

# **Wellness Pastoral Care and Women with New Babies**

By

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**DECLARATION:**

I declare that "Wellness Pastoral Care and Women with New Babies" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Candida S. Millar

\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2003



## **AN OFFERING OF THANKS**

I am unable to fathom life without this research and those who participated in it. It is thus a good thing that these pages have changed me and become a part of who I am, and it is this new self that wishes to thank you for giving a part of your selves.

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To you all. I am different because of you!



## **ABSTRACT**

As participants, we agreed that women's silenced voices need to be heard, more specific to this participatory action research, the voices of women with new babies.

Through wellness pastoral care, we co-laboured in finding ways of standing up to prescribed religious and cultural ideas regarding womaness and motherhood. Pastoral care in partnership with feminist theology and mutuality in community opened a safe place to renegotiate our own preferred ways of seeing our bodies, selves, sexuality, and womaness.

The pastoral care, counselling, and mutuality experienced as a research group became the prevalent characteristic of our wellness that we wished to extend beyond the group and into families, churches, community cohorts, and the planet.

This research is one platform on which the participating women shared hurts, found a place to be heard, and having come to know our Self more deeply, offer this Self as a gift to the reader.

## KEY TERMS

Narrative pastoral care & counselling, mutuality, wellness, motherhood/womaness, women's sexuality, women's knowing, community, women's bodies, women's wisdom, planetary theology, feminist theology

## CONTENTS

Declaration	2
An offering of thanks	3
Abstract	4
Key terms	5
CHAPTER ONE: The Journey	8
1. Introduction	8
1.1. The journey begins	9
1.2. The turning point	13
1.3. Research approach	17
1.4. Research question and aims	19
1.5. Pastoral care	20
1.6. Procedures and participants	22
1.7. My Self	24
CHAPTER TWO: Cult to Contextual	25
2.1. Fundamentalist approaches	25
2.2. The “rebirth”	30
2.3. New epistemological threads	32
2.3.1. Social construction	32
2.3.2. Deconstruction	35
2.3.3. Respect and acknowledgement of power/knowledge	37
2.3.4. Contextual practical theology	40
2.4. A new reality	41
2.4.1. Scriptural theology	41
2.4.2. Postmodern theology	42
2.4.3. Planetary theology	45
2.4.4. Feminist theology	48
2.5. Summary	51
CHAPTER THREE: Spiritual Journeys	52
3.1. Stephanie	55
3.1.1. Response	60
3.2. Kim	62
3.2.1. Response	64
3.3. Sonja	65
3.3.1. Response	70
3.4. Inviting god into conversations and caring	72
3.5. Surviving trauma: Ingrid’s story	73
3.5.1. Response	75
3.6. Summary	77
3.7. Wellness Project	77
CHAPTER FOUR: Pastoral Care in the form of a Wellness Project	79
4.1. What’s in a name?	80

4.2. How the project came to be	81
4.3. The Wellness Project and self care	82
4.3.1. Self care in the form of an exercise workshop	83
4.3.2. Self care in the form of a “women’s night out”	87
4.3.3. Self care in hearing others’ impression of me	90
4.3.4. Self care by standing up to guilt and resentment	91
4.3.5. Self care by being informed	96
4.3.5.1. Homeopathic alternatives	98
4.4. The Wellness Project and partners	100
4.5. The Wellness Project and the environment	103
4.5.1. The nappy-free course	104
4.6. Summary	106
 CHAPTER FIVE: Research, Co-Authors and Kitchen Theology...	 107
5.1. What research taught me about the topic	107
5.2. What I learned about PAR	113
5.3. What I have learned about myself:	114
5.3.1. as researcher	115
5.3.2. as participant	117
5.3.3. as a woman with a baby	118
5.4. Ways the participants benefited	120
5.5. Teaching practical theology	124
5.5.1. An invitation to pastoral therapy	124
5.5.2. New ideas for practical theology	127
5.6. Research’s offspring	129
5.6.1. Wellness pastoral care and the church	129
5.6.2. The future of wellness pastoral care	129
5.7. Conclusion	130
 REFERENCES	 131
 APPENDIX	 140
Appendix A: Letter to Guilt	140
Appendix B: Consent Form	143
Appendix C: Activity Letter	144
Appendix D: Homeopathic Workshop Poster	146
Appendix E: Exercise Workshop Notice	147



## CHAPTER ONE THE JOURNEY

### 1. Introduction

Doing PAR (Participatory Action-research) means taking a journey because PAR is about movement - movement from the way things are to the way things could be ... finding one's way can be a fearful experience.

(Willms 1997: 8)

In doing participatory action research, Willms (1997: 8) expresses that one may find one's self challenging existing norms, "conventional research methodologies," and that we may need to take the "risk" and face the possible resulting criticism. It was with these ideas in mind that I started a journey of my own. It is a journey with Research to find the topic that suited the context, taking into consideration the situation that I am currently in, in my own life. I also needed a topic that had the power to re-position myself, so that I could enter into a dynamic of process of change. McTaggart (1997:40) reports, "[p]articipatory action research is systematically evolving, a living process changing both the researcher and the situations in which he or she acts..."

With the above in mind, Reinharz (1992:194) comments that a common consequence of feminist research is that the researcher herself also undergoes learning and change whilst participating in the research. Intending on doing action research, it is also important that the lives of those who decide to participate should also improve, according to McTaggart (1997:26). May I, therefore invite you, the reader, to journey with me to what develops into Pastoral Care through the vehicle of a "Women's Wellness Project for Women with New Babies".

Pastoral care became that which quenched our thirst: the desire to be whole as women and mothers with the "capacity for love and loving" (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:70). We came together looking for something that would be fluid enough to meet the needs of each woman as an individual, and consistent enough to be a tie that linked us together as women and mothers. Pattison (quoted by Graham 1996:56) is found to have the words that we could embrace to illustrate why pastoral theology and care were so important to us and would serve as the tie that linked and met our changing needs, "Pastoral theology is more like living water than a tablet of



stone. It is something that moves and changes shape, context and appearance, like a lake, over time.”

We, as a participatory group found that searching for our own wellness as well as that of our children, required an openness to our various cultures, contexts, and faith practices, and that would be as pliable as we were in our search for change. Practical theology, with a pastoral care focus, proved that it would not be a “timeless and closed system of theological knowledge, unaffected by cultural shifts” (Rossouw 1993:895), but would aid in the interpretation of who and what we are as women, offering “meaning of the scriptures for contemporary culture” (Botha 1998:125). From pastoral care and theology, as well as feminist perspectives, we hoped we would find new ways of standing up to the discourses that constantly tried to convince us of our worth as mothers and our place in society as women with new babies, from social and religious perspectives.

As researcher, however, the challenge began before these ideas could be confronted as a participatory group. Within myself, I faced the struggle of finding a research topic that would challenge my “private and public life” (Heitink 1993:151) as a practical theologian. As the journey which follows illustrates, I began to come to see the use and dynamic of practical theology and pastoral care in my own life as researcher, as well as participant.

### **1.1. The Journey Begins...**

I started writing a research journal. Clandinin and Connelly (1994:421) have found that through writing research journals people ‘weave together their accounts of the private and the professional, capturing fragments of experience in attempts to sort themselves out’. Research journal writing has been a powerful way for me to give account of my experiences (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:421), of my struggles and my treasures found in planning this research journey. I therefore include excerpts of my journal writings, as these will invite you into my private and professional world and also locate myself within the research process (Maguire 2001:65).

#### ***Journal Entry, 11 May, 2003***

*On my way to the gym at approximately 13h20 today, I looked over at my four month old daughter [Carlie-Anne], in her car seat next to me. She was staring at me, a slight frown crossed her brow, her arms and hands limp at her sides. Her normally active,*

*fidgiting, giggling body sat motionless in her chair, her glare unmoving. I knew immediately, a knowing that a mother has.*

At this moment in my life, I know that she is seeing in me a sadness and longing for wholeness. She knows that I long to be confident as mother, woman, Christian, and South African, yet I am running around trying to involve myself in practices that require I give of myself, a Self that I have not yet been acquainted with. She seems to be *telling* me that there is something I can discover about myself, about my faith practices and about my interaction with other women and mothers. I know what she is telling me, though at this stage, I am unaware of how this will eventuate.

Rule Goldberger (1996:5) refers to this knowing that I experienced as a woman and a mother as "*subjective knowing* – in which knowing is personal, private, and based on intuition and/or feeling states rather than on thought and articulated ideas that are defended with evidence".

A question came to mind:

How often do we, as parents and as a society, listen to our children? Very often, I see myself as parent, "expert" of my own life and that of my child. I thought of David Epstein's words suggesting that the transfer of "expert" knowledge to the child supports the "notion that young people can generate their own solutions." (Epston 1992:186). The challenge for me was and remains, sharing the power of knowing with my daughter of four months.

This challenge however, seemed to be the catalyst that brought many of my discourses to light. I began to question ideas such as, "South Africa is my country and it owes me something," instead, I began to ask myself, "what makes South Africa *my* country, and what role do I play as her citizen, her child? Will she accept me as hers, and hear me, or will she choose to have power over me, as I did over my daughter?" I wanted to know where I stood as a South African, asking to work with her mothers and children. Further to this, my experience with my child at the gym that day challenged my religious past and I asked my discourse of parenting, "is it my Jesus that says I have power over my child, or is it my religion?" I wanted to know what spiritual wellness would look like for my daughter and I, and what this could mean in the lives of other women.

Though I considered the discourses that are part of my life, I did not, at this stage, choose it as a research topic. From a theological perspective, it would be too painful and fearful to face my past (see chapter two) and stand up to personal religious discourses that face me as woman and mother. For example, if I were to interact with ideas of power sharing with my four month old

daughter, would I look at discourses governing my perception of woman's role in the home, wife's role in the marriage, and female in society? Did these laws not follow one another in Ephesians 5:22-33 where it mentions that I must "submit to my husband, just as slaves did to their masters and children to their parents" (Japinga 1999:37).

Though I arrived at a place inside myself where I experienced my heart breaking on hearing the stories of struggles of mothers and their children, and the use of the word "wellness" as one that I could use to exemplify what I hoped to find and explore, together with others, I decided that I would try to put these ideas aside and concentrate on finding a research topic that would be safer. Continuing with the word "wellness" (as mentioned above), I noticed a need for "wellness" in so many areas of our human existence. I continued my exploration with the desperate need for wellness in the social care area of community life.

As I continued the search for a topic however, my personal "wellness" came into question over the months of meeting with community members and pastors and hearing narratives of pain, exhaustion, opinions of right and wrong, etc. I was again faced with the social and religious discourses that I faced as a mother, therapist, wife, and member of a church body. In the following journal entry I invite you into this place.

### ***Journal entry 30 March, 2003***

*I want this to be a "true" and honest reflection of life, contextual, practical, and real. Tears stream down my face... there is so much pain. I am overwhelmed by the motivation to study, yet shackled by the fear of what I may find as I continue with this quest. What happened to the direction I began with? I was so sure that the research interest would present itself as I interacted with grassroots, delved into relationship with the marginalized, had meetings with business men and church leadership. The idea was to glean knowledge on my community, from its people, and motivate my research by their stories, yet I find myself confronted by my own.*

*The more knowledge I glean from within my community, the more powerless I feel. Again and again I find myself back with myself asking who I am as woman, mother, church member, and South African...*

*Dear South Africa,  
My precious friend, my enemy, you who have the power to crush my spirit! Why do you tempt me so? I look at the jewellery adorning your gracious hands and I am in awe! Your bosom, proud, full, nourishing. Your hair is purple, red and*

*orange, a glorious majesty flowing over your shoulders. You stand tall, African garments draped across your strong body, reaching to the ground. Do you remember me as a child? I remember you vividly. You took me by the hand and romanced me by your enthralling beauty, your wisdom, your health and vitality. Though I left you for years, you did not forget me, enticing me back into your embrace in 1999. I am taller now, older, and I am beginning to see into your eyes. Where is your youthfulness? Was it ever there? How did you manage to lie to me for so many years?*

*Do you remember how angry I was at you when you pressed a gun to my forehead and told me "don't f... with me"? You shocked me then, but you appalled me when you took the life of my friend, and I remain unable to fathom reason to your rape of a nine month old baby! Who are you, woman whom they call Rainbow Nation? Why are you so unwell?*

*I am afraid of you! I am scared that you will take the life of my husband, or the innocence of my daughter. I fear your townships, and I struggle to acknowledge your men. And now, after these last 18 months of research and study into practical theology, I have come to fear myself! I have come to realize that I fear you, not because of who you are, but because of who I have made you to be!*

*Oh Nation, do your children starve because of us? I have come to see that I ought to question what we have done to you, sweet Rainbow, that your legs are bruised? Why is it that your mothers are tired and feel so alone, and the children and families are broken and maimed? How is it that your hands render such calluses and yet the work remains too burdensome, never ceasing, never easing? I wonder, dear land, how do we bring wellness to your ailing body, to the women, to the children, to the families?*

*Dear land, for my part in the pain, as a white, religious, South African, privileged by the weapons that maimed you, I ask your forgiveness. Before God, I ask your permission to choose you as you chose me 26 years ago. I too am a mother, I interact with the other mothers. Though we hurt, I ask that I may bleed with your brokenness, that I may cry with your orphans, and look into the eyes of your men who are idle and acknowledge, "I see you, please see me too." With this, I ask that you patiently bear with me, my fears and my ignorance. This is a journey to find wellness, for you, for all mothers, for my country – "land that gave me birth."*

When looking back and reading the journal entries surrounding this time, I recognize this letter to Mother South Africa as a turning point, a beginning to my healing as a South African. It seemed to be from within this healing that I found the courage to stand up to the discourses that face me as a woman, mother and Christian. I wonder what power could be returned to our country if her women and children were healed, supported, and given voice? I felt "that substantial healing is possible and that we are called to participate in its achievement" (Van Leeuwen 1993:22).

## 1.2. The turning point

I have often felt silenced by society and religion on issues such as family values, women's choices relating to full time mothering or working and mothering, the power of women in the family, marriage and self relationships. Society has claimed various victories over my ideas in the past causing the feud to continue, only more challenging and damaging. Religion has often silenced my questioning of what right and wrong might be for me. I wondered at this point what practical theology could offer me, as I wished for more empowering interpretations to Scriptural ideas such as: from Genesis one and two, "man is created first, woman is his helpmate"; "Eve brought sin into the world" and our punishment for this is that men are given "perpetual dominance over women" and we are given "pain in childbirth" (Japinga 1999:36-37). What would my wellness look like as a wife, and mother, from the perspectives of various faith practices, and do I have the strength to hear other's opinions and challenge that which I have been taught? Are other women in a similar struggle to myself? Is the loneliness and pain I sometimes feel as a mother due to my sister Eve's sin? So many questions clouded my search for a research topic. Seeing the need to interact with other women on these ideas, from a variety of religions, I signed up for a workshop.

It was a courageous step to sign up for the "Mom's and Babes" workshop that committed me to one morning per week with the other mothers. It also committed me to being a "stay-at-home-mom" for a further three months. Was I okay with this? Is it what I wanted? Why did I feel inadequate before my God. Was it not enough that I was studying, being a therapist and a mother? With a model of *true womanhood* being that of the woman in Proverbs 31, I believed that I needed to be working, feeding, sewing, purchasing, doing business deals while rising before dawn to feed and clothe my family and servants, etc. Deconstructing *true womanhood* would be a challenge that would require help from other women, women who had not been brought up beneath such faith practices as I had, that may not be influenced by the same discourses. I felt incompetent before my God, and though I knew there was another way to see God and my role as woman and mother, I wished for interaction on these ideas with other women.

I wondered if I could hold onto the idea that "Scripture speaks meaningfully because it is God's way of communicating," and yet invite feminist interpretations of the same though they may not always

have “patience with the Bible” (Japinga 1999:40). Feminist theology offered words for that which I felt I needed, mutuality.

Mutuality, in feminist liberation theology is the basis of right-relation. It is a relational process in which all persons, or parties, are empowered, thereby experiencing themselves as able to survive, affect others creatively, and make a constructive difference in the world around them.

(Heyward 1996:155)

At the point where Feminist theology spoke of mutuality and added, “[i]t provides the vision for our justice-work and the basis for our health and well-being” (Heyward 1996:155), along with the discourses that were challenging me, I felt Research tap me on the shoulder and say, “this could be it, your research topic!”

Research and I observed the journey we had been on and began to acknowledge my experiences of beginning to see the discourses in my own life, we discussed the idea of wellness for women and mothers, and what influence theology has had and could have on their wellness. We wondered about the experiences that other women have had that could add to the journey,

‘Women’s experience’ is a complex and multi-faceted term that includes women’s bodily experiences, women’s socialized experiences...women’s feminist experiences... women’s historical experiences... and women’s individual experiences.

(Young 1996:61)

Research then interviewed me to determine the viability of a topic that would relate to the wellness of mothers, and what role practical theology and pastoral care could play in enhancing such wellness.

**Research:** What would *you* call this research, Candida?

**Candida:** It could possibly be called, ‘Deconstructing and resisting negative perspectives on motherhood and creating communities of care where narratives of wellness can eventuate.’

**Research:** Do you have existing knowledge about the topic?

**Candida:** I prefer to look at this topic from the “not knowing” and the participating mothers being the expert perspective:

Not-knowing requires that our understandings, explanations, and interpretations in therapy not be limited by prior experiences or theoretically formed truths, and knowledge. This description of the not-

knowing position is influenced by hermeneutic and interpretive theories and the related concepts of social constructionism, language, and narrative.

(Anderson & Goolishian 1992:26-39)

Having mentioned the research participants as being the experts, I however, bring the idea of "transparency" to light (White 1991:38) as I am unable to remove myself completely from who I am and that which I bring with me. I have suffered the verbal abuse of society as it spoke of my family and ways of doing motherhood, and I have been affected by the discourses of my past religion that silenced my voice as mother, wife and woman. Discourses of women's silence in church and non-participation in positions of authority because "Eve sinned first" (Japinga 1999:37) and misinterpretations regarding ideas of submission are examples of reasons for religious silences. It has invited guilt into my life and I see it in the lives of the women I have sat and listened to. As such, this research topic spoke to me because of my personal experiences of being a mother. Reinharz (1992:234) suggests that this is "innovative" and beneficial to research in that it may "eradicate the distinction between the researcher and the researched."

Yes, I too have a story to tell (Reinharz 1992:234 and Willms 1997:7), a research of my "personal being." Reinharz (1992:260) refers to an 'epistemology of insiderness' where there is 'a link between the personal experience of the researcher and the research project in which she is engaged'. There has been hurt and pain in allowing religion and society to dictate health, how much weight to put on during pregnancy, how fast one should lose it and the measurement of every milli-pound that my child gains or loses. How busy I am speaks of how I measure up to the Proverbs 31 role model and my home is scrutinized. How efficient I am as a mother, wife, and South African is judged by the size of the pile of laundry behind my door, the dust on my coffee table, how well my hair is brushed today (or if it is brushed at all) and the satisfied, content look on the face of my husband. My story and my discourses are carried with me into this research topic and Research questions whether or not I will be transparent with my fellow participants throughout the research process in this regard.

Transparency becomes challenging when I am asked by research, and held responsible by the research practice to offer what I bring with me when I enter into conversation with both research

and the participatory group (see chapter two). In this regard, Hall (1996:29) states that reflexivity is integral to action research. Reflexivity, according to Hall (1996:30) is a deliberate attempt to:

1. [M]onitor and reflect on one's doing of the research – the methods and the researcher's influence on the setting – and act responsively on these methods as the study proceeds; and
2. account for researcher constitutiveness. The process begins with being self-conscious (to the extent that this is possible) about how one's doing of the research as well what one brings to it (previous experience, knowledge, values, beliefs and *a priori* concepts) shapes the way the data are interpreted and treated. An account of researcher constitutiveness is completed when this awareness is incorporated in the research report.

As initiator of a group of women, coming together to negotiate wellness, care and counselling, I need to be accountable by asking: "how is this going for you?" "Are you being heard?" "Is your voice as loud, if not louder than my own?" "May I borrow from your story to influence my own and how would you suggest we proceed forward?" "Do you feel as though you are experiencing the "dignity and respect" that being made in the "image of God" (Van Leeuwen 1993:22) implies?"

Power sharing (McTaggart 1997:33), or in Reinharz (1992:234) expression of "eradicating the distinction between the researcher and the researched", would need to be negotiated alongside my transparency as researcher. Yes, I hold a larger degree of the power as I initiated the research, however, I am accountable to the field of Practical Theology, to participatory action-research methodology, and to the participating group to be transparent in what I bring with me to the research and to invite challenge from others as to how I am using that power. This is a commitment to being changed by the narratives of others:

We live in and through the narrative identities that we develop in conversation with one another. The skill of the therapist [researcher] is the expertise to participate in this process. Our 'self' is always changing.

(Anderson & Goolishian 1992:289)

**Research:** Are you interested and enthusiastic about the topic?

**Candida:** That my heart feels for the mothers; that we could inform one another and be hearers of one another's narratives; that we could challenge and resist the competitive voices that plague us, to stand in support of one another as we accomplish Earth's most precious, rewarding and demanding job, raising her young. Yes. "When people have strong feelings about a need or a problem, they



are far more likely to take action on it." Smith (1997:228) uses this explanation to define "energy points" in Participatory action-research. Experiencing my own personal "strong feelings" regarding this topic is energizing my interest and enthusiasm.

**Research:** Is the study feasible in terms of time and resources available?

**Candida:** The amount of time absorbed in fighting the internal struggle of "am I doing well enough?" could very well be contained and collected for this purpose. "Am I fit enough, should I spend more time in the gym, is there a quicker, as effective option?" Perhaps there is. We are in a position to work together to find ways of being well more effectively and with support because we all have expertise in various areas of wellness, naturally. As far as resources go, I don't know Research, you pose a thrilling question. In doing a subject search in the local libraries and Internet sources, it looks promising. My greatest resource will be the women who chose to be involved, and they will dictate the literary research agenda.

The development of the research topic, has in turn made it easier for me to conceptualise the proposed research approach.

### **1.3. Research approach**

I have chosen participatory action-research (PAR) as my research vehicle as it has the potential to bring about change, to look at something and liberate it, should it choose to be liberated. Smith (1997:7) states that research should be understood as a rediscovering and recreating personal and social realities... "research" derives from the verb "recerchier" in Old French, meaning "to look at again"...a legitimacy of liberation.

The challenge that I face as participant and researcher is the constant review of power sharing that is required to ensure that an imbalance is not overbearing. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001:78) refer to participatory research ethics that asks "questions about who participates in and benefits from research processes, how information is used and by whom, and how the process transforms or supports power relations". I have thus invited the women into a watching process of accountability

where we have set up a safety net to ensure that facilitation takes place but that ownership does not. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001:78) acknowledge the importance of accountability when saying that participatory research asks for “holding to account the nature and degree of participation which is occurring”. Part of the safety net is a deconstructed Research:

[D]econstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices; those so-called “truths” that are split off from the conditions and the contexts of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of persons’ lives.

(White 1991:27)

Research has become an external, somewhat separate entity that we as participants have the freedom to write to, to hear from, and to be angry at. This initiation from the participating group opens up a safe place for one to voice one’s concern regarding how things are proceeding without feeling shackled by the idea of being negative or harsh to an individual. Deconstructed Research is thus a “safe place” to openly make suggestions, deliver aggression, and even request change or alteration, separate from the fear of offending.

To ensure the safe place is maintained, I am faced with a commitment to facilitation, that though I enter the group with a general idea of how I would like it to develop, I will not dictate direction or force my general ideas, but rather hear the experiences and encourage suggestions as to how our problems may be liberated. Law (1997:54) reflects on why participatory action research fits comfortably with who she is personally and professionally and through her words I could identify my role as researcher:

I do not identify the problems and tell people what they need. I am able to make people feel comfortable in a situation so that they open up and talk about their experiences, and thus can reflect ideas, thoughts, and feelings back to them.

The beauty of this method of research is that it is exciting to witness and participate within the boundless possibilities of our liberation as mothers, as women! To believe in and strive towards the liberation of ourselves, as mothers and women, has been made possible by a postmodern view of reality where one is required to ‘look at things in new ways. It also suggests that we look at new things, given the changing nature of the world in which we live ... [postmodernism] refers to a diversity of processes brought about by the breakdown of boundaries and an implosion of

difference in cultural contexts' (Jennings & Graham 1996:167). Positioning myself as researcher within a postmodern discourse, has helped me to be open to alternative multiple realities and meanings, and in doing so I am challenging the taken-for-granted ideas about motherhood. In this regard, Law (1997:55) reflects on her experience in doing participatory action research:

The bottom line is that participatory action-research takes a certain kind of individual – someone who fundamentally respects the world view of others and really knows how to listen. It also takes a person who likes bucking the system, a person who is a bit of a rebel.

Though there be someone “who fundamentally respects the world view of others, and really knows how to listen....” participatory action-research does not function separate from the lived experiences of those who participate. This research starts with real life experiences of the women who agreed to participate. Smith (1997:184) discloses that “PAR groups honour popular knowledge, believing that people’s feelings, beliefs, and personal experiences are vital ways of knowing.... As individuals, and as a collective, people learn from experience....”

At this point in the journey, Research and I started a discussion on the proposed research question that has since been through a process of negotiation with the participants prior to its final formulation. “Individuals might approach learning differently, but we were unified by the same reality.” (Smith 1997:206) For us, our reality was womanhood and motherhood, how and what we wished to learn differed and required investigation.

#### **1.4. Research question and aims**

The journey of Research and I drew attention on the personal finding of wellness for myself as a woman. Facing the discourses informed by religion and society had already begun to present themselves, and we recognized an idea for a research question and proposed it to a group of women who agreed to participate.

Due to the proposed participatory nature of the research, it is important to keep in mind what Smith (1997:173) says about participatory action research: “The group has ownership over what questions are pursued, and how. Research questions take many forms and are not predetermined, that is, no one person or subgroup enters the process with the major question(s) already specified.” As a “participant-driven approach” (Bishop 1996:216) the sharing of power and control over the

research process becomes an important aspect that I, as researcher, need to keep constantly in consideration. Therefore the initial research question presented by Research and I, was temporary and was changed by the negotiation process (see chapter four). The initial research question was as follows:

*What constitutes wellness for women with new babies and how can pastoral care and counselling enhance such wellness?*

After the negotiating process, the research question altered to ask:

*What does wellness pastoral care and women with new babies constitute?*

The women discussed what aims they hoped this research question would accomplish. The deconstruction of existing ideas on wellness for women, as well as the deconstruction of terms such as “mother”, “woman”, “wife”, specifically from the perspective of religious discourses was mentioned as important. Equally important was that the research aim at hearing the stories of the women to uncover and discover alternative stories. Further to these research aims, the women hoped for the development and enhancement of pastoral care, specifically as it relates to the wellness of women with children. Lastly, research aimed to collaborate with participants in the finding of self and the discovery of new ways of extending the self for the healing of the planet.

From within the research question, and to accomplish the research aims, the women saw the need for a project that would interact with various ideas of wellness and pastoral care.

### **1.5. Pastoral Care**

Asking Research the question: ‘what can pastoral care do to enhance the wellness of women with new babies?’ proved to be an intriguing and focusing query. The participating group suggested various ideas in which they would like to see pastoral care operational in their lives and in the research process, specifically as they saw it relating to the development of what a ‘Wellness Project for Women with New Babies’ would look like (see chapter three and four).

The challenge for pastoral care in the past has been that often women feel that “they cannot talk about their most important experiences with a pastor and be taken seriously and understood” (Bons-Storm 1996:15). Sevenhuijsen (1998:138) reminds us of that which is involved in caring and

warns that “[p]ower and conflict are involved in every phase of the caring process” and thus we, as a participating group, found ourselves looking for new ways of caring. A need presented itself, for pastoral care to be offered in a different way, outside the confines of the walls of church and religion. Mary Daly (1990:354) may suggest pastoral caring being like “sparking the fire of female friendship” and Carter Hayward (1996:155) may offer the idea of mutuality, “a relational process in which all persons, or parties, are empowered, thereby experiencing themselves as able to survive, affect others creatively, and make a constructive difference in the world around them”. The need for a new way of doing pastoral care for wellness in the lives of the women who participated began to define itself through the Wellness Project for Women with New Babies (see chapter four).

Inviting “pastoral communication” through “narrative” and “story” (Bons-Storm 1996:46) gave voice to the experiences of the women, which feminist theology suggests is vital for its existence, “experience is only experience insofar as it is articulated in language” (Young 1996:62). For this reason, pastoral care and counselling in the Wellness Project was characterized by the telling of experiences, thus also coming to “know the self” (Bons-Storm 1996:46). This form of pastoral care enhanced the wellness of the participating women, specifically as each began to accept the differences in the other’s experiences and person, enhancing mutuality. Bons-Storm (1996:145) suggests that this accepting of one another’s differences can “become a blessing if we are not afraid of differences.” She goes on to suggest that “true mutuality” has a “starting point” in “offering an opportunity to learn from each other’s differentness” (Bons-Storm 1996:145). Thus, inviting the “story of God” into our caring became a “conversation partner” (Botha 1998:160) in the Wellness Project and in accepting and appreciating one another’s narratives.

For the women, the most imperative form that pastoral care could take on is that of giving the women space for their voices. Pastoral care and counselling is “defined as a relationship in which people can “articulate the pain in their lives.” (John Patton in Bons-Storm 1996:142). Women coming together to give voice to their stories of pain is part of what the participatory group asked of practical theology and pastoral care.

