies themselves are "confronted by the social process and drawn into history, without ceasing to be bodies. They do not become symbols, signs, or positions in discourse" (Connell, 1995, p. 64), and are in a process of change within social processes.

A further important step was to reconceptualise the theory of *hegemonic masculinity*, an over-used and over-emphasised concept; in this regard, she writes: "This focus on gender relations among men is necessary to keep the analysis dynamic, to prevent the recognition of multiple masculinities from collapsing into a typology of character" (Connell, 1995, p. 76).

It would now be appropriate to place the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the specific context of this research. To do so, it is essential to delve deeper into the construct of hegemonic/toxic masculinity, as many authors have found evidence of this type of masculinity within prison systems (Sabo & Kupers, 2001). Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as the dominant notion of masculinity in a given historical context, comprising those aspects that promote dominance over others, particularly over women, and a hierarchy of inter-masculine dominance (Connell, 1987).

Several studies have shown that masculinity, referred to as hegemonic or toxic in the sense explained earlier, “tends to proliferate wildly in prison” (Kupers, 2005, p.6). In other words, it “dominates” prison culture in this sense. Gender relations in prison serve as a pronounced reflection of the gender relations in society at large, which are amplified and accentuated within the prison context (Kupers, 2017).

Kupers, a psychologist and therapist, expert on prison contexts, writes: "Being a man is not a given, it has to be achieved" (Kupers, 2017; p.4), and identifies certain structural elements evident within the context of the male prison system, such as an excessive hierarchy of dominance in which the “real men”, i.e., the most hostile and tough individuals, are at the top of the ladder of dominance and exert control over those who are less aggressive, i.e., the weaklings at the base of the hierarchy. Moreover, the base of the hierarchy is also associated with femininity. When a man is labelled as a loser, weak, homosexual, it is suggested that he is inferior, and consequently assimilated to a female figure. Conversely, when a man sexually assaults another and subdues him, he is necessarily dominant. Thus, at this level, there is a clear limitation of personal opportunities with strong consequences, because men are pushed to behave in extremely masculine and dominant ways in order to prove that they do not possess characteristics considered feminine (Kupers, 2005; 2017).

Undoubtedly, this emphasisation of male hypersexualisation is a feature that contributes to reinforcing the misogyny and toxicity of masculinity that form the core of male prison culture. Thus, even the very concept of sex changes shape in prison and intensifies, becoming inextricably linked to dynamics of power and domination; those with power, on average, use their power to abuse those with less power.

Prison is a microcosm where a code reigns, which is basically the exaggeration of the

unspoken male code outside the microcosm. The code has tacit rules, and among these is surely the impossibility of showing vulnerability, of relating to people belonging to other groups, of talking or snitching, of remaining in solidarity with one's own group (Kupers, 2005; 2017).

Within the prison microcosm, there are several important concepts to emphasise.

Among these, there is the notion of respect, which, while not inherently toxic, can become toxic when pursued through coercion, intensifying the toxicity associated with masculinity. In prison there is an intensification of the dynamic whereby the man who feels he cannot be respected is the one who feels a strong impulse to dominate others. This can lead to violent episodes or the intensification of certain attitudes, such as posturing as a tough guy and outbursts of anger rather than reflection (Gerzon, 1982). This is also exacerbated by the fact that in most cases these men tend to come from low-income communities, and many suffer from drug and alcohol problems, or have experienced violence (Steiner, Garcia & Mathews, 1997).

There is another microcosm within the prison microcosm, which is that of the juvenile prison, where hypermasculinity is even more evident. In fact, as Messerschmidt shows in his study (1993), adolescents or young men use crime as a tool to construct a stereotyped form of masculinity, which facilitates the transition from adolescence to adulthood and guarantees the approval of their peers, fathers, and other extremely masculine role models. In particular, they carry out actions with the sole purpose of proving their masculinity or demonstrating that they are male enough to be part of a group, bragging to other men about sexual experiences or even sexual violence behaviour. Even more than adults, young men approach crime and violence as a means of attesting to their virility. These behaviours happen more commonly in low-income or Afro-American young men (Miller, 1996).

A further step is the understanding and acceptance of the fact that this hypermasculinity present in the prison phenomenon is not solely due to a set of individual characteristics of male inmates, but also to institutional dynamics, where both inmates and staff are victims. Indeed, toxic masculinity with all its consequences cannot be attributed solely to the personality of individuals. It would be more appropriate to speak of an emerging mechanism that is a consequence of the control of authoritarian individuals and collaborators over another group, composed of the inmates. To this end, Haney and

Zimbardo pointed out that in situations where one group exerts absolute control over another group, there is a tendency towards the emergence of acts of brutal cruelty towards prisoners (Haney & Zimbardo, 1977).

As mentioned earlier, within the confines of the prison microcosm, it's crucial to underscore a specific element, the closure and immobility of this environment; if one wants to avoid a person, a circumstance, a confrontation, there are no alternatives, there are no escape routes, there is nowhere to go. And as Kupers (2005) points out, since escape is impossible, then adapting probably within the microcosm means adopting the prison code, which implies harshness as the key to survival, as the only alternative.

In addition, when discussing maximum-security prisons characterized by minimal social interaction, some authors have highlighted the detrimental effects of psychiatric symptoms, particularly their result in uncontrollable accumulations of rage (Cote & Hodgins, 1990). On the other hand, the phenomenon of prison overcrowding has also led to similar consequences, in particular a significant increase in violence, suicide and illness, and psychiatric symptoms (Thornberry & Call, 1983).

Clearly, the traits of hypermasculinity and especially the tendency not to expose one's vulnerabilities make mental health treatment difficult, leaving individuals even more carriers of their own problems.

Fortunately, several studies have shown that one can actually achieve mental health results despite the adverse conditions in this microcosm (Kivel, 1992).

In this regard, it is crucial mentioning the study *'Kidulthood': Ethnography, juvenile prison violence and the transition from 'boys' to 'men'* by Kate Gooch (2019). The article is a true ethnography describing how adolescents (ages 15-18) living in a juvenile detention centre (YOI) in England create violence, and how this then relates to the construct of masculinity in prison. This study is important because it first differentiates between juvenile and adult prison violence, and at the same time differentiates the concept of masculinity. Young adults in prison, in fact, experience a borderline condition between childhood and adulthood (Gooch, 2019).

Data show that in juvenile prisons, referred to as *young offender institutions* by the author (Gooch, 2019; p.1), there is a strong presence of violence and dangerousness, which takes

shape mainly in bullying and assault dynamics (MoJ, 2016).

Now that the concept of hegemonic-hypermasculinity in prison is clear, it is necessary to set it in the specific context of adolescent boys. Juvenile prisoners, as the ones involved in this research, are in a critical transitional phase, from childhood, to adolescence, and to adulthood (Gooch, 2019). Moreover, the situation is particular and complex if the site of this development is a very adult environment where they are first considered prisoners, and then boys (Gooch, 2016), and therefore how they experience and negotiate this development is also important (Robinson and Hockey, 2011).

If violence in adult prisons is primarily about masculinity, violence in juvenile prisons is also about this negotiation between boyhood and adulthood, and thus is strongly linked to the representation of masculinity, as if the acquisition of male status is inextricably linked to the use of violence (Kupers, 2005).

As was mentioned earlier, the construction of masculinity in prison is not a fixed entity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) but depends on the structure and environment (Ricciardelli et al., 2015); for example, there is a difference between a normal, maximum security, or juvenile prison (Newburn & Stanko, 2013).

Clearly, the juvenile prison context is the most sensitive because juveniles are growing up in special circumstances, and it is an interruption from the normal course of life (Gooch, 2016). Masculinity in this specific context is characterised, according to some authors, by the presence of a mask of toughness behind which fragility and vulnerability are hidden (Crewe, 2014). The author showed how victimisation was a central aspect in juvenile institutions and manifested itself mainly in the form of verbal and physical aggression, and robberies (Gooch, 2016). Physical violence is certainly common, but verbal abuse is surprisingly frequent to be described as a legitimate social interaction. The public dimension of these acts is explained by the need to credibly display masculinity (Goffman, 1956). In particular, the use of nursery rhymes to belittle another boy are harmful as they publicly humiliate him by attributing a childish status to him. In the context of juvenile prisons, using violence has two purposes in particular: to form a reputation as a man and to avoid being victimised (Gooch, 2019).

The primary reason for these mechanisms arises from the incomplete performance of identity and masculinity, where playing the part of the tough man inherently has a necessary counterpart that results in a series of defensive and protective behaviours

(Goffman, 1956). Among these, the support and complicity of peers is a necessary element to confirm the male status and show security; a mechanism accentuated by the presence of gangs, i.e. alliances formed based on territorial or geographical loyalties, "a group or collectivity of people engaged in significant illegitimate or criminal activities, primarily threatening and violent" (Curry and Spergel, 1988; p. 383).

The author highlights how this manifestation of violence is closely linked to emotions such as separation from family, lack of decision-making freedom, deprivation of material possessions and physical restriction. The feelings of anxiety that such situations entail are expressed in the form of violence, as the preservation of self and public identity is the most important need, and being weak (crying, self-harming, etc.) would undermine its integrity (Gooch, 2016).

Indeed, the author showed how, unlike adult prisons, the purpose of using violence includes the expressive motivation of negotiation and transition to adulthood, inevitably caused by being "catapulted into premature maturity" (Gooch, 2019; p.94).

Speaking of violence, data unanimously show that men's involvement in violent and criminal activities far exceeds that of women (Kimmel, 2000), and only a few of these are linked to the presence of mental illness, precisely no more than 10% (Gelles & Straus, 1988). Mental illness is only one of the possible causes of violence, as are biological arguments or evolutionary theories about competition for women. But as psychotherapist Roger Horrocks (1994) argues, men are not naturally aggressive, but certain societies in which they live are. And Kimmel (2000) adds that in addition to societies, diversity is affected by factors such as where they live, peer group, social position, race, and other factors (Messerschmidt, 1993).

So far, we have discussed the construct of masculinity, the specificities, and facets useful for a homogeneous understanding. It is now appropriate to follow the thread that runs from this construct to the construct of fatherhood. Echoing Evans and Wallace (2008), it is important to talk about masculinity but without considering it as a separate narrative of paternity, which remains the focus of this research.

1.1.2. – *Fatherhood*

Benczik's article *A importância da figura paterna para o desenvolvimento infantil* (2011) offers a comprehensive overview of the evolutions and transformations of the father's role (Benczik, 2011), which is important to report following Connell's (1995) thought. The author writes in his book that fatherhood can be studied in relation to multiple and alternative constructions of masculinity, including the hypermasculinity discussed above and the culturally determined concept of masculine identity (Connell, 1995).

To always move on a coherent psychological horizon, it is important to note once again the contribution of psychoanalysis, which attributes an important role to the father figure in the development and psyche of the child, affirming in the father a structuring role (Benczik, 2011). Following in Freud's footsteps, Argentinian psychoanalyst Arminda Aberastury writes that the father is of fundamental importance in the child's equilibrium, acting as a regulator that helps the child invest in the real world (Aberastury, 1991).

According to the psychoanalyst, the importance of the father figure in the child's developmental process becomes evident during two key phases. During the first months of life (six to twelve months), known as early genital organisation, when the child begins to manifest the need for a father figure; this physical and emotional involvement of the father in the child's daily life has a significant impact on the child's psychic organisation (Aberastury, 1991). And in adolescence when his sexual development leads him to understand his role in procreation, the father's role becomes even more relevant as the child faces the challenges of autonomy and identity (Muza, 1998).

To analyse the connection between masculinity and fatherhood, it is useful to refer to the model proposed by Pleck in his book *Fatherhood and Masculinity. The role of the father in child development* (2010), to observe and understand the interrelationships that flow between these two fundamental constructs. Based on the assumption that fatherhood and masculinity potentially intersect in multiple ways (Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005), the author proposes the *important father* hypothesis; with this, he argues that good fatherhood is one of many factors that promote good outcomes for children, that it has positive consequences independent of other influences such as a good mother, and that it has these consequences in ways that are not necessarily related to the masculinity of fathers (Pleck,

2010). The model presented is very long and complex, which is why only some information useful for this research will be selected. It is important to mention it first of all because the author breaks down the construct of fatherhood into two main elements: parental status and parenthood. By the first he means being a biological father (fertility status) or a social father (adoptive parent status or assuming parental responsibility); understood in this sense the dimensions to be considered are certainly the age at which the father became a parent (consider young fathers), the total number of children, the fact of having biological or social children. By the second meaning he means parenting in the pure sense of the term (*fathering*). In his model, he points out that the most frequently used construct in the study of male fatherhood is paternal involvement; this means not only the amount of fathers' interactions with their children, but a broader concept that includes the actual paternal identity (Lamb, Pleck & Levine, 1985). Furthermore, Pleck's model provides a theoretical framework for understanding how conceptions of masculinity and fatherhood are interconnected and mutually influence each other, and how the role of father can vary according to masculinity orientation within specific social and cultural contexts.

In contemporary research on fatherhood, there is often an implicit or explicit assumption of a shift from 'old' to 'new' fathers (Sandberg, Agoff & Fondevila, 2022).

The intimate (Dermott, 2008), caring (Lamb, 1987) or involved (Pleck, 2010) father is often linked to new trends in fatherhood, and these new practices and representations of fatherhood are frequently linked to middle-class societies in the West. However, labelling contemporary fatherhood exclusively shaped by a single paradigm fails to fully grasp the intricate nature of the paternal role (Williams, 2008). Collier and Sheldon (2008) have described contemporary fatherhood as fragmented, and Dermott (2014) conceives of it as a *collection of fatherhoods*.

It is important to look at multiple studies to consider different elements, which play a decisive role in orienting the collective perception of father figures (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2004); the context of this research is a specific one, investigating the role of fatherhood within a male juvenile prison and involving individuals belonging to a low socioeconomic status.

Entering the specific context of Brazil and Latin America, where this research originated, some interesting studies were found that are important to highlight because traditionally Latin America is associated with *machismo identities* (Ingoldsby, 1991). Some authors speak of a slower and more gradual change, compared to the western part of the world, where in general domestic and family responsibilities remain largely the responsibility of women; these changes have come to be known as the crisis of the patriarchal family model and the democratisation of family relations (Jelin, 2005).

Kimmel (2005), in his previously mentioned book, presents the study *O Mito da Masculinidade* (Nolasco, 1993); this examines the father-son relationship, and writes that paternity in Brazil represents the most conflicting core of male identity (Nolasco, 1993). Some predictors of teenage pregnancy are disadvantaged social backgrounds (characterised by violence and a poor and limited future outlook), a childhood history of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, delinquent or criminal behaviour, single parent families or divorced parents, having teenage parents, the presence of a parent with an alcohol or drug problem, the presence of a household member with mental illness or with a history of imprisonment (Fasula et al., 2019). As Amato (1998) writes, “an adolescent father is more an adolescent than a father” (Amato, 1998; p.1).

According to the 2023 World Report², the Ministry of Justice on detention conditions in Brazil reports that as of December 2021, more than 679,500 people were detained in Brazil, exceeding the prison capacity by 45%. Of these, 13,684 in juvenile detention (Brazilian Public Security Forum). One in six Latin American youth and one in 17 Caucasian youth born in the same year are likely to be behind bars (Children's Defence Fund, 2007).

In this regard, the study *A conceptual model of incarcerated adolescent fatherhood: Adolescent identity development and the concept of intersectionality* (Shade et Al., 2011) concerning adolescent fathers in the justice system, explains the process through which young men experience the role and identity of father, including the concept of hegemonic

² <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/brazil>

masculinity and the concept of intersectionality. The study presents an interesting conceptual model related to adolescent fatherhood that illustrates two key concepts underlying the adolescent identity development process in boys: intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity (Figure A).

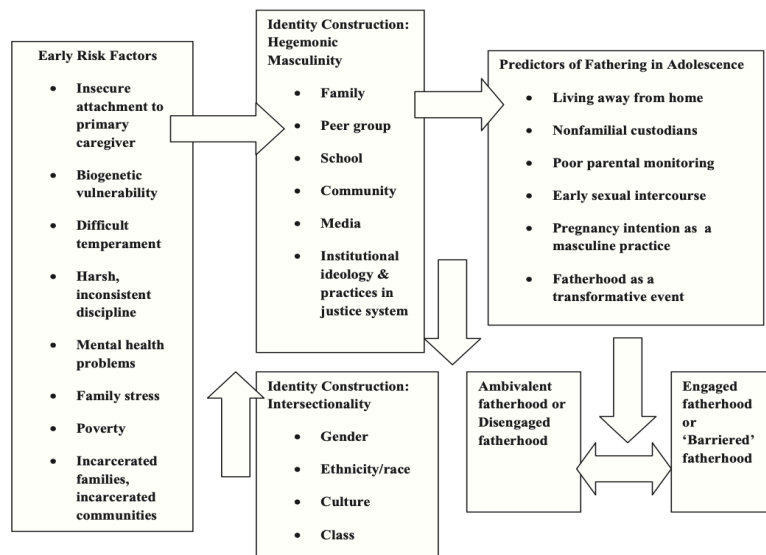


Figure A: A conceptual model of incarcerated adolescent fatherhood: Adolescent identity development and the concept of intersectionality (Shade et Al., 2011)

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the same construct presented earlier of the masculine ideal, i.e., social attitudes and behaviour strongly influenced by a culturally distinct standard of what a hypermasculine man should be (Connell, 2005). The main purpose of this article is to observe how the concept of intersectionality influences identity development.

The first to introduce the concept of identity was Erikson (1968), arguing how this process is central to the adolescent period. His definition of identity was centred on the relationship between identity development and roles, including careers for males and marriages for females. This concept was later expanded into the concept of social or collective identity (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004), recognising that identity is a structured process that is constructed in relation to self and others.

