Scoring For Social Change: A Study of the Mathare Youth Sports Association in Kenya

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Abstract

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The issue of slums has been a growing concern in many developing countries. This dissertation focuses on the micro-practices of youths involved in a sports group known as the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) in Kenya to reveal how the youth navigate various constraints posed by living in slum habitats. MYSA uses an innovative approach to development that combines sports and other social issues such as environmental work, HIV/AIDS awareness, and education.

This research draws primarily from narrative theory and postcolonial feminist standpoints as frameworks for understanding the young people’s lived experiences. These standpoints were selected because of their emphasis on the importance of taking into consideration alternative viewpoints, historicity, and the relationships of individuals to social, political and economic landscapes when representing group(s) of people. The study relies mainly on qualitative field research methods that include in-depth interviews, document analysis, and participant observations.

The results section highlights emergent contradictions that challenge dominant public discourses by providing counter-narratives that are synthesized into four themes that include: the dichotomy between play and work; gender issues; identity; and organizational development.
Finally, a discussion of the findings is included. I argue that MYSA reconceptualizes the privileging of public over private issues in organizational contexts by revealing how organizations can advance their objectives and promote individuals empowerment at the same time. Second, MYSA presents a view from below that can be viewed as a call for scholars, as well as development practitioners to begin their work from the margins. Third, MYSA reconstructs homogenous notions of identity by revealing how youths living in constraint environments are able to navigate such challenges through their utterances and symbolic action thereby evincing multiple/fragmented identities. Fourth, this research reveals how sports can be used for pedagogical purposes, hence, advancing the discussion of rigid dichotomies that separate play and work. Lastly, a discussion of the limitations and future directions for the study are provided.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

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_____________________________________________________________________

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Dedication

To my mother and grandmother
Acknowledgments

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* All images in this study were provided by MYSA’s Shootback Project.
Chapter One

Problem Statement

My first encounter with organizing towards social change took place after I completed my bachelor’s degree in Kenya. At that time, jobs were difficult to come by. In fact, the best way of getting into the job market was by volunteering or getting an internship with a local organization. My college mates and I were lucky to get such opportunities because securing work, voluntary or otherwise, became almost impossible for college students who graduated a couple of years after we did. The job market simply was unable to accommodate the number of people graduating from college. I was fortunate to get an internship of interest to me with a women’s empowerment centre located in the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya’s capital city.

My job as an intern involved conducting and monitoring village trainings on basic economic principles at the Centre. The organization had divided the location where it was based into about 9 areas that we would visit periodically. My job was to accompany the organization’s members to these trainings, and to ensure that the trainings were carried out appropriately and that evaluations were conducted. The Centre’s approach to political, social and economic issues facing people in this area was to train trainers who would in turn disseminate the information to the community. These visits provided me with opportunities to interact with the community. Although the organization targeted women, most of the time I found myself accompanied by middle aged women (35 years and above) and young men who served as trainers. Younger women (15-30 years) turned up
for the trainings occasionally. It was challenging to recruit this age group because many of them were either single mothers or they had to work and could not find time for activities that were supported by the Centre.

The young men that I worked with envied my position as an intern because, unlike me, they had not had the opportunity to pursue higher education, and their futures seemed bleak. Their involvement with the organization gave them something to look forward to, and their recognition as trainers accorded them respect from the members of the community. However, the absence of young women continued to be an issue of concern. After working in the Centre for sometime, I was able to understand why young women seemed invisible in community activities.

There are two issues that stand out when I reflect back on these experiences, including the Centre’s domestic violence counseling sessions (which took place on a weekly basis) and programs for community sex workers. The Centre had a full time lawyer and also worked in partnership with a women and law organization that advocated for women’s rights. If a case was manageable, then the Centre’s lawyer would work with the local police to ensure that a warning letter was sent to the abuser(s), and if the violence did not diminish, then further action would be taken. More serious cases would be referred to the larger women’s organization. Some of the difficulties experienced by the Centre with regard to women’s violence included the fact that Kenya was and remains a patriarchal society. In many instances, the women would still be at the mercy of their husband and a number of them would not return to the Centre for fear of
losing husband support after the first meeting. These power differentials were also evident in economic issues. The Centre worked with another organization to empower women economically by establishing small scale grants for the women to begin businesses. The money would be distributed at different stages. However, with time, the Centre realized that the women ended up using the money for school fees and other basic uses and their businesses never took off.

The commercial sex workers also did not come back to the Centre because the Centre’s alternative for these young women was to provide them with sewing machines. Many women were not interested in this kind of business. First, such an enterprise would mean spending time learning how to sew and make dresses. Second, where would they get a market for their clothes? This, compared with commercial sex, seemed to be the least attractive alternative. Third, what gave us the right, as an organization, to decide on a trade that would be best for them? We hadn’t lived their lives and many of us associated with the organization had many more opportunities. In numerous ways, we could not empathize with their lived experiences.

The Centre attempted to establish an enhanced dialogue with the committee through monthly consultative meetings at the town hall. The voices of the constituents were clear; however, their concerns all required additional resources. The women’s empowerment centre was donor funded and money was limited. The women expressed discontent with the organizational goals. I ended my internship because an opportunity opened up for me and I was able to pursue
further education. A few months later, I heard that the organization had been shut down because donors were not willing to renew funding for the organization.

My experience with the women’s Centre left me with more questions than answers. I have always wondered what happened to the youth I worked with, and what the Centre could have done better. Throughout my graduate studies, I have sought to answer these questions. I was particularly drawn to postcolonial feminist and narrative ways of theorizing as they situate formerly colonized countries within historical contexts. They also deal with issues of voice and representation. As I went back to work with the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) for research and praxis purposes, my objective was to leave with more answers than questions. MYSA was a different sort of development initiative than the organizations with which I had been involved. MYSA, run by and for youth, has transformed the spaces in which youth live and challenged norms that often limit rather than empower youth. I wanted to bear witness to how they do this.

Kenya is located in the eastern part of the African continent, and by 2004, was home to an estimated population of 32 million people (Government of Kenya, 2006). The country is divided into eight provinces that are made up over 40 ethno-linguistic groups (Ennew, 2000). Kenya acquired independence from the British in 1963 through the nationalistic efforts and resistance of its people. In 1992, Kenya became a democratic state characterized by a multiplicity of political parties. Contrary to the general expectations that democracy leads to more accountability by governments and to economic growth, Kenya continues to experience political, economic, and social problems.
I begin this chapter by describing the social landscape of Kenya, in general, and the Mathare, slums in particular. I then describe the efforts of MYSA as they work to address some of the health, educational, and environmental problems experienced by participants. Next, I articulate my theoretical standpoints and conclude the chapter with a set of research questions.

The Social Landscape of Kenya and the Mathare Slums

Kenya’s economic growth rate has declined over the years. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2001), Kenya’s economy performed poorly in the late 1990s, as it grew by 2.3 percent, 1.8 percent, 1.4 percent and 2.0 percent per year in 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 respectively. This decrease is attributed to the harsh effects of structural adjustment programs that promoted liberalization of markets, and the introduction of cost cutting in education and the health care system. The sharp deterioration in economic performance worsened the poverty situation. The number of impoverished people is estimated to have risen from 11 million, or 48 percent of the population, to 17 million, or 56 percent of the population in 2001 (Government of Kenya, 2003). Meanwhile, the country is characterized by large rates of unemployment, deteriorating health facilities, and lower numbers of students enrolling in school. Furthermore, these problems continually affect young people who form the majority of the population. Almost half of the population (44%) is aged below 15. This percentage is expected to remain at the same level up to 2008 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). In terms of employment, the number of unemployed people currently stands at over 2 million or 14.6 percent of the labor force, with young people (15-45 years) accounting for 45% of the total labor force (Government of Kenya, 2003).
School participation rates have also continued to decrease considerably. According to a Government of Kenya report (2003), school participation at the primary education level increased by 1.1% between 1980 and 1989, but then declined by 6.6% between 1989 and 1993. In 2002, Kenya’s president Mwai Kibaki introduced a free primary school system. The impact of this system has yet to be felt because older groups of people who did not enjoy this privilege remain uneducated and unemployed. Similarly, secondary school enrollment has also been on the decline. In 1990, the gross enrollment in secondary schools was 30.2% by 1998 it had fallen to 24% which indicates that well over 70% of eligible children in Kenya do not achieve secondary school education (Ennew, 2000). Access to a secondary school education is constrained not only by the limited number of secondary schools, but also the high cost of secondary school against the backdrop of deepening poverty.

Young people have also been affected by HIV/AIDS. From a single reported AIDS case in 1984, the Kenyan National AIDS control program (1999) estimated the reported AIDS cases to be close to 90,000, while over 2 million people were reportedly living with HIV (Kenya, 2001). The Kenya national demographic and health survey estimated that 7% of adults between the age 15 to 49 years are infected with HIV and the rates of women are nearly double the rates in men. It is also estimated that more than 850,000 children have been orphaned due to HIV/AIDS. The AIDS prevalence is generally higher in urban areas with an average of 11-12% of the population infected. 80-90% of the infections are in the 15-49 age group. Most AIDS deaths occur among individuals between ages 25-35 for men and 20 to 30 for women, assuming an average incubation period of 9 to 10 years (Ennew, 2000). These deaths suggest that most
infections occur among teens and those in their early twenties. NASCOP’S 1999 report on AIDS in Kenya estimated adult prevalence at 13.5% which means that Kenya has one of the most serious HIV/AIDS epidemics in the world when compared with figures available from other countries.

The Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) is located in Kenya’s Capital in a slum known as Mathare. Kenya’s slums, like those in other parts of the world, grew as a result of urbanization as large numbers of people migrated into cities looking for employment in economic activities that mostly revolved around industries and service providers located in the cities (Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2004). Today, about 20% of the population in many African countries live in urban areas, and it is estimated that half of the continent will be urban by 2025 (Dodoo, Sloan & Zulu, 2002). In this group, 60% live in substandard housing and are confined to a small portion of the city, in some cases less than 5% of the total residential area (UN-Habitat, 2004). Welfare monitoring surveys conducted by the Kenyan government indicate that, although three quarters of the poor live in rural areas, the majority of poor people living in urban areas live in slums and peri-urban areas (Government of Kenya, 2003).

Mathare is located a few miles northeast of Nairobi. The slum was established in 1963 as a settlement for landless people (Hake, cited in Brady & Khan, 2002). Since that time, people from all parts of the country have migrated there in the hope of finding land and work. However, these two prospects are difficult to find because of the high unemployment problems that face the country as a whole. The living conditions in Mathare are also some of the worst in Nairobi. Most people live in small, poorly ventilated single rooms which are subdivided by makeshift curtains for privacy (Brady &
Homes are made of cardboard, wood, or mud and wattle, with roofs of tin or corrugated iron.

Image 1: An aerial view of Mathare Slums

It is estimated that Mathare holds between half a million to a million people, and that 70 percent of the households are single parent families with mothers generally raising children (Hognestad & Tollisen, 2004). In many cases, the slums are referred to as informal settlements, a label that signifies government non-provision of public and social services, including public health facilities and schools (Dodoo et al., 2002). Informal settlements not only typically lack formal connection to municipal services, they are also characterized by extremely large populations. A single sanitation facility, for example, might serve over 500 people (UN-Habitat, 2004). Moreover, a study conducted in Nairobi informal settlements by the African Population Health Research Council (2002) found that only about 24% of all households have access to piped water in the form of
public water taps or water piped into residences in slum areas versus 92% in non-slum areas of Nairobi as a whole. In many parts of Nairobi’s slums, residents have no access to running water, electricity, working toilets, or adequate sanitation facilities (Dodoo, et al., 2002).

The majority of residents are either unemployed or self-employed in the informal sector. A major income generating activity for many is selling fruits and vegetables in open air markets or dry cereals from kiosks, or selling cooked foods door to door. Some women do casual labor in nearby quarries or construction sites or are employed as
domestic workers in the homes of middle-income wage earners in the nearby estates.
Others brew and sell *changa‘a* a local alcoholic drink. Many women also engage in commercial sex (Brady & Khan, 2002).

**Mathare Youth Sports Association**

The Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) is a development initiative that works to address the aforementioned social issues. A Nairobi youth website that works in partnership with MYSA describes Mathare as “one of the largest and poorest slums in Africa. Homes are often surrounded by garbage and waste which causes diseases that cripple or kill many of our friends” (Youth Development Networks, 2005, n. p). MYSA was started in 1987 by Bob Munro, a Canadian expatriate, as a small self-help project to organize young people through sport and clean-up activities. The organization is a non-governmental organization (NGO) and is registered under The Societies Act of Kenya as a non-governmental, non-profit and non-political organization. The organization is funded by private donors both locally and internationally.

MYSA is a multi-faceted development initiative, and because of its location in the slums, many of the children are from poor backgrounds. MYSA engages mainly in football and clean-up activities. Other programs include: the Jailed Kids project (an outreach that is responsible for feeding and repatriation of kids in remand homes); the Shootback project (which promotes the development of skills in photography and videography); a sports and leadership academy (which provides training for MYSA leaders, coaches and referees); a leadership award project (which provides scholarship for MYSA volunteers); a youth exchange program (which establishes networking and exchange programs both with local sports groups as well as internationally); an anti-child
labor project (which carries out campaigns against child labor and creates awareness of children’s rights); an HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness project (which creates awareness of substance abuse, reproductive health, HIV and AIDS and other vices in the community); an art and culture support program (which focuses on art, drama, music, and puppetry); and finally, Community Libraries (which provides members of the community with access to information and youth with a safe place to study).

MYSA is recognized worldwide for its efforts in using sport as an entry point to community development. They have won various awards including being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003. Meanwhile, MYSA allocates some of the money it receives from donors to establishing educational scholarship programs for some of its team members. Two hundred boys and girls had benefited from the scholarship program by 2001 (Wambuii, 2003).

Over 10,000 youths have been involved in the organization’s activities in different capacities: as members of the team, referees, coaches, or organizational participants. MYSA’s girls’ league was formed in 1992 and has now grown to a membership of nearly 3,500 (MYSA, 2007). The Mathare girls’ team is especially significant because it changed cultural norms that associated football with boys. In 1998 and 2000, the girls’ team participated in the Norway cup finals, the world’s largest youth football tournament.

In recent years, MYSA has received recognition for its innovativeness and involvement in community activities, such as environmental work and efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS. The group, for example, received the United Nations Environmental Program award for environmental innovation (Momentum, 2002). MYSA has also been involved with creating awareness about HIV/AIDS, and 300 of its youth have received training as
peer counselors. Peer counselors’ main duties include providing information to young people about HIV/AIDS before the beginning of football matches. Furthermore, yearly training workshops are organized, bringing together many children from the slums to learn about HIV/AIDS. Youths who participate in community service are awarded extra team points which bolster their position in the league. On average, the youth put in between 60 and 80 hours of service per week. Community service mostly includes clean up activities on weekends and school holidays. For each successful clean-up activity approved by the Association, a team wins six points (equivalent to two wins in league standings) (Willis, 2000). This enhances the group’s motto that states “you do something, MYSA does something. You do nothing, MYSA does nothing.”

MYSA’s story is a one the reveals how sports can be reconstructed for social good. In the next section, I situate the organization within existing literature on young people by conceptualizing youth, discussing youth agency, and positioning youth within development work.

Literature Review on Youth

The number of young people in the world has continued to rise at unprecedented proportions. According to the World Youth Report (2003) that there are 1.2 billion young people in the world, an indication almost half of the current global population falls under the age of 25 (United Nations, 2004). The next generation of youth (children below the age of 15) will be 1.8 billion. This report further indicates that the growing numbers are accompanied by various challenges. Over 200 million youth live in poverty; 130 million are illiterate; 88 million lack employment; and 10 million live with HIV/AIDS. Although different cultural contexts and academic disciplines adopt various definitions of youth
and different approaches to youth issues, a common thread that runs through scholarly work is the need to direct more attention and resources toward the advancement of this group of people. Durham (2000) revealed this urgency when she noted that:

To pay attention to youth is to pay close attention to the topology of the social landscape—to power and agency; public, national, and domestic spaces and identities, and their articulation and disjuncture; memory, history, and sense of change; globalization and governance, gender and class. (p. 113)

Similarly, other scholars from a cross section of disciplines, most notably, the fields of psychology, sociology, political science, and anthropology have indicated that the youth can be seen as social barometers or signifiers of how the society as a whole is doing (e.g., Benson, 1997; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005; De Waal & Argenti, 2002; Griffith, 2001; Honwana & De Boeck, 2005; Hurrelmann & Hamilton, 1996; Miles, 2000). Benson (1997), for instance, noted that one of the criteria that can be used to determine the health of a society is how well it takes care of its youngest generation. A review of extant literature indicates than much scholarly work has focused on youth pertinence and their role in society; hence, youth literature can be summarized as addressing the following questions: (1) What constitutes the term “youth”? (2) What approaches have been used to address youth issues? and (3) How do young people conceptualize their situation? This literature review explores some of the responses that have emerged over the years that address the above questions.
Conceptualizing Youth

Literature from both developed and developing countries provides different perspectives on the definition of youth. In pre-industrial European society, for example, there was no clear distinction between childhood and other pre-adult phases of life (Griffin, 2004). The main stages of childhood, youth and adulthood were defined primarily in relation to one’s degree of dependence or separation from the family of origin. In many African contexts, the transition from childhood to adulthood was symbolized by initiation, which was considered one of the rites of passage (see Kenyatta, 1979; Mbiti, 1992; Turner, 1967). This stage of life was characterized by various rituals and a period of seclusion for young people that included interaction with elders who taught young people adult responsibilities. This period marked the passage from childhood to adulthood.

A significant share of extant work on youth uses the concept of “adolescence” introduced by psychologist Stanley Hall (1904). Adolescence established a biological foundation to the notion of age stages by creating a shift from childhood to a focus on the onset of puberty (Demos & Demos, 1969). Adolescence was significant because it explained the behavior of people in this age group. This period was seen as a potentially distressing time or “storm and stress” period that was caused by inevitable hormonal upheavals associated with puberty (Griffin, 2004). These characteristics were assumed to set young people apart from the world of mature adults. Many institutions, agencies, and countries draw from Hall’s personality development model as they base their definitions of youth on age categories. The United Nations, for example, categorizes youth as those between 15 and 25 years of age. In the United States, the term “youth” generally refers to
those from the age of 10 or 11 up to twenty (Delgado, 2002). African countries also have variations. Southern African countries generally place youth between the ages of 15 and 24. Botswana and Zambia include people up to 30 years, while Swaziland include those up to 35 (Mufune, 2000). Age specifications are considered useful for policy making purposes.

The representation of youth as an age category has been contested in a number of cases. First, as Delgado (2002) noted, the term “youth” can refer to a various ages depending on an individual’s standpoint. As noted above, different countries, agencies, and individuals associate youth with various numbers. Moreover, as Eccles and Gootman (2002) pointed out, the use of age categories is problematic because differences exist among adolescents within the same age group. Early adolescents, for instance those between ages 10 and 14, are different from older adolescents, aged between 15 and 18 years. Eccles and Gootman also noted that experiences are becoming increasingly fragmented because young people have to wait longer before they can achieve economic independence. In the past, adolescence ended between 18 and 22 years when young adults moved into the labor market, married, and began their families. This changed in most Western industrialized countries, particularly the US and Canada where life is well defined for most social class groups. Young adults are increasingly getting into the job market and getting married later in life. Additionally, as various scholars have argued, youth is related to age but is not determined by it (Delgado, 2002; Honwana & De Boeck, 2005; Miles, 2000; Olive, 2003; Roche, Tucker, Thomson & Flynn, 2004). These scholars caution that research on the lives of young people should consider the politics of
their social place and identity. Young people might be unified by their age, but it could be they are differently located socially on the basis of class, gender, education, and ethnicity.

Young people also have different experiences of the transition to adulthood. De Waal and Argenti (2002) pointed to the fact that a substantial number of young people in Africa can be seen as intermediaries and, thus, might not fit into fixed age categories for any number of reasons. Among those reasons, a significant number of young people have children. They note that many African women bear their first child before the age of 20; about 15-20 percent of all births are to teenage mothers. However, many interventions target young people solely or primarily in their capacity as mothers, without seeing them as young people who are embedded in a social network, and who share the cultural and social attributes of young people. In other cases, children and young people are forced to adopt adult responsibilities, especially in African countries affected by war (e.g., Reynolds, 2005; Utas, 2005). An increasing number of young people have also lost their parents to HIV/AIDS (see Grant & De Cock, 2001).

The personality development model has also been criticized for focusing on the “storm and stress” aspects of young people as a basis of defining their identity (Griffith, 1993, 2001, 2004; Miles, 2000; Watkins & Iverson, 1998). Research on youth that has identified and focused on apparent intractable problems has revealed the debilitating effects of those problems on youths (Benson, 1997). Language about children and adolescents is centered on problem deficits and risks (Benson, 1997; Roche, et al., 2004; Wyn & White, 1997). Griffith (1993, 2004) argued that young people were frequently presented as either actively “deviant” or passively “at risk,” and sometimes as both simultaneously. According to Griffith (1993), young men are more likely to be presented
as actively “deviant,” especially in aggressive forms. Young women were more likely to be constructed as passively ‘at risk’ or youth in trouble (Griffin, 1993, 2004). Griffith derived her work from dominant representations of youth found in academic research texts in Britain and the US as well as a wide range of discourses that included popular culture materials, such as soap operas, newspaper coverage and feature films. She argued that these discourses have shaped welfare policies and practices, family life, education and training provisions and policing strategies and institutions that deal with young people.

Similarly, Zeldin (2004) noted that the association of youth with stereotypes is a widely held belief by the general public, and is the foundation for contemporary policy responses to the prevention of youth violence. He argued that, contrary to popular beliefs, research has failed to support the claim of adolescence as a period of “storm and stress.” However, Zeldin argued that the stereotypes have served two functions. The first of those functions has been to shift debate from other responses for dealing with youth issues. As for the second function, focus on the “storm and stress” period isolated youths and adults within their own communities, and minimized the opportunities for young people to become engaged and to experience a sense of community with local organizations and groups. Learner (2004) also pointed out that the absence of an accepted vocabulary for the discussion of positive youth development was a key obstacle in evaluating the effectiveness of programs or policies aimed at promoting such change. Benson (1997) supported the above views as he suggested that the deficit reduction paradigms tended to be designed to attack one problem at a time (e.g., homelessness, poverty, illiteracy, family violence, child abuse and neglect, unemployment) from people implementing
programs and from funding sources. Benson noted that some of the problems that emerged from utilizing this paradigm were that, when interest in and resources for programs dried up, one issue was replaced in public consciousness by another seemingly more pressing issue.

The perception of youth as a risk group is not limited to Western contexts. In writing on youth in Africa, Honwana and De Boeck (2005) stated that:

Youth problems are constructed as one of the greatest challenges of the twenty first century. Youth are portrayed as both perpetrators and victims in civil conflict, as leaders and led in movements of political reform and religious renewal, as innovators and dupes in the globalization of culture. (p. ix)

Honwana and De Boeck argued that children in Africa must be understood as “makers and breakers” of society. They noted that youth, as “makers” of society, reveal how youth contribute to the structures, norms, rituals, and directions of society, while being shaped by them at the same time. Youth can be seen as “breakers” when they disrupt societal norms, rules and conventions. According to Honwana and De Boeck, youth must be examined within structures over which they might have little or no control, such as family, community, the state and its decay, war, religion, poverty, homelessness and lack of access to education. Similar perspectives are shared by De Waal and Argenti (2002) who wrote that youths are often perceived as potential sources of political disruption, delinquency, and criminality. De Waal and Argenti differed with this perception as they noted that African youth are active actors in contemporary social, political and economic sectors. They noted that organized student bodies have been the main motors for social and political change in Africa. Furthermore, in addition to student organizations, less
visible youth organizations and movements also engage in social activism as they find creative means of articulating their aspirations and alternatives to established social and political orders by using cultural idioms and establishing models of association that might be invisible or obscure to national policy makers. This notion of youth as active agents of change is also emphasized by Diouf (2005) who noted that people have the capacity to not only fracture public space but to re-invent that space. Such agency is revealed in creative and innovative forms of popular culture, such as theatre, arts, music and dance that are often the exclusive domains of the youth.

Many recent approaches to youth issues reveal a shift from a needs and dependency based approach to a more inclusive perspective that highlights young people’s agency as well as a focus on the social landscapes inhabited by youth. Durham (2000), for example, noted that youth should be viewed as a historically constructed social category, as a relational concept, and as a group of actors. Durham referred to the youth as “shifters” who she described as:

A special kind of dialectic or indexical term that works not through absolute referentiality to a fixed context, but one that relates the speaker to a relational, or indexical context. A shifter has the capability of sometimes going further and bringing into discursive awareness the metalinguistic feature of a conversation—that is it can go beyond immediate relationships being negotiated and draw attention to the structure and its categories that produce or enable the encounter. Shifters work metalinguistically, drawing attention to specific relations within a structure of relations, to the structure itself. (p. 166)
Proponents of this perspective have argued that politics, structure, and familial relations are important considerations (e.g., Delgado, 2002; Miles, 2000; Olive, 2003; Wyn & White, 1997). Miles (2000), for instance, argued that the everyday realities of young people’s lifestyles as an expression of or reproduction of the dominant values of society were sometimes ignored. He noted that youth should be viewed as a lifestyle constructed through social processes, such as family relationships, the labor market, schooling and training, and are often expressed through cultural means.

Studies that highlight youth as agents have also focused on youth culture. In highlighting the active role of youth, scholars rely on the concept of youth culture (or subculture) and on youth agency as ways of validating the cultural production of youth (Amit Talai & Wulff, 1995). Youth are seen as social actors who are actively engaged in the construction and reconstruction of social and cultural forms. Youth culture as a construct is overarching and serves as a rubric for capturing many different youth subculture groups (Delgado, 2002). A youth cultural perspective broadens the concept of culture and allows us to view youth as consisting of different subgroups, each with a distinctive personality, set of values, and view towards adults and society (Delgado, 2002).

*Youth and Development*

The field of youth development is relatively new, and emergent definitions reveal connections between a focus on youth as individuals and the societies in which they live. Scholars and practitioners have shifted from identifying protective or risk factors to the identification of both individual and environmental characteristics that promote and enhance youth development toward becoming successful adults (e.g., Lerner, 2004; Roth
& Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Villarruel, Perkins, Borden & Keith, 2003; Watkins & Iverson, 1998; Zeldin, 2004). These approaches provide a more empowering perspective that views youth as individuals who are capable of making contributions to society. Villarruel, et al. (2003) described youth development as the process of:

Purposely creating environments that provide constructive, affirmative, and encouraging relationships that are sustained over time with adults and peers, while concurrently providing an array of opportunities to enable youth to build their competencies and become engaged partners in their own development as well as the development of their communities. (p. 6)

This description is significant because it points out the holistic nature of the youth development approach. Youth development cannot be separated from the society in which it occurs. Social perspectives toward youth play an instrumental role in how youth is perceived by adults and how youths view themselves. Delgado (2002) noted that there is a misconception that youth development can only effectively transpire within a “formal” youth development program. Youth development is not confined to particular settings but is largely dependent on the interplay of factors that play a significant role in the lives of youth that can include family or home, school, community, societal norms, social economic status and physical environment (Delgado, 2002; Hurrelmann & Hamilton, 1996; Olive, 2003).

Many studies of youth have focused on these dynamics. There has been an increased focus on the involvement of youth in peer-related social, sports, and other extra curriculum activities. Eccles and Gootman (2002), for example, noted that many adolescents attach great importance to the activities they do with their peers, and in some
cases, youths consider their peers to be more important than their academic activities. Activities with peers, peer acceptance, and appearance take precedence over school activities, particularly during early adolescence. Eccles and Gootman posit that peer groups are powerful places for identity formation and consolidation mostly because these relationships are more egalitarian than adult-child interactions.

The interaction between youths and adults is also an area that has generated interest in youth studies. These studies have focused on family and youth and adult interaction outside the home. A study carried out of African American youth who were raised by mothers in single parent homes indicated that father loss was an important interpretive bridge between ideology and identity (Hunter, et al., 2006). Many of the young men aspired to be different from their fathers. The study also revealed that the youths relied on other males in their community such as grandparents, brothers in law, and female adults, for counsel. However, some indicated that they felt as though they had lost out on some aspects of life because there were some life lessons that could only be taught by fathers.

Studies that focus on youth-adult interactions outside the family have increased because of a rising recognition of youth as part of the civil society, as well as important constituents in social capital. Jarrett and Watkins (2005) noted that youth programs can serve as a context in which youth are connected to resource-bearing adults in the community who promote the development of social capital. Jarrett and Watkins pointed out that a number of characteristics of organized youth programs suggest that they are well suited to facilitating youth development of social capital. First, youth programs represent intentionally constructed social structures or groups that bring together youth
and non-family adults. Second, interactions between youth and adults within the context of organized youth programs are frequently supportive in nature. Third, many organized programs are concerned explicitly with enhancing youth development through intergenerational relationships. Adults serve as mentors and role models and facilitate the development of social, interpersonal, academic, athletic, and artistic skills on the part of the youths.

Evidence from empirical work also reveals that youth and adult partnerships are beneficial (Camino, 2000). Jones and Perkins (2006) carried out a study to determine the perceptions of youth and adults toward their involvement and interaction with one another when working together on community projects. The findings indicated that participants in youth-led collaborations were significantly more positive toward youth involvement than participants in adult-led collaborations. Moreover, adults in youth-adult partnerships were significantly more positive toward youth involvement and youth-adult interaction than those adults in adult-led collaborations. Results of this study showed that stereotypes perceived by adults can constrain the potential of young people at the community level by hindering their ability to relate to adults which sometimes contributes to youth doubting their own competence. Larson, Walker and Pearce (2005) conducted a study that examined the experiences of youths in a youth driven and adult driven program for high school aged youth. These scholars found out that both approaches were beneficial. In the youth-driven programs, the youth experienced a high degree of ownership and empowerment, and they reported development of leadership and planning skills. In the adult-driven programs, the adults crafted student-centered learning experiences that facilitated the development of specific talents. Consequently, youth
gained self-confidence and benefited from the adults’ experience. The study suggested that both techniques should be balanced for effectiveness especially when adults use their expertise to assist the youth. Lastly, a literature review carried out by Frank (2006) revealed the need for youth to be involved in planning. Frank argued that traditional policy making practices tend to marginalize youth. The study found that young people’s involvement increased their civic capacity, an impact of societal value as well.

In conclusion, a review of youth literature is useful for researching MYSA for a number of reasons. First, as various scholars reveal, the concept of “youth” is defined in different ways depending on individual and cultural standpoints. Kenya’s governmental and non-governmental organizations, for example, classify young people as individuals who fall under 18 years, which is the voting age. The difference between youth and children is also not clearly defined.

MYSA’s youth fell below between the ages of 9-35 years which indicated diversity in life experiences. Most of the younger youths, who form the majority in the organization, were students who lived with relatives or friends. A significant number had completed high school but spent their time in the organization. These young people worked as volunteers in the organization as they searched for jobs. Some volunteers planned to continue with their studies as soon as they could access necessary resources. In many ways, most of the youths, regardless of age, were not economically independent. Consequently, I used “youth” in my study to reveal the ephemeral nature of the groups who were of concern. I argue young people in MYSA experience multiple identities and their youthfulness could be viewed as transient. I used Durham’s notion of “youth” as shifters as opposed to a using static youth categories that could pose limitations for the
study. As their stories revealed, MYSA youth had gone through experiences that cause them to mature faster than their age, thereby adopting adult responsibilities. Some children, for instance, had to engage in small scale business activities that contributed to their household income.

My findings also revealed that, in many cases, girls had to stay home and engage in domestic work. The girls’ contributions presented a unique case because children or youths of similar ages who live in more privileged families in Kenya, or other contexts, were able to enjoy their childhood and engage in play. Additionally, many youth in Mathare were orphaned at an early age which led girls to adopt guardian roles. Finally, many young people in Mathare left home for a number of reasons, including inadequacy of living space and conflicts within the family. This resulted to a number of youths supporting themselves at an early age.

The literature review indicated that the term “youth” was associated in general with a number of stereotypes which fit well with my theories. Narrative and postcolonial feminist theories seek to deconstruct meta-narratives by privileging marginalized voices. As I analyzed MYSA youths’ stories, I sought to determine how these personal narratives advanced or limited the more dominant narratives that present youth identity as characterized by the inevitable “storm and stress” period. My research integrated youth perspectives as well as societal perspectives that emerged through various stakeholders.

Lastly, the literature was useful in examining societal perspectives about youths. As noted, some of MYSA’s employees were over 30 years of age. My study examined how the employees who are considered to be adults by Kenyan standards engage with the
younger cohorts. My study also analyzed ways in which the organization did (or did not) empower the youth by allowing them to participate in decision making processes.

MYSA’s work can be situated within a plethora of sports organizations that work towards poverty alleviation and social advancement in various parts of the world. In the next section, I provide various illustrations of the ways in which sports has been used in developing countries by focusing on organizations that target young people.

Sports Background

The use of sports has gained popularity in the development arena as an appropriate means of creating social change, especially at the grassroots level. The United Nations development agencies, for example, refer to sports as the “universal language,” pointing to the ability of sports to be applied to different contexts in the world. In fact, the United Nations declared 2005 as the “International Year of Sports and Physical Education” which highlighted the role of sports in society and the ability of sports to contribute to advancement of the quality of life (United Nations, 2005). In a related manner, sports have been promoted as an effective way of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or the set of benchmarks of social advancement agreed on by the international community that were to be achieved by 2015 (Koss & Alexandrova, 2005). The MDGs focus on various development aspects such as: eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and empowering women, enhancing environmental sustainability, combating HIV/AIDS, and other health concerns.

A few researchers have started to document the role of sports in community life in general and development work specifically. Existing literature reveals the nature of sports
as an effective form of communication. Scholars in the field of communication, for example, point out that “communication is the vehicle by which community members participate in the enactment, (re)production, consumption, and organizing of sport” (Kassing, et al., 2004, p. 374). These scholars noted that the sports arena can be seen as a community that is pervasive, influential, complex, and restricted, comprised not only of participants, but also of spectators both at live and mediated sporting events. Much of the information that has been written on sporting organizations and development has focused on the ability of sports to reach out to great masses of people. Kassing and colleagues (2004), for example, suggested that sports audiences are amongst the largest in the world. This phenomenon can be explained from a number of perspectives. The first is that sports are considered as having advantages over other cultural forms of expression because they are more readily comprehensible to the mass public (MacClancey, 1996).

Second, sports serve the function of co-producing communities because they can facilitate the creation of feelings of belongingness and connectedness among participants, and lessen distance between people. Sports often unite wider sections of the population by transcending differences of nationality, sex, age, social positioning, geographical location and political attitudes (Kassing, et al., 2004). Sports accessibility reveals the potential usefulness of football as a mechanism for building community and as a vehicle for social change, especially in a context like Kenya where football is accessible to and affordable for many people (Mazrui, 1986).