In finding safe places to give their stories and concerns voice, the women challenged religious and societal discourses regarding their bodies, relationships, and self-care. For the purpose of

standing up to these discourses, pastoral care took on the form of a Wellness Project (see chapter three and four). This Wellness Project offered pastoral care in many ways, one of which being the place where women could “tell their stories among themselves, get used to their own voices, and listen to one another” (Bons-Storm 1996:147). Though this has never been easy, “[t]ogether women practice their subject quality and power to speak, and find the strength to endure the scorn of the dominant discourse” (Bons-Storm 1996:147). This power to speak has further benefit as it opens space for “the most significant conversations to be heard and understood, and for the most significant others to be included in the construction of meaning, even when the significant other may be the Other, who is known by many names, whom some call God” (Griffith 1995:124).

The open space for significant conversations, that later became a safe place through trust and care, began simply in a class for mothers where we shared our questions and challenges.

#### **1.6. Procedures and Participants:**

Though I felt in myself that I had found a research topic and question, it remained subject to the input and negotiation of the participants. I had begun the research on my being (Willms 1997:7) and the procedure that followed was the finding and inviting of the research participants. Attending a class for mothers and babies was where I recognized that many other mothers were struggling with similar questions to what I was, and we came together to discuss those questions. In the conversations that took place thereafter, we found that the proposed research question was common to each of us and we made a commitment to walk together on Research's path.

Having come together and “recognizing a common question or quest”, we were beginning to build “trust and solidarity” (Smith 1997:200) through transparency, conversation, listening and caring. We then proceeded to look into the “context” that we would be working within, which was middle class, white women, the majority of whom are career women, in the Midrand region. Following this, we also looked at what the “various forces at play” (Smith 1997:202) were and found that religious discourses, societal demands, lack of self-care, and guilt, were evident. From this, we were able to decide on what procedures to follow from here forth.

We chose Smith's (1997:198) "framework for Participatory Action-Research Praxiology" as a guide to how we would wish to proceed in this opportunity to look into what constitutes wellness for women with new babies and how pastoral care and counselling can enhance such wellness. This framework motions through a process of coming to know self, which we found challenging because most of the participants had never been asked about the self nor found opportunity to realize how important this is. "Seeking connections" (Smith 1997:198) is the next phase in the process which occurred rapidly due to our common challenges, passions, and needs for support, care and opportunity. Looking into "fundamental needs of humanity" is suggested by Smith (1997:198) as the next concept to investigate. This we embraced two fold. Firstly, looking at our own "fundamental needs" as healing praxis and then seeking opportunity to extend our new found selves toward the co-mending of the "fundamental needs" of others, in which we decided the planet would feature prominently. Smith (1997:198) then offers the discussion of "beginning praxis" in the framework of PAR. This "beginning praxis" (Smith 1997:198) we found to be deeply enmeshed in the other phases of the framework becoming more prominent as the research developed.

For the women who participated, it was important that the research not be limited to our own liberation, but that it be extended beyond the group, for example, into our families, church communities, geographical communities and for the wellbeing of the planet. Hence, the continuation of the "spiral", as Smith (1997:198) suggests was imperative to us. Smith (1997:198) recommends that once the praxis begins, one "investigates", "acts", "analyzes", and then repeats this mini-cycle within the larger framework. Within this research the cycle followed the following movement: finding and interacting with the self, interacting and being changed by others with whom one connects, extending this connectedness to hearing the stories of a hurting humanity and being challenged by these stories. This then igniting action in the needs of others, and igniting change once again in the self who then investigates the new self and possibilities of extending it again in new ways. Following this procedure ensured that we would be continually searching for more efficient, effective means of answering our research question. Our selves were constantly "experiencing conscientization" and awakening" as we interacted with those with whom we connected as well as with the needs of humanity and the planet and it directed us back into a "knowing of self" powerful as we recognized the fluidity of learning, changing, sharing, and then learning again.

There were a number of participants that entered into and out of the process at various stages, many of whom agreed to participate but requested to remain nameless. The core group of participants would often invite their families, or community members into various stages or activities, and they too agreed to participate but remain nameless as they were not a part of the research in its entirety.

The participants who agreed to share their names and who were part of the entire research process were:

Christelle and her son Alexander

Danique and her son Jared

Carmen and her son Jared

Stephanie and her son Shakiel

Kim and her daughter Samantha

Sonja and her daughter Abigail

Candida and her daughter Carlie-Anne (Camy)

Ingrid and her son Morten

### **1.7. My Self**

Now that we, as a participatory group had come together, I needed to look into what would guide and safe guard me, as participant researcher, through a journey of change, revisiting my past, determining my present and looking forward into the future. Chapter two discusses the possibilities and dangers of the journey I have been on, and now would undertake as participatory researcher.

*The hardest thing to do is to step out of what you are comfortable with. The unknown is always there once you step out. Then you have to take everything that comes at you. You have to answer for yourself and that's how you learn.*

*-Gerald Debbink*





## CHAPTER TWO

### **My Story: From Cult to Contextual** *...starting with a small purple flower*

Finding one's way can be a fearful experience. Individuals and groups have to be open to learning, growing, and taking risks. In questioning the status quo... people risk criticism, loss of position or status, and sometimes even their lives. Initially and at different points in the process, persons and groups, plagued by doubts and uncertainties, may fear "stepping out" of what is familiar.

(Willms 1997:8)

If I choose to give voice to my journey, I choose to embrace the risk of vulnerability, of openness, of critique. I offer "My Story" as a chapter illuminating what I bring to the table as researcher and pastoral therapist in an attempt to be transparent about the power/knowledge that I brought to the group. As a participant researcher in a participatory action-research, I need to find ways of constantly reflecting on the power that I bring with me as the person who initiated this research project.

Within the paragraphs that follow, I invite you, the reader into my past, a narrative of fundamentalist approaches to theology and religion that governed my life for nineteen years. Then, I would invite you to witness my "rebirth" where I begin to see how these fundamentalist doctrines blinded me. I then entered the process of selecting that which would become my socially constructed reality as I choose preferred ideas to guide, protect and challenge me as citizen of Southern Africa, as narrative pastoral therapist, as sister, wife, mother and as friend.

#### **2.1. Fundamentalist Approaches**

I began my "quest for zero defect" (borrowed from the National Panasonic Commercial 1997) in an airplane 35 000 feet about sea level. Fully believing that I could embrace my biblically fundamental theology, which would result in arriving at a place of spiritual, cognitive, emotional, social and physical perfection, I began to interpret texts from the bible to inform the quest that I had embarked upon. The reality of my religion began to dawn on me as I faced one failing aspect after the next... I later realized that this was the beginning stages of a new way of being and doing.

I was born into a fundamental religion that many theologians would term a “cult” that was initially Armstrongism. We faithfully maintained a lifestyle of old testament tradition: holy day observance, Sabbath day keeping (Saturday, being the seventh day), fasting on the day of Atonement, and de-leavening our homes for the week of unleavened bread. De-leavening is a process where one removes any and all yeast products – including the crumbs in the toaster – from one’s home and refrains from eating any of these products for a period of 7-8 days. This task was left mainly to the women of the household due to the recommendation and preference that women stayed at home to fulfil the domestic role of homemaker and child-bearer.

Sayers (quoted in Van Leeuwen 1993:52) strongly points out that “every woman is a human being, and every human being must have occupation, if he or she is not to become a nuisance to the world.” One of my earliest challenges with feminist readings conflicting with my church fundamentalism was in this, the “stay at home mom” versus “career woman.” Though I saw the need for the “rebellions” of the stay-at-home- mom for “revolutionary potential” (Tong 1989:55), I was struggling with my own need to have the opportunity to choose either stay-at-home or career mom, without the burden of inadequacy or rebellion hanging over me. The “unique satisfactions” (Van Leeuwen 1993:57) that bearing and raising children spoke of, was attractive to me, and I felt anger within myself towards the religious domination, from various faith practices, that were tainting it. Van Leeuwen (1993:58) suggests that “the solution to such dichotomies lies not in women’s rejecting childbearing and child raising but rather in their regaining control of both – in deciding for themselves ... rather than submitting to the dictates ... or “experts” in this matter.” I struggled to find the strength to stand up to the combination of a religious discourse that said I ought to be a stay-at-home-mother, and society that insisted that women’s rights meant successful career. At this stage however, the struggle was too much, the voices that spoke of our past in my church were too loud and painful, and I was not able to see women’s struggles in this regard as a possible research topic.

We, as a church body, were told and believed that we were the chosen faction, and to be invited into this fellowship, one was required to show true conviction, complete a one to two year correspondence course, and be visited on regular occasions by the local pastor until such time as he deemed one ready to attend a Sabbath day meeting. This notion of being the chosen few,

resonates with what Wilson (2002:136) says of strict religions: “[S]trict religions become strong by isolating their members from the rest of society and by making internal cooperation the only game in town.”

Coffin (2002:182) refers to the life cycle of religious denominations where this life cycle starts from being “sects or cults, grow into churches, give rise to offspring sects, and then mysteriously senesce, to be replaced by their own offspring or by new cults”. The church that I was born into and belonged to for many years, has also faced and is facing, its own life cycle. Already over the years, small movements of change were evident. For many years women were forbidden to wear make-up, paint their nails, or colour their hair. For some feminists this would be seen as a removal of sexuality and power. Though the thought that “there is enormous power for women in being desirable, and desired objects” (De la Rey & Friedman 1996:45) may be a point of argument, the issue of sexuality and power removal is the removal of the freedom to choose that which initiates wholeness in one’s self. The women consented “to the very terms of their marginalization and oppression” (Van Leeuwen 1993:59) for the “self-sacrifice” (Japinga 1999:36) that was required of them as women who respected and served in the elect ‘body of Christ.’ Though small, it was significant when women’s freedom to choose their cosmetic preferences was returned to them. The changes continued more dramatically after 1995.

In 1995, headquarters in Pasadena, California (USA) sent word down the hierarchical structure of pastors, leaders, and deacons to the people, “we are no longer the one and only true church, there are other Christians all around us. It is by grace that we are saved, not what we do. The Sabbath day (Saturday worship) is not a requirement of salvation. There are 10 commandments fulfilled by two!”

Sharing some features of Calvinism, my church also asked for the “internalization of the belief system” (Wilson 2002:103) where faith is turned “from a belief designed to be modified by experience into a fortress designed to protect the belief system from experience” (Wilson 2002:101). It was considered sin and heresy to be found questioning doctrine outside of the “fortress” which led to an internal pool of knowledge that confined experiences to that which one experienced within the church’s rules and regulations. This disabled new experience and in turn

closed the door on new ideas and ways of understanding and participating in faith practices. It was only through the existing hierarchical system that change could eventuate... new ideas and ways were presented via the hierarchical structure. The only way to see other, or outside faith practices, was through the existing "protected belief system" (Wilson 2002:103).

Over the years my church had successfully removed the ability to think, challenge, choose and make decisions, from the people disallowing the experience of interaction and conversation with outside communities. From a feminist perspective, "one's experiences influence the way one hears theological questions and answers and become part of the context from which one makes one's own formulations. One's experiences help shape one's commitments" (Young 1996:61). By illuminating members' outside experiences, their commitments are also influenced and limited. We saw my church as the only 'one true church' due to this reclusive approach to doing church life. This crippled their/our ability to survive separate from the church because we never before had to choose, assess or evaluate ideas and options regarding theology, sociology, or psychological issues. The pastor had all the information that was required for salvation, as well as purchasing vehicles, whether or not to have more children, etc.

Because of this alteration in doctrine, our international body fell apart. Finances declined, numbers waned, traditions shattered, and hearts broke. The people scattered in search of stability given that their entire life's constancy had been dictated by the church.

Many members joined other religions with similar fundamentalist practices after 1995, and the remnant of the church finally began to pray together.

Many non-members asked members how we could have been so blind, for so long? One answer for me lies in the following. Michael White (White 1991:37) offers insight into the crippling effect of some oppressive (fundamentalist) discourses:

It is difficult for persons to challenge these global and unitary knowledges because the language practices that constitute them include build-in injunctions against questions that might be raised about their socio/political/historical contexts. In denying the respondent / reader of this critical information, they experience a certain "suspension." They do not have the information necessary to determine how they might "take" the

views that are expressed, and this dramatically reduces the range of possible responses available to them.

Over the past ten years, I have witnessed the wisdom in the leadership who remained in my church asking other churches, people, members, women and children, and of collaborating with multi denominational religions, in seeking a new way of being and doing religion. I saw hope in this practice of asking and collaborating, and wondered if I would be strong enough to revisit some of my past hurts as a child, and then woman.

The courage the church had in stepping out blindly to ask for help from others with the history of Armstrongism condemning one to the "Lake of Fire" if one questioned existing doctrine, is remarkable. One of the reasons why I chose to remain in this church as an active participant calling it my home church, is precisely because of this commitment to a dynamic of transformation and openness.

Cochrane (1991:12) invites us "to bring [our] commitments, and especially [our] values, under investigation in the need to root out the baleful influences of the powerful idols of our society, and to find fresh roots for grasping the promise of the gospel in life for all, life abundantly, and life now in the expectation of the eternal." It is easy for me to suggest that my church actively participate in that which Cochrane suggests above, the challenge is, will I as an individual respond to this invitation and "root out" the negative "influences" that burden my work, relationship with my God, and how I see myself?

My introduction to the changes in 1995, was a dramatic introduction to a personal God who has begun opening my eyes and heart to the diversity and thrill of the faiths' co-labouring.

In 1995 when the announcement of the changes came, I was in Australia, 17 years of age, on an ambassadorial programme. A conflict of interest presented itself that required advice from my parents (who shared the same religious convictions.) The dilemma was that I was representing my country and had a very important presentation to impart in Sydney. It was on a Friday night (the Sabbath – Friday evening to Saturday evening) as well as being in Sydney, which would require me to travel during the 'Days of Unleavened Bread'. This meant that when travelling, I was not in

control of my diet and in this case specifically, I knew that it would be a challenge to give my religious convictions about yeast products a voice.

I therefore phoned my mother for advice. My mother's response shocked me: "Everything has changed now girlie, go and do what you have to do for South Africa, and do it well. I'll explain everything in a letter soon." The conversation ended due to financial constraints, and I was left swirling in confusion. Snatching my bible, which I was well versed in using to prove our legalistic perspectives as "truth", and my journal, I walked until I could see Australian red dust in every direction, not a blade of grass, a house, or vehicle was visible, only nine cows and a partially erected farm fence many kilometres away gave evidence of life. I vividly remember my words on that day: "Right God, I don't know what's going on. I don't know where to look for *this* in *the* Book, but I know, somehow, that you are real... and you have to be my hope!"

Two meters away, amidst the dust and small clods of sand, I saw one solitary purple flower, the only splash of colour in an ocean of brown dirt. Speaking my hope and my scriptures, was this silent, perfection: my small purple flower. This small purple flower conceived my journey of discovering new faith options, a transformative journey, beginning with my "rebirth."

## **2.2. The "rebirth"**

One of the young women who consulted me during 2002, fourteen years old, shared with me her belief that God did not exist, "Christians are supposed to be satisfied with their Christianity, and they're not." A young man (16) who came to see me for pastoral counselling, mentioned that he found comfort in Jesus as well as in an intimate friendship with another man (Jesus and homosexuality as partners in the healing of an individual was a burden I sat with for months.)

A woman came in one day for pastoral counselling who was speaking of her faith in nature: the trees breathed her scriptures to her. I wanted to be comfortable with these ideas, it was the beginning of a number of challenges that I was to face in searching for a working theology that I would adopt to inform my life work.

At this point in my journey with Research and self, all I had was a poem that I had written to that purple flower in Australia and hope. I did not want to give up my history, it is a part of who I am. It, my past faith practices and the changes in doctrine, did however need focus, enhancement, and a commitment to challenging. Understanding that “challenging” is to “call into question,” as well as to “stimulate” and to be challenging is to call “for full use of one’s abilities and resources” (Ilson 1985: 296-297), I came to realize that “challenging” is a learned exercise that I needed to develop. I saw that to challenge would ask that I find and interact with new faith resources. Reading and exposing myself to variety and alternative faith options was the daunting and fear filled path of learning to challenge, especially due to my lack of knowing where I stood as a woman in the midst of religion.

Challenging one’s faith practices was not a part of my religious tradition, and while it was necessary for my church institution to change in order for members to be able to see the need to challenge and be invited to do so, the practice of knowing *how* to do this was underdeveloped and often absent.

This phenomenon, of the church doing the thinking and then suddenly handing power back to the people and expecting them to know how to think for themselves and the changes the membership thus undergo within themselves, is discussed by Sampson (1989:3). Sampson (1989:3) mentions that “changing conceptions of personhood, then, is somewhat equivalent to a Kuhnian paradigm shift: it is likely to occur only with a major shift in the shape of the underlying culture that has produced it and sustains it...”. This illustrates how change in “personhood” or self would not have been as possible had the institution not shifted to allow it, and opened space for new realities to be given voice.

Offering my story, honesty, being vulnerable and asking to borrow from other’s stories of faith and religion was the beginning of boring through many epistemological layers that would eventually lead to multiple realities and negotiations. When asking others to share their faith knowledges I needed to be transparent as to why I was asking. Being transparent is “being open about why one is saying what one is saying” (Morgan 2000:124) hereby “inviting” those that I interview “behind the scenes” (Morgan 2000:125) of why I am inquiring about their ideas and knowledges.

While deconstructing according to Jacques Derrida is “to undo and not destroy,” (Sampson 1989:7), I was finding myself with a further “complication,” that Derrida expresses as the danger of undoing “one tradition... in order to install in its place another tradition founded on the same frame” (Sampson 1989:7). This process of undoing and then exposing my self to new ways of being, and challenging myself against “installing” similar traditions, motivated me to find, adopt, and challenge new epistemological threads for my self. I was beginning to embrace Fillingham’s (1993:150) ideas:

We must see our rituals for what they are: completely arbitrary things, tired of games and irony, it is good to be dirty and bearded, to have long hair, to look like a girl when one is a boy (and vice versa); one must put “in play,” show up, transform, and reverse the systems which quietly order us about.

### **2.3. New Epistemological Threads**

For me, a structure needed to be in place to contain that which informs this research and my Self, taking into consideration the history of my religious influences with my pre-1995 church, as well as the struggles I carry with me regarding women and our place amidst theological practices.

Cochrane (1991:16) recommends the following responsibility to all practical theologians, and is thus relevant for myself,

We should expect of all practical theologians that they become self-aware of their prior commitments, on what these commitments are based, and how they affect one’s entire approach to practical theology. To make these things explicit for oneself is to become not only self-aware, but also to allow for being self-critical, and to open oneself up to questioning by others.

With this in mind, I have chosen the following four concepts to scaffold (White 2003) the ideas within which I practice and interact with the participatory group and myself: social construction, deconstruction, respect and acknowledging of power, and contextual theology.

#### **2.3.1. Social Construction**

According to Freedman and Combs (1996:1) the social construction discourse,

[c]onsider ways in which every person’s social, interpersonal reality has been constructed through interactions with other human beings and human institutions and to focus on the influence of social realities on the meaning of people’s lives.



If our "social, interpersonal reality" is "constructed" through our relation with others, ensuring one's openness and decenteredness could come from connecting with numerous, varying cultures, dynamics, and languages of different people.

A research such as this requires that I enter into a community (a cohort of individuals with a common, shared interest; in this case, the common interest is the wellness of themselves and their new babies) for the purpose of growth. Participatory action-research offers occasion for participation, allowing the participants in a community with a common interest "an opportunity to look at the world from a number of different and possibly incompatible points of view, providing an opportunity for personal challenge, an acknowledgment and acceptance of difference, and a chance to experience professional growth" (Jennings & Graham 1996:165).

As I enter into community, there is the importance of awareness of two sides of the moment of insertion (Cochrane 1991:13). The first is a self-knowledge of where I enter into this community, knowing that with me I carry discourses from my own world, social and faith community. In this regard Gergen (1991:146) refers to the self as socially constructed and as such it is in and through relationships, including cultural and religious groups that the self is constructed. My religious self that I bring into the research group has been constructed by both the long term influence of my church as well as my recent exposure to postmodern, contextual approaches. Through the exposure, I have come to realise that there is no essential self, but a plurality of selves: "Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction.... Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality" (Gergen 1991:146). As participants, we appreciated the fluidity that participatory action-research offers. We embark on a "quest of being" (Smith 1997:198), and following a process of "beginning praxis" Smith (1997:198) continues that after a few steps in the praxiology, one experiences "transformation" and then the spiral continues in a new "knowing of self." In this we saw meaning in Gergen's (1991:146) quote "[e]ach reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality." This was one of the most influential reasons for the participants' interest in Research: the commitment to change.

The second side to being aware of the moment of insertion (Cochrane 1991:13) is that of the community and all its socially constructed ways of being. Acknowledging the self and the religious

self as socially constructed, I am as researcher and pastoral therapist also aware of the constitutive effects that participating as participant researcher in this group may have. Being aware of my social construction in so far as it is possible offers more scope for power sharing and deconstruction of discourse.

The subject itself is the effect of a production, caught in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses and subjectivity; its reality is the tissue of social relations... our existence as persons has no fundamental essence; we can only ever speak ourselves or be spoken into existence within the terms of available discourses.

(Davis 1991:55)

In doing action research, Winter (1996:13) acknowledges the great importance of reflexive critique, "which is the process of becoming aware of our own perceptual biases". I acknowledge the socially constructed nature of my self, that of my religious self as well as the constitutive effects of the discourses in which I have been and am positioned.

Social construction has guided my views regarding the subjectivity of women as they are positioned within a variety of cultural and religious discourses, as well as our approach to motherhood, and the role that pastoral care and counselling plays in enhancing women with new babies wellness. The idea of motherhood may be socially constructed through cultural and religious discourses, and though we may not be able to or even want move away from them all entirely, the fluidity of PAR and the conversations between the participants, offered us the opportunity to disclose our personal discourses in this regard and choose those that we believed would work for us. Radical feminists have named the social construction and resulting culture's "feelings of repulsion" towards "menstruation, childbirth, nursing, and general bodily care... the legacy of liberal "somatophobia" – that is, the devaluation of the necessary and recurrent functions of the body as compared with the "higher" and "timeless" life of the mind" (Van Leeuwen 1993:57).

The following is an example of how women are being constituted and participating in the constitution of discourses regarding body image and body weight during and after pregnancy. Kim mentioned that, "I put on 28 kg while pregnant! But gosh, look at you Carmen, you're so thin." Carmen responded with, "Throughout my pregnancy people commented on how thin I was, as if it was a good thing. But each person is different, it is not fair to suggest that thin is the better way!"

Carmen wished to illuminate and challenge or deconstruct the power of a discourse about “thin being a good thing” while she did not believe it to be the truth for everyone. For her, thin had been a challenge in her past.

It was a point of sadness for me to witness body comparisons in myself and others who were participating and I wondered where such discourses were conceived. Looking for examples of similar practices of competition, and disregard for bodies, I considered the historical document of the bible. Going back to in biblical times, it appears that struggles would ensue between men, and so often, a woman’s body would be disregarded. Examples of such stories flood the old testament, “rape and murder of the unnamed concubine in Judges 19, the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34, and the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. In each of these stories, the assaults against women are merely the dramatic backdrop for the struggles between men over their power and property.” (Plumb 1996:195). As women fight the power imbalance of patriarchy these days, I wonder if we ought to sit down as women, together, to deconstruct and stand up to the competition, comparing, disregarding, and *raping* of other women’s “energy, creativity, vigour, passion, wisdom, participation” (McBride 1996:183) that may be present because of religious misinterpretations that allowed a power imbalance such as patriarchy to tolerate such practices in the past.

Standing up to socially and religiously constructed discourses through conversation released us as participants to be “self-conscious” (Hall 1996:30) of our “perceptual biases” (Winter 1996:13) and open avenues of deconstruction.

### 2.3.2. Deconstruction

Positioning herself within the social construction discourse, Mary Gergen (1997; 2001), prefers to use the word “reconstruction” rather than “deconstruction.” She has a preference for this idea as it insinuates building rather than breaking down. One “unpacks” rather than “destroy” (Gergen 1997; 2001) or “break down” and then “reconstructs” discourses.

The idea of deconstruction or “unpacking” discourses and/or biases is a procedure of looking for the practices, language, and patterns that are taken as truth due to their longevity or socially construction. Discourses govern our way of seeing ourselves, relationships, and existence (White 1991:27).

This above mentioned idea of deconstruction extends further allowing re-looking, a re-exploration of one's life to chose alternative stories to dominate one's life (White 1991). Bourdieu (1988:xi-xii) suggests that one "objectifies" the frequent and customary. Bourdieu's concept is to take ideas and practices from one's life that one does not see as interesting anymore, or may not even see anymore at all, and look at it from new angles to see what alternative possibilities may be found within it, richening one's life by the "objectified". One may be so accustomed to ideas and practices of oneself that one is also blind to them, and in "objectifying" the ideas and practices, one can challenge them and search for alternative positions and as such begin to "re-author" (White 1991:27) one's preferred story.

I find it imperative that deconstructive practice be a part of the framework that holds this research together. For many years women have been socialized into believing discourses about themselves and their children that have not always been to their or their children's benefit. These discourses affected and clouded the participant's sense of "personal agency" (Morgan 2000:69).

Hearing ourselves, as participants, discussing our bodies and ourselves sounded much like the voice of media, society, and patriarchy and I was wondering with my fellow participants what this would look like deconstructed. For us, it was a power issue. We struggled to silence the voices of society, religion, and patriarchy that removed our power to determine for ourselves what our bodies ought to look like, feel like, and be capable of (sexuality). Wishing this to be different for us, as a participatory group, we looked for ways to silence the competitiveness that society (and often our religious practices) evoked in us. Speaking aloud to one another what we *heard* our discourses trying to convince us of began to redirect the power of defining one's body. McBride (1996:183) reminded the women in the group of the results of standing up to the discourses that revolve around bodies, "In feminist thought power is limitless, infinite. It is not competitive and has nothing to do with control over another. When it is shared rather than being consumed, power actually regenerates and expands." We found this to be a result of our efforts to deconstruct discourses about bodies and Christelle concluded at a social gathering of the group months later, "I'm fine the way I am now. I've had a baby! The choices I make now regarding my body are for health reasons, not to compete with the media, not to be something I am not, and that feels really good."

Through deconstructive conversations women can unpack dominant social and religious discourses about motherhood and caring and connect to what Rule Goldberger (1996:5) calls subjective knowing, where “knowing is personal, private, and based on intuition and/or feelings states rather than on thought and articulated ideas that are defended with evidence”. Having challenged these taken for granted truths on motherhood, caring and being women, one may look at all the knowledge before one’s self and choose the “alternative or preferred story” (White 1991) by which one desires to live, ensuring however, that there remains a safe place for other women to choose differently.

### 2.3.3. Respect and Acknowledgment of Power/ knowledge

Foucault (1988:18) explains Bentham’s Panopticon as “technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or dominations, an objectivizing of the subject”. The religious discourses that misinterpret mother, nurturer, submission to husbands, etc. challenged us, as a participatory group, in that we felt watched and “objectivized” in areas of our lives. For Christelle, this was a feeling of being “watched” by her colleagues as she now worked forty hours per week and not the sixty to eighty that she could manage prior to the arrival of her son. Further to this “domination” of discourses, her struggle as a new mother was battled behind a closed bathroom door, “they [referring to her sisters] can’t cope seeing me falling apart. They are used to seeing me have it together, and they’ve all had children and the husbands report that *their* wives managed fine.”

For other of the participants, the discourses within the roles of wife and husband invited power imbalances into their lives. Though none of the partners openly suggested that women’s place is with the children nor that it is her role to be mother, nurturer, employee and manage it all calmly and joyously, however, the discourse of “submission” seemed to present itself differently. Its presence was noticed in the men’s ability to remove themselves from the burden of responsibility that a new baby introduces. Where most of the men are involved to a certain degree in the family life, the responsibility of organizing child-care, meals, routines, nanny’s, medication, trips to the paediatrician, etc. falls on the woman, as part of her role – whether she works from home, or at her office. Society, religion, husbands, and family seemed to be watching our participants and defining

“normal and abnormal” (Foucault 1971) as it relates to motherhood, and how one’s womaness is performing. Michael Foucault’s “power in institutions is that normal and abnormal is defined by the institution.” In “Madness and Civilizations” (Foucault 1971) he discusses ideas of being “defined” by abnormal and this is studied by the “normal” and in this we come across various imbalances. As women, participating in this research, we opened up conversations that redefined “normal” and “abnormal.” We found that definitions differed from person to person, but that the benefit of choosing one’s own “normal” within a group setting such as this invited confidence and self-knowledge into the struggle to stand up to the societal, and religious discourses that had previously been exhausting us.

When discussing the exhaustion that plagued the majority of the participants, we were surprised to discover that very often we were unsure of where the pressure to perform was coming from, yet we knew it to be constantly present, from before entering into hospital to deliver our children, to this point of conversation, we knew that we were being watched. I recognized this feeling of being watched, though not always aware of who the “watcher” was, in my fundamentalist history. It was oppressively stifling of creativity and the opportunity to find one’s self and capacity within that self was seemingly impossible.