Intersectionality, on the other hand, concerns the complex connections between various categorical statuses that influence the construction and representation of identities among youth; these include ethnicity, social class, and culture (Shade et al., 2011).

Intersectionality is central to examining the identity categories in which young prisoners place themselves to explore adolescent fatherhood. Mainly because detention facilities are highly masculine environments, where ideology and practice promote identity performances that support the hegemonic male ideal, as has already been mentioned. The advantage of intersectional analysis is to delineate the challenges that young male prisoners face in the context of their different juvenile identities and the integration of these with their father identity (Shade et al., 2011).

When discussing the specific context of prison, it is important to emphasise the uniqueness and particularity of the spatio-temporal dimension, and for this it is important to mention some studies (Bartlett & Eriksson, 2019; Sandberg, Agoff & Fondevila, 2022). In the study *How fathers construct and perform masculinity in a liminal prison space* (Bartlett & Eriksson, 2019), the authors show how within the prison context fathers face an internal conflict between 'frontstage' and 'backstage' personalities (Goffman in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, 1956). Within this space, individuals are shaped by the institution itself and the people in it, and they end their performance on stage when they leave this space (Goffman, 1961). Prisoners enter institutions with a “culture of presentation” (Goffman, 1961, p.12) and a self-image formed by the surrounding social dynamics. Backstage, the individual relaxes and can abandon his public representation, going against what is shown in public. The problem is that opportunities to go 'backstage' are scarce in the prison environment. The transition between these two spaces brings with it a negotiation of different masculinities. The authors introduce the concept of “liminality” to refer to prison visiting rooms, where both prisoner and father are temporarily suspended between the inner and outer worlds (Bartlett & Eriksson, 2019).

The study *Stories of the "good father": The role of fatherhood among incarcerated men in Mexico* (Sandberg, Agoff & Fondevila, 2022), which examines the role of fatherhood for incarcerated men in Mexico, introduces the component of the temporal dimension, and presents a method for overcoming the spatiotemporal immobility of imprisonment. The study shows that fictionalised stories of involved fatherhood are also of great importance, as they allow prisoners to project the realisation of their ambitions to be “good fathers” onto a post-release period and can be a last stand against the loss of dignity

as a result of marginalisation and incarceration (Meek, 2011). In this sense, fatherhood can be a motivation towards the future and change for imprisoned fathers (Arditti, 2012). Various studies have shown that narratives about fatherhood can provide prisoners with a valued status and meaningful identity, and also contribute to men's psychological well-being (Schultz, Bucerius & Haggerty, 2023).

In addition to prison, the impact of the low socioeconomic environment on parenting behaviour and its consequences should also be analysed.

The article *Challenging behaviours in young children: The father's role* (Burbach, Fox & Nicholson, 2004) points out that fathers with low SES tend to use punitive practices towards their children more often than those with higher SES, and these have been associated with behavioural problems in children. A salient aspect of the current study is the finding that fathers with low SES report more parenting stress than those with high SES. These findings suggest that fathers may feel dissatisfied with their interactions with their children, believing that they are not meeting their expectations.

A hypothesis supported by Baker and Heller (1996) is that these results could also be influenced by the frustration fathers feel in dealing with difficult child behaviour. Furthermore, fathers with low SES tend to rely more on television as an entertainment tool for their young children than fathers with high SES. This aspect further underlines the differences in parenting approaches based on socioeconomic background (Burbach, Fox & Nicholson, 2004).

In this regard, first Hill's (1949) and then Conger's (1994) model of family stress theories helps to explain the mechanisms that determine how families adapt to a stressor, including involvement in the criminal justice system (Antle et al., 2020). Conger (1994), started from Hill's model and developed it to include the factor of economic disadvantage and influences in family processes and children's behavioural problems through increased parental depression and parent-child conflict (Conger et al. 1994).

It is useful to start with their concepts, to then analyse and understand how family members may adapt to the father's incarceration and reintegration (Antle et al., 2020). Indeed, the prison experience will also contribute to the establishment of an existential stressor, which, in this context, denotes the father's reduced participation in childcare following imprisonment. In addition, the difficulties encountered have an impact on

family dynamics, intensifying tension between parents and between parents and children, promoting negative socialisation by parents and the use of corporal punishment (Conger et al., 1994). In general, studies on paternal incarceration suggest several consequences for children of incarcerated fathers; for example, witnessing criminal activity, arrest or conviction is associated with an increased likelihood of childhood maladjustment, homelessness and lack of insurance in adulthood, of adult delinquency, of difficulties on achieving social status, of being stigmatised or marginalised, of growing up faster than their peers, of difficulties emotionally and in social interactions (Arditti, 2012). In particular, paternal imprisonment is linked to externalising behavioural manifestations (i.e., aggressive attitudes or transgressions of norms) in children, manifesting in physical aggression in male children between the ages of three and five, and a prolonged pattern of externalising behaviour up to age nine for children of both sexes, even when fathers did not share residence with their children before imprisonment (Bartlett & Eriksson, 2019).

Furthermore, to analyse the correlation between paternal imprisonment and children's actions, it is essential to first examine how the father's imprisonment affects maternal depression and anxiety related to parenting. Specifically, when the father of their children is incarcerated, women frequently experience an increase in depressive symptoms, frequently suffer financial instability, and also experience severe emotional distress in maintaining relationships with their incarcerated loved ones due to physical and involvement failures in interacting with their children (Wildeman, Schnittker and Turney, 2012). Thus, paternal incarceration has both direct and indirect negative consequences, through parental mechanisms and maternal mediation, on a child's development (Wildeman et al., 2012).

In order to better understand the situation of parental incarceration and to address the multiple contexts that need to be considered, one can refer to an integration between two important theories: The Ecological Model of Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and The Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1982).

The former focuses on multiple developmental contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); the latter emphasises the qualities of parent-child relationships, but also the consequences of

interruptions in these relationships, as in the case of an imprisoned parent (Bowlby, 1982). Bronfenbrenner (1979) distinguishes the developmental context into systems; the microsystem accommodates dyadic contact and attachment interactions with parents, and the quality of these is an important predictor of children's later social and emotional functioning. The situation of an imprisoned parent involves the child's microsystem (Poehlmann, Park, et al., 2008), and can disrupt it due to several factors, such as the child's age, economic factors, or changes related to caregivers in the strict sense (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003). For example, data from 1989 showed that approximately 1% of US children under the age of four, while developing primary bonds, had a parent in prison (Kemper & Rivara, 1993).

The phenomenon of incarceration also involves other systems; the mesosystem includes the connections between microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), such as the parent-caregiver relationship that is associated with increased stability of the child (Poehlmann, Park, et al., 2008); the exosystem does not directly involve the child but has consequences in the microcosm, such as poverty, stress and available resources of parents and caregivers (Poehlmann, Park, et al., 2008).

Macrosystemic and chronosystemic factors concern the organisation of society (including the judiciary) and policy changes, respectively, about the context of imprisonment (Poehlmann, Park, et al., 2008). The type of prison institution and the policies adopted have an impact on children's interactions with the parent in detention.

Integration with attachment theory helps to understand how visits between children and detained parents represent the most direct form of contact and, consequently, can have relevant effects on children's affective connections and well-being (Poehlmann et al., 2010). Nevertheless, contact between children and their detained parents depends on several interrelated factors at every systemic level.

Overall, studies have found benefits of child contact for detained parents, especially in cases where such contact occurred as part of an intervention (Poehlmann et al., 2010). Contact has positive consequences if it is in the optimal conditions to be carried out. The study emphasises among these conditions certainly the presence of child-friendly environments with age-appropriate games and toys, preparation of visitors and detained parents for the emotional consequences of visits (Arditti, 2003), support from psychologists and other mental health professionals to encourage reflection and manage

stress (Poehlmann, 2005). This is important because visits to detention facilities or places that are unsuitable for minors may give rise to unease and displays of uncertainty, but the total absence of contact with parents may be more problematic and linked to feelings of alienation (Poehlmann, 2005). It is also relevant to consider the advantages of remote forms of interaction, such as letters or telephone conversations, which offer more flexibility, control, and reflection, potentially benefiting the parents in custody, the children and other caregivers involved (Poehlmann et al., 2010).

In this regard, a prison literacy project *Bedtime stories from inside-family practices and affinities in families with incarcerated fathers* (Andersson & Turesson, 2023) shows that it is possible to establish deeper family bonds when fathers are allowed to involve themselves with their children in ways that also embrace the management of practical activities, such as storytelling to children (Andersson & Turesson, 2023).

In particular, this Swedish initiative is committed to enhancing the bond between imprisoned parents and their offspring in order to enable them to participate positively in the emotional, social and intellectual growth of the children. It includes a crucial element, namely the consideration of the factor of distance and separation generated by incarceration. Ordinary activities such as cooking together or helping with homework, considered by Morgan (2011) as essential pillars of family routines, become compromised for imprisoned parents; and distant family dynamics bring about temporary or sometimes more lasting changes in the landscape of gender and family relationships, affecting who takes responsibility for the daily care of children (Morgan, 2011).

Dyer et al. (2018) reported that fathers' emotional intimacy correlates with the frequency of contact established with their children; and fathers' levels of involvement when children were seven years old could predict children's future closeness to their fathers (Dyer et al., 2018). A systematic analysis conducted by Sarkadi et al. (2008) shows that the active and regular involvement of fathers leads to multiple positive outcomes, such as improved cognitive abilities and reduced crime and economic disadvantages in families with limited education. From this, a solid basis emerges that supports encouraging both professionals and decision-makers to create a favourable environment for fathers' active participation in their children's lives.

The study introduces another important concept under the name “family practices” to

refer to the inclusion of the everyday activities that make up family life (Morgan, 2011), emphasising that family and kinship ties require an ongoing commitment maintaining their relevance and meaning. Having an imprisoned parent means that there is a lack of daily interactions on which to build normal family routines, presenting a considerable challenge. Jennifer Mason (2018) also develops the concept of *affinity*, emphasising deep connections - and how these connections can be mediated through tangible objects (Mason, 2018). Time plays a prominent role in understanding affinity, as it shapes relationships in different emotional ways (Mason, 2018). A plausible approach to establishing a distant connection could be to mediate by objects. Mason (2018) argues that the theoretical concept of affinity can be employed to illustrate the deep connections that are facilitated by tangible objects, focusing on the sensory components and how these become bearers of meaning for the relationship. Results show that caring for the practical aspects can lead to greater closeness and the creation of a deeper bond (Morgan, 2011). Indeed, if the daily care that usually constitutes the relationship and forms the feeling of meaningfulness and security is impossible, at least the imagining of a future can bring positive consequences (Andersson and Turesson, 2023).

The interactional theory of antisocial behaviour, developed by Marvin D. Thornberry and colleagues (Thornberry & Krohn, 2003) explores the causes of antisociality by focusing on the reciprocal influence of individual, social, and environmental factors. According to the author, human development takes place within intertwined social relationships and each individual's life course is influenced by the life course of others, particularly the parent-child relationship (Thornberry & Krohn, 2003).

Theories of delinquency and anti-social behaviour (Conger et al., 1992) point out that effective parenting reduces the likelihood that the child will engage in anti-social behaviour. But in turn, effective parenting depends on several factors by which it can be influenced, such as the family's position in the social structure and family poverty (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994).

Antisocial parents are likely to have antisocial children, but it is just as likely that there is some level of intergenerational stability in social class position (Rodgers, 1995). Furthermore, concerning gender differences, antisocial behaviour is more prevalent, frequent, and severe among males than females, and shows greater persistence throughout

their lifetimes. Aggression manifested within family dynamics has a greater influence on disturbing behaviour in boys than in girls (Carlson, 1990). Thus, research findings confirm the existence of intergenerational continuity in antisocial behaviour, and this continuity is more evident among fathers than among mothers (Thornberry et al., 2003).

Finally, it is useful to understand how incarceration shapes parenting, facilitates or presents obstacles to father-child relationships and how important involvement in parenting programmes is in mitigating the negative academic, employment, health, reproductive and behavioural outcomes associated with paternal absence (Charles et al., 2019). More specifically, an in-depth literature review highlights the negative consequences associated with father absence (Benczik, 2011). Among the main impacts, fatherlessness can trigger conflicts in the child's psychological and cognitive growth path, as well as influence the onset of behavioural disorders. In addition, it is associated with poor performance on childhood cognitive tests, an increased likelihood of having to repeat the school year and higher levels of behavioural problems among adolescents; importantly, the negative effect of socioeconomic conditions on deviant behaviour is more pronounced in families without a father figure (Benczik, 2011).

The survey conducted by Carlson in 2006 represents an in-depth analysis of how father absence is influenced by the degree of paternal involvement, and it is noteworthy that levels of involvement by the father and mother are positively correlated, even after taking into account factors such as the child's age and gender, as well as characteristics of the parental context; furthermore, children of incarcerated parents have a higher risk of being in prison themselves (Pleck & Hofferth, 2008).

On the other hand, prisoners experience post-traumatic stress disorder, manifesting trauma-related symptoms such as depression, emotional anaesthesia, anxiety, isolation, and hypervigilance, 2 to 10 times more frequently than people in the community (Stein et al., 1997). “Smart decarceration” refers to a range of change models proposed to improve reintegration into the community; of particular interest are changing the narrative about incarceration and prisoners and implementing interdisciplinary policy and practice interventions (Epperson and Pettus-Davis, 2017).

Meek (2011) shows that a large proportion of individuals upon completion of their sentence return to their communities and families without support to heal from the trauma

of separation or overcome the stigma and barriers associated with their incarceration; it has been shown that those who receive some form of assistance often report lower rates of recidivism and a more successful transition to the community. Other findings show that despite forced separation from their families during incarceration, incarcerated fathers retain parenthood as a crucial element of their self-identity and that despite the way prison institutions can negatively influence self-perception as criminals, fathers in prison can also retain, develop, and demonstrate strong characteristics as parents, providing them with an alternative identity to that of criminal or prisoner (Meek, 2011). Researchers identify the quality of father-child relationships during paternal incarceration as a key indicator of the quality of relationships upon the father's reintegration, especially in the reinforcement of caring parenting behaviours, and the continuation of certain parenting responsibilities (such as playing, assisting with schoolwork, and setting limits on children's activities) during incarceration (Visher, 2013).

The study *Parenting and Incarceration: Perspectives on Father-Child Involvement during Reentry from Prison* (Charles et al., 2019) about reintegration into society, presents two important conceptual frameworks: Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson's *Conceptual Model of Responsible Fatherhood* in order to examine the factors influencing fatherhood (Doherty et al, 1998), and *Arditti's Family Inequality Framework* (FIF) (2018), to examine the mechanisms affecting child and family welfare, and inequality in parental incarceration (Arditti, 2018).

Arditti's proposed model suggests that there are specific ways through which “parental incarceration affects family dynamics, roles and investments in children, contributing to or accentuating inequality within family life” (2018, p. 43). Arditti identifies material hardship (before and after incarceration), family instability (such as the loss of a parental figure or the deterioration of relationships between parents), and the quality of parenting (both that of the caregiver and the environment in which parenting is offered) as mechanisms that influence outcomes for children and families in an incarcerated parenting context.

Grounded in an ecological perspective, Doherty and co-workers' (1998) Model of Responsible Parenthood highlights the role of individual, relational and contextual factors in understanding father involvement. The authors of this study building on these models focus on the power of narrative and bringing the voices of prisoners themselves into the

centre (Charles et al., 2019). It has already been mentioned that prison represents a period of separation and involuntary inactivity, which, for most parents, implies a breakdown of their parental role; consequently, being a parent adds layer of complexity to the reintegration process, as parents try to manage not only their re-entry into the community but also their re-entry into family roles and responsibilities. In this study, in line with Arditti's Framework of Family Inequality, parents described their separation and detachment from their children as a traumatic experience that often led them to withdraw, isolate themselves and reflect on their life history and future; almost all of them mentioned systematic obstacles, in particular restrictions on housing due to having a criminal record and the difficulty in finding a job that supports them, along with their families (Charles et al., 2019). This study presents some distinctive findings. Firstly, all parents stated that they wanted to be involved with their children, but they also recognised that the ability to perform the parental role is influenced and shaped by a combination of personal meanings and expectations, family relationships and broader contextual factors that are likely to influence parenting, as hypothesised by Doherty and colleagues (1998). Other important findings relate to the importance of the support parents received from other parents, and also the fact that although parents had been incarcerated three times on average, they still perceived their current situation as an opportunity for a fresh start in life; similarly, many parents expressed a sense of urgency in making up for lost time during incarceration and deepening their relationship with their children so that their children would avoid the mistakes made by the parent (Charles et al., 2019).

To conclude, this subsection encapsulates the critical literature concerning the construct of fatherhood and related concepts, contextualizing them within the specific framework that this research strives to provide.

1.2 - Journaling and Expressive Writing

According to the constructivist approach, the 1960s were a period of new perspectives regarding writing; the writing process was no longer limited to merely straightforwardly transmitting information (Fatemi, 2004). Elbow (1975) summarized this view by stating that "writing was not just a transmission of meaning, but a construction of meaning" (pp. 134–135).

Subsequently, Journaling or expressive writing will be discussed; it is a concept and tool born with the idea of giving writing and narration a purpose of empowerment; for this reason, it is often referred to as therapeutic, transformative, or reflective Journaling.

Therapeutic Journaling is "the process of writing our thoughts and feelings about our personal experiences" (Mirgain & Singles, 2016). In general, the purpose is to reflect to organize thoughts and manage problems. Therefore, it differs from traditional journal writing, which does not have the ultimate goal of deep self-understanding. The term "therapeutic" refers to the content that this tool aims to accommodate, including events that evoke specific emotions such as anger, pain, anxiety, or joy, as well as specific traumatic or stressful events. Furthermore, various studies have demonstrated its use in different clinical contexts, either on its own, as a self-help method, or as an addition to traditional therapies (Pennebaker, 2004).

