

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

Dominant discourses on power, childhood and gender lead to power inequalities in social relationships in families and schools, allowing abuses of power (the subjugation and marginalisation of women and young people). These dominant structures of belief are often disrespectful of young people's experiences, stories and knowledges. This research attempted to respond to dilemmas in child relationships, to challenge belief structures that construct relationships between adults/young people, and to empower young people to stand up for their beliefs and make their voices heard.

The research was guided by a post-modern, narrative pastoral approach. To deconstruct discourses that restrict young people within social institutions, social construction discourse, feminist post-structuralism, narrative theology and feminist theology were used. Narrative practices were used to look at depression, guilt, trouble and anger. Re-authoring conversations were used to construct preferred stories about young people's identities and to explore alternative stories and the not-yet-said on drugs.

Key terms:

Post-modern epistemology; narrative pastoral approach; feminist post-structuralism; social construction discourse; post-modern theology; power discourse; childhood discourse; gender discourse; externalising conversations; ethical responsibility; accountability.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH FOCUS

1.1.1 Background

There are usually power inequalities within social relationships such as those within families and within adult-child relationships. Social power inequalities can provide opportunities for abuses of power: 'The inequalities make children vulnerable to adult abuse of power because they lack understanding and resources for self-protection' (Poling 1991:23). Taruna McLean (1996:2) wrote the following on her experience of such inequalities when she was a young person in Australia:

Young people in this culture are relatively powerless. From schooling to parenting practices young people's voices and experiences often remain unacknowledged and unheard. When young people try to speak out about the experience of being young, it is often understood as 'a stage', as 'adolescent angst', or as 'youthful idealism'. In this way, young people's perspectives are marginalised and ignored and a climate is created in which abuse can thrive. Despite this, many young people continue to try to give voice to their experiences.

In most South African cultures, the adage 'children should be seen and not heard' represents a traditional structure of beliefs that may construct relationships between adults and young

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people.¹ The saying implies that 'children' should obey (and respect) 'adults'; 'children' should just listen and not speak. Thus they are denied a voice in and about their own experience.

Taken-for-granted assumptions that lie just beneath the surface of many conversations in a particular social context might be given a voice in a society in a set of statements about what is normal or conventional. This set of statements, or discourses, reflects society's commentary and creates meanings. Post-structuralist scholars define the term 'discourse' as follows: 'Discourse refers to a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs that are imbedded in relationships, texts, and institutions. The mechanisms of influence are often invisible. Discourse is a product of social factors rather than an individual's set of ideas' (Scott 1990:135). The discourses that shape, construct and sometimes restrict relationships between adults and young people in society are often disrespectful of young people's experiences and knowledge. Young people are not used to being consulted regarding their lives, thoughts or actions. Often they are the objects of study, being told what to do and how to think. Foucault argued that power shows itself through the evidence that can be found in everyday interactions, in institutionalised social practices and in discourses:

As power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualised; it is exercised by surveillance rather than ceremonies, by observation rather than commemorative accounts....

In a system of discipline, the child is more individualised than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man.

(Foucault 1977:193)

Young people typically become the objects of study by adults and are often excluded from examining their own purposes, reviewing the consequences of their actions, or discussing the effects these actions have on others. Adults tend to do this work for them and hand them ready-made conclusions (Winslade & Monk 1999:8).

Discourses that shape adult-child relationships feature assumptions such as that 'adults are the experts and have the knowledge, experience and resources' and therefore 'children must

¹ In this dissertation I prefer the term 'young people' instead of 'children', because I want to step

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accept their parent's view on what is the truth, what is right and wrong, what is acceptable'. A story Davies tells (1993:40-41) is a very good example of how adults can sometimes make children believe that children ask 'non-askable' questions. Davies (1993:40) remembers the wonder she experienced when, as a child, she saw the silvery leaves on a tree shimmer together, then felt a breeze and was 'filled with wonder at my discovery that the wind was created by the waving of the leaves...something similar to a flock of birds wheeling simultaneously in the sky.' On that occasion, Davies' (1993:41) childhood puzzlement was not valued or shared by the teacher whom she asked, 'how do all the leaves know how to move at the same moment?' Davies (1993:41) describes how an opportunity for collaborative inquiry was lost: 'Her incomprehension clued me into the fact that I had asked an apparently non-askable question and I dropped my questioning immediately.'

Adolescents can and do open up in families a whole array of new values as they bring friends and new ideals into the family arena. According to Carter and McGoldrick (1989:18), families can become derailed at this stage if/when they are closed to new values and threatened by them and they are frequently stuck in an earlier view of their children. Parents may try to control every aspect of their children's lives at a time when it is impossible to do so successfully. The result can be devastating to families: 'Either the adolescent withdraws from the appropriate involvements...or the parents become increasingly frustrated with what they perceive as their own impotence' (Carter & McGoldrick 1989:18). The 'safe' thing to do is to form an assumption that sounds like this: 'It is normal for teenagers to go through a period of rebellion and to seek to separate themselves from their parents' (Winslade & Monk 1999:30). An assumption like the one just mentioned, can shape families' choices, values, feelings and actions. Change is then limited by such dominant culture stories.

Post-structuralist theory looks at how people are shaped by discourses, and at the extent to which these ideas are capable of re-shaping or reconstituting their bodies and desire through imagining other possibilities, recognising the 'importance for each individual of finding ways of recognising the powerful shaping (or constituting) of their bodies, of their desires, that takes place through language, and of finding ways to counteract that force' (Davies 1996:13). A post-structuralist epistemology invites therapists to challenge discourses, to analyse and

outside the modernist adult/child dualism as far as possible.

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illuminate the impact they have on people's lives. Davies (1996:13) argues that counter-actions against powerful shaping forces are premised on the following:

- the individual work of coming to recognise the discursive or linguistic patterns in which one's very being is caught up;
- the collective work of finding new ways of speaking and writing different ways of being into existence; and
- finding ways to recognise and resist disempowering impositions by powerful institutions/others.

Narrative therapy (see 1.2.3) is a post-modern approach to therapy which invites young people to take responsibility and speak out on their needs and desires – to challenge/deconstruct existing discourses which shape and construct relationships between adults and young people. This new paradigm invites young people to take the initiative to develop new skills as their knowledge of themselves becomes richer. This research, which uses a post-structuralist, post-modern narrative approach, challenges young people to make choices according to their own stories of identity.

1.1.2 Significance and purpose of study

Being a consultant to young people in the church where I was a minister for five years made me aware of their feelings of powerlessness. When I started my work as a counsellor at a local high school, I realised that many problems and frustrations resulting from power-inequalities and the discourses of childhood in families and in schools are still amongst us; indeed, it seems that difficulties are multiplying. Approximately eighty percent of the young people that consult me struggle with their relationships with adults, and experience themselves as being powerless in these relationships. Although they struggle with different problems, they all have one thing in common: distance between adults and young people in our society deprives them of agency. Agency refers to the power one has to act in one's own life. The child/adult dualism is a construction that privileges adult knowledge. Adults have the knowledge, the resources and the power to exert authority over the lives of young

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people; they 'know' how young people should behave to be 'proper' – where they may go and what they should say and think.

This document contains an account of the stories that young people told during therapeutic conversations between them and me. I used the narrative practice of deconstruction of the therapist's power, and this has helped me to privilege their voices in this weaving together of dialogue and theory. I am constantly a witness of their powerlessness and their despair concerning adult domination. Their experience of power is a negative one, as if there is a fundamental, insurmountable gulf between those who exercise power and those who are subjected to it.

Foucault said that subjection, domination and combat are found everywhere: 'Whenever one hears talk of meaning and value, of virtue and goodness, one looks for strategies of domination' (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982:109). Foucault also struggled with questions such as these: 'Isn't power simply a form of warlike domination? Shouldn't one therefore conceive all problems of power in terms of relations of war?' (Rabinow 1984:65). It is indeed so that some young people experience their relationship with their parents as a war – a war they can never win. As an adult, and as the parent of a teenage daughter, I am constantly amazed at the potential abuse of power that can result from being in the position of a parent. It seems that the existing discourses on parenting and education limit solutions to the difficulties and dilemmas that exist in adult-child relationships.

Society's apparent openness concerning drugs, alcohol abuse and sexual exploitation complicates relationships between adults and young people even more. Parents want to protect their children; they think that young people are vulnerable, but lack wisdom and experience, and they therefore restrict young people's power to make decisions, and limit them in their sharing of their ideas concerning their needs and desires. Young people, in turn, experience this attempt at protection as a lack of trust. The resulting conflict can destroy parent-child relationships. However, this need not be the case. Instead, I agree with Poling (1991:25-26) that parent-child relationships can be fulfilling and close: 'In spite of the inequality in the parent-child relationship, it has the potential to be one of the most intimate experiences in a person's life.'

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This study is an attempt to respond to the increasing number of dilemmas in relationships between adults and young people. I reflected on the stories young people told me when we engaged in conversations. I used the externalising practices of narrative therapy to deconstruct discourses, in this case, discourses of the power relations between adults and young people. According to Winslade and Monk (1999:44), the externalising of problems puts 'problems back where they belong – in cultural discourses'. 'Externalising' is an approach within therapy that encourages persons to objectify and, at times, to personify the problems that they experience as oppressive. 'In this process, the problem becomes a separate entity and thus external to the person or relationship that was ascribed as the problem' (White & Epson 1990:38). By using externalising questions, people can begin to experience themselves as separate from the problem; they seem to understand the problem as existing in a meaningful system (or discourse). As they unravel the influence the problem has on every aspect of their lives, they seem to realise some possibilities that exist to question/deconstruct the problem.

I also used the narrative practice of deconstruction (see 1.2.3.5.2) to 'unpack' young people's experiences, and sought to assist them in clarifying their goals. Young people are often told that all they need is more self-esteem or more self-confidence and that this will enable them to be who they wish to be in the world. But it is not as simple as that. There are power relations at work through which they need to find their way. For a therapist who seeks to assist young people, this journey involves genuinely seeking young people's opinions and knowledges.² This research is an attempt to work in ways that honour the experiences and knowledges of young people and to enable myself as an adult to step outside the role of 'expert'.³ It is an expedition to explore how a narrative approach can enable people to establish a culture of mutual respect and collaboration – where they can talk across generations.

² The plural 'knowledges' is preferred to the singular among post-modern narrative therapists.

³ It would not be appropriate for me to adopt an authoritative role of 'expert' as if I knew all the answers. Narrative conversations are about creating meaning together through language.