Michael White (1991:34) explains that “the source of power is invisible to those who experience it most intensely” and “it is impossible for persons to determine when they are the subject of surveillance and scrutiny and when they are not, and therefore must assume this to always be the case,” and more specifically “persons are incited to perpetually evaluate themselves and to operate on their bodies and should to forge them as docile; power is autonomous to the extent that those participating in the subjugation of others are in turn, the instruments of power.”

“Instruments of power” (White 1991:34) have silenced women’s knowing (Belenkey et. al. 1986:54) and mothering since “the transition from birth as a natural life event controlled by women to being a medical condition considered by medicine to be best dealt with in hospitals where knowledge and technology prevail” (Papps & Olssen 1997:40). The participants related to the “normalization” that Foucault (Ball 1990:2) speaks of as instituted by “dominant institutions” that “are pivotal in the construction of such uniformity” (Papps & Olssen 1997:40). As a research group, we chose to

stand up to “uniformity” and embrace what we called collaborative uniqueness as an effort to balance power.

Power imbalances in research can eventuate, and I hope to relate the being “watched” (Foucault 1988:18) knowledge as a safeguard against becoming the “watcher” as a researcher, and as a group, that we do not become the “watcher” over other communities of women. Guiding us in our desire to de-center ourselves (myself as researcher, the group as a unit over other women) is what Smith (1997:190) describes as “power-with relations”:

Power-with relations allow mutual influence; people’s perceptions are shaped and reshaped as they exercise respectful caring. Shared power is fluid, moving in response to the interconnected energies within a group.

The power that the discourses regarding women’s bodies, wisdoms, and motherhood, enjoy due to the internalization of these discourse, normalized (Boyne 1990:113) everyone into a similar mold. Discourses had the power to silence the “knowing” (Belenky 1986:23) that women encounter, and they removed the beauty of experiencing a healthy Self. It was a joyous journey of deconstruction that became known as “Pastoral Care in the Form of a Wellness Project” (see chapter four) where our resistance was given voice and opportunity for action. “We are daring to reclaim our alienated bodies, our stolen selves” (Burstow 1992:19) searching our past so that our “having-been” (Burstow 1992:17) can assist in informing our “becoming” (Burstow 1992:17). Our resistance “cherish[es] and attempt[s] to promote such values as life-affirmation, nurture, cooperation, adaptation, respect for aging, environmental connectedness, process foci, and power sharing...” (Burstow 1992:17,18)

For myself, as researcher, being aware of the power/knowledge relations has been necessary in order to be reflexively (Hall 1996:30) aware of the power/knowledge relations within narrative pastoral conversations. It is however relevant to interject that as researcher, I enter into relationship with more power, because I am the initiator. Foucault (1980) encourages power that is “constitutive or positive in its character and effects, not repressive or negative; not a power that is dependent on prohibitions and restrictions.” He explains how people’s lives can be changed and at deeper levels through the positive, unrestricted uses of power. As the one initiating the research, I am in a power position, but building on Foucault’s work Gaventa and Cornwall (2001:72) urge one

to see power as relational and productive. Focusing on the productive dimension of power, power can also enable action: "In this sense power may have a synergistic element, such that action by some enables more action by others." (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:72) I would therefore, prefer to experience my power/knowledge position as one that has enabled further action to be taken by the research participants, and their power/knowledge position as one that has enabled further action to be motivated in communities outside the group.

After our initial meetings, the participants decided what their further needs were and what action was necessary to fulfil these needs. My role was then negotiated (Heron & Reason 2001:186) as being the facilitator in the process of fulfilling the needs of the participants. As initiator of the research, I carry power into the group, the ensuing negotiation between the participants was that this power could be directed in initiating the consciousness raising of discourses and consequently the challenging of discourses, hereby constituting new subjectives. Our discussions of power sharing led us into deeper understandings of contextual practical theology.

#### 2.3.4. Contextual Practical Theology

De Gruchy (1994:10) reminds us that practical theology is contextual in that it works within the community, giving power back to the marginalized, which may use the vehicle of scriptural narratives if it were appropriate. As one who appreciates scriptural narratives, I bring these into the research with me, as they are a part of me, and thus feature as part of the contextual structure of the framework. As each participant shares the faith practices that sustain her, for the edification of the group, I bring scriptural narratives with me as the hope of my faith from within my own context into the context of the group. As each shares, we are able to find relevant wisdoms from each to work towards positive action, beginning within the group, and extending into the context of the community, giving power and support back to women who have children.

I am faced with the "hermeneutical task of theology" (de Gruchy 1994:10). From my own faith context I am able to relate to de Gruchy's (1994:10) statement, "interpreting the gospel in terms of the context in which we find ourselves". Contextual Practical Theology's guides assists me in bringing to the group that which my faith practices offer, should they be relevant to the situations we may find ourselves in as a participatory group. With Contextual Practical Theology as a guide



and part of a framework, I bring in the new faith practices that I have begun to embrace since the changes in my church away from fundamentalism. These new faith practices opened doors of communication that “engage” me in “social analysis” (Cochrane 1991:86) as well as protecting me from “absolutising” (Cochrane 1991:86) my own perceptions and beliefs, and invite others into conversations of new ways of practicing faith. This is my new reality.

## **2.4. A New Reality**

Within the above mentioned framework, I have chosen four informants for my practice. The following theologies I have brought along with me into this research: scriptural theology, postmodern, planetary, and feminist theologies. By no means do I claim to be an expert in any of the below mentioned, however, I have elected to borrow from them to inform that which fleshes out the framework.

### 2.4.1. Scriptural Theology

The reason I call this “scriptural” and not “Biblical” is for its contextual value of its narratives and not its confessional dogma. Humanity, as a whole, is centred in the Bible, not exclusive groups, but as an entirety. Maimela and Konig (1998:20) reiterates the Scriptural centeredness of humanity, “...so in the Bible human beings are most important, though not only some exclusive groups but rather humanity as such... this means that humanity should be in the focus of theology.... God loves the world.” This serves as a reminder to me, as researcher, that the participants, the “humanity” that are involved, are central to this process, not theory or doctrine, but the care of the humanity.

Again I am reminded of Rossouw's (1993:903) challenge to “doing right” as opposed to “being right.” It is important for me to remember this challenge due to my background of misuse of Biblical theology which created a power imbalance. “Doing right” of Rossouw requires the scriptures to work, and to care, lest they become a weapon.

Letty Russel (cited in Japinga 1999:45) echoes my heart when she shares,

The bible has authority in my life because it makes sense of my experience and speaks to me about meaning and purpose of my humanity in Jesus Christ. In spite of its ancient and patriarchal world views, in spite of its inconsistencies and mixed messages, the story of God's love affair with the world leads me to a vision of New Creation that impels my life...

for me the Bible is “scripture,” or “sacred writing, because it functions as “script,” or prompting for life.

Though I do not see embracing scriptural theology as a danger, I need to be transparent with myself and others about the fundamentalist roots that are a characteristic of who I am as a person. Kathleen Norris seemed similarly challenged in her pursuit of a theological equilibrium – as she holds onto her Biblical keenness. She shares her “safety net” in that she treads “with suspicion.” She says that she “trusts, with belief enough to nourish her developing faith” (Japinga 1999:53). Sallie Mc Fague (2001:21) encourages that “we learn how we should *not* live... by becoming aware of how we *should* live...”. This focusing on how one “*should* live” is the thought behind the selection of theologies that govern my practice. Fundamentalism often offers a set of rules or doctrines that disallow searching for new ways that we “*should* live,” nor does it, in my experience, allow for “treading with suspicion.” I believe that if I am to safe guard myself against fundamentalist ideas creeping back in, the safety nets mentioned above are steps in standing up to fundamentalist ideas reoccurring.

#### 2.4.2. Postmodern Theology

Embracing postmodernism was helpful in safe guarding against the internal determination to arrive at a place of perfection, which I had grown up believing possible. This modernist theory was deeply engrained in my being and though I had begun to understand differently, the habitual practices of this religion had to be brought under governance, within myself. Reading the above lines may seem as though I have switched one power imbalance for another, instituting one form of governing to control the previous one. However, the guiding principles that I am attempting to set up in my life are postmodern in approach and thus, by nature of what postmodern practices allow, offer reprieve from the shackles of religion and protection from returning to a fundamental past. “Postmodernism is an approach which requires that we look at things in new ways. It also suggests that we look at new things, given the changing nature of the world in which we live” (Jennings & Graham 1996:167). With this insight and commitment to “looking at the new,” I was less likely to lean into my past ideas of arriving at a place of perfection or completion.

Foucault (1972) suggests that if we are able to deconstruct that which we believe to be obvious, and consider the possibilities of those thoughts, we may alter what knowledge is and how it is

used. Postmodernism offers a vehicle for this lucid altering of thought, and in doing so adds valuable new dimensions of possibility to action research.

My reasoning for challenging frontiers of thought is for the same reasons that Rossouw offers for the need to challenge theology:

A theology that pretends to be a timeless and closed system of theological knowledge, unaffected by cultural shifts, runs the risk of becoming obsolete, and is itself a reaction to preceding cultural developments. Isolating theology from culture is a coping strategy by theology – to deal with the challenges that culture poses to a specific theological interpretation of the world.

(Rossouw 1993:895)

For me, as researcher, I do not wish to become irrelevant in my thinking and actions, which I have witnessed in my fundamentalist experiences. This may become a danger if my theology is not a “working theology” (McFague 2001:xii) that is exposed to “cultural shifts” (Rossouw 1993:895). It has thus also become important for me as participant, to be exposed to shifting cultural ideas or patterns of thinking within the context of “women with babies” to aid in the effectiveness of the participatory group as it chooses to liberate and take action, deconstruct and reconstruct. Derrida’s (1978) work on postmodern ideas, which originates in deconstruction, illuminates how the “ordinary, taken for granted structures of our social world” (Jennings & Graham 1996:176) are unnatural. The challenge for us as a participant group is to uncover the mysteries that lie beneath the unnatural.

Postmodern ideas propose the freedom to challenge religion and the sciences to a more efficient, contextual function. Hence the descriptions of postmodernism used in Herholdt’s (1998:215) writing, “revisionary thinking”; “constructionism”; “critical realism”; and the concept mentioned in previous paragraphs, “deconstruction.” Thoughts held by Isabelle Stengers and David Peat suggest that in the “mechanisms” of chaos, “randomness” and “unpredictability” are “necessary to ensure creativity and novelty” (Herholdt 1998:217). Postmodernism has allowed me to experience God outside of fear. I have been introduced to a God that does not dictate my every move but rather invites me into a co-creating, co-authoring relationship of love. I bring this experience with me into the group and invite participants to fully experiencing our creative potential with such ideas of God.

Dynamics of change and potential, possibilities and action are characteristics of postmodern thinking, as too of participatory action-research. It is thus fitting that as participant researcher, these ideas are brought in. "Postmodernism is... a rediscovery of the value of human participation, a quest for wholeness and meaning, a perspective on the continuity between all levels of a multi-levelled reality." (Herholdt 1998:218). Thomas Kuhn (discussed in Herholdt 1998:218-219) suggests a "new paradigm" or "new intellectual frame work" affecting our language, knowledge, reality, God, and how we interact with these ideas and it questions ideas of Truth. Truth is defined by cultures, periods of time, "the questions we ask, and what we hope to fulfil."

As researcher and pastoral therapist, I am zealous for what will transpire from processes of "asking questions" and defining new "truths." As a participatory group, in a period of our lives, and in a period of time in South Africa where change is our dominant story, I believe this research to hold a thrilling new paradigm within which we, as a group can have effect and expand that effect into our local communities, as a movement towards a "participatory consciousness" (Kotze et al 2002:4). Kotze et al (2002:4) encourages us as a participatory group to embrace Heshusius' (1994:15) expansion on the "selfother" (Kotze et al 2002:4) relationship that calls for a "deeper level of kinship... an attitude of profound openness and receptivity", Heshusius (1994:16-18) continues (in Kotze 2002:5) "when one merges, one can come to know even from silence." We, as participants found these ideas of knowing "even from silence" (Heshusius 1994:18) to be an invitation to care and support one another in new ways, and extend this into our families and friends.

Coming to know one another in a "selfother" relationship (Kotze et al 2002:4) and discovering new truths was the group's experience of the "rediscovery of the value of human participation" (Herholdt 1998:218) and the interface with "multi-levelled realities" (Herholdt 1998:218) that postmodernism reflects.

Postmodern theology is summed up by Marius Herholdt (1998:222), "Postmodern science opts for an integrated understanding of reality that is holistic, ecological and systemic." I find this an accurate reflection as to why I invited "Planetary Theology" (McFague 2001), as partner to postmodern thinking, to fill in the framework of being relevant and contextual in what we bring into

the research process from a theological perspective. Clinebell presents a 'holistic liberation-growth model of pastoral care and counselling' in his work *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counselling* (Pattison 1993:83). He suggests "wholeness" and speaks of being relevant in not only our interactions with self, but also with others, institutions and the environment. Postmodern theology opens up space to discuss varying interpretations of our faith practices and how we can collaborate these practices to the benefit of all participants.

#### 2.4.3. Planetary Theology

*"I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly" - Jesus*

The ideas of planetary theology have influenced my approach in this research topic three fold. Firstly, it is a theology that I can identify with as a Christian called for an "abundant life" which planetary theology speaks to. Secondly, re-defining what is meant by an "abundant life" requires a guide which planetary theology offers. And thirdly, our planet is unhealthy, and for us to be searching for that which constitutes wellness for women with new babies, I believe we are unable to separate our wellness from that of the planet. This consciousness is one that I wished to share with and explore with the research participants.

As a Christian, the idea of an "abundant life" is familiar (John 10:10) though I believe it is not correctly interpreted, nor to its fullest potential. Sallie McFague (2001) is my inspiration in Planetary Theology informing this research with writings such as her *"Life Abundant: rethinking theology and economy for a planet in peril"*. Her foundation of calling the Western Civilizations into account for theology and economy, stems from similar scriptures to those that render truth in my life. She speaks of loving God and loving neighbour, and then challenges: "a widening gap between the rich and the poor as well as the unravelling of the irreplaceable life systems of the planet. Is this loving nature – or our neighbour?" (McFague 2001:xi) She calls on North American middle-class Christians to "live differently in order to love nature, and to live differently, we need to think differently – especially about ourselves and who we are in the scheme of things" (McFague 2001:xi). She believes that all Christians should have a "working theology" that is "good, appropriate and functional" (McFague 2001:xii).

The theory behind planetary theology in this context is an invitation to people, sciences, knowledges and energies, to bring expertise together to ensure survival, and more – our planet's wellness and her citizens better-off. For this however, we need to see our proper size in relation to the world, forests, and the ocean (McFague 2001:6). Perhaps looking deeply at the two words "justice and sustainability" (204) could assist us in seeing ourselves more appropriately. What would this planet be like if we created it such that it was like a "household... where each of us takes only our share, cleans up after ourselves and keeps the house in good repair for future dwellers?" (204) I would like to carry McFague's challenge to my own household, as well as to the community of participants. I feel that as a parent and a co-journer on this planet, I have a responsibility to stand up to, and teach my children to stand up to, the consumerism that McFague discusses.

Bringing this theology to the group in the form of questions and discussion on our role as privileged citizens of this planet, was met with interest and hope for the future of our planet. Questions were raised by the women, "In what way do we wish to allow this theology to affect our liberation as a group? How do we, as a group, stand up to consumerism in our own way? In what ways could we make a difference to the planet, to the marginalized, and for our children? (see chapter four for further comment in this regard.)

We face the dilemma of "individualistic model" and "ecological model." From the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, and the Declaration of Independence, we see our American counterparts (who have great influence in our culture), holding onto "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." (McFague 2001:xi) Sadly, this has bred a cohort (of which most Westernized cultures are members), that see ourselves as basically separate from other people, improving ourselves as best we can, forgetting the damage and desperation that we may be causing planetarily as well as to the marginalized. As a participating group, we mourned for our involvement in this. "The ecological model, then suggests a new vision of the "abundant," good life. It is not and cannot be the consumer model of individual gain, it must be a shared life where "the rich must live more simply, so that the poor may simply live" (209). We, the women, chose to interact with planetary theology and to allow it to guide some of our conversations and actions. I was not disappointed that I transparently brought this theology with me into the group.

Gordon Kaufman (cited in McFague 2001:6) claims, "given the nuclear and ecological crises facing our planet, theology can no longer proceed with business as usual. It must deconstruct, and reconstruct its central symbols – God, Christ, human being – from within this new context." What would our Christian faith look like if we observed it through the lens of our planetary ecological situation? What lenses do I have to remove in order to see through a cosmological lens? What lenses do we as a participatory group of women with babies have to remove to be more aware and active for a "planet in peril"? Will I *do hope* (Weingarten 2000:389-402) by standing up to injustices to poor people, and by standing up to the elements that feed the deterioration of our planet? Will I oppose the plague of consumerism that is consuming us? Sallie McFague (2001:4,130) invites us to be a planet that is the "glory of God" because all of its creatures are "fully alive."

As Walter Brueggemann (quoted in McFague 2001:182) challenges the church, I challenge our participatory group. He suggests that while Jesus represents, "an economy infused with mystery of abundance and a cruciform kind of generosity" the church and its membership may be blinded by consumerism. Brueggemann (quoted in McFague 2001:182) in reference to consumerism says,

It has become a demonic spiritual force among us and the theological and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it... As we walk into the next millennium, we must decide where our trust is placed. The great question facing the church is whether our faith allows us to live a new way.

(Brueggemann in McFague 2001:196)

I would like to take this beyond questioning Christianity, and ask of the participatory group about their faith practices, as the participants vary in religious affiliation. How have their faith practices carried them through challenges or helped them survive trauma? What can we share and borrow from one another's faiths that could aid in a united front against consumerism, for the benefit of our planet and her citizens? For Christians, Brueggemann speaks of the earth coming to being because of the love of God, us being born from the love of God and suggesting that we return to the love of God – he uses this to challenge the church and the power of the gospel to entice us, the church, into a new way of living. Will we answer the call and come together as a group for the liberation of other and planet?

As individuals we experience competition on a daily basis and are well versed in its demands. At the same time, we have only “sporadic” flashes of togetherness, glimpses of what might be if only people would cooperate and their purposes reinforce, rather than undercut, one another.

(Bellah et al. 1985:37)

Though I concur wholeheartedly with the ideas of planetary theology, specifically as it relates to the marginalized, I felt that I lacked exposure to what caring for the marginalized might look like. Needing a deeper awareness and interaction with the heart of the marginalized, I invited feminist theology to guide me in the caring of those I thought I was so removed from. As a participatory group, feminist theology has offered us new space to live and intermingle with one another and our communities.

#### 2.4.4. Feminist Theology

Feminist theology is invited into this research as it is a part of my personal wellness, and as participant researcher, I am not able to divorce myself from that which informs my person – it is brought in by my very presence in the group. Unbeknown to me at the time, I have come to see in hindsight how this theology did hope in my life as a little girl while semi blinded by a dominant patriarchal theology.

I grew up in a regimental, patriarchal church, as well as a male dominated household where patriarchal ideals were implemented due to the teachings of the institution of the church. God and fear were synonymous at that time. At a crucial point in my life, I needed a God of comfort, of patience, of hope, and of love... my narrative pastoral therapist colleagues helped me re-member (Morgan 2001:77) my God, by looking at an image of my late grandmother who would brush my long blond hair with amazing patience. In this simple manner, she created a sensation of belonging, of care and of love. After peeling away the layers of fear and subordination that the institution in my past had created, I was able to “restore the dignity and uniqueness of the qualities of knowing, loving and relating” (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:115) to God.

Feminist theology has offered me tools to make sense of and re-author (White 1991:30) my faith practices as a Christian. Lynn Japinga (1999:105) breathed life into my relationship with Jesus through her “feminine imagery for Jesus.” Though the maternal qualities we find in Jesus may



have had adverse effects in that women may be seen as mothers, and be expected to have the same “sacrificial-mothering” that Jesus had, I found it to be a liberation of my connection with Jesus. I could begin to believe that this Mother could know me. Examples of seeing motherhood in Jesus are captured from *Feminism and Christianity* (Japinga 1999:105):

He carries us within him in love and travail, until the full time when he wanted to suffer the sharpest thorns and cruel pains that ever were or will be, and at the last he died.

The mother can give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and tenderly, with the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life... The mother can lay her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender Mother Jesus can lead us easily into his blessed breast through his sweet open side.

So he wants us to act as a meek child...

I wished to bring to the group my experience of Jesus, not as a power, but as an experience of feminist theology, to share and be shared with, alternative ways of connecting with God and liberating ourselves and others.

Feminism, for me, is not about a female God, nor is my granny my God, rather it is, as many other liberation theologies, about the liberation of the marginalized. “The starting point was woman’s experience of being treated as a second class citizen.” (Keane 1998:122) The reason that it is a necessary element in my life and this research is because feminism has evolved from pro-woman to a pro-people movement. Various strands of Feminism exist today. I am not of the opinion that women ought to create a separatist culture devoid of male influences, this being the focus of Radical revolutionary feminist theologians such as Mary Daly. For me, this would be de-centring men and creating a marginalized group that would then require liberation. The result is a perpetual circle of breaking down community which would contradict what community is in feminist Christianity: “mutuality, interrelatedness, and compassion.” (Isherwood &McEwan 1996:32)

Rather, I embrace reformist feminist ideas where we opt for equilibrium of synergy, equally respecting and empowering the other’s unique giftedness for the betterment of our planet. Ackermann (1996:44) suggests that there are three areas in which “feminist theology of praxis” can take place. She speaks firstly of collaborating by “drawing on the stories and experiences of

women and other marginalized and oppressed people.” The research proposes beginning within the group to hear stories of women who have been marginalized, and then extend this beyond to other groups of oppressed people, women, children and men. Secondly, she speaks of a collaboration of “women scholars” and literary input. Thirdly, she challenges us with suggesting a co-labouring of the sciences.

This theology calls for a re-authoring of the stories of women, men, and sciences, where consciousness of the evils of sexism can be brought to light and the enrichment of both men and women can be realized. Feminist Christianity uses “sexism” as an example of what the theology defines as sin:

The violation of the right relation. Because right relations are those which are mutually empowering, sin occurs whenever a person or group use or abuse an individual, group or natural resource for their own purposes, thereby disempowering, degrading and all too often destroying who or what was used.

(Isherwood & McEwan 1996:218)

Embracing this theology of sin was a constant reminder to ask myself why I am doing what I am doing, who benefits and am I destroying someone or something? Bringing ideas of feminist theology to the group brought in a flavour of extending liberation beyond our own hurts and pains as women, to the greater community of marginalized people and things.

Our country has a history that ought to touch the conscious of the privileged citizens within her borders. Feminism offers our deprived people hope, and it is an imperative addition to any practical theological research in South Africa – being driven by a liberation theology. “The enduring theo-ethical significance of values such as justice, love, freedom, equality, peace and wholeness lie at the heart of a mended creation” (Ackermann 1996:34). Ackermann (1996:34) suggests that “liberating praxis is collaborative, sustained action for justice, liberation and healing, empowered by continuous struggle, hope and passion. It can emerge from those who have privilege and power as well as from the actions and knowledge of those who are marginalized and oppressed”. Ackermann presents ideas and thoughts that echo the plight of participatory action-research methods which once again illustrates the necessity for Feminist ideas in this particular research as we network women into communities of mutual care and healing (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:31).

"The acceptance and sharing of pain and sorrow can lead to change and transformation, both in individuals and in communities" (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:96). The participating group's interest was invested in the caring, sharing and healing of ourselves as women with new babies, with the hope of it precipitating beyond the group to family, church communities and the larger geographical community.

## **2.5. Summary**

This chapter has been a journey through my past, and into my present, sharing the changes in my faith practices and choices in a practical theological context, and how these were brought to the participatory group.

Having shared that which governs my practice and self, I invite you, the reader, into the participatory group as witness.

This is the community of the "wellness project for women with new babies" where you will witness the sharing of stories of spiritual strength, surviving trauma, and supporting one another through new narratives.

### CHAPTER THREE SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS



We cannot know ourselves, free of cultural constraints, any more than we can know other parts of the world. We must always recognize ourselves as embedded in cultural communities. One can ask questions about the world, but cannot claim to have discovered the truth. The best one can expect is that a new interpretation, a different perspective, or an interesting slant can be created. In this sense social constructionism invites creativity, new interpretations, and an openness to other fields of knowledge. Whether a new interpretation becomes acceptable depends importantly upon others in the linguistic community.

(Davis & Gergen 1997:7)

Sharing one another's stories during the group discussions facilitates a new construction of our realities. We are invited in to new ways of seeing and challenging our own beliefs as well as that of others. This in turn affected the manner in which we interact with our husbands and how we raise our children. Research invited three women to tell their faith narratives, and one, her story of surviving trauma. This also gave us the opportunity to witness and be altered by others' perspectives.

The opportunity to share stories would serve as a soundboard to hear one's own wisdom and acknowledge it as valid.

Every person has her own unique body of knowledge that's been given to them through their life's experiences. And realizing that mine is as valid as the next person's, whether or not that person has gone through six or seven years of college, I feel that my knowledge is as important and real and valuable as theirs is.

(Belenky et. al. 1986:69)

It may be relevant to interject the feminist perspective of relational interaction, at this time. Mary Gergen (2001:1-51) challenges psychology in the setting of relational awareness in that she suggests that it may not be an accurate reflection of a person's personal narrative if the setting of the interview, or place of sharing does not contain relational bonds. To explain more clearly, where psychology in the past has professed to attain research from formalized meetings and manage to be guided by an individual professing neutrality, Gergen (2001:2) proposes that to have "no relationship [with participants] is a social/physical impossibility" and a "partnership of some sort"

may be an alternative option. The creation of a “safe place” where relationship is not only possible, but encouraged, was the foundation to this session of sharing one’s personal, spiritual narrative.

As researcher, and pastoral carer, I am urged by Gergen (2001:2) to be “humble about the generalization of [my] findings from unrepresentative samples”. This reminds me that the findings from these stories are unique and relevant to those represented and present, not for purpose of generalization but becoming an integral asset to the pastoral value of the wellness project (see chapter four).

“The quest for theological reflection will no longer ask the question “is something Christian?” but “is something healthy?” (Isherwood & McEwan quoted in Grobbelaar 2001:10). To be hearing one another’s faith narratives was not for the benefit of Christianity, or any other singled out religion, but for the wellness of the participants. “Speaking first to be heard is power over. Hearing to bring forth speech is empowering” (Nelle Morton quoted in Bons-Storm 1996:11). The challenge for pastoral care in this regard is how does one listen to silenced women. For the participating group, we faced answering the question of why “women often ask themselves, “Isn’t this problem somehow my fault?” or “Is this problem even worth discussing?”” (Bons-Storm 1996:11). We found various social and religious discourses rapped tightly around the reasons we ask the above questions. For many years, we, the participating women, have lived in a patriarchal country, governed by hierarchal religious structures. We found that to voice our concerns, one had the option of being a subordinate and approaching someone in authority with personal dilemmas, or alternatively, the pastor or pastoral counsellor, who in most of our lived experience was male. The issue was not necessarily “male,” but rather the silencing of power imbalanced in the institutions of patriarchy and religion. Bons-Storm (1996:11) uses the following words to express a similar sentiment to that which we, the participating group discussed, “[t]hey are not sure they can find the right words, and frequently they have a vague or even acute sense of embarrassment in referring their problems to a pastor or counsellor.”

In the past, women faced with the above mentioned challenges, would turn to sisters, mothers, or the women in the community for the care they sought. As a participatory group, we found that our support and care options were limited due to the rapid pace of life in Gauteng, South Africa, the

disbursement of our families overseas and to other provinces, and time restraints. For us, the wellness project was an option to rekindle what we looked for in care, and invited pastoral care to meet the challenges of women that find themselves isolated, and in need of communities of care. Pastoral care for the women of the participating group could not be a pastor of any one religion, they called for something richer. "The caring community, inclusive of both laity and clergy, provides the pastoral care. The ministry of pastoral care should therefore be understood holistically rather than hierarchically." (de Jongh van Arkel 2000:32). The "caring community" for the wellness of women was the women who participated, women of various religions, forming a type of "congregation." De Jongh van Arkel (2000:33) defines what we, as participants, were attempting during this phase of the wellness project as "pastoral care" which he explains in relation to "pastoral counselling" and "mutual care," he suggests that pastoral care, "takes a middle position between the two as part of the official upbuilding and nurture of the people of God who form a congregation."

The idea of functioning as a form of a congregation or care giving group challenged us in various ways. Feminist practices stretched the participants to a realization of the "liberating and dangerous" (Gergen 2001:4) challenge of Reinharz (1985:163) to "articulate our values and, on basis of these, to develop new theories and formulate new research practices." The "new research practices" that we hoped to continue to find were pastoral care practices within the group for the purpose of extending beyond the group.

For the women of the participating group, stepping away from the normalizing standardized measurements that an ordinary psychological research derives its value from, is refreshing and breathes life into their experiences. There is no right or wrong, only alternative ways of being and challenging of our perspective discourses. With permission from one another, we entered into "all of a person's relationships as a representative of the care of God and the fellowship of his people" (Sothoren 1983:119). The function of pastoral carer thus becomes a shared responsibility of each individual in the group, balancing power, each being given opportunity to witness and have a voice. In this, being a mutual carer and pastoral carer were interchangeable depending on who was sharing, and who was witnessing.