Transformative Journaling emphasizes the tool's ability to facilitate and promote change through a series of mechanisms that will be explained later. At the core of these mechanisms lies the opportunity that writing offers to "step back from immediate experience and integrate it" (Pennebaker, 1997), and to cognitively reorganize the experience (Pennebaker, 1985).

Reflective Journaling is well explained in the article *The Mirror of Paper: Understanding Reflective Journaling* (Hubbs & Brand, 2005), which delves into the concept and meaning of Reflective Journaling. As the authors state, the term "mirror of paper" is a metaphor used to indicate the process of reflective writing; in fact, transcribing mental contents onto

paper is likened to the act of looking at oneself in a mirror, leading to better self-understanding through introspection and exploration (Hubbs & Brand, 2005).

This tool can be used in a wide range of contexts, with different purposes and for different target audiences. For example, interactive journaling (Miller, 2014), dialogue journaling, class interactive (team) journaling, and personal journaling (Hubbs & Brand, 2005). Once the key attributes and values have been clarified, this research will generally focus on Journaling or expressive writing.

One of the pioneers in this field is James W. Pennebaker, a psychologist known for developing the *Written Emotional Disclosure Paradigm* (WED), a research approach that explores the effects of emotional writing on people's psychological well-being (Pennebaker, 1997). The author devised and implemented a protocol of expressive writing based on a free approach to writing, with no specific rules regarding content or grammatical structure. It involves asking a person to write about a stressful, traumatic, or emotional experience for three to five sessions over four consecutive days, with each session lasting 15 to 20 minutes. This structured program has shown improvements in physical and psychological health.

More specifically, Acar & Dirik (2019) explain three theoretical models that can particularly explain the mechanism underlying the effects of WED on physical and psychological health. These models include emotional inhibition, exposure, and cognitive processing.

The mechanism of emotional inhibition is well explained by Pennebaker (1985), who suggests that actively suppressing thoughts and feelings related to traumatic events requires effort, exacerbates stress in the body, and is linked to increased physiological activity, obsessive thoughts about trauma, and enduring health problems. Addressing a trauma by talking or writing about it, and acknowledging the emotions involved, seems to reduce physiological burden, gradually decreasing overall stress. This process involves translating the event into words, facilitating cognitive integration, and understanding, factors that further contribute to reducing physiological activity related to suppression and reflection (Pennebaker and Beall, 1986).

Furthermore, exposure to negative emotions can lead to reappraisal, acceptance, and a

greater sense of control (Kloss and Lisman, 2002). Through the mechanism of repeated exposure in a safe environment, negative responses to stressors diminish. According to some studies (Foa & Rothbaum, 1998), the efficacy of prolonged exposure as a method for treating post-traumatic stress has led to the hypothesis that the writing approach can promote the extinction of negative emotional responses. This is achieved through the repeated writing of traumatic memories (Lepore et al., 2002).

Lastly, the mechanism of cognitive processing suggests that writing allows for the restructuring, organizing, and adapting of traumatic memories and facilitates the organization of an event into a coherent narrative (Pennebaker et al., 1997). After stressful or painful events, disconnected fragments of experiences are temporarily stored in active memory, which then brings them to mind (Horowitz, 1986). These intrusions arise from the discrepancy between the trauma and existing mental patterns, pushing individuals to deny, avoid, or repress such reactions. The cognitive processing of these events involves intrusive and avoidance reactions, with a progressive reappraisal or adaptation of mental models (Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997). Although empirically evaluating the cognitive processing hypothesis has been complex due to challenges in observing changes in the cognitive sphere, it has been demonstrated that a well-structured and coherent narrative is crucial for deriving benefits from expressive writing (Smyth et al., 2001). Furthermore, it has emerged that expressive writing improves working memory capacity, suggesting a potential enhancement in cognitive processing (Klein & Boals, 2001).

In general, the described mechanism of action is complex because the benefits result from multiple interrelated mechanisms. In conclusion, expressive writing yields improvements because these "seem to require the translation of experiences into language" (Pennebaker, 1997).

One of the potentialities of journaling intervention lies in its adaptability; it can be used in various populations, contexts, and theories (Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997).

Journaling is discussed as a learning tool. In the article by Hubbs and Brand (2005), there is a comprehensive review of theories underlying the concept of "the paper mirror," where various authors have emphasized the importance of highlighting the connection between reflective writing and learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Rogers, 1982; Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1986; Baldwin, 1991; Mezirow, 1998). Dewey (1938) argues the importance

of the connection between reflection and experience, emphasizing that reflective thinking has the power to make an obscure situation clear. From this theory, scholars like Kolb (1984) and Rogers (1982) focused on making the reflective process (Kolb, 1984) and the process of self-discovery (Rogers, 1982) a necessary part of learning. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1986) shows how expressive writing provides a vehicle for inner dialogue that connects thoughts, feelings, and actions, emphasizing an individual's emotions.

Similarly, Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1998) attributes to reflective writing the capacity to transcend automatic thinking (intuitive adoption of thought patterns or unquestioned beliefs) and embrace a transformative form of learning.

Lastly, Baldwin (1991) highlights how the act of journaling can become a powerful tool for self-awareness, personal growth, and spiritual exploration, stating: "Writing creates a bridge between the inner world and the outer world, connecting the paths of action and reflection" (1991).

To conclude the section on expressive writing as a learning tool, the pioneer in this field, Pennebaker, argues that the act of writing itself aids in "integrating fragments of a stress reaction into a coherent narrative" (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999).

Similarly, journaling also holds value in the field of service-learning, a US pedagogical proposal that combines education with community service, focusing on personal and civic responsibility, and critical and reflective thinking (Andrian, 2018). Although journaling is primarily an individual activity, within the context of service learning as a community development concept, the individual undergoes an empowerment process that leads to reintegration into family relationships, community, or group contexts.

Among the many functions of expressive writing, one undoubtedly stands out: its role as a healing tool. In this case, as well, various authors have demonstrated the efficacy of their studies.

Honos-Webb, Sunwolf, Hart, and Scalise (2006) conducted a study using journaling as an intervention to reduce traumatic symptoms following the September 11 terrorist attacks. The results showed a reduction in trauma symptoms reported by participants.

Linder, Miller, and Johnson (2000) presented journal writing as a means to create a therapeutic environment that acknowledges and embraces a client's suffering; processing pain is crucial to the healing process. The authors observed that journaling helps clients

explore the meaning of their suffering and validate their pain. "The journal gives meaning to the meaningless and fills the void with writings from the heart ... it is a path to truth without judgment" (Linder et al., 2000, p. 7).

Badenoch (2008), author of *Being a Brain-Wise Therapist: A Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, has shown that the act of writing facilitates healing through mind-body interaction; this mind-body connection promotes healing and change in the client's life (Badenoch, 2008). Contemporary poet Gregory Orr (2002) asserts that "survival begins when we translate our crisis into language, when we give it symbolic expression as drama of the Self and the forces that assail it" (pp. 4–5). Lepore and Greenberg (2003) attributed these effects to writing as a means of safely exposing stimuli that evoke fear and, ultimately, facilitating recovery.

Furthermore, over the last 20 years, a growing body of literature has demonstrated the beneficial effects of writing about traumatic or stressful events on physical and emotional health. To objectively demonstrate the assessed improvements, it's important to mention some studies. In general, the opportunity to freely express thoughts and feelings related to stress has a positive effect on mental and physical health (Smyth, 1998), although the physical benefits seem more robust than the emotional ones. From the first study on expressive writing, the authors concluded that "writing about a past traumatic experience was associated with a long-term reduction in health problems" (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986).

Long-term results related to physical health include medical visits related to illness (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986), blood pressure (Davidson et al, 2002), lung function (Smyth et al, 1999), liver function (Francis & Pennebaker, 1992), and hospitalization days (Norman et al, 2004), as well as various measures of immune system functioning (Pennebaker et al, 1988).

Particularly, expressive writing has produced notable benefits in individuals with various medical conditions, including asthma or rheumatoid arthritis; cancer patients (Rosenberg et al, 2002); HIV-infected patients (Petrie et al, 2004); patients with papilloma (Solano et al, 2003); patients with chronic pelvic pain (Norman et al, 2004).

The benefits involving emotional health are demonstrated by numerous studies.

Individuals may experience improved mood, better stress management, increased

emotional awareness, enhanced self-exploration, and self-awareness (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005). These same authors also mention how expressive writing has demonstrated positive impacts in other psychological domains, including academic performance, work absenteeism, returning to work after a job loss, working memory, and sports performance. Moreover, this practice can influence social and linguistic behavior, suggesting a broader impact on daily life. Among linguistic factors, an increased usage of words with positive emotions, balanced use of words with negative emotions, and a gradual increase in words expressing self-efficacy, intention, causality, or understanding are noted (Pennebaker, 1993; 1997). Other studies have shown that expressive writing also altered how participants interacted with others, suggesting that the tool could have an impact on both social and linguistic behaviour (Pennebaker & Graybeal, 2001).

In conclusion, reflective writing facilitates deeper processing of material and may attenuate the emotional and physiological impact of intrusive thoughts (Lepore, 1997), thus proving to be a valuable practice contributing to substantial improvements in both physical and emotional health.

Some studies that aim to demonstrate the physical and psychological benefits of expressive writing have also identified individual differences to identify subgroups for which expressive writing is most advantageous. Among these, gender and age are of interest to this research.

Regarding gender, several studies have shown that the effects obtained from using this tool are generally greater for males than for females (Smyth, 1998). Since traditional gender roles often make men less inclined to share trauma or express emotions compared to women (Ptacek, Smith & Zanas, 1992), it is plausible that men may benefit more from the practice of expressive writing. This could be due to the initially lower levels of emotional expression that men tend to have before starting to write. Furthermore, men often adopt problem-solving-oriented coping strategies (Ptacek et al., 1992), but engaging in writing could promote a greater focus on trauma. This difference in approach could enhance the positive effects of emotional expression through writing (Pennebaker, 1993). Regarding age, particularly the study *The Therapeutic Use of Journaling With Adolescents* (Utley & Garza, 2011), highlights the multiple advantages of using expressive writing with adolescents (DeGangi & Nemiroff, 2010).

Foremost among these advantages, this tool becomes a "cultural means of communication" in a world where the advent of computers and mobile phones erect barriers and increase distances between human beings (Riviere, 2008). According to the authors, expressive writing is useful in deepening self-understanding among peers, contributing to identity formation; it also enhances the ability to confront challenges, promotes effectiveness in interpersonal relationships, and helps manage emotions.

From a developmental perspective, adolescents develop more abstract thinking and reflect on how they feel, what they think, and how they are perceived by others. Therefore, interventions involving expression, such as journaling, which relies on symbols and metaphors, are particularly suitable for this age group.

Symbolic metaphor thus assumes a key role, guiding the understanding of internal ambiguities of the true self, as it gives meaning to experience. This is particularly relevant for youth and adolescents compared to adults.

In support of this, Marzelli (2006) found that journaling with adolescents is advantageous as it helps to: a) examine issues from various perspectives, b) recognize the use of metaphor in intuitive exploration, c) reaffirm the self as an authority, and d) understand one's identity about others.

Additionally, two factors particularly stand out with this target audience: overcoming therapeutic distance and internal energy.

Journaling is less intimidating for adolescents compared to traditional talk therapy, as it creates therapeutic distance between the person and the narrative (DeGangi & Nemiroff, 2010). Furthermore, the journaling process allows participants to express unspoken thoughts and feelings, attribute meaning to pain, and assess their emotional state on paper. This process provides a basis for meaningful discussion and can serve as a tool to establish a relationship with clients who are not voluntary participants, as is often the case with adolescents (Bolton et al., 2004). The journal can act as a precursor to the therapeutic relationship, allowing the client to feel at ease in self-intimacy before forming a deeper bond with the therapist.

Internal energy refers to the intrinsic motivation for change that journaling fosters, leading to a sense of personal responsibility in managing one's conditions, enabling adolescents to become skilled at solving their problems (Rogers, 1993).

Another advantage of expressive writing is its potential to be used with specific individuals and objectives. For example, a significant study conducted by Proctor et al. (2012) investigated the effectiveness of journaling among inmates with substance addiction. This research is based in a context where problematic substance use has been recognized as a salient risk factor for future criminal behaviour, as highlighted by Andrews, Bonta, and Wormith (2006).

In the context of criminal recidivism, problematic substance use is a dynamic predictor of such behaviour, as it suggests the potential for change over time.

The primary aim of Proctor's study was to understand how interactive journaling could influence criminal recidivism. The results indicate that this approach demonstrated a positive effect on recidivism rates, independent of other prognostic factors.

A relevant aspect of the interactive journal is its ability to measure a prisoner's level of self-reflection. This tool enables the assessment of self-awareness, interest, and learning of inmates, thus helping to identify their readiness for change.

In conclusion, this study suggests that interactive journaling is well-received by inmates and requires minimal commitment from them, demonstrating efficiency in terms of time. Moreover, it has the potential to reduce criminal recidivism, indicating that it could represent an important strategy for preventing and treating criminal behaviors associated with substance dependence among the prison population.

Regarding the structure of the text, the specific type of journaling presented in this work is the letter. As Evers writes in *Journaling: A path to our innermost self* (2008):

“Write a letter to someone that you will never mail. Write the letter to a living or dead person or to God. Write all the things that you always wanted to say to the addressee. All the pain that person caused and/ or all the joy that person brought to your life. Why does God let bad things happen to good people? Write and ask. Write the letter to yourself and go back and read it in five years”.

The underlying idea is that of a letter that progresses over time.

The temporal dimension here assumes a fundamental value, as clearly explained by studies conducted by the University of Toronto, which developed a significant program of online writing tools called the "Self-Authoring Suite"; the purpose of this program is

to guide individuals through the process of reflection and self-exploration.

The program is based on the theory of expressive writing, which has been widely discussed so far, and is divided into four main modules that move through the past-present-future time horizon.

The Past Authoring Program helps to remember, articulate, and analyse major significant life events.

The Present Authoring Program comprises two modules. One focuses on understanding and developing personal virtues. The other focuses on interpersonal relationships and relational dynamics.

The Future Authoring Program helps to envision a meaningful, healthy, and productive future and develop a detailed actionable plan based on personal values.

The importance of the temporal dimension will be reflected in this research.

In conclusion, the literature demonstrates the effectiveness of this tool, its versatility, and adaptability. Despite its various facets and ramifications, it's important to emphasize that the principle behind expressive writing is freedom, allowing the individual to bring forth what is authentic and meaningful to themselves.

Chapter II

Context and Methodology

This chapter will examine the context and methodology behind this research; it is divided into three sub-chapters.

Specifically, in the first section, the data analysis and construction procedures will be addressed using a qualitative-constructionist approach. The two main methodologies adopted, namely content analysis and critical discourse analysis, will be explained, and the main dimensions and categories of analysis will be presented.

The next section will be dedicated to a detailed presentation of the specific research context, including a precise and accurate description of the activities and people involved.

This description will allow us to grasp the key elements guiding the object of study.

In the last section, the body of data, in general, will be presented, with a particular focus on the letter-writing project. The proposed activities, participants, and objectives will be explained.

The exploration of the context and the presentation of the adopted methodology are essential to adequately construct the interpretation of reality.

2.1 - Data Analysis Method and Technique

This section has the technical and theoretical task of providing the methodology used to analyse the data in this study. The methodology employed is qualitative and constructionist; therefore, it would be appropriate to first define of these two terms.

It is necessary to refer to the text *Analisi del discorso e contesto sociale* by Giuseppe Mantovani (2008), where the author discusses the importance of qualitative methods in studying social and cultural phenomena in a context characterized by diversity and complexity. The author uses the term "methodology," presenting it not as a mere set of rules and procedures for conducting research but rather as how a theory materializes into the object of study being investigated. In other words, these approaches are not just technical tools; they reflect the theoretical perspective from which one starts and how it translates into research practice. Methodologies serve as a guide to construct and define the object of study, allowing for a meaningful and coherent exploration of the issues of interest. Mantovani also speaks of a "circular relationship" between theories and methodologies (2008).

In Mantovani's circular perspective, discourse analysis methods are based on observing communication patterns and dynamics within a specific social context. Both the content of the discourse and the interactive and relational processes manifested in the context are analysed. The goal is to understand how discourse develops and changes over time and how linguistic interactions influence and are influenced by the surrounding social context. In summary, Giuseppe Mantovani proposes a circular approach to discourse analysis and social context, where discourse and context are considered interconnected and interdependent. He writes, "methodologies are not procedural rules for producing standardized research but rather how a theory operationally constructs its object of investigation" (Mantovani, 2008) to show that methodologies are moments in an ongoing research process, rather than pre-established rules to be applied. This approach allows for capturing the complexity of communicative and social dynamics and exploring the meanings, relationships, and identities that emerge through discourse within a specific context.

In *Social Context in HCI: A New Framework for Mental Models, Cooperation, and Communication* (1996), Mantovani presents the three-level model of social contexts

(Figure B), a theoretical perspective that considers the complexity of social interactions and includes the social dimensions in various contexts of everyday life. The author defines the context as a set of processes that "provide socially recognizable meaning to situations," rather than being a mere physical aggregation of people (Mantovani, 1996). The model is structured into three levels:

- 1) The construction of social context as a result of the interaction between cultural models and actors' decisions/actions. It encompasses the social dynamics governing cooperation, conflict, and communication among individuals and groups, and includes the social norms and values of a particular society.
- 2) The interpretation of specific or everyday situations that arise from the opportunities offered by the environment and the interests of the actor.
- 3) The interaction with the environment through artifacts. The idea is that actors use artifacts, which are designed to respond to specific usage contexts, to perform tasks to fulfil their interests, which, in turn, are influenced by cultural models.