Historically, sports have been used to advance political agendas. In the Soviet Union, for example, sports were used to socialize the population into a newly established system of values that communism promoted (MacClancey, 1996). In this case, sports
were used to dominate the citizenry. In other cases, sports have been used as vehicles for resistance. In South Africa, football was used in political activism, organizing, and speech making in the 1970s and 1980s (Nauright, 1997). The use of football was effective because the apartheid regime had declared a state of emergency causing groups such as the Black Conscious Movement and the United Democratic Front (UDF) to use football to address crowds. Moreover, sports have been used in health promotions to combat unhealthy, deviant, and anti-social behaviors, such as drunkenness, delinquency, and prostitution. Mitrano and Smith (1990) provided an example of a sign placed in a sporting shop that encouraged the Crucian youth to “get hooked on sports not drugs” and “Don’t be a fool, go and stay in school” (p. 53). Sports have also been used in health contexts for national and regional campaigns, for example in the “Kick polio out of Africa” campaign that was launched in 1996 by Nelson Mandela and other African leaders which led to a significant reduction of polio induced paralysis from 205 cases per day to 388 cases the entire year (WHO Joint Press Release, 2004).

More specific cases indicate that sports are increasingly being used in the development of children and youth. Many organizations recognize that sport and play are fundamental to youth development and can be used for teaching youth essential values and life skills, such as teamwork, cooperation, and respect (Unicef, n.d). Moreover, sports have been used to address social issues such as crime. An organization that illustrates the effectiveness of sports in enhancing life skills and alleviating crime is the Midnight Basketball League (MBL) that started in 1986 in Maryland, USA. This basketball organization is distinct from regular teams for a number of reasons. First, the organization schedules its matches late at night, a time when young inner city males are
most vulnerable to the drug culture and other activities (Sailes, n.d). Additionally, players are expected to attend a one hour workshop that focuses on areas such as skills for job interviews, financial management, alcohol abuse prevention, conflict resolution and entrepreneurship. MBL has an estimated 10,000 young men across America. Sailes (n.d) pointed out that participation in sports contributes to players’ self identity and self assertiveness. He noted that, as players follow rules, they are able to gain respect from their peers, popularity and reputation.

The West City Project located in Mendoza city in Argentina uses an approach that is similar to that of MBL. The organization uses sports to curb crime. According to West City (n.d), the poverty stricken city is characterized by crime and drugs. The organization uses soccer for boys. Girls in the organization participate in hockey which gained popularity when Argentina won the Women’s Hockey Championships in 2002. In addition to sports, the young people are instructed on personal fitness, healthy diet, and study skills. The organization also has teachers who volunteer to assist youth with homework.

Sports have also been used to address child abuse. The Helderberg Partnership project, located in Macassar, South Africa was established in 1999 as a joint initiative of the Helderberg Sports Academy (HSA) and Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse in Helderberg (PATCH). The organization was started when sports academy officials realized that sexual abuse was a serious problem in the area. Children and youth engage in various sports that include athletics, road running, and race walking. Participants in the program also receive information on a sexual abuse related topic every week as a way of increasing awareness on the issue (Helderberg Partnership Project, n.d).
In addition to equipping youth with life skills and physical fitness, emotional well-being is positively associated with the extent of participation in sports and vigorous recreational activity among adolescents (Steptoe & Butler, 1996). This emotional dimension has led to the utilization of sports in countries that have been affected by conflict. Sports have been used in war torn countries for two purposes: first in assisting individuals to recover from trauma through emotional development, and second, for rehabilitating individuals involved in war. Carvalho and Farkas (2005), for example, pointed out that sports play a number of roles in rehabilitating people with disabilities. Sports have a therapeutic function that is useful for improving the functional capacities of patients. Sports also have psychological effects on individuals because sports assist individuals in overcoming problems of identity caused by disability. Lastly, sports can be used as a means of social inclusion because they promote the visibility of the positive aspects, or abilities, that emerge when people with disabilities engage in sports viewed by the general public. In many cases, when people with disabilities engage in sports, they are viewed as agents, which promote empowering images that project them as active members of society. Carvalho and Farkas (2005) provide the illustration of a partnership between the International Olympic Committee, the local government, local rehabilitation centers, and other organizations that utilize sports to rehabilitate individuals with disability in Angola. This country is one of the most affected regions in the world affected by landmines which has led to high numbers of amputees.

The Right to Play organization uses sports to promote opportunities for development, health, and peace. The organization works with refugee children and former child soldiers. Main sports include basketball, volleyball, athletics, netball, and
soccer. The Right to Play’s work is especially significant because in some African countries for example, in Liberia and Sierra Leone child soldiers were involved in conflicts (Richards, 1997). In such countries, where cultural infrastructures have been dismantled sports are used to re-socialize children who have been away from the cultural structures.

Sports have also been used in reducing cultural tensions. The organization Playing for Peace adopts this approach by working in countries such as South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Middle East regions that are marked with ethnic, religious, and cultural tensions. In South Africa, the program has reached 10,000 middle school children. In 2002, the program expanded to Northern Ireland and integrated Catholic and Protestant children’s basketball in many parts of Ireland (Brewington, 2005). One of the advantages of these programs is that they have a ripple effect in the community. Bailey (2005) wrote that, as parents see their children participating in the activities, they are likely to support such an initiative.

Sports literature indicates that sports have been used extensively in the health arena. Health programs have been at the forefront in using sports to create awareness of various health aspects. A number of organizations utilize sports for peer education and awareness. An example of the unique ways in which sports is used is illustrated by a scenario in Honduras. A national match is characterized by an unusual beginning when a football match takes place: “The game is between teams called ‘The San Pedrano Football Club’ and ‘Death United’ with the latter fielding players named ‘Infected Syringe’, ‘Drugs’, ‘Infidelity’, ‘Promiscuity’ and – in the attack—positions – ‘HIV’ and ‘AIDS’. On San Pedrano’s side, ‘knowledge’, ‘Abstinence’, ‘Fidelity’ and ‘Condom’,
fight back hard” (Unicef, n.d). This game took place in a stadium that was comprised of 35,000 fans with more than two million watching from home on television. The match was a carefully scripted show called “Let’s Score a Goal against AIDS” created by a local NGO with the support of UNICEF and Honduras Ministry of Health.

A similar example of how sports are used in health settings, albeit through a different approach, is by the Nakubulaye Community-Based HIV/AIDS project (COBAP) that is funded by the Laureus foundation. COBAP based in Uganda was started in 1993 with the primary objectives of providing healthcare, rehabilitation, and shelter for people who have been affected by HIV/AIDS (Nakubulaye, n.d). The organization began using sports because health care workers experienced difficulties in recruiting people living in the slums to attend health care meetings. The project set up football and netball activities and introduced health related workshops during half time. This project has now expanded to include bicycle racing, volleyball, and indoor games.

A final example is the Magic Bus organization that was founded in 1999 to promote the social advancement of slum children in India (The Magic Bus, n.d). The organization tackles multiple issues as it is located in the Dharavi area of Mumbai where 54% of the population lives below India’s poverty level. According to the organization’s website, “Magic Bus creates ‘classrooms’ without walls offering basic formal education, shelter, clothing, food and healthcare, including HIV/AIDS awareness, by using sporting activities as a means to attract the young people’s interest.” One of the program’s objectives is to reduce the number of young children on the streets. Magic Bus has successfully coached a rugby team of youngsters between the ages of 16-20 and is recognized by the International Rugby Association.
Summary

This literature review reveals the prevalence of sports organizations for development. The above organizations are a small fraction of the numerous organizations that have emerged over the years. The organizations’ descriptions were selected with the purpose of revealing different issues that have been addressed by sports for development organizations. The examples illustrate an expanding perception of sports that shifts from traditional models that depicted sports primarily as a medium for entertainment. Sports organizations reveal that sports can be used for meaningful change. Sports organizations also provide new vocabulary that provides analogies between specific aspects of sports and real life issue that have been proven to promote dialogue and change. My research situates MYSA within this growing arena.

The programs of MYSA offer a rich context in which to explore how sports are woven in a web of activities designed to raise awareness and consciousness about lived issues and foster systemic change. Hognestad and Tollisen (2004) argued that MYSA activities have been instrumental in reconstructing the traditional perceptions of the Kenyan public that associate the slums with drugs, illegal beer, prostitution, HIV and AIDS, and mob justice. Through ethnographic inspired fieldwork, I explored how the spaces of the slums had been (re)articulated by MYSA, how various stakeholders experienced and participated in MYSA activities, challenges confronted by MYSA in the course of their development agenda, and how MYSA assisted individuals in crafting alternative narratives about self, other, and community. Next, I briefly position development work as discursive practices. I then articulate my theoretical standpoint for understanding MYSA as a development initiative, drawing primarily on postcolonial
feminist and narrative theory. Finally, I offer several research questions that guided my fieldwork.

Discourses of Development

Development has been at the heart of organizing for social change in many societies. The definitions of development differ depending on individual standpoints. In the West, development has traditionally symbolized the provision of development aid, which typically involves sending “experts” by governments to provide support for both government organizations and the civil society mainly to countries situated in the global South such as Africa, Asia, and Latin American continents (Carothers, 1999). Such aid is channeled to various economic and political sectors. From the standpoint of developing countries, development has been signified by aid locally administered by state governments, non-governmental organizations or international organization (Ndegwa, 1996). In recent times, development has become associated with economic debt that is owed by developing countries to world economic institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Communication practitioners have been at the forefront of development work, through diffusion of technology, setting agendas for pertinent issues, and increasing community involvement across the borders of countries (e.g., Rogers, 2003; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Despite the strategic application of communication technologies, many development programs have failed to achieve their goals (see critiques by Wilkins, 2000). In many developing countries, levels of poverty, malnutrition, overpopulation, and gender inequalities have continued to rise (or abated more slowly than expected). Meanwhile, environmental degradation remains an issue that requires policy
interventions to could curb the effects of global warming and the depletion of the ozone layers (Fraser & Estrapo, 1998, Wilkins, 2000). Health issues, especially HIV/AIDS, continue to rise in alarming rates, especially in Africa and Asia (Singhal & Rogers, 2003).

Development has been defined in different ways. First, development has been construed in broad terms as “a set of practices and concepts referring to the effort to bring about growth and change in the ‘Third World’ or the ‘developing world’” (Walters, 2000, p. 92). Other analyses frame development as “a widely participatory process of social change in society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment” (Rogers, 1993, p. 41). In fact, the International Development Strategy for the Second Development Decade declared that the goal of development was ‘to bring about sustained improvement in the well-being of the individual and to bestow benefits to all” (Synder & Tadese, 1995, p. 3). These definitions have been criticized because of their over-emphasis on the material or economic elements of development, and on the means used to achieve development.

It is from these criticisms that the crucial role played by communication emerges. Most noteworthy is the fact that many scholars (e.g. Escobar, 1997; Walters, 2000; White, 1999) conceptualize development as discourse. From this perspective, communication and development can be seen as existing in a symbiotic relationship. Walters, for example, stated that development is “a discourse that mediates and expresses power through the construction of the Third World as a problem requiring management and intervention” (2000, p. 89). This perspective could be traced to the construction of
development as a discourse that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s (Escobar, 1997, Melkote & Steeves, 2000). As Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) reminded us:

Discourse refers to a broader societal narrative embedded in a system of representation, which offer predictable yet elastic, lucid yet contradictory images of possible subjectivities, relations among them, and attendant disciplinary practices. (p. 18)

In organizational contexts societal narratives affect the formation of identity as well as the organizational forms. Individuals assimilate these representations and incorporate them in their everyday lives. In short, discourse does ideological work that “constructs identity, secures and obstructs structural inequalities and contradictions” (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. xviii).

In development work, the use of discourse in organizing is evident. According to Escobar (1997), “the organizing premise was the belief in the role of modernization as the only force capable of destroying archaic superstitions and relations, at whatever social, cultural, and political cost” (Escobar, 1997, p. 86). Consequently, development work focused on strategies that would lead to economic growth. It was assumed that a “take off” point would be achieved that would lead to a trickling down of a country’s wealth to the poor. Yet, as Barker (2000) noted, the focus of economic development could be likened to a chapter in the Enlightenment dream, “a dream that promised an orderly progress from poverty and ignorance to prosperity and modernity” (p. 177). Barker maintained that this misconception rendered invisible the instrumental role that development had played in maintaining and sustaining global structures of neocolonialism and dependency.
Indeed, many countries have continued to experience a downward spiral in their economic development. In Africa, for example, after more than thirty years of activities associated with development work, there are minor results that could be associated with development work (Ake, 1996). Claude Ake observed that “for most Africans, real incomes are lower than they were two decades ago, health prospects are poorer, malnourishment is widespread, and infrastructure is breaking down, as are some social institutions” (p. 1). Ake attributed these setbacks to the lack of political will both locally and internationally. These suggestions point to the fact that previous development paradigms ignored the input of those targeted, an issue that has been highlighted by development scholars. This disregard has occurred at the problem definition level, priority setting level, and resource allocation stage (Jamieson, 1991).

Development discourse has also been instrumental in the creation of identity. According to White (1999), discourse published in the World Bank is “indicative of a development policy that objectifies populations and personifies policy, and ultimately constructs an identity of the nations it works within” (p. 27). The World Bank defines social progress on the basis of markers such as per-capital income, gross domestic product, literacy levels, unemployment, and child mortality rates. Such characterizations depict people living in marginalized areas as beneficiaries of development. Moreover, development policies can be seen as a mode of representation because they produce a reality that can become entrenched in the lives of people. Lastly, development discourse assumes that the boundaries of one country or region are similar or applicable to those of other regions of the world. For instance, the lending policies of the World Bank were shaped after the Marshall Plan perspective that had been used by the US to rebuild
Europe after World War I. In developing countries, the use of the same strategy has been problematic because many developing countries were beginning from scratch, unlike the European countries that already had existing projects (Fraser & Estrada, 1998).

In summary, the examination of discourse and development is significant because it reveals how power relations have been structured historically between developed and developing areas. The fact that many developing areas have been on the receiving end both financially and ideologically reveals the contrasts in power relations. Indeed, the hierarchical nature of development work is sometimes a setback because its benefits do not get to the people on ground (Gumcio Dagron, 2001). Furthermore, as Melkote (2000), indicated the reality of the social and political situation in most developing countries is such that urban and rural poor, women, and other people at the grassroots are entrapped in a dependency situation in highly stratified and unequal social and economic structures. As Melkote argued, “In the absence of tangible efforts to empower these ‘unequal’ partners, the terms ‘participatory’ or ‘coequal knowledge sharing’ will remain as mere clichés” (p. 42).

Many communication and development scholars have reconceptualized the relationship between communication and development. When compared to traditional forms that were hierarchical and primarily message centered, the emergent communication strategy can be seen as being more people-centered. Development communication is now presented as an exchange of ideas that is characterized by a social conscience that is heavily oriented toward the human aspects of development (Mmoeka, 1994). This reconceptualization is significant because physical and economic growths are important only in so far as they help to improve the human condition. According to
Mmoeka, communication plays two roles in development. First, it engages in the transformation role that seeks social change in the direction of higher quality of life and social justice. Second, communication plays a socialization function because it strives to maintain some of the established values of society that are consonant with development and social change. In so doing, development communication tries to create a balance in social and economic advancement between physical output and human interrelationships. Communication development is also based on the perception that the current inequality and marginalization of the poor, which have resulted from past decades of development, can be prevented.

Most contemporary development initiatives seek to be holistic and inclusive. Factors such as culture and spirituality are viewed as important elements that must be taken into consideration in program design and implementation. In health settings, for example, culture has served as an ally for HIV/AIDS outreaches (see Singhal & Rogers, 2003). Culture has also been useful in reverting to traditional forms of communication such as theatre, puppets, dance and music that are firmly rooted in the traditional cultural and artistic expressions of many communities in poorer countries (Gumscio Dagron, 2001). In other contexts, combinations of contemporary media and traditional forms of communication have been used together. Some initiatives rely on the use of participatory photography and theatre to raise awareness (e.g. Gumscio Dagron, 2001; Harter, Sharma, Pant, Singhal & Sharma, 2007; Singhal, Harter, Chitnis & Sharma, in press). Video revolution, for instance, has made it possible for individuals to create their own messages—share common experiences, question the absolute control over mass media
exercised by the power elite, and to some extent retain the power of communication within their own community (Nair & White, 1993).

At the heart of contemporary development discourses is a desire to foster dialogue among community members. Through dialogue, individuals engage in reflexivity about the situated historical, political, social, and historical contexts of their lives. Dialogue also plays a role in decentralizing power that is crucial in development. As Melkote (2000) argued, “real change is not possible unless we deal squarely with the lack of power among individuals and groups especially at the grassroots” (p. 40). In summary, alternative forms of communication promote citizen participation in planning for improvements, thereby promoting democracy and freedom of expression through dialogue.

Two frameworks—postcolonial feminist and narrative theory and praxis—offer a sensible place from which to make sense of MYSA’s development discourses. In the next chapter, I outline core assumptions of each framework.
Chapter Two

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial studies have emerged as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that is committed to theorizing the problematics of colonization and decolonization (Shome & Hedge, 2002). Shaped by its origins in imperialism, postcolonial theory challenges the notion of “independence” in formerly colonized countries by highlighting the lingering consequences of colonialism. Consequently, postcolonial theorists address contemporary issues such as migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation and race, and gender. Meanwhile, theorists respond to influential master discourses of the West such as history, philosophy, and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all of these come into being (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995). Postcolonial theory situates itself as a lens for examining these issues as it draws from critical, cultural, Marxist, and postmodern theories among others (Shome & Hedge, 2002).

Williams (1997) noted that postcolonialism can examined from different levels that include: a) a set of appropriate tools for plotting the dynamics of the Third World after colonialism; b) psychological delineation of the conditions and status of colonial subjects after independence; c) a description of actually existing spaces, that is, the post independence nations of the Third World particularly their state formulations; d) a global condition level, namely the state of the colonizing metropolis itself after the divestiture of its colonies (p.19). Postcolonial theory can therefore be seen as a theory that digs into the past and traces problems that are associated with colonialism and subsequent neocolonialism. The theory can be viewed as performing dual purposes. First, when
postcolonial theory focuses on colonialism, it acknowledges that this form of oppression distorted, disfigured, and destroyed the past of the oppressed people (Fanon, 1994). Second, the theory recognizes that neocolonialism comes out of a specific vision of continued asymmetry in the balance of global power. Drawing on the initial vision of dependency theory, world systems theory, and cultural imperialism theory, postcolonial theory argues that direct domination of colonization is replaced by the perpetuity of global criticism, as it directs the political and cultural economy into ever more complex bonds of dependency and exploitation (Kavoori, 1998).

Postcolonialism highlights some impediments that have emerged as a result of the depletion of raw materials and resources by former colonial powers, as well as previous suppressions of any attempts by the colonized to produce self-governing political structures. Postcolonialism also draws attention to the exploitation that took place in developing countries in order to establish the developing world.

At local levels within states, the theory can be seen as raising questions about emergent African leaders or elites and their ability to free themselves from Westernized ways of thinking. Postcolonial theory therefore can be seen as moving beyond those who have undergone colonialism, to the metropolis or those countries who exercised colonization. As Juan (1999) argued, the experiences between the conqueror and the conquered transcend particular situations. Moreover, increasing levels of urban misery and large scale poverty, even in the more developed countries of the world, as well as daily immigration and increasingly multicultural societies provide supportive evidence for Juan’s claim that draws attention to the marginalized in the conqueror’s contexts (see also Mohanty, 2003).
In summary, the historical development of postcoloniality existed for a long time before that particular name was used to describe it. Ashcroft (2001) noted that colonized peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension which ensued from the problematics of colonization. However, the theory came into being through a vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience. The term “postcolonial” can therefore be seen as addressing aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact. The term continues to be used in contemporary times because many postcolonial societies are subject to new forms of domination, including neo-colonialism and globalization.

In the next section, I provide a broader discussion of postcolonial feminist by focusing on some of the areas that these theories are concerned with including hybridity, representation and voice. I conclude by providing some of the criticisms and contributions that have emerged in recent years on postcolonial feminist standpoints.

Postcolonial Feminist Standpoints

Feminist postcolonial work shares many similarities with postcolonial theory. Both are political as they concern themselves with the struggle against oppression and injustice. The two orientations also reject established hierarchical systems such as capitalism which has resulted to the marginalization of certain groups of people in society. Decolonization has always been central to the project of Third World feminist theorizing because of the realization that women still remain in subordinate positions even with the demise of the physical markers of imperialism. McClintock (1994) clearly articulated this integration of feminism with colonial work as she rightly noted that the decolonization of formerly colonized states led to unequal advancements for both men
and women. She wrote that, “In a world where women do two-thirds of the world’s work, earn 10% of the world’s income, and own less than 1% of the world’s property, the promise of ‘post-colonialism’ has been a history of hopes postponed” (p. 298).

Consequently, postcolonial feminism “takes the experience of Western colonialism and its contemporary effects as a high priority in the process of setting up a speaking position from which to articulate a standpoint of cultural, national, regional or social identity” (Schutte, 2000, p. 59).

Postcolonial feminist approaches seek to examine the “in betweens” within binaries as feminists argue that these relationships must be viewed as mutually related rather than separate entities. Research on women tends to visualize Western women as distinct from women from non-Western cultures. However, when such views are traced to colonialism’s connections between the Western/non-Western, binaries emerge because economic structures such as capitalism have worked to diminish women’s positions both in the Western and the non-Western contexts. Postcolonial feminism therefore integrates issues that face the global North and the global South thereby lessening the gaps between the two continuums as will be discussed at the conclusion of this chapter. Postcolonial feminist theorists grapple with the notions of hybridity, representation, and epistemological criticisms focusing on voice that are associated with the postcolonial subject.

Hybridity

Postcolonial theory’s existence can be traced to a period that preceded the invasion of countries by Western powers. This period was marked by resistance from various quarters in the countries that subsequently became occupied by colonial powers.
Dominant colonial cultures experienced counter resistance which resulted to the emergence of different indigenous local and hybrid processes of self determination to defy, erode and sometimes supplant the enormous power of imperial cultural knowledge (Aschroft, 2001). Many scholars who focus on the nation and postcolonial theory note that previously colonized countries needed a form of cohesiveness or commonality in order to encourage collective resistance against imperialism (Fanon, 1994; Narayan, 1997). The preservation of nations became one of the goals of newly independent states. However, as Narayan (1997) noted, states cannot be seen as having been cohesive entities because some groups of people were oppressed at the expense of the ruling classes. Narayan (1997) maintained that women were relegated to positions as the preservers of states by maintaining traditional aspects while men in similar contexts were able to adopt Western technology and other Western ideals. Moreover, women were often portrayed as emblems of cultural integrity, preservers of culture, as was particularly evident in traditional female dress and practices of marriage and sexuality. Thus “women were situated in the context consisting of social forces: on the one hand, centripetal tendencies toward increasing globalization and integration and, on the other hand, centrifugal tendencies toward nationalism and fragmentation” (Narayan & Harding, 2000, p. 1).

Similarly, Ake (1996), a political scientist referred to the African contexts, arguing that development was never in the agenda of developing countries, but the idea of nationhood was used to divert citizens’ attention in African nations from activities of the government that were characterized by corruption at the highest echelons. As such, the presentation of former colonies as homogenous or unified has been deconstructed from various perspectives.
Postcolonial scholars have used the term “hybridity” to raise issues with the concept of homogeneity that is closely associated with cohesiveness within emergent postcolonial states. Shome and Hedge (2002), for example, took the position that hybridity is useful because it seeks to encompass unity and agency within certain groups, thereby reducing the reification of universalistic approaches. However, as Bhabha (1994) argued, hybridity can also represent the ultimate denial of origin, subject, race, class, and nation. He further noted that the concept of hybridity seeks to problematize and decompose the solidified categories by which racial, class, and primordial identities are constructed.

Fursich and Robin (2002) provided illustrations of how the representation of states could be transformed in order to sustain dominant cultures through national websites. The two scholars examined a number of African countries’ websites that targeted Western investors whom the website creators referred to as “preferred” readers. The nationalism that emerges on the World Wide Web is one that is constructed within global capitalism. Countries’ identities are lost in the midst of conflicting representations as the African countries strive to “keep up” with the West. While in reality the major goal of nation building is to raise the standards of living for the people, according to Fursich and Robin, these standards can only be achieved when African countries adopt a false image in order to attract foreign investors and expatriates. Similarly, Parameswaran (2002) examined photographs of Asians as presented in the National Geographic. She provided a comparison between pictures of Asians and those of Americans as she contrasted a narrative that depicts Asians as backward ‘oriental’ while Americans are portrayed as being advanced. The argument against viewing states as homogeneous is
further exemplified by Fanon (1994) who argued that, in many cases, formerly colonized states are faced with multiple identities that include their traditional self, their oppressed colonial self, and the emergent liberal self. The liberal self or the postcolonial self is one of the contentious issues in such cases. Consequently, people in developing countries have learned to negotiate these issues in the practice of their everyday lives (Ahluwalia, 2001).

In postcolonial feminism, hybridity can be a useful element in creating cooperation between groups of people who are bound by interests in certain issues thereby leading to change and advancement. However, hybridity can also be seen as contributing to the depiction of various groups of women as homogeneous or single entities. Some illustrations of such representations include portrayals of women as a category of analysis denoted by phrases such as “sisters in struggle,” “victims of male violence,” “women as universal dependents,” and “women as victims of the colonial process” (Mohanty, 2003). Such misnomers occur at two levels. The first level takes place when Western countries speak for other cultures. The second level occurs within states when dominant groups, such as intellectuals, speak for the marginalized.

In short, I used postcolonial feminist sensibilities to recognize hybridity in its various manifestations. By using narratives I sought to highlight the importance of individuals’ voices and individuals’ reflexivity on issues that affect them by paying specific attention to the language used by participants in expressing their lived experiences. I also placed the narratives within historical, political, and social economic contexts of Kenya and of the particular location in which MYSA is situated to avoid
making generalizations about this particular youth group and other groups in Kenya or in 
other parts of the world.

*Representation*

In postcolonial feminist theory, flawed representations occur through the process 
of “othering” which could be viewed as discursively colonizing non-Western women 
unpacked the concept of the “other” by focusing on the alterity. She noted that:

The breakthrough in constructing the concept of the *other* occurs when one 
combines the notion of the other as different from the self with the 
acknowledgment of the self’s decentering that results from the experience of such 
differences. The other, the foreigner, the stranger, is that person occupying the 
space of the subaltern in the culturally asymmetrical power relations, but also 
those elements or dimensions of the self that unsettle or decenter the ego’s 
dominant, self enclosed territorialized identity. (p. 48)

The other is therefore depicted as different culturally and usually of lower status 
than the dominant groups. The latter groups use their own standards to determine how to 
present the “other.” By portraying women in non-Western countries as identical and 
interchangeable, and more exploited than women in the dominant capitalist societies, 
liberal and socialist feminists alike encode a belief in their own cultural superiority. 
hooks (2000), for example, took issue with the homogenization of women’s experiences 
when she argued that presenting women’s issues in a similar manner suggests the notion 
that factors like class, race, and religion do not create a diversity of experience.
Third World scholars have argued that, in general, Western feminisms have emerged as the dominant forms of feminism because many discourses attribute the “origins” of feminism to the West (Kolawole, 1997; Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997; Oyewumi, 2003). As a result, Western experiences are typically used as the benchmark for the advancement of all women. However, this view is highly flawed because, in the Western world, women’s movements are viewed as products of modernization and feminism (Mohanty, 2003). Moreover, when Western standards are applied to other countries, non-Western women fall at the bottom of the feminist hierarchy. As Oyewumi (2003) pointed out, some Western feminists have engaged in anthropological research that utilizes ethnocentric approaches which result in biased myths about African women because they privilege particular ways of codification of knowledge that are biased.

Narayan (1997) attributed these representations to the analytical categories employed in writings that specifically focus on both quantitative representations and through definitions of culture as they are perceived in the US. Narayan (1997), for example, argued that the use of numbers of people who wear veils as an indication of discrimination against women in certain contexts is highly problematic. Furthermore, concepts such as the sexual division of labor, family, household, and patriarchy are often used without specification of local cultures and histories. Harding (1991) also took issue with the nature of science and the coming of enlightenment as the basis for evaluating other cultures. She argued that Western ways of knowing have been privileged while history indicates that civilization and use of technology were utilized in non-Western countries for many centuries. Postcolonial feminist theory, therefore, draws attention to institutional, societal, and philosophic forms of racism, ethnocentrism, and Eurocentrism
(Narayan & Harding, 2000). When Western feminism fails to take into account the issues of colonialism and imperialism, the dangerous outcome is that women in the developing world are likely to view feminism as a mark of Western colonization. Feminism, in this instance, is likely to be tied symbolically to Western (capitalist) modernity and will not be disassociated from modernity’s values.

Mohanty (2003) provided some steps that could be carried out in attempts to adequately represent non-Western women. She noted that discussions of the intellectual and political constructions of non-Western feminisms must include two simultaneous processes. These two processes are the internal critique of hegemonic “Western” feminisms and the formulation of autonomous feminist concerns and strategies that are geographically, historically, and culturally grounded. The first project is one of deconstructing and dismantling; the second one is building and constructing. The first process of deconstruction is achieved by postcolonial feminists as they examine various ways in which certain groups of people are subjugated through an investigation of how various ways of knowing emerge and how these epistemologies represent the “other” as insubordinate (Harding, 1991).

Many scholars have also argued that previous representations of non-Western women have neglected the situatedness of women in the context of the global hegemony of Western scholarship (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan & Harding, 2000). As such, feminist scholars argue that research practices should seek to reveal the voices of the silenced and marginalized, particularly those who have been used to oppress certain groups (hooks, 2000). Various feminist orientations, such as third wave and feminist standpoints, have traditionally worked towards the rejection of essentialist identity politics and the
hegemony that narrows marginalized peoples’ agency and distorts their self definitions. For example, Parker (2003) argued that the goals of feminist representations should be to enhance self identity, immanent value, and self determination amongst people. Additionally, Howry and Wood (2001) noted that feminism serves four functions: 1) it names women’s experiences into existence; 2) it provides a premise for understanding and articulating women’s experiences; 4) it provides a means of healing; and, 5) it enables feminist activism. Such principles can only be achieved when a space for subjectivity among the marginalized is created and facilitated through a search for the marginalized voice. Moreover, the principles go beyond the study of women to other marginalized groups. In this study, I draw from postcolonial feminist orientations to analyze various forms of representations that emerge with regard to young people living in Mathare. Next, I examine the issue of voice which is an important component in ensuring that marginalized experiences are able to surface.

**Voice**

Postcolonial feminist standpoints are concerned with the issue of voice. A case in point is outlined by Oyewumi (2003) who argued that some Western theorists depict African feminism within a framework of oppression and invisibility. Oyewumi claimed that African women’s mobilization and self-assertion are not represented adequately in feminist theorizing which can be traced, in part, to colonial forces and practices. She argued that much of the emphasis has been on the voiceless African woman. However, Kolawole (1997) opposed such distorted forms of representations by pointing out that African women are not only speaking back but are also actively engaged in work that deconstructs distorted images or misrepresentations of African women. Kolawole (1997)
referred to Micere Mugo a well known African scholar who associated the
misrepresentation of African women’s voices with a refusal by scholars to search for
African voices in the right places, such as market places or in farms.

Issues raised by the lack of marginalized voices can also be traced to the
representation of such groups by dominant groups of people. For example, postcolonial
theory has been criticized as an intellectual project that is produced by scholars from
developing countries based in the West (Appiah, 1992). Appiah (1992) dismissed
postcoloniality as a notion that is limited to intellectuals in reference to the African
context. He noted that postcoloniality “is the condition that we might ungenerously call a
comprador intelligentsia: of a small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and
thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalist at the
periphery” (p. 432). If Appiah’s statement is true, then it raises the question of who can
and ought to speak for the postcolonial subject. Spivak (1994) tackled this question as she
drew her arguments from the death of the subject that was enhanced by Western theories.
She asked the question “for whom had the subject died?” She delved further into the
issue by illustrating how the recovery of the subject has occurred in the naming and
branding of the victims of widow sacrifice in India. According to Spivak (1994), such
representation continues to subjugate women because it presents them as permanent
victims.

Spivak’s idea of the subaltern can be traced to Gramsci; who conceptualized the
subaltern classes as having no history of their own. These classes were unrecognized by
official historical documents, the subaltern was instead integrated into the master
narratives of the powerful. It follows, therefore, that the controversy of the subaltern
cannot be analyzed without considering hegemony and power structures. From Gramsci’s point of view, the “subaltern” cannot be conceived apart from the totality of social relations at any given historical period (Juan, 1999). The subaltern project thus gives voice to the voiceless and visibility to the invisible. Juan (1999) presented “hegemony” in the sense not just of political leadership of an alliance of classes but also of male and intellectual leadership of a historical bloc of forces engendered in the process of revolutionary transformation. He, for instance, argued that “in the present crisis of transnational capitalism, institutions like the World Bank and various United Nations agencies seek to define peasant subalternity with familiar schemes like ‘integrated rural development’ and civil society ‘rural reconstruction, movement’ (p. 100). Juan argued that transnational institutions exercise the panoptic gaze over less powerful countries. I support the point of view provided by authors who advocate that scholars need to listen to marginalized voices as a foundation for their reflections. These voices need to be juxtaposed with existing materials on the subjects. Some post-colonial feminists have been active in analyzing texts within their cultural contexts and by highlighting anomalies that exist (e.g., Narayan, 1997, analysis of the Indian culture within Western scholarships).

Key Criticisms and Contributions

The use of the term “postcolonial” has been criticized by various scholars. Kavoori (1998), for instance, argued that the use of the “post” prefix can be seen as deceptive because it is depicted as a celebratory term that indicates that the colonial age has passed, and that a final closure has occurred. The “post” also tends to ignore current
capitalistic tendencies that continue to subjugate formerly colonized people. Similarly, McClintock (1994) took issue with “postcolonialism” when she noted that:

The ‘post-colonial scene’ occurs in an entranced suspension of history, as if the definitive historical events have preceded us, and are now in the making. If the theory promises a decentering of history in hybridity, syncretism, multi-dimensional time, and so forth, the singularity of the term effects a re-centering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance. (p. 293)

McClintock (1994) maintained that the use of “postcolonial” revives colonialism from its disappearance. Hall (1996) also added to this discussion when he stated that, like the other “posts,” adopting such a stance extinguishes the politics of resistance because it posits no clear domination and calls for no clear opposition. Moreover, the creation of labels, such as “Third World,” in discourse as a form of identity exemplifies power differentiations between the global North and South (Ong, 1994). Additionally, binaries associated with postcolonial theory such as colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed are further divided based on geographical dichotomies that include First/Third, center/margin, metropolitan/peripheral, and local/global and further delineate various groups of people (Grossberg, 1996). This artificial conceptualization places many formerly colonized countries at the bottom of the socially constructed hierarchy. According to Kavoori (1998), such connotations hide heterogeneities, mask contradictions, and dissolve differences within individual states. Consequently, states are portrayed as permanent social and economic structures. Furthermore, an imagery of dependency is created because, in many cases, developed and developing worlds co-exist
in a symbiotic, but largely unequal, relationship. Labels obscure forms of resistance that might be emergent in the developing countries. Such categorizations are also untenable because they ignore poverty in the developed countries, while they utilize Western models to determine what is development or underdevelopment.