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1.1.3 The question of accountability

Adopting a social constructionist stance (see 1.2.1.3) offers useful ideas about how power, knowledge, and 'truth' are negotiated in families and larger cultural aggregations. Knowledge on reality is seen as a social construction: 'Knowledge is not an objective, taken-for-granted "truth", but a social construction' (Freedman & Combs 1996a:22). Gergen (1985:266) argues that a social constructionist approach to knowledge begins with radical doubt about the taken-for-granted world, whether in the sciences or in daily life: '...in a specialised way [it] acts as a form of social criticism.... It invites one to challenge the objective basis of conventional knowledge.'

Therapists can normally only engage in a conversation with a client through language. 'Humans can be defined as language-generating, meaning-generating systems engaged in an activity that is inter-subjective and recursive' (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:377). It is through language, through conversation, that meaning and understanding are co-created by the participants of a conversation: 'Conversation – language and communicative action – is simply part of a hermeneutic struggle to reach understanding with those with whom we are in contact' (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:378). The role of the therapist in the dynamic process of the language event is to help the client to construct his/her own meaningful understanding. To be able to do this, the therapist must be aware of the influence of pre-existing discourses about truth and meaning on his/her own life, and how such discourses could possibly cloud the therapist's stance in the therapeutic conversation.

Therapeutic accountability is about addressing power differences between client and therapist by making the imbalance of power transparent; it is about revealing that there is a power differential in the therapy context, and 'it is one that cannot be erased, regardless of how committed we [as therapists] are to egalitarian practices' (White 1995a:166). The accountability and self-reflexivity of the therapist is an important part of deconstructing power relations. If the power/knowledge relation is ignored, it remains invisible and therapists expose themselves and their clients to the danger of abuse. Post-modern therapy emphasises a more egalitarian and open relationship between therapist and client, a relationship where both the therapist and the client reflect on the process of communication.

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A therapist can use deconstructing practices to reflect on the power-relation that exists in the client-therapist relationship. Foucault (1980:50) thought it is important to deconstruct/make visible what was previously unseen, because 'it can sometimes be the effect of using a magnifying instrument.' Deconstruction then means to take apart the discourses that construct/constitute a person. The therapist must always bear in mind the 'said' and the 'not-yet-said'. In this way therapists are continuously reflecting on their understanding of the meaning and 'realities' they create.

Accountability means 'to self-reflexively deconstruct our own voices, located as they are in a particular class and ethnic, cultural, temporal, historical, geographical spaces' (Jones 1990:8). In my research and therapy I attempted to deconstruct my own power as the 'expert' adult to empower the young people I interviewed, and privilege them as the primary authors of alternative stories and preferred ways of being.

I am a white, Afrikaans-speaking, heterosexual female, 35 years old (or young). I grew up in a strict, conservative, Afrikaans home where the dominant discourses were patriarchal and hierarchical. This means that I had relatively no power to make decisions according to my values, needs and desires. I did not think of myself as capable, or as having the knowledge I needed to make the 'right' choices. Reflecting on my childhood brings many of my old emotions and feelings of frustration, anger and rebellion to the surface. I spent my childhood years in the rural parts of what was then called the North-western Transvaal, in the late 1970s, under the system of Apartheid. At that time, the church to which our family belonged, the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika*, supported the 'truth' of Apartheid and the sexism, racism and classism imbedded in that system. My parents both passed matric, with no further qualifications. I acquired a degree in theology and was ordained as a minister. From 1992 until 1997 I was a full-time minister. I have been married for 16 years to a white man who has also had the privilege of receiving a university education. I have two children: a fifteen-year-old daughter and a six-year-old son.

During most of my adult years I was in a position of power: as a white person I had power in a system of Apartheid; as a minister I had knowledge of theology which put me in an authoritative position; and as a parent I had authority over children according to the patriarchal paradigm. This means that I am narrowly limited in my understanding of the

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structures of power from 'below', from the position of 'underdog'. As a woman in a patriarchal society, I have gained some knowledge of what it is to be marginalised, excluded from the centres of power on a systematic basis, but not enough to understand the extent of power-abuse experienced by other marginalised groups. Through my studies at the Institute for Therapeutic Development, I have become increasingly aware of the potential to abuse power that comes with being in a position of power. In the consultations I have with the young people at the high school where I work, I continuously try to deconstruct the 'truths' and 'beliefs' I was taught as a child, to unmask the invisible power that belongs to parents and adults.

Having free access to a counsellor is a new 'luxury' for young people in South Africa. Until recently the school as an institution was seen as a place where children are prepared, academically, for their future. No time could be wasted, for they must study, pass all their grades, and go to another academic institution, preferably university, to acquire the highest possible degree and be successful. Once again 'children were seen and not heard'. To fit the definition of a well-disciplined child, a child had to listen to the teachers, do well and behave. In addition, adults thought they had insight into the emotions of the children, and they reserved the right to 'send' a child to a psychologist if, and when, they saw fit. During the past five years, more and more schools have experienced a need to appoint a counsellor. Young people find the idea of being listened to very attractive. Once they discover that a therapist is willing to listen carefully to their talk, and take their understanding of the world seriously, they come to therapy willingly and are filled with enthusiasm. I was fascinated with the young people's excitement about the idea that I was planning to write a paper on their perceptions and struggles with current situations in life. They showed delight and satisfaction at getting a chance to 'show and tell' their knowledge and skills to others. Freeman, Epston and Lobovits (1997:127) believe that children experience satisfaction and a sense of worth when they can take up the position of consultant: 'When engaged as consultants, children assume an unconventional role: they are consulted as authorities on their own lives; their pre-existing knowledges and abilities are deemed effective and worthy of respect; their ideas are considered significant enough to be documented and circulated to others.'

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It is only because of my daily conversations with young people, through constant dialogue with them about their insights and experiences, that I am able to write this study on the power-difference between adults and young people. In a very short time I have changed many of my perceptions because of the courage of these young people to voice their experiences. I am grateful also to my teenage daughter, who has helped me to make some radical changes in my perspectives. In the interests of therapeutic conversation, and my ethical responsibility to co-construct meaning with young clients, I have learned to look at society and the Church⁴ more imaginatively than I did before, trying to look through the eyes of those consulting me. It is a revelation to see in how many ways young people are powerless, and to see the abuse of power they experience within their relationships with each other and adults.

In spite of my attempts to be accountable, I am aware that my privileged position in society – as a white, middle-class adult, and as a counsellor at a school – limits my understanding of the full impact of power-abuse as experienced by young people. I therefore challenge the reader of this research report to reflect on any distortions that might warp the situation.

1.1.4 Research questions

Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, was one of the main contributors of post-structuralist thought. He thought and wrote about truth, power and language, arguing that: 'knowledge/power works through language' (Fillingham 1993:12). He was sceptical about 'universal' truths. He regarded language as the constitutive force of meaning: 'Whereas grammatical construction needs only elements and rules in order to operate...there is no statement in general, no free, neutral, independent statement; but a statement always belongs to a series of a whole...It is always part of a network of statements' (Foucault 1977:99). People are constantly constituted in language and in relationships. Language constitutes the world and beliefs of people. Language creates the realities humans know. Foucault was interested in the knowledge(s) held by human beings and how power acts on human beings. Parker (1989:61) explains Foucault's view: 'What is spoken, and who may speak, are issues of power.'

⁴ The term 'the Church' is used generally to refer to all Christian denominations.

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Foucault saw language as an instrument of power – the power people have in society is in direct proportion to their ability to participate in the various discourses that shape our society. He argues that there is an inseparable link between knowledge and power: 'The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge, and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power' (Foucault 1980:51). This means that the discourses of a society determine what knowledge is held to be true, right or proper in that society, so that those who control the discourse control knowledge (Freedman & Combs 1996a:38). The creators of these discourses, the people who decide what can count as the truth, become the voices of society, while other voices are marginalised. This means that power is knowledge and knowledge is power. Du Toit (1997:947) states that: 'Truth is only outwardly independent of the group which holds the power. The power we experience today above all is the truth of norms and chances, the expert's truth about what is average or deviant, safe or dangerous, same or different.'

Patriarchal discourses put men in society in the ultimate position of power and knowledge. The dominant discourses about childhood serve adults as a powerful majority who use mental and even physical force to impose their idea of what is right or true on a minority. This means that young people may be marginalized, disempowered and are without a voice. The problem within the epistemological framework of these discourses is this:

In so far as the differences between people and between organism and environment have been understood to be non-reciprocal and hierarchical (with certain kinds of people on top), there has evolved a domination of group over group, individual over individual, and humanity over humanity's environment.

(Sampson 1989:17)

Foucault (1980:97) thought we should not ask the unanswerable – why certain people want to dominate, or what they seek, or what their overall strategy is – he urged us to ask instead 'how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours'.

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A questioning of the influence of patriarchal beliefs and Michel Foucault's perspectives on power form a basis for the research questions. The research is based on the concept of the deconstruction of patriarchal and gender discourses of power and power-relations. The questions informing and forming the research are the following:

- **How can narrative therapy make a contribution in supporting young people to externalise their problems and internalise their strengths? Can a richer description of their identity and skills empower them to make their voices heard in a responsible way?**
- **How can narrative therapy play a role in challenging dominant discourses regarding the parent-child relationship and power inequalities that may exist in this relationship?**

1.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

1.2.1 Conceptual framework of the study

'A paradigm encompasses three elements: epistemology, ontology and methodology. Epistemology asks: how do we know the world? What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known? Ontology raises basic questions about the nature of reality. Methodology focuses on how we gain knowledge about the world' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994: 99). A paradigm is a basic set of beliefs which define the world-view of the researcher. The epistemology I use is informed by a post-modern paradigm. In Sections 1.2.1.1 to 1.2.1.6, I explain the paradigm shift from modernity to a post-modern view of reality. Developments in theology and narrative discourse also play a part in the conceptual framework of this research.

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1.2.1.1 The meaning of modernity

Modernity can be described as an approach to knowledge that emerged since the Enlightenment period. The Western world has come to think itself capable of arriving at the truth in all arenas through scientific inquiry. This way of thinking dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The epistemological assumptions that form the foundations of modernity are the propositions that knowledge is certain, objective, and good, and that such knowledge can be obtained – at least theoretically: 'The investigator and the investigated "object" are assumed to be independent entities, and the investigator to be capable of studying the object without influencing it or being influenced by it' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:110).

The end of the eighteenth century engendered a shift in the organization of language that saw human beings emerge as the *locus* of knowledge. 'In the modern age, the truths of life are thought to reside in the depths of the human being: the standard puzzle over the person, who could be at once the subject and object of her own understanding, became inscribed in discourse with the arrival of this historical period' (Parker 1989:59,60). Pre-modernists and modernists agree on the objectivity of reality (Dockery 1995:15). Such a view of knowledge and truth is called positivism, and it posits that all knowledge (scientific or social) should be based either on evidence which is evident to every person, or can be checked by any other rational person (Pieterse 1993:56).