Mantovani's framework highlights the significance of understanding social contexts and how they influence human-computer interactions and communication in a more comprehensive and nuanced manner.

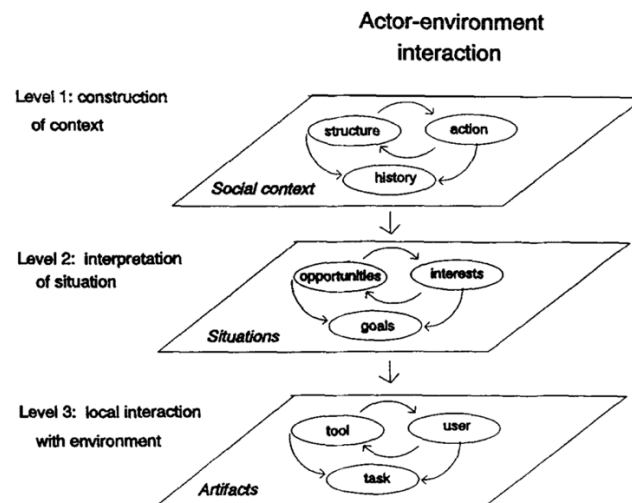


Figure B: A three-level model of social context (actor-environment interaction). The first level is the construction of context; the second level is the interpretation of situation; the third level is the local interaction with the environment.

Furthermore, Mantovani argues that qualitative methodologies, as in this research, enable

access to the processes of "everyday life," understood as "naturally occurring" situations shaped and interpreted by different theories. Language plays a particular role in this context since it is considered central to qualitative methodologies, being both a socially constructed artifact and a necessary tool for connecting and addressing everyday various aspects. The underlying perspective of this methodology is the constructionist view, which posits that the research object is "constructed," as is the methodology proposed to address it (Mantovani, 2008).

Qualitative research is a broad concept that encompasses numerous study orientations and approaches, all aimed at understanding and explaining the meaning of social phenomena. This research approach is based on the idea that social phenomena cannot be fully understood through the mere collection of quantitative data and the application of statistical analysis, but rather require a deeper immersion in the social context and the experiences of the participants. The primary objective of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings, interpretations, and experiences of the subjects involved in the study. This often involves the use of methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of texts and documents. These approaches allow for the capture of details and contexts that are important for understanding social. Qualitative research also emphasizes the interpretation and analysis of collected data, rather than mere quantification. Through contextual immersion and interpretive analysis of data, this research methodology offers a rich and detailed insight into human experiences and social processes, enabling the grasping of complexities and subtleties that may otherwise elude purely quantitative analysis (Mantovani, 2008; Fairclough, 2013).

The constructionist perspective, which can be seen as a philosophical approach to research, suggests that reality is subjectively interpreted, and knowledge is socially constructed. According to this perspective, there is no objective reality independent of human interpretations; instead, as is showed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), reality is constantly created and negotiated through social interactions and language. They introduced the concept of the "social construction of reality" to explain how individuals construct and negotiate meaning within a social and cultural context. In their work, they argue that reality is not an objective and pre-existing given; rather, it is a social construction. They argue that

individuals construct the meaning and interpretation of reality through social interaction and the process of socialization. Ideas, beliefs, and social norms are shared and internalized by individuals within a specific cultural and social context, influencing their perception of the world and the creation of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

When applying qualitative analysis with a constructionist perspective, the aim is to explore and understand the subjective meanings and interpretations present in the collected data. Instead of seeking to generalize results to a broader population, as one would do in quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis focuses on deepening the understanding of specific contexts, experiences, and individual or social perspectives, which can vary among people or within different cultures.

Qualitative constructionist methodologies are based on a set of theories and approaches that emphasize the constructive and interpretative nature of social reality.

Some of the main tools and methods used in constructionist qualitative research include content analysis and critical discourse analysis, which are two related approaches. These approaches focus on critically analysing texts and discourses to understand the meanings, ideologies, and social implications embedded within them.

More specifically, qualitative content analysis is one of several research methods used to analyse textual data, with a focus on language as a form of communication, paying attention to the content (McTavish & Pirro, 1990). This content can be written, electronic, verbalized, or visual. Therefore, qualitative content analysis goes beyond mere word counting to examine language deeply and aims to classify large amounts of text into a manageable number of categories representing similar meanings (Weber, 1990). The main goal is to subjectively extract and interpret the meanings present in the texts by identifying recurring themes, categories, or patterns. This approach may involve data coding, identification of key concepts, analysis of expressed sentiments or opinions, and other categorization and interpretation strategies. Categories can comprise single words or multiple ones. Words, phrases, or other units of text classified in the same category are considered to have similar meanings. This similarity can be based on the researcher's objectives and may rely on the precise meaning of words, such as grouping synonyms, or on words sharing similar connotations.

Weber (1990) emphasizes the versatility of this methodology, which "allows for a deeper understanding of various aspects of communication and social dynamics," a central aspect

of social interaction. Thus, to distinguish it from the one explained later, content analysis takes place within the text and is considered internal.

Critical discourse analysis goes beyond content analysis, as it also focuses on the social, political, and cultural contextualization of discourses, and in this sense, it is external to the content of the text itself.

The "Critical Discourse Analysis" (CDA), explained and addressed in Mantovani's same text, is an interdisciplinary approach focused on critically analysing discourses developed in the 1980s and 1990s by various scholars, with Norman Fairclough being one of the main contributors. In his book *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2013), the author presents this methodology, which aims to explore how language and discourses are used to legitimize, naturalize, or contest existing power structures and social inequalities. Through discourse analysis, CDA seeks to reveal how texts, contexts, and social practices are interconnected; therefore, it focuses on the critical analysis of how texts communicate meanings and represent reality.

Some key principles of CDA include social contextualization, ideology, power analysis, and social transformation. This means that it is crucial to analyze discourses within their social, political, and cultural contexts, uncover the ideologies present in discourses, and understand how power is exercised and represented. Fairclough (1992), has developed a three-dimensional model for CDA, proposing that CDA should go through three interconnected stages or processes: description, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and broader social context.

In the first stage, "description" or text analysis, the focus is on the formal properties of the text. During this phase, the text itself becomes the object of analysis, primarily identifying and classifying some of its formal language characteristics, such as grammar and vocabulary.

The second stage, "interpretation" or process analysis is centred on the relationship between the text and the surrounding interaction. In this phase, the text is considered as the outcome of a production process, and the analysis delves into the cognitive processes of the participants.

The third stage, "explanation" or social analysis concerns the relationship between interaction and the broader social context. During this phase, social events and structures

that influence both the interaction with the text and are influenced by the events themselves are examined. Particular attention is given to the social determination of the processes of text production and interpretation and their social effects (Ilyas & Afzal, 2021).

CDA focuses on language used by real people (Al Ghazali, 2007), and within this approach, three different types of meaning conveyed by the formal characteristics of a text are identified. The first is experiential meaning, where the text producer represents their experience of the natural and social world through the text's content, expressing personal knowledge and beliefs. The second is relational meaning, which emerges when social relations are enacted through the text itself within the discourse. The third is expressive meaning, when the text producer expresses an evaluation of an aspect of reality or social identities (Fairclough, 1992). The author, in this social nature of language, argues that discourse is primarily shaped by the power dynamics present in society and, at the same time, discourse socially shapes social relations, being influenced by them (Al Ghazali, 2007).

In conclusion, Fairclough's adopted CDA goes beyond analyzing lexical and grammatical relationships within a text, becoming a valuable tool for understanding social interactions and promoting social change. Both approaches used aim to reveal social and political dynamics within discourses and texts, and they should be employed whenever language and text play a central role. Content analysis and critical discourse analysis are complementary methodologies and can be used in combination for a more comprehensive understanding of discourses and social practices. Given these theoretical perspectives, the corpus of data forming this research will be briefly discussed and later thoroughly explained, leaving room now for the procedure of data collection.

The complete data corpus consists of multiple objects. The primary source of data collection is built upon the analysis of letters written by adolescents obtained through a project that will be described later. Other data sources include team reports on each adolescent, life history and family history, participant observation during home visits and family interaction contexts, ethnographic diary notes on psychologist-adolescent co-conducted sessions, interviews conducted with the team, open interviews, and conversations with the adolescents.

The procedure for collecting such data began only after obtaining consent from the

Director and Coordinator of the juvenile facility. Similarly, it followed a well-defined process, primarily defining the objectives and purposes of the process, including identifying the research questions to be answered. The focus of this research undoubtedly revolves around the analysis of the father figure in a specific context, that of a juvenile detention centre in Brazil, examining two perspectives: that of being a child first and then that of being a father.

Once that was established, the data collection methods were chosen. Being a qualitative constructionist research, the data collection methods were primarily qualitative, as previously described. After selecting the methods, it was necessary to develop the data collection tools.

For interviews with privileged witnesses, it was necessary to create a list of questions, obtain the right to record, conduct the interviews in Portuguese, transcribe the responses in Portuguese, and translate the responses into Italian.

For the letters, which represent the focus of this research, it was necessary to transcribe the texts in Portuguese into a private digital document and translate them into Italian to work with both languages. It was essential not to retain the original letter but to return it to each author.

Regarding participant observation, it was prudent to utilize an ethnographic diary to collect all oral information.

Regarding the team's reports on each adolescent, life history, and family history, it was essential to obtain consent and permission from the coordinating and socio-educational team to freely access the private documents of the adolescents whenever needed, as they are minors in conflict with the law. The same applied to team meetings, hearings with the judge and prosecutor, and home visits.

The data collection planning followed a precise and defined schedule. Four exact months were allocated for data collection, five days a week, from Monday to Friday, with the possibility of staying at the facility from 7:00 am until 6:00 pm.

Furthermore, a data quality control was performed with the assistance of the team, who participated in the transcription of the letters, which were filled with spelling errors and difficult-to-understand sentences.

Subsequently, the data collection analysis included organizing, coding, and synthesizing the data to identify patterns, trends, or answers to research questions. As previously

mentioned, content analysis and discourse analysis stand out among the methodologies, especially with the letters, which are the main focus of this research.

When referring to the letters, content analysis involves identifying and categorizing themes, concepts, or keywords present in them.

In particular, the eighteen letters were analysed using a qualitative and constructionist methodology. These letters, which focused on the father figure from the perspective of being a child and then being a father, were analysed following a process of building a robust literature on the subject as a reference. Similarly, it was necessary to build literature related to journaling and expressive writing.

Therefore, there was initially a phase of reading, understanding, and becoming familiar with the content and themes in general to have a clear understanding of them.

Subsequently, the phase of categorizing the different dimensions of meaning followed; this means that the main and recurring concepts were organized into meaningfully chosen categories. The categories represent a higher level of abstraction than specific concepts and allow for structured organization and analysis of the data. In the case of the letters, the categories undoubtedly represent key concepts. While some categories were predetermined based on the research objectives, others emerged from the data without a pre-existing structure. Additionally, the categories enable the categorization and grouping of specific details in the letters into broader concepts, facilitating an overview and the identification of patterns or trends.

In the third chapter, which focuses on the analysis of the results, the identified categories will be definitively explicated. Among these, it is undoubtedly crucial to examine how the image of the father develops and takes shape starting from the role of being a son and later as a father. In other words, it is essential to study how the father figure is constructed and transmitted across generations. Within the dimension of fatherhood, the categories could be manifold, for example, a present father, an absent father, a father in prison, a father never known, a deceased father, a biological father.

Exploring the broader family dynamics and constructions that emerge beyond the father figure is equally interesting. One such dimension to consider is the mother figure.

Another category of study concerns spirituality/religiosity in family dynamics and faith. In this context, God can be considered as a figure different from but comparable to that of a "father." Exploring the presence and influence of God in family dynamics can provide

further insights into the image and role of the father in the construction of family identity. Following the dimension of fatherhood, a second dimension is represented by emotions. Within this dimension, the categories would represent recurring themes emerging from the letters or personal experiences falling within the emotional/sensational sphere.

One recurring category is the theme of forgiveness, highlighting its importance in the context of family relationships. Examining how the theme of forgiveness manifests in family relationships can offer valuable insights into the dynamics of parent-child bonds and the process of constructing the father's image. Forgiveness becomes a way to overcome misunderstandings, disappointments, and shortcomings that may occur within the father-child dynamic. The words "perdão" (forgiveness) and "presença" (presence) often intertwine, indicating that the father's presence, understood not only as his physical presence but also as understanding and support, can facilitate the process of forgiveness and emotional healing. Regarding the concept of presence, it is often contrasted with its extreme opposite, "ausência" (absence).

Another recurring category is the concept of "saudade." Both letters addressed to the father and the son reveal the intense emotional bond that exists between the father and the children. "Saudade" expresses profound nostalgia and the desire to see someone again, but it goes beyond that. This feeling can be interpreted as the echo of a deep family bond that persists despite physical absence and is more prominently present in the letters to the son than in those to the father. It is interesting to analyse and evaluate the sincerity of the use of this term and the expression of this sentiment.

A third important dimension is the temporal dimension. Within the time dimension, one necessary category focuses on the future. Similarly, creating a thematic connection with the letter-writing project, it is important to dedicate a category to the triad of past-present-future.

In conclusion, these different dimensions and categories of analysis allow us to delve into the importance of the father figure in the construction of family identity, examining his role both in the personal sphere and the generational one. Furthermore, they enable us to better understand the intensity of family relationships and overall family dynamics, the influence of God and spirituality, the significance of presence and forgiveness in building a meaningful father-child bond, and other important and recurring dynamics.

Part of the qualitative and constructionist methodology undoubtedly involves analysing

relationships and social contexts, thus exploring the internal and external worlds of the participants as much as possible. It is important to understand the social dynamics and how they influence the participants' interpretations. Based on the identified categories and analysed relationships, it is necessary to interpret the meaning and construction of reality that emerges from the letters, capturing the participants' subjective interpretations and how these reflect in the construction of their experiences or social perspectives. This is useful for identifying commonalities, contrasts, or patterns that emerge from the letters, comparing the interpretations with relevant literature and theories. Since qualitative constructionist analysis is an iterative process, constant reflection on the emerging categories and interpretations is required; reflexivity is important in assessing how positions or perspectives may have influenced data interpretation.

Reflexivity refers to the researcher's awareness of their responsibility in constructing their study "object," as it is not simply "found" but actively "constructed." More properly, reflexivity refers to the researcher's ability to recognize and consider their influences, biases, expectations, and personal positions during the analysis process. It involves the researcher's critical self-awareness regarding their role and experiences in how they interpret and understand the data. When using content analysis to examine documents, in this case, the letters, it is important to recognize that the researcher is not a neutral observer but is influenced by their own perspectives, knowledge, and cultural background. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be aware of these influences and take them into account during the analysis process.

Reflexivity can be expressed through various strategies; in this research, keeping a research journal with reflections on personal reactions and interpretations was helpful, as well as participating in team meetings to engage with professionals and have opportunities for discussion and comparison.

By integrating reflexivity into content analysis, one can strive to minimize the effects of personal biases and achieve a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the data. This approach contributes to ensuring a more objective and reliable analysis.

When discussing content analysis, it is also necessary to consider a focus on positioning. This means that the analysis of the letters should take into account the positioning of the individuals involved in the discourse. This implies paying attention to the perspective and role of different actors or authors of the letters. In fact, despite creating categories, the

letters were still read and analysed individually, as singular entities rather than as a group. The letter-writing project, which constitutes the core of this research, was developed following the theoretical framework of Journaling. This powerful tool, extensively discussed in the previous section, is an integral part of the data collection and analysis methodology. At its core, Journaling involves the daily act of writing; this approach has been thoroughly explored in James W. Pennebaker's book *Expressive Writing: Words that Heal* (2014). The author states: "Emotional writing - or what is often described in research studies as Expressive Writing (EW) - can positively affect people's sleeping habits, work efficiency, and their connections to others" (Pennebaker, 2014).

Pennebaker developed the "paradigm of emotional disclosure through writing," which is a research approach aimed at exploring the effects of emotional writing on mental health and well-being. This paradigm mainly involves the activity of freely writing about emotionally charged experiences, traumas, or salient moments in an individual's life. People are encouraged to freely express their thoughts and feelings without restrictions or concerns about grammatical structure or judgment.

The paradigm of emotional disclosure through writing is based on a free writing approach, implying that there are no strict restrictions on grammar or text formatting. Those engaged in this practice are encouraged to write freely, without worrying about following specific writing rules.

The main goal is to freely express one's thoughts and feelings about emotionally intense experiences or traumas and allow the emergence of what is authentic and meaningful to the individual. In other words, the aim is not to produce a structured text or a formal composition but rather to share one's emotions openly and sincerely through writing (Pennebaker, 1997).

After clarifying the methodology of data analysis and construction, the data collection procedure, dimensions, and categories of analysis, the paper proceeds with a description of the context.

2.2 - Contextual Background and Project Presentation

The present research takes place in the specific context of the FUNASE CASE, in Petrolina, Pernambuco, Brazil, where I have spent four months, from September to December 2022.

FUNASE, which stands for “Fundação de Atendimento Socioeducativo”, or Foundation for Socio-Educational Assistance, is the agency responsible for the adolescent/youth under social-educational measure of restriction and/or deprivation of freedom.

It has a long story that started as “Children's Social Service” organ, intending to assist children and adolescents in situations of social vulnerability in the state of Pernambuco, later called FEBEM, which stands for “Fundação do Bem Estar do Menor”, or Children's Welfare Foundation.