Many of the above claims could be considered as valid claims to a major extent. However, postcolonial theory could arguably be seen as the beginning of a process of self-reflexivity by formerly colonized peoples. As Fanon (1994) noted, “We must therefore not be content with delving into the past of a people in order to find coherent elements which will counteract colonialism’s attempts to falsify and harm…. ” He added that “a critical examination of colonization is only the beginning…. We must work and fight with the same rhythms as the people to construct the culture and to prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already springing up” (p. 44). Self-reflexivity is therefore critical because it provides a foundational base for a new identity that emerges when states acknowledge their past and seek to build a future that is homegrown. Moreover, although postcolonial scholarship is committed to theorizing the problematics and contexts of de/colonization, its concern is not merely with chronicling the facts of colonialism. Rather, as Shome and Hedge (2002) wrote, “postcolonial scholarship’s commitment and critical goals first and foremost, are interventionalist and highly political. In its best work, postcolonial scholarship theorizes not just colonial conditions but why those conditions are what they are, and how they can be undone and redone” (p. 250).

Postcolonial feminism can be seen as one of the ways that we can move from binaries and an all encompassing view of representation to providing a view from
“elsewhere” (Mohanty, 2003). Postcolonial standpoints carry out this task by shifting from the center to paying particular attention to the margins, an approach that is different from classic postcolonial theories that evaluate groups as global or as states (hooks, 2000). Postcolonial feminists also deviate from the presentation of groups as homogenous and, instead, argue for the centrality of self-reflexive collective practice in the transformation of the self, reconceptualizations of identity, and political mobilizations as necessary elements of the practice of decolonization (Mohanty, 2003). Mohanty provided an alternative to the universalizing tendencies as she urged a shift from the use of the widely accepted notion of "sisterhood," by replacing that term with "solidarity." She defined solidarity in terms of “mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities” (p. 6). The enactment of solidarity, therefore, does not assume the commonality of oppression such as the argument that all women are oppressed; instead, solidarity acknowledges differences and calls for dialogue.

Jaggar (2000) examined the possibility of a feminist dialogue, especially between Western and non-Western cultures. She noted that the first step in such solidarity begins with an acknowledgement that a single or monolithic global feminist community is non-existent. She maintained that dialogue could be facilitated by recognition that the possibilities for working together could consist of multiple and overlapping discursive networks. Jaggar pointed to a number of ways in which the exchanges between such feminist discourse communities across the world can be the sites of important critical perspectives on ongoing economic, political, social and environmental issues that are crucial to feminist agendas both within and across national contexts. According to Jaggar
(2000), one of the ways in which subaltern women can articulate their specific needs is by creating their own language. She views language as a public construct and described its absence as a public and not private omission.

The task of creating a new language is a collective project in which the subaltern woman claims a collective identity distinct from her identification as the daughter, wife, and/or mother of particular others. Only by creating a collective identity with other women in similar situations, perhaps with other daughters, wives, and mothers, can the subaltern even come to see herself as subaltern and, as Jaggar (2000) argued, can she see shared similarities.

Jaggar’s second recommendation focuses on how to work with difference or how to achieve dialogue in contexts that are characterized by significant differences in cultural bearings and worldviews. The affirmation of difference is basic to postcolonial epistemology. Jaggar noted that critical dialogue between members of communities that have significant differences but who still share some basic concerns is likely to be more immediately useful in promoting reassessments of feminist commitments. She noted that one of the goals of global feminism is for each community to reevaluate their commitments in comparison to those that emerge from other feminist orientations. She noted that “a feminist conception of discourse, with its emphasis on listening, personal friendship and responsiveness to emotion, and its concerns to address power inequalities, is especially suited to facilitate such an immersion” (p. 19).

The practical implication of such views is that global feminist agendas need to shift from issues that have previously been sensationalized, such as non-Western marital
and sexual practices, female genital mutilation (FGM)\(^1\), polygamy and other issues. A different approach would be to focus on the outsourcing that is propagated by multinational corporations from the West to non-Western countries and the effect of Western conceptions of development and patterns of consumption. Western and Third World women are not affected equally by changes in the world economic order highly characterized by capitalism. Third World women are generally affected more adversely than Western women. A minority of Third World women benefit from these changes, but in many ways the poorest in both countries suffer the most (Jaggar, 2000; Mohanty, 2003).

Schutte (2000) contributed to the notion of solidarity or cooperative significance in postcolonial feminist standpoints. She emphasized the need to develop a model for understanding cultural differences. The problems that are associated with misrepresentation can be traced to the disregard of contexts or the use of flawed research methodologies. Schutte (2000) presented cultural alterity as a notion that points to ethics and to ways of knowing far deeper than the superficial ways of knowing that emerge when dominant groups perceive themselves as epistemological producers by placing themselves at the center. According to Schutte (2000), “cultural alterity demands that the other be heard in her difference, and that the self give itself the time, the space and the opportunity to appreciate the stranger within and without” (p. 55). She placed a special emphasis on cross cultural communication that includes two processes: first, an understanding of what is being said, and second, people must relate what has been said to complex signifiers by denoting what is left unsaid.

\(^1\) FGM is a term often used by outsiders. Various scholars (e.g. Greiner, Singhal, Hurlburt, 2007) question the use of this vocabulary as they posit that mutilation is not usually the intent of the action. These scholars used the term female genital cutting which is more neutral.
Similarly, Narayan proposed a number of strategies that Third World feminists could use in challenging the cultural essentialist’s agenda. The feminist critique of gender essentialism does not merely charge that essentialist claims about “women” are overgeneralizations, but points out that these generalizations are hegemonic in that they represent the problems of privileged women (most often white, Western middle-class, heterosexual women) as paradigmatic “women’s issues.” Narayan (2000) stated that:

Viable post colonial feminist perspectives need to engage in rethinking the prevailing portraits of “Western culture” and of different Third World cultures, rather than assisting in their replication and reification by conflating political resistance to Western domination and intrusion with essentialist notions of “cultural difference” and “cultural preservation.” (pp. 85-86)

Anti-essentialist feminists counter static representations by insisting on historical understandings of contexts in which cultures came into being.

Developing ways of thinking that reveal multi-vocal standpoints and experiences can help us resist monolithic treatments of cultures (Barker, 2000). Narrative theory and practice is a natural ally for postcolonial feminist projects—a political struggle that necessarily involves new ways of perceiving and retelling a person’s or people’s history. To empower a group of people is to bear witness to their stories; to suppress a group (or person) is to silence or stifle their stories. Personal or group narratives “assert both a right to proclaim publicly (to even a few others) one’s identity and the need to define one’s experience as relevant” (Harter, Japp, & Beck, 2005, p. 24). In the next section, I articulate the key characteristics of narrative theory and practice and illustrate its heuristic potential when coupled with a postcolonial feminist standpoint.
Narrative Theorizing

Storytelling is a part of every day experiences. Indeed, it has been posited that social life itself is storied (Somers, 1994). People make sense of their experiences, claim identities, interact with each other, and participate in cultural conversations through storytelling (Langellier & Peterson, 2004). Narratives are also seen as some of the most powerful tools in transforming the ideas of self and society as a whole (Garro & Mattingly, 2000; Mumby, 1987). Frank (2005) revealed the crucial role of narratives for humans’ sensemaking when he noted that storytelling determines what events are worth talking about, how relationships are to be understood, and what actions need to be taken.

Narratives have become significant in scholarly work because they indicate a shift from traditional ways of reasoning that recognized the act of storytelling as important primarily for the purposes of representation (see critiques by Fisher, 1987; Somers, 1994). Indeed, narrative scholars position narrativity within the discursive turn across social sciences (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Fisher, 1987; Frank, 1995, 2005; Harter et al., 2005; Somers, 1994). Somers articulated the importance of this shift:

It is by focusing attention on the new ontological dimension of narrative studies rather than on the traditional rendering of narratives as limited to a method or form of representation, that we have the opportunity to engage with historically and empirically based research into social action and social agency that is at once temporal, relational, cultural, as well as institutional, material and macro-structural. (p. 607)

Like other contemporary scholars, I approach narratives and narrativity as both social epistemology and social ontology (see also Frank, 1995; Harter et al., 2005;
Somers, 1994). In other words, I believe that the nature of selfhood is storied and that narratives allow individuals to make sense of the world. Of course, institutional and societal discourses are shaped by and shape ontological or autobiographical narratives (i.e., my story is interwoven with the story of my family, culture, organizations I belong to). Narrative approaches also privilege human action and critically examine how action affects social identities, thereby challenging dominant ways of thinking whereby particular ways of knowing are considered universal.

Multiple scholars approach narratives from various perspectives but are united by the notion that narratives somehow mediate between self and the world, whether by evoking or simply creating order and meaning (Harter et al., 2005; Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997). As such, narrative approaches point to the need for situating various narratives within their historical, institutional, and relational contexts. Somers (1994) noted that “the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by connecting (however unstably) parts to a constructed configuration or a social network of relationships (however incoherent or unrealizable) composed of symbolic, institutional and material practices” (p. 616). Because narratives, including master narratives of a culture, or what Somers terms meta-narratives, are a pastiche of observations, they can be questioned or challenged. For example, “meta-narratives” such as capitalism can be questioned when they are presented as the only acceptable route to advancement.

Disciplinary theories that scholars craft can also be understood as conceptual stories (Somers, 1994). Scholars advance, modify, and sometimes abandon theoretical explanations of phenomena—conceptual narratives that provide us with a vocabulary for understanding how characters across time and space live their lives. Postcolonial feminist
theory, for example, seeks to rearticulate narrative form by placing agents within socio-
historical, temporal, and relational contexts. When understood as narrative, critics can
question how the form and structure of theories influence individuals’ identities, identify
who is missing from stories, and isolate alternative plots. Conceptual narratives, like any
stories, are grounded within cultural contexts and arise at particular moments or times in
history. In other words, the social and political environment in which theories arise
shapes the kinds of questions asked and the claims advanced.

I organize my discussion around key characteristics of narrative theory and
practice and the ideological and political nature of narrative activity.

*Characteristics of Narrative Theory and Practice*

The first characteristic of narratives is the fact that they move beyond the act of
telling a story to a revelation of reflexivity by narrators. Kerby (1997) noted that
narratives are not a simple description of an occurrence but are interpretive acts that
reveal how we understand our lives. Frank (1995) also articulated the difference between
telling and narrating when he wrote that “a story ‘refers to actual tales people tell’ and
narratives emerge when discussing the general structural types that comprise various
stories” (p. 14). He further noted that a narrative type is the most general storyline that
can be recognized underlying the plot and tensions of particular stories. People tell their
own unique stories but they compose these stories by adapting and combining narrative
types that cultures make available. Meanwhile, as Polkinghorne (1988) suggested,
narrativity involves the whole process of “making a story, to the cognitive scheme of the
story, or the result of the process also called ‘stories,’ ‘tales,’ or ‘histories’” (p. 13). I
agree with Polkinghorne and others who propose that, regardless of the perspective held,
stories can be seen as narratives that reveal an individual’s ability to make sense of certain aspects of his/her life by ordering the elements of his/her stories in a manner that achieves his/her goals.

“Effective” narratives are those that help individuals achieve their goals (Garro & Mattingly, 2000). According to Gergen and Gergen (1986), successful narratives “select and arrange events in such a way that the goal state is rendered more or less probable” (p. 26). Bruner (2001) provided two characteristics that mark narrative accounts when he stated that:

Narratives should center upon people and their intentional states; their desires, beliefs and they should focus on how these intentional states led to certain kinds of activities…Second, narratives must also answer the question ‘why,’ why is this worth telling, what is interesting about it?’ Not everything that happens is worth telling about, and it is not always clear why what one tells merits telling. (p. 29)

One of the ways in which stories achieve coherence is by selectivity that is demonstrated through rearranging of elements, redescription, and simplification of events in people’s lives (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997). When storytellers position themselves as protagonists, they assume that there is a teller of the story and an audience to hear it even if the audience is only the self considered as addressee (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997; Langellier & Paterson, 2004). Indeed, it is these elements of moving towards a certain end that highlight the nature of stories as a form of persuasion.

Rhetorical theorists have re-conceptualized persuasion to focus on the dialectical processes that link social actors, texts, and communicative situations (Cheney,
Christensen, Conrad & Lair, 2004). Fisher (1987) also noted that the narrative paradigm challenges the notion:

that human communication—if it is to be considered rhetorical—must be argumentative in form and that reason is to be attributed only to discourse marked by clearly identifiable modes of inference and implication, and that the norms for evaluation of rhetorical communication must be rational standards taken exclusively from informal or formal logic. (p. 62)

One of the ways in which connections are made between agency and action is by conceptualizing narratives as performance. “Storytelling is performance in that possibilities for our participation are marked out in advance, so to speak, by the discourse and by our material conditions,” argued Langellier and Peterson (2004); “when we participate in storytelling, whether as storytellers or audiences, we reenact storytelling as a conventionalized form of communication as well as collaborate in the production of a unique story or performance” (p.4). Stories, thus, demonstrate both uniqueness and universality. Because stories are contextualized accounts, they can convey the particularity of any situation (Garro & Mattingly, 2000).

Fisher (1987) noted that, regardless of the form they are given, recounting and accounting for actions constitute stories and serve to establish a meaningful life-world. He added that narratives entail recounting stories which take forms such as history, biography, or autobiography. Narrator’s characters, conflicts, resolutions, and styles might vary, but each mode of recounting and accounting is but a way of relating a “truth” about the human condition. Many scholars have attempted to incorporate social actors, social texts, and communication by drawing from dramaturgical plots whose main focus
is human action. Gergen and Gergen (1986), for example, referred to narratives’ capacity to create feelings or emotions as dramatic engagement. They posited that narrative theory is concerned with the relationships among events, not the events themselves. Other scholars have used Kenneth Burke’s articulation of the pentad that emerges in his grammar of motives, a schema that situates agents within specific contexts (Burke, 1945/1969). In fact, Fisher (1987) based his definition of narration on Burke’s dramatic pentad. Fisher wrote that “by ‘narration,’ I mean symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (p. 58). Similarly, Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) referred to narratives as forms of discourse that place events in a sequential order with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Moreover, narrative accounts “should also be or appear to be order preserving, in the sense of preserving or appearing to preserve sequence—the essential properties of which life itself consists or is supposed to consist” (Bruner, 2001, p. 28).

Narrators create coherence in their narratives through the process of emplotting. Emplotment is critical in making connections because it gives significance to independent instances, thus contributing to the historicity of the subject. Emplotment translates acts into episodes that eventually translate into meaningful narrations (Somers, 1994). When analyzed from a structural perspective, narrative thinking or the performance of narratives results in the unitization of experience by establishing temporal boundaries and causal relations (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986). Emplotment also functions to enable narrators to identify conflicts in their lives. Narratives conventionalize the common forms of human mishaps into genres—comedy, tragedy, romance, irony, and other language usages (Bruner, 2002). Narratives also can be seen as “the recounting of
human plans gone off the track, expectations gone awry” (p.17). According to Bruner (2002), “narrative in all its forms, is a dialectic between what is expected and what came to pass… a narrative is an instrument not so much for solving problems as for finding them” (p. 15).

Stories provide turning points or episodes in which the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist’s story to a belief, a conviction or thought (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001). Narratives also provide a space for audiences to learn from stories. Stories “provide a powerful medium for learning and gaining understanding about others by affording a context for insights into what one has not personally experienced” (Garro & Mattingly, 2000, p. 1). In short, we make stories to come to terms with oddities and disruptions in the continuity of our lives. Indeed, learning stories are used by many cultures to stimulate questions, raise issues, foster debate and offer listeners a view of life as it could be. Oral tales are used by many cultures to shape minds, providing each listener with a concept of self, of choice, of relationship to community, and of individual power (Sunwolf, 1999).

Narratives can therefore be seen as playing a significant role in the creation of an individual’s identity. An individual’s capacity to identify areas in his/her life that need to be addressed and, in turn, to take specific action to address those areas is a storied ability. Somers (1994) referred to such narratives as ontological narratives, defining them as “stories that social actors use to make sense—indeed, to act—in their lives” (p. 618). Ontological narratives function to define who we are which, in turn, influences how we act. Ontological narratives emerge as a result of social and interpersonal relationships and can be understood as complicated interactions of one’s own sense of self and others’
understanding of who one is. Brockmeier and Harre’ (2001) noted that “our local repertoire of narrative forms is interwoven with a broader cultural set of fundamental discursive order that determine who tells which story, when and where, why and to whom” (p. 42). Personal narratives are affected by public or institutional narratives and the power relations that guide people’s social interactions.

Institutional narratives both enable and constrain organizational members. Somers (1994) referred to narratives that take place in institutional settings as public narratives which she defined as “narratives that are attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand, micro and macro” (p. 619). Such narratives include master narratives or the widely circulated stories that summarize the socially shared understandings that make communal life intelligible to its members (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001). While narratives have the power to redefine our moral perception, teach us our responsibilities, motivate and guide our actions, master narratives categorize particular groups of people in certain ways, thereby cultivating and maintaining norms for the behavior of the people who belong to this group.

The Ideological and Political Nature of Narrative Activity

At organizational levels, the creation and enactment of narratives is not a neutral process; narratives function to (re)produce or resist certain ideologies. Mumby (1987) rightly insisted that narratives require a “political reading.” Indeed, Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) pointed out that, when placed within organizational discourses, narratives function as lenses that reveal subtle aspects of organizing that might not be evident at the surface level. Mumby (1987) described the value of a political reading of narratives:
Story-telling is not a simple representing of pre-existing reality, but is rather a politically motivated production of a certain way of perceiving the world which privileges certain interests over others. A political reading of narrative draws attention to the relationship between narrative structure and the process of interpretation and, as such, focuses on the process by which dominant meaning systems arise. (p. 114)

This redefinition of narratives can be seen as contributing to critiques of some of the strategies used by modern organizations to achieve unified identities among organizational members (see Bullis & Strout 2000; Jablin, 2001).

Within organizational settings, as Eisenberg (1984) noted, contradictions emerge because individuals are faced with at least two sources of knowledge: the inner voice of the individual coupled with the outer voice that is promoted by the organization. In similar fashion, Bakhtin (1981) positioned the human mind as a theater between centripetal forces that involve human cognition and centrifugal forces that emerge in relation to interaction with members of the society. Bakhtin argued that individuals are always faced with a multiplicity of voices known as heteroglossia. As such, Brockmeier and Carbaugh (2001) argued:

Every narrative self account is itself part of a life, embedded in a lived context of interaction and communication, intention and imagination, ambiguity and vagueness, there is always, potentially, a next and different story to tell, as there occurs different situations in which to tell it. (p. 7)

Narrative accounts are not stable reports; instead, they are indeterminate and shift along with the exigencies of different moments.
When examined from a political stance, meta-narratives can be evaluated by the presence (or absence) of multiple voices and standpoints. What characters are granted a privileged place? Who remains invisible? Whose interests are served by dominant narrative accounts? How do narratives, as one form of symbolic interaction, legitimate some meaning systems and not others? These particular questions revolve around issues of power. As Foucault noted, power should be examined in the contexts of what it *does* and not what it *is*. According to Foucault (1980), power:

- Must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization . . . [Individuals] are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (p. 98)

The examination of how individuals interact with dominant power structures through narrativity is also crucial because it reveals how, through storied interactions, individuals negotiate their positions within the structures. Structures could be seen to be both empowering and constraining (Giddens, 1979). For example, Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, and Brokaw (2004) revealed how the structuring of invisibility among the hidden homeless (i.e., youth without homes) shapes and is shaped by ways in which these discourses inform the social contexts within which youth develop and embody autobiographical narratives. Such narrative activity simultaneously enhances and diminishes youths’ power and that of service providers.
Health scholars have also used a narrative approach to challenge the dominance of the biomedical story and scientific rationality as the only valuable knowledge in health care interactions (e.g., Frank, 1995; Harter et al., 2005; Sharf & Vanderford, 2003). Although these scholars acknowledge the significance of the biomedical model, they position it as “one” of many epistemologies as they craft space for personal narratives from diverse stakeholders including patients and family members. These scholars argue that personal narratives can allow patients to make sense of their conditions, reconstruct their identities, and share their experiences and frustrations with others. Such narratives should also be considered as forms of knowledge that could add value to empirical work on health sciences (Sharf, 2005). Frank (1995) noted that “the need for a personal voice depends on the availability of the means—the rhetorical tools and cultural legitimacy—for expressing this voice.” He added that “postmodern times have presented space where the capacity for telling one’s story is reclaimed” (p. 7).

Of particular importance for postcolonial feminists is the power inherent in counter-narratives. In talking about the potential to disrupt dominant and harmful discourses by constructing alternative stories, Lindemann-Nelson (2001) argued that:

How freely we can exercise our moral agency is contingent on a number of things. Most broadly, it depends on the form of life we inhabit: the niche we occupy in our particular society; the practices and institutions within the society that set the possibilities for the courses of action that are open to us; the material, cultural, and imaginative resources at our disposal; the constraints arising from the moral flaws within our roles and relationships, the shared moral understandings that render our actions intelligible to those around us. More
specifically, the extent to which our moral agency is free or constrained is
determined by our own—and others’—conception of who we are. (p. xii)
Lindemann-Nelson’s work is especially useful because she bases her arguments on how
master narratives can work to distort and damage some individuals’ identities. Damaged
identities emerge when important aspects of narratives are omitted, distorting a people’s
history. Lindemann-Nelson posited that individuals develop damaged identities when
members of dominant groups position them as unworthy of full moral respect.
Lindemann-Nelson also acknowledged that a person’s identity only becomes damaged
when she internalizes the other group’s negative perceptions about her. This distorted
identity can be averted through the construction of counter stories which she defined as
comprising of “a subset of stories that constitute a revised understanding of a person or
social group. They are stories that define people morally, and are developed for the
express purpose of resisting and undermining an oppressive master narrative” (p. 8).

In short, narrative and narrative scholarship are sets of practices inscribed by
power relations. The work on narrative repair is useful because it reveals the power of
storied thinking to shift world views and render credible the voices of previously
marginalized and silenced individuals. Carabas and Harter (2005) suggested that:

Stories sustain cultures, yet they remain as fluid as the people, languages, or
societal practices that they reproduce and/or resist….Counter-narratives are
significant, not merely as a corrective to the gaps, erasures, and misunderstanding
of hegemonic history, but also because the practice of rewriting leads to the
formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity. (pp. 164-165)
Just as individual and collective identities are narratively damaged, so too can they be narratively repaired. Each new story enriches the cognitive resources available for future acts of narrative thought (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986).

**Summary and Research Questions**

As articulated in this chapter, my standpoint was informed by postcolonial feminist and narrative traditions. The coupling of these perspectives provided a theoretically sensible place from which to understand MYSA’s social change efforts. As I engaged in fieldwork, I paid particular attention to issues of voice, representation, hybridity, and how young people narrated their lives. Consequently, my fieldwork was characterized extensive interactions with youth, and multiple conversations with various stakeholders.

Postcolonial feminist and narrative theory and practice are inherently dialogic—meaning is co-constructed between researchers and participants. I embarked on this journey with the goal of *working with* participants to make sense of how MYSA understood and embodied social change, including how participants crafted alternative narratives for self, other, and society. Based on the literature I had reviewed and guided by overarching postcolonial feminist and narrative philosophies, I posed the following research questions:

RQ1: How do stakeholders narrate their experiences with MYSA?

RQ2: What counter-narratives, if any, does MYSA offer its stakeholders?

RQ2a: How, if at all, do MYSA’s counter-narratives work to disrupt hegemonic and colonial narratives?
RQ2b: Whose interests are served (and whose are marginalized) in MYSA’s counter-narratives?
Chapter Three

Methodology

My research methods were based primarily on interpretive methods. The chosen method was heavily influenced by various Third World feminist standpoints. Like many scholars, I sought to present MYSA as space that honored young people’s voices that were previously subdued by societal discourses that associated people living in slums with particular stereotypes. Interpretive methods and ethnographically inspired fieldwork in particular facilitated this process as such research methods provide researchers with a space that allows them to interact with multiple participants in their natural environments. Moreover, time spent in the field provided me with opportunities to detect power relations that were related to gender, political, or economic deprivation—issues that might not have been visible on the surface. My postcolonial feminist standpoint and narrative theory also influenced the design of this project. For example, as I began developing my methodology, I initially focused more on the women’s team. However, as I read through various works, it became clear that MYSA addresses multiple forms of social inequalities that have been previously ignored by the state and many of Nairobi’s residents. My research focus included both sexes, and explored how gendered discourses functioned in concert with other forms of difference.

My postcolonial feminist standpoint was also useful in examining how I projected myself as a researcher. As a young person who grew up in Kenya, the research project was ideal because I understood the language and I had experienced some of the issues that MYSA youth deal with, albeit at a different level because I grew up in a fairly safe neighborhood and in a considerably well built house. As an insider, I was passionate
about revealing the voices of the young people and working with them to make sense of how larger historical forces affected their worldviews and their lives in general. However, my postcolonial feminist standpoint could also be seen as setting me up as an outsider. As a student I had been exposed to various forms of knowledge and my ideas have been transformed by these experiences. My reflexivity had been influenced as a result of relocation from the context where I grew up, to my scholarly interactions that were influenced by various perspectives at an intellectual level. However, as Narayan (2000) and Mohanty (2003) argued, this outsider perspective can be useful as it can facilitate a critical perspective. Nevertheless, I continued to struggle with the above tensions. In the next sections, I will present the elements of my research design. I begin by discussing ethnographic fieldwork. I then provide information on my data collection methods and analysis, and conclude with an outline of my fieldwork.

Ethnographically Inspired Fieldwork

I utilized ethnographically inspired fieldwork methods as my research procedures. Ethnography is described as a process that entails prolonged interactions with a group of people ensuring that the researcher becomes immersed in the participants’ daily activities (Cresswell, 1997). In many ways, ethnographic work involves an attempt by researchers to describe and interpret observed relationships between social practices and systems of meaning within particular contexts (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The assumption is that, by living in close proximity and interacting with people, ethnographers can comprehend the beliefs, motivations and behaviors of participants. The final product of field procedures is a holistic cultural portrait of the social group that incorporates both the views of the
actors in the group (emic) as well as personal standpoints on the social live that is experienced during field (Cresswell, 1997).

Ethnographic fieldwork is facilitated by language, social interaction, and written texts. As a result of a concern with understanding members' meanings, research practices are characterized by data collection methods that focus on representation. Such practices include thick descriptions of cultures based on intimate knowledge and participation (Van Manen, 1990). Moreover, texts that address ethnographical analysis (for example those that utilize transcripts from meetings) are considered useful, especially when natural occurring social settings are involved (Patton, 2002). The conversational evidence in the texts is derived from the features of the setting as well as interactions that occur (Denzin, 1989). Tedlock (2000) noted that the combination of various methods serves “to produce historically, politically and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives” (p. 455).

As with other research methods, ethnographic research methods are not value free. Validity in interpretive research methods is assessed in terms of trustworthiness criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, and authenticity criteria including fairness and ontological, catalytic and tactical authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Some of the ways that interpretive researchers ensure this form of validity is through the use of peer reviews and member checking. Peer reviews allow colleagues to examine the research, the process, and the outcomes by going through field notes and the analysis (Riessman, 1993). During my research I utilized member checking in order to ensure that I did not misrepresent participants’ views. One of the ways that I did this was sharing my understanding of various stories with individual participants.
during interviews. Additionally, throughout my research, I worked in close consultation with my chairs to ensure that my research process was credible in the scholarly world. Lastly, I attempted to achieve internal validity through the use of multiple sources of data, for example, observations, participation, and interviews.

Setting and Participants

As discussed in Chapter 1, since its inception, MYSA has believed in youth self-empowerment. It claims to be an organization of youth, run by youth and designed for youth (Willis, 2000). Most of the hundreds of volunteer coaches and referees are teenagers. Different leagues are run by a local committee composed of coaches and captains. These groups’ chairpersons constitute the sports council, which is responsible for all MYSA sports programs. The community service council is a second council that consists of local community and youth leaders who organize slum clean-up projects. Both Councils elect several members to the executive council that is responsible for the overall management and budget of MYSA.

The main avenues through which one becomes a member are (1) becoming a football player, coach, or referee; (2) participating in clean-up activities or campaigns; and/or (3) serving as a volunteer in one of the community service programs. The vast majority of MYSA members enter through the football programs (Brady & Khan, 2002). Once an individual has been a member for at least two years, he or she is eligible for any number of benefits including educational scholarships, specialized skills training participation in international tournaments, employment with MYSA, and practical experience in facilitating groups, organizing meetings, and running projects.
MYSA’s teams are organized into leagues. The first league is for children under the age of 10 that consisted of 65 teams in 2006\(^2\). Boys and girls play together in this league. Young people in this age group do not compete in tournaments and the regular soccer rules are not enforced as they play for fun. The heaviest concentration of youths is in the under 12 category. MYSA statistics indicated that there were 417 boys’ teams as compared to 111 girls’ teams in 2006. Participation dropped significantly in the older age groups. For instance, the over 16 team had 116 boys teams and to 32 girls teams in 2006.

Lastly, there is a professional team made up of former MYSA graduates. This team was formed in 1994 and is known as Mathare United. Mathare United is a separate and income generating entity that is owned by XXCEL Africa Ltd.

Fieldwork

My research was primarily based on interviews but I also utilized other ethnographic methods such as participant observation and document analysis. I made initial contacts with MYSA by visiting the organization in December, 2005. On this visit, I talked with some MYSA’s staff members who expressed an interest in my research and were willing to host me during my fieldwork. However, I was not able to observe any activities at that time because many programs were inactive in December.

I began my data collection process from mid June to end of August 2006 after my request for IRB clearance was approved by Ohio University. I spent the first few weeks getting to know MYSA’s youth and administrators. I also visited the local government administrators with the objective of creating positive relationships before conducting the actual interviews. However, it was hard setting up interviews with the officials because of

\(^2\) The teams statistics provided in this section are based on MYSA’s registration records provided by the Sports department for the following period January 1, 2006 to February 28, 2006.
their busy schedules. I was only able to interview one official. My field research was based in the Mathare area, but I also accompanied the teams to neighboring areas zones. The interviews were conducted mainly with young women and men who were currently in MYSA as well as former MYSA members. I also interviewed parents, MYSA administrators, teachers and local government officials. My goal in the fieldwork process was to get thick descriptions from the interviewees because such descriptions went beyond mere or brief reporting of an act to describing and probing the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action (Glesne, 1999). I kept a log of all research activities including types, times and spaces of activities (see appendix C).

Interviews

Interviews facilitated the process of acquiring narratives because they provide effective ways of creating interactions between researchers and participants (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2003). Interviews served multiple functions in my research. First, they facilitated interactions between the participants and myself that might not have emerged through the use of other forms of data collection, such as observation and document analysis (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002). Interviews, for example, enable researchers to seek clarification immediately because of their interpersonal nature. Second, interviews can also shield researchers from confusion that could emerge from other data collection means or the failure of participants to respond to research questions (Patton, 2002). Lastly, qualitative interviewing design ought to be flexible and continuous. Although questions can be prepared in advance, researchers are not bound by a pre-established interview schedule; instead, researchers
use their list of questions only as a general guide for the process. Moreover, the thick
descriptions that accompany interpretive interviewing reveal more than what a person is
saying; “[a thick description] presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of
relationships that join persons to one another” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). Consequently,
interviews can be viewed as a means of acquiring information because the details
gathered in the process are seen as “true and accurate pictures of respondent’s lives and
selves” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646).

Interpretive interviewing methods differ significantly from traditional interview
styles. Holstein and Gubrium (2002) noted that interviews were traditionally analyzed as
accurate descriptions, experiences or reports, or literary representations of reality.
Consequently, the analysis entailed systematic coding, grouping or summarizing of the
descriptions. Through their analysis of the interview data, researchers sought to provide a
logical organizing framework to explain aspects of the social world that respondents
portrayed. In this framework, participants were seen as subordinate to the issues
(questions) to which they responded. In the traditional view of interviewing, when
questions were “properly” asked, the passive subject engaged in a “minimalist version”
of the interpretive practice, perception, storage and reports of experience (p. 120). In such
cases, participants had limited input in the research process besides responding to
questions. Interpretive forms of interviewing provide an alternative to the previous
passivity of respondents because questions formulated shift from examining the “what's”
depictions of the activities of everyday life of people's lives, to a combination of the
“what's” and the “how's” (referring to the constructive order of every day lives) (Fontana
& Frey, 2000). In interpretive forms of interviewing, production of meaning is
emphasized and is generated through the combination of activities that happen daily in peoples’ lives, as well as how these activities are interpreted by the individuals. These interviews are characterized by active participation in interactions with respondents. The interactions are seen as negotiated accomplishments, involving both interviewer and respondents that are shaped by the context in which they take place.

My interviewing process relied on biographical accounts that rest on the collection and analysis of stories, accounts, and narratives that speak to turning points in people’s experiences in their daily activities (Riessman, 1993). Biographical accounts place people in the larger, historical, institutional and cultural arenas that surround their lives. The assumption is that context affects individual stories and meanings. Biographical methods also focus mainly, but not exclusively, on epiphanies or those interactional moments that leave a mark on people’s lives (Denzin, 1989). By recording such experiences, the researcher is able to illuminate the moments of crisis that occur in people’s lives. Moreover, as researchers deconstruct the experiences, they are able to point out instabilities, processes of change, and the interplay of differences and heterogeneity that make stability, unity, structure, function, and coherency (Czarniawska, 1998).

Biographical accounts also place people in the larger, historical, institutional, and cultural arenas that surround their lives. The assumption is that context affects an individual’s stories and meanings. Indeed, interpretive researchers argue that history is socially embedded which leads to the assumption that all interpretations are temporally located and, therefore, always open to reinterpretation (Glesne, 1999). According to Denzin (1989), historical accounts contain a number of components. First, an account
provides a picture of the way the events and processes studied unfold over time. This component of an account focuses on participants’ descriptions of their experiences from the beginning to the end of the research process. Second, historical accounts refer to the ways that participants describe events as they unfold within a larger historical social structure. This structure includes issues of power within both micro and macro relationships and cultural meanings that structure everyday social interaction and social relationships. Finally, history operates at the level of the individual participants’ and the researcher’s personal biographies. Both the researcher and participants bring their historical and personal backgrounds to the interpretive process.

In my analysis of MYSA, I drew on biographical accounts and I focused on situating the young people within Kenya’s larger history by focusing on personal life history, their historical background in the sports world, and how their involvement with MYSA has affected their relationships with family members and the outside world. I digitally recorded the interviews and transcribed them after the completion of the field research. I also took field notes to ensure that I had captured stakeholders’ stories appropriately. I also kept a journal of my own personal experiences. I spent approximately 20-30 hours a week at MYSA starting mid-June, 2006 to the end of August. I was able to put in 280 observation/volunteer, and interview hours during my fieldwork. In total, I interviewed 47 participants: 15 staff members, 25 volunteers, four parents, one government official, and two teachers. The interviews amounted to 496 pages of transcripts. The length of interviews varied from 30 minutes to one hour. Interview protocols for each group of stakeholders are provided in the appendices. Some of the questions that guided me during the interviewing process as I interviewed women
for instance were as follows: How, if at all, have the women’s lives changed as a result of their involvement in sports? How, if at all, do family members and community members react to their involvement in soccer? How would they describe their interaction with the men in MYSA? Has this interaction changed over time? As I interviewed the men, I focused on the following question: What is their perception of women’s involvement in soccer? As I interviewed the community leaders, including teachers and government officials, I asked the following questions: What are the administrators’ views of MYSA? How, if at all, has MYSA contributed to the community?