Oden (1995:24) speaks of modernity as an ideological spell, an alluring vision of human potential: 'The enchantment of modernity is characterised by technological messianism, enlightenment idealism, quantifying empiricism, and the smug fantasy of inevitable historical progress.' Modernity, with its claim that it can find truth and meaning through rational thought, sought to liberate humanity from its fate as described and developed by medieval thinkers who argued that God controls and rules the universe and humankind. Science promised a new freedom and progress for humanity. Using human reasoning and technology, humans could obtain control over nature and history. This would release humankind from a predetermined universe. The postulates of a thinking self and a mechanistic universe opened up the way for an explosion of knowledge – the so-called 'Enlightenment project'. The goal of

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the human intellectual quest became that of unlocking the secrets of the universe, in order to master nature for human benefit and to create a better world. Grenz (1995:91) maintains that the main characteristic of the twentieth century was 'bringing rational management to life, and seeking to improve the quality of life through technology.'

1.2.1.2 Pondering on post-modernity

A new paradigm is growing and gaining momentum. It includes a critique on modernity, and it is called post-modernity. This shift started with Thomas Kuhn's view on truth as a matter of perspective, and his belief that knowledge of the world is not improved through systematic study, but by the way people shift their way of seeing the world. Post-modernity is a diverse cultural movement. The term is an umbrella concept covering styles, movements, shifts and approaches in the field of art, history, architecture, literature, the political sciences, economics, philosophy, and, of course, theology. It is a time, movement or outlook that affects literature, music, a sense of right and wrong, self-identity and theology. It is a movement beyond scientific modernism, and it is breaking away from the 'determinism of the modern worldview' (Henry 1995:34).

Dockery (1995:15) suggests that the post-modernist movement is a dislocating human condition experienced in the last years of the twentieth century (and the start of the twenty-first), and that it is 'dislocating because it tends to throw people out of the worldviews they have traditionally held'. Post-modernity could be best described as a revision of some of the elements of the modern mind – rather than as a rejection. It offers a choice to the individual, society and the church. Post-modernity is a worldview looking at human experience as incoherent, and lacking absolutes in the area of truth and meaning.

Post-modernity is a basic distrust of any voice that purports to tell that that is the way it is: 'Post-modernity is incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard 1986 [1984]:xxiii). The post-modern thinker moves away from the paradigms of modernist times and challenges and questions everything that has been regarded as true and certain. The epistemological foundation of post-modern thought is that there 'is no objective and rational truth out there. Objective truth is inaccessible and meaning resides not in the external reality or texts but in

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the interpreter'. Du Toit (1997:941) explains this principle as follows: 'Post-modernism does not relativise truth, but denies the very possibility of truth. Truth has been replaced by the play of meaning, and concern for truth is purely context dependent. The post-modernist denies the existence of truth as an autonomous entity.'

1.2.1.3 Social construction discourse

Social constructionist thought began with radical doubt about and distrust of what is generally accepted as the truth and is taken for granted. This discourse acts as a form of social critique or criticism. It challenges the concept of knowledge as mental representation because it views knowledge itself as a social construction (Gergen 1985:268).

Knowledge and understanding are products of the social activity of human beings – an enterprise of people in a relationship. Gergen (1985:270) says that people generally see knowledge as that which is represented in linguistic propositions, stored in books and journals, on discs and the like. These renderings of knowledge are constituents of social practices. Knowledge is something people 'do' together. Freedman and Combs (1996a:1) agree with the notion that knowledge is a social construction: 'Every person's social, interpersonal reality has been constructed through interaction with other human beings, and human interaction. People, together, construct their realities as they live them.'

Knowledge can be placed within a process of social interchange: 'Social construction discourse is an attempt to approach knowledge from the perspective of the social processes through which it is created' (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:3). Meanings are thus co-created by individuals in conversation with each other. Meaning and understanding are developed by individuals in conversation with each other in their common attempts to understand other persons and things, each other's words and actions: 'Meaning and understanding are thus intersubjective and mediated through language' (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:390). However, in the light of Foucault's notions of power-relations within any social interchange, it is perhaps important to consider the recursive contributions of participants in any conversation to the emergence of a given discourse.

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1.2.1.4 Are we lost without language?

What we say and how we speak is not neutral or passive. Through speaking we create a reality. We give meaning to our experiences through and in stories: 'Language constitutes our world and beliefs. Truth can never be "out there"' (Freedman & Combs 1996a:28).

Some scholars think that language comes first to the post-modernist, and that it shapes our perception of reality: 'The very contents of our minds are not really our own, but rather reflections of the culture we live in. The language we inhabit shapes our innermost thoughts. We can never step outside our language' (Van Hoozer 1998:8). It seems then that there can be no meaning or understanding (and therefore no knowledge) prior to language. Human systems are language-generating and meaning-generating systems. Through language, through conversation, meaning and understanding are co-created: 'People exist in and through language. Meaning is not in someone's head, but rather in interaction' (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:372,378). Freedman and Combs (1995a:24) think that language is not something that mirrors nature but that it creates the nature we know.

1.2.1.5 Tell me the truth!

According to a post-modern epistemology, there are no absolute truths out there: 'Within the multiple stories and multiple possibilities of the post modern "multiverse" we believe that there are no "essential" truths' (Freedman & Combs 1996a:34).

Social constructionists think that 'truth' can at best refer to the possibility of connecting and of understanding utterances, different beliefs and sign-systems. This means that humans understand their world, each other, and themselves through language, through changing stories and self-description. A post-modern understanding of a story is that it is the unfolding development of narrative meaning by which what is past becomes meaningful in terms of what is present and what is projected in future. 'The unfolding of life in the mode of stories is the "essence" of truth' (Du Toit 1997:949).

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1.2.1.6 Derrida and deconstruction

Jacques Derrida was the first to use deconstruction within post-structuralist literary criticism and linguistic analysis during the 1970's and 1980's. Post-modern scholars began to view texts with scepticism – in the sense that they no longer take the modernist view that a text has only 'one true meaning'. They began to challenge all notions that involve the primacy of the subject or author. They thought that the gaps, silences, unarticulated and 'not said' in a text are part of the meaning and should be taken into consideration when reading a text. 'One of Derrida's central methodological devices to accomplish this feat hinges on the notion of placing a term under erasure (*sous rature*)' (Sampson 1989:7). Deconstruction is to undo or unpack; not to destroy. Sampson explains what Derrida means by *sous rature*: 'placing a term under erasure is to first write a word and then to cross it out, keeping (printing) both the word and its deletion simultaneously. Words are necessary to our understanding, therefore they must remain legible. But the same words are also inaccurate, therefore they are crossed out.' Listening for what was 'not said', searching for the many possibilities of how 'the said' was put together, might just open space for alternatives – in literary studies an alternative reading of the text, and in therapy an alternative understanding of the self.

Wolfreys (1998:12) quotes J.H. Miller on this subject: 'Deconstruction is nothing more or less than a good reading as such, and a mode of interpretation.' Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of the text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Deconstruction does not take things apart; it is not an operation; it only reveals how things are put together.

Derrida doubts reason's ability to achieve a 'totalising' discourse, that is, a universal explanation of some aspect of reality. Derrida is an undoer, a de-constructor, and what he undoes is the covenant between language and reality which characterises Western philosophy's belief that it can state the 'truth': 'Derrida basically wants to undo "logocentrism", the belief that language can be used to map the world, the belief that consciousness can mirror the cosmos' (Van Hoozer 1998:7). This understanding of deconstruction coincides with the arguments of constructivism and social construction

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discourse on knowledge: objective knowledge is not possible; knowledge and meaning are constructed in and through language.

1.2.2 Theology today

Within the epistemological framework of the modern paradigm, the Church believed that it was possible for theologians to study the Word of God and obtain true knowledge or words (*Logos*) about God (*Theos*). The subject (the theologian) could study an object (God and the traditions of the Church), for the purpose of finding absolute, timeless and universal truths (dogmas), so that Christians could live according to these rules and be saved. What happens to theology in the current paradigm shift from knowledge as an objective truth to knowledge as a social construction? Post-modern scholars now challenge theology to re-think the purpose, object, task and ethics of theology in a changing world. The challenge to the Church is to find a new and fresh way to reflect on faith (theology), as well as change the way of being in the world (practice): 'Theology is that activity by which human beings relate their faith in God (*Theos*) to the patterns of meaning that prevail in any historical period or culture (*logos*). Culture is the interpretive and coping mechanism of society.... Any fundamental change in culture leads to further theological reflection' (Rossouw 1993:894-907).

How can practical theology and the part it can play in the relationship between adults and children be defined? Heyns and Pieterse (1990:8) argue that practical theology is that part of theology which studies the actions of people whose aim it is to help others to meet God, and live in community with God and the world. At an everyday level, this means that the work of practical theology goes on whenever and wherever persons who consider themselves to be Christians ask questions about who they are and what they are doing (Gerkin 1986:75).

Young people today ask questions about the power adults have over them; they challenge patriarchy and every other discourse that the Church has proclaimed as right and holy. What needs to be done? Feminist theologians suggest that a serious re-interpretation of certain areas of Scripture and of tradition is needed, so that the Church can speak in a different voice to the victims of oppression, and about the role of patriarchy in the lives of women and

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children (Keane 1998:125). For centuries, the discourses of patriarchy, which favour the domination of men over women, and adults over children, was sanctioned by the Church: 'It was in the church that I learned not to question the behaviour of adults' (Poling 1991:40). The Church said that parents love their children, protect them and know what is right for them – like God. However, the cruel reality of physical, mental and sexual abuse causes pain and discomfort, conflicting questions and anger in young victims. A feminist theology of praxis suggests an alternative: 'Critical, committed, constructive, collaborative and accountable reflection on the theories and praxis of struggle and hope for the mending of creation based on the stories and experiences of women/marginalised and oppressed people' (Ackerman 1996:34). The praxis of any theology that is relevant must be liberating and aim to heal and restore.

The questions young, white⁵ people ask about politics, the church and the part their parents played in the previous dispensation in this country are questions that pastoral therapists can use to deconstruct the discourses young people try to analyse. Some young people might feel that their parents, the school, the country's leaders and the Church lie(d). They ask questions about God, and the truth and God's place in their struggle as young people. The Church, and theology, should be actively involved and engaged in the praxis of its members, both 'adults' and 'children'. The aim of a post-modern theology of praxis is not to provide a rational or exact explanation of God, but to point to the coherence between different human experiences of God and the ways people experience the world both physically and morally.