FEBEM became FUNDAC, “Fundação da Criança e do Adolescente” (Children and Adolescent Foundation) with the approval of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), the statute that deals with the legal regulations governing the integral protection of children and adolescents in the Brazilian state.

After several changes, depending on legislation advances, the actual name of the organ is FUNASE, and it is strictly linked from 2015 to the new secretariat: “Secretaria de Desenvolvimento Social, Criança e Juventude (SDSCJ) de Pernambuco” (Secretariat for Social Development, Children and Youth of Pernambuco). This new secretariat has “the mission of planning and executing, at state level, the Socio-Educational Programme aimed at adolescents involved in and/or authors of unlawful acts, under detention and semi-freedom measures, ensuring the assistance and promotion of their fundamental rights, through articulated actions with the organised civil society and public and private institutions”.³

Thus, the FUNASE is a complex organ with clear principles and a precise structure, managing a set of actions aimed at guaranteeing fundamental rights, prioritizing the developing person, focusing on education in values, raising society's awareness, and mobilising adolescents with socio-educational measures.

³ <https://www.funase.pe.gov.br/institucional/historico>

Based on specific values as Perseverance, Resilience, Reliability, Creativity, Commitment and Ethics, as defined by the Foundation itself, the Political-Pedagogical Project is built, a periodically revised document that “aims to subsidise and guide the preparation of the Operational Plans of the care modalities and each Unit, as well as the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the actions developed”. In concrete terms, the Operational Plans aim at the daily implementation of the socio-educational service.⁴

There are four types of structure:

- Uniai: Unidade de Atendimento Inicial (Initial Care Unit) receives adolescents/young people of both sexes, aged 12 to 18, for a maximum period of five days, right after the infringement.
- Cenip: Centro de Internação Provisória (Provisional Detention Centre) is a temporary internment home where adolescents are sent to stay for a maximum of fortyfive days, while awaiting the decision of the sentence about releasing them permanently, sending them to CASE, a juvenile prison, or to CASEM, a semi-release home.
- Casem: Casa de Semiliberdade (Semi-liberty Home) is a residence model and can be either a first measure or a form of transition to the open environment. Schooling and vocational training are compulsory visits to family members at weekends are allowed.
- Case: Centro de Atendimento Socioeducativo (Socio-Educational Service Centre) is the context in which I carried out my research and I will present it in more detail.

CENTRO DE ATENDIMENTO SOCIOEDUCATIVO (CASE)

In these centres, the socio-educational measure of internment takes place, so it is to all intents and purposes a juvenile prison.

Adolescents who, following a court sentence, have been found guilty of an offense considered medium or serious, or are repeat offenders, and are therefore considered a danger to themselves or others, are housed here. For this reason, they require re-education in a closed and supervised facility. They can stay for a maximum of three years or the age of 21 and must be re-evaluated, at most, every six months.

"It is worth emphasising that deprivation of liberty must be an exceptional condition for the implementation of actions and interventions to guarantee the rights of

⁴ https://www.funase.pe.gov.br/images/legislacao/PROPOSTA_PEDAGÓGICA_DA_FUNASE.pdf

adolescents/young people considered as offenders. The implementation of external activities must be at the discretion of the technical team, unless expressly determined otherwise by the court"⁵.

Every single unit has his characteristics, so I will go deeper into the structure where I had my internship and my research context that takes place in the city of Petrolina, state of Pernambuco, north of Brazil. It can accommodate a maximum of 40 male adolescents between 12 and 21 years of age.

During my whole stay, twenty adolescents have passed through the structure. And in this specific context, the youngest was sixteen years old and the oldest was twenty.

The people who work in the Petrolina CASE are of different types: the director, the technical and socio-educational coordinator, teachers, and professors (Portuguese, mathematics, science, English), agents, cooks, drivers, cleaners, a nurse, and a multi-professional team, which has been my reference for these months. This is made up of two psychologists, three social workers, a pedagogue, and a lawyer, to assure that the different areas of knowledge promote the comprehensive care of adolescents/young people and their families in an interdisciplinary manner.

The socio-educational action is carried out based on multiple activities, and some of them follow a very precise procedure.

Primarily, the young person is welcomed into the facility and is isolated to allow the general situation to be assessed, and to avoid problematic knowledge before entry into the facility. There is initial assistance regarding the operation of the unit (timetables, rules, management, activities, objectives) from the multidisciplinary technical team that includes the boy's family; this also represents a primordial contact with the family.

During the entire stay, individual and group attendance activities are carried out.

The 'individual presence' appointments involve each professional, and the subject of conversation is related to the latter's field and profession. The information obtained from these is the basis for the construction of two key tools: the Multidimensional Diagnosis and the Individual Assistance Plan (PIA).

While the former is a tool for analysing the individual's life history at a global and total level (psychologically, pedagogically, socially, legally) and is carried out by

⁵ <https://www.funase.pe.gov.br>

professionals, the latter is a tool for forecasting and recording activities, built with the participation of the adolescent and his family, to promote their autonomy and responsibility.

It is necessary and important to clarify that the thinking behind the socio-educational reality is a restorative perspective, and no longer a punitive one, privileging active listening and dialogue as the tools underlying the helping relationship.

Returning to the topic of activities, those at group level are also of fundamental importance. These can be of various kinds and can be classified into internal and external. Internal group activities include daily school lessons (Portuguese language, mathematics, science, computer science) and sports (capoeira, football, etc). And then, the reading course, the GOD (Drug Orientation Groups), weekly or monthly activities to raise awareness on different issues (suicide, disability, respect for women), and recreational activities (watching games or films). The external activities concern training courses that are carried out outside the facility, to enable the young people to acquire skills and do good for the community, for example the cooking course and the agriculture course. The latter, for example, consisted of helping elderly people to grow fruit and vegetables, and help turn around the economy of a poor and semi-abandoned neighbourhood. In both cases, the aim is to create a socially responsible micro-community, working on interpersonal relationships, the absence of violence and mutual respect.

Moreover, some of these activities were not only cognitive, but also educational and social. In this regard, they show the concrete presence of the Service-Learning proposal, a “mechanism for community engagement” (Felten & Clayton, 2011). In the original and pedagogical sense, it is a methodological approach that “seeks to engage students in activities that both combine community service and academic learning. Because service-learning programs are typically rooted in formal courses (core academic, elective, or vocational), the service activities are usually based on particular curricular concepts that are being taught” (Furco, 1996, p.25).

This educational approach implemented within the community is rooted in practical experience and active involvement of individuals to develop greater social awareness and a sense of responsibility towards the community (Eyler & Giles, 1999). It is based on three fundamental elements: service, learning, and reflection. Service involves involving students in projects that respond to real community needs. Learning takes place through

practical experience, in which students acquire knowledge and skills useful for their education. Finally, reflection allows students to elaborate and analyse the lived experience, recognizing the challenges and opportunities encountered, evaluating the results obtained, and charting new strategies for the future.

To illustrate this further, the employment of an example would be useful. In the context where this research takes place, young people learned with an educator how to cultivate the land, not only in a practical sense but also in a deeper sense, for example, the value of patience, respect for landowners, knowledge of plants and their significance, and more.

This meaningful learning allowed young people to develop knowledge and responsibility in this field, take concrete actions (cultivating), and provide a service to the community; in this case, the service of revitalizing an abandoned neighbourhood and helping elderly people who could no longer bear the burden of cultivating fields (Jacoby, 1996).

Obviously, there are other activities in which the adolescents are not involved, e.g., team meetings and spaces for reflection and sharing, or more purely legal activities in which a judge or justice promoter is present. These include the development of individual records, i.e., an evaluation report that shows the adolescent's entire evolution in the socio-educational measure, including improvements as much as difficulties; this contributes to the judicial determination and must be submitted during the evaluation period established in the sentence.

Lastly, looking at the micro-family community, it is customary to have a home visit, where the professionals visit the adolescent's family and community context to capture the elements of daily life and social relations. On the other hand, for the adolescent, the family unit is allowed to enter into the structure once in a week and to spend the whole day, as well as engaging in telephone interactions.

Through a recorded interview with the socio-educational team, except for the lawyer, information was collected about the specific role of each professional, focusing on the figure of psychologist.

This role is described as "accompanying all adolescents ... offering qualified listening and contact able to provide them with support and welcome introductions, respecting the personal history they bring with them, understanding the paths that have led them to the detention measure", said the Psychologist Julyana. Or still, "My function here is to accompany, support, orient, and analyse the development and evolution of adolescents

and to provide, through relationships, opinions on their behaviour. I analyse and follow adolescents during the socio-educational measure they are serving", said the Psychologist Leda.

Furthermore, in addition to their individual and specific roles, they also highlighted their activities in the multidisciplinary team; they are responsible for the entire document elaboration process (such as the PIA and others described earlier). In conclusion, as one of the two emphasizes, "our goal is always to understand and contribute to the social, community, and family processes of these young people present here."

Intereurisland Program for research and intercultural exchanges allowed me to carry out a training internship for four months. This program is based on a model that proposes a synergy between university/local community relations and international relations between different contexts and social responsibility projects/programs.

According to the Professor, Director of the Program, and co-supervisor Nicola Andrian, the Intereurisland process model presents the practices divided into three major areas: Internationalization and Intercultural Dialogue, Intersectorality and Social Responsibility of University, and Service Learning.

Regarding the role of a psychology trainee student, the first few days were devoted to observing the structure, the work of the professionals, the adolescents, and the main activities; also, participation in all the activities described earlier was permitted by the team. Active listening and participatory observation were the main features of not only the initial participation, but also the entire stay. Furthermore, the Director and the Professionals allow the student to propose an activity to be carried out with the adolescents once the initial phase had passed. It is crucial to respect the initial observation phase to understand the internal dynamics of the structure, to keep a thorough and reflective ethnographic diary writing comments, notes, and reflections.

As it transpired from the ethnographic diary's notes, this research object is the analysis of the father figure, and it arose from the initial phase of observation, and awareness of their complete absence.

Access to reports containing all information on the adolescents, as well as the opportunity to participate in home visits, interviews, team meetings, school lessons, afternoon courses, meetings with the Promoter of Justice, and even hearings with the Judge, allowed for subsequent daily requests and discoveries of information, ultimately leading to the

choice of the research object.

Additionally, the opportunity to propose and execute an activity with the adolescents, subject to the approval of the entire team, was provided and carried out throughout the stay in the facility. This activity consisted of writing two letters: one addressed to the father and the other to the son of the adolescents.

The project was explained by me to every adolescent individually during the first meeting in the presence of a psychologist. They were given the opportunity to express any doubts or difficulties they had, and there was no time limit set for delivery since they had limited time available and may not always have a pen with them. Interested individuals were able to request a meeting at any time to deliver their letter without any coercion. The meeting with the adolescent author of the letter consisted of reading the letter together, leading to deep reflections and an important moment of sharing.

Similarly, the writing of the second letter was organized, addressed to the son, regardless of his existence. Therefore, even if the letters had a specific recipient, the intention was not to send this correspondence anywhere, but it was supposed to remain in the possession of the adolescents, so that they could continue to carry it forward whenever they wanted. The project also included a final individual meeting with every participant to conclude the project, with shared reflections, and then the return of the letters to the writers.

This work arises from the analysis of these letters and the teachings of these four months. The purpose of this sub-chapter is to provide an accurate description of the reference context, as it is specific to the origin of the research object. Being able to know the characteristics and uniqueness of a context in such depth is a notable advantage. The next section will focus on presenting the corpus of data collected, particularly from the previously described letter activity.

In conclusion, the experience of being a psychology trainee student in this facility is based on active observation, participatory learning, and the execution of a meaningful project. Through the act of writing and sharing letters with absent fathers and sons, the adolescents were engaged in a reflective process, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of their emotions and relationships.

This project had the intention of highlighting the importance of addressing the impact of absent fathers on adolescent development and the necessity of engaging in empathetic and reflective practices.

2.3 - Data corpus Presentation

This section focuses on describing the data corpus used in this research, which is based on a qualitative and constructivist methodology. The characteristics of this data corpus will be described, including the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of the letters, as well as sociodemographic features and additional information about the participants. Subsequently, the content analysis method will be illustrated, highlighting the analysis categories and the procedures followed for the identification and coding of the letter content. In conclusion, the detailed description of the data corpus and the content analysis method will provide a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the research results.

The data corpus used in this research consists of multiple sources: the letter writing project, team reports on each teenager, their life history and family background, participant observation during home visits and family interaction contexts, notes from the co-conducted psychologist-adolescent meetings, the interview conducted with the team, open interviews, and conversations with the teenagers.

As previously described, the main data collection source is derived from the analysis of letters written by the adolescents. The production of these letters stems from the activity proposed in the previous section, which involves writing two letters by each adolescent: one to their father and one to their own future child.

Regarding the main reason for choosing the father figure as the object of the letters, certainly arises from the awareness of its problematic nature. The father, in fact, is predominantly absent, and this absence is common in almost every family story of the adolescents.

The primary objective of this activity carried out with the adolescents was to engage them in a process of reflection and deepening of their own emotions and relationships, aiming to gain a better understanding of the impact of this figure on their growth and development.

Each letter was collected and preserved for subsequent analysis using the content analysis method. This analytical approach was chosen to allow for an accurate assessment of the content of the letters, focusing on understanding the emotions and thoughts of the

adolescents regarding the theme of paternal absence and the potential repercussions of such absence on their future child.

Based on the description of the main data collection element, it can be stated that it took place over three months, from October to December. It is necessary to consider several important factors among the eighteen adolescents who participated in the project.

Firstly, it should be noted that there was a difference in the length of stay within the facility for the entire duration of the project. Depending on their personal history, some adolescents were interred in the facility for different lengths of time. Some entered the project while it was already in progress, while others left before its completion. This constitutes a limitation of the research since the time spent within the facility was not uniform for everyone. However, in some specific cases, this limitation was overcome by obtaining consent to continue the activity in the semi-liberty structure (CENIP), where some of them spent a few months before their final release.

Another factor to consider is the level of writing ability among the involved adolescents. Some of them were unable to write, while others were capable of doing so with spelling and lexical errors. For this reason, preliminary information gathering took place with Portuguese language teachers in an effort to involve all adolescents, without excluding anyone based on their writing abilities. This limitation was overcome with the consent of the adolescents who spoke while someone transcribed their words.

In total, fifteen adolescents were involved in the entire project. This means that each of them entered the dedicated activity room individually, received an explanation of the project, and participated in its implementation. However, this does not imply that thirty letters were produced (two letters per each of the fifteen teenagers).

The project was proposed and accepted by the socio-educational team, as well as the management and coordination members of the facility, while respecting the privacy rights of every minor and non-minor adolescent. Furthermore, the project was preceded by organizational and preparatory discussions, with the need to adhere to a somewhat flexible timeline.

The entire project was conducted on an individual level, without provisions for group meetings or community dynamics during the activity, except for the final contact with the facility, which will be explained later.

The first meeting with each adolescent involved their psychologist and varied in duration.

Activities within the facility were organized to include lessons in different subjects from 8 am until noon, with a break at 10 am. After an hour-long lunch break, practical activities, rather than academic ones, resumed. Dinner was served at 6 pm, followed by confinement in the cell.

One limitation of this activity was the requirement of using a pen/pencil, as adolescents were not allowed to bring it into their cells. Consequently, a significant portion of the free time that could have been dedicated to writing was not allocated for this task.

Primarily due to this reason, along with the specific context, rules, and customs of the facility, the letter delivery time was defined as quite variable. However, what had to be strictly adhered to was the recipient of the letter—strictly the first letter for the father and the second for the child. More specifically, during the introductory meeting, which was preceded by a review of the family history, the activity was proposed with due consideration for the adolescent's well-being. This included ensuring clear understanding, willingness, and appreciation of the idea, as well as the possession of paper and a pencil. Furthermore, it was essential to inquire about the relationship with the father, which necessitated the presence of the adolescent's psychologist. There are two psychologists within the facility, each responsible for half of the adolescents. They establish an ongoing relationship throughout the entire stay, and in almost all cases, a bond of trust is formed. The adolescents were asked to talk about their fathers, the past, the present moment, and the future moment of freedom. Then it was announced that this would be the subject of the letter. This was one of the most crucial moments of the entire project—to see the reaction of them towards fathers who, in most cases, had always been absent.

Within this absence, it is important to differentiate the various situations mentioned by the adolescents themselves: some fathers had passed away, others had never been known, some were in prison, some had alcohol or drug addictions, some had left home, some had established violent relationships, some shared the household but not a relationship, some were present but separated from the mother, and finally, some were present and had a good relationship.

Practically, each of these cases presented resistance to writing the letter, and the reasons presented by the adolescents were diverse. One reason was the feeling of incapacity. It was primarily a resistance stemming from the shame of not being able to write correctly, making spelling and grammar mistakes, and not possessing a broad vocabulary to

translate thoughts into words. This feeling of shame was mitigated by emphasizing the difference between the work of a psychologist and a teacher, making them aware and preventing the fear of judgment from holding them back.

Another resistance encountered in every situation was the fear of the letters being disclosed. In fact, there is a close relationship of constant updates and presence between the socio-educational facility and the legal authorities (judge and prosecutor), and the adolescents were aware of this. Therefore, it was necessary to specify that the ethical code required the custody of the letters to stay within the socio-educational team, allowing the adolescents to write sincere and unfiltered thoughts.

As previously mentioned, resistances differ, and it is appropriate to describe them individually. In the case of the father's death, the common response to the proposal has always been, "*How can I write to him if he's dead?*". Even within the realm of death, other sub-stories determine the reaction. For instance, the death could have been recent or occurred many years ago. It could have been a natural death or a result of violence or even drug related. In any case, the task was to help the adolescent understand that it was possible to write a letter to someone who is no longer alive by using their imagination. They were encouraged to imagine that the person is still here and think about what they would say to them.