Participant Observation

I took the role of a participant observer during my field work. Participation and observations work together with interviews. Fontana and Frey (2000), for example, refer to observation as an informal interviewing of the world. A major advantage of participation and observation is that it provides current and emerging events as they evolve under the researcher’s eyes. Participant observation also focuses on or provides access to nonverbal cues that might not be available through other research methods (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Moreover, as Glesne (1999) noted, participant observation methods present researchers with a continuum between being a complete outsider to being an insider. One of the ways that an individual could become a member of MYSA is by engaging in community service. Throughout my study I participated in a number of community activities that were organized at that time. I attended drama outreaches, environmental cleanup, and football matches in which I played the role of being a fan and spectator. I also worked as a volunteer for the jailkids program. Lastly, I sat in various meeting such as the sports council, girls’ forum and executive council forums.
I took field notes after each observation period in order to document experiences, including analytic memos that link the observations with emergent themes and theory. At the end of my fieldwork I had 70 pages of field notes. The notes included descriptions of what I had observed, my personal thoughts of various issues, and areas that I felt needed further clarification. I used these notes to formulate further questions that would enhance my understanding of unfolding phenomenon. I also attempted to relate what I was hearing from the field with my theoretical underpinnings in the process of writing my field notes.

Document Analysis

During my research, I utilized document analysis in a number of ways. First, MYSA had archived materials on the organization, mostly articles clipped from local newspapers. The organization granted me access to these materials. In total, I analyzed 54 articles, mostly newspaper and magazine cuttings from both local and international media. The local media included the *Daily Nation*, the *East African*, the *Standard* and *Kenya Times*. Some of the international media included *Reader’s Digest*, *London Economist*, and the *New York Times*. I also analyzed the organization’s documents such as the code of conduct and newsletters. Lastly, I examined MYSA’s website. I compared the information emerging from the public discourse with MYSA’s organizational documents with a goal of answering the following questions: How, if at all, was the organizational representation of young people living in Mathare similar or different from that depicted in mainstream media? In addition to analyzing the above documents, I examined two books produced by MYSA’s “shootback” project titled: *Shootback: Photos by kids from the Mathare slums* (edited by photographer Lana Wong); and *The millennium goals: a
promise to the youth. As I examined the pictures, the following questions guided me:
What kinds of images did the young people focus on? What kinds of stories did the pictures tell about the young people’s lived experiences? In the next section, I offer additional information on my data analysis procedure.

Data Analysis

I used the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This strategy combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed. As social phenomena are recorded and classified, they are also compared across categories. Thus, the discovery of relationships, beginning with the analysis of initial observations, undergoes continuous refinement throughout the data collection and analysis process, and continuously feeds back into the process of category coding. As new events are constantly compared with previous events, new typological dimensions as well as new relationships can be discovered.

The constant comparison approach is characterized by the reading and rereading of the interviews, with the aim of recognizing themes and concepts. The constant comparison method is also practical because it presents a step by step way of carrying out research (Rubin & Rubin, 2003). The steps include: reading the interviews and marking off each time a particular idea or concept is mentioned or explained, indicating a code for the subject in each paragraph, grouping together responses describing the same idea or process and examining everything that is put together in the same category and within categories. The goal of the constant comparison method is to reconstruct the categories used by subjects to conceptualize their own experiences and world views.
My analysis process began during the transcription phase of my research. I started identifying recurring information and noting emerging categories. After the completion of the transcription process, I read the entire transcripts two times, carefully, making additions to my list of categories. At the end of this second reading, I had eight themes. I then went back to my transcriptions for a third reading. In this step, I continued to check for (in)consistencies in the emergent narratives, and I also gathered supportive materials and examples for each of the themes. In some cases, the themes tended to overlap and as a result of that I combined some of my themes which eventually led to my final four themes.

Conceptualizing Rigor

The quality of my research can be evaluated at different levels. As I have indicated in previous sections, the purpose of my research was to represent MYSA youth in their own words and from their own perspectives. Consequently, my research focused on subjective views of my participants. In this section, I present elements of my research rigor by articulating how my positioning as a researcher, data collection, and data analysis enhanced the credibility and trustworthy of this work.

Interpretive researchers acknowledge that power is an important element in research because knowledge is seen as a social and political construction (Denzin, 1989). One of the ways in which my research addressed this issue was through the position I adopted as a researcher. I situated my self as an instrument through which participants’ voices could be revealed. Through a redefinition of the traditional roles occupied by the researcher and participants, I was able to decentralize the power issues that privilege researchers as dominant authorities in the research process (see Patton, 2002). This was
facilitated by a number of decisions. First, my questions were open ended, hence, providing participants with the ability to shape the trajectory of issues they chose to address through their responses. Further, as previously mentioned, I focused on biographical accounts or descriptions that are characterized by thick descriptions that provide holistic pictures of individuals’ experiences and lives in general. In MYSA’s context, such accounts entailed participants talking not only about their involvement in the organization but also temporal elements and how these aspects intersected with their other activities such as school, family, politics and the social economic state of the country.

Second, I was constantly aware that my interviews were based on subjective meanings. I approached this issue in a number of ways. To begin with, I was concerned about how the interviewing process produced reflexivity between the participants and myself. Throughout the data collection process I focused on hearing my participants’ voices which Rawlins (2003) described as:

Hearing others is not a passive enactment of being-in-conversation. Hearing voices, it says something about you that is critical. It identifies you as someone who has postponed speaking, someone who is reserving and respecting the space of talk for (an) other. It announces you as someone potentially open to the other’s voice, at least in this moment when he/she is speaking. Listening in this way is a committed, active passivity. It is an opening in practice, conscientious listening. (p. 122)

Rawlins’ distinction of hearing and listening influenced my research, for example, I concluded my interviews by sharing with my audience my understanding of key issues.
that had emerged during the interaction so as to ensure that my understanding of the issues was accurate. I would also ask participants questions based on what I was hearing. In so doing, I was able to get clarification on issues that I might not have understood during the actual interviewing process. In other words, my understanding of participants’ perspectives was a dialogic process because I considered my role as that of a learner. This was consistent with John and Lyn Lofland (1995) suggestion that researchers should adopt the role of the “socially acceptable incompetent” when interviewing (p. 175). A naturalistic researcher, according to Lofland and Lofland (1995), “is one who does not understand. She or he is ‘ignorant’ and needs to be ‘taught’” (p. 56). After listening to the participants I engaged in the process of reflexivity that involved situating participants’ voices within other voices such as the theories that I was using, various scholarly texts that had been written on the youth, and other public discourse. The emergent result of my work was a product that was based on a co-construction of knowledge that included the consideration of my participants’ views, relevant scholarly work as well as my personal perspectives during the fieldwork.

Third, my research rigor can be evaluated through my reliance of the basic principles of my theoretical frameworks. Feminist research, for example, is based on the belief that researchers must be continually conscious of ways in which their work responds to (or neglects) difference and ambiguity. Throughout my research I avoided homogenizing youths’ perspectives. I approached this issue in two ways: by providing diverse perspectives, and by being sensitive to my audiences concerns. Next, I provide examples of how I took into consideration the two factors. First, when I began my research I planned on interviewing 30 participants. Based on the MYSA’s multiple
programs, the numbers of staff working for the organization, and discussions with my committee, I increased my proposed number by interviewing 55 participants both formally and informally. Out of the 55, I transcribed 47 of the interviews. As a result of using multiple individuals, the study provides perspectives on the organization from different angles such as volunteering, working for the organization (administrative angle), playing for MYSA on professional capacities, and external viewpoints (provided by parents, teachers, parents and local administrators).

The second illustration of my sensitivity to my participants was in relation to the research design. My initial data collection stage included the analysis of photos taken during fieldwork. However, I realized that some of the participants were hesitant about having their photos taken. I made a conscious decision to respect those wishes by relying on the photos that had been taken by MYSA youth for my analysis instead of taking pictures. Furthermore, I used pseudonyms when referring to participants to protect the identities of individuals. I also identified the role they play at MYSA or in the community (e.g., staff member, teacher, government official).

Fourth, I enhanced my research credibility by utilizing multiple methods. Interpretive researchers argue that it is ineffective to represent a world of objects that are separated from human knowers who use language and symbols to accurately describe and explain the truth (Rubin & Rubin, 2003). My research methods included an analysis of MYSA’s communication in a holistic sense. Interviews provided me with storied accounts. My observations afforded me with a space to cross check if the narratives I was hearing were consistent with MYSA’s work. Time spent in the field, meetings, and in MYSA environs enriched my understanding of MYSA. Lastly, participant observation
enabled me to have some experience of MYSA work, especially as I worked with the jailkids program.

Finally, my data analysis process was guided by grounded theory. My themes emerged from the information gathered in the field. As I explained in the data analysis section, my role was to identify recurring themes. I shared these themes with some participants to ensure that I was representing the organizational perspectives accurately through member checking while on the field. I also provided a copy of my research findings to the organization before I made the final submission of my study that was disseminated to various stakeholders within the organization. I then set up a meeting to discuss my findings with MYSA’s key administrators. Additionally, I shared my themes with my chairs who provided feedback throughout the entire research process. In the next chapter I present a detailed account of my research findings.
Chapter Four

Results

The research findings presented in this chapter present the outcome of my fieldwork experience. The results originated primarily from in-depth interviews with MYSA youths, parents, teachers, and local government officials. I was also able to participate and observe a number of MYSA activities. Lastly, I conducted document analysis on newspaper clips archived by the organization. The information presented is a combination of individuals’ perspectives as well as my personal reflections. In-depth interviews in particular enabled me to capture and juxtapose personal narratives as well as societal perspectives on Mathare. The interviews also reflected consistencies within the stories especially when youths talked about their work in MYSA. In other cases individuals presented novel ideas that enriched common experiences.

My theoretical lenses, both the postcolonial feminist and narrative standpoints, guided me in highlighting the multiple voices that emerged. In some cases, the stories did not follow sequential order with a clear beginning and end. In such instances, I relied on the process of emplotment by attempting to provide significance to individual instances by drawing from other narratives and historicity (see Sommers, 1994). The use of emplotment allowed me to identify various conflicts, silences and contradictions that became apparent in the course of the field work.

As was indicated in Chapter 3, I used the constant comparison method of data analysis to come up with general themes. I was able to generate four major themes, specifically: play versus work, identity, gender, and organizational development. I organize this chapter around those themes by beginning with play versus work which
focuses on how MYSA utilizes programs such as sports, arts and photography for pedagogic purposes. This theme revealed unique strategies that could be integrated into an understanding of what is privileged as knowledge or education. The second theme on identity provides the “in betweens” in metanarratives and personal narratives that emerge as youths engage with competing discourses. This theme is significant because it points to the importance of ontological narratives in challenging stereotypes embedded in metanarratives thereby reflecting marginalized people’s agency. Moreover, the identity theme reveals the need to shift from notions of essentialist identity and presents identity as shifting and often fragmented.

The third theme on gender highlights MYSA’s role in breaking gender barriers that prevent women from engaging in sports. I draw from postcolonial feminist standpoints as I situate women’s experiences in MYSA within historical, and social cultural landscapes, which reveal certain contradictions that emerge, and how external structures limit women’s involvement. This theme also reveals how the women overcome rigid societal structures by engaging in sports and other activities. Lastly, the theme analyzes MYSA men’s perspectives on women’s participation. The emergent responses provide contrasting perspectives, some that are laden with patriarchal reasoning, and others that view women’s involvement in soccer as an empowering process and thus part and parcel of development.

The final theme traces the organization’s development. I begin with the organization’s origins and organizational strengths, concluding with some of the challenges the organization faces. These challenges include criticisms of program
activities (e.g., Norway cup, environmental cleanups, and organizational bureaucracy). In the next section I offer a storied representation of each theme.

Play Versus Work

Thinking back on my days as a player, I would say that football is like a life situation. When you are in the field, you need to give the game your best shot because you cannot repeat the game after it’s over. Regardless of whether you have won or lost you should ask yourself why you experienced that particular outcome. When you figure out why you lost a game, you can improve. It’s possible to score and become the best. You see, in life, avoiding such an injury could be likened to involving yourself in bad behaviors—situations that can be avoided.

The above comments were made by Bahati, a former footballer who was actively involved in MYSA’s drama group. Bahati was responding to a question concerning the most important lessons that she had acquired from playing football. Her metaphorical response is significant in light of MYSA’s goals of using sports to address life issues. Esther, a female player for the women’s senior team, described MYSA’s mission in the following manner:

MYSA’s mission is to enable youth to become better people than they were before. The organization targets youths and teaches them many things. Their mission is to teach the community about a variety of issues, but most of the time the organization targets youth because they have the potential of becoming future leaders.

This theme of acquiring both skills and knowledge on the field was evident in the community activities in which youth engaged in, as well as in many of the interviews that
I conducted. As will be described later in the discussion of identity, MYSA members viewed various programs of the organization, for example, the environmental clean-up program, as contributing to a change in attitudes amongst young people and the community as a whole. As the youth engaged in community clean-up, their work highlighted the importance of maintaining high hygienic standards in the present time and for future generations. In discussing this theme, a theme that is based on the knowledge and skills acquired through participation in MYSA, I will focus on programs such as sports, drama, and shootback to reveal how these programs provided youth with creative knowledge related to their lives.

MYSA Sports Programs and Education

A discussion of sports contribution to intellectual growth is especially important because play and work have traditionally been perceived as dichotomous (see Dewey, 1916). Dewey noted that occupational activities or those that include play and work, such as wood work, molding, dramatization and story telling, have become part of the curriculum in academic settings. However, these activities are viewed as significant for the purposes of enhancing social relations rather than as skills to be utilized in the future. Occupational activities are subordinated to education or intellectual results. Consequently, Dewey proposed that the combination of both play and work, or the technical and intellectual aspects of learning, could lead to a number of beneficial results. He noted, for example, that “experience has shown that when children are involved in physical activities, that brings their natural impulses into play, going to school is a joy, management is less of a burden and learning is easier” (p. 194). Furthermore, a fusion of these two aspects indicates a shift from the rigidity that emerges as a result of adhering to
prescribed ways of knowing that do not allow for critical thinking. Such fusions, of course, are laced with mistakes, referred to by Dewey as an “incidental requirement,” that enhance creativity in the learning process because students begin from scratch and learn through the process.

Dewey’s work is useful in analyzing MYSA as the dichotomy was evident in parents’ perceptions of youth involvement in sports. Many parents felt that active participation in sports would affect the academic work of their children. Hekima, a male participant, stated that his parents responded in the following manner when he started playing football:

My parents were mad and did not want me to play football; they wanted me to focus on books. They went to school and informed my teachers that they did not want me to play, but I still continued playing. I would sneak out of the house. I didn’t lose hope because I liked playing soccer and I knew that I was good at it. I wanted to be a professional player and I wanted to begin preparing for that at an early age. I started performing well at school and my parents left me alone.

Although Hekima wanted to become a professional footballer, his ambitions changed over the years, and by the time of our conversation, he had taken up business as a career. He enjoyed business, but he indicated that he was pleased that he had the opportunity to explore sports. Through trial and error, he had finally found his calling. Deno expressed similar thoughts, noting that:

Many of our parents were against football because they did not think that the game would benefit us in any way. That was a negative approach; education was everything. This might have been the case, but I also knew that, without play, one
could not achieve much. My father discouraged me from playing soccer because he wanted to ensure that I was studying. After I made it for Norway, when I was 16 years old, my father did not have any problems with football. He began to support me. I also continued doing well in school.

Masaku, on the other hand, used more unconventional means by taking advantage of his parents’ great emphasis on education to engage in sports. He narrated the following:

I had to carry books or hide or I would ask some of my friends to come and pick me up. These friends would come to my home carrying books and we would pretend to be leaving for the library, but then we would go to play football. Now the problem is that we would really enjoy the game, and by the time we went back home, we would forget that we had said that we were going to study. Our clothes would be dirty and our families would know that we were returning from a football match. When this behavior became persistent, my father reluctantly allowed me to play football.

Many parents were cautious about their children involvement with MYSA, believing that sports represented “play” rather than school or work. Yet, through sports, involvement in the MYSA sports program contributed to the intellectual advancement of many youngsters. A number of members were scholarship recipients. Some participants had received support throughout their entire high school education. In this way, MYSA activities transcend the traditional binary of play versus school or work. Zawadi, a female participant, indicated that she would not have been able to pursue high school had it not been for the scholarship she received from MYSA. She explained that, after she
completed primary school, her father did not want to support her—“I was out of school for one year. I got MYSA’s scholarship and I was able to go to school the following year.”

One of MYSA’s requirements is that all members under 18 years of age have to be enrolled in school as a prerequisite for participating in MYSA activities. Out of all my interviews, only one person indicated that football might have affected her grades. She acknowledged that “if I wasn’t playing football I think I would have performed better in school, but I spent so much time in sports, and I did not do well in school. I know I can’t get a good job.”

In addition to emphasizing the importance of education and constantly supporting members to complete their studies, MYSA structured its activities in ways that enhanced the acquisition of life skills and values. The structure can be seen as complementing education received from school because the activities focused both on experiential as well as active learning. I begin the next section by discussing the role of sports and formal workshops and then move on the other forms of art in which MYSA youths were involved.

*Football.* Sports formed the entry point to MYSA. As can be expected, all MYSA teams are guided by explicit norms that are stipulated in the organization’s code of conduct, commonly referred to as MYSA “fair play code.” The code dictates the required behavior of coaches and team members, in their conduct both on the field and off the field. The 11 basic rules address personal discipline and control by, for example, indicating that MYSA youth are not allowed to smoke, drink alcohol, or use illegal substances. The rules are also consistent with MYSA’s goals and avowed desire to
improve the quality of life for MYSA participants. For example, MYSA’s efforts to promote environmental awareness contribute to a healthier living environment for its participants. Although many of MYSA’s rules could be likened to rules that apply to sporting teams in general, MYSA’s reward system has distinct aspects. One illustration that exemplifies this uniqueness is that MYSA has awards not only for best players but for best sportsmanship. Fadhili, a male member, distinguished between the two by explaining that:

Best players were many, but sportsmanship had to do with not getting yellow cards. People were not used to order; you looked more respectable and famous when you were rude and tough in the slums. When someone kicked you and you didn’t retaliate, or fight back, this was unusual because the expectation was that you had to fight back.

Fadhili was describing the initial situation that existed when MYSA started. Fadhili who was one of MYSA’s pioneers indicated that best sportsmanship awards were created to maintain high levels of discipline. By rewarding players who did not get yellow cards, MYSA demanded high levels of discipline as yellow cards are normally given to players who have committed misconduct (behavior not considered as serious enough to be dismissed from the game).
MYSA’s rewards system was also exceptional because team work was considered to be the ultimate goal. Of course, the MYSA matches, as is true in many sports, were competitive. If a player had exceptional skills, the likelihood of joining one of MYSA’s professional teams or playing international tournaments was high. However, according to a number of MYSA’s members, the cooperative aspects outweighed competitiveness. I asked Esther, a female member, how losing teams were treated in the organization. She responded by saying that:

MYSA treats people equally. They (losing teams) are not treated as outcasts. In every game there has to be winners and losers and I wouldn’t say that they are treated negatively. In MYSA girls’ tournaments, when teams play, there is a “best
losers’ category. People in this group are able to advance to the next level of the tournament. This group is not viewed as incapable.

Esther explained that the term “best losers” referred to teams that were perceived as having worked hard in what was, ultimately, a losing effort for them.

When determining who was going to play in competitive sports matches, a number of factors were taken into consideration. Andrew, a senior staff member, explained the criteria that were used in most cases when selecting top players:

Our motto is that “you do something, we do something; you do nothing, we do nothing.” We ask the following questions when selecting players for the Norway Cup. What activities has an individual been involved in? Has a person only engaged in football? If we focused on football as the only activity, MYSA would have the best players. There is more to life; a football game takes only two hours which means that players have an additional 22 hours besides the 12 hours required for sleep.

Andrew noted that points earned during community service activities contributed heavily to both team and individual standing in the organization.

Movement games. MYSA also used movement games extensively. These kinds of games were described as popular games that were not generally considered professional sports. Younger children (those between the 9 and 13 years of age) were involved in these games. The goal of utilizing movement games was to teach children life values through play. One interesting example of this kind of game was the “human spirit” game. One child (human spirit) was placed in the middle of a huge circle consisting of about 20 children. The group would run around the “human spirit” until the facilitator prompted
the child to capture one of the children from the larger group. The captured child would then join the “human spirit” and the process continued. The last child to be captured was recognized as the winner.

MYSA facilitators then began a discussion that related the game with HIV/AIDS. For example, the facilitator would ask the children what the capturing process symbolized. The responses varied. For instance, some children would talk about the literal process that depicted their concrete observations, while others would connect the act of capturing to the transmission of HIV/AIDS. The facilitator would then use the responses to discuss some of the best ways that people could use to avoid being captured by the human spirit. Children would often contribute to the discussion by talking about the importance of making wise decisions. The facilitator also used this forum as an opportunity to talk about ways of preventing HIV/AIDS by drawing analogies between the disease and the game (by frequently referring to terminologies that were used in the game, such as the human spirit). Additionally, issues such as the origin of the disease, the rates and modes of transmission, and stigmas associated with the disease were discussed. These issues can also be seen as representations of the moral of the game.

Movement games can be viewed as educational vehicles that function to create a space where children are able to deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire, 1993). Paulo Friere refers to this transformation as the practice of freedom because it shifts from the integration of the younger generation into the existing systems of thinking. Friere argued that, as people use communication to engage with the world, new perspectives emerge that determine their life trajectories.
Exposure to the world. MYSA youths often referred to their international matches as some of their best moments in the organization. One MYSA youth explained that he had traveled to Brazil, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. He said the following about his experiences:

When we came back, we were still young, but we had matured both in the game and in life. We were so exposed that, when we got back, other teams in the league were making offers. We began to understand the nature of sports and that we had talents which could translate into opportunities. We realized that if we got serious with the game then we were likely to become great players in the future. That’s when I got serious with the game. When I came back and went to the field the next day, all the young people were so enthusiastic to see me because I was the only representative from my area.

Although MYSA provided opportunities to travel abroad, the majority had traveled to Norway because MYSA consistently sent a number of teams for an annual tournament that was held in that country. Many shared positive experiences. Amani, who had been to Norway twice, said that, as a result of his trip, he was able to look at MYSA from the point of view of an outsider because, now, he had seen how other programs work in different countries. He felt that MYSA needed to utilize new approaches for more effectiveness. Ben, one of MYSA’s coaches, also noted that:

Everything has both negative and positive effects. When we take children to Norway, they become exposed and they forget some things. When they come back they feel like they have “arrived.” Some of them do not want to go back to school; they no longer listen to anyone. I would say that most of them experience
change because they still want to continue with school with the hope that, one day, they will win another scholarship that will enable them to get a job and have a good life. (An analysis of Norway Cup critics will be presented in the organizational development theme).

My final illustration of the influence of the Norway cup is based on Fadhili’s reflections as he talked about his Norway Cup experience:

My best moment in MYSA was when I went to Norway. The trip changes the way you see the world. When you are young in Mathare, this is a big deal. It brings a lot of excitement in your family. It is a great experience. We usually take 55 people every year. There was a suggestion that we should reduce the number of teams and spend more money on activities, but I am one of the people who think that going to Norway makes a very big difference, not just to the player but to their immediate and extended families. The effects are far reaching—I say this with confidence. When I came back, I had a different perspective about life. Fadhili, as well as other youths, indicated that the trip was inspirational as they were able to experience the more developed world. Many of them felt motivated to work hard so that they could live well in the future. Though sports such activities, youths’ sense of possibilities expanded.

Sports and peace education. MYSA worked with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to promote peace in refugee camps. The staff member who was in charge of establishing the program in Kakuma described MYSA’s work in a camp that consisted of rival groups that were prone to conflict:
One of the strategies that we used was that we made a requirement that teams had to be multinational to be registered in the leagues. This was an important step because most of the conflicts in the camps erupted when teams that consisted of particular nationalities, for example, the Rwandese or Somalis, formed their own teams. If one team won over another, chaos would emerge. However, when the team’s members were diverse, even when a referee made a bad call, violence was unlikely to emerge.

According to the staff member, MYSA not only focused on football but also worked to sustain other sports, such as volleyball and basketball. MYSA also involved the local community because one of the aims of the program was to bridge the gap between the refugees and the locals. The local people perceived refugees as more privileged because they received a free education while the local people did not have access to such facilities. MYSA established positive relationships by mobilizing groups that were created for tree planting activities during the rainy season. The tree planting activity was important because the Kakuma camp is located in Kenya’s Northern part that is an area that is prone to drought and famine.

Formal Workshops

MYSA youths often participated in organized workshops that took place at the organizational level and in events that were organized by other organizations. I talked to a number of people who had attended HIV/AIDS counseling workshops that were organized by the Amani counseling center, a well known organization. One participant had also attended a workshop that was facilitated by an organization begun by Professor Wangari Maathai the first African woman Nobel Peace Prize winner. A number of other
participants had attended international workshops that focused on gender and
development. These workshops were significant as they provided “turning points” and
can be seen as “eye openers” for many participants. Amina, for example, explained:

I became trained as a peer educator. This was a really a good thing in my life first
because the workshop (residential) made a difference. We were able to get a
different experience from the one we were used to in our neighborhoods. We
received positive information that helped us, as well as other people in our lives. I
was 14 years then; there weren’t a lot of people who were going for workshops at
that age; my mother did not object to my going.

Amina was reflexive about the information she had gathered as was evident in her
subsequent comments:

The things I learned in the first workshop have really helped in my life. I was
surprised that some things could be considered as drugs— things that I was
exposed to on a daily basis. I did not have information on drugs, but later on, I
was able to make connections between drugs and harmful effects when my friends
started taking cannabis sativa. I’m not the kind of person to keep away from
people. I prefer talking to people instead of staying away from them because of
their behavior. I have seen many things happening to my friends; I have seen my
friends suffer; I have also seen my friends when they are confused as they try to
make important decisions. Luckily, the knowledge from the workshop helped in
preventing these things from happening to me.

Another participant, Levina, also talked about the change that emerged from the
information that she received:
I went for a peer educator workshop that changed me as a person. MYSA has an HIV/AIDS motto that says that “by changing the way one person behaves, you can save many lives.” We realize that there is no cure for HIV and AIDS, so we share the information we have on AIDS. So that really inspired me. Even if sometimes people do not listen to us, I know the information changed me personally. I know how to behave, and I know what I am supposed to do. That has changed my life.

Art for Education

MYSA’s arts and culture program uses activities such as drama, dance, and acrobatics to educate young people in the community. Mdosi, a male member, provided a historical background of the arts program by explaining that:

The arts program started because… the AIDS program had a project on reproductive health. This program mostly relied on discussions, forums or lectures. The style of disseminating information was monotonous and that’s when the idea of using art came up. The purpose of the program is to pass information to the community, to create development, to build the talent of youngsters living in slums.

Mdosi noted that some of the forms of art that are utilized by program include painting, drawing, dance, acting, and acrobatics. MYSA held an annual festival that children could be involved with in exploring their talents. The festival was known as watoto wanasya festival (children have a say) and was focused on empowering children to understand their rights. The rights included rights to education, shelter, and freedom from child labor.
Plays as mirrors of society: Participatory theatre. MYSA volunteers who were part of the theatre group usually performed during football matches, environmental clean up projects, and school outreach programs. I accompanied the group to one of their school outreaches. The play was a combination of song, African contemporary dance, and acting. The audience was clearly thrilled as MYSA youth did a thoroughly entertaining job. The drama group consisted of an energized group of young people who often looked at life in interesting ways. Most of the plots in the plays focused on issues that were common in the area such as crime, poverty, sexual harassment, deception, and family disintegration, among other issues. Indeed, Toni, a member of the group, referred to their plays as “mirrors of society” because most people in the audience saw reflections of their individual lives or of people they knew enacted in the plays. This is particularly significant because one of the basic rules for radical change is to recognize the world as it is. This awareness is then followed by engaging the world “on its own terms” in attempts to change in ways that could enhance just ways of living (Alinsky, 1967).

MYSA youths often portrayed existing issues in humorous ways by incorporating chaos and conflict in the plots. In many instances, the issues were left unresolved which usually provided a space for the actors to interact with the audience. MYSA youth would use the gaps within stories to talk about life lessons, or to engage their audience in attempts to find ways in which the problem or plot could be reconstructed for more meaningful endings. The drama group’s approach could also be likened to “problem-posing” education (Friere, 1993) in that there was a constant unveiling of reality, emergence of consciousness, and critical intervention. Friere noted that, in “problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in
the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (p. 64).

Image 4: MYSA’s drama team during a performance

A focus on MYSA’s drama group as a critical pedagogical vehicle is also important because the group used symbols that were familiar to their peers. The drama group used local language, namely *Kiswahili* and *Sheng* (a language mostly used by urban youth that is a combination of English and local languages). Additionally, traditional forms of entertainment were employed. The African contemporary dance, for instance, was a combination of traditional dances and emergent trends. In adopting culturally based approaches, young people utilized culture as an ally. This is an approach that has been used by scholars/activists in pursuing social change (see Airhebuwa, 1995; Singhal & Rogers (2003).
Image 5: The *Haba na Haba* group uses drums for entertainment education

The process of developing scripts for the plays was also empowering. The drama group consisted of youths from different zones. Individual members would often guide the group as to the most pertinent issues facing their respective home areas. Designated group members would be responsible for approaching schools and setting up the shows in their local areas. This aspect is noteworthy because, although the drama group existed as a program within MYSA’s hierarchical structure, the group utilized democratic ways of organizing. All group members were involved from the initial processes of identification of story lines through to the performance of the play.
Narratives as forms of instruction. The MYSA information and education group was also situated within the umbrella of the arts and culture program. This group consisted of peer educators whose main goal was to share information on various health issues with their friends. In some cases, the group visited schools. On a number of occasions, I attended sessions that were held at a high school. In many cases, youths in these schools actively participated in the conversations because they were interacting with their peers. Interestingly, MYSA youths used the act of narration. Dewey (1916, 1938) argued that work or industry offers little to engage the emotions and the imagination because the information is more technical. By using stories, MYSA utilized creativity and appealed to the audience members’ imaginations in ways that enhanced their understanding of life issues. I attended a session where Ernest, a male volunteer, began his story in this manner: “I remember when I was in high school I went for a science competition and I saw a very beautiful girl. Can anyone guess what I said to her?” He paused and invited the audience to come up with various responses about what they thought he had said to the girl. After a number of students had responded, he revealed his own response—which was that he asked her out for a date. He then continued with the narration by stating the following: “As I prepared for our first date, I was all set to impress her, but I did not have money to take her out, so I sold my radio, and tried to get money to take her to a special place. Would you have done that if you were on my position?” He then followed a pattern that was similar to the one he used for first question. After listening to the responses from the class, he provided a moral, in this case, that you should avoid creating false impressions but, instead, should be yourself and live within your means. He then picked up the story from where he left, and he told the
students that he had told the girl that he didn’t have any other girl friends. The students indicated that did not think this was true. They stated that they had used the same line even when the truth was that they had multiple girlfriends/boyfriends.

By the end of the narration, Ernest had addressed various types of relationships, sexually transmitted diseases, and sugar daddies and mothers, and had provided opportunities for both females and males in the class to give their perspectives on the issues. Ernest did not complete the story, but he promised to continue his narrative in the next session. The students were very engrossed with the story and expressed a desire for him to continue. In this particular case, students identified with the story because they were at an age (16-18 years old) where romantic relationships were “important” aspects of their lives. By engaging the youths at their level and through the use of personal experience, Ernest made the knowledge very accessible and credible (Dewey, 1916). Ernest used his (and their) experiences and the capacities of the learners as starting points. Additionally, this educational experience involved continuity and interaction between the learner and what was learned which was likely to have future implications (Dewey, 1938).

*Shootback: Eyes for the World*

The “shootback” project was started to enable youths to describe their lived experiences to the world. Youths were trained in photography, including the actual process of taking photos and processing those photos. The youth were also equipped with skills such as caption writing. Bernard, the program manager, explained how the program operated by pointing out that, when older youths received training, they were expected to
pass on this information to younger children between 12 and 15 years of age. He added that:

These kids follow our steps as we will train them on photography and video production. We are now working on the second phase of the program by including video production. I have done courses on video production and graphic design sponsored by MYSA. I could not have afforded to do video production or graphic design because such courses are quite expensive. I have really benefited as a member and I am very willing to help other kids.

Image 6: MYSA Shootback program members document life in Mathare

Bernard, who was 23 years old, was charged with the responsibility of running the program and managing a team of about 30 youths. Although he joined MYSA as a
footballer, his interests had changed with time. He noted that, although football was a
good profession, it was wise to complement it with an additional area of expertise.
MYSA Shootback project had published two books titled: *Shootback: Photos by kids from the Mathare slums*; and *The millennium goals: a promise to the youth*. MYSA youths were involved in taking the pictures. They were trained in photography and
provided with cameras and asked to take pictures that resonated with any aspect of their
lives. One youth described his/her responsibility as follows: “shootback sharpshooters are
out to shoot anything that is worth shooting relating to our day to day lives.” Some took
pictures of family and friends; others chose to photograph places that included houses
and businesses. In one of the pictures, for example, a youth shot a man lying on a street.
The caption read:

> In this picture, you can see a person comfortably sleeping on the stones. Maybe he
> was drunk or it’s because he lacked shelter. Nobody is interested in asking him
> what his problems are because everyone has their own problems.

Another picture showed a boy about 12 years old kicking a ball. The caption read
“playing his way out of the slum.” A third picture focused on a group of six boys posing
for the camera. The caption read:

> Showing real excitement—These children were very excited when they saw the
> Shootback group walking along with their cameras and taking photos. It was
> amazing to them. One of them told me, since they had never seen youth taking
> pictures in such a way. Only tourists are the ones who come to the slum and take
> photos.
The second book published by MYSA titled *The millennium goals: a promise to the youth* consisted of similar themes. One for example showed a teenage girl hiding her face from the camera. The caption read:

I am 17 yrs, I dropped from school three years ago in class 8 because I was pregnant and the guy, father of the child abandoned me and my child, but family were very understanding and they didn’t chase me like other families do. Now I am a maid in my neighbours house and my mother takes care of my child. I would like to go back to school and continue with my primary and secondary education. My child is now 1½ years.