A clarification of the differences between mutual care, pastoral care, and pastoral counselling may be helpful at this time. De Jongh van Arkel (2000:33) reports that “mutual care is primarily a spontaneous, supportive caring action, pastoral counselling is a more specialized problem-orientated caring action in its focus on people with problems. Pastoral care takes a middle position between the two as part of the official upbuilding and nurture of the people of God who form a congregation.” As researcher, I have opted to leave the word “congregation” undefined as it could invite “a collection of do’s and don’ts” (Rossouw 1993:895) into the participating group’s function, limiting what our function as a group has to contribute to outside communities of varying faith practices.

Caring through sharing narratives was nurturing for many reasons, one of which Anderson and Goolishian (1992:26) explain in that “people live, and understand their living, through socially constructed narrative realities that give meaning and organization to their experience”. Finding “meaning and organization” was birthed in the conversations that eventuated as the women’s stories were given voice.

The following four stories are excerpts from the lives of Stephanie, Kim, Sonja and Ingrid.

### **3.1. Stephanie**

“It wasn’t, at the time, just that my husband-to-be was Muslim, it was also that he is coloured. It wasn’t just religion, it was cultural and racial as well. My real father [biological father] was alright with all of it in the beginning, until I told him I was getting married – he never came to the wedding”

Stephanie’s story begins with her attendance at a Catholic school, her being forced to attend church and be a part of the Catholic religion, neither of which were her choice. Taking part in Catholic faith practices, such as prayer, church ceremonies, and the symbols, were an internal struggle over the years. She did not believe in the God whom she was told to offer prayers, and the symbols were meaningless and empty. These activities invited frustration and anger towards religion.

"Converting [to Muslim faith] was really easy" she said as she explained the ceremony of receiving her Muslim name "Kaamelah."

The transition to a different religion, for Stephanie, was about a change from not believing in anything, to finding her God and learning to pray. According to Muslim religion it is not permitted to marry someone who is not of the Muslim faith yet Stephanie emphasized that she *chose* the Muslim faith and began practicing it before she and her husband married. "I chose Muslim." This choice stood against her previous experience of not being given a choice regarding religion. She could identify with Bons-Storm's (1996:116) words, "looking at the church and at God from the position of an "awakened" woman" compared to her past which was "full of voices but made of stone."

Stephanie shared: "Long before we [husband and her] got serious, I decided that the Muslim faith was for me. His family are very supportive because my sister-in-law is also white and my mother-in-law converted to Muslim from Christianity, so there has been quite a lot of converting going on, they are all used to it." For Stephanie, the comfort she found in the family began with the commonality between herself and the other women in the family, a "community of choice" is formed which Gelder (1996:32) explains, "while people in communities of choice do not necessarily share a common history they do share values and interests which have often arisen from similar life experiences. Friendship plays a vital part in creating and sustaining communities of choice." Stephanie found her interests in Muslim faith a common experience between herself and the women in her in-law family, and their friendship sustains their "community of choice."

"My step father walked me down the aisle, I knew I had his and my mother's support." Having made the choice of faith practices for herself, the support of family from the previous religion was an outward sign of their respect and acceptance of her finding her new self from a religious perspective.

Stephanie shared her view of the difference between being forced to adopt a religion, and being given the opportunity to choose her faith. The choice did not come without pain and subsequent loss, "I had to stand up to the things and people that didn't want me to choose identity for myself,



otherwise I would not be where I am today. I actually believe in something now, I have learned how to fast, how to pray. Though my father thought I would call the wedding off, right until the last few days, I told him I was going to go through with it."

Stephanie shared how her father's reaction spoke of his unbelief in her new faith and self convictions. She did not see herself as standing up to her father but rather standing up to the discourses, such as racism, fundamentalism, biases, etc., that spoke through her past religion and her biological father. This could be seen as Stephanie's "shift into subjectivism," which Belenky et. al. (1986:83) describes is "an adaptive move in that it is accompanied by an increased experience of strength, optimism, and self-value". Stephanie's "self reflection" of who she was and who she had become through the choices she had made, illustrated that she was "not inevitably caught in the subject position that the particular narrative and the related discursive practices might seem to dictate" (Davies 2000:90-91) Rather, she had found her discursive positioning (Davies 2000:87) to be altered as she came into new realities through her new faith practices.

Hearing Stephanie's story of her conversion to the Muslim faith as well as her in-laws acceptance of her into a Muslim family with Muslim traditions evoked concern in the women. Some of the women had heard stories of women in the Muslim faith being ill treated and the idea of submission being taken to an extreme that they saw as removing a woman's self-worth. "Perhaps it is a lack of knowledge, a misunderstanding of the different religions. Maybe people need to be informed more clearly on how the Muslim faith works. I believe that every religion in extreme is a danger, because then people forget about love of others," offered Stephanie.

"How did you cope accepting a religion that could be oppressing to women, like where you are "impure" during your monthlies?", asked one of the concerned participants. Some of the women were of the same opinion as Dr. Christiane Northrup, and found the idea of one's menstrual cycle being "impure" offensive. For these participants and Northrup (1998:95) see one's menstrual cycle as a time to "celebrate" as it is "a source of our female power ... The ebb and flow of dreams, creativity and hormones associated with different parts of the cycle offer us a profound opportunity to deepen our connection with our inner knowing."

Stephanie smiled at the concern. "I don't feel oppression from this religion at all." She shared that what she had borrowed from the religious practices of fasting and prayer served her far more than concerns regarding whether or not she was seen as "impure" while on her menstrual cycle. The Muslim traditions of fasting and prayer taught her to connect with the "inner knowing" that Northrup (1998:95) speaks of in other ways. "I also was not worried that I might have given birth to a daughter, with the potential to be oppressed. The family traditions in the Muslim faith can be more dominating than the religion itself. It seems that people have taken religion to extremes, not God. I am also a part of a very progressive, liberal Muslim family, who respect God and one another, man, woman or child, and this removes the oppressive potential of the religion." Stephanie explained that though the women in her family were not expected to wear traditional clothing or make the journey to Mecca, they did take their religion seriously. "We do however, take our religion seriously. We fast for thirty days every year, and we would like to try accomplish the five pillars to the religion. My husband and his brother want to go to Mecca, but you have to be completely out of debt before you go, no bond, no payments of any kind. That's something to work towards."

The trip to Mecca was an interesting discussion for the group for two reasons. Firstly, the idea of being debt free was attractive yet seemingly unrealistic for many of the participants. For Stephanie, it was meaningful and something to work towards. Secondly, the atmosphere of the group changed when Stephanie expressed her desire to leave the Mecca trip for her husband, and that this was acceptable to the family. "Personally, I do not want to go, you don't need to go as a couple. I don't approve of the way things are between men and women over there." Stephanie felt that she will not be able to "handle" things overseas, and that she thus chose against going there as a expression of her disapproval of unfair practices toward women, though not as a demonstration against her faith.

For the group, it was important to hear that she was able to make such a stand and be supported in her decision by her husband and Muslim family. The participants were given the opportunity to witness the family's liberation and progressive approach that Stephanie had reported of earlier and were thus able to interact with the various faith practices more openly. The desire to learn and

borrow from one another's faith practices was opened up again once the protective concern was validated.

Taking control of one's religion and finding the balanced medium that works for oneself, could be a facet of self-care for women to recognize and embrace for themselves. Stephanie had illustrated this by finding and choosing the faith practice that suited her, and then finding her own liberation in it by standing up to unfair family practices within the religion, overseas. Though it may be seen as a small action that Stephanie chose in standing up to women's oppression by not travelling to Mecca, the action was liberating to the group.

"For Shakiel [her son] I believe that it is important to grow up believing in something. Before my husband and I decided to fall pregnant, we discussed how we would raise our child. We both decided to raise him according to Muslim values, but at the same time expose him to other religions, this way he is able to make an informed decision, when he is older, about what religion suits him and his family. Our decision is not at all a Muslim practice, but we would want it to be a family practice – of giving our children the freedom to choose, and encouraging them to have the courage to do so, as I did, despite the resistance they may face." The decision to offer freedom to children to choose their own religion opened the group to discussions of religious pluralism. Lubbe (1995:165) suitably articulates what the group encountered through witnessing alternative faith narratives, "it is more than religious plurality (or diversity), since it implies 'the energetic engagement with that diversity' with includes reciprocity, the search for mutual understanding, and a conscious encounter of religious commitments." Each of the individual faith practices represented in the group had varying ideas on family, power sharing and what one of the participants called "child rearing." The "energetic engagement" (Lubbe 1995:165) that we experienced as participants introduced us to new ways of seeing our own faith practice as well as seeing our own faith in relation to one another's faith practices.

Stephanie was confident in her family's support and the power sharing that her and her husband agree on in their marriage. What they hold onto shares commonality with practical theology in what Osmer (1997:49) terms "basic epistemic value". Osmer (1997:49) reports on the commonality mentioned above in that it is, "the importance of establishing truth in situations of

conflict through fair and open communicative processes” that challenge practical theology and that Stephanie and her husband hold onto and attest significance to. To be capable of settling “differences through rational means rather than violence or manipulation” is a knowledge that Stephanie imparted to the research group.

The group saw this as a strength in Stephanie’s family that we could all borrow from. Allowing our children the choice was discussed as a responsibility, though many of us with fundamental background struggled to fathom ideas on ways of doing this effectively without pressure or becoming radically liberal where anything goes.

Our children [the participants’ babies] would be given the opportunity to choose their religion, but from an informed perspective, which would be a commitment on the part of the parent when deciding what school the child would be enrolled in, and what she/he is exposed to during their early informative years. Informing would be accomplished differently for each of the participants, for myself and my child, visiting and interacting with other people whose faith practices differ from our own would be an enlightenment and a learning experience for both of us. For other participants, they would rely on the schools they chose for their children to illuminate the richness in available religious ideas to select from, with guidance and involvement of themselves as parents.

Stephanie’s faith narrative evoked various responses from Research and the group. This we saw as the process of interacting with alternative ways of being.

### 3.1.1. Response

For the group witnessing Stephanie’s story, many misconceptions of the Muslim faith were terminated. Belenky et. al. (1986:26) state that “... in order for reflection to occur, the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen or read and write – sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other’s experiences”. Due to the reflection that was taking place, the women recognized the importance of bringing up a child who is able to make informed religious decisions and it also challenged the participants on their own belief systems. For each of us, finding a new truth was experienced differently, and we were changed by witnessing the power-sharing that is possible within a marriage in a faith practice that may not

always promote it. Stephanie shared her story of standing up to religious discourses and in that challenged the participants to do the same. We are in a position to choose and not be dictated to regarding our faith practices, though we, as well as our children, should be in a position to make informed choices regarding this. Our perceptions and defensiveness towards the Muslim faith was transformed to acceptance and intrigue, and an openness towards others' ideas on religion resulted.

Smith (1997:191) speaks of "truth resonating" as either "a silent but clear tone" vibrating... "an understanding dissolves, replaced with the glimmering new comprehension" or alternatively, "truth arrives abruptly, hitting like a ton of bricks, a physical sensation. Another echoing layer of the complexity of life is revealed." This discovering together diluted fundamentalism to a more pliable presence and the women found common ground in their desire to explore different ways of raising our children. Suggestions on how to look at parenting differently were pooled, and some decided to look to outside sources, and cultures, for ideas. Allowing children the power to choose seemed to filter through more than just religion, such as conversations about older children choosing their own god-parents.

Spiritual conversations such as the above opened up avenues of co-labouring in the search for new ways of raising and socializing children. Understanding the privilege and responsibility of what we bring into the lives of our children can be daunting if faced alone. As women, we began renegotiating our defined selves and what we believe we bring to the family as parents. This is a break through for many of us as we look at the theories and knowledges that dominated the relationships of our childhood. Taggart (1989:100) saw this struggle already looming in 1989 while writing 'Epistemological Equality as Fulfilment of Family Therapy', in *Women in Families*,

...the struggle by women to define *themselves* in this or any context raises profound theoretical and epistemological questions. Women's realization that *they* are the ones to define their nature and place in human affairs points to a radical break with past definitions of both theory and knowledge. When women criticize how the standard theories routinely construct them, they call those theories and their basic assumptions radically into question. (Taggart 1989:100)

As women with new babies, these conversations had began to open up avenues of confronting theories and assumptions and making choices as to what we would hold onto and what would be

discarded for the wellness of our Self and family. This, to me as researcher, was a powerful breakthrough in women embracing the glorious beauty of what is intrinsically gifted within them.

### 3.2. Kim

“He was very strong in his faith. I don’t think his faith filtered through to give me strength at that time. I was angry with God, religion, everything.”

Kim shared her Christian walk from a time when she walked away from an abusive marriage, two miscarriages, and an almost effective attempt at suicide, to find for herself a place of safety and solidarity. Choosing Christianity, though her Jewish heritage opposed it, was a decision she made for her self. Meeting her husband, Pastor Dom was for her, the beginning of her faith in action. “He was a church planter”, she began. “My family was horrified that we would want to get married in that little church with our black friends, but it is the way we wanted it.” She began to retell the story of her last few months in Zimbabwe.

“Do you know where your husband is right now?” The frantic phone call came from the wife of one of the other crusaders that worked with Kim’s missionary husband. “They’ve picked up a bunch of them and taken them to prison, accusing them of trying to assassinate President Mugabe!” she finished.

Two days later Kim found herself in prison too, five months pregnant, and being accused of selling foreign exchange. “While I was feeding my unborn child old cabbage, the guards were urinating on my husband. With 80 people in one cell and a barrel of slops to dig in to find food, he lost ten kilograms and found his strength in Jesus. He says that God put him there to encourage those in prison with him... he’s very together. He taught bible school, and sang songs with his cell mates.”

“I was angry with God, religion, everything. All I could think about was what we had done and given to these people, and this is what they were doing to my husband and I. I was not allowed to see my husband, but I heard that they wanted to give him a two year sentence and then deport him.” Kim’s telling of the strength and bond between mother and unborn child burst light into a dramatic story of leaving a home land, a comfortable life-style and a close extended family. “I

fought the system, female, pregnant and all. They waved the two year sentence and dropped him off at the airport in shackles where I put him on a flight to South Africa. A few weeks later, I followed and we began trying to survive in a country where we knew no one, had no money, and needed to find a place for our daughter Samantha to be born.”

With her personal bank account frozen and all her assets in her husband’s name, Kim and her family tackled Southern Africa. “My baby’s nursery, everything, left behind. I arrived with my faith, and that’s it.” Kim spoke of the power she was able to draw from her religious conviction that had resurfaced, the connection between her and her unborn daughter, and a determination to safeguard her unborn child. Never again would she allow someone to remove life from her as her first husband did when he threw her down the stairs in her second trimester. The powers of dictatorship pale next to mother protecting her child.

“There are flashes of light in this story too,” Kim shared, “my dad and I were never close. It is amazing how it has brought us together, and though he never held me as a child, I watch in amazement at him holding Samantha”. She smiles as she speaks. “Then,” she continues, “there is meeting people like you all through this wellness project.” Kim’s elaboration about friendship and needing people around you to support, care and hold you up, bears testimony of the value that this group has brought to each other. We came together with a similar friendship ideology to that of feminists: the “intention to enhance the well-being” of each other and attempt “to improve the quality of life in one’s community in the process” (Hunt 1996:74)

“As far as her religious choices go, I want her [Samantha] to be happy. When she is old enough, she must choose... growing up, she’ll be going to Sunday school, knowing the Lord and being Christian. It’s really amazing having a Christian life. The Christians that have supported us have been phenomenal.” Kim and Carmen, two Christian participants, entered into conversation about their families’ ways of informing their children about the diversity of religion.

The response to Kim’s story brought new ways of being to light.

### 3.2.1. Response

Kim's elaboration about friendship and needing people around you to support, care and hold you up, bears testimony of the value that this group has brought to each other. This need, or passion, that these women shared to be heard is not new to women. Weingarten (1997:2) shares her passion of wanting "to help mothers, myself included, to untangle the binds we are in – to locate the words to create the ideas that will enable us to share the truths of our lives".

Kim's story was an opportunity for the group to witness her trauma. Kaethe Weingarten (2003:3-5) discusses the experience of witnessing story, being affected by it, and finding a way to deal with the "common shock" that the witness experiences. "The witnessing of violence and violation, events that fall on a continuum from the ordinary to the extraordinary, jolts us into a response I call common shock" Weingarten (2003:5) explains.

The openness and vulnerability in the group enhanced our ability as participants to "rid" (Weingarten 2003:5) ourselves of the "common shock" that we were "now carrying within" us from witnessing her narrative. We chose acts of caring, sharing, and giving to meet Kim's immediate physical and emotional needs as an outward sign of how we were affected by what we heard. The eventuating clothing, employment offers, food parcels, listening, caring, and supporting that transpired have voice to the common shock that Weingarten (2003) speaks of. Kim found that it was and is the development of the relationships within the group and having others affected by her story, that have empowered her finding of self and thus her ability to survive. Taggart (1989:109) suggests that "women, given their ability to live in relational reality, are more likely to be aware of their supporters..." which Taggart believes to be those who encourage, support them, and hear them, despite the trauma, and richness that their lives often contain.

In sharing her faith journey, Kim opened spaces for further conversations ensuing from the witnessing group. "My husband was forced to attend Sunday school and he is put off completely – of religion." Carmen adamantly opposed the measure of forcing children to be involved in religion because of the damage it does in the long run. She reminded the group of Stephanie's pre-religion days where she believed in nothing, and how rewarding it was to choose and then have something



to believe in. Carmen agreed with Kim's assessment of the Christian life and said that Jared (her son) would also attend Sunday school until he chose otherwise.

What stood out for me, as researcher, was the appeal to raise children with an awareness of what "gifts and blessings" they have. Having experienced plenty, as well as poverty, and then plenty once more, Kim chooses to impart to her children values that I find mirrored in Ohye's (1998:137) description of Japanese parenting, "...when Japanese parents are asked to describe the quality they most wish to nurture in their children, they speak of *sunao*, an open-hearted cooperation through sensitivity with the other." This is to create an awareness in the children of the "other's" effort or feeling while doing / purchasing / giving / being. "Mothers in Japan invariably appeal to the child's feelings for others and to the interpersonal consequences of their actions." (Ohye 1998:137) Kim's shared experience of living in Zimbabwe illuminated how contrasting Ohye's (1998:137) description of Japanese family is next to Zimbabwean life, where there is so very little consideration for the other. The group was able to borrow from this contrast and see their own role in parenting from a new perspective.

"There is such hatred between the races in Zimbabwe. Mugabe has made a point of making it that way." Kim's description of the situation just over our boarder reminded us all of our responsibility within South Africa as we influence, expose and socially construct Africa's children. In sharing our stories, we become part of one another's stories - Ackermann (1996:48) calls this an intersection and goes on to say that we are changed by these intersections. "It is only when hearing and telling stories begins as a process of openness, vulnerability and mutual engagement that alienations of class, race and gender can be challenged" (Ackermann 1996:48). By vulnerably telling her story, Kim opened the channels of beginning to challenge existing oppression.

### **3.3. Sonja**

"My spiritual journey started about four years before I met Tony [Sonja's deceased partner, who is the father of her daughter Abigail.] I have a book club that consists of girls from school, so we've known each other at least twenty years. The books that we bring in are learning, growing, soul developing, spiritual books. So we've all been journeying this path together. Have you ever heard of Elizabeth Kubler Ross? She started Hospice in the world, and she realized that when people

were dying, no body cared. People were treated like they were already dead." Sonja continued to explain how her thoughts on death and dying are congruent with those of Kubler Ross, in that there is importance for people who were dying to know that they were dying because "people have terrible fear of dying but there is no-one to talk to because everyone they know is pretending that they are going to get better." Michael White (2003) and Sonja echo similarity in their ideas about decentring one's self and centring the knowledges of those who are consulting us. Both have used ideas of interviewing the person who "has the problem" as the individual with the knowledge on that problem, and not entering into conversations as experts. For Sonja, it has become exceedingly important to her that the knowledges of the marginalized be heard, specifically relating to death and dying.

"Her [Kubler Ross's] autobiography is a life altering read. And I finished reading it a week before Tony died. I had also done a hospice course three years ago in lieu of life-line, death, HIV/Aids counselling. I also have my own understanding of death; that a person may feel like they are still there, even though physically they are not. They feel the same. It was bizarre that I read the book at the time of Tony's death because my concern was that Tony did not realize that he had died, or maybe he could see his body... that I needed to empty my mind so that I could feel him so that he can make contact. Very often when people lose loved ones, they are understandably very distraught, but this may disallow any connection to be possible, it's just trauma. Which is understandable. For me, this whole thing of Tony dying was absolutely horrific, but if I did not have my spirituality, there's no way I could pull through it. I was able to accept it even a few months after he died. Maybe my pregnancy helped, the excitement of having his baby."

Sonja shared that she and Tony were hoping to become pregnant and though she had negative pregnancy tests one week after his death, by the second week her tests were positive. Tony had passed away leaving his one week old, unborn daughter growing in Sonja. "It was a complete miracle. That is such a gift, one door closing and another opening. Something so huge had been taken from me and yet something equally huge had been given to me. That helped me." To this day, Sonja still cries for Tony, she sees him in her daughter's every smile and in the twinkle of her beautiful eyes, they are "tears of sadness, I miss him, I wish he could see her and hold her, but I know he's around, I still have signs from him."

Tony has on various occasions been able to communicate with Sonja through her spirituality. Six weeks after his death, Sonja thought she would go for bereavement counselling. "My biggest concern was that Tony saw the truck coming, knew that it was his demise, and felt the impact." For Sonja to know that Tony was "okay" and that he had not suffered any trauma was of priority. The Buddhist woman that she went to see immediately picked up on the presence of a young man all over and around Sonja when she walked into the room. "He's showing me that he died recently in an impact, flung out of his body", she said. Tony wanted to share with Sonja that he had felt absolutely no pain; that he was flung out of his body, and he is "in a place of peace and absolute beauty and love."

Tears came to my eyes and the lump in my throat held me speechless as Sonja spoke of the Buddhist's who watched Tony and then said, "he's bringing his mother over, she wants to see what her daughter-in-law is like." Tony told Sonja that he was always with her and then, what made it very real for her, was that the woman was able to see that Tony thrived on sport and played guitar, two elements that spoke clearly of his character. "I walked out of there, with the field of wild flowers that he said he sends me, and the reminder of our love for the outdoors. I knew he was absolutely one hundred percent okay." I wondered if that had given her the peace she had been looking for, she claimed that it had - initially. "I walked out of there on a cloud, but two weeks after that, I started feeling quite angry. He was so fine and I was left with so much on my plate. I hit some major downers, and I went to see a homeopath who had studied Chinese medicine. That boosted me. I kept reading a lot. I read across the board spirituality. I'm not religious. I believe in God completely, I pray, I know I have guides and that I'm supported. The Buddhist lady suggested that I try out the Buddhist temple. Though I really like the Buddhist philosophy of no fear, peaceful, loving... I also know that I don't need to go to a specific place to pray, I can pray where ever I am, and that I'm surrounded by people that have the same ideas as me, I had support, I didn't need a church." I asked if this was her own spirituality that she created for herself, that works for her and carried her, to which she replied, "I'm spiritual and absolutely respect other's beliefs, but religion is not for me."

She, Sonja, would pass on to others, including her daughter, that it is not *what* you believe, but rather *that* you believe. "I have come across others who have lost partners. My one friend for example lost her fiancé nine years ago, and to this day is not able to deal with it. Her life is quite a mess in some areas and she believes that once someone dies, that's it, they are gone. From that I appreciate my experiences so much more. I feel very fortunate." Hearing this from Sonja intrigued me as to how she may choose to raise Abigail, what she would like to pass on to her daughter, and what she may wish to withhold. "I believe that her father is her guardian angel, he's there looking after her. My way of bringing her father into her life is by sharing that though she can not see him, he's always with her... and that she is lucky to have this because so many other children don't have fathers involved in their lives at all. Her father will play a very large role in our lives, and through that, my beliefs will come through. But she is completely allowed to make her own decisions on her spirituality. I will never try and sway her in any direction at all, though she'll see what I believe." We discussed the responsibility of parents to ensure that children are able to make informed decisions regarding their spiritual journey. Sonja's main concern was that so many religions are "fear based" and carry the connotations of "if you don't believe in God, you're going to hell!" or "if you don't do this, you're going to burn forever!"

"So much of this is controlling. It needs to be through love and spending time with them [one's children]. My only issue is anything that is fear based. I'll tell her about other religions, she can choose to do what she wants to." When deconstructing the idea of "fear in religion" we realized that in many cases fear has taken hold of the very structure of investigating other religions, hereby handicapping one's mere ability to be informed.

The journey that Sonja is on has grown her love for Tony, "he talks to me a lot. And it is like being in a long distance relationship." She answered when I asked where she was in her journey. "The only thing is that I don't get is the phone calls. But I know he's there, I know his energy."

"I know he would've been a wonderful father, he wanted a daughter, this would've been very special for him. But I'm not sure what his approach to her woman-ness would have been..." Sonja continued to query how Tony may have chosen to ensure power balances within their family. We discussed how we would want to raise our children, our sons for example, to have an

understanding of the wisdoms of woman-ness, and our daughters with high esteem and respect for self. "The way I was brought up," informed Sonja, "was very domesticated in that we were to run around my father ensuring that he was comfortable and relaxed, etc. And this is a real issue for me. He brought me up with the idea that all I need to do is a secretarial course because I'm going to get married and have children." A small laugh escaped from her as she said, "well, hello, look where I am now, unmarried, nearly 40!" This "damaging outlook" has brought anger into Sonja's memories of her self because she feels that she ought to have taken the responsibility to educate herself despite the patriarchal views informing her. "I want my daughter, on the other hand, to know that she can be anything she wants to be, that she will have the ability, the support, and intelligence to do it! She must know that she's going to be special, she's not going to simply have to look after some man, as my father believes will be her [Abigail's] life." Sonja had explored "varied standpoints on a given set of gender relations... for deconstructing a too coherent, dichotomous portrayal of girls groups versus boys' groups and for developing a more complex understanding of gender relations" (Gergen & Davies 1997:195). In this Sonja had begun to socialize her daughter differently to the way in which she had been informed as a young girl.

"Even my mother... I overheard her on the phone once saying that I would never find a husband because I can't cook and men want a home maker!" As women with alternative views, and having met men with alternative views, we were able to find humour in her mother's comments, rather than offence. It is comments such as these that further illuminate the path we are on as feminists, and we are able to walk an extra mile.

As women, we are able to hear one another's stories and be changed by them. We were interested to hear how Sonja was doing now, with one court case in progress and another, between the driver and the insurance company, having closed a few days ago. Tony had left a substantial amount of money to a brother who was "down and out" many years before meeting Sonja. Since his death, Sonja is contesting Tony's will in request for the financing of Abigail's education throughout her life. The brother, who knows that Abigail is Tony's child, refuses to acknowledge this fact in court for fear that he will lose some of the financial benefit that he has received from his deceased brother, and the court is unable to prove Tony's paternity due to his remains being cremated. Sonja sighs and simply says that Tony knows what is going on and that

her God is in control. She refuses to be reduced to malice by his greed and leaves her request with her lawyers, confident that she will “be okay” regardless of the outcome. Again, she claims that her spirituality has offered her peace in this regard. The court case that was concluded over the past weekend was a little different however and tapped into her spiritual knowing...

“And now,” she says, deeply burdened, “the driver of the other vehicle is sentenced to two and a half years in prison and his license suspended for five years...” she pauses, “he’s the father of two small children and the soul income earner.” She looks away, “I am so upset that I didn’t stand up in that court and tell them that it was wrong... it doesn’t bring anybody back, it just destroys another family! This poor man, he’s a first time offender...” We both sat in silence for what seemed like endless moments, a silence that spoke loudly against what is called *justice* in this country. A rapist may be granted immediate bail, but a hard working father of a five year old and a two year old is sentenced by an insurance company’s processes and procedures. “I can try send his wife money every month... if I am able to... but still, I should’ve said something.” (sigh.)

“Forgiveness is huge, and sending her some money every month, not that it would carry her through, but it makes it a full circle. This person was not malicious in any way, didn’t want to harm anyone at all. Here’s an innocent father who fell asleep behind the wheel...there is so much to be worked on in this country”

### 3.3.1. Response

Will we stand up in court and speak against what is called “justice” when it is our turn? Sonja’s story has planted seeds within each of us. She may not have stood up that time, but because of her story, each one of us will stand up for the marginalized somewhere, sometime. We are now equipped with this responsibility because of the vulnerability she accepted in order to share her story. Though accepting this responsibility was not an intentional feminist movement, it is a collective of women who “envision a world very different from that doled out to them” (Taggart 1989:108) by existing systems – whether judicial or patriarchal. Taggart (1989:108) continues, “as the scales fall away from their eyes, new knowledge emerges for the oppressed through the intellectual and political struggles they wage with their oppressors. The pursuit of justice and the quest for truth become one....”. For us, Sonja’s story began such a pursuit.

We had not heard Sonja's story to judge, in fact, quite the opposite. Coming together in shared trust, we were not able to "call anyone's experience wrong... connected knowers do not measure other people's words by some impersonal standard. Their purpose is not to judge but to understand." (Belenky et. al. 1986:116)

When discussing gender socialization with Sonja, it became apparent that the word "socialization" may be the issue. To opt for altering the way we were "socialized" by substituting one power imbalance for another seems dull in comparison to the construct of a new ideology of "socialization". We chose "gender approaches" as a new way to consult with our children offering a wider scope of possibilities.