In the case of a living father, it is important to distinguish whether he is absent, present but with a difficult relationship, or present with a good relationship. In the case of an absent father, the most recurring sentiment was indifference. The common response was, "*I have nothing to say to him, we don't talk, he has never been there for me*". It was interesting to explore whether this expressed indifference was genuine or not. In some cases, even when it started with this response, it ended with a letter. However, in other cases, when the indifference was real and perhaps developed after years of absence, writing the letter became truly difficult because the bond was not only physically broken but also emotionally severed. In such cases, the adolescent often requested to write the letter addressed to another recipient, someone who fully embodied the father figure and caregiver role for them.

In the situation of a living and present father, some adolescents were happy to write the letter and even deliver it relatively quickly. However, despite having a good relationship, some individuals struggled to write positive things to another man, even if it was their

own father. Perhaps it was an exaggeration of masculine traits, making it seem impossible to express a familial expression of love to their father. In particular, one adolescent had a very close relationship with his father, much more than with his mother, which was quite rare and distinctive. Given this close bond, there were high expectations of a letter to his father, but it never materialized. Through team discussions, it emerged that the boy had strong narcissistic traits that prevented him from opening up and writing, perhaps out of fear of losing the toughness and aloofness that he took pride in.

Moving on to the challenging situation of a living father with whom there was anger, hatred, or violence, the initial reaction was completely resistant and dismissive. The characteristic phrase was, "*I hate him, what am I supposed to say to him?*". It was crucial to approach the situation with sensitivity and tact because sometimes the reason behind these attitudes was connected to violent dynamics inside the family, including the adolescents themselves.

Although some letters never arrived, it was instructive to witness, understand, and address the reaction to the activity proposal because the refusal to write the letter is already a form of communication. Among these cases, one instance stands out, which is when hatred and violence combine with a sense of abandonment. No letters were received from this individual, but the encounters were highly formative and relevant. In their story, there is a history of violence followed by abandonment by both parents, and it is difficult to describe the emotions displayed in response to the request. It is likely that the consequences of their past included a strong sense of abandonment, leading to an inability to form attachments, and a weak and underestimated mother resulting in a lack of respect towards other females. As a result, this person manifested rebellion, attempts at corruption and seduction, and a complete refusal to write, despite the expanded range of possible recipients, most likely due to the total absence of a caregiver. This situation undoubtedly had consequences that further opened the space for working with him, despite the letter not being delivered.

Furthermore, a very common request from the adolescents was to change the recipient of the letter, replacing the father figure with another caregiver, most commonly the mother, grandmother, or girlfriend. Normally, this request was not granted, but some of them, to think about their father, ended up writing to their mother or grandmother. One of them, in particular, said, "*A senhora foi a mãe e o pai para mim*" (literally, "You have been

mother and father to me"), addressing his grandmother. These letters, even though not addressed to the father, remain important in the context of their search.

The recipient of the second letter was the son or daughter. During a meeting with the psychologists, the theme of the relationship between the adolescent and their own child was addressed, in cases where they had one, or the desire to have one. It is interesting to note that a large portion of the adolescents, aged between sixteen and twenty, already had children.

If the child was alive and present, the adolescents were encouraged to write them a letter. The most common response was, "*but they're so young*", "*they won't understand*", "*they can't read*". It was important to reiterate once again that the letter should be written imagining that it would be read by the recipient, even though the actual purpose was for themselves. They were encouraged to feel free to write anything, as there would be no evaluation or judgment. The psychologists also explained the benefits of writing, the benefit of expressing thoughts and emotions, using a specific word: "*desabafar*", which literally means sharing emotions and releasing accumulated tension through verbalizing feelings and thoughts that are causing discomfort.

For the adolescents who did not have children yet but expressed the desire to have them, their letters were filled with love and dreams, plans for the future. This was certainly a topic to discuss before their departure from the institution.

Naturally, following the delivery of the second letter or during the subsequent meetings, discussions revolved around the importance of transitioning from being children to becoming fathers, the significance of having a clear understanding of responsibilities, and trying to detach from negative experiences they had lived through. They were also encouraged to seize the opportunity to transform these experiences into something positive, ensuring that their own children would not experience the same absence. Among the letters to their children, one stands out where the father tells his son: "*Vou ser pra você um pai que eu nunca tive*", (literally, "I will be the father for you that I never had"), or "*Vou ser presente na vida dos meus filhos e não vou ser igual ao meu pai*" (literally, "I will be present in my children's lives, and I will not be like my father").

The total number of letters reached and collected at the end of the project is eighteen. Out of this total, theoretically ten are intended for the father figure, while eight are meant for the son or daughter. In the category of letters intended for the father figure, not all of them

are addressed to the father, but rather to the caregiver whom the adolescents perceive as their own, such as the mother or grandmother.

Both the letters addressed to the father and those addressed to the children present interesting recurring themes. Among them is the concept of "*saudade*", a sentiment that is often mistakenly translated as nostalgia, but in reality, it encompasses much more. Gilberto Gil, a Brazilian singer, musician, and politician, defines it as "the poignant presence of an absence" (Toda Saudade, 1989). Alongside this sentiment, the words "*perdão*" (forgiveness) and "*presença*" (presence) appear in almost all the letters. Regarding the latter, it is often juxtaposed with its extreme opposite, "*ausência*" (absence). Finally, the presence of God and religious elements, in general, are strongly represented in the letters.

As for the participants involved, they are the adolescents from the CASE institution in Petrolina, aged between sixteen and twenty. Throughout the research, no names or surnames of the participants will be mentioned. The offenses committed include theft, robbery, murder, assault, sexual offences, drug and/or weapons trafficking. The participants refer to those who decided to take part in the project, attend the meetings, attempt to write the letters, and deliver them. However, beyond the physical aspect of the letters, it is important to mention other individuals who did not receive a letter but still contribute to the research. Specifically, they were unable to complete the letter, but they never refused to participate in the meetings. These meetings were then discussed within the socio-educational team, and the conclusions, which are also valuable data, will be presented.

The first of these, who was unable to write, recounts having little contact with his father, who only approaches him when he needs favours and never contributes to anything. When he was young, his father was involved in illegal activities, and the boy saw him smoking marijuana, which led him to do the same. Despite this, the boy does not feel an emotional bond towards his father, and the latter has never taken on the role of a father figure, someone who takes care of him. The boy believes that if he had another paternal figure to look up to, his life would have been different. Instead, his mother is a figure of respect and reference for him. He concludes by saying that his father has never visited him in the facility.

The second boy, although capable of writing, refused to write the letter. Despite the plans

to live and work with his father once he is released, he doesn't have deep feelings for him because his father has never fulfilled the role of taking care of him or providing support. He has vivid memories of his childhood when his father stopped living with him at the age of seven due to his alcoholism and violence towards his mother and siblings. Although his father has apologized, the boy states that he does not forgive him, but still coexists with him. Similarly, he mentions that he has never seen his father come to the institution. On the other hand, his mother plays an affectionate and important role in his life. The third boy finds his paternal grandmother as a reference figure. His father has spent time in prison twice, once for fraud and once for rape. He currently lives with his mother and stepfather, but in the past, he has lived with both parents. The boy describes his relationship with his father as fragile, distant, but calm, never having opened up emotionally to him. Once again, his father has never come to visit him.

Then, another boy, orphaned upon the death of mother at a young age and raised by changing families following the deaths of several caregivers, showed indifference towards writing the letter, but not towards the meetings. The father was alive but had never gone to visit him. Another boy, who cannot write, shows a fragile family context. Both the father and the son suffer from mental health issues, and the father lacks the autonomy to provide support to the boy, with whom he communicates through video calls with short dialogues and monosyllabic responses. Meanwhile, the teenager has not received any visits from his family. And finally, two other boys, who have been previously mentioned.

It is evident that the letter project is the richest source of data for research, but aside from that, other sources have proven crucial. Among them, participant observation accompanied by notes in the ethnographic diary has been valuable due to the availability of participation in various activities. Additionally, the relationships made available for consultation, enriched by the commentary and analysis of the socio-educational team, have provided essential insights. Co-facilitated meetings and open, unrestricted interviews with the boys have also been salient sources of data collection.

In particular, the analysis of the letters, which remain the primary and most substantial data, is based on the categorization of themes addressed in the letters. This involves identifying recurring patterns or trends and highlighting expressed emotions or attitudes. Among the categories of analysis, it is undoubtedly crucial to understand how the father

figure is constructed from the perspective of the son, and subsequently from that of the father, thus establishing a generational construction of the paternal figure. Furthermore, on a more general level, it is important to comprehend the family constructions that emerge, extending beyond the paternal figure.

Moreover, among the categories of analysis, there is also the presence of "God," perhaps considered as a different form of "Father." Lastly, it is interesting to observe recurring themes common to the letters, with forgiveness being undoubtedly one of them.

To obtain the most comprehensive understanding of project participants and their key attributes before delving into result analysis, the following table serves as an explanatory tool (Figure C). Respectively: the age of the adolescent, socioeconomic status, entry into the facility, completion of the first and second letters, committed offense, literacy level, a characteristic of the father figure, and the presence or absence of children.

	AGE	SES	ENTRY	LETTER 1	LETTER 2	OFFENSE	LITERACY	FATHER	CHILDREN
1	2005	LOW	08/2022	YES	YES	ROBBERY	YES	absent	NO
2	2004	LOW	09/2022	YES	YES	THEFT	YES	dead	NO
3	2004	LOW	04/2022	YES	YES	RAPE	YES	normal	NO
4	2004	LOW	05/2022	YES	YES	HOMICIDE	YES	absent	NO
5	2002	LOW	07/2022	YES	YES	HOMICIDE	YES	adoptive	YES
6	2005	LOW	07/2022	YES	NO	RAPE	LOW	absent	NO
7	2003	LOW	06/2022	YES	YES	ROBBERY	YES	absent	YES
8	2003	LOW	10/2022	YES	YES	THEFT	YES	present	YES
9	2004	LOW	11/2022	YES	NO	HOMICIDE	YES	alcoholic	NO
10	2005	LOW	10/2022	YES	YES	HOMICIDE	NO	absent	?
11	2005	LOW	08/2022	NO	NO	ROBBERY	NO	absent	NO
12	2004	LOW	07/2022	NO	NO	ROBBERY	YES	absent	NO
13	2006	LOW	11/2022	NO	NO	DRUG TRADE	YES	absent	NO
14	2004	LOW	07/2022	NO	NO	AGGRESSION	NO	mental problems	?
15	2004	LOW	06/2022	NO	NO	HOMICIDE	YES	absent	NO
16	2004	LOW	06/2022	NO	NO	ROBBERY	YES	absent	NO
17	2002	LOW	05/2022	NO	NO	AGGRESSION	NO	dead	NO
18	2005	LOW	01/2022	NO	NO	THEFT	NO	absent	NO

Figure C: The main characteristics considered interesting for the research of the eighteen participating adolescents.

In conclusion, having clear categories allows for organizing and structuring the data to facilitate analysis and interpretation. The next chapter will focus on the analysis of the obtained results and their interpretation from a constructionist perspective.

Chapter III

Results

The third and final chapter of this dissertation consists of the analysis and subsequent interpretation of the collected data, following the qualitative-constructivist perspective, as previously explained.

3.1 - Research Findings

The letters, representing the key object of this research, were transcribed into digital form with the help of the research team, for purely linguistic reasons and to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions themselves. These were then analysed in the following months in their original language using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software (Muhr, 1991; 1994); the software is based on the Grounded Theory approach, which posits that interpretations and results can emerge directly from the collected data rather than from pre-existing theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). In general, when analysing the data corpus using the software, the original language was preferred.

As previously explained, qualitative content analysis (QCA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) are the two main methods. The former focuses primarily on understanding the themes and content of texts (Schreier, 2012), while the latter focuses on the construction of meanings and social processes (Fairclough, 1992).

Once the research question was identified, after data collection and organization described in the previous chapters, the core of the analysis consists of creating dimensions and categories that form the framework for coding the data (Schreier, 2012). The software's goal is to assist data analysis by facilitating the process of creating codes, conceptual relationships, and thematic networks.

The data coding approach followed both an inductive and deductive path; thus, while some categories were predetermined based on the research objectives derived from a literature review on the presented themes, others emerged during the data analysis without a pre-existing structure. Finally, prominent patterns among the codes were identified, subsequently grouped, and linked to the relevant literature.

The data collected during the initial stages of the research are factual descriptions of events, the context, and observed individuals, transcribed in the form of ethnographic notes; therefore, they primarily serve the purpose of providing a clear understanding of the context. The subsequent data, such as adolescents' anamneses, interviews, and letters, underwent a proper analysis, both through the use of software and in a traditional form.

As mentioned, the qualitative-constructivist methodology extends to relationships and the social context, as well as to the participants themselves. Therefore, the results analysis will involve interpreting both the construction of reality emerging from the letters and the

subjectivity of the participants, comparing these with the literature and theories previously presented.

Before beginning, it is important to emphasize that the prison context is vulnerable, where great care must be taken not to disclose personal or identifiable data; for this reason, the participants' names and identifying information will not appear in any way. For convenience, especially in the use of the software, the youths will be associated with numbers, which will correspond to the numbers on their letters.

The interview with the socio-educational team is important for understanding the specific context and general dynamics between adolescents and the father figure, the mother figure, and the child figure. In general, a contradictory picture of family ties emerged, with a clear fragility in relationships with the father figure and a strong attachment to the mother figure. Regarding the father figure, it was highlighted that the most common reality is one of rupture and weakening of bonds. Many adolescents grew up without a present father figure or with a very weak bond with their fathers. In some cases, when the father is present, his involvement is often limited and may be associated with illegal activities or irresponsible behaviour. In general, the father figure does not play a strong role in their lives. On the other hand, the mother figure emerges as a fundamental source of affection and support for detained adolescents. They express a deep identification with their mothers and often consider them the primary emotional reference point. Regarding the child figure, many of the participants become fathers at a very young age, and the responsibility for their children tends to fall on their partners or their partners' families. According to the psychologists' perspective, despite the desire to be responsible fathers, there is a high risk that these adolescents may reproduce irresponsible behaviours similar to those of their own parents. In summary, the interview highlighted the complexity of family dynamics among detained adolescents, with a clear need for support to strengthen family bonds and promote a better understanding of relationships with fatherly, motherly, and child figures. To this end, professionals believe that the letter-writing project provided an opportunity for the youths to express their feelings and reflect on their family relationships. It was seen as a valuable channel for expression and reflection on relationships with fatherly, motherly, and child figures.

Despite the general awareness of these dynamics, the presence of individual letters allows

for an individual observation and analysis of each participant's story. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, even those who ultimately did not want or were unable to write and deliver the letter are still considered research participants because aspects of resistance and rejection towards the father figure emerged during individual sessions, which is important to consider.

Unlike the letters, which are a subjective production of the adolescents, the interviews were not analysed using the software; therefore, a more in-depth and specific analysis is essential for these. In the use of the software, the main dimensions of analysis, namely fatherhood, emotionality, and temporality, discussed in the previous section, were broken down into various categories, to which codes were assigned to adequately examine the various components of interest.

The dimension of fatherhood was broken down into the present father, the absent father, the deceased father, the father in prison, the father in addiction situations (alcohol/drugs) or with problems, the adoptive father. In addition, other subcategories were added even though they were not characteristics of the father in the strict sense; these included the spiritual father (God as father), the mother figure, other family figures/relationships that were neither father nor mother.

The second dimension, emotionality, was primarily broken down into three main categories: negative, neutral, and positive emotions. These, in turn, were specified in subcategories, where the main and recurring emotions/sensations were love, gratitude, esteem, nostalgia/saudade, forgiveness, indifference, loneliness, sadness, anger, resentment, rejection, grudge, disappointment.

The third dimension is temporality. This was also broken down into three categories: the past, the present, the future. The temporal dimension also has a symbolic value, where, the past is associated with error, the present with immobility (space-time), and the future with personal transformation and life change.

Out of the twenty adolescents who entered the facility from October to December 2022, only eighteen of them are actual participants, as one completed the socio-educational measure in October, and the other entered the facility in December. If all of them had written two letters each, there would be thirty-six now. At the conclusion of the project,

it was possible to collect a total of eighteen letters, equivalent to 50% of the maximum theoretically expected. Out of these, ten were theoretically intended for the father figure, while the remaining eight were addressed to the child. It is worth noting that within the category of letters intended for the father figure, not all were addressed to the biological father but rather to the caregiver identified by the adolescents, who could be the mother or grandmother.

Out of the eighteen participants, eight of them wrote two letters each, and other eight did not write any letters. Two of them only wrote the first letter, intended for their fathers; one of them completed the socio-educational measure after writing it, while the second entered the facility in December, delaying his entry compared to the other adolescents. In both cases, they did not have time to write the second letter, intended for their child.

Among the total number, five of them are unable to write; of these, only one still participated in the project, agreeing to speak while someone else wrote alongside him. Nevertheless, the result showed disorganized and incoherent thoughts, supporting the professionals' suspicion of the need for a comprehensive examination due to suspected intellectual disability and a high level of cognitive deficit. The other four youths who did not know how to write refused to dictate the letters and declined alternatives like drawing. One of them has a mental disorder specified by ICD 10 and is under psychiatric treatment. The other three are in the process of literacy within the facility.

The letters present a wide variation among them in terms of length, content, expression level, and literacy, while still addressing the same recipients. Additionally, it is important to note that two of the letters theoretically intended for the father figure were directed to another recipient; the first one addressed it to their grandmother, writing, "You are my mother and my father to me," and the second one began by writing, "To my mom and my grandpa".