Some of the pictures did not have captions. These pictures still focused on current issues that were facing Mathare residents. Examples included a picture that captured the extensive garbage in the area; another featured a cemetery and various pictures captured people involved in the informal sector, for example, selling vegetables and metalwork. While the book did not explain why these pictures were taken, the images invited viewers to engage with the material as they tried to determine what caused the situation or how the issues can be resolved. The book also had various sections with text. One portion that I found interesting was an estimation of the daily expenditure for a person living in Mathare. The list included items such as water, taking a bath or using the community bathroom and rent. While most of Nairobi gets running water in their houses, people in Mathare have to buy these basic necessities from individually owned taps or have to pay tenants for each trip they take to the toilet. These brief descriptions of the pictures and how MYSA uses its activities to sensitize the community lead me to a discussion of various identities that emerge as youth navigate their lived conditions.
Identity

I visited MYSA’s jail kids program at Nairobi’s Juvenile Court during my third week of field work. The jail kids program was a feeding program for children who had been taken to the remand home. Children were taken to remand homes for various reasons: some had wandered from their homes and had lost their way, others were petty criminals, while others had committed violent crimes. These children were brought to the Juvenile Court for hearings that would determine if they would be able to go back to their homes. The jail kids program operated three days a week. A typical day in the jail kids program began at 9:00 in the morning. MYSA volunteers would clean up the area and prepare meals for the children that included breakfast and lunch. As the volunteers fed the children they would engage them in conversations as they tried to determine if the children could remember their parents or family members’ names, and their home locations. In some cases the children were too young to provide this kind of information and in such cases local media assisted by taking photos that were posted in the local media. MYSA volunteers then used the information provided by the children to trace children’s families with a goal of repatriating the children back to their homes. Ordinarily the government was responsible for repatriating children but the processes usually took a long time. MYSA youths worked in collaboration with the government to speed up the process. I was enthusiastic about visiting this program but was quite unprepared for what I witnessed.

On that particular day, there were over twenty children aged between three years to ten years. The majority were five to ten years old. As would be expected in a gathering comprised of children within this age category, the general mood could be described as
somewhat chaotic. Various behavioral displays were evident. Some children cried uncontrollably, others watched quietly, while some went about bullying their peers. The two adults who accompanied the children tried to deal with the situation as best as they could. I watched a young man in his late twenties move towards one of the crying children. He picked up the child and began talking to the little girl. The child was quiet within a few minutes. Other children who had been watching this happen moved towards the young man and he began talking to them as well. As they listened I could tell that some of them seemed to enjoy the conversation. The young man seemed equally pleased with the conversation—the feeling was mutual. I continued to watch the young man as he interacted with the children. When lunch was served, the young man assisted in feeding one of the younger children. After the children were fed and left for the day, the young man assisted in cleaning the area. His day at the program ended at 4:00pm. He then left for team practice.

The young man was a member of the Mathare United team, a team that had become a household name in Kenya because of its top notch players. Although he earned more than his peers at the Mathare Youth Sports Association, he was expected to put in a number of community services hours that was part of his monthly salary package. His assigned job was to volunteer in the jail kids program. In many cases, all he had to do was to show up and provide the children with attention and affection—from my observations, that seemed to make a difference in the children’s day (Field notes).

The above narrative reflects the organizational image that MYSA is associated with by various stakeholders. Many individuals with whom I had conversations made connections between the activities that the youth engage with when articulating their
perceptions of MYSA’s youth. The most common response by all stakeholders was the association of youth with sports and the organization’s achievements both locally and internationally. Parents, teachers, and local government officials also talked about MYSA youth’s contribution to environmental cleanliness via clean-ups. Many stakeholders also highlighted MYSA youths’ HIV/AIDS work awareness. One teacher, for example, mentioned that the awareness work was especially useful for students at his school because many of them had been orphaned by the AIDS disease.

My conversations with MYSA youths revealed that they were aware that the community perceived their work highly. However, their stories also suggested that these positive perceptions emerged amidst competing narratives. While many appreciated the positive image that emerged as a result of their involvement with the organization they also indicated that there were other perceptions that emerged from the society which tended to limit their agency. In this section, I categorize my findings into different kinds of narratives that include: public or master narratives and personal narratives. In each of the narratives, I examine the multiple identities that emerge in MYSA by paying particular attention to the narratives that the young people tell about themselves, their agency, and societal perceptions. I begin by interrogating notion of slums by presenting young people’s views on the area, then move to describing how the young people negotiate the perception, through agency.

Public Narratives

In chapter two, I noted that individuals know, understand and make sense of their social world, and claim their identities through narratives (Somers, 1994). The ontological dimension of narratives suggests that an examination of social agency must
be placed within temporal, relational, cultural as well as the institutional and macro-structures. The ontological view also implies that identity is not static and that our identities are often fragmented or multiple (see Lindemann-Nelson, 2001). In writing on cultural identity, Hall (1996) noted that although identities might:

> Evoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond,

identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (p. 4)

Moreover, although ontological narratives define who we are, they emerge as a result of social and interpersonal relationships and can be understood as a complicated interaction of one’s own sense of self and others’ understanding of who one is. Indeed as Brockmeier and Harre (2001) noted that “our local repertoire of narrative forms is interwoven with a broader cultural set of fundamental discursive order that determine who tells which story, when and where, why and to whom” (p. 42). Social constructionists (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1967) also remind us that identity is constructed through our interaction with others, or co-constructed meanings (Harter et al., 2005). An analysis of public narratives therefore provides an appropriate place to start with in the presentation of various identities that emerge in MYSA.

MYSA’s context is significant mostly because individual identities of people living in this area tend to be conflated with those of people living in the Mathare area as a whole. Public narratives reveal the impoverished nature of the area that is often associated with violent crimes, and social issues highlighted in chapter one have an
impact on the societal views of the identities of the people living in the area.

Consequently, narratives provided by MYSA’s youth are useful because stories are contextualized accounts, they can convey the particularity of situations (Garro & Mattingly, 2000). My conversations with young people on various stereotypes that are imposed on people living in the slums elicited a variety of responses. Consider the following conversation:

Priscilla: Sometimes when people think of slums they perceive the area negatively. You have lived in the slums all your life and you have various experiences, my first question is, do you think that people refer to the area as a slum or just Mathare?

Anyira: It’s a slum because of the housing structures. The houses aren’t really good, that’s what makes it a slum. I would consider it a slum.

Priscilla: What would you say about the negativity that is associated with slums?

Anyira: People talk negatively about the slum. For example when you go for a job interview and people hear that you are from Mathare, this works against you. But I think this is a flawed notion because there are some really good people with good behavior down here. I don’t know why people think that, maybe it’s because they hear about crimes happening in the area. I would say that within Mathare there are good people.

Priscilla: Have you experienced such reactions during job interviews?

Anyira: It’s not an example. This is something I have seen many times. People will invite you for an interview, but as soon as you reveal where you are from, people look at you and they think that you’re really dangerous, and they can’t
have you working for their organization. There have been such incidences. People think that you’re a bad person.

Anyira pointed out to the generalizations about Mathare as he specifically talked about crime in the area. He also noted that societal stereotypes pose limitations for individuals as they exclude them from advancing professionally. Furthermore, such public narratives can also be seen to be limiting the young people’s social mobility. In this case broader social inequalities are reflected and reproduced by the language used (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). By being labeled as dangerous, Mathare youth are seen as different from the “others” in the society—the good people. Hall (1997) posited that identities can be seen as forms of representation that are created through difference. A person’s or group identity is described in comparison with another group. The ‘other’ is not only ‘different’, but also less desirable, less acceptable, less powerful (Hall, 1997). In similar fashion, Bakhtin also noted that “in order to be perceived as a whole, as something finished, a person or object must be shaped in the time/spaces categories of the other, and that is possible only when the person or object is perceived from the position of outsideness” (Holquist, 1990, p. 30). Anyira challenged negative notions of the term slums by arguing that the term slum is not problematic because it signified the housing structures.

Fadhili shared his perspectives on the perception of Mathare by referring to language and symbolic connotations. He noted that negative stereotypes are associated not only with crimes, but also with mentally challenged people, as the largest psychiatric hospital in the country is situated in the Mathare area. As I listened to Fadhili, I remembered that as a child growing up in Nairobi, it was not unusual to hear people
suggesting to their friends when they acted in questionable or unusual ways that they would take them to Mathare. I was too young then to know where Mathare was located, but I was under the impression that many mentally challenged people lived there. The common usage of language by people in the society to make connections between Mathare and the hospital created a perception that the majority of people living in Mathare were mentally challenged. Fadhili articulated this aspect and other societal views in the following manner:

Fadhili: I think that before Mathare United came up, Mathare was presumed to be a place for mad people because of the mental hospital. Since MYSA and Mathare United started, when you talk of Mathare, the first thing that comes to people’s mind is Mathare United. Mathare is no longer a name that you mention without wanting to associate your name with the area. I know of one guy who used to live in Mathare. Whenever he was using public transportation he would alight before getting to Mathare. He would then walk an extra mile so that his colleagues and friends would not know that he was from Mathare. This is understandable because some people develop opinions and judge you based on that. Sometimes I think that it is not unwise to hide because some people’s perceptions or view of who you are will change completely. Nowadays, I am not afraid of introducing myself as Fadhili and tell my classmates that I work for Mathare youth. Everybody knows Mathare. I have no reason to be ashamed of working for Mathare youth. I can assure you that if it was 10 years ago, before MYSA became a household name it would not have been easy. MYSA has become like a brand name.
Fadhili’s reflects on how societal perceptions can affect individuals’ behavior. Many scholars indicate that identity can be enacted or performed (e.g., Goffman, 1959). Fadhili’s friend in the above case can be seen as using performance to save face, or “passing” as someone else. According to Fadhili, his friend understood that if other people perceived him as living in the Mathare area, he was likely to loose face, to avoid this, he created the impression that he lived in a different area. This could also be seen as a form of resistance to dominant discourse because as Goffman (1959) argued, individuals who hold subordinate positions or roles utilize the space provided by the backstage to question social roles and the rights and duties that are attached to a given status. The young person’s example uses the “front stage,” that is creating the impression that he lives in a well regarded neighborhood to gain acceptance. This behavior is also consistent with the use of public transcripts because he seems to be maintaining the status quo as he enacts reified meanings (Scott, 1990). The walk to Mathare on the other hand can be seen as a hidden transcript or the use of backstage. Fadhili also introduces the fact that MYSA has created a new image when he states that the organization is seen as a brandname, indicating that the popularity that MYSA has gained over the years. In his reflection, he discloses, that while he might not have identified with Mathare in the past decade, he is now proud of the fact that he is a part of MYSA which for many symbolizes Mathare as a whole.

*Turning points.* Stories from young people revealed critical turning points. As Lindemann-Nelson (2001) pointed out, stories contain turning points or episodes in which the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist’s story to a belief, a conviction or thought. Many youth acknowledged that public narratives that
associated crime with the slums were a reality that they sometimes embodied in their personal lives. However, as the youths described their past, they seemed to be drawing a line between their past identity and their current identity. Kadenge, for instance, indicated that he had played for MYSA as a teenager but left the organization and had come back after 10 years. I asked him why he had decided to come back to the organization. He said the following:

Kadenge: I looked at the situation out there …after completing school I was able to get temporary jobs but sometimes I would be jobless. I started engaging in some activities in my neighborhood because things became difficult. Sometimes I had to take people’s things (steal) I would get arrested. Life played me, so I decided that I didn’t want to live such a life, so I decided to come back here (MYSA) with the hope that I might be successful in the organization. I now assist this program as a volunteer.

Kadenge’s story highlights one of narrative functions because he reveals that the act of narrating is not a simple description of an occurrence but can be seen interpretive acts that reveal how we understand our lives (Kerby, 1997). Kadenge now works in the jail kids program. Similarly, Daniel who also volunteers in the jail kids program stated the following:

Daniel: I joined MYSA last year but one. I decided that staying at home wasn’t good so I decided to come and help children. Since I joined MYSA I feel that I have changed because before I joined the organization, I was involved in activities that were not good. I have been able to assist kids, I interview them and sometimes they open up and tell me what they did at home. I also share my
experiences because I passed through the same system and I tell them how I grew up and stopped engaging in negative behavior. If the children listen to me, then I assist them in changing their behavior, and when they are released by the courts we are able to take them back home.

Priscilla: What information do you share with the children?

Daniel: Behavior issues.

Priscilla: Can you give me some examples of some of those issues?

Daniel: Mostly bad behaviors, for example I tell them that that stealing from other people is not good.

The enacted identity revealed by Kadenge and Daniel can be seen as narrative identity (see Somers, 1994). Frank (2005) describes narrative identity as “a pedagogy in narrative that circumscribes identity. This pedagogy is both dense—the stories refer to multiple aspects of our lives and reach us constantly through multiple media—yet also loosely connected. The sources of these stories are not linked in any demonstrable ways. The pedagogy from elsewhere is not an ideology, its sources are too diverse in their interests—yet it shapes our ideas about how our stories can be told and lived” (p. xiii).

Both Kadenge and Daniel indicated in their stories that although they had lived lives that were consistent with the broader narratives, they had tried to resist these narratives by adopting a life that contributed to the growth of young children who were faced with the same challenges. Some MYSA youth made attempts to provide explanations for youth identity that reflected the stereotypes. Mdosi, for example, noted that the living conditions in Mathare can be used to explain why men get into crime. Consider my conversation with him:
Priscilla: What challenges do young men face in Mathare?

Mdosi: Men are faced with various challenges. The first one is that men in the ghetto indulge themselves in crime. So that’s the biggest challenge for men.

Priscilla: What kinds of crime?

Mdosi: Like stealing, other crimes are also quite popular. These are fueled by… you know in ghettos people live in single rooms with both parents. As a young person you feel that you know what goes on inside the curtain so you feel that you need to move away to get some space. The problem is that you do not have any finances to get you started so you begin to involve yourself in criminal activities.

Zawadi also suggested that many people did not have control over the circumstances. She said the following:

I wouldn’t say that slums are bad places people live there because of poverty. You know, people don’t have control over their situation, it just happens. So in my personal opinion slums are not bad places. It depends on how you look at it. I feel that the slums are good, I have been brought up the slum way, I haven’t had a high life.

Mdosi also revealed similar perspectives. Mdosi seemed to agree that living in the slums was not a matter of choice but he also provided an opinion that revealed a way of coping with the harsh living conditions. He commented that:

In my opinion I would say that it’s [living in the slums] an opportunity. Being born in the ghetto prepares you for what life has to offer because life is not smooth, life has hardships, ups and downs. So when you’re born in the ghetto, you are in a position where you know that things are not easy so you must walk
the extra mile to achieve whatever you want. This prepares you not to wait for things to get easy so that you can take action. Things are hard and you have to put in extra energy in everything you undertake, so I feel that it’s an opportunity.

The ability of youth to find ways of surviving is closely associated with street smarts (Harter et al, 2005). Although street smarts are not recognized as an authentic form of knowledge, marginalized individuals adopt skills that assist them in navigating social and economic constraints. Such skills include adaptability and a heightened level of awareness of their contexts.

Daniel seemed to agree with both Zawadi and Mdosi that living was beyond youth control; however, he suggested that young people had a choice on how to live their lives.

Priscilla: Mathare is associated with many negative things for example prostitution, drunkenness, and other things. What are your thoughts about such perceptions?

Daniel: There are many negative things that take place in Mathare. MYSA helps because if the organization didn’t exist a lot of girls would be bad or would use drugs. That’s why the over 18 teams were established. They play every Sunday. As a result, instead of people going to drink, they come to MYSA and some of those who used to be drunkards have stopped drinking. It’s not unusual to see people getting hopelessly drunk when they are still young, when they haven’t even married. Nowadays they (youth) play at MYSA every Sunday. But it’s not everyone who is bad, it just depends on how they take care of themselves.
The choice to join MYSA in many cases reflected the fact that the young people felt that they developed a more positive identity in the society. Anyira for instance reflected on the kind of person he might have become if he had not joined MYSA.

Priscilla: What do your parents think about your involvement in MYSA?

Anyira: They think that it’s good. Since I joined MYSA my life has changed. I don’t think that it would be the same if I was just down there (Mathare Valley). Many of my friends have been murdered because of stealing. There are many bad things that happen down there like drunkenness, drugs which has resulted in my friends’ deaths. So MYSA has really helped me and I’m happy to be in this organization. It helped me change my behavior.

Priscilla: How has the organization led to your behavior change?

Anyira: There are different ways, for instance when you’re in the field the coach tells you’re supposed to conduct yourself in a certain way, they tell us many things about life. I would say that they have contributed a lot to my life.

In the next section, I provide further illustrations of how youth identities were affected through their involvement in MYSA.

Personal Narratives

*Countering community stereotypes by giving back.* Throughout my research I was astonished by volunteers’ resilience in facing challenges they encountered on a daily basis. In spite of growing up in Nairobi, the sanitary conditions in Mathare were appalling. The pungent smells that emanated from open sewers and piles of rotting garbage were disturbing. One of the research participants had described the area as a “disaster.” The living conditions were unlike any that I had experienced before. I was
able to visit MYSA youths’ homes, constructed of mud, wood and tin, which in many cases consisted of single rooms partitioned by a curtain that separated the kitchen (also served as the seating area for the family), and a bedroom. I had also been to number of schools in the area that had classrooms that were often congested, and lacked a number of resources that could facilitate effective learning. Despite the above limitations, the community service events that I attended (mostly organized by the jail kids, arts and culture and environment programs) were always well attended.

I was interested in finding out why the young people felt the need to give back to a society that had failed them (my opinion) by not improving the living conditions. Interestingly, the responses that I received consisted of stories that made linkages between agency and action, as the youth narrated that their work in community service revealed better future possibilities. Additionally, the stories can also be seen as accounting for actions that worked towards establishing a more meaningful world for the narrators (Fisher, 1987). Generally, many youth felt that they were giving back not only to the organization, but also to their families, and to the community as a whole. In other cases, the youth indicated that the government was quite dormant in the area. Lastly, a number of youth also expressed concern about the future generations which led them to believe that change had to begin with them. I begin by providing a narrative that is representative of many of the views that were expressed by the youth.

When people hear stories about the things we have done, they think that we have achieved a lot but in some ways I’m still indebted. My life has really changed because of the investment that MYSA made in me. I feel that I haven’t paid back.
When children reach my age and do the things that I have done and they start to see results then I will say that my time in MYSA is coming to an end.

The above statement is representative of the many of the views that were expressed by the youth. Many youth felt obligated to actively engage in the community. Amani who made the above remarks had joined the organization when he was nine years old. He indicated that MYSA contributed to his completion of high school education. He had dropped out of school for sometime, but MYSA’s director at the time convinced him to go back and also talked school officials into taking him back. Amani who was 28 years had continued to serve the organization as a volunteer and as a full time staff member. He felt hat MYSA had given him so much and he had to pay back through his work with children. Amani spent most of his time both weekdays and weekends with children in the arts and culture group. He would often refer to the children as “my children” or “our children,” that is, the organization’s children.

Similar thoughts were shared by other youths as they spoke about their involvement in community service and their thoughts about the community as a whole. Consider these two conversations:

Priscilla: Let’s talk about your community service work, when working in the field, how would you describe your feelings?

Anyira: I feel really good because the City Council is not doing its work here. In the slums, community service really benefits the community because we do not have a central place for garbage collection, people dispose trash anywhere. So it’s usually good when we go down (Mathare Valley) and make attempts to keep the environment clean. I think that (clean-ups) have more impact than sports because
through sports you help yourself but through community service we assist the whole community.

Priscilla: So you feel like you’re doing something about the situation?

Anyira: Yes it’s like giving back to the community.

Priscilla: Has the community made any contributions to your life?

Anyira: Although the community hasn’t given you much, you try your best to ensure that people live well.

Toni provided an interesting perspective of why he felt indebted to the community:

Priscilla: MYSA requires you to put in some community service hours. Tell me when you’re doing community service how do you feel?

Toni: When I do community service I feel like I’m doing the right thing. The community brings has brought us up, so it’s up to us to give back to the community what it gave us. So for me community service is gesture of appreciation.

Priscilla: Some people would argue that the community hasn’t given you much. What has the community done for you?

Toni: The community that I live in appreciates the things I do. If community members met me somewhere in need, or stranded they would help me. If I fell somewhere, someone in the community would carry me. Such small things count, someone doesn’t have to buy you a piece of land for you to say that they’ve helped you. It is those small things that make you think that you need to do something for the community.
Many participants felt that engaging in community service set a good precedent for community members, consider the following conversation:

Priscilla: You also mentioned previously that you do community service, how would you describe that experience?

Diana: I feel really happy because I do not do it because it benefits me. I do it because it benefits the community at large. When I show people that I am interested in community service they are also likely to show interest. When you sweep a particular area, people see the difference, especially when garbage has been removed from their path way. When we make our environment clean, this creates a good image for the organization because people recognize that MYSA youth have been involved in that particular activity. Through clean-ups, we become recognized not only for sports, but for other things as well.

Social activism. Many youth felt that it was up to them to change the situation in Mathare. They were concerned about the health consequences of the living conditions especially to the younger generations. Pendo for example made the following observations when I asked her about her perceptions of community service:

Pendo: I feel proud when I am doing clean-up because it is my home area. I know that blocked sewage could easily find its way into people’s houses if the situation is not handled in a timely manner. After the clean ups, I feel that I have left a place better than I found it. Children get cleaner areas to play in because sometimes children look for metal in dirty water or in streams. They get into the water without shoes in dirty water. That is not good.

Priscilla: Why do they look for metal?
Pendo: They look for metal and nails which they sell in Kilograms. One kilo is 10 shillings. Others get cuts which lead to tetanus. Some have sores that never heal and they tell you that they got cut when they were looking for *machunde* (metal).

Priscilla: Is this a common practice?

Pendo: Yes especially among children. We try to solve such issues though clean-ups.

Pendo’s feelings were also echoed by Mdosi who said the following:

I work in my own community so I feel that I’m helping to change the situation in my community. It’s a good chance and a good opportunity to do community service because there are people who lead privileged lives, and who don’t know that such circumstances exist. I know that if I do not remove the water in my area, the water will become stagnant creating room for mosquitoes to breed and as a result Malaria could emerge.

Bahati also felt that by engaging in community service, MYSA youth set a good example for the community.

I think that when people see you doing community service they can easily take up that responsibility and begin to clean up themselves. In that way we are able to involve people, not necessarily to join MYSA but to do something about their environment. When we are doing community service, children gang up, and other people in the area who are not MYSA members help us in cleaning the area. I feel good because when you live in a clean environment, people might be able to maintain such behavior and become clean. On the other hand, if you are in a dirty environment, you can not perceive yourself as being clean because you need to be
in a clean place so that you can keep yourself clean. Cleanliness is next to godliness.

Patrick, one of MYSA’s staff noted that some people engaged in community service because of the scholarship incentives or to earn points for their teams. He mentioned that when working with the younger children, making connections between community service and the incentives was one of the ways that worked because at their age such an explanation made sense. He also noted that he felt that community service was a good work ethic because as the children matured they were likely to continue with this behavior which was an asset for the community.

Image 7: MYSA youth engage in a clean up exercise

The above narratives point out to youths perceptions on how community service has changed the community’s situation, and a sense of self connected to the social. In some cases, some youth mentioned that they were involved in projects that had meanings for them at a personal level. For example, the youth engaged in work that directly
countered various stereotypes. Youths provided illuminating stories of how HIV/AIDS had affected their families as well as how their work had enabled them to deal with the disease. Others mentioned that did not know any family members or friends who had HIV/AIDS. However, they indicated that through MYSA they often visited children’s homes where they had been able to witness some of the realities posed by the AIDS disease.

A number of youth had encountered people with AIDS. Bahati for example had various interactions. She noted in our conversation that her knowledge of the disease helped her in her interactions:

Priscilla: You do a significant amount of work that has to do with HIV/AIDS in the drama team. Do you know people who are living with the disease?

Bahati: Yes, there is a girl who we work with, she is younger so she is not in our group, but she is HIV positive and I like her a lot.

Priscilla: Is she under 18?

Bahati: Yes she is 17 and I show her a lot of love because having AIDS does not mean that you should stay away from them. I know several people and I communicate with them.

Priscilla: Friends or family?

Bahati: Family, I have an aunt who passed away after a long time. My friend’s mum also passed away last year but at that time I hadn’t joined MYSA so I didn’t have the courage to approach anyone or say things about AIDS. Now I have started sitting down with people, AIDS patients and sharing all the information I know about HIV and AIDS, to show them love and all that.
Bahati’s response is significant because people with HIV/AIDS are still stigmatized in the Kenya (as elsewhere). Her response reveals that her interactions are driven by the desire to share information and to respond in ways that are empowering for the affected people. Hekima, a male member indicated that while he had worked for the AIDS project since he was in high school he never thought that the disease would affect his family.

Consider my conversation with him:

Priscilla: You have told me about the workshops that you attended on HIV/AIDS and your peer counseling skills. Have you been able to share this information with people who have HIV/AIDS, like friends or family?

Hekima: I have been with people who have HIV/AIDS, I talk to them. As a volunteer in the program I would go to children’s homes to assist in different ways. Through my interactions with children, I was able to get a sense of the kind of things they went through. Later on I was mad because I had been dealing with people who were HIV positive but I didn’t know that this is something that could affect my family. One day I was shocked when my neighbor called me when I was out of town on a work related trip. He told me that he was calling to inquire if I had seen my mum. I responded by saying that I had talked to her one phone a few minutes before his call but I had not seen her because I was out of town. My mum had been ill for sometime. He shocked me when he asked me if she (mother) had started using ARV’s (Anti Retroviral Drugs). I was shocked, I had talked to my mother a few minutes before and she had told me that she was fine. It’s hard to imagine that your mum is HIV positive or something like that….You know when my dad died they said that he died of Amoeba, tuberculosis etc. Something
like that (HIV/AIDS) could not just come to my mind. My mother told me that there was something she had always wanted to tell me but that it had taken her sometime. She said “your dad infected me with the virus.” I was not that shocked because the kind of picture I wanted to put in my mind was that it (HIV/AIDS) was just like any other disease, there was no problem, life had to continue so I was there with her and we talked for a while. But I was really mad, very mad.

Priscilla: Why were you mad?

Hekima: Mad with my mum because she could have told me earlier. But you know sometimes, even though the signs were there, I think I knew it but I did not want to believe it.

Hekima told me that as soon as he left his mother he went and talked to two friends in MYSA who really sympathized with him and provided the support he needed to cope with the news. His mother died after some time.

My last illustration of how community service intersected with personal life is based on Kadiri a former street boy who had been rehabilitated from the streets through the jail kids program. He was a volunteer at the jail kids program. I asked him to tell me the story of how he became a street boy and how he became involved with MYSA.

I was living in the streets and MYSA came visiting in 1997 and they (MYSA) began assisting me in the rehabilitation process. We were the first people to go to the Kabete remand home, MYSA came and prepared a Christmas party for us, they also organized a football match but because they (MYSA volunteers) were quite busy on that day we were not able to talk to them.
Kadiri explained that although he did not get the opportunity to talk to the volunteers, he met one of the Mathare United players later in the streets of Nairobi. He went on to provide a background of how he had ended up in the streets:

Kadiri: I ran away from home sometime back and I met with one of the guys from MYSA called Kizito from Mathare United who told me that he had seen me at the Kabete remand home. I was sniffing glue then. He told me to stop getting high on glue and even if I couldn’t stop completely, I needed to reduce the intake. I kept coming to MYSA jail kid outreaches and I met another guy from MYSA whose name is Alphi. Alphi brought me some clothes and invited me to the food program that was started in 1997. I started assisting in this program. I would clean the dishes and clean up the area after the children finished eating. MYSA does not discriminate, people are mixed and everyone who comes for the food program is provided with food. I worked hard and because of my efforts I was given the volunteer position.

I’m usually happy because I have changed through MYSA. I’m not arrested as regularly as I used to and I see that God has helped me with that. I’m happy because I know that the organization can help me. I thank God and ask him to bless them because they really give of themselves. So I would say that the people really work hard. Speaking for myself they (MYSA) brought me from far. I used to sniff glue and if it wasn’t for MYSA I would not have been able to do this. I feel that now I’m in a position to help many who are still in the streets so that they can turn around as I did.

Priscilla: Why did you run away from home?
Kadiri: I didn’t know better, it’s just life, I can’t pin point a reason because no one had wronged me.

As revealed by the stories in this theme, MYSA influences and is influenced by MYSA youth. Through collective resistance the youth have been able to change the stereotypes. This theme also reveals contradictions that the youth face as they struggle with the burden of carrying societal stereotypes on the area. This theme moves from the essentialist conceptualization of the youth as it presents their experiences as multiple and fragmented. The themes also reveals performed identity, the fact that some youths play the role scripted by the society, and also one that is often influenced by their lived circumstances. Such stories reveal turning points, where young people change their lifestyles and begin to engage in social activism. Youths use their past that is sometimes characterized by crime to influence the lifestyles of the younger youths who face similar situations. In this way they use their narratives to teach. In the next section I examine further transformation that take place on the gender realm in MYSA.

Gender

*During my first week at MYSA I attended a meeting that was organized by the sports program committee. I sat next to Patrick, a committee member who was a chairman in one of the zones that were part of MYSA. I introduced myself to Patrick and continued to talk with him as we waited for the meeting to begin. I was curious about the absence of women in the meeting that had about 15 young men, and I expressed my concern to Patrick. He told me the women would show up as the meeting progressed. About 15 minutes into the meeting, the first woman walked in. Patrick looked at me as if to confirm his prediction that women would show up. He asked me to observe the women*
closely; he predicted that they would not participate in the meeting. Patrick was right again—the three women who attended this meeting left without saying a word. I resumed my conversation with Patrick after the meeting. He told me that in general women were not actively involved in MYSA, but when opportunities such as attending workshops or employment positions arose men were expected to share those activities with women.

After that initial meeting I was able to attend a number of meetings held by other committees, and I realized that, on a number of occasions, women talked, and they voiced their concerns. In fact, in one of the meetings, two women were “too vocal.” According to the male facilitator, he had to maintain “order” by expelling them from the meeting. However, the numbers of women, when compared to those of men were quite limited, which could explain why men seemed do be doing all the work and the talking. (Field notes)

In this next section, I explore how women participated in MYSA, how society perceived them, and how they viewed themselves. I also look at some of the challenges women encounter as they engage in sports.

I indicated in chapter two that one of the ways in which African women are rendered invisible is when scholars search for their voices in the wrong places. Micere Mugo, for example, noted that such voices exist and can be found in market places or in farms. MYSA presents an additional space in which women’s voices can be heard as they engage in sports. The organization has grown, both in strength and in numbers, and has emerged as one of the best structured establishments for women’s football. According to MYSA (2007), the girls’ team consists of 3,500 women playing on 250 teams (most of the participants used “girls” to refer to women participants; I use these terms
interchangeably). Moreover, MYSA has a senior team that provides players to the national team for international tournaments organized by the Kenya Football Federation (KFF).

The women’s team has been successful on and off the field. This success was evident during my visit to MYSA. In July, the MYSA girls under 14 team represented the organization at the Norway Cup tournament that is one of the largest youth international tournaments. The tournament consisted of 30,000 players from 45 countries. MYSA’s girls made it to the quarter finals. In previous years, MYSA girls’ teams had won two gold medals, a silver medal, and two bronze medals. The second tournament that the women’s team participated in as I collected my data was the Street Football World tournament in Germany. The tournament was organized by the Street Football World organization. The event consisted of 80 organizations from different parts of the world that use sports for social change. MYSA emerged as the world champion in this tournament. Lastly, MYSA girls took first place in a regional tournament known as the East African Cup. These matches are highly regarded in the country as a whole and within the Mathare area, and were covered by the local media.
MYSA’s women were also active off the fields. All were involved in community service in different capacities. A number were members of the shootback project, many were peer educators, a few were in the jailkids program, and others were part of the arts and culture program. As a result of their participation in these programs, many aspired to work in similar areas in the future, for instance as peer counselors, journalists, or professional art instructors. Moreover, a majority of girls participated actively in the Girls’ Forum—a group that was established with the sole purpose of increasing the number of girls involved in MYSA and addressing girls’ issues at the grassroots level.

Collectively, the women’s stories revealed a connection between their involvement in sports, their backgrounds, and the role of the organization in shaping their perspectives. Their stories also touched upon some of the challenges that they faced on and off the field. More specifically, the women’s stories pointed out how society views
women’s involvement in sports and how women in MYSA negotiated such perspectives. In some cases, the women seemed to accept the stories crafted for them while, in other cases, these societal views were contested. I categorize my sub-themes as “moving beyond private spaces”; and “engaging societal discourse and conclude with ‘overcoming the ceilings’.” I provide an analysis of these themes by examining MYSA women’s narratives as well as the narratives of other stakeholders, including counterparts, parents’ stories, and staff members’ perspectives.

Moving Beyond Private Spaces

Football in Africa, as in many other places, has been a male domain. This is consistent with writings that indicate that men are more visible in public domains than are women (e.g., Aubrey 1997, 2001, Mikell, 1994; Nzomo, 1994 1997, 1998). De Waal (2002) pointed out that, even the term “youth” is gendered as he noted that, when examined from a political perspective, “the term ‘youth’ is not gender neutral. The category refers primarily to males, because females are less socially (publicly) and politically visible” (p. 17). Many communication scholars have problematized the binaries that occur when public versus private spaces are used (e.g., Deetz, 1992; Hochschild, 2003; Mumby, 2000). Mumby (2000), for example, argued that what “counts as “public” or “private” is the product of discursive practices that shape our understandings of who we are both as citizens and as individuals” (p. 6). He noted that a critical feminist approach is significant because it has the ability to unpack the discursive articulation of public and private relationships, and to demonstrate the ways in which different conceptualizations of these relationships serve different interests.
This research uses public spaces to refer to “a set of physical or mediated spaces where people can gather and share information, debate opinions, and tease out their political interests and social needs with other participants” (Squires, 2002, p. 448). In contrast, the private space refers to the domestic sphere and unpaid work that is performed by women normally in the home. Gender scholars highlight that African women in general participate in the public sector although men still outdistance women in such jobs (Ampofu, et al., 2004). The public sector includes those who have been elected by citizens or have been appointed by the government to serve in areas such as the civil service and other state institutions (Aubrey, 2001). Ampofu and colleagues indicated that women working in the private sector are concentrated in low salaried fields such as sales, services and clerical work, while those working at higher levels are clustered in primary and secondary school teaching and nursing. They further noted that some women have ventured into medicine, law, business and academia, but overall, their participation in these areas is low. In Kenya, Nzomo (1994; 1997) pointed out that, while a number of women have engaged in politics in recent years, the numbers of women in the public sector and legal arenas is still low. Nzomo (1997) directed attention to the socio-cultural systems of beliefs and myths which inform the socialization process and gendered education training that most men and women are exposed to from childhood. She noted that sex-stereotypes and gender segregation in employment and allocation of roles in private and public life are primarily a product of the early socialization process as well as the indoctrination of the social environment. Moreover, as Nzomo (1994, 1997) argued, women also lack access to opportunities and resources that might enhance their ability to compete with men on an equal footing.
As MYSA stories reveal, women are gradually overcoming the public/private boundaries, albeit in small progressions. I begin this section by describing how women became involved in sports and some of the challenges they have faced as they have moved into the public space. I note that, in MYSA’s case, participation in sports can be seen as a symbol, or signifier, of the public.

Women in MYSA indicated that they had joined the organization in different ways: through siblings, mostly brothers who were football players; invitations by girlfriends; curiosity; and through recruitment by coaches who visited their schools. One commonality that emerged was their expression of difficulties they experienced when they initially became involved in sports. The reasons provided by the women could be summarized as: lack of parental consent; engaging societal discourse; Attitudes about women’s abilities in football; and material and national constraints.