The challenge for practical theology is to find a new way of communication, where the voices of the marginalised are listened to. 'In order to be relevant, theologians need to express themselves constantly in the idiom of their day to properly address the religious needs of society' (Herholdt 1998:221). The emphasis should fall on **doing** right, instead of **being** right (Dill 1996:216). The task of a post-modern theology of praxis is to engage in a process of critical reflection and to re-think the dogma of the Church. Increasingly, there is a belief that there is no fixed body of theological truth available that can be carried over from generation to generation, but that every generation must discover meaning for itself. People model God as they discover and experience spirituality, therefore 'every person imagines God

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personally and differently' (Herholdt 1998:224). Post-modern theology moves in the direction of a spirituality of wholeness; and the value of human feelings as part of the human experience of God in theological reflection is restored (Herholdt 1998:216). Humanity, both young and old, are seen as active participants in their own lives. With all the choices available to them, every human is a co-creator in God's plan – not a passive recipient of a predetermined decision by a distant God (Herholdt 1998:217).

1.2.3 Narrative therapy

1.2.3.1 A story-shaped world

A narrative approach to therapy is informed by social construction discourse. The perspective of this framework is that all forms of knowledge and truth are socially constructed through interaction with other human beings and cultures: 'All the things that make up the psychological fabric of "reality" arise through social interaction over time' (Freedman & Combs 1996a:23). This means that we, 'cannot have direct knowledge of the world. What persons know of life they know through "lived" experience...in order to make sense of our lives and to express ourselves, experience must be "storied" and it is this storying that determines the meaning ascribed to experience' (White & Epston 1990:9).

Humans 'story' their experiences to make sense of their world and structure their reality. It is not that 'reality' in itself has a narrative form, but that human experience does have: '...all things human are in some sense rooted in, or find their deepest structural framework in, a narrative or story of some kind' (Gerkin 1986:26). People strive to make sense of life by arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time, so that they can arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them. This account can be looked at as a story, a map or a self-narrative (White & Epston 1990). Narrative therapy is based on the view that truth and meaning are *created*, not *discovered*, by the mind. Human beings are interpreting beings – they give meaning to their experience as they live their lives. The personal story (self-narrative) structures experiences.

³ The high school where I have a position as a therapist is situated in a predominantly white suburb.

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The stories people have about their lives actually shape or constitute their lives: 'Not only do we, as humans, give meaning to our experience by "storying" our lives, but we are also empowered to 'perform' our stories through our knowledge of them' (White & Epston 1990:x). Narrative therapy is about the retelling and reliving of stories. When people speak of what is immediately real to them, they tell stories and fragments of stories. Stories make up whole lives:

For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.

(Gerkin 1986:29)

1.2.3.2 A storied therapy

The stories people have and tell about themselves are constitutive – shaping their life and relationships (White & Epston 1990:10). Some stories are half-forgotten or marginalised as unimportant. The narratives people have about themselves are never completed:

A narrative can never encompass the full richness of our lived experience, because life experience is richer than discourse. There are always feelings and lived experiences not fully storied...we prune from our experience those events that do not fit with the dominant evolving stories that we and others have about us. Over time and of necessity, much of our stock of lived experience goes unstoried and is never 'told' or expressed.

(White & Epston 1990:11,12)

The story of who people are can never fully be told, since there are always experiences and perspectives not told or storied. 'While no one story can hope to completely capture the complexity of lived experience, what we emphasise or omit has real effects on the teller or listener' (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:470). Re-authoring conversations conducted in a narrative way can enable people to become aware of the multiplicity of their own and of other

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stories. Other possibilities become available through the questioning of the taken for granted knowledges.

Based on the view that individuals create and experience meaning in conversation with one another, therapy can be described as a kind of a language-generating and meaning-generating system in which the client and therapist create meaning around some 'problem' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27). White and Epston (1990:x) think that narrative therapy is 'a process of "storying" and/or "re-storying" the lives and experiences of persons who present with problems'. The therapist co-creates meaning, with the client, through questions, and it is never completed, never-ending, always open. Narrative therapy is seen as an 'in-there-together' process where people talk *with* one another and not *to* one another.

1.2.3.3 The aim of therapy

People structure and organise their lives in stories. But life, and our experience of events, is always bigger and more than the stories we have to tell. Life experience is richer than discourse. Narrative structures organise and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story. People that come to therapy have 'thin' descriptions of their lives and experiences, which revolve around a dominant 'problem' story or narrative. The aim of therapy is to open up space for conversation, to fill the gaps of the 'unstoried' lived experience, so that new and alternative stories can be born, and preferred ways of being can be created. Narrative approaches to counselling invite clients to begin a journey of co-exploration in search of talents and abilities that are hidden or veiled by a life problem. In the conversations I had with young people, I invited them to take responsibility and speak out on their needs and desires. Using the new paradigm of narrative therapy, young people are invited to take the initiative in developing new skills as their knowledges of themselves become richer. This research challenged young people to make choices according to their preferred stories of identity.

I used deconstruction to unpack the discourses that influence the lives of the young people I interviewed. A discourse is a dominant way of knowing – the 'fixed' truth about things that privilege some voices and give them power, and marginalise other voices. Deconstructing

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questions challenge the existing discourses that shape and construct the relationships between adults and young people. It is important not to replace one system of power abuse with another, but rather to deconstruct power structures within the system through which people are marginalised. According to Sampson (1989:7,8), Derrida's aim with deconstruction is, 'not to undo the tradition of Western metaphysics in order to install in its place another tradition founded on the same frame. His deconstructive aim is to undo the very notions of identity and hierarchy in the first place'. It means to become aware of discourses of power and the effects they have on people in relationships (Kotzé 1994:114).

1.2.3.4 The role of the therapist

According to a social constructionist view, the 'beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, and the like that make up our social realities are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another from generation to generation and day to day. Societies construct the "lenses" through which their members interpret the world' (Freedman & Combs 1996a:16). A narrative therapist must reflect on the interactions between the stories that clients are living in their personal lives, and the stories that are circulating in their cultures – both their local culture and the larger culture. These cultural stories, the taken for granted 'truths' about how one *should* be, influence the way people interpret their daily experience and the meaning(s) they derive for their self-narrative. I have used the practice of deconstruction to 'unwrap' the impact of cultural discourses on the lives of the young people who formed part of this research project.

In therapy, the struggle to understand is always a dialogue between the client and the therapist; it is a mutual search and exploration through conversation. The therapist could be called a 'conversational artist – an architect of the dialogical process, whose expertise lies in the arena of creating a space for, and facilitating a dialogical conversation' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:270). The therapist is not someone who produces change, but one who opens up space for conversation and helps clients to see and use the alternative stories and preferred ways of being evolved and created during the therapeutic process. The re-authoring of lives and relationships is achieved primarily, although not exclusively, through a process of questioning.

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1.2.3.5 Practices of narrative therapy

1.2.3.5.1 *'Not-knowing', 'The client is the expert'*

According to Anderson & Goolishian (1992), social constructionist discourse developed this practice (the client is the expert) which narrative therapists use. A 'not knowing' approach means that the therapist's actions communicate an abundant, genuine curiosity, and a constant need to know more about the 'said' and the 'not yet said'. In the therapeutic process, client and therapist are always moving towards what is not yet known. The expertise of the therapist is not expertise on the life of the client, but expertise in creating space for and facilitating a dialogical conversation. The therapist asks questions: 'from a position of "not-knowing" rather than asking questions that are informed by method and demand specific answers' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28). The need is to know more about what the client says, rather than to convey preconceived opinions and expectations about the client, the problem, or what must be changed. The client becomes the person whose expert knowledge on his/her life is acknowledged and privileged. The consequences of the therapist's 'not-knowing' are that 'the client stops being a piece of dynamics "out there" with a problem, and becomes something that is part of oneself' (Hoffman & Wheat 1997:107).

1.2.3.5.2 *Deconstruction of the problem*

The practice of 'externalising the problem' (see also 3.3.3) focuses on the relationship and functioning of the power of the dominant story and how it constitutes people's lives. People are subject to the power of 'normalising' truths that shape their lives and relationships. A deconstruction of power can be done by means of an objectification of taken for granted practices of power. This therapeutic practice can encourage people to re-author their own lives and to re-establish agency of self. This approach encourages persons to objectify and, at times, to personify the problem that they experience as oppressive. In this process, the 'problem becomes a separate entity and thus external to the person or relationship that was ascribed to the problem' (White & Epston 1990:38).

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Questions that give the client opportunities to explore various dimensions of the situation, and 'map' the influence of the problem on the various levels of the client's life, deconstruct the problem. The therapist becomes interested in what the problem has done to a person, what it is currently doing, or what it might yet do. This procedure challenges the taken-for-granted realities and practices, the so-called 'truths' that people have about how life should be. The therapist becomes curious about the 'local knowledge' of an individual, the ignored lived experience, the unstoried events: 'This means that there must develop an understanding of the influence on particular people of the dominant stories of their culture while cherishing the knowledge that each person's stories are different than anyone else's' (Freedman & Combs 1996a:33). Deconstructive questioning offers a possibility to look at problems from a different perspective, to notice other possible narratives.

Externalising conversations invite people to see their own lives as distinct from the life of the problem, and challenge them to work against the problem. By asking questions about the influence that the person has on the life of the problem, the problem becomes the problem, not the person. This creates hope for the client: 'When people, through the "unmasking" process of relating problems to societal discourses, see their local problems as particular instances of political problems in the larger society, they can become motivated to deal with them differently' (Freedman & Combs 1996a:68). Through externalising conversations, the problem is to an extent disempowered, as it no longer speaks to persons of the 'truth' about who they are as people, or about the very nature of their relationship. This opens new possibilities for action (White 1995a:23).

1.2.3.5.3 Re-authoring conversations

Stories are full of gaps and inconsistencies, lived experiences and events that do not fit the dominant evolving stories that we and others have about ourselves. The therapist is to a certain extent a 'gold digger' – always searching for untold and unstoried narratives. This local knowledge about a person comes to light when externalising questions are asked about the influence of the client on the life of the problem. Michel White calls this knowledge 'unique outcomes'. The inconsistencies with the dominant problem story form the building blocks to the re-authoring of new and alternative narratives. They include the whole gamut

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of events, feelings, intentions, thoughts and actions that have a historical, future or present location that cannot be accommodated by the dominant story (White & Epston 1990:16). The role of the therapist is to link all these 'unique outcomes' through persistent questioning so that a new/alternative narrative can be born.

The questions that can thicken the plot of preferred stories centre around the steps that the client takes to stand up against a problem (landscape of action) and the meaning of identity (landscape of identity). Through re-authoring conversations, the client recognises his/her potential to take control and work against a problem. It is a process through which a person begins to redefine his/her own identity.