The software analysed the letters based on the three dimensions and the selected categories mentioned earlier. It provides a series of views with different functions, including Code Distribution, Code-Document Table, Code Co-Occurrence (Beta), and Concepts (Beta).

These tools allow for observing the distribution of codes, the distribution of codes in documents, the co-occurrence of codes, and the cloud of concepts, respectively. The main

focus of the research is the father figure, how it is constructed and transmitted across generations, how it develops and takes shape from the perspective of being a child first and a father later. To obtain clearer results, the dimensions of analysis have been maintained in the results.

Crossing the emotional dimension (negative-positive-neutral emotions) and the fatherhood dimension (in all its categories) in a general way through the Code Co-Occurrence tool reveals that the range of positive emotions is correlated with the presence of either the mother or father. Conversely, the range of negative emotions strongly co-occurs with situations in which the father figure is absent or indifferent to the life of their child (Figure 1).

	FATHER: absent	FATHER: dead	FATHER: neutral/no relations	FATHER: present	MOTHER
EMOTION: anger	4	0	1	0	0
EMOTION: delusion	3	0	1	0	0
EMOTION: gratitude	0	0	0	0	1
EMOTION: indifference	2	0	3	0	0
EMOTION: love	0	0	0	2	1
EMOTION: refusal	2	0	2	0	0
EMOTION: resentment	3	0	1	0	0
EMOTION: sadness	7	0	2	0	0

Figure 1: Emotional dimension and paternal dimension. The intersection shows that the range of negative emotions strongly co-occurs with absent and indifferent fatherhood situations.

Subsequently, using the Code-Document tool, the narrow temporal dimension (past, present, future) was related to both groups of letters (both to fathers and to children). The results reveal that the future time is present more than twice as often in the letters to children, whereas, conversely, both past and present times are more prevalent in the letters to fathers than in those to children (Figure 2).

	LETTERS to CHILDREN	LETTERS to FATHER
TIME: future	20	9
TIME: past	2	15
TIME: present	5	9

Figure 2: Temporal dimension and letters. The intersection shows that future is more common in letters to children, while present and past are more common in letters to fathers.

Investigating deeper into the dimension of temporality, the Code-Document tool allowed us to observe the relationship among various categories of temporality, including symbolic ones. Thus, past, present, and future time, along with their associations with the time of error, immobility, and personal transformation, were examined in the documents, first towards fathers (Figure 3), and then towards children (Figure 4). The results reveal a strong presence of past time in letters addressed to fathers, while future and present times are roughly equivalent. Conversely, in letters addressed to children, the predominant time is the future, followed by the present, with past time nearly absent. In both situations, the category of personal transformation is salient, encompassing all messages that converge to show change and transformation related to post-detention. Although this category is more prevalent in letters destined for children, it still holds importance in those addressed to fathers.

	LETTERS to FATHER
TIME: error-mistake	2
TIME: future	9
TIME: immobility	4
TIME: past	15
TIME: personal transformation and life ...	7
TIME: present	9

Figure 3: Temporal dimension and letters to the father.

	LETTERS to CHILDREN
TIME: error-mistake	2
TIME: future	20
TIME: immobility	4
TIME: past	2
TIME: personal transformation and life ...	13
TIME: present	5

Figure 4: Temporal dimension and letters to the children.

These intersections show that in both situations, the category of personal transformation is relevant.

Connecting the narrow temporal dimension to the emotional dimension, it is relevant how the future time is deeply linked to the range of positive emotions, particularly love and

hope-trust. Conversely, the past time is primarily associated with the range of negative emotions, especially anger and sadness. The present emerges here as a rather neutral time, characterized by the coexistence of multiple emotional categories (Figure 5).

	TIME: future	TIME: past	TIME: present
EMOTION: anger	0	8	1
EMOTION: delusion	1	3	2
EMOTION: hope - trust	11	0	0
EMOTION: indifference	0	1	0
EMOTION: loneliness	0	0	1
EMOTION: love	10	1	1
EMOTION: regret	0	3	1
EMOTION: resentment	1	3	3
EMOTION: sadness	1	10	3
EMOTION: saudade/nostalgia	1	1	2

Figure 5: Emotional dimension and temporal dimension. The intersection shows that future time is deeply linked to the range of positive emotions, while past time is primarily associated with the range of negative emotions.

Looking more closely at the relationship between the emotional dimension and the temporal dimension, using the same Code Co-Occurrence tool, all categories of temporality were correlated with positive emotions (for convenience, empty rows/columns were removed from the specific view to directly observe meaningful relationships) (Figure 6). This highlights how future time, especially in its symbolic value of personal transformation and life change as described by the adolescents, is positively correlated with the presence of positive emotions, particularly love and hope-trust.

	EMOTION: hope - trust	EMOTION: love
TIME: future	11	10
TIME: personal transformation and life ...	9	6
TIME: present	0	1

Figure 6: Temporal dimension and positive emotional dimension. The intersection shows that future time, especially in its symbolic value of personal transformation and life change is positively correlated with the presence of positive emotions.

Using the tool that allows correlating codes with documents, the emotional dimension in general was observed in relation to both groups of letters, including negative, neutral, and positive emotions (Figure 7). The presence of positive emotions in the group of letters destined for the children is salient, especially in the categories of love and hope-trust. The latter refers to emotions and feelings related to the adolescents' desire to be able to be, or to give their children something. For example, someone writes: "My dream will come true, I will get you into medical school, my child, so you can make me proud, so you can be someone in life... hope is the last thing to die." Despite the dominance of positive emotions in the letters to the children, there are also references to nostalgia/saudade for those who are already parents but cannot be in daily contact with their children due to detention. For example: "Dad will be home soon", "Dad misses you like crazy", "When Dad gets here, he'll put you on his knees and take care of you, and he'll alleviate the longing".

In the group of letters destined for the fathers, the full range of emotions is present; however, the category that appears to be the most prominent is sadness.

	LETTERS to CHILDREN	LETTERS to FATHER
EMOTION: anger	0	8
EMOTION: delusion	0	4
EMOTION: esteem	0	2
EMOTION: gratitude	0	2
EMOTION: hope - trust	12	0
EMOTION: indifference	0	4
EMOTION: loneliness	0	1
EMOTION: love	18	7
EMOTION: refusal	0	2
EMOTION: regret	0	4
EMOTION: resentment	0	6
EMOTION: sadness	1	13
EMOTION: saudade/nostalgia	5	4

Figure 7: Emotional dimension and letters. The intersection shows that the categories love and hope-trust are relevant in letters to children, while the category sadness is salient in letters to fathers.

There is a category within the dimension of fatherhood that is worth highlighting, named "generationality" This category has been divided into "generationality from child to father", referring to the relationship between the writing adolescent and their own father, and "generationality from father to child," referring to the relationship between the writing adolescent and their own son/daughter.

The Code Co-Occurrence tool allows us to relate this category to the dimension of time, highlighting how generationality in the letters to the children is strongly linked to both the future and the time of personal transformation and change (Figure 8).

	TIME: future	TIME: past	TIME: personal transformation and life ...
GENERATIONALITY from FATHER to son	5	1	5
GENERATIONALITY from SON to father	0	1	0

Figure 8: *Generationality and temporal dimension. The intersection shows that generationality in letters to the children is strongly linked to future time and personal transformation time.*

The present category is important because it relates to the intergenerational dynamics of fatherhood. For example, one adolescent writes: "I will be the father to you that I never had," or "I will be present in my children's lives and not be like my father," or even "Everything I didn't have from my father and wanted, my children will have".

These words, written in a letter addressed to their own child, hold crucial significance as they allow the adolescent to engage in deep reflection on their responsibilities. This reflection often follows an analysis of their personal experience as a child, through which they have experienced the pain and frustration caused by their father's absence.

These findings also confirm the perspective of the professionals as revealed in the interviews. They report that in many cases, there is a lack of a sense of parental responsibility, which can be attributed to various reasons, including "machismo" where the responsibility for a child is seen as the mother's duty, immaturity (as many become fathers at a very young age), or because they end up replicating the same role they witnessed in their own fathers. Despite the adolescents' desire to "change" and "do things differently," as reflected in the letters themselves, it is essential to work on the dimension of parenthood. As the psychologist writes, "It's about making them realize that there is a life depending on them".

The results presented so far are the outcome of the analysis solely based on the letters written by the adolescents using the ATLAS.ti software. The next phase of analysis will focus on the anamneses from professionals outlining the socio-psychological state of the adolescents.

It is important to emphasize that these documents are not the adolescents' own work but rather a summary of crucial information about their lives. They help to gain a deep understanding of the context and highlight unique aspects of each life story. Furthermore, these documents, which serve as a summary of the adolescents' histories, serve to complement the analysis. From the initial analysis, some categories within the dimension

of fatherhood do not seem to have emerged sufficiently. This dimension is the only one that can be investigated, as the dimensions of emotions and time, being highly subjective, cannot be compared.

It is interesting to observe the reason behind this and understand whether it is due to the absence of the letter itself or a deliberate omission of certain information by the adolescents.

Proceeding with this second phase of analysis allows to examine beyond what the adolescents themselves have written, or beyond what they may have deliberately omitted, which will be referred to as "hidden states".

The anamneses or relations encompass the entire population of adolescents and are also useful for linking the information gap between participants who have written letters and those who have not. In some cases, they also help us understand the reasons behind resistance to write.

Relevant information in the anamneses has been selected and mainly includes age, date of entry into the facility, reason for admission (offense), family composition, socioeconomic condition, level of literacy/schooling, and other notable events according to the professionals. Among these, some are common to all, while others, although different among participants, have not produced interesting outcomes, even when correlated or intersected with other documents or results. These include the age range, which spans from sixteen to twenty years, and the low and vulnerable socioeconomic status, which does not seem to have any relevant impact on the various hypothesized correlations. Similarly, the committed offenses, although varying from theft, robbery, homicide, assaults, sexual offenses, illicit drug and/or weapons trafficking, do not appear to be related to the main identified dimensions.

The level of literacy among adolescents varies, but due to what has been described previously, it has not produced any particularly relevant results, except for the inability to include the two main requested documents in the analysis, namely, the two letters. The year of entry into the facility ranges from 2021 to 2022, and again, there do not seem to be notable differences, except for the two cases described earlier involving the adolescents who had less time than the others and only submitted the letter to their father. At this point, family composition remains as the only substantial information. For convenience, all eighteen anamneses have been entered into ATLAS.ti. Then, the same

codes as those for the multiple categories forming the dimension of fatherhood have been applied, along with others that did not emerge previously (e.g., adoptive father). The codes applied in this phase are absent father, deceased father, separated father, father with addictions (alcohol-drugs)/issues (including mental health), neutral-indifferent father (no relationship), present father, violent father, father in prison, adoptive father. Applying the Code-Document tool to the dimension of fatherhood and the anamneses reveals various lines of connection that require in-depth analysis (Figure 9).

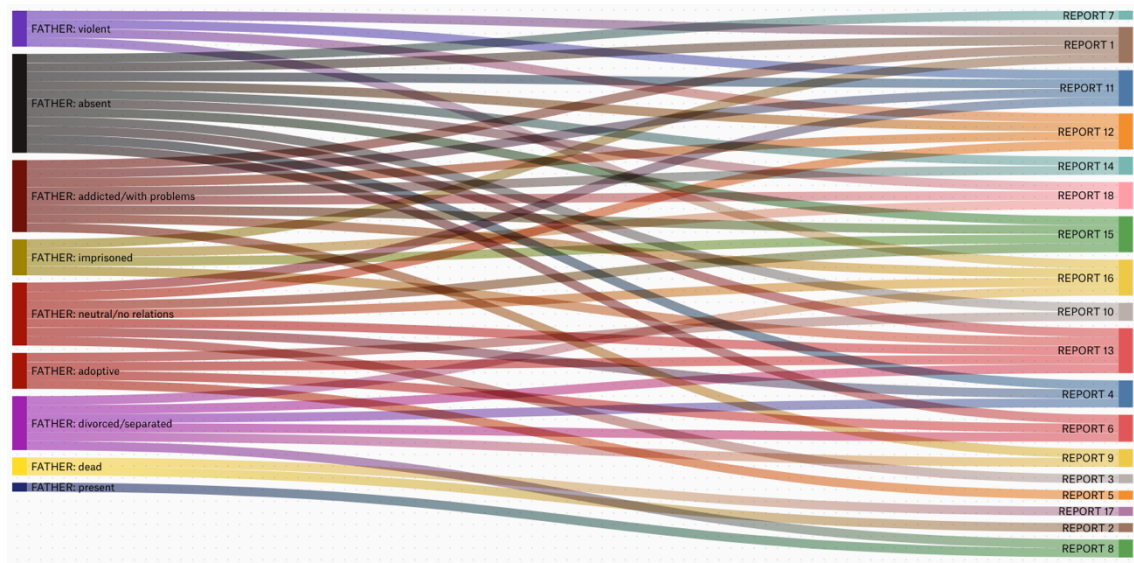


Figure 9: Paternal dimension and anamneses. This intersection shows the multiple lines of connection between father states and adolescent reports.

Indeed, in addition to the need to add new codes, it is evident how all these lines of connection denote a substantial absence of references to these "father states" in the letters from the adolescents. References to the "father states" present in the letters to the fathers were then compared to those present in the anamneses from the professionals, obtaining the following result (Figure 10).

	LETTERS to FATHER	REPORTS-ANAMNESES
FATHER: absent	13	11
FATHER: addicted/with pro...	1	8
FATHER: adoptive	0	4
FATHER: dead	1	2
FATHER: divorced/separated	4	6
FATHER: imprisoned	0	4
FATHER: neutral/no relations	7	7
FATHER: present	3	1
FATHER: violent	0	4

Figure 10: Paternal dimension in letters and anamneses. The intersection shows the comparison of father states between letters to fathers and adolescents reports.

From here, it becomes clear that some of these "father states" have not been mentioned at all in the letters from the adolescents, suggesting that in these cases, there is resistance, refusal, or negligence. This seems to represent a relevant opportunity to further refine the research focus.

In particular, the "father states" of "dependent/with problems," "in prison," and "violent" were mentioned only once in the letters and sixteen times in the anamneses. Therefore, it is believed that these differences need to be further investigated.

3.2 – Discussion

This research has qualitatively explored the entire dataset, comprising letters written by adolescents, anamneses/reports from professionals about adolescents, and interviews with the socio-educational team. The dimensions of analysis include the paternal dimension, the emotional dimension, and the temporal dimension.

In the first phase of analysis, the letters were analysed using the software ATLAS.ti, and the various dimensions were correlated with each other to observe their relationships.

In the second phase of analysis, the anamneses/reports of the adolescents are introduced into the analysis documents and correlated with the results highlighted by the analysis of the letters.

When interpreting the results, it is appropriate to refer to the literature of interest presented in the first chapter.

As previously explained, prison is a microcosm where an unspoken code of rules prevails, one of the most characteristic being the inability to show vulnerability (Kupers, 2005; 2017). This, in addition to the literacy factor, undoubtedly allows for a prior reflection on the resistance and refusal of some adolescents to express themselves and/or write on a delicate and sensitive subject. Furthermore, for the same reason, it was impossible to create moments of community during the project, which, on the contrary, was conducted individually. Some studies in this regard show how manifestations of vulnerability such as crying or self-harm can influence and compromise the integrity and stability of identity (Gooch, 2016).

It has also been stated that in the microcosm of a juvenile detention centre, the construct of masculinity intensifies; this finds a response in the age of the individuals involved, who are going through a transition from adolescence to adulthood (Messerschmidt, 1993). In this research, the age of the participants ranges from sixteen to twenty years, thus considered notable a priori in line with the studies just mentioned.

In this transitional phase, detention appears as an interruption from the normal course of life (Gooch, 2016). The concept of "interruption" is worth remembering because it is one

of the reasons why in the research, the present time (of detention) will be associated with the symbolic time of "immobility", present in many letters.

The temporal dimension is certainly a recurring theme in this research, and its symbolic connotation is equally relevant. By "temporal immobility", connected to the "present time" or detention, we refer to one of the main characteristics of the prison microcosm: spatiotemporal immobility. Prison is, by its nature, a place of closure and immobility (Kupers, 2005; Bartlett & Eriksson, 2019; Sandberg, Agoff & Fondevila, 2022).

In this regard, Bartlett and Eriksson (2019) introduce the concept of "liminality", easily connected to that of "immobility", to refer to the typical space of the prison where the individual is temporarily suspended between the inner and outer worlds (Bartlett & Eriksson, 2019). Once again, the dimension of immobility returns about the time spent in detention.

Specifically, when observing the temporal dimension about the emotional dimension, the results show that the range of positive emotions is correlated with the category "future time", while the range of negative emotions is correlated with the category "past time". At the same time, when comparing the temporal dimension in letters to fathers and letters to children, it emerges that the "past time" category is more prevalent in letters to fathers, while the "future time" category is more prevalent in letters to children.

Therefore, it is a salient result, though not surprising. Considering the symbolic dimension of temporality, in both types of letters, the category of "personal transformation and life change" remains predominant, although it is more present in letters addressed to children. This is somewhat surprising because one would expect it in letters to children but not in letters to fathers.