In some cases, such barriers were voiced independently while, in other cases, multiple limitations emerged in individual accounts. My focus on women who were over 18 years of age served as an advantage because participants were able to draw from their long history in the organization and intertwine such stories with their current positions. The women used the space provided by storytelling to make sense of some of their circumstances. One of the women, for example, began by saying that things had changed. She described the current situation as follows: “Our parents had difficulty accepting MYSA. Nowadays, it is not hard to sell MYSA because there are existing role models. People have seen that MYSA can work; you do not really need to convince people.”
Parental consent. Parental consent can be looked at from various perspectives. The first is that historically girls have been expected to stay home so as to provide help with housework. Other reasons have included the fact that parents have been concerned about their children’s safety, that their daughters would join the wrong crowd, or that their daughters would become pregnant. Lucy, who is an assistant coach described her situation in the following manner:

I would say that the problems that we experienced originally caused a decrease in the numbers. The first problem was parental consent. Some parents still think that if girls play football they will be misled by their friends. This may not be entirely true because there are other reasons that could account for their daughter’s negative behavior. The girl might have joined a bad group—peer pressure might have caused her to drop out of football.

Lucy explained that many girls missed practice because they had to stay at home, especially if they had younger siblings, so that they could assist in taking care of them. When I asked her if men faced similar problems she responded by stating that “Men do not have such problems because, from the onset parents do not bother with male children. When men leave the house to play, that’s not a problem, but you know, for girls, they have to stay at home assist with the work.” In some cases women explained that they had to assist in their families for survival. Many participants were from single mother headed households. Some participants knew who their fathers were, while others had never seen or known their fathers. However, they explained that their mothers were the sole providers in most cases and that, to make ends meet, they had to assist them. This support would often take the form of helping with chores in the house or in various businesses in
which their parents were involved. Asha, who was a former player and is now a parent of one of MYSA’s youth, narrated her story in the following manner:

I joined the organization in 92; I did not stay for long because the organization was not well off. The fields were far and we had to walk; we would come home late. My mother was not happy with this so I decided to stop playing. My father had left home which used to stress her. My mother sold tomatoes and we lived on that income. On Saturdays, instead of going for football, we would go out looking for papers in the streets. We would clean them (papers) and put tomatoes in them. Sometimes I would avoid this job by playing football; my siblings would have to do this work. My mother really complained about this because instead of helping her I would opt for football. Sometimes we would come home from school only to find that there was no food. As a child I could not understand this because all I wanted was food. These things made me stop playing.

Asha’s story reveals that, in some cases, women had to choose between playing football and contributing to the family. When looked at this way, many chose to stop playing because football could be perceived as a luxury when compared to family survival such as putting food on the table.

One of the ways that MYSA dealt with the problem of girls having to stay home so that they could look after their siblings was through the establishment of the gender partnership project that was donor funded. I asked Naomi, a MYSA member who was involved in the project, what the gender partnership entailed. She responded in the following manner: “The project included pitching tents in the field so that girls could come with children. For example, if parents went to work, the girls could come with their
brothers or sisters. We would provide snacks for siblings which enabled girls to play.”
This partnership ran for a period of one year then ended due to lack of funds.

Many girls indicated that parental consent was an issue. Some girls attributed their difficulty in engaging in sports to a combination of reasons. Factors such as religion, culture and perceptions about football as a whole emerged as barriers. Levina articulated her initial experience in participating in sports by stating that:

It was really difficult because my parents did not believe that a girl should go out and play soccer with her brothers. Honestly, the community also did not accept that fact that girls could play. My church was opposed to girls wearing shorts. It was really hard. I used to sneak out with my brothers. When I came back I would get punished but they were not punished—boys were expected to go out and play soccer. I was not supposed to, but I persevered. My father accepted my involvement with MYSA only after I got my first scholarship. That was in 1998. He realized that there were some positive things about MYSA. So at first it was difficult.

Levina later indicated that church members had changed their attitudes towards her with time, as MYSA gained recognition. It was also interesting that her father accepted her participation in MYSA only after she received her scholarship.

The research findings indicated parental concern about their daughter(s) involvement in sports was not farfetched. Many of the girls interviewed affirmed that rape, teenage pregnancies, and abortions were issues of concern. Consider my conversation with Nekesa, when I asked her to tell me about some of the challenges that women face in the area.
Nekesa: Things like rape, teenage pregnancies, many women take drugs and things like that.

Priscilla: Is rape a common thing?

Nekesa: No it has reduced but there were days when the cases were high.

Priscilla: In the night?

Nekesa: Yes at night.

Priscilla: How do you protect yourself?

Nekesa: You just have to go home early and avoid dangerous areas.

Similar concerns were echoed by Pendo who was a volunteer. She said the following:

I joined MYSA when I was very young, I was born in Mathare and I would see the problems that faced us. In recent years things have changed. When I joined MYSA there was no space to play because the houses are built close together, they are also congested. We used to be so idle, some people would drop out of school, there were early pregnancies, many abortions, and rapes would be reported everyday. There were also violent crimes, we would see all of this—all the things associated with slums. They were all here.

The playing space had not changed because of the congestion in the slum and the lack of proper housing policies in the area, but MYSA presented opportunities for involvement, therefore reducing idleness. Pendo provided a detailed description of her encounter with abortion by describing witnessing aborted fetuses on a daily basis, and her helplessness when friends come to her seeking counsel:

One of the things that I have seen change are the rates of abortion. Our house is positioned such that the door faces the garbage dumping site. In the morning I
could differentiate between a paper bag that had trash, and one that had babies because it is something that I was used to seeing since I was a child—these were rampant cases. Some of the babies were not dead. This would really affect me. Some of my friends would go through abortions with my knowledge. They would share their dilemmas with me. Their boyfriends did not want to take up responsibility for the pregnancy, and they did not know what to do. They would talk about various options, like carrying out an abortion, running away from home or suicide. When they began talking like this I would be heartbroken because I was also young. I could not help them in any way. I couldn’t tell them to come to our home because we were many. So they would go out and get advice from their peers who would tell them to get an abortion. They would ask them to get 500 shillings and they would take them to someone who would carry out the procedure. In Mathare there are many places where you can go for “backdoor” abortions.

In many African contexts abortion is perceived negatively. Tradition and culture attach great weight to having a baby, and there are no accepted ways of dealing with unwanted pregnancies (Chambua, et al., 1994). Consequently, abortion is illegal in most African countries with the exception of Zambia, Burundi and South Africa that legally permit induced abortions for reasons other than complications that threaten a woman’s life (Silberschmidt & Rasch, 2001). However, as Silberschmidt and Rasch note, while there are limited ways of dealing with unwanted pregnancies, adolescent girls’ early sexual activity, early pregnancy, induced abortions, and the increase in HIV infections are major concerns in Sub-Saharan Africa. They point out that early sexual activity is
generally attributed to fundamental social economic change, the erosion of moral codes, familial control, and abandoned rituals such as initiation ceremonies which serve to prepare adolescents into their roles and responsibilities as adults. Moreover, in countries such as Kenya, the legal system does not support single mothers. Many women legislators have advocated for the reinstatement of the Affiliation Act that would provide an avenue for single women to sue a child’s father for child support. The Affiliation Act was passed in 1959, but was repealed in 1969 by a male dominated parliament. Many male politicians and members of the public complained that it was a foreign idea that would encourage women’s promiscuity and prostitution (Thomas, 2000). African scholars have argued that, in some cases, researchers have promoted a bad girl image of the pregnant teen by neglecting the boys or men who make them pregnant (Ampofu, et al., 2004). Interestingly, while it could be argued that national policies have failed in addressing the issues of unwanted pregnancies and abortions, MYSA has taken certain steps to ensure that men are accountable for their actions. This was suggested by Lucy in the following conversation:

Priscilla: Are there problems faced by women that could affect their ability to lead?

Lucy: Some of us joined (MYSA) when we were young. We have grown in the organization. Some girls become beautiful as they grow, and because we are mixed, when men see these changes, they go for the girls. Sometimes girls get pregnant and they run away from MYSA. They end up dropping out.

Priscilla: Are the men responsible for the pregnancies usually from MYSA?

Lucy: Some of them are; others are not.
Priscilla: Are there any repercussions for the men in MYSA when they get girls pregnant?

Lucy: It reached a point where if you were dating a MYSA girl you had to sign a contract, acknowledging that you would be responsible for her if anything happened. People have become more cautious.

The contract can be seen as a symbolic attempt by MYSA to challenge the unbalanced system that favored men by relieving them of their responsibilities for children. However, the contract might not have much impact, especially in cases where a child’s father is not a member of MYSA. Moreover, as one parent indicated, the child’s father might want to support the child but might not be able due to financial constraints created through lack of employment. Additionally, one of the ways in which the coaches attempted to circumvent parents’ resistance to girls playing soccer when the girls program began was by assuring parents that they would be personally responsible for the girls if anything went wrong. Some of the coaches went to the extent of taking personal responsibility for the women. Amani, who is a staff member, recalled his days as a volunteer in the organization. He noted that he had to tell parents that he would be personally responsible for the girls:

I had to sit with mothers and reassure them that if the girl became pregnant then I would be responsible—she could come for my neck. We would protect the girls. No one wanted to let go of their child. Eventually this changed. Today, mothers tell their children to go and stay in MYSA because they have seen the successes. This use of figurative language that cannot be interpreted at a literal level depicts the efforts made by the organization in recruiting women. The organization was operating
against deeply held beliefs that predicted some of the setbacks that could emerge if women became exposed to the public sports arena.

Engaging societal discourse. My second theme is based on interactions that emerged as women began operating in the public sphere. This theme is significant for two reasons. The first is that, when connections are articulated between the public and private sphere, they reveal complex relationships between discourse, power, and identity (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Mumby, 2000). In many of my interviews one of the common responses I received as I talked to participants, both male and female, about women’s participation was that women were weak and, hence, could not advance beyond a certain level in football. An analogy can be drawn between this rigid perspective and the glass ceiling principle that emerges in organizations which set limits on women’s advancement in their professional lives. Buzzanell (1995) discussed the glass ceiling concept by exploring three definitions in which the glass ceiling term had been applied. According to Buzzanell, the term glass ceiling has been used: (1) to address the numbers of women at different organizational levels; (2) to explain reasons for women’s exclusion; and (3) to highlight some of the strategies that have been used for developing women’s potential. Buzzanell noted that these perspectives are based on the positivist thinking, which contributes to strategies that only deal with the surface level of issues. Such perspectives, she added, have not altered underlying power structures. She argued that simply allowing women to participate in organizations was insufficient in itself because such approaches do not change gender dynamics. Moreover, such practices do not take into consideration the daily interactions between men and women that sustain certain biases against women. Similarly, in discussing gender interactions, Ashcraft and
Mumby (2004) pointed out that gendered identities were not created in a vacuum, but rather, they must be seen as shifting enactments that are embedded in cultural and material discourses as well as social and organizational identities. Buzzanell’s work is useful in unpacking the issues that emerge in MYSA because the organization continues to deal with shifting definitions of gender. Many young men inferred that women did not understand gender. Additionally, as a researcher, I initially focused on the issues of numbers because there were large discrepancies between men’s and women’s involvement in MYSA. However, as I became familiar with the narratives and the explanations provided by participants, I realized the issue was much deeper than the numbers and the representation. I begin by sharing some of the responses I received from my participants about women’s leadership and women players’ future prospects.

*Attitudes about women’s abilities in football.* I met Maddox at MYSA’s library. Maddox, who had completed high school a few years before, had volunteered at MYSA for over 10 years. He usually came to MYSA to pass time at the library when he did not have practice. In our conversation, he explained that he wanted to study journalism, but he was still in the process of looking for finances. As we continued talking, our conversation shifted to the issue of women’s participation in sports. Maddox seemed to have a clear stance on the women’s participation. He began by saying that:

I would say that it’s (women’s participation) good, because many girls usually stay at home and they end up becoming prostitutes in the neighborhood, or get mixed up with bad company. So when they get involved in sports it’s really good because their behavior changes. MYSA changes them in a way.
He also mentioned that men face challenges as is evidenced by the fact that many of them became criminals. Generally, he felt that participating in MYSA was beneficial for both sexes. However, when I asked him if women should be allowed to take leadership positions, he suggested that women would not make good leaders. Consider my conversation with him on this issue:

Maddox: I think women are not motivated because, when we talk about leadership in the organization, girls appear to have a weakness. I am not sure if they don’t want to lead, or don’t think they can lead. I’m not sure what the problem is but there is a certain kind of weakness there.

Priscilla: Do you think that men have something to do with this?

Maddox: I don’t think so because in Kenya, the number of women is higher than that of men. If women voted for a woman we would have a woman president by now.

Priscilla: What about cultural practices that increase opportunities for men leaders?

Maddox: People place blame on cultural practices but things are changing. If we rely on culture, culture can be misleading in that people may not advance. They (women) need to rise up.

Priscilla: Would you vote for women leaders?

Maddox: Yes I would.

Priscilla: You don’t sound convincing.
Maddox: It is because they (women) have a weakness. Even if a woman became a leader, we would still feel that we cannot advance because they do not have the power.

Priscilla: Men have had power for so long, for example, financial power that is used sometimes to influence voters.

Maddox: But women have also been around. Why can’t they work towards getting the power?

Priscilla: Women are now getting educated in higher numbers.

Maddox: That’s true.

Priscilla: In a few years there is a likelihood that they will be leading and men will be fighting for opportunities.

Maddox: That can never happen. Men will continue leading and women will always follow. Girls need to come out in their numbers.

I had spoken to different participants in the field about MYSA’s elections. Many had indicated that the local elections could be likened to the national elections. The elections were characterized by intense campaigning and networking. In MYSA, elections take place at the zonal level on an annual basis. Winning is determined by a member’s popularity because the member with a majority of votes usually wins the election. Members in the zones elect members to the executive committee, which the main volunteer decision is making body (the organization’s structure is provided in appendix A). The chairperson (the highest ranking member) is elected by the executive committee members. However, since a majority of MYSA’s volunteers (an estimated 13,000) are men, and all the members of the executive committee at the time of this
research were men, it was difficult for women to achieve leadership positions. Maddox’s views reflected a kind of reasoning that suggested that both men and women enjoyed an equal footing. However, organizational rules and regulations can be seen as a limitation. I spoke with the highest ranking female member who was the only women first representative on one of MYSA’s committees. MYSA has two committees: the sports council and the community service committee. Each of these committees had representatives from the different zones. The representatives were supported by second representatives. Diana shared the following about her position after one of the weekly meetings:

Priscilla: How many women representatives are there in the organization?
Diana: I’m the only woman first representative in MYSA. There are eight other women, but they are second representatives so they cannot vote during elections.
Priscilla: So, then, what you’re telling me is that you are the only one who can vote for the women?
Diana: Yes.
Priscilla: What do you think about that?
Diana: I think that it is good, because we work under the constitution and the laws have to be followed.
Priscilla: What do you think about the fact that you are the only woman and that that are such small numbers of women?
Diana: I think it would be good if we increased in numbers so that we can get the power to do things. In this organization, men are leaders, so they think that they

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are the only ones who can lead, but we also need to show them that we can lead, so we need some changes.

Priscilla: What would such changes entail?

Diana: We can also show them that we can do it. For example, in the case of voting, we can suggest that we are going with the majority, that women are the ones who would be voting.

Priscilla: Do you have any suggestions on how women can achieve leadership positions?

Diana: This would have to originate from the zones. If women are chosen from the zones as first representatives, that’s what would enable them to achieve power.

Although Diana was the highest ranking woman in MYSA, she was involved in decision making only at the committee level. Women were absent at the executive level. Amina, who was a volunteer, expressed frustration at not being able to influence the decision making process by saying that she did not feel like she had any impact on the decisions that were made in the organization. She went on to say the following:

I feel that, it is not just a feeling because the truth is that the executive is one of the decision making bodies. The interesting part is that it is run by men. MYSA is not a men’s only organization. I feel that I am not involved in any way because, when decisions are being made, women are not there to make sense of the issues. There are things that may not be visible on the surface, but if women are there they can provide their perspective. They can speak for women when certain
decisions do not favor them. But men can’t see such things. So my feeling is that girls are not involved in any way.

One of the female staff members shared similar thoughts about her involvement in decision making. I asked her if as a staff member, she perceived herself as being able to influence organizational decisions. She responded by stating that “I cannot do anything; I am not in the management; I’m down there. Even if I try to say something, it will not reach the top level because the top level consists of men only. At the end of the day, my problem will not be discussed.”

The notion of weakness articulated by Maddox is diluted when MYSA’s structural issues are presented because the systems in place seem to pose constraints on and barriers for women. However, it was interesting when one woman coach seemed to support the notion that women were weak:

Priscilla: MYSA has few women employees, especially when you compare their number to that of men. The sports council has very few women and the executive council does not have women. As a person who has been in this organization for a long time, what would you say about this?

Lucy: You know women are soft.

Priscilla: What do you mean when you say that they are soft?

Lucy: I would say they are soft because there is stiff competition in MYSA. It’s not like we are competing girls to girls or boys to boys, no, it is boys to girls. As we participate in the zonal elections, men are usually on the front line, wanting to become chairs, or take up other positions. Girls shy off; they need time to gain
confidence. I, for example, took time to gain that confidence and to stand up, or think that I could fight with the men.

I also talked with some male coaches about their experiences in training women. Many said that they would prefer not to coach women; they pointed physical weakness of women. Kingstone, for example, said that “Girls are a challenge. For me, it’s a little difficult. I think that girls cannot reach the level that I want to coach. I know that I can push men to that level.” I went on to discuss with him women’s involvement in sports, and he said the following:

Priscilla: What are your feelings about women’s participation in sports?
Kingstone: You know, in our culture, girls are supposed to stay at home. Nowadays competition takes in both ways—that is with boys and girls in your area. But there is a gender problem. Many of them don’t understand gender.
Priscilla: Who are you referring to?
Kingstone: Women want to get opportunities because they are women. But they forget that they should not be getting opportunities because they are women but that they should work hard to get the opportunity even if they are women. That’s the problem because, you see, if you and I are competing for an opportunity, you expect to be favored because you are a woman. Many (women) understand gender in that way. We are supposed to be at the same level of qualification or they should be better than I so that they can get the opportunities.

In my conversation with Kingstone, he indicated that, with MYSA’s growth, parents have been less restrictive with women. As a result, he felt that equality had been achieved. I asked him about the limited number of women employees in MYSA. He agreed that the
organization needed to find ways of reducing the gap because that aspect did not “look
good.” However, he still maintained that women need to work harder. Baraka, who had
experience coaching both boys and girls, indicated that gender differences also emerged
on the field. He had the following response:

   It is easy coaching men because, even when they are tired, you can still push
   them. When girls become tired, then you have no power to make them continue.
   You can also be harsh on men so that they deliver what you want them to achieve.
   Girls lose their tempers when you’re harsh. They could refuse to be cooperative,
   such that it is hard to achieve results. So when training women, you have to be a
   little bit soft when compared to the boys.

   The above responses raise an important issue because the coaches indicated that
boys are better in football. Interestingly, girls’ performance is evaluated against men’s
ways of playing. Girls were expected to reveal similar skills. Feminist scholars have
argued that organizations like MYSA have adopted the traditional approach of rational
thinking and hegemonic masculinity is privileged (e.g., Buzzanell, 1994). MYSA’s case
is interesting because emotional displays are considered as softness or as a form of
weakness. I talked to one of MYSA’s senior coaches and he indicated that he does not
coach girls because they “scream” too much. Organizational scholars argue that
organizational perspectives need to be reformulated in such a way women’s ways of
thinking are taken into consideration and included in the process of organizing (see
Buzzanell, 2000).

   One staff member who had been in the organization for more than fifteen years,
shared his thoughts with me by using his narrative both to make sense of the situation of
women and to provide a solution. He made connections between women’s “weakness,” few numbers, and lack of opportunities.

I can tell you why the numbers of women are limited. I take the blame because, when we started the girls’ program, we wanted to run it as we run the boys’ program. This was wrong because there were many things that we overlooked culturally. How are the women? How does society cause them to think about themselves? Football is not a bad game, but there is very little time to express yourself. It is about running, passing out the ball; it involves interaction. Maybe we should have dwelt more on training them on leadership; we should have taken a different approach, tried to build their self esteem so that they are able to mix with the boys. We still see like girls are fragile; we don’t want to put them in positions of leadership. Another problem is that we push girls. I think that we decided to establish a girls’ team so that we appeared gender sensitive. I don’t know, but I’m against all these things.

The above conversations focus on the notion of weakness on the field. Weakness was also evident in conversations revolving around activities that women engage in off the field. Participants’ responses portrayed women as the “other” who are easily influenced or are incapable of making their own decisions. For example, Lucy mentioned that one of the challenges that women face is that they, typically, drop out of MYSA when they get boyfriends who are not MYSA members. “These men tell them that they do not want girlfriends who play football, so the girls stop playing football.” Mdosi, one of MYSA’s male members, had the following to say about the challenges facing women:
In sports, I would say that there are early teenage pregnancies, which hinder them (women) from taking sports to a professional level because they have to spare sometime to take care of the child, so time becomes a challenge. The other thing is that when a girl gets pregnant in the ghetto or drops out of school, the alternative is to get married. This is wrong because they need to challenge themselves and take up their responsibilities instead of thinking that getting married is the only solution.

Similar thoughts were also shared by another male member, Oduor, who suggested the following:

Oduor: The other challenge is that they (women) are idle. They also have a culture where they think that they will get a man who will get them out of the slums rather than thinking of how they can get themselves out of the situation they live in.

Oduor is a member of the drama outreach program. I asked him if their plays tackle such issues. He responded by saying that the drama group has tried to educate women not to rely too much on men. The above conversations are significant because the respondents indicated that men yield enormous influence on women. However, a consideration of the context provides an alternative perspective on the notion of “weakness”. I examine the context by looking at some of the material and national constraints facing women. This approach is significant because the material constraints that women face determine their particular needs. Molyneux (1985) distinguishes between practical and strategic needs. Practical gender needs are for resources to meet women’s immediate and pressing needs for their families and are directly related to their
struggle to survive. These needs are determined by conditions experienced by women within the sexual division of labor and specific social organization of their society. The goal is not usually gender equality, as women do not challenge existing forms of subordination regardless of the fact that practical needs emerge from that subordination. Strategic needs, on the other hand, seek to reduce women’s subordination to men by promoting gender equality. These needs might include the abolition of the sexual division of labor, alleviation of women’s burdens of childcare and housework, the elimination of institutional sexism, such as discriminatory property rights, and access to resources, political equality, reproductive freedom, and measures to end male violence against women.

Material constraints. I talked to Asha, one of MYSA’s former players. She shared some of her experiences with me:

I stayed with my mother until 1996. I lived with my mother but I would sleep at the house of a friend. Their mother was well off, so my brother and I would sleep at their house. My mother would sleep at our house with our father because our father was a drunkard. My mother had him sleep on the bed we were using so my brother and I did not have a bed. I continued spending nights at my friend’s place until I met Alex. I moved out of my mother’s house and I went to live with him.

Some women participants indicated their difficult experiences at home pushed them into cohabiting with men. In Asha’s case, her boyfriend did not have a permanent job. He struggled to provide for her and her children. Her brother also left home and is now involved in brewing chang’aa (illegal brew). The notion of women’s reliance on men also emerged as respondents talked about women making a living from K-street. K-
Street is the short form of Koinange Street located in Nairobi City. This street is known for commercial sex activities. Pendo provided a general perspective of some societal views that are associated with girls who work at K-Street. Consider my conversation with her:

Priscilla: Does your family support your involvement in MYSA?

Pendo: They do because I come here as I don’t have a job. I use the allowance I get to buy fruits or flour for my sister. They (family) feel like I have a job. If I stayed home, I would be idle; I might have become pregnant. I could also begin hanging out with a bad group—girls who go to K-Street in town. I could begin having evil thoughts because an idle mind is the devil’s workshop.

Priscilla: Do many women go to Koinange?

Pendo: I know a good number. One of my friends dropped out of school when we were in secondary school. She goes to Konainge. Her mother knows it, but she does nothing about it. There was a time when I was talking to her at a bus stop—someone saw us who knew the kind of work that this girl engages in. When I met him later in the day, he asked me why I was hanging around that girl. I told him that she was my friend. He asked me where we were going together. I explained that we were both going to town for different errands. He told me not to be hanging around her. Then he asked me if I was aware what the girl did in town. I pretended not to know. He said that she was one of the girls who went to K-Street. “She has a bad character. When I saw you together, I thought that she had started taking you there.” I told him that I would not stop talking to her because of what she did. We grew up together.
My conversation with Pendo revealed that she would not consider going to K-
Street; nevertheless, she does not judge her friend although she indicates that she is aware
that her friend is a commercial sex worker. She also demonstrates a measure of defiance
when her male friend cautioned her. Cole (2004) pointed out that various contemporary
development initiatives have resulted in the marginalization of youth, making them
vulnerable to social economic exclusion. She noted that youth use transactional sex as a
means not only to save themselves from grim economic circumstances but to find new
kinds of power and the respect of adulthood. I talked to a mother of one of MYSA youths
who explained that she engaged in prostitution to educate her children. Unfortunately, she
contracted HIV/AIDS as a result. She also mentioned that, in order to survive, she sold
chang’aa but stopped when police caught her engaged in this illegal trade. In order to
make ends meet, women in MYSA sometimes engage in behavior that might be viewed
as unacceptable by society. According to Nelson (1988), most of Mathare women
generate their income from selling illegal brews, but also supplement some of their
income by engaging in commercial sex with their customers. Nelson noted that “these
women are generally regarded by their female peers as stupid and too lazy to earn money
in any other way, mainly because this is a dangerous activity and women who constantly
entertain large numbers of strangers run the risk of being badly beaten or robbed by
unscrupulous, vicious, or drunken customers” (p. 188). However, a majority of women
prefer to limit commercial sex to times when there is a dire need for money.

Material constraints also affected the number of girls playing because some could
not afford shorts or shoes. In some of the matches that I attended, girls played barefoot.
Some fields had stones and bottles, I witnessed a number of girls get bruised while playing unkempt fields. One woman coach explained the problem as follows:

Lucy: The other problem is that sometimes one zone loses uniforms. We work in 16 zones which means that we create a budget for 16 zones. Sometimes girls do not have shoes. They say they cannot play without shoes. In other cases, they do not have shorts. Boys sometimes plan better because, when they get a little money, they go out looking for shorts, but for girls this, is difficult. If a parent gives you 10 shillings, would you go out looking for shorts?

Priscilla: There are probably other things I could do with the money.

Lucy: When a parent gives a girl 10 shillings, she might consider buying shorts, but this thought is surpassed by other necessities, such as always (sanitary pads).

Priscilla: Yes, that’s an important thing,

Lucy: That’s a big thing. When working with girls, you have to be there, try to keep them close, and help them look for such things, equipment, so that they can come. It takes more time to convince women to play on the field.

Priscilla: So what can be done about this? Do you have any suggestions?

Lucy: That’s difficult.

Priscilla: Because of too many problems?

Lucy: Yes, even if you provide the sanitary pads and uniforms, other problems emerge.

Priscilla: What kinds of problems?

Lucy: There are the problems with parents wanting them to stay at home; studies, they never end; they just increase.
Priscilla: When you think you have sorted out one another emerges?
Lucy: We deal with them as they come.

*National constraints.* Many of the participants talked about the fact that, in Kenya, sports program are not advanced enough for girls to play professional football. Masaku, one of MYSA’s volunteers, was critical about the future of sports. He said:

Women world wide participate in soccer, but in Kenya, there isn’t much competition when you compare women’s soccer to men’s soccer. This limits MYSA girls’ team. In MYSA, we have two men’s teams in the Premier League, but when our women grow and reach that age, where will they go?

MYSA has tried to overcome this barrier by creating a club for senior women. However, without a national structure in place, women can only play for a limited time. This problem is compounded by the fact that the senior team can only accommodate about 20 women at a time. Young girls in MYSA long to play for the senior team at some point in their lives. Oduor shared these concerns:

Oduor: I would say that it’s (women’s participation) a good thing for a better future, but Kenya’s football level does not help much. We do not have women role models who have achieved in soccer in Kenya. I know that, when some women get children, they don’t come back—after investing so much time in sports. The other thing is that we only have one women’s coach. When you look at MYSA, many opportunities are provided for men to train in Norway, but I don’t think that an opportunity has ever been provided for a woman. Women also get tired a lot. They don’t like to persevere.

Priscilla: Are you referring to all women?
Oduor: Not all, but many get tired early. Their future seems bleak. What will happen to them when they get to 25 years?

As we continued talking, I asked Oduor what his perception of empowerment was. He made critical connections between empowerment and women’s football.

Oduor: I think empowerment is—using football as a tool for empowering women but where are the results? A good life in the future? That would be good, but the chances of achieving that kind of life are not as many as men’s, unless the organization comes up with other ways of doing things. They (women) need to be provided with other options besides football so that, when a girl leaves the organization, she can survive without football. The market for girls’ football just isn’t there. I usually think about it and wonder what will happen after 10 years. How many women will be playing football? There are children coming up in the sport. Women have to give up their positions. What will they do?

Dorina, who is one of MYSA’s success stories, is one of the few women referees recognized in Kenya. She noted that, although women are interested in soccer, they are not provided with opportunities. She continued to say that:

I have trained many referees here. There was a time I conducted training for more than 25 women referees, but at the end of the day we had 5. I don’t know what happened to the rest. We try to follow-up and bring them back slowly. The problem is that they claim that, even if they complete the course, they will not be able to officiate matches because no one knows them in KFF. You have to be known. Additionally, it’s a male sports, and it’s a male’s field. If you don’t know
anyone up there, you will remain at the bottom forever. So they (girls) are not
given equal chances as men.

Although, women participants indicated that, although Kenya’s situation did not provide
them with many options in football, they still felt that they had some control over their
future. Many expressed clear plans for careers they were preparing to pursue after their
work in MYSA. Esther, for example, mentioned that she was taking a course on tours and
travel at a local college. She indicated that she had always wanted to become a
professional footballer. When I asked her what led her to change her professional interest,
she responded by saying that:

I changed because, in Kenya, there is no future for women’s football. When you
look at KFF (Kenya Football Federation), that’s the body that is responsible for
the sport, but it focuses more on men. Women’s soccer is overlooked. Even when
the organization focuses on men, the corruption levels are high. That is the reason
why local football never goes far. For example, last time when we went to
Nigeria, we represented the country as players, but we were not paid. There was
no allowance at all. That kills players’ morale.

Other participants indicated interest in working as professional peer counselors, art
instructors, journalists, or hair dressers. Only one participant aspired to remain in sports.
She mentioned that she wanted to become a professional referee. Nonetheless, sports
serve as a springboard to other activities.

*Overcoming the Ceilings*

As described above MYSA girls face a variety of difficulties; however, they
continue to challenge the master narratives, such as girls cannot play, girls should stay at
home, and girls are weak. Stories have the power to reveal turning points and reconstruct or repair certain narratives (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001). In many cases, MYSA women resisted dominant narratives that presented them as weak. Their stories reveal the important role played by personal will power in resisting that dominant narrative. Many girls indicated that they were willing to go against their parents’ wishes by choosing to continue to play. Lucy shared this with me:

My parents had a problem with me playing football. They refused to let me play football when I was in high school. I told them that if they forced me to stop playing then I would have to leave school. I would leave. I am the first born, and my father was afraid that the rest of my siblings would do the same. So they (parents) told me that I could play football, but I would have to continue with my studies. I told them that I would study. I kept my word. I have never missed school, and I plan to continue studying as long as I can. MYSA requires us to be in school, so that is a motivator. I continued with school and my parents can now see the fruits.

Women also expressed their will power through individual resistance characterized by self-definition and self-determination (Parker, 2003). Parker described self-definition as the ability of an individual to name their own reality. Self-determination, on the other hand, is the ability to decide a person’s destiny. These two elements were evident in the girls’ narratives. Pendo expressed some of the challenges that she has faced in MYSA by stating that:

The only thing that I can think of is that men really compete with us. I am going to run for the executive’s chairperson’s position next year, and I know I can
become MYSA’s director. I was sharing these ambitions with my friends, and they were laughing at me. I believe that I can do it. I am able to deal with men. For example, one day I was facilitating one of the meetings for the under 14 boys who were preparing to leave for Norway. The boys were quite ignorant. After the session, they came up to me and asked me how I had become so well versed with the issues. I told them that it was through my own life experiences and from my studies. One of them said that he would not want to marry someone like me. The other boys who were there laughed. I asked him why, and he said that “you know too much, and you will compete with me in the house.” I think that this (when women speak up) threatens men, and sometimes I feel that I am denied some opportunities because of my personality.

Women’s self determination was also revealed in the fact that some women continue to play for MYSA after having children. Nyambura, who had been in MYSA for over 10 years, had the following to say:

I got pregnant as a player. Nowadays when people get pregnant they don’t come back because they feel embarrassed to be playing as mothers. I’m not embarrassed because I have a husband. Even if I didn’t have one, I would still play. There are some girls with no husbands who play. There are some on the senior team who are able to support their children through the money they receive from playing.

Moreover, Baraka, a male coach team coach also indicated that MYSA did not turn away mothers.
I now have four players on my team who are parents, two are single parents and two have boyfriends who are MYSA members. We try to advise them, especially those under 18 years. We encourage them that, if they must have sex, they need to play it safe. Otherwise we encourage them to abstain. If players become pregnant when they are under 18, or if we get to hear that they have aborted, we have to drop them from the team. Those who are over 18 are free to come back to the team after they have a baby because if we drop them from the team, then we will be promoting prostitution, as they earn their living from the team. If we took that away from them, we would be denying them. But we try to encourage them to safeguard their lives. We ask them to choose men well, someone they can live well with and someone who can assist them.

Some women participants also pointed to the fact that MYSA had women leaders. Esther made the following comment about women and leadership in MYSA:

Leaders exist in MYSA. In fact our team has a female manager. This is a very great position. In the girls’ forum, we have a chairlady and when opportunities emerge for people to go abroad for workshops, these are the people who attend. Nowadays women have started getting high positions in MYSA. This is not something that started a long time ago, it started recently because people fought for it. In the past, men would be the leaders. Even women teams would have male coaches. Nowadays, women stand for themselves.

Although I have presented the viewpoints of men who view women as weak or fragile in the above sections, men’s views are not monolithic. There were some men who had progressive viewpoints. Mdosi, for example, indicated that women’s participation is
good because it empowers them. As he responded to my question concerning women’s participation, he said “I think it’s an excellent idea because, when MYSA started, it was a men’s or boy’s organization. Including women in the organization is a good opportunity to increase competition. It’s not all about men. In many ways, it’s a way of empowering women so that they can overcome the same challenges faced by men.”