1.2.4 Research approach

1.2.4.1 The research approach: general description and reasons

The modernist paradigm that has dominated formal discourse in science for some four hundred years is characterised by a belief that there is an objective truth that is knowable and researchable. There is an emphasis on essences and absolutes; and a scientific metaphor is used to 'analyse' everything (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996:15). Quantitative research was/is a very useful tool in a modernist paradigm to prove/falsify objective 'truths'. Quantitative research, according to modernism, focuses 'on efforts to verify (positivism) or falsify (post-positivism) a prior hypothesis, most usefully stated as mathematical (quantitative) propositions, or propositions that can be easily converted into precise mathematical formulas expressing functional relationships' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:106).

A post-modern researcher draws upon social construction discourse, which emphasises the role of language in observing the world, so that research becomes an expression of relationships among persons and not an expression of a researcher's cognition. According to Gergen (1985:267-268), post-modern research focuses on the meanings generated by the participants in a study, not on the individual's mind. Knowledge is not seen as a product of an individual's mind, but as the co-ordinated activities of individuals to accomplish locally agreed upon purposes in conceiving the 'real' world. Knowledge is socially constructed

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through interactions between people. The knowing subject must not remain detached from the object of inquiry. This has consequences for research and research methods. The preference is for qualitative action research from the perspective of the participants as co-researchers and co-creators, not case studies, from the start of the project to the finish. Meaning is derived from the process of research and it is not a matter of results being examined or measured in terms of quantity, intensity or frequency.

1.2.4.2 Aim of research

The goal of research is to expand and enrich understanding of matters. It is about co-creating ideas and opening up new reflexive discourses about knowledge. Post-modern research has moved towards qualitative research that emphasises the process of investigation and does not attempt to prove causal relationships between variables. Qualitative research seeks to discern patterns of new meaning. Social construction discourse points out that these new meanings are generated by people as they collectively generate descriptions and explanations in language (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:5). Action research is aimed at creating knowledge during the process of intervention. There is power-sharing between researcher and participant. This makes action research collaborative. Action research is also emancipatory because 'it aims not only at technical and practical improvement and the participants' better understanding, along with transformation and change within the existing boundaries and conditions, but also at changing the system itself' (Zuber-Skerrit 1996:5). The aim of this research is not just to increase knowledge, but also to empower participants to change their oppressive situation. The participants benefit from the research while it is taking place. The relationship between the researcher and those being researched is a subject-subject relationship (Heitink 1999:175). 'There is no hierarchy, but open and symmetrical communication' (Zuber-Skerrit 1996:5).

Action-based qualitative research is open-ended. I agree with Eisner (1991:211) that 'human beings have the capacity to go beyond information given, to fill in gaps, to generate interpretations, to extrapolate, and to make inferences in order to construe meanings. Through this process knowledge is accumulated, perception refined, and meaning deepened'. Davies (1996:7) describes emancipatory action research as follows:

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Feminist post-structuralist emancipatory strategies involve open-ended work with people who are seeking to find ways of bringing about desired changes. Such strategies are necessarily unstructured. The outcomes cannot be pre-planned. The ways of working must be allowed to emerge from the informed talk of the people involved.

1.2.4.3 Collecting stories

The information presented in this research reflects the experiences and perceptions as storied by the participants during therapeutic conversations. Using narrative practices and questioning, I attempted to co-construct new meaning and understanding with young people – the question of hermeneutics (understanding) is an important issue here. Qualitative research practices were used to investigate the research question stated in 1.1.4. The hermeneutic and dialectic nature of qualitative research can be described as follows:

The variable and personal (intramental) nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents. These varying constructions are interpreted using conventional hermeneutical techniques, and are compared and contrasted through dialectical interchange.

(Denzin & Lincoln 1994:111)

Qualitative research looks to the human-as-instrument for the collection and analysis of 'data'. I used the dialectic discourse of narrative therapy, in other words, I asked questions and reflected on the answers in a search for new narratives and new realities which, I hoped, made a difference to the lives of the young people who participated in this project.

Action-based qualitative research studies recognises the personal involvement of the researcher in the research study, not as it was traditionally understood, where 'an interview is centred around the interviewer's ideas, needs and understandings' (Heshusius 1995:119), but with the therapist in a position not-knowing; where the typical adult control over the conversation is given up. Heshusius (1995: 121-122) describes the mode of consciousness a therapist enters as participatory, 'that is, when concerns with the self have been let go, total

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attentiveness can occur...This mode relates to a way of being with others and with the self that is passively alert, vigilant but not intrusive². It implicates that the client is the expert on his/her self-narrative, dreams, hopes and wishes.

Information was gathered in this research through conversations with individuals. Letters and documents that reflect on the conversations were used. No formal quantitative data analysis or statistical analysis were employed. The stories told by the clients are reported verbatim, as far as possible, in an interpretative format. Since human action cannot be reduced to statistics, the criteria used to judge the quality of the research are trustworthiness and authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:167).

The study explores a deconstruction of discourses of power that shape relationships between young people and adults. In this respect, the narrative idea of opening up more choices does not mean to help people stay within an oppressive situation, but to empower them to challenge the dominant stories that constitute their life-stories and help them to change their roles. As co-author of the meanings people give to their experiences, I attempted to assist young people to look at ways of empowering them, as well as at possible paradigm shifts in discourses of discipline.

1.2.4.4 Considerations

The aim of therapy is primarily to benefit the participants. The narrative conversations focused on participants' agendas, the power-play in families they presented through their storytelling, and not on agendas of achieving freedom from rules on discipline. I identified participants for this research and they gave their written consent for me to share their experiences through the publication of the dissertation. Information sheets and forms similar to those proposed by McLean (1997:130-133) were used to inform participants and obtain their informed consent (see Appendices 1, 2 and 3). The participants were invited to edit the research report, to review it, comment on it and make sure it meets with their approval. Their comments are included in the last chapter (see 5.2). Trust and confidentiality between the respondents and myself were respected and honoured; fictional names were used to protect the identity of participants.

CHAPTER TWO

DISCOURSES INFORMING CONCEPTS OF POWER

2.1 I CAN SEE YOUR LIPS MOVING, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING

I once explained a difficult concept to my five-year-old son to which he replied: 'Mommy, I can see your lips move, but I don't know what you're saying.' I realised that he did not understand the adult language I used. My adult knowledge created an adult world that excluded my son.

We live in an adult society. The 'big people' in our society have power over the 'little people'. The voices of young people are silenced. In parent-child relationships knowledge and power belong to parents. Phrases such as 'I am your parent, you should do it because I say so' or 'this is something all parents teach their children' imply that parental authority cannot be questioned. Prior to going to school, young people learn to talk, to observe, to register their own bodily experiences in particular ways. From an early age, young people learn to believe that whatever parents do is right and good for them. Institutions such as churches and schools sanction the belief that young people have no authoritative knowledge and therefore have, and should have, very little control over their lives: 'One of the early things they [children] inevitably learn when they go to school is the apparently infinite revisability of conclusions in the face of superior and more powerful school knowledges. They learn to see in ways deemed legitimate by people with access to those authoritative knowledges' (Davies 1993:40).

The basic paradigm of childhood that young people grow up with, that people come to accept as 'truth', is that young people are different from adults; that young people must achieve adulthood; that the responsibility for the growing up of young people lies with adults. Relationships between young people and adults have been shaped by discourses of power

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over many years. These general 'truths' have been supported and institutionalised by the social interchanges of previous generations. The dominant narratives about young people and adults made us believe that these discourses speak the truth about the identities and different roles of adults and young people.

Parents have certain requirements regarding what it means to be 'proper' and 'good'. Young people are the subjects, and subjected to adult storylines – good parent storylines, storylines about responsible adulthood, or hard-working fathers needing peace and quiet from the noisy prattle of young people. These dominant discourses tend to blind people to the possibilities that other narratives might offer. Young people are allowed no control over their own storylines; and adults' courses of action can rarely be questioned by young people.

Young people's experiences, stories and voices are marginalised and they are disempowered as the authors of their own lives. They are rarely, if ever, consulted on their perspectives or understanding of the problems or difficulties they experience. Society today holds a common belief that young people cannot find solutions to their own problems. Their knowledge of life must be controlled by adults – adults will 'see' the problem and find solutions, because adults 'know it all'. Agency is taken away from young people.

This research seeks out the 'lived experience' that lies outside the domain of the dominant discourse; the 'local' stories that young people tell that can empower them to understand their world and themselves, and help them to write and live their own truth. The aim of this action-based research (as discussed in Section 1.2.4) is to empower young people. Through therapy, young people are invited to make their voices heard in a responsible way and to challenge the dominant discourses regarding parent-child relationships. The discourses that imprison young people must be questioned and dismantled. This means that a critical operation must be undertaken to unmask taken-for-granted ideas and stories on patriarchy, childhood, gender, power and knowledge. The deconstruction of such (often institutionalised) discourses make alternative stories and ideas more visible (Davies 1993:8).

2.2 DISCOURSES OF POWER

To be able to co-create new meanings with the young participants in this research, it is important to try to understand how certain kinds of negotiated meanings operate to subjugate, marginalise or trivialise people's experience, or allow it to be fully represented. Conceptually, the idea of discourse is most helpful in understanding the mechanisms by which some people's experiences become dominant while other people's experiences – often those of women and children – are pushed out of sight.

What does the term 'discourse' mean? In post-modern epistemology, there is a strong emphasis on language, because it creates the realities people know and live. Language can create a discourse which constructs and shapes people's lives. In its broadest sense, the term discourse means anything written or said or communicated using signs that reflect a 'specific pattern or way of thought...these discourses are created through particular social practices' (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:39). Discourse, as an interpretation of experience by a particular group of individuals, organises social relationships as power relations. Weingarten (1998:7) describes the effects of discourse as follows: 'Whether we are aware of discourse or not, it can powerfully shape the stories we can tell and the stories we can hear. Discourses influence what we can know and not know, see and not see, say and not say, in complex and subtle ways.' Foucault was the first to pose a key question of power regarding discourse: 'Who is served by a particular discourse?' (Rabinow 1984:57).

In order to deconstruct successfully the structures of power that ground discourses of patriarchy, childhood and gender, one needs to understand different perspectives on the concept of power. Within a post-modern paradigm, the work of a French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1977, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1988), with his ideas on relational power, has a prominent place. Bronwyn Davies (1993, 1996), a post-structuralist feminist, looks at power from a gender point of view. James Poling (1991) is a practical theologian who wrote about the abuse of power in the Church. Below, I set out my understanding of their points of view, as I try to make sense of the power relations I encountered during this research.

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2.2.1 Michel Foucault

According to Fillingham (1993:7-12), Foucault's starting point was the truism that 'knowledge is power'. Knowledge is what a group of people put together and decide is true; they are in fact constructing truth, deciding matters that define humanity, and this 'truth' affects people in general. The question is how some people (usually a powerful minority) get others (the majority) to accept their ideas of 'how the world works'. How is it possible that they can impose their idea of what is right, or true, on the majority? It requires power to create belief. Foucault claimed that every assertion of knowledge is an act of power: 'Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power....It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power' (Foucault 1980:52). Interpretations are put forward by those in power: 'Because knowledge is always the result of the use of power, to name something is to exercise power and hence to do violence to what is named. Social institutions do violence by imposing their own understanding to the centreless flux of experience' (Grenz 1995:93). Knowledge that circulates in discourses is employed in everyday interaction in relations of submission and domination. Power is always present in human relationships.