Building upon the concept of spatio-temporal immobility, some studies, in a subsequent step, identify and demonstrate ways and methods to overcome this spatio-temporal immobility of detention. In particular, they highlight how working on the narrative of fatherhood can allow inmates to project themselves into the "future time" and the "time of transformation", focusing on realizing their ambitions of being "good fathers" (Sandberg, Agoff & Fondevila, 2022). Other studies have shown that this is strongly correlated with the psychological well-being of inmates (Schultz, Bucerius & Haggerty,

2023), as well as the emotional connections and well-being of children (Poehlmann et al., 2010), especially when such contacts are part of an intervention (e.g., Byrne et al., 2010; Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998). Conversely, it has been demonstrated that the total absence of contact with parents can be more problematic and linked to feelings of estrangement (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). For this reason, it is relevant to consider the advantages of long-distance interactions, such as letters or phone conversations (Tuerk & Loper, 2006). Furthermore, another very important study highlights the effects of storytelling projects by incarcerated fathers on their children (Andersson and Turesson, 2023). Although the project is different, it is still important to mention it because it emphasizes the element of considering the factor of distance and separation generated by incarceration. It also shows how separation challenges the image of the family unit from the outside and family dynamics from within (Strasser et al., 2009). A systematic analysis conducted by Sarkadi et al. (2008) demonstrates that the active and regular involvement of fathers leads to multiple positive outcomes, such as improved cognitive abilities and a reduction in crimes and economic disadvantages in families with limited education. This provides a solid foundation to encourage both professionals and decision-makers to create a supportive environment to promote fathers' active participation in their children's lives. Having an incarcerated parent means missing the daily interactions on which to build normal family routines, presenting a notable challenge. Results show that caring for practical aspects can lead to greater closeness and the formation of a deeper bond (Morgan, 2011). If the daily care that usually constitutes the relationship and forms the sense of significance and security is impossible, at least the imagination of a future can have positive consequences (Andersson and Turesson, 2023). Moreover, the temporal dimension of future time is strongly present.

Detention shapes parenthood (Charles et al., 2019), which is why involvement in parenting programs (Johnson 2001) is important to mitigate negative outcomes in academic, occupational, health, reproductive, and behavioural domains associated with paternal absence (Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan 2004). Despite how correctional institutions may negatively influence self-perception as criminals (Little, 1990), incarcerated fathers can also maintain, develop, and demonstrate strong parenting characteristics, offering them an alternative identity to that of a criminal or inmate (Meek, 2011), provided they receive adequate support. This is also important for the post-

detention period; in fact, researchers identify the quality of father-child relationships during paternal incarceration as a key indicator of relationship quality at the time of the father's reintegration (Festen et al., 2002), especially in strengthening caring parenting behaviours (Brunton-Smith and McCarthy, 2017) and in continuing some parental responsibilities (such as playing, assisting with schoolwork, and setting limits on children's activities) during detention (Visher, 2013).

Indeed, the results of the present research have shown that letters to children are strongly linked to positive emotions and a temporal dimension of the future and personal transformation.

Introducing the emotional dimension, the research has demonstrated that the results intersecting the emotional and paternal dimensions show that the range of positive emotions is correlated with the categories "present father" and "mother", while the range of negative emotions is correlated with the categories "absent father" and "neutral father". The inclusion of the maternal figure among the categories is important because the professionals themselves have described her as "a place of welcome, support, and safety" (Psychologist). There are situations in which this figure is compromised, but the most common and recurring thought is "mother queen" and/or "mother above all else" (psychologist), as emerged from the interviews.

Furthermore, when comparing the emotional dimension in letters to fathers and letters to children, it is evident that the range of positive emotions is relevant in letters destined for children, particularly in the categories of "love" and "hope-trust". Conversely, letters to fathers encompass the emotional dimension in general, including negative, neutral, and positive emotions, but the most prevalent category is "sadness" because situations of absent paternal states predominate.

Finally, the category of "generationality" described earlier within the paternal dimension, is salient in letters to children. Considering these results, it was deemed necessary to investigate the past or pre-detention time. This will be better explained later, with appropriate references to the literature.

In the second phase of the analysis, which includes the addition of histories or reports, there is an expansion and deepening of the paternal dimension, to the extent that it becomes necessary to create new "paternal states".

Indeed, as anticipated by the reference literature at the beginning of the thesis, fatherhood can be studied in relation to multiple and alternative constructions of masculinity (Connell, 1995). Collier and Sheldon (2008) have described contemporary fatherhood as fragmented, and Dermott (2008) conceives it as a "collection of fatherhoods".

Among these, one author proposes the hypothesis of "important fatherhood" (Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005), indicating that good fatherhood is one of many factors promoting positive outcomes for children, having positive consequences regardless of other influences like a good mother, and having these consequences in ways not necessarily linked to fathers' masculinity (Pleck, 2010). In the present research, this designation was not included because it implies an implicit judgment and required information that could not be obtained, including post-detention data.

On the contrary, the results highlight that among the most salient categories are "dependent/troubled father", "in prison", and "violent father."

Consistent with these results, some studies show that the presence of adolescents in prison is mainly related to three important factors, namely coming from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds, drug and/or alcohol dependence, and experiencing violence (Steiner, Garcia & Mathews, 1997; Miller 1996). These precisely correspond to the three substantial paternal states.

One study in particular analyses the impact of low socioeconomic status on parenting behaviour and its consequences (Burbach, Fox & Nicholson, 2004). The article highlights that fathers with low SES tend to use punitive practices more often with their children compared to those with higher SES, and these have been associated with behavioural problems in children. Fathers with low SES also report more parenting stress compared to those with high SES (Stormshak, Bierman, McMahon, and Lengua, 2000). In general, there are many differences in parenting approaches based on socioeconomic context (Burbach, Fox & Nicholson, 2004). This is an important factor to consider, as the population involved in this research shares low and vulnerable socioeconomic status, a family history of addiction, and violent parents. In this case, the reference literature is a fundamental framework in line with the results shown. Adolescents need to confront and understand the initially hidden and subsequently emerging "paternal states", working through any resistance they may encounter in the process.

So far, we have discussed the concept of fatherhood in the context of incarceration, but it is also important to emphasize the particular type of fatherhood in question, namely adolescent fatherhood, as the individuals involved, male minors, are not only sons but also take on the role of fathers themselves.

Fatherhood in Brazil, as explained in the first chapter, has been defined by a scholar as the most conflicting aspect of male identity (Nolasco, 1993). For example, some studies on fatherhood in Latin America speak of a slower and more gradual change compared to the Western part of the world, where domestic and family responsibilities generally remain in the hands of women (Jelin, 1998; 2005). This notion is unanimously confirmed by professionals who assert that whether the father is present or not, primary responsibility is given to the mother.

Entering the literature on adolescent fatherhood in Brazil, this is an increasing reality (Carvalho et al., 2009; Meincke and Carraro, 2009), and the factors that determine it are related to disadvantaged social contexts (Fasula et al., 2019), as is the case in the present context.

Some of the main factors include a childhood history of abuse, delinquent behaviours, single-parent or divorced families, adolescent parents, parental dependence (drugs/alcohol), parents with mental illnesses, parents with a history of detention, and a vulnerable community (Miller et al., 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003). Many of these factors presented in the literature are the same as those characterizing the families involved in this research at a general level; for this reason, it is appropriate to delve even further into this specific discourse.

The incarceration of a parent is considered a strong stressor for a family (Conger et al., 1994), which has a range of consequences for the children. Among these are childhood maladjustment, adult delinquency, emotional difficulties, and social interaction problems (Arditti, 2012). Detention stories involving the father figure have been associated with externalizing behavioural manifestations (i.e., aggressive attitudes or norm violations) in children (Geller et al., 2012).

From the results of the present research, the dimension of generationality emerges as a relevant aspect in the letters, with adolescents reflecting on their future responsibilities as parents and seeking to break free from negative patterns inherited from the past.

The interactional theory of antisocial behaviour (Thornberry, 1987) highlights the high

probability that antisocial parents have antisocial children. This is because research outcomes confirm the existence of intergenerational continuity in antisocial behaviour, and this continuity is more apparent among fathers than among mothers (Thornberry et al., 2003).

It is important to mention these theories because the results of the present research have revealed that some of the parents of incarcerated adolescents are themselves detained or have a history of legal problems. In this case, as well, the results align with the reference literature, further validating the hypothesis of promoting targeted interventions to support responsible parenting among incarcerated adolescents.

Additionally, another study related to adolescent fatherhood shows various risk factors: insecure attachment to the primary caregiver, biogenetic vulnerability, difficult temperament, overly strict parenting, mental health issues, family stress, poverty, and families with a history of detention (Shade et al., 2011). If these factors are prevalent, then according to the author, there is a strong likelihood that the consequence will be an "ambivalent" or "disengaged" father, as most situations emerging from the results confirm.

In conclusion, it has already been mentioned that prison represents a period of involuntary separation and inactivity, which, for most parents, implies a rupture of their parental role (Clarke et al. 2005; Mapson 2013). Consequently, being a parent adds an additional layer of complexity to the reintegration process, as parents seek to manage not only their reintegration into the community but also their reintegration into family roles and responsibilities. Some results have highlighted the importance that incarcerated fathers attach to regaining lost time during incarceration and deepening their relationship with their children so that their children can avoid the mistakes made by the parent (Charles et al., 2019). This fundamental aspect is referred to as "generationality" in the present research and has shown salient results about letters addressed to children, strongly indicating that incarcerated adolescent fathers desire, at least theoretically, not to repeat the same parenting mechanisms and roles they experienced as children.

Introducing an additional reference to the Interactional Theory of Antisocial Behaviour (Thornberry, 1987) described previously and comparing it with these findings, it is

appropriate to emphasize that all three adolescents who have declared and acknowledged children and have expressed feelings of redemption towards their children's figure do not have fathers with a history of detention, addiction, or violence. In particular, one has an adoptive father and has never met their biological father, another is cared for by their grandmother and has never known their biological father, and the third has a favourable family situation and a positive relationship with their father. This aspect does not directly confirm the Interactional Theory of Antisocial Behaviour (Thornberry, 1987) but supports it through the confirmation of an exception, despite the small sample size.

These studies and the results obtained emphasize the importance of addressing the most salient analysis categories for incarcerated adolescents and working on the "present time" of "immobility" to have positive consequences on the "future time" of "personal transformation".

To conclude, this research has analysed the experience of incarceration of adolescents within a juvenile detention centre, taking into consideration the aspects of parenthood from a dual perspective, that of being children and that of being fathers. To do so, the dimensions considered theoretically relevant were chosen, namely the dimensions of fatherhood, emotionality, and temporality. Finally, the results obtained have been supported by a coherent reference literature. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing targeted interventions to improve the lives of incarcerated adolescents and promote their well-being and reintegration into society.

Conclusion

The reference literature has shown how involvement in a detention path can influence a person's perception of their parental role and reinforce stereotypical traits of masculinity, especially if this occurs during the process of adultization, where children assume adult roles and responsibilities within the family. This process is common among children from economically disadvantaged families (Burton, 2007), as in the present research. Understanding the paternal figure from a dual perspective, first as children and then as fathers, within a juvenile detention centre and an economically disadvantaged context, means comprehending bilateral mechanisms of intergenerational influences on roles, identities, and responsibilities.

Implementing parenthood-related projects is necessary to impact the dimension referred to in this research as "generationality" and to assist young and/or future fathers in the context of incarceration in understanding and resolving identity practices that may be foreign or conflicting to them. Care activities are needed to promote paternal identity and the development of the role among male adolescents.

The detention period is a time of immobility, where it is crucial to develop ways to keep fatherhood alive (or acknowledge it to avoid evasion) despite the structural circumstances that objectively complicate the assumption of this role (Lamb, 1987). Expressive writing can be an option to preserve this identity.

Furthermore, it is evident that for the detainees it is easier to discuss fatherhood in the context of the future rather than the past, despite a substantial degree of optimism. While narratives in the present had to account for current challenges and circumstances, future visions had fewer limitations of this kind.

Assisting detainees in this process, which extends between the present and the future, can be considered a "generative activity" (Sandberg et al., 2022, p.241).

The temporal dimension plays a crucial role in understanding narratives and their meaning within the context of parent-child relationships. Parental dynamics do not crystallize in the present but extend to future experiences and perspectives, filled with hope or anxiety. Family practices during the detention period are placed in a temporal context that encompasses family history, the present, and expectations for the future.

The family situation, when one parent is under detention, manifests itself in various

shades depending on the circumstances and pre-existing relational dynamics. However, in the majority of cases, incarceration leaves a profound mark on the parent-child relationship. The project's goal is to transcend the physical confines of detention by creating contexts where family ties can be exceptionally strengthened during the period of incarceration. Daily care, which typically contributes to creating a sense of security and meaning in family relationships, is often absent in the context of incarceration, and trust and connection are rarely built (Landolt & Wei Da, 2005).

At this point, it is necessary to highlight peculiarities and limitations of this research. The study *Reflections on the Performance of Emotion, Masculinity, and Position Within a Prison Ethnography* (Stewart, 2020) served as an inspiration to describe some relevant dynamics that can arise when conducting research in a prison, an emotionally charged environment (Liebling, 2014).

To conduct research in a prison, effective management and understanding of one's own emotions “are fundamental to comprehend the research process, exploring the substantial gains in understanding that can emerge from recognizing the (inter)subjective and embodied dimensions of fieldwork” (Rowe, 2014, p. 404).

Prison is a microcosm where any external element inevitably draws attention to itself, especially if it is present daily, if it is female, young, or foreign. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the emotional challenges to be faced. Despite being treated with respect almost all the time, I experienced the feeling of being in danger, of being in excess, uncomfortable, and stressed. Therefore, I engaged in an important emotional effort to manage my internal reactions and external impressions and to assert my position, which was necessary to gain their trust and respect. It is equally important to find effective ways to address these personal and relational challenges, developing strategies to maintain appropriate boundaries. The fact that this research was conducted by a twenty-three-year-old female student certainly influenced the research itself. Particularly, since it was a juvenile detention centre, the adolescents were under 21 years old, so one could almost speak of peers. Earning respect and trust involved a series of notable mechanisms, and it is important to emphasize them for the discussions on reflexivity presented in the second chapter. However, it is equally important to note that I never had the impression that participation in the letter-writing project was considered more attractive because I was a

woman. Given the sensitivity of the proposed project, there is a high probability that gender issues were secondary. In conclusion, the words of Coffey (1999, p.5) are useful and explanatory, stating that “fieldwork shapes, builds identities, intimate relationships, an emotional self, and a physical self”. This means that the expression of emotions in specific social contexts are shaped by culture and social roles. Human encounters reflect the intensity of emotions not only in the conflict dynamics and prevailing social rules in a prison context, but also in the process of immersion in fieldwork in general (Stewart, 2020).

Presenting the limitations of this research, the primary one is of a space-time nature. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, there are structural limitations imposed by detention that affect the research. For instance, the boys did not have constant access to paper and a pen, which had repercussions on their writing freedom. Simultaneously, the time limit has to be considered since it is a place characterized by fixed and established hourly rules that cannot be disregarded. In addition, the detention period is predetermined, and there were several instances where someone who had initiated the project could not complete it due to their own release, or conversely, it was challenging to involve boys who entered last because there wasn't enough time to create a space of trust and listening.

Furthermore, the limitations of a study with eighteen participants are evident as it cannot claim representativeness. However, the strength of the available data and the opportunity to delve so specifically into a context and obtain subjective elaborations from insiders must be acknowledged. In particular, the use of expressive writing had limitations regarding the illiterate population; at the same time, it had two main advantages, one in terms of personal distance, allowing some adolescents to express themselves in ways they might not have verbally. The second advantage concerns the fact that the practice of writing could improve literacy levels even to a minimal extent.

Another significant aspect to consider pertains to the concept of restitution, which entails sharing research findings with the communities or individuals involved, whether directly or indirectly (Lupo & Minicuci, 2015). In the context of this research, the process of restitution is developed in two distinct phases.

The first phase occurred on the final day of my stay when I chose to write and read a

letter. I considered this moment a sensitive means to encourage self-expression. The recipient of this letter was the entire community of the detention centre, but it was especially directed toward the adolescents who collaborated with me on the project that enabled this research. Alongside expressing profound gratitude, it explored the theme of expressive writing and highlighted the challenges associated with self-expression. Then, I gave the letters back to them, emphasizing the significance of keeping the letters in order to read them again in the future.

Returning the letters written by the adolescents is a tangible way to share the project accomplished together and to encourage reflection on what has been achieved.

The second phase of restitution involved the creation of a well-structured brochure for the present project. This brochure was intended to be donated to the institution to facilitate the project's continuity with future interns and educators.

After some professionals informed me that some interns were continuing the project I had initiated, although, in an unstructured manner, I considered it crucial to delineate guidelines that could enhance the project's implementation beyond what I had achieved. The aim was to provide, in a clear and structured form, what had been generously granted to me. The goal was to contribute to sustaining the project over time. I firmly believe that the practice of restitution is an essential moment in guaranteeing that research has a genuine and enduring impact on the individuals involved.

In conclusion, the professionals interviewed unanimously viewed the letter-writing project positively, considering it "an important initiative... intelligent...needed".

The goal of this project was to observe and investigate the paternal figure without using excessively intrusive methods. Writing seemed like a suitable method that provided the necessary distance and detachment in such a vulnerable and delicate context. Furthermore, this methodology was supported by a substantial body of reference literature. Within the prison environment, adolescents feel pressured to hide their emotions and avoid displaying any vulnerability or weakness.

This is where the paper can assume the role of a "privileged space for reflection" (Social Worker). The presence of every adolescent was crucial, whether they were able to express themselves on paper or not, because even the unreceived letters - non-letters - contained content related to difficulties, disinterest, refusal, or resistance in processing this

relationship. Regarding the analysis of the paternal figure, it was defined as an opportunity for the boys to "perceive themselves in their role in this relationship and in what they want to be for their own children". The project was considered "a beautiful gift, both for the adolescents and for the unit" (Psychologist). Therefore, based on the value of feedback, I believe it is appropriate, if not necessary, to create a more structured project of this kind to offer to the institution that allowed this research to take place. Evaluating the micro-level merits of such a project allows us to validate and demonstrate the importance of creating an appropriate space for reflection within complex and vulnerable contexts like juvenile detention.

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