Similarly, Masaku supported women’s involvement in leadership roles. He noted that:

It is not men’s preserve to think, and a woman can also have good thinking. Now the only problem is that men are not ready to accept this in the home. They still think that men should do most of the policy making. Will your man accept that you are the one suggesting that the family should buy a piece of land? Now that is still hard. They still rely on a way of thinking that suggests that there should be a division of labor. But women’s participation is good because it brings in gender equity. I’m not sure how to put it because, in African society or culture, girls used to be at home, they would cook. This causes boys to think “If I did such things as a child, what work would my sister do?” When we began in 1988, there were only boys in the field. When we finished playing, we would go home, find that our sisters had cooked. We’d leave our clothes there for them to wash, and go do our own errands. But now, when they come to the field we understand—you don’t expect that she will cook on days when you do not have a game. I feel that the society is undergoing a transition, but we are still following the past ways, while trying to bring in the new. This generates conflict because, when a person is about to marry, a man expects his wife play to play certain roles, but when you leave for
work, women also leave for work in the current times. However, the woman will still expect you to bring food, yet you left the house together. Or if a woman brings the food, she expects you to cook. In my view, I feel that we are not yet ready for that. Our society is not yet ready for that.

Masaku’s response is optimistic but also reveals the contradictions that emerge with changing roles and expectations. Masaku’s comments also underline the difficulties involved in changing rigid cultural roles that privilege men in many ways. Amina reflected on this domination when I asked her if men and women faced similar problems. She said:

Women are still deprived of some opportunities. For example, if a girl and her brother complete high school together, the man is usually the first to go college. I wonder what criteria is used—just because the woman is useful at home, she will clean the dishes and do other work, she has to stay at home so her brother attends college. It is only after he is done that the girl goes to college.

Masaku’s and Amina’s thoughts can be situated within the context of patriarchy. Walby (1989) argued that the term “patriarchy” is not universal. Various forms of patriarchy exist that are dependent on relations between structures. She defined patriarchy as a system that exists at six different levels: modes of production, relations in waged labor, state level, male violence, sexuality, and culture. However, patriarchy, or male dominance, is not a fixed phenomenon. It is historically situated and can change with the society that encodes it. As I previously mentioned, many girls in MYSA challenge cultural forms of patriarchy as they aspire to go to college and to advance professionally.
MYSA girls reveal resistance to societal perspectives by organizing as women in the girls’ forum. This can be seen as a form of collective resistance that emerges through coalition formation and community building (Parker, 2003). The forum’s goal is to increase women’s participation at the zonal level. Each woman participant is expected to start and maintain a team in her zone. Bahati, who is an active member in the girls’ forum, articulated the goal of the girls’ forum in this manner:

One of the things that we deal with in the girls’ forum is the fact that MYSA needs more girls in the organization. If you look at the staff ratio between men and women, the girls’ ratio is very low. Our objective in the girls’ forum is also to empower women such that, when MYSA holds interviews for job openings or activities that might creating new opportunities, we are able to have women who can speak for themselves. I would say that MYSA has become more gender sensitive.

Priscilla: Can you give me some indicators of gender sensitivity?

Bahati: Yes. Nowadays, when MYSA takes people for courses, they usually take equal numbers of both sexes.

MYSA also organizes workshops for the girls. Levina described one of the workshops as follows:

The main aim of the workshop was to educate and show girls that they could do what boys could do, and even do it in a better way. After the workshop, we went back to the zones and shared the information with other girls. We emphasized that they could do the things that boys did, and that there was no difference between us. Through the knowledge we gained at the conference we were able to inspire
many girls. I think it has worked because our numbers in the organization have increased, and we are involved in many activities, just like the boys. We also started getting positions that were previously held by boys. People in MYSA believe that they have to get a chairman, not a chairperson. We have been fighting for such positions. In the community service committee, for example, the general belief is that the first representative has to be a man and the second representative should be a lady. In 1998, I was the first community service representative because I believed that I could do it. After attending the workshop, I knew that nothing was difficult.

Another participant shared her thoughts on the girls’ forum by stating:

I think it’s a good group. Men in MYSA do not want to do anything about the girls’ forum. They feel threatened when girls stand up and speak for themselves. They know that girls will become empowered and they are afraid of it. The girls’ forum is really working. If the girls’ forum was not there, I would not have been able to form the arts and culture group in my zone. It is because I was interested in hearing the girls’ voices. I realized that boys were playing, registering each and every year—their teams were increasing every year. In my zone, the girls’ teams had really deteriorated, so I had to look for girls. I also searched for answers on why there was a decrease in girl’s involvement. I did this as a member of the girls’ forum. So I would say that the girls’ forum is bringing girls together.

Many women in the girls’ forum indicated that they felt that the forum was an important body in the organization because it focused on their issues. However, some indicated that it was difficult to be involved in the organization mostly because they were
not represented on the executive council. One of the girls noted that the organization had allowed girls representation in the executive council for some time. However, the same members of the executive council had used a stipulation in the constitution that stated that only elected chairpersons could attend the meetings. Additionally, the women indicated that they did not have staff support because a majority of female staff were not involved in the girls’ forum. One female volunteer stated: “Staff members have all they want. They are paid at the end of the month so they do not push for other things. I don’t feel staff members help us to understand women’s issues or make contributions to girls’ issues in anyway.”

I talked to the women staff about this and reasons for not participating in the girls’ forum included the fact that women in the forum did not trust them. Consider the following response from Nekesa:

Priscilla: Are you involved in the girls’ forum?

Nekesa: No

Priscilla: Why aren’t you involved?

Nekesa: I can’t do much in that forum because the girls consider me as a staff member. They think that staff members are more powerful.

Priscilla: Can this gap be lessened?

Nekesa: What we would like to see is women replacing women if any of them have to leave.

Nekesa felt that the division between female staff members and volunteers could be lessened by increasing the female population. Another staff member shared similar views by noting that the idea of the girls’ forum was good but that the girls’ attitudes need to change. According to her, the forum was not effective because it did not support its
agenda with action. She felt that the organization as a whole was trying to increase the girls’ numbers, but the girls were not doing their job. I asked her what role she played in the girls’ forum. She said:

   We, as girls, have a problem. When we see fellow women doing well, we begin to hate them. If you ask them why they hate you, they have no reason. This is a result of jealousy. That is our problem. We are jealous of each other. The forum did not want to include staff members because they saw us as competing with them. They want to work by themselves. I think we can help them because there is no way their issues can reach the management without our assistance. When they share the issues with men, the men do not do anything about it. But because they do not want to work with us, we isolate ourselves, so a gap emerges. That’s one of the challenges that we have as women.

This staff member continued to say that, if the girls’ forum had indicated an interest in working with staff members, all the staff would be in the group. She also implied that she felt that men influenced the girls. She said:

   I would also say that women have their own weakness because men incite them—they encourage them to eliminate certain people and the girls agree to do that. How does that help women? They give them that advice, yet they do not present your issues appropriately. We, as women, also let ourselves down. Although we say that MYSA does not help us, we, as women, have a weakness, and we need to change that.
Men’s views concerning relationships between female staff and volunteers provided an interesting perspective. For example, I asked one of the male participants why the senior women’s team was coached by a man.

Priscilla: I have noticed that the women’s team is coached by men.

Kingstone: We tried to use a woman coach—I think girls’ greatest enemies are girls. We didn’t have a male coach... we had a man coach initially, then we got rid of him, so we put two female coaches and team managers. The team’s performance went down. Issues emerged every week. Since the current coach took over the team, things have changed and the girls are now focused. There has been a tremendous improvement, and now we have five girls playing in Kenya’s National team. Before that, we didn’t have many girls on the national team. I don’t know what the problem is, but I don’t think that the problem is men. It’s within the girls themselves.

Similar thoughts were shared by a male coach who trains female players. He said:

I think that there is also a problem with women… there is a point where women stop liking each other because of minor issues. They are not like men. It’s hard for them to appreciate when a woman is in charge. There is tension within women themselves. There is the way that women talk to men and men are able to calm down, but when it comes to women these forms of communication build up tension and they end up splitting into different groups. It reaches a point where it is difficult to have role models. I think many women here have male role models.

As I reflected on these multiple perspectives about women’s divisions, I realized that one of the problems was a lack of communication. Stories from both female MYSA
participants and staff volunteers indicated that both parties faced similar challenges. I asked one woman staff member if interactions within the organization enabled women to share their life experiences. The staff member indicated that such interactions never occurred. This could provide one explanation for the gaps. Shared narratives from both parties could highlight similarities in experience which could promote dialogue and greater understanding. However, at present, those narratives were not being shared. In my next theme, I summarize youths’ reflections on MYSA and some of the tensions that emerge in the organization.

Organizational Development

MYSA describes itself as a self-help youth program that links sports with community service. As such, the examination of organizational narratives provides an important lens for analyzing how MYSA fits in within development agendas. I explore this theme by highlighting some of MYSA’s members’ perspectives on the organization and development by adopting three metaphors that emerged from the stories. The metaphors include *MYSA is an icon, MYSA is a family* and *MYSA is an entry point/spring board*. I conclude the section by presenting some of the challenges that face MYSA youth as they engage in development work.

*Icon in the Community*

*MYSAA is like an icon in the community. MYSA has does many things, it reveals how life can be. It provides opportunities for leadership and shows us how to be good role models.*

Communication and development scholars have posited that in recent times development models become more authentic when they are created in collaboration with
actors within specific context and with the utilization of cultural models (e.g. Jamieson, 1991, White, 1999). The development process includes the involvement of local people in the creation, planning, implementation and evaluation of projects. MYSA fits in well within the above descriptions because it defines itself as an organization that is run and works for the youth. Many youths talked about MYSA’s role in their social advancement. One youth, for instance, stated that “Their (MYSA) mission is to change youths’ lives in the Mathare ghetto so that they can become good members in their community. Their aim is to create a better future for the youth—to show that Mathare has more that the evils that it is associated with.”

MYSA’s beginnings can be traced to the organization’s founder. I asked Mdosi what he understood by the term “development.” He made the following connections:

Development is not only about employment, it’s about changing the community. One example is when MYSA’s founder came up with this idea of creating MYSA. When he saw children playing football using balls that were made of paper bags, he was able to detect talent, and children’s ability to be involved in the sport. He decided to strike a deal with the children by telling them that if they did something he would do something in return. He asked them to mobilize other youths. In return he provided a leather ball – at that time balls were really a big deal. I would say that’s an illustration of development. That’s how I understand development—building the talent of a child to that level. Many youths now play professional football through MYSA. I’m very proud of the fact that 90% of the people who play for Kenya’s national league, have passed through MYSA leagues.
The story of Bob Munro, MYSA’s founder came up in a number of interviews. Many of the youths I talked to did not know Mr. Munro on a personal level but some had seen him in the matches. Interestingly, many referred to him on a first name basis. They spoke as if they knew him because the story of MYSA’s origin was a common narrative. Other stories were similar to Mdosi’s and they provided further details such as the fact that Munro, a Canadian, development professional was approached by young boys who saw him watching them as they played. The boys requested him to referee one of the games. He said that he would do that on condition that they also did something in return. Munro suggested that they clean up the football field. The boys agreed to the terms which led to the birth of MYSA. MYSA eventually grew in unexpected ways and was guided by the words exchanged in the initial contact, that is, “You do something for MYSA, MYSA does something for you.” The above approach is especially significant because it highlights a shift from development entities that are based on dependency. Bob Munro established a mutual relationship, he provided leather balls as well as time. The youths put in their fair share, which was to make a contribution to the communities in which they lived by engaging in clean-ups. The above narrative is also important because the terms of the relationship were negotiated by both parties. Dialogic communication was central in this process. Munro did not introduce a new concept. He instead began with the youths’ interests and passion to create more sustainable change.

Giving back to the community had set MYSA apart, two decades after that initial encounter. MYSA’s youth continued to give back to their community through clean-up. I asked a local government official if he was familiar with MYSA works and he responded by saying that:
As far as I know, MYSA is a respected group. Especially because of their environmental clean up activities, their work is evident. Their production of international players is also a positive aspect, we are proud of them. I think that it is because of youth efforts that the government has come up with a Ministry of Youth Affairs. The government has set apart one billion shillings to assist them in starting income generating activities. We are encouraging them, not only youths in MYSA but also those of the same age but in other areas to begin projects they have been doing it.

The government official made connections between the youths’ work, and the governments’ funds that were directed toward funding youth entrepreneurial activities. However, as we continued talking he was skeptical about the funds’ ability to have long lasting impacts on the high numbers of youth in the country. Although the local government official indicated that the relationship between MYSA and the government was cordial, this relationship was strained in some cases. Bob Munro, MYSA’s founder conflicted with the minister of sports and the Kenya Football Federation (KFF) over KFF’s operations and mismanagement of football related funds (Wandera, 2006). Munro championed for the rights of local athletes at the national level. An example of this role is evidenced by excerpts of correspondence to the minister of sports that appeared in a national newspaper (Ayieko, 2006). Munro wrote:

I fully agree with you that changes are needed to solve the structural problems in our football. This should be done to ensure that the clubs, coaches, players and referees who actually make the football have a greater role in decision making about football. I assure you of my continuing respect and support for your
commitment to improving Kenyan football so that our many talented youth and senior players can test and develop their skills and, as many are from poor families, can earn incomes to help their families escape poverty.

KFF’s history was marked by power wrangles and allegations of corruption. The organization was recently suspended by the international football governing body Federation Internationale de football Association (FIFA) for failing to comply with the body’s roles, and interference by the Kenyan government in running the organization.

In addition to advocating for youth rights from the management levels, MYSA’s youths also made attempts to establish relationships with policy makers. One of MYSA’s youths talked about how his program had coordinated a match between MYSA’s youths and some members of parliament. He described the outcome of the match in the following way:

Were able to talk with them “one on one” and we shared the anti child labor agenda. We asked them to use a certain percentage of the Community Development Fund (CDF) for children because in Eastlands there were still many children who were not going to school even with the free education. We explained that we had a pilot program that was funded by ILO and we told them that when the organization pulled out we would like the program to be sustainable because the children who have been withdrawn from child labor and were being supported once the program ended they would also go back.

The above youth was talking about a new initiative that was in the process of being introduced to MYSA by the International Labor Organization that would focus on sensitizing the community on child labor. The match was an important development
because under normal circumstances it was difficult to set up a meeting with politicians. In Kenya members of parliament were provided with funds to develop their constituencies. MYSA’s youth were advocating for the funds to be channeled towards children’s advancement. The organization of the match can also be seen as an expression of agency and MYSA’s youth desire to influence children’s rights issues from the grassroots to the policy making levels.

MYSA’s iconic uniqueness also stemmed from its youth focused approach. MYSA’s staff members were former volunteers. I asked a number of the young people if becoming staff members presented different experiences from those of their days as volunteers. One young man said that:

The difference isn’t big because I worked with the community as a volunteer. I had a team in the zone—that team is special to me because I started working with them when they were very young about 12 years. They were like family and I knew some of their families. They have achieved a lot some of them at playing at a higher level, some are playing for the premier leagues. There are two who went for the Street Football in Germany this month. I was close to them as a volunteer and we are still very close now that I’m a staff member. I don’t think that there is a big difference. The emphasis in the organization is to help the community. The only difference is the package, as a volunteer I didn’t earn much—that’s the only major difference.

MYSA youths also situated organizational development within the context of improved infrastructure. One of the youths stated that development is “Improvement in the welfare of the society. This could be physical, for example, through the construction
of buildings or roads.” Similar thoughts were shared by another participant who focused on MYSA’s growth in particular. The participant traced the organization’s growth from the initial structure located at Eastleigh that MYSA still continued to rent, to the MYSA owned headquarters that housed administrative offices, the sports academy, and a storage section for the environment program.

**MYSA is a Springboard**

During my interviews, words such as stepping stone, ladder and entry points were common as youth described the temporal nature of their involvement with MYSA. Many youths indicated that they considered MYSA as a springboard for personal development. Mdosi, for instance, stated that the organization had advanced to a level that facilitated career opportunities or transitions to other jobs for members. Consider the following statement:

> I would say that employment is also an issue that matters and MYSA has now grown to an extent that it can be seen as a *stepping stone*, a place where you learn, and get experience and then move on to other jobs as opportunities emerge.

Lucy one of MYSA’s employee mentioned that she that she had stopped playing so that she could provide opportunities for others. She noted that:

> I do not play because I would like to give other youth a *sporting chance*. I now focus on coaching. MYSA only has one professional team but the number of girls has increased. I have left that opportunity of the other girls because I have a job.

Lucy drew from organizational discourse as one of MYSA’s mottos is to give youth a sporting chance. These words also appear in MYSA’s logo, vehicles and equipment serving as constant reminders of the organization’s goal.
MYSA was often seen as a springboard that enabled youth to get jobs in other institutions. As a result, the youths talked about the temporary nature of their involvement with MYSA. Mdosi highlighted this aspect by saying that:

MYSA is a youth organization and I know I need to leave so that other youths can benefit from the opportunities that the organization is providing. I’m not here to stay but I would like to learn a few things and then leave so that others can get into the organization.

Indeed, an analysis of former MYSA youths indicated that MYSA’s youths had moved to other organizations. For example, two of MYSA’s former youths were involved in running CHRISC and Carolina for Kibera organizations that also focused on youth issues. A number of youths were also coaching in local schools. Andrew, a staff member, noted that such opportunities emerged as a result of the positive image created by the organization. He noted that:

One of the effects of using football as an entry point is that coaches become more ambitious because MYSA coaches are very marketable. Different schools and teams are interested in them because MYSA’s record in international tournaments is well known.

A number of MYSA’s youths had also left the organization for international teams. One of Mathare United former players for example narrated his team’s experience in the nineties in the following manner:

We played from 94-97, in 98 we performed well we got many trophies, we were representing the country. Many clubs became interested in our players. As a result of these offers, many players left causing the team’s performance to deteriorate.
Some people left for the US, Norway and Sweden. There was a positive exodus, within one season about 9-10 players had moved. We had to start a new Mathare United.

Although this player indicated that team performance had deteriorated, he indicated that the departure of his team mates was positive because they would be able to play for teams that could provide them with more lucrative contracts at that time. Many renowned Kenyan footballers like Dennis Oliech, Titus Mulama and Maurice Wambua were recounted by MYSA members as evidence of some international players that were former MYSA athletes. Additionally, participants were proud of the fact that the current head coach of the Kenya’s national team’s under 23 was a MYSA coach. Baraka, for example, described the coach as “a person who was from the slum but had risen to become a star.”

MYSA was also proud of its role in promoting scholarship. In addition to children who had been assisted through the scholarship program, 11 MYSA’s youth had been able to earn college degrees (Sports and Development, n. d). Moses Mutuli, one of MYSA’s youth won the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship Award. Moses had graduated with a first class honors from the University of Nairobi where he had also been named as the best overall student in the entire University with the highest proficiency in both academic and extra-curricular activities (The tough road to Oxford, 2003).

I had the opportunity of talking to a staff member who had earned a bachelor’s degree. He noted that he was proud of the fact that he had achieved this academic milestone; however, he was quick to remind me that education was only one of the benchmarks of success. He stated that:
I think that success can be interpreted in different ways, many of my age mates look at being alive as a success… So in slums sometimes it’s not whether you go to college or not, you can still consider yourself successful just by being alive, being sober, and doing the right things. Many of the people we played with went into crime and have long been forgotten, others got into drugs and drinking. Even my best friend turned into drinking and drugs died at 23. Sometimes it’s not the fact that you went to the university, it’s just being alive and sober. You can still consider yourself successful even without a proper job. Many of the people we played with went into crime and have died. It’s tough.

The young man’s perception of success is notable because as was discussed on the theme on play and work, education in academic settings is sometimes considered the marker of success. As the MYSA member indicated success is relative, and is really dependent on particular contexts.

Personal advancement was also enhanced by a process that was characterized by mentoring. Amani mentioned that he was able to become a leader in the organization because he was mentored into that role. He said the following:

For us to have grown up to this age we must have had great mentors. Surviving in the ghetto is hard. Of course there are both good and bad mentors. There are those whose mentors are thieves and they end up being shot. The way I see it is that when you choose MYSA it’s like choosing the hard way. You may seem poor, because you’re trying to make yourself a life that is positive. At the end people are able to reap the benefits. If you steal on the other hand, you will be able to get money but then that’s a short life. That was an important thing in MYSA, the fact
that those role models who were there before us set high standards. We strive to be like them or do things in a better way. We don’t want to leave MYSA the way we found it.

Amani continued to mentor the youth in the organization. MYSA also presented opportunities for leadership. I asked Toni, one of the volunteers if he would describe MYSA’s work as development work. He stated that:

Development is something that builds the community. What MYSA does is also development because the organization builds young leaders. It also helps the leaders to sustain themselves in life by providing the basics, for example, through education.

MYSA’s players, especially those who played for the senior team, were expected to establish and run their own teams. The arts and culture program also followed the same structure after its formation. The drama group members formed their own groups in their own zones which was one of the reasons why MYSA numbers grew exponentially. The majority of MYSA’s youth were trained on leadership through workshops that were organized at regular intervals. Leadership was also evident in MYSA’s structure. One sports official articulated this process when he explained that:

In sports, we try to act as role models to the youth by establishing committees. The committee members are elected at the zone level. The committees then run the leagues independently, which enhances leadership. We also have councils such as the sports councils. In such committees, there are chairmen who meet with their group members after every week or every two weekends. In these
meetings, the members talk about their problems and achievements at the zone level.

Additionally, many program officers appointed volunteers who assisted them in running their programs. The officers spent time sharing their knowledge and experience with their protégés. These volunteers would be the first to be considered when opportunities came up. In closing this section, I end with a quote that summarizes why MYSA was an icon in the community and its role in development. Ben described development in the following manner “I think its personal growth. It is also organizational growth—MYSA has grown in terms of numbers. It could also be seen as a ladder where people move step by step.”

*MYSA is like a Family*

A number of MYSA youth and employees described the organization as a family which signified the close relationships and ties that existed in the organization. Andrew, a senior staff member, referred to the first Mathare United team as a family. The first Mathare United players was unique because the group had joined the organization at the same time, traveled Brazil, met with the legendary Pele and experienced MYSA’s first victory when they won the Moi’s Golden cup. The Golden cup was a prestigious national award that was presented by President Daniel Arap Moi. This award led to MYSA’s recognition nationwide. Andrew also noted that the team members had a good working relationship with founder Bob Munro.

Although MYSA had grown significantly over the years, current members still experienced social closeness. Zawadi, for instance, responded to a question about her relationship with her program members in the following manner:
We like each other a lot because when people have problems, home related or otherwise, they share it with the group. We usually address it, and try to come up with solutions. We stay as a family, one family. If an outsider hurts any group member it’s like they are hurting the whole group.

These close ties among members were also evident in stories that recounted difficult moments. Pendo talked about a personal situation where her eldest sister diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. She noted that she was angry at first because her parents were deceased, and her sister had been charged with the responsibility of taking care of the family. She narrated the rest of the story in the following manner:

I started avoiding my sister and I would spend nights at friends’ places. My sister noticed that the issue had affected me. I would come to MYSA for meetings and I would be quiet, I would avoid my sister when I was at home, or I would get home late at night. I decided that as a Christian what I was doing was not right, I was discriminating against her. I came to MYSA and I talked to one of my fellow counselors. I explained the situation to her and we talked about it. *That is what we do when we have problems* we share with each other and our peers are able to help us whenever they can. I kept going for counseling sessions with my friend and my feelings were able to change with time. My self confidence and self esteem increased. I went home and faced her (sister). I prayed to God and asked to forgive me for the way I had treated my sister. I accepted the situation.

Levi who was a coach mentioned that one of the problems he encountered with the girls in his team is that they could not afford shoes and many had to play barefoot. He indicated that he used his own money on various occasions to buy shoes for the girls. He
mentioned that he was proud of the fact that some of these girls had become successful players. One, for example, had been to Norway twice, and had just come back from Germany. He noted that when his players advanced he felt that his efforts had been rewarded.

The organization as a whole often shifted its resources to unplanned or emergent needs that affected its members. One senior staff member indicated that although the organizations did not have emergency funds, whenever possible MYSA tried to help members in times of need. One MYSA member provided such evidence when he shared an incident where he was attacked by thugs and left with life threatening injuries. MYSA assisted him by paying for his medical bills. Moreover, natural occurrences such as the outbreak of diseases also affected MYSA’s budget. MYSA members said that the organization had provided assistance to members in a situation when the area was faced by a cholera outbreak. I also attended a number of meetings where members made monetary contributions for members who were bereaved or sick. On a number of occasions, I heard MYSA youths saying that they had spent time visiting with families that were bereaved.

MYSA also stood out in serving its members as it did not discriminate on the basis of physical disability or ethnicity. Masaku provided an example of one of MYSA’s members, Ogallo who was deaf by noting that MYSA helped him get a hearing aid which enabled him to communicate with people and to participate in sports. Masaku concluded his statement by asking “If MYSA wasn’t there what would he be doing?” Indeed, the inspiring story of Ogallo had captured the local media’s attention. An article in the Nation one of the widely read local dailies carried a feature on Ogallo that described him
as a child who had lost his hearing as a result of high body temperature that was not treated effectively (Wepukhulu, 2005). Ogallo was 31 years old during my field visit was quoted as saying that “Other kids my age used to tease me from time to time which more often than not got onto my nerves and upset me.” According to the newspaper article, the teasing stopped when Ogallo began playing for the Undugu Saints youth team in the MYSA’s Mathare zone. During my field research, Ogallo played for Mathare Youth, and had a full time job in MYSA.

Masaku’s also talked about the fact that MYSA did not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity. MYSA is located in an area that has multiple ethnic groups. Ethnic conflicts are common in the area but MYSA is continued to operate as a multiethnic group since its inception. In some cases, the organization has supported members who have been affected by ethnic conflicts. The most recent example was when MYSA had to cut down on its 20th anniversary celebrations scheduled last year to buy blankets, food and medicine for people who had been affected by clashes that had emerged in the slum area. Such clashes normally occurred between gangs and had to do with the sale of illicit brews. These gangs are usually formed on ethnicity lines.

Finally, MYSA was associated with the baby sitting role. This was evident when I asked one youth how the community members perceived MYSA, he responded by saying that:

In the areas where MYSA is located I think that the community appreciates MYSA because it has provided opportunities for children by capturing their talents and developing them. Many parents feel like MYSA baby sits when their children are in MYSA.
Similarly, one parent stated the following:

Many of my children are in MYSA. One of my boys joined a renowned secondary school through football. I could not have afforded to take him to that school. MYSA has really helped because many of the children who are in MYSA have succeeded. Sometimes boys give up when they don’t see any results from football. I think that MYSA needs to establish some small business enterprise something that can provide them with some form of income.

This parent was clearly appreciative of the role that MYSA had played in her children’s lives. However, some of MYSA youths were critical about the notion of MYSA as a babysitter. Kingstone, one of MYSA youths felt that this association of MYSA with baby sitting was a setback because sometimes parents blamed the organization when their children engaged in unacceptable behavior. He noted that MYSA was not the solution to all societal problems and parents had a role to play. He noted that:

Even in families some people get lost, it’s the same thing with MYSA we try watch over all the children to makes sure that they become good people, good citizens. But there are those who get out of hand and do other things. Some parents forget that it is their responsibility to guide their children towards the right track. You hear people referring to MYSA’s children indicating that the children belong to MYSA. Families should help MYSA in keeping the children on track.

Another staff member shared similar thoughts by saying that:

There are also those (parents) whose children started misbehaving when they joined MYSA or they could also cheat that they come to MYSA but did other things instead. Others expect to see change but when they do not see the change
then wonder why it’s taking so long to do things. When you think about MYSA and development, you could compare the organization’s work and the government’s. The government does nothing, so people expect MYSA to do everything including supporting mothers and the elderly. They get disappointed that MYSA only works with youths.

The above discussion provides various perspectives of MYSA’s role in development that is characterized by collectivity and concern for members. However, as is with the case with many organizations, MYSA faced challenges and contradictions as it organized for social change. In the next section, I provide critiques that were provided by the MYSA youths and various stakeholders.

Challenges Facing MYSA and Critiques

Many of the critiques had to do with a misunderstanding of MYSA’s work. For example, one of the youth indicated that some parents did not understand how MYSA works by saying that:

Some people send their children to MYSA but they do not make it for the tournament selections—that anger affects their perception. Sometimes when people hear of aid (scholarships) they are just interested in getting them without working for them, or involving themselves in community service.

This participant indicated that some community members were not always supportive of MYSA’s activities because they were unfamiliar with the structure. She noted that some parents and children gave up at the initial stages or when their children did not make it for competitive matches.
Second, some community members were under the impression that MYSA was using children to raise money from donors. Consider my conversation with one of the youth on how community members viewed MYSA:

Masaku: I think that the community appreciates MYSA. But then you know political elements always emerge and critiques for the sake—for example that the white man is using us.

Priscilla: What do they mean when they refer to the white man?
Masaku: Bob. Outside MYSA- the federation feels threatened by MYSA. When MYSA comes up with any policy they fight it. Any contribution by Bob is fought against. Then you see like now MYSA has managed to have two men’s teams that play in the premier league. The teams compete with other teams, that is, 20 teams in the league. Sometimes even when the team has qualified on merit but there are people still try to fight the decisions—They allege that the white man has used his money. So you see when it reaches that political point- citizens are involved in politics, people think that MYSA exploits us and that the white man colonizes us.

Masaku responses are critical in understanding MYSA’s relationship with the broader society. MYSA was a donor funded organization and most of the funding sources were international based—countries that were associated with wealth. Additionally, the fact that Munro was originally from Canada created the perception that he was wealthy. MYSA staff indicated that MYSA was a transparent organization that was audited on an annual basis by a recognized audit firm. They also indicated that financial reports were shared with the executive on a regular basis.
MYSA’s unprecedented expansion to other areas (16 zones) also drew resistance from community members. One of the youths observed that:

People living in the slum feel sometimes that MYSA is still called Mathare while it had moved to other places. People from these areas are still treated equally. There is a general feeling that people from Mathare should be given special preference.

One former youth member shared similar thoughts by explaining why she had left MYSA:

We saw that the organization was not helping us. There were people who were being helped. They were helping people from other neighborhoods. These are the people who benefit from MYSA while when MYSA brings visitors. I see them (MYSA) bringing their visitors to see Mathare. The people who bring them here are not Mathare people. They use Mathare people’s living conditions to get money.

The above participant felt that the organization should focus more on the Mathare youth. MYSA’s policy however was to provided youths with opportunities to participate in sports.

MYSA youth also talked about the challenges of bureaucracy. Organizational decisions had to be approved at various levels. If a certain program made particular prepositions, these would have to be discussed at the executive and management levels before a final approval was made. One staff member expressed frustration with the long process by saying the following:
As I work in the field, I see the urgency of assisting children towards change—because if you don’t do it fast enough a child living in the ghetto could die within a year. When we sit at the management level we don’t see that rush because we see things at a different perspective. I usually push and I conflict with people over such things. I push because I want to see things happening. At the end of the day that is what matters—it is not how much money we saved but the number of lives saved, or how many children through the AIDS program heard about condoms and used them and avoided death that year… you know such things. How many children joined the music group and avoided using guns that year? Or how many went out to take photos (Shootback project). We need to be on the ground. It’s annoying when things move slowly. But these obstacles also make life exciting. Obstacles are good they make us strong.

Program delays were also affected by donor especially when there were delays in disbursements of funds. I attended a number of sports committee meetings whereby committee chairs complained the organization was not fulfilling their commitment on the agree time. Such commitments included the provision of balls and leveling of playing fields.

Decision making processes varied from program to program. For example one program leader indicated that he made all his decisions in consultation with his members. He said that:

I have to report my activity to the members. If members object any of my prepositions, I cannot make a decision because they run the program. I work as a
leader or someone who reports members’ decisions to the management. Members make decisions. I view myself as their voice.

However, some members felt that they were not involved in the decision making process. One member mentioned that:

Most of the times we do not get the chance to influence decisions because the people who get the opportunity are those in the executive and the council—those in the sports and community service committees.

These thoughts were shared by many of the participants. Although some felt that they were involved in the decision making process, they felt that this was limited to the program levels. As indicated in the play and work theme, the drama group for example felt that they had some control over the script writing and presentation process. However, most of the other decisions had to be approved at the top level.

Some participants also expressed dissatisfaction with some of MYSA’s projects, for example, community service and the Norway tournament. One participant for instance felt that the cleanup exercise’s impact was minimal in the community. He noted that:

Some children come just to be seen, so that they can sign the scholarship forms. Change in the area is not always evident because of the magnitude of the problem. I think an alternative would be for people to identify long lasting activities, for instance, working on particular projects, like building a bridge in a certain area. You know, many of our areas have mtaros (trenches), building a bridge would be a better idea, than when we use rakes during the regular clean-ups which is temporal because the trench will end up blocking the following day. I think that it
(process) needs to be coordinated such that when we unblock a trench we have the confidence that it will remain that way for the next five or six months. It beats the purpose if we come with rakes and when we come back the following day the situation is the same, or when we collect papers in the area but when you come back after some time the papers have scattered all over again. I tend to think MYSA has the potential, it has capacity to do the community service but they (organization) needs to be coordinated well. I think the strategies need to be diversified.

The Norway Cup was also a controversial issue. There are members who felt that attending the Norway cup contributed to the organization’s identity as a sports organization. Those who supported the Norway cup indicated that traveling to Norway might be the only benefit a person received from MYSA. One participant indicated that “When a child from the slum gets a passport and goes to the airport for international travel, that’s a big deal. That’s everybody’s dream.” As I mentioned in the play and work theme, some children came back from Norway with more confidence and did better in school because of the exposure provided by the trip. However, others felt that the Norway Cup was too expensive. One member for example stated the following:

I’m not against the Norway cup, I went for the Norway cup. However, I think that the organization spends eight million shillings in three weeks, while we spend four million a whole year for education, why can’t we reverse this? Spend four million or a million in education. When a child travels for Norway cup they experience excitement for three weeks, but what happens after that?
Although members had divergent views, the trip to Norway continued to be a significant annual event.

In summary, the organizational development highlights the transitions that MYSA has undergone in the process of becoming a beacon of hope to the community. The themes also underscore some of the challenges that the organization has encountered such as tensions between: urgency of the issues at hand, and bureaucratic red tape, dependency and independence, spending money on Norway cup and paying for more critical issues such as school fees. This theme highlights the social change process, that it often unpredictable, and is often marked with contradictions and tensions (see Harter, 2004; Papa, Singhal & Papa, 2006). These scholars argue that such struggles could lead to positive outcomes. MYSA’s case, in particular, reveals urgent issues that need to be addressed and raises questions concerning pertinent social issues. My research indicated that, through such identifications, the organization had begun taking steps to address some of the issues. For example, the issue of Norway cup was one that was discussed a number of times in committee meetings. A senior staff member indicated that a MYSA had made a preposition to reduce the numbers of teams attending the Norway cup so that more money could be channeled to school fees but the majority of members voted for the tournament. Additionally, MYSA had begun taking the necessary steps towards sustainability. Two senior coaches who had been trained at an accredited institution in the Netherlands (KNVB) had started offering commercial courses at the sports academy. In the next section, I embark on a discussion of the themes by drawing from my theoretical frameworks.
Chapter Five

Discussion

Relationships between Postcolonial Feminist Standpoints and Youth

My interest in MYSA was generated by a desire to highlight MYSA’s youth contributions to the development agenda and to reveal how they overcome stereotypes associated with slums. MYSA presented a unique case because it was run by the youth. Many of MYSA’s senior staff members and volunteers had grown up in the organization. Their stories revealed how MYSA had impacted their lives and their identities as a whole. MYSA also illustrated how organizational operations are affected by the social, political and economic landscapes in which they operate. More importantly, I was interested identifying various contributions that MYSA could make to development and communication scholars. According to the literature review, youth have previously been researched within discourses that are primarily centered on the discourse of the “storm and stress” model—a model that presents the youth as rebellious, at risk, passive, and dependent. Furthermore, previous work on youth focused on youth organizations that were adult driven. When situated within this backdrop, MYSA can be viewed as an alternative organization because it defines itself as an organization that not only works for but one that is run by the youth. In so doing, MYSA youths have transformed their social spaces and challenged the societal beliefs that often limit rather than empower them.