'Nothing is ever above power,' says Foucault (1988:106). 'Power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truths. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him, belong to this production' (Foucault 1977:194). Rabinow (1984:64) describes Foucault's concept of the productive force of power as follows:

The exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information. Power is more than repression; what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says 'no', but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.

In Foucault's work, knowledge is described as circulating in the form of practices throughout the body of society. Knowledge manifests itself in literature and art, and in everyday discourse. Not only does discourse organise and exclude forms of knowledge, but discourse

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relates and helps organise social relations as power relations (Parker 1989:61). Foucault used the idea of 'relationships of power', rather than the singular term 'power'. He suggests that when one speaks of 'power', one thinks immediately of a political structure or a dominant hegemonic class. In such traditional notions, power is monolithic, hierarchical and clearly visible (Fillingham 1993:140). Power is embodied in the law, is written down, and is wholly negative, consisting of prohibitions and taboos: 'thou shalt not'.

However, relationships of power are not hierarchical, flowing from the top down, but everywhere, local: 'An analysis of power cannot be reduced to institutions, class or the state, but rather the power relations within' (Zuber-Skerrit 1996:173). For Foucault, power is associated with practices, techniques and procedures. Power is relational: the amount of power people have is determined in relation to other people. Relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (family, kinship, sexuality) in which they simultaneously play a conditioning as well as a conditioned role.

Power is not a possession; it is exercised rather than held, and it is not limited to a central point. Power is something which circulates, 'something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation....Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application' (Foucault 1980:98). Power does not 'belong' to a group of people: 'It is not a possession that the one group holds and another lacks' (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982:117).

If power is not a thing, or the control of a set of institutions, or the hidden rationality to history, then the task of the analyst is to identify how it operates. Power is not restricted to political institutions; it plays a 'directly productive role'; it comes from below and is multidirectional, operating from the top down and also from the bottom up (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982:185).

Foucault (1980:82) argued that power is integrated with knowledge, but he also recognised subjugated knowledges, 'whole sets of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate

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to their task or insufficiently elaborated; naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity'. In parent-child relationships the knowledges of the young are subjugated, and power can be organised in a domination-repression relation.

Power of the disciplinary type, in families or schools, does not adequately represent all power relations and all possibilities of power relations. Rabinow (1984:380) interprets Foucault, regarding this analysis of power, as follows: 'Power is not discipline; discipline is a possible procedure of power.' In a disciplinary regime, all those subject to control are individualised through surveillance and constant observation. Those being controlled, most of the time, must effect most power. Those being ruled either accept the demands of those in power as legitimate, or else fear that those who have power may be watching. However, domination of one group over another, is not the essence of power (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982:186). Foucault (1982:211) acknowledged resistance against a form of power which makes individuals subjects; anti-authority struggles that have developed, 'opposition to the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over mentally ill....They are struggles which question the status of the individual....Oppositions against the effects of power which are linked with knowledge, competence and qualification: struggles against the privileges of knowledge.'

Apart from acceptance and fear, there is also resistance against subordination and powerlessness. Precisely because power is conceived of as relational, the potential for resistance is present within any power relationship. Fillingham (1993:145,151) describes Foucault's view on resistance as follows:

Resistance does not exist outside of the system of power relations. It is, instead, inherently part of the relation....If there was no resistance, there would be no power relations, because it would simply be a matter of obedience. So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance.

Resistance is the hole in power, like the holes in Swiss cheese, and only power/resistance can form a whole. Resistance exists in the same place as power: 'As soon as there is a power

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relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power; we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy' (Foucault 1988:123). The resistance against relations of power can be seen in the lives of individuals: people, young and old, male and female, show their resistance by speaking up against the injustice of domination and repression, anti-oppression movements are formed, individuals speak to counsellors and therapists and take steps to stand up against the powerlessness they experience in their lives. This must give us hope for a future where people will be conscious of the effects of their positions of power. People usually know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but they often do not know what that which they do does to others.

2.2.2 James Newton Poling

Poling is a practical theologian who writes about power and the abuse of power, especially the sexual abuse of women in the Church. He looks at power in families, the Church and communities to understand the ways in which power can be abused. He sees power as a 'complex term with personal, social, and religious connotations. At a personal level, all persons have some power by virtue of being alive, along with an inner drive to use this power to become all they can be' (Poling 1991:12). He thinks that power in its ideal form is virtually synonymous with life itself: 'To live is to desire power to relate to others. If power is roughly defined as the ability to make or establish a claim on life, then power is co-extensive with life itself' (Poling 1991:24). This means that power is the ability to act in effective ways with the objects and people that make up the perceived world, and people feel powerful when they can move objects and influence people according to their goals. In a sense, Poling agrees with Foucault that power is everywhere and that power is relational.

'Power is often misunderstood as a one-way effect on others,' says Poling (1991:24). But power is actually organised by the relational webs of which people are part; power is relational. The ability to act in effective ways depends on connections with other persons: 'Power is gauged by the complexity of the relationships that can be contained by an interaction' (Poling 1991:24). Some people are denied the chance to exercise their power because of oppression; others use their power for destructive ends.

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Society dictates how power is distributed: 'Institutions and ideologies determine who has privilege to be dominant and who must defer. Some persons are given great power to make choices for themselves and other people, and are protected from the consequences of their choices' (Poling 1991:12). Many are denied the power to control even their own bodies and minds, and their choices are circumscribed by others. So, for example, patriarchy is a hierarchical system in which men are considered to be set above women, as God is above human beings. This discourse has, for a long time, enabled men to maintain domination over women. The discourse of childhood also puts adults in positions of power over children. These inequities create opportunities for abusive behaviours and unjust power arrangements. If such inequalities are to be removed, then, today, the role of the Church and religion is to define the nature of power and its legitimate uses.

In his deconstruction of power, Poling (1991:27) asks: 'Why has society organised power so that inequity becomes the occasion for injustice? Why is it that some individuals abuse their power in destructive behaviours such as physical and sexual abuse?' The answer he comes up with is this: human fear and arrogance. Because it is so very difficult for humans to live and love on the terms that God gives, because there are risks involved in being human, humans are anxious and sometimes get desperate. This insecurity creates fear, and people seek power and dominance to give them a sense of security. In the words of Poling (1991:27):

Abuse of power for the individual is motivated by fear and by the resulting desire to control the power of life. This fear and arrogance are then used to create societies in which structures of domination create special possibilities for the privileged at the expense of shared power for all persons. The power that is intended by God for everyone who lives is used to destroy relationships in exchange for control. Rather than live in insecurity, some persons choose to create structures that dominate and control others for personal gratification and false security.

Poling (1991:31) considers the abuse of power in itself, and sexual abuses by members of the clergy and Sunday school teachers as evil: 'Social injustice and the individual abuse of power are evil. They harm the power of life itself within the relational web....Abuse of power not

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only destroys individuals, it also destroys the web of relationships on which all life depends.' He thinks that, in the long run, the exercise of unilateral power by a parent over a child can destroy the parent's future as well as the child's (Poling 1991:28).

Many victims of abuse lose the battle. There are many whose spirits and resistance are broken and whose lives are shattered. However, Poling (1991:32) had conversations with many survivors of sexual abuse who had the courage to tell their stories of hope: 'Those with resilient spirits can teach us about both the evil of abusive power and the source of hope in an unjust world. The resistance of individuals and groups becomes a source of hope for all humanity.'

Poling grounds the healing of victims in the love of God: 'Discovering the Jesus who can reveal God's power and love...is one of the challenges of modern theology....Through resistance to the abuse of power and the work of God's love in Jesus Christ, the human spirit is made resilient' (Poling 1991:33). The perverse capacity that individuals have for misusing the power of life against others and organising society in unjust ways can lead to a state of despair about the future. However, Poling (1991:33) thinks that the resilient hope of the human spirit can resist abuse and create new communities for the restoration of communion and freedom of self, others, and God.

2.3 DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHY, CHILDHOOD AND GENDER

To deconstruct or undo a discourse, questions can be asked about the 'will' or 'intention' of a person who holds power, and about the positions from which power is exercised, as well as about how the construction works that some individuals have higher positions in relation to others (Parker 1989:61). I use post-structuralist theory as a means of dislocating the press of usual discourses, as a way of unravelling old realities and perceptions and thus making way for new ones:

Post-structuralist theory undoes the boundaries between the disciplines of sociology, psychology, history and studies of literature. It demonstrates that we need to look not just at the work that collectivities collaboratively do to construct

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gendered worlds but also to look at the work the language does to limit, shape, make possible, one kind of world or another.

(Davies 1993:xviii)

Within this framework, the constitutive force of social structures and of language is recognised. Each individual person is seen in his/her social and historical context as a speaking subject, who has the ability to invert and break old structures and patterns and discourses and thus speak or write into existence other ways of being.

2.3.1 Is patriarchy discipline or punishment?

2.3.1.1 Understanding the term 'patriarchy'

The Latin word for father is *pater*. The word 'patriarchy' literally mean: 'rule by the father'. In a patriarchal family there are structures and practices that ensure male dominance and sharp gender differences. In a patriarchal society, fathers (adult males) are the dominant group, the most important group, humans who are free and have rights. Other people (women, children and slaves) are worth something only because of their particular relation to men. Traditional patriarchal law denied adult women autonomous civil status. A woman was regarded as a man's possession. Ruether (1989:31) states:

Women were treated legally as permanent minors and dependents of fathers and husbands. They had no right to represent themselves politically as legal persons. Women, children and slaves had no legal status. They were seen as dependants and quasi-property of men, as persons who had no right to assert their own will but who were bound under the yoke of obedience and servitude of their lords – the male head of the household.

Marriage was a business deal transacted between two males; the woman often had little say, at least legally. The most important function of a woman was to bear healthy children for her husband, so that his name can live on. She was responsible for looking after his house, preparing meals, cleaning, and waiting on her master (the man) who told her what to do next. A fertile and beautiful wife increased a man's status. Children were regarded as insurance for a man's old age – especially boys. Slaves were also seen as the possessions of a man, and they had to work for him so that he could become rich (Dreyer 1999).

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Patriarchy perpetuates a system of male domination at the expense of women. Many patriarchal ideas are still alive in society today. Bloomquist (1989:5) states: 'Patriarchy is the complex of ideologies and structures that sustains and perpetuates male control over females.' It is a political structure which privileges men: they make the rules; they have authority over women and children. According to this paradigm, women and children can be happy and free only as long as they obey their 'master's voice'.