Sonja approached her child's faith choices with a fresh openness that reminded me of Bonnie Ohye's (1998:135) discussions on a mother's voice that can be "heard without speech, that knowing another can occur in a context that does not emphasize speaking, and that [my] children will come to discern much about their mother and her heritage through silence." Sonja suggested that her daughter Abigail would know what she believed separate from Sonja indoctrinating or forcing anything onto her, in fact, without words. "This silence is not that of a drowned or silenced voice, but rather is silence that is eloquent and resonant, embedded within a universe that steadily and powerfully directs one's attention away from the "self" and to the "other." (Ohye 1998:135)

It is my hope that those who read Sonja's story will not only benefit from witnessing her spiritual journey, and experience the sharing of faith without words, but also join us women in standing up for the marginalized. Further to this, Sonja has agreed to partner with myself and those who consult me in re-authoring ideas and discourses proposed by death and dying. This idea was proposed by Michael White while conferencing in South Africa, August 2003.

We, as a participatory group, regarded hearing one another's spiritual journey's as enriching to our lives and wished to extend the spiritual element further in our conversations and caring. Inviting God into our conversations and caring, specifically when hearing other's stories of trauma, was our opportunity to extend the enriching spiritual element further.

### 3.4. Inviting God into Conversations and Caring

The extent of mothers' self-sacrifices and their ability to cope with everything-from breastfeeding a 2-pound newborn to raising a child who is disabled or has a difficult temperament – is astonishing. However, just as astonishing is society's inability or unwillingness to recognize the true difficulty of all these endeavours.

*-Mothering Against the Odds*

The above quote is borrowed from *Mothering Against the Odds*, (Coll et al 1998:xix) an aptly expressive title illuminating a powerful reason and need for inviting God into conversations and caring, as women with new babies: "society's inability or unwillingness to recognize the true difficulty of all these endeavours." As participants, we felt like we needed to begin to challenge this "inability" of society by acknowledging one another's difficulties as mothers within the safety of the group.

Throughout this document, the word/s "safety"; "safe place"; "feel safe"; "safe conversations" have presented themselves expressing the desired effect of PAR. The challenge is that there is never a completely neutral or "safe" place, though as a group we have found this gathering to be as close to it as we see humanly possible. The "God-talk" element can almost always be seen as dangerous as one participant suggested, "God-talk is usually condemning not uplifting." Melissa Griffith offers two possible reasons why "God-talk" can be limited, "by proscriptive constraints – that this God-talk is not to be spoken of here, and by prescriptive constraints – that God can and should be spoken of here, but only in a certain way." (Griffith 1995:124). It was a rare experience for us as participants to find ourselves in a group where conversations of God and caring were combined and were not "proscriptive" or "prescriptive."

For the participants, the opportunity to discuss God in a group was not for the purpose of converting, but rather for the edification and sharing of self. Though the dangers of "God-talk" were present, the group did not feel limited, though initially daunting, surprisingly uncomplicated, perhaps due to the participants expecting to be "surprised, rather than stifled" (Griffith 1995:129).

For me, the interaction and deliberation of my friends' narratives added to my personal spiritual journey of discovery. "The Holy's other name is Surprise" shares Griffith (1995:137), her tradition



combines with my experience of the women, “if one is too certain of her specifications of God, she will miss God... the Israelites could not wholly name God. They said “Yahweh” which meant, “I am who I am, and I will be who I will be.” Movement and mystery.” Witnessing one another’s spiritual narratives asks “safety” to challenge “peace,” and “certainty” to be challenged by “faith” (Griffith 1995).

On numerous occasions, Kim has suggested that everyone has “an issue,” though what is “an issue for one, may not be an issue for another,” she reminds that we find support and commonality in that we have “an issue.” Pastoral care and counselling for these women is a place to be heard, telling spiritual narratives as well as narratives of surviving trauma. Hearing is healing, and the benefit for both narrator and witness were evident.

Ingrid’s story was one of surviving trauma, and for us all – hearing was healing.

### **3.5. Surviving Trauma: Ingrid’s story**

“So many of my friends have children the age of my eldest, and so, are unable to sympathize with my story of trauma.”

Having experienced a difficult pregnancy with her first child, Ingrid felt relieved at arriving at 37 weeks with her second. It was the phone call from her doctor while she was out shopping that started the whirlwind experience that would bring her son into the world. “Rush to the hospital! We need you in here NOW!” The demand of the doctor left Ingrid’s shopping cart unattended and her daughter dropped off at a friend’s home. “I remember walking down the hall crying because things had been going so well, but the blood tests taken the day before showed that the preclampsia was now dictating my child’s arrival.” Ingrid’s platelet count had dropped so low that she was in danger of needing a transfusion and was thus unable to have an epidural inserted. The doctor explained very clearly that going under general anaesthetic would mean a quick caesarean section and went through all the details of how it needed to take place. “I wish they’d never ever told me how quick it has to be or why. I’ve had operations, and it’s never really bothered me, for some reason it really freaked me out when he explained it this time and it had to do with my son’s birth and survival. I know this doesn’t sound so bad when I say it, but it was really traumatic for me.”

"There are about ten people standing around, watching you lying there, the gynie walks around and holds his scalpel ready and then a person behind you says, "1, 2, 3, GO!" I was screaming, I wanted to go home! I've never felt such fear, lying there, helpless, seeing the scalpel... his shoes, the gynie had butcher shoes on, I felt like I was in a butchery! And then you're smothered."

"When I woke up, I had no pain killers and was screaming blue murder... exhaustion did not allow me to stay awake and I was asleep again within minutes. About five hours later I got to see my baby boy. The first time I got to hold him, my husband had already seen him, gone to pick up my daughter and had returned. I literally only had him in my arms for a few minutes when they arrived and I had to be mommy to the big sister and make her feel special. I just wanted to see my baby and I had to encourage my daughter. I spent the first two weeks trying to get rid of the fear I felt while on the operating table... and then I realized: I missed my son's birth. I felt awful. And then guilt entered into the equation: it had taken me two weeks to realize that I had missed out on his birth because I was too busy commiserating the operating table fears!"

Ingrid continued to share with the women how others' opinions were that she ought to be grateful that her baby was healthy, that he was not born very premature, etc. Guilt seemed to be using the words of those who heard her story to tell her that she ought to be "getting over it" which upset her more.

"For three days I tried breast feeding, but I didn't trust my body with the responsibility and I made the monumentous decision not to breast feed. It's so weird, I don't know how to explain it." Many memories of her hospital experience replay themselves to Ingrid and even months after the ordeal she finds herself remembering further hurtful occurrences that she now finds a place to express. "I remember my daughter coming in to visit mommy, she was being so brave to be around me in the hospital. The nursing sister came in and thinking that I was stressed out because my daughter was with me – when it was actually the medication they had me on – moaned at me in front of my four year old saying that "she is stressing you out, she must go!" With tears in her eyes Ingrid whispered, "I can't believe the way that those nurses dealt with the situation. I was robbed of the birthing process, robbed from being able to tell people because I was told to "get over it," and robbed of my natural ability to know what is good for me."

### 3.5.1. Response

For the participating group, sharing of faith and other narratives began a movement away from the normalisation of what we, as women with new babies, had experienced over the past year: pregnancy to birth, birth to becoming mothers. Papps and Olssen (1997:40) explain it as:

The organizational structure of hospitals has provided an environment which has facilitated the surveillance of women during childbirth and fostered a process of normalization. Doctors in the hospital system, moreover, have been at the apex of the hierarchy, thus producing a structure that has reinforced the development of a medical discourse.

It is this medical discourse, as well as that of discourses of motherhood that these conversations elucidate. Foucault provides the consideration that normalization “denotes processes concerned with the establishment of measurements, hierarchy and regulations around statistical norms” (Papps & Olsen 1997:40). The women’s sharing of stories was a powerful voice against normalization as we discussed how we would do things differently in the future and support one another in alternative decisions regarding raising and birthing our babies. Ingrid’s sharing of her experience and consequent knowledge, was what feminism arose out of, “a commitment to take women’s experiences and formulations seriously” (Taggart 1989:109).

For Ingrid, the need to be heard by women in a similar place as herself was to a large degree met. Hearing herself tell the story was already for her a beginning to the healing that she was experiencing. The women acknowledged her decision to stop breast feeding as something that they would call “taking control” of your body. The suggestion was made that perhaps Ingrid internally needed to take control back for herself and this decision was the only one that she saw as available to her. “I needed to take control at that stage and that was the only thing I felt like I had control over. It sounds so strange, I know.” Ingrid’s comment was met with support from the women who were witnessing: “but that’s why we agreed to be a part of this group, it’s a place to express how you feel, even if it’s irrational, because we need support in things like this.”

Bons-Storm (1996:102-103) discusses how motherhood has the qualities of a “cultural institution.” It becomes a challenge for women to share their stories, “stories that verbalize the unwordable gaps in the narrative about women’s sexuality and experiences of motherhood, if these stories go against assumptions” of listeners. Very often women sharing their stories of motherhood, if outside

of a safe environment “risk being called unfeminine, unnatural, disturbed, or improper.” (Bons-Storm 1996:103) Ingrid, like the rest of us, found a place where that risk was minimized and she was able to stand up to the discourses surrounding breastfeeding and the choices that mothers ought to have in this regard.

“Thank you for your story Ingrid, I felt very similar”, added Christelle. Carmen shared that “people theorize for us, so our natural knowing is not good enough. I felt guilty for not being able to do it the “academic way” and then you feel guilty for feeling guilty because they tell you to “get over it” and then you feel like a failure for not being able to get rid of guilt.”

Christelle offered her story of being a woman who is comfortable with being in control. “This group has worked for me because I’m always feeling guilt; guilt for not going through natural birth, for going back to work, for enjoying the stimulation of work, etc. My husband did not know what to do with me. I would sit in the toilet and cry. We all feel guilt for some reason.” Bons-Storm (1996:55) shares her view on guilt and women:

Socialization in the dominant sociocultural narrative not only intends for women to feel shame and guilt if they do not play the roles allotted to them, but also if they play an allotted role, but in a negative sense.... This shame and guilt is often very deeply buried in their personalities.... Even if they feel and act as emancipated, “liberated” women. There is hardly a professional woman who does not feel guilt in her relationships with her partner or children.

For Christelle, the women were a group of “connected knowers” who came with an “attitude of trust” (Belenky et al 1986:116) and she was able to share and hear that she was not alone in her thoughts, feelings and hurts, and collectively we could stand up to “socialization in the dominant sociocultural narrative” (Belenky et al 1986:116) for the wellness of all women.

Ingrid found her liberation in having had her hair cut and giving her story voice, even the parts of it that she initially thought would speak of her as a “bad mother.” Weingarten (1997:7) echoes this idea in *The Mother’s Voice*: “It is the rare mother who does not at some time have a story that violates a central idea of how she and her community think a “good” mother ought to be, feel, or behave.” Ingrid was already able to testify to healing. She found the group to be a safe place

where she could “represent herself accurately” rather than “representing herself acceptably” (Weingarten 1997:7).

### **3.6. Summary**

The stories in this chapter draw on the dynamic of change and informing. “Our witnessing of one another’s stories changes and enhances what we have to give our children... yesterday some of the spiritual conversations we have had would have been a challenge for me and I would have done things differently to the way I will choose to do things now because of what I have experienced today”, summarised one of the participants, concurring, another added, “This changes how I feel about religions, how I judge others and I how I choose to take action in the future.”

Each of the participant’s stories vary as much as they do as people, however, “once we recount our stories in community, and analyze and reflect together on their meaning, they acquire the power to move us forward” (Ackermann 1996:48).

For me, these stories brought to light Ina Praetorius’ theory that “women need different forms of power and they need a shared knowledge of what power is effective and what and how different forms of power can be interlinked” (Praetorius 1998:58) in order to embrace Ackermann’s (1996:48) “diverse experiences” which are “a central category in a feminist theology of praxis.” Praetorius (1998:58) is encouraging women to see their development in reclaiming power as “ethically grounded” and not as “sin.” The participants seemed to find experimenting in self-development as reclaiming some power in their natural ability to know (Belenky et. al. 1986), finding it in the witnessing and sharing within the safe environment of the wellness project.

### **3.7. The Wellness Project**

The Wellness Project for Women with New Babies was initiated by the participatory group as a container within which many of their thoughts, ideas, and desired action could take place. It is a title that we chose as a collective, expressing who we are as women, but not to the exclusion of other women. We see it as a home, a safe place that will hopefully multiply itself internally, and externally for the liberation of all women, specifically relating to the wellness of those with new babies.

Engaging with stories alone is, however, not enough. There are compelling political and personal reasons to move from story to liberating praxis. The process of awareness begun by engaging in the mutual exchange of stories underscores the capacity for transformation. This change is both politically and personally transforming when we accept the challenge to act as agents for the mending of creation.

(Ackermann 1996:48)



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Pastoral Care in the Form of a Wellness Project

The participating group focused on “transformation of social relations towards equality, mutuality, and positive interdependence” (Van Leeuwen 1993:11) by sharing spiritual narratives, as expressed in chapter three, as well as via projects mentioned within this chapter.

This social transformation is spoken of by Van Leeuwen (1993:11) as a gospel initiation. Witnessing the gospel working in new ways was for me a renewing of my personal faith practice of Christianity. From the various faith practices represented in the group, we could concur Van Leeuwen’s (1993:12) proposal that it is the will of God to repair “relations to “mutuality and equality” when we worked towards this end through the initiation of a wellness project for women.

As a participant, I wondered what our lives, as women, would look like if we stepped away from what Van Leeuwen et al (1993:11) calls “supreme value on wealth and professional achievements.” It seemed that a large percentage of our thought and conversation initially revolved around society’s ideas of women who have children and the women’s potential as earners as well as caregivers. We discussed how we, as a group, could evacuate discourses of value according to materialism, in order to open space for the purpose of discovering self and other? We were challenged by the notion to stop and consider the discourses of what is and is not important for us as women with children. One of the effects of the discourses regarding motherhood that we faced was the limited subject positions available to us, as the identity of being a mother somehow excludes any other positions. Conversations regarding the ways in which wellness can stand up to discourses opened new scope for what the wellness project could offer the participants and community. The participating group recognized that how we choose to language within, about, and outside of the group affected how we saw ourselves and what we were hoping to accomplish with Research.

Davies (2003:1) suggests that “language is both a resource and a constraint. It makes social and personal being possible but it also limits the available forms of being to those that make sense

within the terms provided by the language.” Through wellness pastoral care we hoped to challenge the ways we partnered with caring language for ourselves and other women with babies. We began to see how our self-other participation could contribute and develop “kitchen table theology” (Graham 1998:71) that could be extended to mothers who are not as fortunate as we are. Graham (1998:71) explains “kitchen table theology” as one that extends beyond academics, it seeks justice and care.

We saw our coming together for similar purposes to what Graham (1998:71) describes and recognized these conversations in lounges and kitchens as legitimate theological work. Our self-other participation began with conversations, often painful conversations, regarding languaging, and continued with a commitment to discuss further ways of seeking justice and care for mothers who are less fortunate.

Though a small step, we began by entertaining alternative ideas in languaging the name we chose for our meetings.

#### **4.1. What’s in a name?**

Within the first meeting, the women’s group found common ground in that all have children of similar ages, and all had felt alone at one time or another in the journey of early motherhood. Through an atmosphere of “positive interdependence” which Van Leeuwen (1993:11) continues to explain is a “the transformation of social relations” the women encountered their first connection. One said: “the word “mom” or “mother” seems so limiting. People forget that I am still a sister, an aunt, a wife, a friend.” Davies (2003:1) reminds us that language “defines our possibilities and limitations, it constitutes our subjectivities.” McFague (1982:56) explains the limitation of words such as “mother” as “the total interpretive situation of a text is a complex triad of speaker, text and hearer in which many possibilities are present for misunderstandings, differences of opinions, varying interpretations, and revisions of previous interpretations”.

In voicing a concern regarding the limiting possibilities in the word “mom/mother”, the group decided that they are “women with new babies.” Moira Gatens’ view (Papps & Olssen 1997:46) is that a possible reason for feelings of disenfranchisement of such terms as for example mother,



could be linked to the a patriarchal theme. In this regard Gatens (in Papps & Olssen 1997:46) claims that “it was necessary to exclude women from the political sphere, so reducing women to roles that have meaning only in relation to men – ‘wife’, ‘mother’, ‘daughter’”. While the “political sphere” (Gatens in Papps & Olssen 1997:46) looks very different now, the participating women felt that religious prescriptive approaches in many of their lives, relives what Gatens is suggesting - “reducing women to roles that have meaning only in relation to men” (Gatens in Papps & Olssen 1997:46).

Some of the group participants agreed with the previous idea regarding women’s roles, others did not believe this reduction to roles to be the case, but the consensus for more careful selection of words was unanimous. The word “wellness” seemed to be an apt expression of why we came together, and thus the topic of this part of the research became, “the Wellness Project for Women with New Babies.”

#### **4.2. How the Project came to Be**

In chapter one, I reflected on the journey that research and I had as we came into the fullness of meeting with the women who participated in this research. Positioning this research with participatory action research, and being committed to “pastoral care as ethical care” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7) I hope that this chapter will reflect the research process of doing research “with” rather than “on” people (Heron & Reason 2001). This chapter also reflects the “participatory process in which therapists [researchers] collaborate with people in challenging oppressive discourses and negotiating ways of living in an ethical and ecological accountable way” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8).

Being committed to doing pastoral care as participatory ethical care has challenged me “not to care *for* but to care *with* people who are in need of care” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). With this chapter, I invite you to witness the experiment of acting on the requests of one another and developing the project in accordance with the needs, hurts, and celebrations of the women who participated. Clinebell (1984:) suggests that the “key element in group care is reciprocal sharing and giving, in contrast to the mere taking and receiving that are commonly found in pastoral care and pastoral counselling ... both helper and helped are found in the same group”. Together with the women, we

negotiated the aims and goals of the group and as such invited pastoral care *with* the research participants. In doing this, Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:7) remark that then pastoral care moves “towards care as a social practice where it is socially constructed by care-givers as well as care receivers”.

The research participants started off by voicing concerns about the lack of self care, and conversations on whether or not one needs to give oneself permission for self care. The conversations then followed on to ideas on gender socialization and perpetuating change in the environment. In embracing commitment towards participatory ethical care and participatory action research we “started to work on articulating the thematic concern which would hold [our] group together and how [we] established authentically shared agreement in the group that the thematic concern was a basis for collaborative action” (McTaggart 1997:38). Our group functioned similarly to De Jongh van Arkel’s (2000:27) explanation on MASH (mutual aid self help) groups where people “come together to help one another overcome or better cope with a common problem, situation, illness, handicap, addiction or other stressful life situation” (Madara & Peterson 1987:214). In the sections that follow I will discuss the identified concerns that the women wanted to discuss and explore within the research project.

#### **4.3. The Wellness Project and Self Care**

For the women of the group, self care had become a foreign concept since having children. Care would first be offered to the child, then to the other family members, and if there was time remaining, to the self. Guilt seemed to shackle the minuscule self care and had us convinced that even laundry was more important than self. Conversations tended to lend toward protesting the lack of initiation and respect for the care of self, and resistance to the discourse that informed our intimate relationships and spouses who often did not recognize and acknowledge the need for self care in women. Discourses such as “the modern woman does not require nurturing and intimate love, she is self sufficient” came under the spotlight. Protest and resistance are both necessary elements of a pre-course to change. The women progressed through this precourse to reconstruction which is where self care was able to find its voice from within ourselves, not necessarily from our intimate relationships/ partners. “The challenge is to shift from protest to

reconstruction..." if we are to be a catalyst in healing praxis that works toward a "mended creation" (Ackermann 1996:37). On the micro level of self care this happened in the group.

Pattison (1993:82) reminds us that while caring for the individual is important, "nonetheless, a moment's reflection will make it obvious that many of the things which affect the well-being and growth of individuals for good or ill originate in the wider social and political order". Within our interaction as a group, a few relevant socio-political biases were uncovered, that posed a threat to the wellness and self-care of the participants. These socio-political biases are reflected in dominant discourses such as patriarchal views on motherhood, perceptions of women's bodies together with the demands of society on the appearance of women who have recently had babies, and the expectation of one's own family as it relates to energy and sociability of a mother in present day thinking. The "reorientation of pastoral care," as Pattison (1993:82-105) words it, was to focus on these gender social-political informed ideas that influenced the women in this group and find new ways of shifting the power from these discourses, back to the women themselves. We also constantly kept in mind other mothers who were not included in the group and who were influenced by other socio-political factors.

The women of this group decided that the most effective way in which to re-orientate these ideas was through the means of an exercise workshop, a women's night out, letters written by others to our selves, anti-guilt conversations and being informed as to ways of being women who are also mothers. I hoped that via these avenues I, together with the women, would be able to experience self care in new ways and extend our selves to the wider world as an outcome.

#### **4.3.1. Self Care in the form of an Exercise Workshop**

The "attention to embodiment as one of the central features of feminist ethics" (Hogan 1996:56) illuminated our research in the shift from disembodied religious discourses affecting women's interaction with themselves separate from their bodies. Due to the foundation of disembodied ideas in different bodies of knowledge (including theology), "which promotes a dualism which denigrates the body (and in consequence women, who are more identified with carnality)..." (Hogan 1996:56), the group looked at alternative ways of seeing body, health, fitness and exercise.

The focus of the exercise workshop was “a revised notion of the moral subject which appreciates human beings as embodied and does not treat the body as merely an accessory” (Hogan 1996:56), or in our position a “reproduction mechanism” or “dairy feeding factory” as one participant shared.

The women discussed the word “exercise” and saw it as a means to silence the dominant voices of society’s impression of their bodies. These prescriptive voices spoke of women who should be a certain size, energy level, and competence (in motherhood, and other activities) six weeks after the birth of a baby – usually scaled according to media’s impressions. As a group we wished to reclaim a self chosen perception of our own appearance. “When I am exercising, I see myself differently, and it doesn’t matter to me what other’s think of my post pregnancy body” said Danique. The exercise workshop was a mere physical-act representing far more than push-ups, sit-ups and squats. Challenging the discourses surrounding women and their bodies did not only mean working on exercise, but also voicing our choices for our bodies and health for our own chosen benefits rather than to meet the standards set by the media’s or society’s watchful eye. Exercise for us was not about becoming a show piece for others to approve of. Through conversation and open intimate sharing, the group was able to share the desire to be healthy and reconnecting with themselves again.

Reflecting, as a group, on our “desires and preferences” opened up discussions that began to clarify our “intentional states” where we could identify for ourselves what exercise and wellness self-caring is as part of ourselves. We believed that if we accepted and appreciated ourselves, our ability to see our personal possibilities would be enhanced. Exploring how exercise could be one of means by which one is better able to see their possibilities eventuated in an exercise workshop. Looking inside ourselves to see what we could bring out for our own benefit was the start of deciding what an exercise workshop would look like.

If you bring forth what is within you,  
What you bring forth will save you.  
If you do not bring forth what is within you,  
What you do not bring forth will destroy you.  
*Jesus, in The Gospel According to Thomas.*

For us, the exercise workshop may only have been the beginning of a work of healing ourselves as we stood together before a personal trainer selected specifically because of his respect and awe of the ability of women's bodies. He discussed with me, as researcher, his views on becoming aware of one's abilities in many facets of life when one exercises and care for your body. He agrees with David Spangler's (quoted in Northrup 1998:693) discussions on the body and soul creating each other, and in this, one finds ones self.

Christelle Northrup (1998:693) reminds us of the body's design to need movement, or exercise, though the ideas of what constitutes exercise may require challenging. She speaks of needing to "overcome the 'no pain no gain' legacy" which the group identified with as a time restraint. For Christelle, the "pain" of exercise, was the way in which she saw time and its limitations, again inviting guilt into her life that convinced her she should be able to do more. For Carmen, it was time she would rather be with Jared, her son. Stephanie struggled with the motivation and saw it as her idea of "pain." For me, I interpreted "no pain, no gain" as the hardship of dieting, physically hurting while at the gym, and seeing the regiment of exercise. Northrup (1998:693) offered a different perception. Firstly, she suggested that we not wait until everything else is done before we start taking care of ourselves, otherwise, we never will. "We must create exercise time" (Northrup 1998:693). With this the women discussed the reality of time constraints being women with babies:

"Exercise is something I should be thinking about but I think about how I want to spend every available hour with him (Jared). I've read that the first thing to do when you go back to work is your care of self", shared Carmen.

"To exercise long enough to actually make a difference. He (referring to her baby) may need attention every few minutes and you get on and off and on and off that walker, and then lose motivation for it," said Christelle.

Even though motivation for conventional exercise options was limited, the women shared the benefits of exercise from their personal frame of reference. Northrup (1998:695) encountered similar advantages while researching exercise for women. When exercising, most women experienced less depression and anxiety (Young 1979:110-117); were able to relax more effectively (Bahrke 1979:41-44); assisted in enhanced assertiveness, spontaneity and enthusiasm; positively altered their attitude toward body and self-acceptance (Collingswood & Willet 1971:411-412); slept better (Griffin & Trinder 1978:447-50); and experienced a higher self-esteem (Morgan et al 1970:213-217).

Van Leeuwen et al (1993:282) introduced a challenge to us as women when she asks when we will “challenge the dominant norm of slimness” by either seeing exercise differently (as a means to wellness rather than “slimness”) or by some other way? Where exercise is an element in self care, how do we see “weight issues”? Many of us have heard and been affected by society and media’s team effort in illuminating “ideal” post pregnancy body shapes and images. The challenge to us as women is to choose exercise as an opportunity for self-care and not be absorbed into it by “weight loss” addictions. Van Leeuwen (1993:283) asks us women why we may choose the words, “oh, you’ve lost weight! You look *so* good!” Are we implying that it is weight loss that made her look good, and what of her pre-weight loss self? Do we as women fall into the trap of using society’s words when interacting with one another, and how damaging can the language we chose be? “Why do we rarely compliment women on looking strong” rather than “implying that “looking good” means “looking slim”?” (Van Leeuwen 1993:283,284)

The challenge continues in being aware of “body politics” and being “ready to challenge norms that devalue women and their experiences” (Steinem quoted in Van Leeuwen 1993:283). Van Leeuwen et al (1993:283) elaborates on these ideas by encouraging us women, to try to find the space for women’s caesarean scars and their stretch marks to hold the same heroic power as men’s war scares hold images of courage. An exercise workshop was a small physical action with monumentous political repercussions: we began seeing how small acts of self care catalysed resistance to larger discourses of patriarchy, the media, and of male-female relations. As we began to regard ourselves differently we noticed how this in turn affected others who were in community with us, family, church, and/or school. Witnessing ourselves organize and participate in self-care activities such as this one, opened our eyes to our own personal possibilities and preferred selves (White 1991:22).

The reality of the women’s situation, alongside the knowledge and need to engage in self care in this manner, fell on the respectful ears of the trainer. He asked the women if they would prefer a programme that could be accomplished at home, three to four times per week, absorbing only twenty to thirty minutes per day. “Some of the exercises can be done with baby if you feel up to it”, the trainer claimed. He committed himself to telephonically encouraging their self-care path and

reminding them of the value they possess to one another, to the environment, and the example they are to other women. Eventually this exercise workshop was participated by research participants, as well as two other women with babies who recognized the value of such an exercise programme, where one is invited to “view exercise as an opportunity to experience new levels of energy and vitality (Van Leeuwen et al 1993:283).

Having accomplished the exercise workshop, further discussion took place on the importance of rest and rejuvenation of the body.

The idea of a “women’s night out” presented itself as an opportunity to remove one’s self from ordinary routine and enjoy the company of other women as a vista of rejuvenation.

#### **4.3.2. Self Care in the form of A “Women’s Night Out”**

Over-extending myself is not stretching myself. I had to accept and monitor the difference. Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.

Audre Lorde (1988:131)

As participants we faced challenging ourselves regarding what Lorde (1988:131) suggests, “caring for myself is not self-indulgence” as guilt would wish us to believe. Though we would prefer to use an alternative word to “warfare” (Lorde 1988:131) when discussing politics of this nature, we found the investigation into self politics invigorating, specifically as we discussed why going out as a group constituted self care.

Pattison (1993:90) engages in conversations regarding the political characteristics of the church, clergy, and/or self. Even the choice of remaining neutral, is in itself a “political stance for it maintains the status quo, leaving things the way they are” (Pattison 1993:90). The real choice that we face, suggests Bonthius (cited in Pattison 1993:91) “is what kind of agent [she] will be... whether [she] will act with insight and effectiveness on the environment, or whether [she] will act in ignorance and prejudice or simply by default, to oppose necessary social change.” As participants, our desire was to *choose* the “kind of agent” we would be for self, environment and community, and no longer allow it to simply “happen to us” as one participant voiced. Going out with the

women was again a step ever how small in demonstrating our choice for self care, and in effect, the care of the others in the group, mutuality (Heyward 1996:155) and friendship (Hunt 1996:74).

Seeing the self as political offers the freedom to give the self the attention it deserves, and the opportunity to heal in what ever means it dictates and this in turn has the potential to be a catalyst in the healing of the larger creation (Ackermann 1996:48). Regarding and understanding our political self, and thus our ethical responsibility to the “mending of creation” (Ackermann 1996:48), we can begin to determine for ourselves, as women, what our healing will be. Northrup (1998:717) confirms the beginning of our understanding of our political-ness:

To name your work ‘political’, especially when it comes to your body and to things that are ‘womanly’, is an act of power. If you are a mother, believe me, your work is political. If you are a nurse, a child care worker, or anything else – your work’s political. If you’re healing a fibroid tumour or remembering your incest, you are doing political work.