My theoretical standpoints were crucial in carrying out my research goals. Postcolonial feminist standpoints were appropriate because these theoretical underpinnings are driven by the desire to privilege marginalized voices. In my analysis of
MYSA, the theory played a number of functions. First, feminist postcolonial theory allowed me to capture various stories that challenged stereotypes that are associated with people living in Mathare slums as a whole. MYSA in particular provided a counter story that revealed young people’s agency in resisting dominant society perceptions. Second, the use of postcolonial feminism enabled me to capture the situatedness of stories as young people talked about various constraints they were faced with in their own lives which took place at the family, organization and national levels. The youth reconfigured widely held beliefs about themselves as a people by revealing their daily struggles with societal perceptions and the structures in place. Furthermore, postcolonial feminist approach was useful in advancing the fact that although youths in different contexts might share similar experiences based on age, a focus on MYSA’s contextual aspects reduced homogenizing their experiences. Finally, postcolonial feminist standpoints allowed me to pay attention to issues of representation and voice, and as a result of this sensitivity I was able to capture differences of opinions and multiple perspectives.

Narratives and Youth

In my research, narratives provided a vehicle for youths to express their understanding and to be reflexive of how different circumstances shaped their identities and agency. As a researcher, narrative theory enabled me to play the role of co-constructing these experiences as I interacted with the youth in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing their lived experiences. Narrative theory helped me ask the following questions, whose voices are privileged in MYSA discourse? Whose voices are marginalized? How do the political, social and economic conditions impact on youths’ agency and their outlook on life? Narrative theory provided responses to these
questions by privileging not only youths’ utterances but also their social agency. The utterances provided the youth with the opportunity to define their own experience as relevant and worth listening to. In short, narratives provided an empowering space for youths as they used their own vocabulary to define who they were, their place in the world, and their hope for the future. As a whole, the emergent voices provided a perspective that revealed critical thinking and agency—a perspective that not only looks for answers on what led to the current state of affairs, but one that works towards resolving the situation. Such a perspective revealed and required tremendous courage and optimism for the future.

The use of the above theoretical approaches as conceptual narratives was appropriate because they often overlapped. Both theoretical approaches enabled me to reveal a middle ground between extremes. One of those extremes portrays youths in general, and Mathare youths in particular, as dangerous; the contrasting view presents youths as active agents who have the ability and will to influence their future. Moreover, both theories make contributions to research because they challenge us to think from the margins. More specifically, MYSA makes contributions to the ways in which we view organizing as it shifts our notions of public and private, rational and emotional, and hierarchical and participation—notions that often advance and constrain organizations.

In the next sections, I provide further explanations of how identity construction and resistance of dominant narratives occurs in MYSA. I use my research questions as foundations for synthesizing the information gathered in the field as I conclude this research.
Theoretical Implications

Research Question One

The first question was framed in the following manner: How do stakeholders narrate their experiences with MYSA? This question’s purpose was to provide an opportunity for youth to talk about their perceptions of their involvement in the organization from their own standpoints. A number of concepts drawn from the themes addressed this research question they including: MYSA is like a family; MYSA as spring board; MYSA’s role in safeguarding lives and turning points.

Stakeholders’ narrations of their experience in MYSA were often explicitly tied to the external environment. Responses that highlighted material circumstances were common as the youth were united by their common struggle against material deprivation. As such, development initiatives like environmental clean-ups and HIV/AIDS awareness were viewed as bridges between sports and material constraints. Youths’ views were supported by other stakeholders such as local government officials, parents and teachers who associated MYSA youths with dexterity in football as well as participation in community service activities.

MYSA stood out as innovation because of its ability to reconstruct sports from a purely entertainment and physical development construct to a platform that addressed pertinent societal issues (see Singhal & Rogers, 1999, 2003). The organization was able to recreate itself in ways that enabled it to address multiple issues through different programs. Indeed, MYSA’s strength rests in the ability of sports to mobilize. As previously mentioned, most of the organization’s activities were well attended. Many youths highlighted the importance of sports but were also quick to point out that the
sports approach was only one way of solving their problems. In the next section, I discuss how MYSA used general principles of organizing for sports to create an alternative organization that contributes to the epistemological understanding of organizations.

MYSA’s structure and use of sports promoted the cooperative ethic of organizing. The organization (as many sports institutions) emphasized the fact that winning a game was based on the quality of teams that worked towards achieving common goals. However, MYSA was different from many competitive sports organization because its team based approach translated to other areas of work that had a social focus. The team based approach was especially relevant in this particular context because many stakeholders acknowledged that the enormity of the social problems was too great for individuals to change in their own capacity. As such, cooperation was emphasized through the realization that development can only occur through concerted efforts by all stakeholders. Many scholars have pointed out that in order for development to occur, organizational structural change is necessary. Nair and White (1993) for example noted that organization change is important because it provides alternative organizational structures that work to disrupt power within establishment. Such change leads to improved or different behaviors and norms that are redirected towards new goals. By encouraging cooperation, MYSA collapsed its boundary controls that often limit and bifurcate organizations with the community and invited collaboration with various stakeholders.

Organizational discourse contributed to the idea that cooperation was necessary, and that change was a gradual process. Two of MYSA’s mottos illustrated this aspect. The first one—*haba na haba hujaza kibaba* (step by step we reach the goal)—
emphasized that even the smallest step counted. A second common motto that was
commonly recounted by youth was “You do something, MYSA does something for you.”
This motto encouraged the youth to be proactive and enhanced the belief that change
would only take place when or if they took the initiative. This spoke of the youths’ sense
of agency. Moreover, the second motto emphasized the fact that for any change to occur,
each individual had to play their part in the team. The notion of working together was
evident in youths’ responses because as they talked about their community service work
they indicated that they were giving back to the community. Some noted that as a result
of their initiative, some community members offered to join them and would participate
in the clean-ups even when youths did not show up.

MYSA’s emphasis on cooperation was also evident in the interpersonal
relationships that emerged within the organization. Youth often referred to the
organization as a family which could be viewed as a form of symbolic construction that
operated at various levels. Youths spoke of empowering relationships that emerged
through their involvement at the organization. Some youths attributed their success in the
organization to mentoring processes with older members who had nurtured them into
becoming successful players and young adults. This was significant because a number of
MYSA youths had grown up in female headed households which meant that having
mentors in MYSA gave them male figures to look up to. A number of young people also
referred to the organization’s ability to provide for their needs especially through the
scholarships they received from the organization and employment. Finally, many youths
talked about interpersonal conflicts that had to do with divergent opinions but they also
acknowledged just like in families this was a normal aspect of life.
The above relationships can be viewed as making a scholarly contribution because they deconstruct the dichotomy between the private and public spheres in organizations. MYSA provides an exemplary case as the organization was able to achieve its main objective that was to succeed as a sporting organization, as well as to address personal issues that could potentially affect members’ effectiveness in sports. In MYSA’s context, the public could be viewed as youths’ engagement in sports and other programs. The personal or the private was evident when the youths talked about having a support group in organization. A number of youth revealed that their peers in the organization had often assisted them in dealing with turbulences in their lives for example, illness or deaths in the family.

Youth narratives also associated the organization with a springboard metaphor. MYSA provided youths with skills that enabled them to become more independent, which is a key component of the empowerment process. The skills included practical as well as critical thinking skills. As indicated earlier, the majority of youth often referred to the temporary nature of their stay at MYSA. The organization was seen as an entry point to other opportunities. Leadership was considered as an important aspect of equipping youth. The organization used its Sports Academy to run workshops on leadership. MYSA combined the information provided in the workshops with practical aspects. Youths were charged with the responsibility of establishing and running their own sports teams. The executive committee and the various councils provided opportunities for youths to take charge of larger constituents and to become involved in complex decision making. Furthermore, MYSA evinced a high regard for accountability. Participants often mentioned the fact that there were no secrets in MYSA. Full time staff members, such as
the director, program managers, and financial manager, were often summoned by the executive committee to explain various decisions or developments that took place in the organization. While MYSA’s was structured in a bureaucratic manner evidenced by the fact that ultimate decisions were made by the board of directors and management, a number of youths felt that they had the power to influence decisions at the program levels. A number of program managers also indicated that they felt that their role as staff members was to represent the views of their committee members. In some cases, youths expressed dissatisfaction when their suggestions were not acted upon or if the decision making process was too slow. This was evident in a number of meetings that I attended. The program managers were quick to provide explanations and although the issues were not always resolved, dialogue was crucial as it enhanced understanding.

The use of dialogue was also evident in program operations. In fact, dialogue was encouraged. The drama team and shootback projects were powerful illustrations of empowering dialogic encounters. Both programs equipped the youth with cameras and the ability to create scripts, respectively, and gave them freedom to use these tools as a means to capture their world realities. As a result, these two forums cultivated ample ground for dialogue. The photographs, for instance, often led to discussions of the realities presented. In drama, the plays often presented conflicts that could be resolved in more than one way. Such conflicts provided playwrights and community members a space to engage with the scripts materials which enhanced learning. This dialogic spaces also facilitated integrated thinking because in many cases a number of people were involved in coming up with solutions to problems that affected individual MYSA members and the community as a whole.
Lastly, dialogue was a key characteristic in MYSA’s movement games. These particular games were important because they targeted younger youths (9-13 years). In reaching out to this group movement games enhanced the learning process for this group. Certain ideas or concepts, for example, HIV/AIDS that are sometimes too abstract for children to understand were associated with constructs that emerged in the game. This made learning interesting and facilitated significant contributions from children.

Closely related to the perception of MYSA as an entry point was the fact that youths accorded the organization with the role of safeguarding their lives. Many individuals were reflexive about MYSA’s role in their lives. This was particularly evident when youths speculated about how their life prospects might have been different. Some youth indicated that MYSA played a safeguarding function because the organization had changed their life trajectories. On more that one occasion, youths compared themselves to friends who were not involved in MYSA by stating that some of them had become criminals, single mothers or had been killed as a result of the life choices that they had made. Others viewed MYSA as providing turning points for their lives. These youths in particular acknowledged that they were involved in crimes prior to joining the organization. The youths stated that their involvement in MYSA provided them with an opportunity to share such experiences with children who were undergoing the same issues. One youth, for instance, mentioned that he often shared his previous experiences with the children who were served by the jailkids program.

Research Question Two

The second question was divided into three parts. I begin by discussing the first part that was framed as: What counter-narratives, if any, does MYSA offer its
stakeholders? MYSA provided its members with new vocabulary. Metaphors such as *MYSA as an icon, MYSA as a brand name*, revealed both the organization’s popularity as well as its uniqueness. By using such language, youths contested homogenous perspectives that associated the slums with the societal vices. MYSA’s sports teams and their achievements were regularly highlighted in local newspapers. Such positive publicity was significant as it influenced societal perspectives. More importantly, such positive public images affected youths’ identity. However, many youths indicated the fact that they were from Mathare slums environs often infiltrated the positive image produced by MYSA. Such competing discourses were constraining as indicated in my discussion on identity. Many youths, for example, felt that they could not access job opportunities because of negative perceptions. The youths also talked about the “fact” that they never had a chance of ever going to college. In many ways youths’ identity can be viewed as situated at the intersection of meta-narratives and ontological accounts. That is, the widely held and accepted beliefs that sometimes held certain “truths” such as the nature of crimes emanating from Mathare, and their personal accounts that revealed that they were successfully resisting the negative stereotypes.

Nevertheless, MYSA provided a number of counter-narratives for its stakeholders. Women narrations about MYSA provided an illustration of a counter-narrative. Many women shared their stories by revealing difficulties that they had faced when they joined organizations. The difficulties had to do with cultural beliefs and life circumstances that relegated them to private spheres. Their stories also provided triumphant accounts of how their resilience in pursuing sports had contributed to changing perceptions. MYSA women’s stories revealed progress as well as challenges.
Although MYSA was enhancing women’s participation in sports, participants stories indicated that prescribed roles of women and men in society were larger than the organization. The problems had to do with deeply embedded patriarchal beliefs that had been promoted through culture and socialization. However, by providing opportunities for girls to excel in football, MYSA had jumpstarted the process of challenging hegemonic structures in the sports arena.

MYSA also provided a counter-narrative to the way sports organizations are run in the country. As highlighted in the previous chapter, Kenya’s national football body often limited the youth. Many youths talked about the controversial football association (KFF) that was tainted with mismanagement and leadership wrangles. However, the youth continued to excel and MYSA’s founder has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of youths at the national level and challenging KFF to become more accountable. MYSA and a number of other major football clubs in Kenya had established an alternative sports body known as the Kenya Premier League (KPL) that was characterized by accountability and transparency. This league also included the focus on social issues such as HIV/AIDS awareness. At the local level, MYSA worked with the local government officials especially through the jailkids program which enhanced their visibility. I talked to two civil servants who worked with the jailkids project and they indicated that MYSA’s contribution helped speed up the process of child repatriation.

Lastly, as discussed on the identity theme, MYSA used sports to lobby for support from legislators on different issues such as child labor. MYSA’s youths described these activities with pride as they felt that they were accomplishing their civic duties. Through such acts MYSA’s youths can be seen to be influencing policy in their own small ways.
Finally, many youths highlighted their travels abroad as having a major impact on their lives. As one of the youths indicated traveling to a different country was a “big deal” in the slums. Such trips accorded them respect. Most importantly, as one of MYSA staff member shared, when MYSA youths competed against and won matches with youths from countries that were considered as more developed, such victory enhanced their self esteem. International matches and workshops expanded youths’ horizons in life.

Research Question 2a. The second part of my research question was: How, if at all, do MYSA’s counter-narratives work to disrupt hegemonic and colonial narratives? In her book titled *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from women’s lives*, Sandra Harding (1991), a renown philosopher advanced the claim that Western science was useful to some extent, but that it also played the simultaneous role of marginalizing some groups of people such as women and the poor. Harding argued that scientific work should be constructed from the perspectives of the marginalized for effectiveness. MYSA provides some ways that could make contributions to this approach of thinking from the margins. By presenting sports as a pedagogical tool, or a place where individuals acquire skills and knowledge, MYSA presents an additional way of thinking. MYSA’s case suggests that the scholarly world could benefit from ways of learning that emerge from the grassroots. MYSA also supports the proposition that effective learning is facilitated through a combination of play and work activities (see Dewey, 1938). As the theme on play verses work indicated football, movement games, art and narrations were effective ways of generating knowledge.

MYSA in many ways also creates shifts from using top-bottom approaches that have characterized development discourse in the past. This research illustrated these
shifts in a number of cases. First, MYSA’s model is people centered. The organization has evolved in ways that have enabled it to serve its constituents in more comprehensive ways in addition to facilitating sports. MYSA adopts an ecological perspective to development, one that encompasses the holistic well being of individuals. This is evidenced by the adoption of a multifaceted approach to society issues illustrated by a focus on health, education, and community building. Additionally, MYSA’s was started through a mutual agreement between youths and the organizational founder that was based on a firm belief that if everyone did their part, then change was likely to emerge. Many youths conceptualized development as moving beyond individual to the community as a whole, and to the consideration of future generations.

Of particular significance to communication scholars are the strategies used by the organization. The use of participatory methods such as drama, music, and narratives were effective because these strategies are affordable and sustainable. Such strategies also facilitate ongoing dialogue. The strategies mirror current situations and lived experiences which can be viewed as a call for solution. MYSA’s communication strategies seek to empower the youths and the community as a whole to look for solutions within the community as opposed to relying on local or international organizations which are perceived in many cases as bearing expertise in development issues. By adopting this approach the highly unequal dependency relationships that characterize grassroots and development agencies are reduced. MYSA trains youth to become more independent. Instead of focusing on monetary rewards, MYSA privileges skills and knowledge. Although MYSA provides scholarships for school, funds are sent directly to schools. In
so doing, MYSA reconstructs the perception of poor people as beneficiaries of development to agents of development.

Research Question 2b. The final part of the second research question inquired the following: Whose interests are served (and whose are marginalized) in MYSA’s counter-narratives? As a whole, MYSA serves the interests of the youth. As mentioned, previously MYSA youths felt that they were involved in the decision making process at the program level. However, some felt limited by the organization’s hierarchy. I talked to one of MYSA’s senior staff member who explained that structure was appropriate in MYSA’s case for practical reasons. MYSA has a large membership which makes it impossible to involve all members. MYSA staff and volunteers also talked about the decision making process and MYSA activities being limited by donor funding. In some cases such funding took long processes which affected program process. Although the funding has enabled the organization to make significant strides, this remains a hurdle. Participants indicated that donors could assist by channeling funds towards more sustainable projects.

The masculine voice is still privileged in MYSA. Women’s teams were expected to perform just as well as men although it was clear that women faced more constraints than men. As indicated on the gender theme, women still face various limitations that are similar to glass ceilings. Patriarchal voices emerged when both men and women who presented women as weak or soft. Nevertheless, it was encouraging to hear young men who suggested that times had changed and that girls required equal opportunities as men.

MYSA’s case also highlighted some colonial tendencies highlighted the fact that MYSA operated within a context that was not conducive for youths to excel in sports. A
number of youths pointed out to the corruption charges against KFF and the loss of FIFA’s trust in the national body, which had caused Kenya to be expelled from participating in the international bodies until the conflicts within the organization had been resolved. Youths provided first hand accounts of how KFF had failed to pay them when they represented the country in international tournaments. Moreover, women participants suggested that women’s soccer was not a top priority in the national body. Such responses revealed the misuse of power by a few at the expense of stakeholders. It also set a negative precedent for young aspiring professional players and leaders. Closely related to the above discussion was the fact that MYSA’s founder had been active in pressuring KFF to become more accountable. Both KFF and the Kenyan government had turned the issue into a race issue. One of MYSA’s youth indicated that some members of the community felt that Bob Munro used his status as a white male to take advantage of the organization, a claim that was advanced by KFF and the Kenyan sports minister. My analysis of various documents on MYSA suggested that Munro had been a strong advocate for the advancement of youths. This was evident in MYSA’s growth and success. MYSA youths considered him a role model, mentor and development agent. Others also pointed to the fact that he had passed on leadership to MYSA youths. Indeed all the field meetings I attended were facilitated and run by MYSA volunteers and staff members. Lastly, MYSA youths argued that Munro had initiated a project in an area where the Kenyan government had showed little interest in promoting better quality of life. However, the fact that Munro was from a different country continued to be a controversial aspect.
Finally, public narratives that associated MYSA with stereotypes also tended to limit youth agency. As I mentioned in chapter one, the Kenyan government refers to Mathare as informal settlements. As a result of this labeling, Mathare’s inhabitants and infrastructure are not a priority as is evidenced by the deplorable living conditions. When this protracted definition of people living in MYSA is combined with the societal perceptions of MYSA as a crime zone, both the society and government view Mathare as a hopeless situation. However, by distinguishing between various narratives and recognizing the political nature that metanarratives and public narratives play, this research uncovers some of the silences by presenting a holistic picture that situates MYSA within societal perceptions, deprivation and by revealing counter narratives that emerge from MYSA.

Practical Implications

MYSA represents an organization that has been successful in enhancing cooperation and opportunities for members as they participate in grassroots organization. In this section, I present four recommendations that could assist MYSA in becoming more effective. MYSA bears many qualities of solidarity which Mohanty (2003) defined in terms of mutuality, accountability and recognition of common interests. As the above discussion has revealed, dialogue is an inherent aspect in the organization’s operations. However, as Mohanty noted solidarity does not assume commonality of experience which is applicable to MYSA’s case. Youths talked about differences that emerged within the organization at different levels. For example, some youth indicated that they felt as if MYSA was run by youths from two different generations. The older youth were not willing to change. Second, youths who were more involved in other areas such as
drama, HIV/AIDS awareness indicated that such programs did not receive sufficient
support when compared to sports. Finally, as my theme on gender indicated both men and
women were considered equal. These are areas that MYSA could focus on addressing
through continued dialogue and consultative meetings.

The second recommendation is that adults in the community need to be involved
in MYSA activities. As one of the participants indicated, sometimes parents think of
MYSA as a baby sitter, which led to a laxity in parents playing their guardian roles.
MYSA youths mentioned that the organization invited parents of children selected for the
Norway Cup in order to brief them on the details of the journey. A similar approach
could be used to involve parents in other programs, for example, by inviting them for
annual events so that they could become more familiar with MYSA’s goals.

It was also evident during my research that a number of Nairobi residents who I
interacted with were not familiar with MYSA’s other activities besides sports or beyond
the Mathare United team. My recommendation would be that MYSA engaged in more
publicity. Additionally, MYSA youths often referred to former members who were
successful. One of the ways in which the organization might enhance continuity is by
inviting alumni to the organization whenever possible so that they could motivate
younger members.

My final recommendation addresses gender issues. MYSA stands out as an
organization that is working towards diminishing the gender divide as discussed in the
theme on gender. However, numbers are used as indicators of gender advancement. As
the findings indicated women face both material and national constraints. Molyneux
(1985) differentiation of needs faced by women is appropriate because it illustrates the
fact that women often focus on practical needs such as taking care of their families as opposed to strategic needs which might influence policies. In MYSA’s case, strategic needs can be equated to participating in sports and influencing societal perceptions of women’s involvement in football. Many women might opt to fulfill practical needs. My recommendation would that MYSA focused on addressing these structural issues. The organization indicated that one of the ways it had addressed this issue was by establishing the professional female team. Although this was a move forward, many female youths continued to be faced with various constraints as revealed on the gender theme section.

Additionally, female participants indicated that they had attended workshops that focused on gender equality. The youth stated that the information provided had transformed their ways of thinking and increased their confidence. A further recommendation would be to involve MYSA male members in such forums. As feminist postcolonial scholars posit, changes in gender disparities are likely to emerge when both men and women works towards dismantling patriarchy and hegemonic structures.

Finally, the girls’ forum was also an appropriate group for women empowerment. However, one of the issues that emerged was that there were divisions between MYSA’s women staff and volunteers. As a researcher, I was well positioned to listen to both groups. One aspect that emerged was the commonality in experiences. Both groups faced the same struggles and continued to face similar limitations albeit at different levels. My recommendation would be to create spaces where these experiences can be shared as a basis for beginning dialogue. Lastly, as one MYSA member suggested a formal mentoring program could also be established between women leaders and volunteers as that might strengthen the relationships between women.
Limitations and Directions for Future Research

My study focused on the youth. As a result I was not able to talk to some stakeholders such as donors, and MYSA’s founder Bob Munro. My research goal was to find out how youth organize themselves for change and I wanted to listen to youths’ perspectives about their interaction with the organization and various stakeholders. Further research could focus on other stakeholders as this could provide different perspectives. For example, interviews with donors might provide further knowledge on funding issues, and a better sense of sustainability issues.

Second, while this research has focused on the youths’ perspectives on how people living outside Mathare –viewed them, one of the limitation is that I was not able to formally interview the outsiders. Future research could focus on the issue of “othering” by listening to narratives from non Mathare- residents. The combination of these voices, that is from the periphery so to speak, and those from the margins could possibly highlight differences and similarities which could lay the groundwork for dialogue. Moreover, these multiple voices could lead to a more heightened awareness and a more holistic picture of Mathare that shifts from the stereotypical notions held by the society. Such voices, for example, could also reveal how members of the public view poverty issues in Mathare.

Second, as the findings indicate, MYSA is now viewed as an icon of the society. The organization has a record of many successes and a well established structure. In contrast, throughout my research I was exposed to a number of smaller youth organizations in the area that were not as advanced as MYSA. Future research could
analyze small scale organizations that exist in the area with a goal of making connections of how these organizations could learn from MYSA and vice versa.

Third, MYSA makes a theoretical contribution to the discussion on play and work that was initiated by John Dewey. Future research could advance this discussion by focusing on how daily conversations reconstruct soccer from being just a game to other issues in life. In other words, such research could focus on examining how the playfulness of sports intersects with life issues. One such area of exploration might be to use Kenneth’s Burke comic frame as a strategy for resistance, change and activism. Such a focus could situate MYSA within a number of organizations that use creativity for social good. An example of such an organization is Code Pink that is involved in creative campaigns against war and fear based politics in the US.

Lastly, my duration on the field was also limited. Besides my preliminary one day visit I had never been to MYSA. One of the things that might have strengthened my research and future research might have been to carry out an ethnographic study which would have meant living in the area. This might have given me a better sense of the lived experiences.

Personal Reflections

One of the things that I am most proud of about my research was the fact that I used the narrative approach. The approach provided participants with a space to take ownership in the writing of stories provided in this dissertation. The participants highlighted what mattered to them which became the substance of my research. Narrative approaches allowed me to present the youths’ voices with limited “interference” from my perspective as a researcher. In this section, I write about my own experiences and how
my life was impacted as a result of the field study. I went into the field with my own notions of what I was going to experience. In many ways I felt that prepared me for the situation. My academic knowledge on development had presented me with multiple scenarios. I had been exposed to development literature from Asia and Latin America. I had participated in long discussions and varying perspectives on social change in my four years of graduate school. Yet, none of these experiences prepared me for MYSA.

MYSA not only enriched my academic experience but it also moved me beyond my comfort zones to a world that is full of uncertainties and difficulties. Through my interactions in MYSA I experienced what it means to become truly human, not in the Freirian sense, but the realization of my vulnerability as a human being or in the most humbling sense. MYSA narratives both challenged and invited me to become an actor in their story. This invitation can be described in two ways, emotional participation and the practical implications of my interactions with participants.

I encountered a complex combination of emotions. Participants’ experiences fluctuated between the revelations of painful emotions as well as joyful accounts. Sometimes these emotions occurred concurrently. The feelings of joy included winning a game, and descriptions of feelings that came with meeting great world players like Pele and Michael Johnson. Positive emotions were also revealed when a male staff member shed tears when he described seeing one of the children that he had mentored address an international forum with unmatched confidence (men rarely shed tears in this context). Another example of the joyous moments was when a volunteer in the jailkids described the fulfillment that with repatriating a child back to their family, and the appreciation and relief that was expressed by parents. Lastly, I witnessed and felt joy when one of
MYSA’s members talked about the fact that he has enrolled to college with great pride—things that most people take for granted.

These represent just a few of the many of positive emotions that emerged during my interviews. I loved listening to such stories, after all, one of my goals was to reveal how the youths had succeeded in constrained environments. The stories also revealed struggles and pains that emerged from experiences. Such pains included emotions of losing a loved one to HIV/AIDS, the pains of hearing about experiences with abortion. Other pains included having a sick family member and not having money to take them to the hospital, or making it to the hospital yet lacking money to purchase prescriptions.

While many of the joys and pains emerged from my formal interviews, many were shared over lunch, or in my encounters with people I had made friends with in the streets. For example, I was walking to the office one day when I met one of MYSA’s members and he explained that he had just come from the hospital because he was trying to resolve a situation where one of his deceased friends was stuck in a funeral home because of unpaid medical bills. In many situations I struggled with feelings of hopelessness. As a student, money was tight. In some cases I shared these experiences with some of my privileged friends who were so moved by the stories that they made contributions to some of these cases. However, in most cases, I struggled to come up with a few words of comfort which often came out as a mumble. Sometimes I listened in silence. All in all I hope these expressions made some “slight” difference in my newly found friends’ lives.

I use the word slight because Mathare exposed me to deprivation in the truest sense. My home is located about 20 miles from MYSA which was quite some distance from MYSA. However, on many occasions MYSA’s situation would be on my thoughts
even when I was physically absent. MYSA’s smells which I found particularly disturbing would linger with me late into the night, yet this was a reality for thousands of people and the least of their concerns. MYSA youth were involved with more concrete issues. The youth were dedicated to changing issues. Such issues were revealed by one of my participants who said that the more time MYSA spent in the field recruiting or sharing messages on HIV/AIDS meant that less lives were lost to crime and to AIDS deaths. I attended meetings and activities both on weekdays and weekends and each of these meetings, many of the staff members and volunteers were in attendance. I often left just before five in the evening and the majority of the staff members were still in their offices or conducting field activities. MYSA exposed me to optimistic narratives, which I realized require hard work. Such work is mostly altruistic because in some cases the results are not readily evident.

As I worked in the field I often thought about my personal contributions. As a scholar, this research adds to the communication and development field by providing a holistic picture of how sports as an interpersonal space can mobilize resources for social change. Existing information on sports and social change focuses mainly on project description. My research highlights how the contexts limits or enables the effectiveness of sports and youth organizations as a whole. I also realized that MYSA youth appreciated the fact that someone was interested in their stories. Some participants actually expressed the fact that they wanted these stories told. By chronicling the voices my research contributes to the public narratives by providing a viewpoint that opposes widely held beliefs about Mathare and the people living in the area. As I mentioned earlier, some of my friends who were non-MYSA residents had also become actors in the
story by contributing in their own ways. My hope is that this work will find its way to other publics therefore contributing to a change in the stereotypes. If such change occurs I will feel that I have given back to the many youth who gave me their precious time and took it upon themselves to teach and show me their world.
References


Carragee (Eds.), *Communication and social activism*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.


Philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial, and feminist world (pp. 80-100).

Bloomington, IN: Hypatia Books.


Appendix A: MYSA Organizational Structure

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

Project Title: Scoring for Social Change: The Case of Mathare Youth Sports Association in Kenya (MYSA)

Researcher(s): Priscilla Wamucii

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Claudia Hale

Department: School of Communication Studies

Rebecca G. Cala 5/30/06
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

Approval Date
Expiration Date 5/29/07

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation. Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
Appendix C: Research Log

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Appendix D

Interview Protocol: Young Women

Interviewee (pseudonym): __________________________  Date: ____________

Place: __________________________  Time of interview: _____

Questions

If the interviewee took photos, ask the participant to talk about the photos and why she took them, what they reveal about MYSA, the lived experiences in Mathare and her personal life.

Assume for a moment that you are speaking with someone who knows nothing about MYSA and the activities that you participate in. How would you describe your involvement with the organization to him or her?

Tell me your story of how and why you joined MYSA

To what extent are you involved in MYSA’s activities?

Tell me about your life aspirations.

Do you see MYSA as helping you to reach them?
Can you think of ways that MYSA would prevent you from achieving your personal aspirations?

Are your aspirations similar to the ones you had before joining MYSA?

How do you feel when you are playing soccer, or doing community service in the community (energized, embarrassed, etc)?

What does your family think about your involvement in MYSA?

When you think about your other roles in life and your relationships, how does your work in MYSA fit into these?

Does your involvement in MYSA conflict with other roles and responsibilities?

Do other people in your life support your work with MYSA?

How do you think community members perceive MYSA’s youth?
Most organizations that people work for are guided by key values and missions. In your own words, how would you describe the mission of MYSA? How would you describe the values of MYSA?

What does the word “development” mean to you?

Can you think of times or situations when members of MYSA talk about values guiding the organization?

Do you hold any leadership position (e.g. coach, referee etc.) in MYSA?

Are you asked to participate in making decisions at MYSA meetings?

Are there any problems that are faced by women that are not experienced by men in MYSA?

Do you face any problems as a woman personally?

Are there some important issues about MYSA that I have not talked with you about that you think are important for me to know?

Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix E

Interview Protocol: Young Men

Interviewee (pseudonym): __________________________ Date: ___________

Place: __________________________ Time of interview: _____

Questions

If the interviewee took photos, ask the participant to talk about the photos and why he took them, what they reveal about MYSA, the lived experiences in Mathare and his personal life.

Assume for a moment that you are speaking with someone who knows nothing about MYSA and the activities that you participate in. How would you describe your involvement with the organization to him or her?

Tell me your story of how and why you joined MYSA

To what extent are you involved in MYSA’s activities?

Tell me about your life aspirations.

Do you see MYSA as helping you to reach them?
Can you think of ways that MYSA would prevent you from achieving your personal aspirations?

Are your aspirations similar to the ones you had before joining MYSA?

How do you feel when you are playing soccer, or doing community service in the community (energized, embarrassed, etc)?

What does your family think about your involvement in MYSA?

When you think about your other roles in life and your relationships, how does your work in MYSA fit into these?

Does your involvement in MYSA conflict with other roles and responsibilities?

Do other people in your life support your work with MYSA?

What does the word “development” mean to you?

How do you think community members perceive MYSA’s youth?
Most organizations that people work for are guided by key values and missions, in your own words, how would you describe the mission of MYSA? How would you describe the values of MYSA?

Can you think of times or situations when members of MYSA talk about values guiding the organization?

Do you hold any leadership position (e.g. coach, referee etc.) in MYSA?

Are you asked to participate in making decisions at MYSA meetings?

What, in your view, are some of the challenges you face as a member in MYSA?

What are your perceptions about women’s participation in MYSA?

What, in your view, are the challenges faced by women in MYSA?

Do you face similar challenges?

Should women be allowed to take leadership positions?
Are there some important issues about MYSA that I have not talked to you about that you think are important for me to know?

Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix F

Interview Protocol: Staff Members

Interviewee (pseudonym): __________________________  Date: _____________

Place: __________________________  Time of interview: _____

Questions

Tell me your story and how and why you started working at MYSA.

Tell me about your life aspirations.

Do you view MYSA as a stepping stone to another job?

What contact, if any at all, do you have with local government officials?

How do you think community members perceive MYSA?

What do you think is the role of MYSA in youth empowerment?
Most organizations that people work for are guided by key values and missions, in your own words, how would you describe the mission of MYSA? How would you describe the values of MYSA?

Can you think of times or situations when members of MYSA talk about values guiding the organization?

To what extent do you participate in the daily activities in MYSA?

Are staff members asked to participate in the daily running of MYSA?

What are some of the challenges that you face in your job on a daily basis?

What have been some of the most fulfilling moments in your job? What are some of the good things about working for MYSA?

Are there some important issues about MYSA that I have not talked to you about that you think are important for me to know?

Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix G

Interview Protocol: Outside Stakeholders (parents and local community leaders)

Interviewee (pseudonym): ______________________ Date: ____________

Place: ______________________ Time of interview: ______

Questions

Tell me what you know about MYSA

How do you perceive MYSA? What do you think of the organization?

How do you think the community as a whole perceives MYSA?

Do you interact with MYSA in any capacity?

If you could change one thing about MYSA’s interaction with you what would it be?

Most organizations that people work for are guided by key values and missions, in your own words, how would you describe the mission of MYSA? How would you describe the values of MYSA?

Can you think of times or situations when members of MYSA talk about values guiding the organization?
Have you had any problems with young people involved in MYSA?

Are there some important issues about MYSA that I have not talked to you about that you think are important for me to know?

Do you have any questions for me?