2.3.1.2 Where does patriarchy come from?

A study of ancient societies reveals that patriarchy as a social system has been around for a very long time. Literature about the culture of early Mediterranean societies reflects a patriarchal view of reality, based on the disparity between men and women. Culture refers to the pattern of thought, behaviour, language and symbols that hold a people together (Poling 1991:125). The texts of the Christian tradition are also products of patriarchal culture and history.

2.3.1.3 What does the Bible say?⁶

The Bible reflects the patriarchal ways of the societies in which the biblical writers lived. There is also a notable absence of women's voices in Scripture (Keane 1998:126). In the patriarchal society of biblical times, power was distributed according to gender and class. Everything revolved around the honour and shame of men.

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, tells a story about creation and man's relation to all living things. God created Adam first, then, when Adam could not find a suitable companion amongst the animals, God created Eve from one of Adam's ribs: 'Woman is her name, because she was taken out of man' (Genesis 2:21). Eve was considered to be inferior to Adam; she was the one who listened to Satan and brought God's punishment to them: 'And He said to the woman: I will increase your trouble in pregnancy and your pain in giving birth. In spite of this, you will still have desire for your husband, yet you will be subject to him' (Genesis 3:16).

⁶ Scripture quotations are from Revised Standard Version of the Bible, 1973.

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In almost every narrative that follows, the sharp distinction between genders is noticeable. Women were secondary to men and were regarded as inferior. A woman's place was to serve her husband, keep quiet and obey the male voices in society. Women had no say in private or general matters; they could not participate in religious activities or hold any position of leadership. The power in the patriarchal society of the Old Testament belonged to men; the stories in the Bible were written by men and reflect the perspectives and experiences of men. The place of a woman was at home; her role in society centred on her husband and children; therefore it is only natural that most of the stories in the Bible have a man as the main character: a political or religious leader, a prophet, king or special believer.

The New Testament contains the revolutionary teachings of Jesus. He lived in the same patriarchal society, where the power belonged to men. However, Jesus' words and deeds did not mirror the values of his culture as far as the importance and role of the patriarchal family were concerned. He treated women totally differently from the way other men treated them; He wanted people in society to be equal; women were to be respected as individual persons and not treated as objects. In His teachings as well as His life, Jesus put the individual person above social and religious laws – both men and women. Jesus went against the practices of His society by letting women into his company of disciples; He talked to women, touched 'impure' women, commanded them to spread the Gospel, taught them and associated with all women on the same level as men. Jacobs-Malina (Dreyer 1999:82) argues: 'There is every reason to believe that Israel's rejection of Jesus was necessitated by the maintenance of a patriarchal social system which would have deplored Jesus' negation of male honour as the central social value' (Dreyer 1999:82).

Jesus' way influenced the early Christian communities. When people heard the Gospel of Jesus, and believed it, they were baptised – men, women, children and slaves – and everybody was accepted in the Christian community. Jesus' message that all people were equal before God, and that an individual can be saved because of his/her faith, went against the norms of the time. For a while this alternative community could survive. They expected the Second Coming of Christ to be during their lifetime. But since the expected Second Coming of Christ did not occur, it is no surprise that these Christian communities slipped back into the patriarchal beliefs of their time. The New Testament offers a mixture of patriarchal

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and liberating ideas. Ephesians 4:21 sets out a radical principle of equality: 'Submit yourself to one another because of your reverence to Christ.' The very next verse gives a theological explanation of the subordination and inferiority of women: 'Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over the church' (Ephesians 5:22,23).

Patriarchy is a historically created gender hierarchy of males over females, a hierarchy which functioned as if it were natural. This structure also affected the relationship between adults and children – autonomy and authority are in the hands of parents: 'Patriarchy became a moral system in which power or control is the central value, not only in male-female relationships, but throughout the social and natural order' (Bloomquist 1989:5). The only one of the Ten Commandments with a promise is the fifth commandment, which lays down the rule for behaviour toward parents: 'Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land I am giving you' (Exodus 20:12). Children should obey their parents, and parents have a duty to punish disobedient children; for that is the sign of their love: 'If you don't punish your son, you don't love him. If you do love him, you will correct him' (Proverbs 13:24). Children do not have the knowledge needed to do the 'right thing', and parents, who have the knowledge, must go to great lengths to correct them: 'Children just naturally do silly, careless things, but a good spanking will teach them how to behave' (Proverbs 22:15). The New Testament confirms this rule for obedience: 'Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents, for this is the right thing to do' (Ephesians 6:1).

2.3.1.4 What does the tradition of the Church say?

From an early age, the Church had to formulate the content of faith in dogmas. The Church was seen as the institution to provide the norms for everyday life. The view of Biblical Theology, the earliest form of theology, is that the Bible is the only norm for Christian doctrine and life. In terms of this theological approach, theologians simply have to formulate systematically the doctrines that are already contained in the Bible (König 1998:11).

Patriarchal discourse was kept alive by theology for a very long time: 'The story of the Fall is about Eve, the primary guilty partner in causing historic evil in the world. Her subordination

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to man is a just punishment for her guilt in causing evil to come into the world, thereby leading to the death of Christ' (Ruether 1989:32). The underlying message, built into the words and structures of religious tradition, remains constant: by God's design, women and children are subject to men. 'Christianity constantly underscores the value of obedience [of children] to authority figures, especially parental or quasi-parental figures. The Christian parent is the ultimate authority next to God' (Redmond 1989:78,79). The Bible presents us with this institution; it is good, God's will; and society can continue to organise the distribution of power in this way. The Church preached patriarchy and lived patriarchy – for a very long time the positions of power were reserved for men, and women and children were seen but not heard at all.

Christianity has been a primary – in many women's lives the primary force – in shaping an acceptance of the organisation of power in society. The Church is God's voice on earth; what child or woman can question the Church? Far from condemning injustices perpetrated against women in social, political and economic life, the Church practised, and still practices, its own forms of discrimination against women (Keane 1998:122). Bethenhausen (1989:xiii) thinks that patriarchy is the foundation of Christianity: 'It seems that the Christian tradition is so entrenched in and undergirded by patriarchy that without it, the very religion itself would disappear.'

2.3.1.5 Summary

In a patriarchal system, the power to organise society belongs to men and to adults – because they have knowledge and resources. The potential exists for power abuse: those who have power can structure society in such a way that those who are vulnerable are denied the full resources that life has to offer. The victims of patriarchy are those with insufficient social power to protect themselves. The desire to be in control, to have control over other people's lives, can lead to an abuse of power. Patriarchy is about unjust power relationships of men and women, perpetuated by ideologies and institutions. It is another structure of domination that creates the condition for abuses of power (Poling 1991:29). There are various ways that power can be, and has been, abused in a family: systematic physical or

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sexual abuse, deprivation, erratic behaviour resulting from alcohol and drug abuse, and, of course, (invisible) emotional abuse.

Relationships between young people and parents are based on a system that was always regarded as normative and therefore not open to scrutiny. Society creates 'blind zones' in which interpersonal abuses of power/violence are tacitly permitted and are not redressed. The patriarchal idea of authority and individualism also enables the powerful to hide or be invisible.

Feminist post-structuralists in particular have begun the work of deconstructing the male/female dualism: 'Deconstruction is a political act: it reveals the generally invisible but repressive politics of any particular form of representation' (Davies 1993:8). The result of this deconstructing act is the discovery of the very mainsprings of power that have held women and other marginalised groups in place. To change oppression, the essential first step is to know how oppression is achieved. A post-modern theology takes deconstruction one step further: questions are asked about the ethics of a system or institution.

Abuses have taken place in families; it still happens every day. All parents misuse their power at times in relation to the children they care for. Sometimes parents try to mould their children in certain narrow directions to meet their own needs. Some parents turn against their children in a systematic way and try to break their spirits and destroy their claim on life. Poling (1991:145) argues that abuse is the weapon of power that keeps patriarchy intact. Patriarchy has failed to provide a healthy family model in which all persons are treated with dignity and respect. Instead of being nurtured, as a child has a right to expect from the caregiver, the abused child is used to gratify the selfish desires of the adult – to increase his/her power.

The post-modern movement challenges paradigms and institutions to focus on the consequences of their ideologies: what are the implications of actions? A patriarchal community organises power on the basis of privilege and dominance, and it is unjust. Those who have power accumulate resources beyond what they need, while others are marginalised and rendered voiceless. Abuse of power engenders fear, anger and mistrust in victims which

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can dominate their whole life. Brock (1989:42,46) gives a very critical evaluation of patriarchy: 'I believe that patriarchy is the encompassing social system that sanctions child abuse. Virtually all child rearing in our culture is control orientated.' Healing can only be achieved where the victims are encouraged to voice their experiences of oppression and abuse, and the perpetrators are held responsible (Poling 1991:151). A post-modern society seeks liberation from the oppression of racism, classism and sexism, that is, from patriarchy.

2.3.2 How far is it from a child to an adult?

I grew up in a culture where childhood was seen as a distinct phase in human development: biologically and psychologically separate from adulthood. Adults know certain things young people do not and should not; they do things young people do not or cannot. Young people grow up learning not to question the behaviour and knowledge of adults: parents know best and only want what is best for their children. Children should listen to their parents, do well, be good and not cause trouble. Adults have possessions, careers and children. Adults must protect and teach their children until they are old enough to understand and stand on their own feet. Institutions such as schools and the Church assist parents to raise their children. In these institutions the authority and goodness of parents are emphasised and young people are taught to be obedient.

This modernist discourse on childhood disempowers young people. The division of people into adults and children can, did, and still does lead to subordination of children as beings without a voice regarding their own needs and desires. This discourse of domination of adults over children sometimes results in exploitation and practices of abuse. The adult/child dualism is so fundamental to society's usual talk and to people's understanding of identity that it is generally understood as a natural 'fact' of the 'real world'. Is childhood a separate phase from adulthood? Or could it be that society has learned to see such a 'phase' as a 'natural fact'? According to social construction discourse, knowledge is constructed by people using language. If deconstruction is a process, or a critical operation in which taken-for-granted ideas and stories are questioned or disrupted (Davies 1993:8), then, in an attempt to deconstruct the construct of childhood, the following question could be asked: 'Are alternative ideas and stories about childhood available?' Is it possible that young people can be

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consulted on their ideas on childhood? Can adults collaborate with young people in the deconstruction of childhood?

I believe that children need childhood: a childhood that is sensitive to the needs, hopes and dreams of young people. If one takes into consideration teenage violence and crime, a high rate of depression and suicide among the young, increasing abuse of alcohol and drugs, and sexual activity among children as young as twelve, it seems that the 'adult-child' is not ready for the emotional and psychological responsibilities of the grown-up world. How can a safe environment be provided for young people to grow up in?