Northrup (1998:724) continues: “If we are ever to create safety in the outside world for ourselves, we must first create safety for ourselves right in our own bodies.” The group had found safety within our own bodies and were extending that safety outside of ourselves into the group through conversation and commitment. Going out together was an expression of a need to celebrate who we are as individuals, as women in a process of discovering wellness, with a desire to have fun along the way. Myths of motherhood often decenter the option of “fun” for mothers separate from their children. Braverman (1989:227) discusses how she tried “to get out from under the myth of motherhood.” We were looking for “other options” (Braverman 1989:227) that would enhance motherhood for ourselves. One such option was to centralize fun as an acceptable activity for women with babies and in doing so, resist the often sombreness of religion and its prescription of duty on women and mothers.

The “Women’s Night Out” invited a festive, thrilling, rejoining of the pre-family self with the now-family self as we positioned ourselves within our various “social and psychological realities” (Davies 2000:89) celebrating the discourses that we had stood up to thus far.

Davies (2000:89) suggests that “an individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted through the various discursive



practices in which he or she participates.” As participants who had experienced a women's night out, we had began to “learn to respect yourself and your body, regardless of how wounded you've been, regardless of your current weight, regardless of whom you married or what your sexual preference is” (Northrup 1998:725).

The evening was daunting as many had not left their children alone with a babysitter or their partner as yet. Guilt had also attempted to convince the women that such an event would be “self indulgence” (Audre Lorde 1988:131). Despite this, we were what Northrup (1998:716) calls, “healing women” coming together to have fun: a celebration of energy, of womanhood, of laughter and healing. All of us departed from the restaurant, having enjoyed our wine and salads, pizza and the free “shooter” to celebrate womanhood and the beginning of a self that is whole (Northrup 1998:49-64).

Recognizing the priceless act of interacting with other women as an “affirmation of freedom” (Daly 1990:369) and as “radically Self-affirming” (Daly 1990:369) both the participants and their partners worked towards finding ways to encourage further such bonding experiences. Carmen shared a solution that her and her husband conjured:

“Once a month, a very close girlfriend and I will spend as much of a Saturday as we can together. We go to the movies, to lunch, enjoy a glass of wine over lunch and that sort of thing. Sean (husband) tells me to go and take as much time as I need and he'll look after Jared (son). I trust him (Sean) as much as I'd trust myself. It's not that I don't think of Jared while I'm away, it's just that I know he's okay with his father. Invariably I'll get home and ask how Jared was and he'll tell me how he slept the whole day. They do that with their fathers, they're total angels!”

Having heard Carmen and her husband's ideas regarding bonding experiences, Christelle suggested another “radically Self-affirming” (Daly 1990:369) activity. Her idea connected self care with others' impressions of one's self.

### 4.3.3. Self Care in hearing others' impression of me

Christelle shared a story of a friend who was doing a course that required letters from friends. The letter was "why I value you." She shared that though they are "exceptionally good friends," they do not open up often enough and tell one another how they see each other. "That was wonderful therapy for me, to say to someone why I love having them in my life."

As a group we discussed the option of asking three close friends or relatives to write a "why I value you" letter to ourselves based on conversations of our transforming selves. The idea was to create a type of definitional ceremony (White 1995) that would operate as an "outsider witness" (Morgan 2000:126) as the women were going through transitions of coming to know themselves differently. Morgan explains the responsibility of the "outsider witness" as being "there to witness the re-authoring conversations and then to retell what they have heard in ways that contribute to rich descriptions of alternative stories of people's lives and identities" (Morgan 2000:126,127).

For various reasons, only two of the women in the group found this to be a worthwhile experiment. Others in the group were of the opinion that they would like to enhance their self-concept from within, and not based on the opinion of others. Their thoughts were based on an idea that if one is prepared to hear and build themselves on positive words from others, they are susceptible to the detrimental effects of negative words as well. The remainder of the participants either forgot or did not find the time to participate in the above activity.

Danique, and Molly were two of the participants who did decide on doing this activity. Molly said the following:

"Being reminded of why I am valued as a person is something I needed, especially after returning to work and believing that my family thought bad of me because I had returned, and my work colleagues thought bad of me because I wasn't as valuable to them as I was before. Hearing an outsider explaining how they heard my desires for coming to see my self differently and healing, as well as for caring and wanting to reach out to others, was confirming of what I am trying to accomplish."

The women who participated in the activity were able to stand up to guilt and resentment by using the words that others had written to them, but those who decided not to take part in the activity suggested an alternative option in dealing with guilt and resentment.

#### **4.3.4. Self Care by standing up to guilt and resentment**

As participants, we are unable to completely dismiss religious prescriptions on women and mothers that have resulted in some of the guilt that we experience. A young girl “develops morally via an ethic of care and responsibility. She learns quite early on that her own needs must take second place to those of others; if she attends to them she feels ‘guilty” (Murphy 1996:89). Discussing how we, as participants, have found ourselves subordinate in religious practices and then paled against the colourful figure of the Proverbs 31 woman who is capable of all things, we began to recognize the origin of some of our guilt. Murphy (1996:91) reminded the participants that “[a] woman can be released from the burden of guilt by being put in touch with the creative, life-giving source of her being, and by affirming the dignity and worth of what has formerly been devalued.”

As a research group, we realized that for an experience such as this affirmation to effectively alter past hurts and oppression, we would need to find creative ways to invite our faith practices in to witness and thus take part in these affirmations. The participants thought of inviting our partners as representatives of our faith practices into the process at a later stage to begin to stand up to religious prescriptions on women and mothers. The group requested that we, as individuals who have “made some progress in self-knowledge” (Murphy 1996:91), first define for ourselves what our guilt looked like, separate from the “voice of outside authority” (Murphy 1996:91), which was part of the initial conception of guilt.

“The vocabularies of women and the vocabulary of “the proper way of speaking about one’s own life as a woman” are often different writes Carolyn Heilbrun” (Bons-Storm 1996:61). As participants, we felt that within the safety of the research group, with the trust that existed, we could use a vocabulary comfortable and expressive to our selves as we discussed guilt and its effect in our lives.

White and Epston (1990:54) discuss “facilitating a mutually acceptable definition of the problem” so that the participants can “work cooperatively in any attempt to challenge the effects of the problem”. Externalizing conversations (White 1984;1986) assist groups to identify the characteristics and definitions of the problem that are common to their experience of the problem and allows for a united front in standing up to that problem.

Not all the research participants experienced the presence of Guilt in their lives. They therefore did not have a need to stand up to Guilt. The rest of the group, namely Christelle, Carmen, Stephanie and Kim, consulted me in their desire to stand up to guilt and we went through a practice of externalizing conversations. We used relative influence questions (Morgan 2000:34) to map the effects of Guilt in their lives. We mapped the problem's influence in the lives of each of the participants (White & Epston 1990:29) and then looked at the participants influence in the life of the problem. Relative influence questions illuminated and enabled conversations about "unique outcomes" (White 1991:29) that the women could use as a premise for the re-authoring of "alternative stories" (White 1991:29) that had less of the problem's influence.

We began the meeting by pasting sheets of white paper on the wall and drawing lines on them, one for each of the participants. We marked where the Guilt's influence was one year prior, two months prior, and on this particular day. Then we shared stories of when Guilt was less influential and why this may have been the case at the time. For example, Kim discovered that she had more confidence in her spiritual life during the times when Guilt was less influential. Borrowing from Morgan (2000:37), I asked "what was happening [to you] at that time, the skills, competencies, desires or hopes [you were] connected to and the ways [you] were reducing the influence of the problem at that time." Morgan (2000:37) names these conversations "non-problem-saturated conversations" and through them we could identify various characteristics of a personified. We learnt when Guilt liked to sneak in to the lives of women but also what scared it away, such as friendship and support. Kim shared that her connection to the women "gives me the support I need to see that I'm not alone in standing up to guilt. It makes guilt weaker in my life."

Having found out a little more about Guilt and its history in each of the participants lives, we decided that interviewing Guilt would be the most useful manner in which to effectively challenge Guilt's influence in our lives. Firstly, we thought up a few interesting questions that could be asked and then suggested that questions be made up as we went along. Examples of such questions follow, we addressed Guilt by asking:

- (a) What is your agenda in Christelle's life?
- (b) What is the worst thing that could happen to you?
- (c) What would happen if we redefined your role?

- (d) What was it like for you when [Kim's spiritual life made yours so challenging]? (the use of stories from the mapping process discussed above)
- (e) You will be used by Carmen to remind her that she will one day work half days and be able to spend more time with her son. Can we call this your responsibility or your job?
- (f) How much of your time will be freed up when Stephanie refuses to allow you to say that her son will like her nanny more than herself?
- (g) Who are some of your friends/allies?

Resulting from this interview we found that Guilt was using common tactics to all of us present such as trying to convince the mothers that their children would prefer their caregivers, or that they were incapable mothers. During this interview we asked questions to track the influence of the problem in the participants' lives and finding that which keeps the problem alive and effective (White & Epston 1990:16)

Through the means of externalization we tracked the influence of guilt in the past, present and what influence we would like it to have in the future. Within these discussions, guilt's characteristics and "friends" were identified, bringing to light their co-evolution. The participants began a process of re-orientating their power over Guilt and to re-author (White 1991:29) its influence in their lives as an informant (see letter to Guilt below) rather than oppressor of their lives. They began by choosing what percentage of influence they would *allow* Guilt in their lives, and by writing letters to Guilt when Guilt is most actively trying to convince them of a different influence percentage. The participants also chose what Guilt's characteristics would be as an informant in their individual lives. For Christelle, Guilt would be allowed to whisper a reminder to her, only when she is working more than forty five – fifty hours per week. This would be a reminder of her son who loves being near her and would love to give her some mommy attention. Guilt would not however be permitted to speak louder than a whisper, nor would it be allowed to speak prior to the forty five – fifty hour border line.

For Carmen, Guilt was reduced to an informant who was permitted characteristics of motivator. It was not allowed to tell her that she is "missing out on my son's mile stones, those precious moments." Guilt was however given permission to remind her that her efforts now at the office were paying off her bond so that "when my little boy goes to school, I will only have to work half day and be able to spend time with him in the afternoons."

Stephanie shared that she would like Guilt to be removed almost completely, except for a very small percentage with the characteristic of preservation. Preservation for Stephanie was the guarding of her time with Shakiel on weekends standing up to the pressures of family and friends who would otherwise be demanding time with her son.

We wished to add momentum to this process of lessening the influence of Guilt in our lives and chose to use a letter as a practice of informing Guilt of its new position in our lives. White and Epston (1990:17) explain the practice of letter writing as follows:

...in a therapy of oral tradition, the re-authoring of lives and relationships is achieved primarily, although not exclusively, through a process of questioning. In a therapy that incorporates the narrative tradition, this is also achieved through recourse to a variety of documents.

In this case, a letter was the chosen document to inform Guilt of our meeting and its new role in each of our lives. It also serves as a summary of the "standing up to guilt and resentment" session. Prior to its formation, various ideas and comments were requested to be within the letter. As facilitator, I was asked to reproduce that which was discussed in a letter addressed directly to Guilt, and make copies for all who had been a part of its creation as a reminder to all who participated of the new found position of Guilt in our lives. The participants chose a "letter of redundancy" (Morgan 2000:107) as it is written to Guilt to let it know that its past function as oppressor is no longer necessary or welcome and has in fact become redundant. Below are large snippets from various sections in the letter, one may view the letter in its entirety in the appendix.

*Dear Guilt,*

*Four women coming together to discuss you and your friends must have been daunting for you. We have decided that your influence in our lives is to be reduced and the percentage of control that you possessed is no longer acceptable.*

*It seems that you prefer women with babies who have returned to work and suggest a variety of lies in an attempt to acquire more control of their lives. For Stephanie, you managed to acquire 90% control in her life in that first week of her returning to work, by telling her that her son needed her at home, and that if she was not at home, he would become more attached to his nanny and he would begin to see the nanny as mommy. For Carmen, you invited your friend Sadness into the equation, stealing the joy of providing for one's family from her. You managed to convince Carmen that she should give over control to you when she forgot to contact the nanny because she was enjoying the inspiration that*

*her work brings her. Even though she knows that the care-giver is excellent and has full confidence in her ability to care for her son, you whisper to her that she should not feel that confidence and should be at home with him herself.*

*Guilt, I was intrigued by your involvement with Christelle. You managed to get in on a few fronts, "guilt of going back to work and leaving him with a care-giver, guilt of enjoying going back to work, and then guilt that I should be wanting to be with him". Christelle informed us about you, "and then it comes at me from another perspective as well. I was used to working until 7p.m., bringing work home, working over weekends, etc. and I felt the commitment to the company. I now experience guilt because I don't put in those kind of hours anymore, and when I need to take time off for a trip to the paediatrician, it really effects me." The lies and twisting of words that you have used with the group have been effective up to the point of us discussing you. Ideas about leaving children with care-givers, that our children will enjoy them more; whispering things like, "Carmen, you shouldn't be leaving Jared, look at his beautiful smile when he looks at you, he's so excited to see you, how can you leave him!" I have noticed that you have invited your age old accomplice, Resentment, to push and twist the pain of not having the choice to stay home or go back to work. You two have tried very hard to wedge yourselves between the husbands and wives in an attempt to intercept a united front against Blame – another of your buddies.*

*You, Guilt, seem to work from the inside. Though you tried with Christelle to force yourself in from the outside voices of family members, she has never allowed you in. Why is it that you try so hard to steal the joy that us women receive from the stimulation of work? Is it that you do not want us to recognize our worth in the business field, that we are valued and needed both in business and at home? I notice that you try to set us women against each other with competition. You say things like, "you should be enjoying the four messy feeds that you give your baby on weekends, other moms are able to do them every day, other mothers have it together." And then you refuse to allow us the excitement of returning to work on Monday, telling us again that this excitement is negative.*

From the body of the letter:

*I believe you, Guilt, were concerned by our discussion of your tactics, but I believe it would have been a shock for you to see the scale of percentages that illustrated your current influence in the lives of the participants. Carmen said that you now only have 30% control, Christelle said about 45%. Though you tried to get in with Stephanie from the side of her family when she began reclaiming her life from you, you remain at 30% influence in her life.*

*Our attendance at the wellness project has shrunk your influence in our lives and we have come to see that the tools we have to stand up against you are highly effective. We know that tears are okay, even if you have caused them, they are healthy and healing. No longer will we believe your lie that we are failing because our cheeks glisten with our internal healing balm. We have heard you say, "you will never be completely rid of me," and to that we now respond, "we know!" but we boldly add, "we are okay with that!" Through this liberation, we have found an alternative story that we recognize as beneficial*

*to ourselves, and it includes you as informant. We do, however, remove the power you have to control. Looking back over our lives, each of us has a story of standing up to you, we have all found special ways of reducing your influence and we know it is not only possible, but has already been accomplished. Seeing our past successes reminded us that there have been times that you were less influential, and we've embraced those stories as our preferred realities.*

*There is a good side to you guilt, and though you may despise our pointing this out to you, you will in time come to appreciate it as we have. You remind us of our responsibility as women, wives and mothers. It is a reminder of beauty and strength that thwarts some of the attempts of your friends. Anger at husbands, stress at work, snapping at husband when baby is ratty, etc. The awareness that a partnership between a small percentage of you and large percentage of womaness, has created a key to our wellness as women with new babies. We are no longer influenced by fear of cancelling plans to be at home with our family and a lot less influenced by anger when dad arrives home and sometimes does not notice what needs to be accomplished. Coming to the project is a constant reminder of our value as women, that though there are times when you try to convince us that we are terrible mothers, there is a place where we are validated and the correct ratio of your influence in our lives is re-established.*

The letter ended as follows:

*We have decided that you are an informant; forums such as the wellness project liberate us as we hear others' stories about you; and we are freed from your negative side. We have found a way to lessen your influence, be safe-guarded against a power imbalance in your favour, and found use for the little of you that we choose to invite to remain in our lives.*

*With this invitation to partnership we sign off,  
Women with new babies.*

Having the letter in hand as a tool in standing up to Guilt and its friends, the women continued in the quest for wellness. We found through the research topic that self care included the concept of being informed.

#### **4.3.5. Self-care by being informed**

The idea of "being informed" was invited into the group as a means of shifting power back to the women. Society seems to have absorbed power and knowledge, via the media, to the detriment of new mothers. For me, as participant, books and magazines had instilled doubt in my own knowledge on breast feeding my baby, when to do it, how much, supplementing. In hindsight I can see the difference between acting from my personal knowing as a mother and acting from a place



of doubt due to reading conflicting messages from outside sources. The former is now enhancing my wellness as a mother because of this research.

Foucault (1980:82) comments on knowledge absorption as “subjugated knowledges.” Subjugated knowledges is described as “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated... located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.” Foucault (1980:82) argues for these “low-ranking, unqualified” knowledges to be “re-emerged” so that criticism can “perform its work.” For the women of the participating group, this “re-emerging” of knowledge is to search for our knowledges as mothers that have been silenced (Weingarten 1997:7) and find ways, even small steps such as validating and using each other’s knowledge as mothers, to re-discover this knowledge and embrace it as truth for ourselves, “truth that is personal, particular, and grounded in firsthand experience” (Belenky et. al. 1986:113).

One of the participants shared her own “truth” as defined by Belenky (1986:113) in her story of going to see a lactation specialist because she was told by all her mother’s friends that breastfeeding is an absolute necessity for motherhood. Having been given two identical copies of “The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding” by different seniors, she felt she needed to see the specialist. She had inverted nipples and with only two days before her baby was due, she tearfully found the money to attend the expensive appointment. The woman poked and prodded at her nipples until her first milk had dripped patches across her blue shirt. “You can and must breast feed. Call me if you can’t, I will show you if it takes me a week.” Reported the specialist who promptly handed her a bill and told her what it would cost to be seen in hospital should she be “unable to do it yourself.” When her baby was born, the wailing child would not relent, and failure to latch the child onto inverted nipples invited guilt and feelings of inadequacy into the young mother in her first hour of motherhood. Two days later, the child had still not latched on and continued to scream in fits of uncomfortable hunger. “I knew in my heart that all I wanted to do was to express some milk and feed my child so that I could hold a contented baby in my arms, a baby who had been nourished by my breast milk, even if it was through a bottle” she told the group through tears. “All I could think of was that lactation specialist and what she said... I felt like I was a failure because I couldn’t do it... she wouldn’t latch on...”

For the above participant “truth that is personal, particular, and grounded in firsthand experience” (Belenky et. al. 1986:113) was separated from the knowledge that the specialist, the books, and older mothers could offer her. Her knowledge was subjugated until much later on when it no longer mattered who was breast feeding. She knows for herself that expressing breast milk and feeding through a bottle for six months for her daughter was knowledge/power and truth of wellness for her child.

Having had the ability to “know” stolen from us by hundreds of books, magazines, broadcasts and programmes, many of which are contradictive, we came together, clutching the little lives we are responsible for, treading in fear of error and failure.

Reallocation of this power imbalance was discussed beneath the auspice of various concerns, ideas and topics, of which we have decided to share one. Homeopathic alternatives for the wellness of women and their babies. This example may seem frivolous to some audiences, should the witness of this chapter be a mother with a new baby, her recognition and acknowledgement of this example would prove highly informative and would be seen as a major area where power is in the hands of Society.

#### *4.3.5.1. Homeopathic Alternatives for Women with New Babies*

Entering into the months of winter is a daunting phase for a new mother. Not only is baby at risk of her/his first cold, but mothers are usually at a low tolerance level due to lack of sleep, time restrains leading to poor choices in food intake, etc. The women felt less than equipped to face the winter months, and were drained by all that they had read, they asked for professional advice on vitamins for themselves, and what to do with children when they are showing signs of illness. Though many prefer homeopathic options, all were interested in hearing both sides, the General Practitioner’s opinion, as well as the homeopath so that informed choices could be made. The women saw this as an opportunity to remember what their knowing told them, and how these remembered “ways of knowing might conceptualize the self” (Belenky et al 1986:31) and then begin to draw pictures of the self for their own viewing. Basically, this process, discussed by Belenky et al. (1986:31) is one

of removing self-knowledge from the perception of it being “lodged with others” and returning self-knowledge to the self’s knowing.

Feminist theology offers the concept of “redemption” (Grey quoted in Raphael 1996:200) to add to the process of acknowledging women’s experiences and returning self-knowledge to women:

[T]he very process of such revision on the basis of women’s experience is itself a part of the process of redemption. Since the verb ‘to redeem’ can be defined as an act of reclamation, liberation, recovery from a ‘state of submersion’, or extrication from meaninglessness, ‘when we engage in an activity of reclaiming the lost history and experience of women this is truly a redeeming activity’

All of the women participating are first time mothers, and most do not have a mother living in their own geographical community and could relate to Grey’s (quoted in Raphael 1996:200) ideas of “reclaiming” in various ways. The spreading out of families has forced women to find for themselves alternative ways of raising children, and to try figure out their own “redemption” (Grey quoted in Raphael 1996:200) as women with babies. Because the demands on women are different from what they were in the past, the women who participated felt it would be beneficial to bring their questions to the professionals, hear their opinion, and take from it only what they felt worked for their families.

Dr. Mike Clark, who practices as both general practitioner as well as homeopath, agreed to spend the afternoon with the women, at a local venue that would supply food and beverages. Packages of samples were handed out to ensure that the participants were given the opportunity to test various products without the financial burden attached. Invitations were extended beyond the participatory group as a first step of practising inclusivity and twenty women were expected.

“Our inner guidance can direct us towards whatever is most life-enhancing and life-fulfilling for us.” Christelle Northrup (2001:49) speaks of learning to trust our inner ability to discern what will and will not work for our bodies... “after gathering information from a number of experts” The homeopathic workshop invited a doctor who was a practicing GP as well as a qualified homeopath, thus serving a dual role in the information gathering of the women. Reclaiming the power to trust in one’s self requires a sense of knowing, and knowing is often challenged when we are ill informed.

Dr. Clark answered a vast array of questions from bum rash, to energy supplements for breast feeding mothers, to alternative options for vaccinations. As a group we were encouraged to find that which felt the most correct to us, not only in medical choices, but also in life and life-fulfilling choices. Northrup (2001:51) echoes Clark's comments when she states, "when you move towards that which is most fulfilling and life-enhancing, healing follows regardless of what your health is like at the time".

#### 4.4. The Wellness Project and Partners

'Sex in the marriage of a new family' is a topic that the women seemed challenged by at the time. Laughingly we joked of wellness being connected to sex. Seeing a serious side to it as well, the women openly shared what their current concerns were:

Research: "Is sex a choice for the sanity of the family?"

Kim: "Men must realize that I still hurt. My scars from the caesarean are sore, they tingle and it's numb a lot."

Christelle: "The point for me is that I don't feel good about myself so I don't actually want to take my clothes off."

Stephanie: "I have a road map on my stomach. Terrible stretch marks."

Kim: "But you see in magazines, they're expecting a baby and then a few weeks later they are pictured in mini skirts. It's unfair."

Carmen: "Are we to compete against that?"

Candida: "Yea, but it's not always about looks. A woman who feels sexy is sexy!"

Kim: "But my husband has seen the whole birthing process... what are we now in their eyes?"

The dialogue above draws a picture of us, the participating group, on the first day of our coming together. How different it is now. We have come to see that it is when we rejoice in the celebration of our inner beauty that so many of our external concerns fall into place.

"What if the knight in shining armour never comes? What a thought! What a relief, in fact! After centuries of being told that someone else could, should and would take care of us, we now have a chance to learn how to take care of ourselves – together... The people we've been waiting for are us'... when we change ourselves *inside* by allowing ourselves

to experience and own our long-suppressed emotions and woundings *as well as* our hopes and dreams for ourselves, our families and our planet, the conditions of our lives change on the outside.

(Northrup 2001:725)

As a participatory group we had found so much of ourselves through the various activities of pastoral care through the wellness project that we felt that we would like to share our changed lives outside of ourselves. Where before we were previously challenged by Biblical and religious prescriptions of who we are as mothers, we were now interested in new ways of seeing parenting differently with our partners. From biblical perspectives we, as women, "were identified by [our] relationships, first as daughter to a father, then as a wife to a husband... women's primary purpose in life was to produce and rear children, so women's names, rights, and wishes were not considered very important" (Japinga 1999:38).

Through conversation and mutual care we, as participants, came to see importance differently and faced a challenge as to how we would interact with our partners. Often, conversations delved into how parenting ought to be shared and equal if we were to feel that our "names, rights, and wishes" (Japinga 1999:38) as mothers were truly being acknowledged. African American feminist hooks (1984:137) spoke deeply to us and we brought the following consideration into conversation with our partners, "Women and men must define the work of fathering and mothering in the same way if males and females are to accept equal responsibility in parenting." The challenge we faced was in the deconstructing the prescribed roles of "mother" and "father" which required safe places to communicate.

Inviting the partners into the safe-place that had been developed over the weeks was a step we all felt was a natural progression and expression of our new selves. As the weeks progressed and we began to find ourselves, within ourselves, physically, spiritually, and emotionally, we were motivated toward the mere fun of all being together with our partners, completely without agenda or expectation. With the desire of creating a safe place for the men to interact, we planned an evening of conversation and board games.

When originally considering the event, we had hoped for an evening of remembering pre-baby days, and defining the roles of father and mother. The planning and eventuating evening,

however, took on a personality of its own and the women were flexible and moulded into the festive, casual atmosphere of the evening's discussions and eventuating fun. As participants we desired to share our interest in "fatherhood" having "the same meaning and significance as motherhood" (hooks 1984:137) and thus "responsibility for child care and child rearing" is shared. The participating group saw these conversations as ways to stand up to motherhood as an institution which Bons-Storm (1996:98) mentions is "muffled by the socio-cultural myth of motherhood" which the participants saw as a stifling of their sexuality. Bons-Storm (1996:99) explains how "the story about female sexual desire is told in the context of the more inclusive story about "Woman as Mother."" She continues that women have had to "model themselves on the Madonna... the good mother has to focus her life [and body] entirely on her son, while being herself asexual" (Bons-Storm 1996:100). As a group we introduced the notion of standing up to and overcoming dualist ideas of "rigid separation of male from female" (Webster 1996:214), and extending this to prescribed roles of mother from father. What would our relationships look like if we "emphasized the value of bodiliness in contrast to the [religious] asceticism of the past" (Webster 1996:214)? Could we and would we commit to "overcoming patriarchal social structures and building sexual justice" (Webster 1996:215)? The challenges posed were taken in for reflection between the partners in their own safe places.

As the event concluded, one of the partners turned to me, as researcher, and asked, 'so, what does this prove?' Still reeling in the last hilarious comment, I sighed and simply answered, 'a sparkling moment, Harvey, a sparkling moment'. Michael White, in his conference in South Africa (2003) spoke of extraordinary moments in people's lives that surface through questioning and in sharing of narratives. These sparkling moments in people's lives are what alternative stories (White 1991:29) are built upon. Our evening together was one without expectation and demand from either side of the partnerships, which was different for all participants and their partners. The evening was already an alternative story being lived, a testimony to the scaffolding (White 2003) that the women had built for themselves to experience their "resurrected" (White 1991:29) knowledges in new ways and it opened conversations between partners regarding the redefining of prescribed religious roles.

We had, in this one evening, begun to initiate larger communities where women's voice could be heard, and human sexuality spoken about. "Many of us had the sense that the richness, complexity, and power of our own and other mothers' experience had not been fully brought forth and that we needed to create community for this to happen" (Coll et al 1998:xvi). This evening where women's stories were told and given voice, was the beginning of creating such larger communities to be extended to other mothers to contain their experiences.

Such an evening with partners where women's stories are heard, also formed part of a sounding board of sorts, in which ideas on how the men and women in those larger communities were raised, what they would hold onto, and what they would like to see different in their children. At the evening with partners, a rather challenging discussion on our environmental responsibility, specifically from the perspective of our various faith practices took place that we, as a participatory group wished to expand upon within the confines of our safe place, the wellness project.

#### **4.5. Wellness Project and the Environment**

Throughout the research process, various faith conversations asked the question, "what is truth?" As a participatory group, we thought such conversations fit most suitably beneath this section because we concur with Isherwood (1996:228), "the challenge of feminist theology [and our own thinking] to this way of being is to declare that truth is found by living in relation to one's community and environment." The participants agreed that in finding the self and learning to love and care for the self in partnership with theology, one must not divorce it from the community and environment. We had begun to recognise that "truth" and healing become fuller and more plausible if embraced within the context of community and environment. "Truth is found not by asking the question, 'what is truth?' but by pursuing right relation with the whole of the created order" (Isherwood 1996:228).

When discussing how Isherwood's (1996:228) ideas of "right relation with the whole of the created order" resonates with our understanding, we, as a participating group found ourselves challenging our socially constructed views of the "created order" (Isherwood 1996:228). Relations with religion seemed to be the most prominent informant when discussing order. For example, the Roman Catholic church has for many years, even as late as the "late twentieth century" (Ruether 1996:26)

prescribed women's inability to handle the responsibility of ordination because "by their very nature, women cannot 'image Christ'." (Ruether 1996:26).

As a participating group, we recognized that religion's affirming of "women's subordination" was, and in many situations still is, an illumination of a patriarchal system that not only marginalises women but also reduces the importance of caring for the environment and planet. The research group realized from our personal experiences that in challenging environmental injustices, one is directly faced with religion that does not acknowledge its role in the "mending of creation" (Ackermann 1996:48) and the centring of the marginalized.

As a participatory-action group, we discussed ways in which our meeting together could precipitate effective, positive care and change in other aspects of life, for example family, institution, community and environment. We found that pastoral theology from feminist perspectives offered "rituals and metaphors of healing and reconciliation" (Graham 1996:172). Choosing our own action as a participatory group, even in small ways, was the beginning of our reconciliation to the environment, and we hoped this example would perpetuate religion taking more responsibility in planetary issues.

As women with new babies, we are a part of one of the most awesome battles of the environment, that of environment versus disposable nappies. We all drew in deep breathes and discussed our options amidst the very deep and real connection to the convenience of the disposable nappy. We all agreed that our current frame of reference was too narrow to offer realistic alternatives and we chose to seek help. Sonja is a woman who brings with her an awareness of humankind's effect on the earth. She also brings with her ideas of how we can do it differently. We all agreed that this information, should it be viable in our own situations, would be knowledge to pass on to others, in the hope of offering the environment a chance of survival. We too wish to be a part of giving back and healing after its gradual and now rapid destruction.

#### **4.5.1. The Nappy-Free Course**

Though a small initiative, we discussed the option of the "nappy-free" trend. This idea is based on becoming fully in tune with one's child. When the baby, even from birth, needs to attend to a bodily



function, one would rapidly move the little being to one of many large pans dispersed around the home, and make a specific sound that will ultimately be associated with the function. Eventually the parent is able to take the child to the nearest pan, create the chosen sound that is used when that specific function is being taken care of, and the child responds with that function. There is no need for nappies at all. This alternative option was brought to our attention by one of our members Sonja.

The participants thought it to be a somewhat fanciful idea given that the majority of mothers are career orientated and though would like to be so deeply in tune with their new babies, it is simply not feasible with the time available to them and their children. The course did however offer the opportunity to discuss reducing the number of disposable nappies used by either substituting one or two disposables for towelling nappies every day, as well as an hour of “nappy free” in the morning and perhaps one in the evening allowing the children play time on waterproof sheeting and blankets with their bottoms bare. Though the environment may only benefit remotely, as mothers we are becoming more conscious of our consumer based existence and our babies are thriving on a few bare moments a day.

The value of consciousness-raising for us as a group, and myself as participating Christian, was challenging. McFague echoes my questions to Christology as we ask “can Christology be ecological?” (McFague 2001:161). How do I answer Jesus, while looking at our ecological situation, “Who do you say I am?” (Jesus quoted in McFague 2001:162). “Ecological Christology: they point to the intrinsic connection between all forms of oppression, and especially between that of poor people and degraded nature” (McFague 2001:165). I felt deeply challenged by these ideas, and by a God in scriptures who takes destruction of the creation seriously, “and the time came... to destroy those who destroy the earth.” (Revelation 11:18 *NASB*).

I discussed my concerns and heartfelt fervour regarding my view of the church’s lack of taking responsibility as it relates to environmental issues, with the group. The group shared from their own personal convictions their desire to be more conscious of the planet and ecological situation that we have been a part of creating. We discussed the ways in which we had bought into the religious discourse that “we are individuals with the right to happiness, especially the happiness of

the consumer-style “abundant life” (McFague 2001:xi). For us, it had become important to not only look at liberation of self, and the marginalized, but to see that these are directly linked to the state of our planet and take action accordingly. We had begun discussions, that are continuing presently, regarding how we chose to interpret our various faith practices in light of the planet’s dire situation and our responsibility.

#### **4.6. Summary**

The group’s coming to know their Self, using this as power to stand up to dominant discourses in their lives, as illustrated by the section on Guilt, and then expanding these new beginnings into their family communities and environmental care illuminates the foundation stages of a “mended creation” (Ackermann 1996:48).

Ackermann (1996:47) summarises our struggle:

The mending of creation speaks of justice, love, freedom, equality and the flourishing of righteousness, all of which foster good relations between and among people... the mending of creation rests on transforming our relationships with ourselves, with one another, with God and with our environment through actions for justice and freedom, as well as changing those societal structures which perpetuate economic, political and social separateness among people.

While I, as participant, see us, the group, as being in a process of involving ourselves in what Ackermann (1996:47) has called, “the mending of creation”, as participant-researcher, I have experienced this process in a manner that has been life altering and exhilarating. Chapter five illuminates these experiences.



## Chapter Five

### Research, Co-Authors and Kitchen Theology...

As chapter one contained, and this chapter revisits, Reinharz (1992:194) comments that a common consequence of this type of research is that the researcher herself also undergoes learning and change whilst participating in the research. According to McTaggart (1997:26) it is also important that the lives of those who decide to participate should also improve. It is with this in mind that I invite you through this chapter, which is a synopsis of the journey that Research, as well as myself and the participants co-authored. The change in my self is a precious gift that this research and the other co-authors gave me, and continues to enhance my life. The participants/co-authors found the same to be true for them. Each of the topics below offer evidence of the change in self and the learning that I experienced as participant, as researcher, and as a woman with a baby, as well as sharing feedback from the participants themselves.

#### 5.1. What Research taught me about the topic

I distinctly recall the moment where Research tapped me on the shoulder and said, "this could be it," and joined me in the journey of discovering the topic of interest (see chapter one). Research met me at a place where my own heart was broken, and I was struggling, as a mother, wife, researcher, South African, woman, feeling alone and tired. It was the interview between Research and myself (see chapter one) that began collecting the fragments of my Self and suggesting ideas of re-composition and wholeness. A part of the interview mentioned in chapter one:

**Research:** What would *you* call this research, Candida?

**Candida:** Deconstructing and resisting negative perspectives on motherhood and creating communities of care where narratives of wellness can eventuate.

**Research:** Do you have existing knowledge about the topic?

**Candida:** I prefer to look at this topic from the perspective of "not knowing" where the participants are the experts.

The above ideas of topic name came from the place I was at, and though I did not wish to force these ideas upon the participants, I also knew that we would come together due to our common

struggle. Entering into conversation with potential participants from a not-knowing (see below) was a new concept for me.

Not-knowing requires that our understandings, explanations, and interpretations in therapy not be limited by prior experiences or theoretically formed truths, and knowledge. This description of the not-knowing position is influenced by hermeneutic and interpretive theories and the related concepts of social constructionism, language, and narrative (Gergen, 1982; Shapiro and Sica, 1984; Shotter and Gergen, 1989; Wachterhauser, 1986).

Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28

This concept of not limiting my “understandings” by my “prior experiences” was a new practice for me, and proved to be liberating. This was not an easy feat for me, having grown up in a fundamental patriarchal system that did not always allow my heart and soul to have a voice and had very strict prescriptions and rules to follow. Research thus became as Smith (1999:7) explains it:

Research should be understood as a rediscovering and recreating personal and social realities... “research” derives from the verb “recherchier” in Old French, meaning “to look at again”...a legitimacy of liberation.

The “rediscovering and recreating” of my own reality as mother, woman, wife, South African, and feminist took shape from the choice of topic. Though I knew that I would benefit immensely from the topic, my concern was that when discussing possible research ideas with a participatory group, that our input may be vastly diverse and we would not be able to effectively co-search the topic.

This concern brought me to needing to make a choice: would I embrace the issues of that the participatory group brought with them as the research topic, or would I impose my own struggle onto the participants and invite them to embrace my issues. As participant, it was tempting to impose my own struggle, because I felt that I needed the research to be of benefit to my own healing.

As researcher, I wished to come together with other women and hear their issues and interact with their agenda as priority. Heron and Reason (2001:186) say that “it is also really important at the induction meeting, that, as far as is possible, people have an opportunity to help define the inquiry

topic, the criteria for joining the inquiry, the arrangements made for meeting structure and related matters”.

It was this “induction meeting” where my own personal liberation began. The women echoed my heart’s longing, and we shared in our struggle and challenges, and were easily able to collectively “define the inquiry topic” and begin to negotiate the “structure, and related matters.” For some reason this ease of conversation surprised me, perhaps due to the limited interaction I have had as a participant in a support group with other women. How this research came to be was my personal beginning of a life-long co-searching with women and children, for in it I have found family! For me, this is the mutuality that “provides for [my] justice-work and the basis for [my] health and well-being (Heyward 1996:155)

I had not realized the necessity for women to support and stand with women, specifically regarding the healing benefits of mutuality (Heyward 1996:155) and friendship (Hunt 1996:74). Healing according to Isherwood (1996:96) is “[t]he acceptance and sharing of pain and sorrow” which “can lead to change and transformation, both in individuals and in communities.” This research took us into what Sallie Mc Fague (2001:21) speaks of when she comments “we learn how we should *not* live... by becoming aware of how we *should* live...”

“Becoming aware” has new meaning for me now, as this document draws to a close. There is a process involved with learning how we “should live” and wellness and pastoral care amongst women illuminated that “becoming aware” process. As a participatory group, we began to see the topic come to fruition from McFague’s process of “becoming aware.”

Further learning from the choice of topic regarding wellness in women with new babies, what was discussed within previous chapters about “glimpses” of togetherness.” Bellah et al (1985:37) suggest that...

As individuals we experience competition on a daily basis and are well versed in its demands. At the same time, we have only “sporadic” flashes of togetherness, glimpses of what might be if only people would cooperate and their purposes reinforce, rather than undercut, one another.

The research taught me that wellness in women begins with togetherness. Bellah et al. (1985:37) resonates with the idea of coming together as women and speak of "togetherness" as something that is rare and requires being sought after. Once finding each other in this "togetherness" (Bellah et al. 1985:37), there is room to find where "wellness is not about being right or wrong, it's about choices, seeing self, finding within ourselves care, love, and respect for power, environment." (Bellah et al. 1985:37) Spirituality speaks of such as "the interdependence and sacredness of all life forms, and the importance of earth-human relationships" (King 1996:220). As a group we had come to know more about our selves and respect for self and planet/environment, and through this coming to know self experienced the desire to interact and open up to others and "earth-human" opportunities.

We, as a participating group, were introduced to multiple truths in Anderson and Goolishian's (1992:26) explanation that "people live, and understand their living, through socially constructed narrative realities that give meaning and organization to their experience." Each of the participants found their experiences to add to and develop the topic as well as to enhance others' knowledges. In this their stories were validated and the practice of giving our Selves voice embraced. Having so much in common with one another at this stage of our lives, as participants, we found that we had the potential to "shape [our] perceptions and thoughts to match those of others" (Belenky et. al. 1986:38). We also found that to "celebrate and magnify the experiences of similarities and intimacies" (Belenky et. al. 1986:38) with one another provided us with "the experiences of mutuality, equality, and reciprocity that are most helpful in eventually enabling [us] to disentangle [our] own voice from the voices of others" (Belenky et. al. 1986:38) inside the group and outside of it.

Perhaps in this research topic was the beginning of attaining Weingarten's (1997:2) passion of wanting "to help mothers, myself included, to untangle the binds we are in – to locate the words to create the ideas that will enable us to share the truths of our lives." Where Coll (1998:xix) is "astonished" by "society's inability or unwillingness to recognize the true difficulty of all these endeavours" regarding the raising of children and being women with new babies, in the chosen topic we were able to find wellness from the creation of our own "society" that understands and acknowledges what we are accomplishing as women with children. In the past, pastoral care was

ill equipped to offer effective attention to the needs of women. "Vital areas of pastoral need for women – questions of abortion, contraception, childcare, sexuality, violence, and sexual abuse..." (Graham 1996:172) and thus feminist theology has introduced "Women Church" ideas. For the participatory group, pastoral care was challenged, and transformed in that it was not delivered from a pedestal of pastoral/ministerial power, but rather pastoral care came from within the group to the group, caring for the issues that directly related to us in this particular community – women with new babies.

Creating our own "society" or community was only the beginning of our finding new ways of doing pastoral care. It was not enough for the group to only find wellness for themselves as women with children, we wished for the topic to expand further and affect larger communities of women and children. We continue to be challenged by Pattison (1993:86) to not only "exercise care focused on individuals" but to actively "find support for social and political action" (Pattison 1993:86) that extends beyond the individuals in the group. We found ourselves learning about and thus being aware of "body politics" and being "ready to challenge norms that devalue women and their experiences" (Steinem quoted in Van Leeuwen 1993:283).

We took Van Leeuwen's (1993:283) elaboration on these thoughts seriously by regarding our caesarean scars and stretch marks as heroic, much the same as men's war scares, and stories hold images of courage. The words we chose to use when describing our bodies or selves were challenged by new knowledges and wisdoms and we carried this commitment - to stand up to "norms that devalue women and their experiences" (Steinem quoted in Van Leeuwen 1993:283) to our families and friends. This topic brought wellness in women to a level of heroism, and in this we found ourselves better equipped to face and stand up to the politics we encountered through the research journey.

Over-extending myself is not stretching myself. I had to accept and monitor the difference. Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.

(Audre Lorde 1988:131)

Utilizing Lorde's thoughts mentioned above, we realized that our wellness was connected to, intertwined with, and much the same as our knowing (Belenky et. al. 1986:23) Our struggle was to

learn to acknowledge, nurture and listen to that knowing capacity. Northrup's ideas (2001:51) regarding healing were introduced to the group and mentioned through previous chapters, and from my own personal participatory experience, I was challenged by her ideas on healing: "Our inner guidance can direct us towards whatever is most life-enhancing and life-fulfilling for us" which I noticed needed the partnership of deconstructing socially constructed discourses to enhance our wellness.

The homeopath / GP who visited the group agreed with Northrup's (2001:51) ideas explaining that "when you move towards that which is most fulfilling and life-enhancing, healing follows regardless of what your health is like at the time." Sharing these challenges with the group seemed to make wellness possible for me, and I found my Self healing from the faith practices of my past, to the liberating freedom of moving towards wellness that I never thought possible – thanks to the wisdoms shared by the women, their children, new faith practices, Dr. Clark, Jorge (the personal trainer), and the feminist and eco-theological literature we have interacted with.

Throughout this research, I have begun to interacting with the feminist idea that this wellness and freedom that I found, could be another way of looking at redemption. Tatman (1996:198) suggests that the way traditional Christianity sees redemption may need to "be transformed." In the same way that "creation happens around us every day, so too can redemption happen here and now" according to Tatman (1996:199), if we are to actively get involved with the struggle for justice, we will in this learn "what we are to know about love" (Harrison quoted in Tatman 1996:199) for ourselves and outside of ourselves, as a form of redemption. These ideas echo the discussions in previous chapters on spirituality and its concerns of "interdependence and sacredness of all life forms, and the importance of earth-human relationships" and ensuring that the "greatest efforts go into re-imagining the divine and developing more inclusive images and metaphors for God" (King 1996:220). Though still inconclusive, my thoughts ponder my new found redemption, how this wellness has changed me and what I will do with it.

Furthermore, I learned from the topic of "wellness" in *my* life, that it is a life style commitment, there is no "quick fix," and in order to attain wellness in the most holistic manner possible, I want to surround myself with women who will struggle along side each other to stand up to oppressive and



prescriptive discourses and re-write the scripts for women. I want to be part of a group of women who are willing to develop and contribute to a "kitchen table theology" as Graham (1998:71) explains. This theology extends well beyond the academic sphere, seeking justice and care where some feminists claim the right to have their kitchen tables recognized as a site of legitimate theological work. This work speaks of a theology from below that grows from self-other participation.

## **5.2. What I learned about doing Participatory Action-research (PAR)**

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the research was the chosen research methodology. As a human being with discourses, I found it sometimes difficult to decentre myself and engage in self-other relationships (Heshusius 1994:17).

Smith (1997:173) says that, "The group has ownership over what questions are pursued, and how. Research questions take many forms and are not predetermined, that is, no one person or subgroup enters the process with the major question(s) already specified." As a "participant-driven approach" (Bishop 1996:216) the sharing of power and control over the research process becomes an important aspect that I, as researcher, needed to keep constantly in consideration. Alongside this, I am reminded of Winter's (1996:13) recognition of the great importance of reflexive critique, "which is the process of becoming aware of our own perceptual biases". Acknowledging the socially constructed nature of my self as English speaking, white, woman, once fundamentalist, and the constitutive effects of the discourses in which I have been and are positioned, included reflexivity in this research.

Chapter two elaborates extensively on what experience and/or knowledge I entered into the research with and how it may or may not affect the research process as well as the transformation and experience for all of us. The challenge for me as participant researcher was to acknowledge the above procedures and warnings, without separating myself from the intimate interaction that is fashioned by PAR.

I found Smith's (1997:191) suggestions valid and an expression in what took place:

through their actions and reflections, group members determine and hold a shared truth about their reality. People experiencing a certain truth expand; they are "more" than

before: more complex, more conscious, more knowledgeable, and perhaps more ready to enter into new learning and relationships accompanied by fresh questions and confusion.

Perhaps I was experiencing “fresh questions and confusion” when I became aware of my inability to fully enter into and open up with the group. Heron and Reason (2001) warn against doing PAR “on” people instead of “with” people. I found my challenge to be the “with” – which insinuates a “togetherness” that took me a while to enter into. PAR opened a new door in my life, that of challenging myself to find and enter into “togetherness” especially because of its rarity (Bellah et al 1985:37). Feminist theology speaks of coming to know “a more personal and authentic self” through self-narratives as women. I felt what Bons-Storm (1996:46) speaks of as being “understood by a listener” which formed “a bridge of shared knowledge and understanding of the self” which made entering into “togetherness” a life enriching experience.

It was in witnessing the healing and cleansing that the other participants experienced when taking the courage to enter into a community of trust that I began to experiment with it for myself. As we began to more fully comprehend the potential of PAR, we began to more deeply understand what McTaggart means when commenting “research by particular people on their own work, to help them improve what they do, including how they work with and for others” (1997:39). This step of mine was necessary if this research was to be effective in its PAR characteristics, which differ from other forms of research and caring by this very issue: Clinebell (1984) suggests that the “key element in group care is reciprocal sharing and giving, in contrast to the mere taking and receiving that are commonly found in pastoral care and pastoral counselling... both helper and helped are found in the same group.” This, Sevenhuijsen (1998:147) calls “caring solidarity.” Choosing and adopting PAR was the most challenging element to this research, and the most rewarding key to my learning about other people, sharing, caring and learning about Self.

### **5.3. What I have learned about myself**

*The hardest thing to do is to step out of what you are comfortable with. The unknown is always there once you step out. Then you have to take everything that comes at you. You have to answer for yourself and that's how you learn.*

*-Gerald Debbink*

### 5.3.1. As researcher

Reinharz (1992:260) refers to an “epistemology of insiderness” where there is “a link between the personal experience of the researcher and the research project in which she is engaged.” Though it was a process for me to enter into this “insiderness” that Reinharz speaks of, the “link” was evident from the beginning stages of collectively discussing the topic. I found the line between being researcher and being participant a challenge to clearly define, though the process of identifying it was also a coming to know my Self. To see one’s Self in various roles and to take the time to define each of those roles is rewarding and liberating and such “seeing and defining” skills may be applied to various other life roles. For me, being researcher in PAR and defining what that meant aided me in the defining of my role as woman, wife, mother, sister, South African. Once I was comfortable with defining my life roles for myself, it became easier to participate and interact with the narratives of the group, hereby enhancing the change that my Self underwent. Anderson and Goolishian (1992:289) speak of this and I have come to understand it more deeply having been involved as researcher:

We live in and through the narrative identities that we develop in conversation with one another. The skill of the therapist [researcher] is the expertise to participate in this process. Our ‘self’ is always changing.

(Anderson & Goolishian 1992:289)

Law (1997:54) played a timeous role in my life as she entered into the process post defining “self as researcher.” I Engaged in her recommendation: “do not identify the problems and tell people what they need.” She continues, “I am able to make people feel comfortable in a situation so that they open up and talk about their experiences, and thus can reflect ideas, thoughts, and feelings back to them.” This was more appropriate after defining my roles as both researcher and participant as I could then utilize her ideas as characteristics of the research role. Had her ideas been presented prior to defining my roles, I may have struggled more deeply with the participatory role, as I explained earlier, due to my struggle to open up, I may have withdrawn further.

Defining roles and connecting as both participant and researcher required that I be transparent: “being open about why one is saying what one is saying” (Morgan 2000:124) hereby “inviting” those that I interview “behind the scenes” (:125) of who I am and what I bring with me into the research process. I found transparency to be the key that opened the door to the participants

encouraging, negotiating, and holding me accountable for both roles with in which I attempted engagement. Transparency and accountability aided me in standing up to the fear I entered into the research with, that I would undo “one tradition... in order to install in its place another tradition founded on the same frame” (Sampson 1989:7) as expressed in previous chapters. I found myself better able to deconstruct in Jacque Derrida’s defining of it: “to undo and not destroy,” (Sampson 1989:7) which also helped in power balancing – a challenge of PAR.

Smith (1997:190) describes a way to balance power:

Power-with relations allow mutual influence; people’s perceptions are shaped and reshaped as they exercise respectful caring. Shared power is fluid, moving in response to the interconnected energies within a group.

I learned as researcher in PAR that power is present and one is not able to remove one’s self from it completely. But, as Smith mentions above, through “respectful caring” we invite “power-with relations” to regulate the group in a more effective way of moving power within the group for the benefit of all. We were hereby able to embrace Foucault’s (1980) encouragement of power that is “constitutive or positive in its character and effects, not repressive or negative; not a power that is dependent on prohibitions and restrictions.” Foucault (discussed in Jennings & Graham 1996:173) explains how people’s lives can be changed and at deeper levels through the positive, unrestricted uses of power. As mentioned in previous chapters, as researcher, I do enter into the process of initiating this research with power. The challenge put before me is that I ethically – through accountability and transparency – manage and share power, and it is in this way that power can be seen as relational and productive (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:72) Witnessing the liberating effects of “power-with relations” within the group, I believe that power was enabled by and for all participants for the purpose of enabling action. This resulting enabling action points to my, as researcher, governing of self by Rossouw’s (1993:903) challenge that I should “...not only be sensitive to suffering in general, but should be especially sensitive to the practical consequences that theological perspectives and belief practices might have.” Rossouw challenges us to move “from being right to doing right” (1993:903). Accepting this challenge was my personal movement, as researcher, from “being right” to “doing right” with the group as co-searchers. In this we are again reminded of Pattison’s (1993:101) socio-political challenge to pastoral care in that we “redirect [our] attention to the community and society, but without losing sight of individuals who

remain supremely important ends in themselves" (Pattison 1993:101) This is a challenge I would like to extend to marginalized groups in our society.

The process of constantly checking my self against power imbalances was enhanced by what the feminist movement defines as "sin." For me as researcher, I have learned that deliberate off balancing of power, where I refuse to hear the guidance of my fellow participants' would be a "violation of the right relation," which is sin.

... right relations are those which are mutually empowering, sin occurs whenever a person or group use or abuse an individual, group or natural resource for their own purposes, thereby disempowering, degrading and all too often destroying who or what was used.

(Isherwood & McEwan 1996:218)

Regarding sin in the feminist light could possibly be the most defining guide of my role as researcher, and that which most enhanced my involvement as participant in Action-research.

### **5.3.2. As participant**

Being a woman with a young baby brought about the need in me for a support group, a safe-place to find my own wellness, and share caring with others in similar positions. I remember the struggle I started out with, the weakness I felt convincing me that signing up for "Mom's and Babes" would be a commitment to being a "stay home mother" for at least another three months and was I okay with that? I struggled with these questions while labouring to find a research topic combined to give meaning to Stengers and Peat's thoughts: in the "mechanisms" of chaos, "randomness" and "unpredictability" are "necessary to ensure creativity and novelty" (Herholdt 1998:217). Participating in the support and caring of other women, this research, as well as the interaction with the workshops that the wellness project (see chapter four) initiated, encouraged me to more fully come into my Self.

My new Self has come to love being a woman, and feels enriched by the term "mother." Where the old Self would be insulted by such titles as "stay home mother"; "mom"; "mother", the new Self embraces these terms and acknowledges the privilege of being able to grow with my children at home, because it works for us. My new Self has the gift of trusting my knowing, which tells me that I am in the right place in my life, doing the right thing, for my Self, which ultimately benefits my

child, husband and other relationships. I have learned how much I believe in, and am not ashamed by simplicity. I am more courageous about voicing this belief now that I have experienced an audience who will hear my thoughts on standing up to consumerism informed by McFague (2001:209): "the rich must live more simply, so that the poor may simply live." I now voice my longing to see this planet in its full "glory of God" because all of its creatures are "fully alive." (McFague 2001:4,130)

As a participant in this research, my layers of fear and subordination, instituted by a fundamentalist past, have been peeled away, restoring "the dignity and uniqueness of the qualities of knowing, loving and relating" (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:115) to God. This due to the narratives of co-participants, and their encouraging, supporting, caring, and active togetherness that instituted change in our perceptions of faith practices, environmental influences, and family and community involvement.

For me, the "Holy Other's name" has truly become "Surprise" (Griffith 1995:137). Griffith continues "if one is too certain of her specifications of God, she will miss God... the Israelites could not wholly name God. They said "Yahweh" which meant, "I am who I am, and I will be who I will be." Movement and mystery." Witnessing one another's spiritual narratives asks "safety" to challenge "peace," and "certainty" to be challenged by "faith" (Griffith 1995). And in these challenges, instituted by Griffith, I have a new picture of God, one who I come to see differently and newly, day by day. Today, He is the nurturing Mother.

### **5.3.3. As a woman with a baby**

Clandinin and Connelly (1994:421) have found that through writing journals people 'weave together their accounts of the private and the professional, capturing fragments of experience in attempts to sort themselves out'. Journal writing has been a powerful way for me to give account of my experiences and struggles and treasures, specifically through this research journey. I recall the conception of the research topic, the day that I began to listen to my daughter of four months (at that time.) Epston's (1992:186) words have become truth due to my experiencing them. Epston suggests that the transfer of "expert" knowledge to the child supports the "notion that young people can generate their own solutions." My four

month old daughter ignited my coming to learn about “knowing” and “intuition.” Goldberger (1996:5) refers to this knowing that I began experiencing through my daughter, as a fellow woman and as her mother as “personal, private, and based on intuition and/or feeling states rather than on thought and articulated ideas that are defended with evidence”.

From the day my baby spoke to me... our relationship changed.

*... I said nothing, I merely continued on my journey to the gym. We arrived, I walked her into the junior care area of Virgin Active in Midrand, when she looked at me one last time and then focused her attention else where with a deliberate sigh.*

(See 1.1)

The relationship between my daughter and I has been reconstructed through this research project. Words “take on their meaning only within the context of ongoing relationships” (Gergen 1994:49). However, since no context is the same, “meanings are not permanently fixed but are continuously influenced, constructed and reconstructed over time” (Anderson 1997:42) The beauty of meanings and words change over time, and for us this is that they do not always have to be verbalized, “often a voice has no sound, not because it has been silenced, but because it finds its beauty in this” (Ohye 1998:135). My baby and I learned this from the Japanese ways of parenting and loving (Ohye 1998:135). We found these new ways of languaging liberating. She has since learned a few of my verbal words, and I hers, but still, our most powerful loving, knowing and caring is silent.

Perhaps in my and my child’s new relationship, ideas on community can benefit. Isherwood and McEwan (1996:32) suggest “mutuality, interrelatedness, and compassion” when defining feminist community. Through this research project my daughter and I have interacted with, embraced parts of, and found our own community that works – a liberated theology that has in effect altered my perception of God’s characteristics: “mutuality, interrelatedness, and compassion.” I did not believe that a research project could have such far-reaching results on the life of myself as mother and my relationship with my baby. Could this be significant in Ackermann’s (1996:34) descriptions of a *mended creation*: “values such as justice, love, freedom, equality, peace and wholeness lie at the heart of a mended creation”?

Research’s influence in my life as a woman with a new baby has helped me to “untangle the binds [I] am in – to locate the words to create the ideas that enable [me] to share the truths of [my] life.” This bears witness to the partnership between Research and Weingarten’s (1997:2) passion. I

have experienced, with other women with new babies, the fullness of interacting with and participating in our emotions and learning to trust them. This occurred through listening to one another's stories, and witnessing the proof in each that there is benefit and empowerment in what Northrup (2001:53) calls becoming "aware of our inner guidance systems" and learning "to trust our emotions." In this I have been able to care for my own intuition, because I can trust my intuition separate from it being dependant on "any reasoning process" (Northrup 2001:57).

#### **5.4. In what ways did the other participants benefit?**

Gaventa and Cornwall (2001:78) refer to participatory research ethics that asks "questions about who participates in and benefits from research processes, how information is used and by whom, and how the process transforms or supports power relations". Asking the participants how this question may be answered for them was interesting conversation and I asked if I could use snippets of their comments to share a few of the ways that this research benefited us all as a group.

"My awareness of the environment has been enhanced and I feel like I appreciate it more, and am actually making a difference, even if in a small way" replied one participant. Another shared that though she was only able to participate in small portions of the process due to distance, she would like to carry the ideas of mutuality and care with the resulting action to her area and work within her own culture and community. "I would say I'm affected spiritually, but from the point of view in that I felt spiritually lighter and more at peace after our sessions. I would get home feeling cheerful and positive, and felt ultimately that everything was going to be okay!" Carmen shared. Christelle explained what such a group meant for her,

It helped me understand that I am not alone in the emotional and life upheavals I am experiencing. Sharing this made me feel more "normal". It also made me feel better about myself as a mother, I realized that all new mothers feel unsure and in the dark and that it didn't mean that I was not a good mother. It also helped in discussing methods of dealing with various baby as well as women and relationship issues – having more options to choose from is always helpful. For me it provided an outlet or place where I could talk honestly about my situation and feelings, without feeling that I would be judged.

The women brought themselves into the group and due to the nature of Participatory action research methodology, they were able to feel validated as mothers and women. Smith (1997:184)



discloses that "PAR groups honour popular knowledge, believing that people's feelings, beliefs, and personal experiences are vital ways of knowing.... As individuals, and as a collective, people learn from experience...." For one of the participants, her Self as a woman benefited, "As a woman, it was lovely to meet with other women and just talk. I need women to talk to (I think that that's my sanity) and it was great to be able to get out of the house and meet other people. It's so easy to become isolated when you're a new mom. Having these sessions gave me something positive to look forward to...women interaction. And I think the best part is that I've made friends... that is perhaps for me one of the best things that came out of this project." For Carmen, her Self as mother, "As a new mom, it was wonderful to be with moms going through the same things that I was and to be able to share ideas and get advice. It was so important for me to have someone to share the hard times (and good times!) with and get ideas from. It made motherhood seem less daunting and I felt that my life was more under control. And when I heard that other moms were going through what I was, I felt less isolated. It's also good to hear that other moms do make mistakes, and that I am not the only imperfect one!"

As discussed in chapter two, the challenge of being blinded by discourses often means that we do not know what questions to ask, or how to unveil ourselves to the possibilities that may be available to us, regarding our wellness as women. Michael White (1991:37) offers insight into the crippling effect of some oppressive (fundamentalist) discourses:

It is difficult for persons to challenge these global and unitary knowledges because the language practices that constitute them include build-in injunctions against questions that might be raised about their socio/political/historical contexts. In denying the respondent / reader of this critical information, they experience a certain "suspension." They do not have the information necessary to determine how they might "take" the views that are expressed, and this dramatically reduces the range of possible responses available to them.

The participants saw White's ideas in their relationships and interaction with fellow participants, "My relationships with my husband and son benefited from the interaction with the group. Because I saw that other moms were going through what I was and that their babies were doing what my baby was, I felt less useless and alone...and so I started to enjoy him more. I realised that my son was normal (and so was I) and that helped me bond more with him. Rather than constantly fearing that I was doing something wrong, or that he wasn't normal! My husband saw a huge change in

me because of my interactions with the group. I was less dependent on him to fulfil the support I needed and because I was happier, we were happier. He (husband) was very supportive of me attending the sessions, and in fact now still encourages me to keep up contact with the women."

It seemed that our interaction with one another offered more resources from which to draw when finding our Selves, our relationships, and our environments. Christelle commented that one of the most rewarding benefits of being involved was that the research 'improved my relationship with myself, made me realize that I should not be so hard on myself and that I am coping as well as most of the other moms." Agreeing with Christelle's comments, one of the participants shared that it was in the coming together that she began to see herself differently, and this in turn led her to see her potential, capabilities and hopes from a more whole and complete perspective.

"Mothers need to talk and women need to be listened to. Perhaps I should clarify. I always want to talk about my baby...what's he's doing, what he can do, and things I'm worried about. Often, for me anyway, the talking is the best part...yes it's great if people listen to you and hear you, but it's still wonderful just to be able to voice it. But as a woman I need to be listened to and know that someone hears me and cares. That's what I found in the group."

"Yes, and when I'm heard and cared for here, I am better able to function outside of this circle. I've learned that I can challenge ideas and stand up for things that don't make sense or hurt me and my family." Perhaps this is part of what Susan Smith's (1997:173) interprets as PAR, "a critical and spiritual form of research, is about personal and social transformation for liberation, that is, the eventual achievement of equitable communities and societies, which are characterized by justice, freedom, and ecological balance." Christelle wished to express her experience of new mothers. They "need to have a place to talk about how they feel and what they are going through. Not all of the support provided by such a group can be obtained from a husband/ partner." She continued to share how the research "definitely improved relationships with my husband and child... personally, it made me more tolerant with my husband because I began to realize that his actions are similar to that of many of the other fathers."

The women believed the group to be valuable and commented on it in areas of improvement and areas of affectivity. One such comment was the "make-up of the group" which one participant said

"is vital to the success of the group and how much people will get out of it. We all seemed to be on the same page and so seemed to want to talk about the same things and be going through the same things. It's amazing how well we seemed to get on, considering none of us really knew anyone before our sessions."

"I liked the slightly more structured session where some got to share their stories."

"The session on guilt was immensely rewarding. It was so beneficial and it was wonderful to see that the other mums felt like I did. There are times that guilt creeps back, and I battle immensely, but it does help having the support community that we do here to remind me again."

"There were occasions when I felt as if my voice wasn't heard and that I was drowned out. But then again, perhaps I should have made more of an effort to make myself heard. I think this is why I preferred the sessions when the group was slightly more structured so that everyone gets a chance to speak, be heard, etc. that appeals to me, but then I am very organised. I found that it gave everyone the chance to be heard. I learnt more about Stephanie and my own faith ideas during the session in which she discussed her Muslim faith, than I did in any of the other sessions."

For the majority of us, the process of involvement opened us up to seeing differently, much the same as that which postmodernism encourages, "Postmodernism is an approach which requires that we look at things in new ways. It also suggests that we look at new things, given the changing nature of the world in which we live" (Jennings & Graham 1996:167). One example of such "seeing" is in the following quote by one of the participants:

I now believe that emotion, being felt and expressed is a strength though society deems it a weakness. I grew up being told that I was over-emotional with this being levelled as a criticism and not something to be proud of. I now believe that it is in knowing yourself, warts and beauty spots, and accepting who you are, that can start to become truly happy. If you need something or someone to make you happy and are waiting for that, you will always be waiting for the next thing. But it is difficult to face up to who you are. I try every day (and don't always succeed mind you!) to be grateful for that day and for all my blessings, because I know that I am truly blessed.

## 5.5. What does this teach Practical Theology

### 5.5.1. An invitation to pastoral therapy

As participants, we were given opportunity to be challenged and to challenge. We would like to extend this opportunity of learning to pastoral theology. The following section is an invitation to “pastoral care to consider, develop, change and grow in theory and in practice” (Pattison 1994:58).

Throughout this research, we as participants, interrogated various ideas of pastoral care and counselling, and would like to share with pastoral therapy what our experiences of each were through this research. As mentioned in previous chapters, de Jongh van Arkel (2000:33) explains the difference between three partnering concepts of care:

Whereas mutuality is primarily a spontaneous, supportive caring action, pastoral counselling is a more specialized problem-orientated caring action in its focus on people with problems. Pastoral care takes a middle position between the two as part of the official upbuilding and nurture of the people of God who form a congregation.

What we, as participants, experienced as a group was a delicate combination of all three forms of care. Where the “Anti-Guilt” session (see chapter four) is one example of our experiencing “pastoral counselling” (de Jongh van Arkel 2000:33), we experienced “mutuality” (Heyward 1996:155) in various forms throughout in our “togetherness” Bellah et al (1985:37). Our experience of pastoral care was incorporating the concept of counselling with the idea of mutuality in a process of “upbuilding and nurture of the people” (de Jongh van Arkel 2000:33).

In this encounter with pastoral care, we experienced de Jongh van Arkel’s (2000:33) “congregation” more as what feminists call “community” (Gelder 1996:31) because our centeredness was “around ideas of mutuality and caring” (Gelder 1996:31). Perhaps in regarding pastoral care outside of the congregation and within a setting such as our group’s community, we, as participants, may offer Pattison (1993) some relief for his concerns of pastoral care’s limitations. Pattison (1993:82) expresses his concern for the manner in which pastoral care has functioned in the past: “[p]sychologically-informed, individually-focused pastoral care has become unnecessarily narrow and straitened, sometimes with consequences bordering on the disastrous.”

As a research group, we found pastoral care to challenge “individually-focused” (Pattison 1993:82) practices in that it focused on validating one another’s experiences as a “reclamation of the power

of naming and articulating [our] lives..." (Young 1996:61) and as an extension of the idea of redemption. Carter Heyward (quoted in Tatman 1996:199) discusses a way of seeing the "nature of redemption":

It is about our refusal to settle for less than justice here on earth .... Redemption begins to happen when humans move from a passive or apathetic acceptance of ourselves as created, dependent beings into an understanding of ourselves as co-creative, interrelated creatures.

The participating group found motivation and passion for "redemption" for ourselves and the marginalized from our interaction with one another. McBride (1996:183) reports that, "women experience power in their bonding together with other women, and find liberation through the discovery that other women feel as they do... Power is re-imagined as energy, creativity, vigour, passion, wisdom, participation, mutuality-in-relation."

The questions we, as a research group, pose to pastoral therapy is whether it can function separate from patriarchal rules and regulations of the past. Is it able to stand up to its potential of becoming a "timeless and closed system of theological knowledge, unaffected by cultural shifts" (Rossouw 1993:895) and will it entertain new ideas of redemption as a practice of care that begins with the redemption of the individual and then extends beyond the individual into marginalized communities?

According to Cochrane (1991:110),

[P]astoral care needs to be exercised by people who subscribe to women's full humanity and who are sensitive to the appalling toll which stereotyping and discrimination has taken on women. In order to do this feminism will have to be seen as a human issue and not merely as women's concern, and the pastor as both a 'facilitator of meaning' and an 'awakener of growth.'

Having been involved in this research as pastoral therapist, researcher and participant, I agree with Cochrane's (1991:110) explanation of what pastoral care "needs," however, I also believe that "facilitator of meaning" and "awakener of growth" should not be limited to the pastoral function but rather be extended to include those participating in the care and caring.

As a research group, we found that in our finding of self through community, we moved "from a passive acceptance of ourselves" (Tatman 1996:199) to understanding and embracing our role as

“agents for the mending of creation” (Ackermann 1996:48) which extended pastoral care beyond ourselves into “liberating praxis” (Ackermann 1996:48). We found that extending beyond ourselves was stepping away from the dangers of an “individually-focused” caring that Pattison (1993:82) warns of.

In the past, pastoral therapy/ care was limited to the function of the ordained clergy (Graham 1996:171) which was predominantly male. Over the years, this has been extended to the “caring community” which de Jough van Arkel (2000:32) defines as “inclusive of both laity and clergy.” As a group, we invited pastoral care, counselling and mutuality, outside of the church buildings and into our lounges and gardens. As a group we heard and were changed by Alicia’s story:

Alicia, an elderly woman with worn face and feet, drew herself up and answered: “we are the church. When they locked our church, we held church under the trees and we baptized our children in the river. When the commissar told us we were not allowed to do so, we took them to the sea at night. We just kept on being church. We kept on hoping. We will make this place better for our children. Tell them, *we are* the church.”

(Ackermann 1996:32)

This movement away from religious discursive rules and regulations and into caring/ supporting spirituality suggests that both the carer and the cared for are found in the same group, for Alicia, it was they who were the church – both carer and cared for within the sanctity of the people. Spirituality suggests “interdependence and sacredness of all life-forms” (King 1996:220) offering a “holistic” (de Jough van Arkel 2000:32) rather than “hierarchical” pastoral caring.

Having expressed the desire for “holistic” pastoral caring rather than “hierarchical” pastoral caring, there remains a place for structure and direction, not as a form of control or power, but as a process of facilitation that is protecting. Two of the participants expressed their preference for the meetings that were slightly more structured, though the meetings were not hierarchical in nature.

Testing the slightly structured meetings with the group resulted in the following reports: “I felt that I obtained most from the group when it had a bit of a formalized structure or a sort of agenda to achieve, rather than just a general free for all.” Where some of the participants felt daunted by the prospect of facilitating, leading, or offering ideas on “agenda” or “formalized structure” (Christelle), others embraced the opportunity to ensure that power was shared and all participants were given voice. Carmen explained “as in all groups some people are more chatty than others, however I do

feel that with a structured approach more power sharing was achieved, it provided the more quiet individuals with the opportunity to share their views and feelings.”

Inviting pastoral therapy into new ways of caring affects the ways in which we interact with practical theology. As a group we interacted with new ideas for practical theology.

#### 5.5.2. New ideas for practical theology

When considering Practical Theology’s focus as “the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society” (Heitink 1999:6) we are invited to witness the action that modern society requires prior to the invitation of Christian faith practices. Could one ask Practical Theology to construct the Christian faith as a skeletal structure upon which to flesh out knowledges of individuals for the betterment of our society as a whole? The reason I ask this question is because I wonder what action Christianity is able to perform if it is separate from being informed by alternative faith practices?

Take for example the simple scripture; “...love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30) Looking at these words outside of the shackles of doctrine allows participants to interact and interpret meaning for themselves, gently challenging their own faith practice without confrontation, and at the same time challenging their Self.

These words of *how* love functions (Mark 12:30) effectively opened new discussions within our group that we would like to offer to Practical Theology as potential ideas for its own faith praxis. From the perspective of “wellness in women with new babies” this scripture encapsulated so much of our finding alternative ways of being “well.” Firstly we looked at the idea of “love the Lord your God” who for each of us was slightly different. Muslim sacred scripture speaks of Ala, and the Christian participants spoke of Jesus, or their God “who art in heaven.” For myself, a God with both male and female characteristics, in the image of a large huggable Granny, invited me to “love the Lord” my God.

Our discussions continued into ideas of what “heart,” soul” “mind” and “strength” might mean for each of us. Christian history tells a story of passing on the faith tradition, “...the continuity of the Christian faith in the lives of men and women and in the church depends on tradition, the mediation of the tradition through various channels” (Heitink 1999:6) We would like to invite Practical Theology to not limit itself to its tradition but to embrace similar ideas of what “wellness” could be, in looking at *how* one practices wellness, rather than *what* wellness is. The participatory group determined, through conversation and interview of alternative faith ideas, that in interrogating various faith practices, we come to see a variety of *ways of doing wellness*. It is in interrogating various faith practices that we found out *how* to do wellness for ourselves that is important, not in finding a definition of wellness as such. Thus this research offers practical theology ideas on the *methodology* of finding practices of wellness, not necessarily a definition of *what* wellness is.

Diverse ideas sprung forth from various participants, many of whom had not taken part in the “Wellness Project” element of the research, yet found the idea of informing Practical Theology liberating. Some offered that “love the Lord your God” is an extension of our interaction with other people, specifically women, children and the marginalized, and very importantly, incorporates our association with the environment. Conversations about “love the Lord your God with all your heart” spoke of a need for inner healing of past hurts in order to open up the heart’s potential to love both God and others. “Love the Lord your God with all your soul” was discussed beneath the auspice of passion, whether for family, work, or ministry. Loving God with one’s mind seemed to take on the perception of study, challenge, openness, and rekindling women’s ways of knowing. To invite the idea of intuition back into the lives of women, especially as it relates to the raising of their children seemed to breathe new life into their relationships and linked into ideas of loving with the mind. “Strength” was seen as our physical responsibility: exercise or movement for wellness, as discussed in chapter four: the Wellness Project and Exercise.

All of the interpretations above led to initiatives that were incorporated into the “Wellness Project for Women with New Babies” – many of which are communicated in chapter four. These initiatives illuminated ideas on finding wisdom for theology outside of normal traditional channels. Northrup (2001:50) elucidates these views when she contrasts “External Guidance: dominant cultural view”



and “Inner Guidance.” Listed below are a few of her thoughts that encouraged the group’s interaction with spirituality, and we thus extend this encouragement to Practical Theology:

<b>External Guidance: Dominant Cultural View</b>	<b>Inner Guidance:</b>
Nature is inferior to God and must be controlled	Nature is a reflection of Divine Spirit
Human beings are superior to the natural world	Human beings are co-creators with spirit and nature
Behaviour is based on fear and judgment	Behaviour is based on respect for self. Respect for self results in respect for others.
Difference is suspect and must be controlled	Difference is celebrated as a reflection of the creativity of spirit
Delayed gratification. Enjoyment and fulfilment must be earned	Live for the moment and enjoy the process of creating
Support and nourishment must be earned from people and institutions outside oneself	The individual is self-nourishing through her connection with her inner being and guidance system
Approval from others is the basis for happiness	Self-approval and self-acceptance are the keys to happiness
It is possible to control everything and everyone	Humans are not capable of understanding everything from a strictly physical viewpoint. Mystery is part of the wonder of life

I am enthralled and invigorated by Northrup’s (2001) “Women’s Bodies, Women’s Wisdom” as well as the work of Sallie McFague (2001) “Life Abundant,” and I wonder what would transpire should theologians, doctors, and environmentalists collaborate their research efforts? What new ways of looking for and finding wellness would eventuate? What would “wellness” look like in humankind? How would our planet be faring? What would our relationship with God and other be like?

## **5.6. Research’s Offspring**

### 5.6.1. Wellness and the church

The church of which I am a member has subsequently asked that a wellness ministry be set up within the congregation, for the wellness of its congregants, as well as that of the local community. This is a unique opportunity for Research and I that I am hoping some of the participants of this research will be part of.

### 5.6.2. The future of Wellness

Having witnessed the potential of Practical Theology in a Participatory Action genre, I am motivated to approach local business initiatives requesting that sponsorship be offered for inviting

new participants into similar “Wellness Projects” in search of looking at support for a variety of issues, whether HIV/Aids related, homelessness related, or related to the exhaustion of professionals i.e. secondary trauma of social aid officers.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

Dear Lord, I have seen you in a new way, interacting with your daughters and sisters, in such a respect has moved me to tears on numerous occasions. Thank you for this, that you have opened my heart to feel and care, that you surrounded me with women to share feeling and caring with, and that you worked with us in the creation of a safe place to do this. These women have enriched my life, and my relationship with my child, husband and Self, community and environment. Thank you for answering the conversation we had in chapter one, and partnering with us in finding and researching this topic. I am changed, and I am new. South Africa’s arms seem open to me again, and I wish to continue to embrace her and her hurting children, practical theology, pastoral care and therapy... and be embraced back by them. We are a part of each other again, you, me, South Africa and our children. Amen.

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“Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction.... Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality.” Gergen (1991:157)

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: Letter to Guilt

*Dear Guilt,*

*Four women coming together to discuss you and your friends must have been daunting for you. We have decided that your influence in our lives is to be reduced and the percentage of control that you possessed is no longer acceptable.*

*It seems that you prefer women with babies who have returned to work and suggest a variety of lies in an attempt to acquire more control of their lives. For Stephanie, you managed to acquire 90% control in her life in that first week of her returning to work, by telling her that her son needed her at home, and that if she was not at home, he would become more attached to his nanny and he would begin to see the nanny as mommy. For Carmen, you invited your friend Sadness into the equation, stealing the joy of providing for one's family from her. You managed to convince Carmen that she should give over control to you when she forgot to contact the nanny because she was enjoying the inspiration that her work brings her. Even though she knows that the care-giver is excellent and has full confidence in her ability to care for her son, you whisper to her that she should not feel that confidence and should be at home with him herself.*

*Guilt, I was intrigued by your involvement with Christelle. You managed to get in on a few fronts, "guilt of going back to work and leaving him with a care-giver, guilt of enjoying going back to work, and then guilt that I should be wanting to be with him". Christelle informed us about you, "and then it comes at me from another perspective as well. I was used to working until 7p.m., bringing work home, working over weekends, etc. and I felt the commitment to the company. I now experience guilt because I don't put in those kind of hours anymore, and when I need to take time off for a trip to the pediatrician, it really effects me." The lies and twisting of words that you have used with the group have been effective up to the point of us discussing you. Ideas about leaving children with care-givers, that our children will enjoy them more; whispering things like, "Carmen, you shouldn't be leaving Jared, look at his beautiful smile when he looks at you, he's so excited to see you, how can you leave him!" I have noticed that you have invited your age old accomplice, Resentment, to push and twist the pain of not having the choice to stay home or go back to work. You two have tried very hard to wedge yourselves between the husbands and wives in an attempt to intercept a united front against Blame – another of your buddies.*

*You, Guilt, seem to work from the inside. Though you tried with Christelle to force yourself in from the outside voices of family members, she has never allowed you in. Why is it that you try so hard to steal the joy that us women receive from the stimulation of work? Is it that you do not want us to recognize our worth in the business field, that we are valued and needed both in business and at home? I notice that you try to set us women against each other with competition. You say things like, "you should be enjoying the four messy feeds that you give your baby on weekends, other moms are able to do them every day,*

*other mothers have it together." And then you refuse to allow us the excitement of returning to work on Monday, telling us again that this excitement is negative.*

*We have recognized a few of your other friends: frustration, envy, jealousy, competition, helplessness, and confusion. The women shared about your friends saying, "I look at a few of the other mothers we have met who have the financial ability to stay home with their children... and then there is envy."*

*"Jealousy is a friend of guilt. I experience jealousy pointing out that other mothers have the choice. I feel helpless and I feel that the choice was robbed from me. This was not my choice."*

*"Confusion sets in when I wonder what I would have done if I did have the choice. I wonder if guilt would have been even stronger and more controlling of my life if I did have the choice to stay home but chose to return to work anyway, because I enjoy work..."*

*I believe you, Guilt, were concerned by our discussion of your tactics, but I believe it would have been a shock for you to see the scale of percentages that illustrated your current influence in the lives of the participants. Carmen said that you now only have 30% control, Christelle said about 45%. Though you tried to get in with Stephanie from the side of her family when she began reclaiming her life from you, you remain at 30% influence in her life.*

*Our attendance at the wellness project has shrunk your influence in our lives and we have come to see that the tools we have to stand up against you are highly effective. We know that tears are okay, even if you have caused them, they are healthy and healing. No longer will we believe your lie that we are failing because our cheeks glisten with our internal healing balm. We have heard you say, "you will never be completely rid of me," and to that we now respond, "we know!" but we boldly add, "we are okay with that!" Through this liberation, we have found an alternative story that we recognize as beneficial to ourselves, and it includes you as informant. We do, however, remove the power you have to control. Looking back over our lives, each of us has a story of standing up to you, we have all found special ways of reducing your influence and we know it is not only possible, but has already been accomplished. Seeing our past successes reminded us that there have been times that you were less influential, and we've embraced those stories as our preferred realities.*

*There is a good side to you guilt, and though you may despise our pointing this out to you, you will in time come to appreciate it as we have. You remind us of our responsibility as women, wives and mothers. It is a reminder of beauty and strength that thwarts some of the attempts of your friends. Anger at husbands, stress at work, snapping at husband when baby is ratty, etc. The awareness that a partnership between a small percentage of you and large percentage of womaness, has created a key to our wellness as women with new babies. We are no longer influenced by fear of cancelling plans to be at home with our family and a lot less influenced by anger when dad arrives home and sometimes does not notice what needs to be accomplished. Coming to the project is a constant reminder of our value as women, that though there are times when you try to convince us that we are terrible mothers, there is a place where we are validated and the correct ratio of your influence in our lives is re-established.*

*So many times you and anger have tried to convince us that our husbands try to make our lives difficult, when we know otherwise. You now serve only as a reminder that men and women often have contrasting approaches to life, and we know we are in control enough to find a place for our voice to be heard, even with our husbands, and extended families, we will find ways of being heard and asking for what it is we are in need of.*

*To ensure that you are kept at the correct percentage of influence we have set up a safety net. We realize the need to ask someone else to plan things once in a while – even if it is hubby that must plan. Challenging the stigma attached to being a family who enjoys staying home more often than going out, has become a consistent part of our lives, and reminding you constantly that for us being a family does not compare with being without a family. We choose to say, “WOW THANK YOU” when our husbands step out and help, not because we have to, but because they need it, and we have the right to choose to do it. When wanting to get a point across to our husbands, we choose moments of calm, equal space, to ensure the point is received and guilt does not have reason to visit later in the evening due to ensuing arguments. We have now found a safe place to bring our “big picture” talk, so that we are able to directly and effectively give voice to our pains and hurts without losing the audience on the “big picture” discussion. As women, we are able to sit with one another and carry the discussions that may have fallen on deaf ears elsewhere. Here guilt, you will notice that your influence is almost non-existent. Reminding ourselves of the benefits of going back to work, for some, it makes us better mothers, for others, more able to offer the opportunities necessary for raising children. Providing for our family's wellbeing is a place that you are no longer invited to be, guilt. This is a sacred right of us as women of new babies. If we are offered the opportunity to enjoy an afternoon/evening away from our babies, you are only permitted to be an informant to us if we are doing it more than is required for our self care. We know that we too are our children's heroes, as daddies are when they walk in the door having been away from baby all day. This is also sacred, and you are no longer tolerated in this area of living. We know that we are not alone in standing up to you, and we are committed to exposing your efforts to take the power we have reclaimed from you*

*There are some secrets that we will share with you, guilt. As women, there are times when you help us cope. We are “feeling” beings and an “abundant life” often means that to “feel” we are to feel the abundance of the full spectrum of emotions, from extreme pain to ecstatic joyfulness, and you fall somewhere within that spectrum. To eradicate you altogether may be denying the beauty of what we as women are able to experience in this life.*

*We have decided that you are an informant; forums such as the wellness project liberate us as we hear others' stories about you; and we are freed from your negative side. We have found a way to lessen your influence, be safe-guarded against a power imbalance in your favour, and found use for the little of you that we choose to invite to remain in our lives.*

*With this invitation to partnership we sign off,  
Women with new babies.*

## Appendix B: Consent form

### CONCENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I understand what the project is about. All the queries that I have had concerning the research project have been addressed, and I understand that I am able to ask questions and request information at anytime during the project.

I understand that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am able to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage
3. I am aware of what will happen to my personal information ( including tape recordings) at the conclusion of the project, that the data will be destroyed but that any raw data the project depends on, will be retained.
4. I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study.
5. All personal information supplied will remain confidential throughout the project.
6. I am aware that Candida's supervisors and examiners will read the material.

I am willing to participate in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of participant in capital letters)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of witness)

Note: Consent form informed by Grobbelaar, R (Kotze & Kotze 2001:192



# Wellness Project

...for women with  
new babies

Hello Women,

Here are some dates to diarize:

Date	Activity	Baby with / not	Cost
Friday, June 6	Women's night out	NOT	Only what you eat & drink
Saturday, June 7	Exercise workshop	NOT	R100
Thursday, June 19	Homeopathy workshop	NOT	R100
Saturday, June 28	Wellness Project	WITH	Free ☺

Here's a break down of the above mentioned:

- **Women's Night Out:**

This is a Friday night out with the women from our wellness project. Venue to be confirmed via sms. We will be sure to select a venue that is classy, caters for conversation, and where we can let our hair down, wear a little make-up and enjoy a cocktail or two. Please ask your hubbies/moms to baby sit, and be sure to bring your stories of "old boyfriends" and "pre-pregnancy life!" Meet at Candida's complex at 6:30p.m. and we'll carpool from there. RSVP by the day before. Invite a friend if you wish.

- **Exercise Workshop:**



Jorge will be bringing our bods up to scratch with this workshop that will ensure we go home with two 30 minute workouts that we can do in the comfort of our own home. Specifically tailored for women who have had cesareans; women who are going back to work and those who do not have time / finances to attend the local gym. Bring a sweat towel, comfie clothes to exercise in and your showering goodies. RSVP Candida by no later than Friday, June 6! Invite friends!

- **Homeopathy Workshop:**

This will definitely be a hit. Commencement is at 2p.m. on Thursday, June 19<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Mike Clark will be discussing women's wellness (45 mins), and baby's wellness (45 mins). From a homeopathic perspective, we will be ensured a variety of thrilling ideas to take home to our families, and to ensure self-care! Find out how to handle our babies' health issues. Stunning lunch and coffee/tea will be included in the cost. If you have anything you would like to hear about specifically, sms it to me and I will pass it on to the doctor. RSVP no later than Thursday, June 12<sup>th</sup> to Candida Millar (011 318-2830). Limited space available, but pass on the information anyway.

- **Wellness Project:**

This one you are familiar with. Christelle has graciously opened her home to us. Please RSVP Candida by the day before and collect directions to her home.

**For Payment Information:**

Please ensure that payment is made by the RSVP date to secure your seat. You may drop payment off at my home in Noordwyk for all of the above. Payment for the Homeopathy workshop can be settled at my home, or at DJ's Café, Midway Mews.



# **Women's Wellness Project**

*...for women with new babies*

# **Homeopathic alternatives for the new mother.**

**Thursday, 19 June**



**13h30 for 14h00**



**DJ's Deli, Midway Mews**



**RSVP: 12 June**




**R100**

**Price includes lunch**

**Dr. Mike Clark will be discussing homeopathic perspectives in women's health and that of her baby. Alternative ideas in coping with the challenges that being a first time mom presents.**

**Payment secures seat. Limited space. Payments may be made at DJ's Deli, Midway Mews  
Info. C.S. Millar  
(011) 318-2830**

Appendix E: Exercise workshop notices



### Wellness Project

*...for women with new babies*

## Exercise Workshop

◆

**Saturday, 7 June**

**10:00**

◆

**Gracia Hall**

◆

**12:00 - 5:00**


◆

**Free**

Personal trainer, Jorge, is ready to help us working moms (and those of us who can't get to the gym) work out two 30 min. all over body routines that we can do at home, without wasting precious bonding time with baby & hubby!

Payment secures spot.  
Info. C.S. Millar  
(011) 318-2830

[cmillar@ccoll.ca](mailto:cmillar@ccoll.ca)



### Wellness Project

*...for women with new babies*

## Exercise Workshop

◆

**Saturday, 7 June**

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◆

**Gracia Hall**

◆

**12:00 - 5:00**

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