On November 20, 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 'Convention on the rights of the child'.⁷

The Convention promises children around the world the right to life, liberty, education and health care. It provides protection to children in armed conflict, protection from discrimination, protection from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, protection within the justice system, and protection from economic exploitation, in addition to many other fundamental protections.

(United Nations 1989)

What does the picture look like in the year 2001? On the tenth anniversary of the Convention, children around the world are still victims of appalling abuses. Too often, street children are killed or tortured by the police. Children as young as seven or eight are recruited or kidnapped to serve as soldiers in military forces. Sometimes children as young as six are forced to work under extremely difficult conditions, often as bonded labourers or in forced prostitution. Refugee children, often separated from their families, are vulnerable to exploitation, sexual abuse or domestic violence. For many students, life in the classroom is intolerable – at the hands of peers and teachers, many children suffer acts of discrimination, abuse, sexual violence and harassment.

⁷ Information on the Convention was found on 'Children's rights division – Home page'.

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It seems that young people in society are still without a voice. This research is an attempt to empower young people, both the clients of our narrative conversations, and those who may read this research paper.

In my search for alternative stories on childhood, I came across the work of Aries (1962) and Postman (1983). They deconstructed the modernist concepts of childhood and adulthood. Although I do not agree with all their ideas or conclusions (their model seems to work better for upper class and middle class children), I found many useful notions for the deconstruction of the child/adult dualism.

2.3.2.1 Once there were no children

Philippe Aries (1962) wrote a history and concept of childhood in Western European culture. In Medieval times, there were no words to refer to children, apart from the word 'baby'. 'In its attempts to talk about little children, the French language of the seventeenth century was hampered by the lack of words to distinguish them from bigger ones. The same was true of English' (Aries 1962:28). Medieval art (until about the twelfth century) did not acknowledge childhood, or rather it did not attempt to portray it; there was no place for childhood. Children were depicted as adults on a reduced scale (Aries 1962:33). The reason was probably that children mingled with adults in everyday life, and any gathering for the purposes of work, relaxation or sport brought together both children and adults. It was only in the seventeenth century that portraits of children on their own became numerous and commonplace (Aries 1962:46). The literature of the same period shows a keen interest in little children's habits and jargon. In terms of fashions in the medieval period, clothing was the same for both young and old; little in medieval dress distinguished the child from the adult. In the seventeenth century, however, the child, or at least the child of quality, began to cease to be dressed like a grown-up. This change affected boys more than girls (Aries 1962:61). A study of the games people played in previous centuries shows that there was not such a strict division as there is today between children's games and those played by adults. Young and old played the same games. In the seventeenth century, a distinction began to be made between the games of adults and noblemen and the games of children and

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yokels (Aries 1962:92). It seems that everything was permitted in the presence of children: coarse language, scabrous actions and situations; they heard everything and saw everything. It seems that respect for children was completely unknown (Aries 1962:103).

The conclusion that Aries (1962:128) reaches about childhood is the following: 'In Medieval society [until the seventeenth century] the idea of childhood did not exist – that is the awareness of a particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult.' Postman (1983:15) argues that the oralism of the Middle Ages helps to explain the absence of childhood. Oralism means that children (from about seven years old) have a similar command over speech to that of many adults. They can say and understand what adults can say and understand: 'Immersed in an oral world, living in the same social sphere as adults, unrestrained by segregating institutions, the medieval child would have had access to almost all forms of behaviour common to the culture.'

2.3.2.2 The birth of childhood

The idea of childhood in Western Europe emerged around the end of the sixteenth century. The increasingly urbanised middle classes could afford to give their children the leisure for schooling and play. This led to more widespread education for young people. The invention of the printing press led to the discovery that young people are different from adults, because they could not read⁸. Reading allows people enter the non-observed and abstract world of knowledge. It creates a split between those who cannot read and those who can. The printing press created a new definition of adulthood based on reading competence⁹, and correspondingly, a new conception of childhood, based on reading incompetence. 'It is the scourge of childhood, because, in a sense, it creates adulthood. Literature of all kinds – including maps, charts, contracts and deeds – keeps valuable secrets' (Postman 1983:13). In a literate world a literate adult has access to cultural secrets codified in unnatural symbols.

⁸ A possible criticism of Postman here is that literacy existed before the invention of printing. The issue here is the increasingly commonness of reading allowed by printing. Postman's distinction between adults and children is based on literacy. What then about all the lower-class adults who have never been taught to read? Are they by definition also 'children'?

⁹ The question remains how literacy is defined. It seems to be defined from a Western point of view. In South Africa for example, many adults may not be able to read or write, and yet they can speak six or seven languages. Would they be classified as illiterate in terms of Postman's view?

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The new adulthood, by definition, excluded children. As children were expelled from the adult world, it became necessary to find another world for them to inhabit – the world of childhood. In a literate world, children must become adults; adulthood has to be earned. Adulthood became a symbolic achievement. 'From print onward, the young would have to become adults, and they would have to do it by learning to read. In order to accomplish that, they would require education. European civilisation invented schools. By doing so it made childhood a necessity' (Postman 1983:36). Infancy ended at the point at which command of speech was achieved; childhood began with the task of learning how to read.

As childhood became a social and intellectual category, stages of childhood became visible. The inevitable followed: the clothing of children became different from that of adults; their language began to be differentiated from adult speech: 'These were outward signs of a new class of people. They were people who spoke differently, dressed differently, learned differently, and, in the end, thought differently' (Postman 1983:45). Children had to attend school, and go through certain stages and phases to achieve adulthood. Adults found themselves with unprecedented control over the environment of the young. They set forth the conditions by which a child was to become an adult. Adults received the power to control the lives of children. It was adults who decided what their children should, and should not, learn at school; how much time children must spend learning, what secrets should be withheld from them. Through reading, adults were in possession of information that was not considered suitable for children to know – secrets about sexual relations, but also about money, about violence, about illness, about death, about social relations. The task of the adult was to prepare the child for the management of the adult's symbolic world. A heavy responsibility fell to parents and schoolmasters (and later to government) for the 'correct' upbringing of children.

2.3.2.3 The disappearance of childhood

By the turn of the nineteenth century, childhood had come to be regarded as every person's birthright, an ideal that transcended social and economic class. Inevitably, childhood came to be defined as a biological category, a distinct phase, and not a product of culture. During this period, adults exclusively controlled information:

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The book culture of the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries created a knowledge monopoly. A fully literate adult had access to all of the sacred and profane information and books, to the many forms of literature, to all of the recorded secrets of human experience. Children, for the most part, did not. Which is why they were children.

(Postman 1983:76)

But the wheel turned. In 1832, while on a voyage on the ship Sully, Samuel Morse first learned that electricity could be sent instantly over any known length of wire (Postman 1983:68). With the invention of the telegraph, electricity, television and computers, a new and different information and communication environment developed. A process began that made information impossible to control. The world became flooded with information (Postman 1983:72). With television, the basis of the information hierarchy collapsed, because TV images are available to everyone, regardless of age. Television presents information in a form that is 'undifferentiated in its accessibility' (Postman 1983:79), and this means that television does not make distinctions between the categories 'child' and 'adult'. Young and old can absorb the information that comes through picture and sound. The six-year-old and the sixty-year-old are equally qualified to experience what television has to offer. No special skill is required to watch television; the division between adults and children is disappearing once again (Postman 1983:84).

Children can also learn the secrets of adult life that were previously controlled by adults: 'Without secrets, of course, there can be no such thing as childhood' (Postman 1983:80). Television discloses secrets, makes public what has previously been private: 'It opens the view to the backstage of adult life' (Postman 1983:95). What is mostly shown on television is the plain fact that the adult world is filled with ineptitude, strife and worry. Children are confronted with marital conflict, the need for life insurance, adult and family violence, incompetent political leaders, sickness and death. They see adult cynicism and indifference, and they develop these attitudes themselves. They watch political corruption and immoral behaviour.

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When people who are young (in terms of their age in years) are shown on television, movies and magazines, they are depicted as miniature adults in the manner of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century paintings. Young people do not differ significantly in their interests, language, dress, or sexuality from the adults (Postman 1983:122-126). The clothing industry of young people has undergone vast changes in the past decade. What was once unambiguously recognised as 'children's' clothing has virtually disappeared (Postman 1983:128). Twelve-year-old boys wear three-piece suits to birthday parties, eleven-year-old girls wear high heels, and sixty-year-old adults can go to a party wearing jeans and sneakers. This process can be seen to occur not only in clothing but in eating habits as well. Junk food, once regarded suitable only for the young, is now commonplace for adults. In games and entertainment, Western society is moving towards a homogeneity of style: everybody plays the same games and watches the same programmes and movies. It is commonplace to use twelve-year-old professional models. Stars that make their mark in the world of sport get younger every year; better coaching and training techniques made it possible for children to attain adult-level competence (Postman 1983:131). Even the language young people use does not differ significantly from adult language. Adult language secrets, called 'dirty words' are now fully known to the young and this language is used freely (Postman 1983:133). Adults use 'slang' and young people use adult language with the same variety, depth and precision that adults do. It seems that never before have young people known so much about adult life as now. Children have become adult-like. Childhood is disappearing.

2.3.2.4 Agency as liberating force

The story of childhood as something different from the story of adulthood became the discourse that excluded other ways of being. Children grow up being directed by adults and being told what to do and what to say. This can evoke feelings of frustration and demonstrations of protest, like slamming doors, shouting and the like. Expressions about the unfairness of having no agency may include: 'Why can they do that I can't? It's not fair.' Adults have an explanation for the 'uncontrollable' and 'unacceptable' behaviour of children: 'It's just a phase.' This usually ends the discussion. Young people's behaviour is explained in

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terms of the discourse of the stages of childhood that lead to adulthood. This dualism of child/adult is not fully human: 'Children, like women and other marginalised groups, are constantly deprived of agency. Their subject status is always partial and conditional. They can be positioned as beings without agency and autonomy at any moment, usually when they are read by adults as knowing how they should behave' (Davies 1993:9).

When does a child have the attributes and skills of an adult? Davies explains how modernist Western culture understands 'identity': 'Two attributes "essential" to identity in the way it is currently understood are autonomy and agency' (Davies 1993:8). To achieve full adult status, young people must achieve a sense of themselves as beings with agency – to make choices as individuals about what they do, and to accept responsibility for those choices. At the same time, those choices must be recognisable as 'rational' – following the principles of decision-making acceptable to the group or society. Effective claims of identity require a knowledge of how to 'get it right'. Only when young people have reached full adult status by modernist standards will they have a voice.

It is fundamental to being a child that adults have agency over the lives of children. At school, reading books, children are taught that it is the author who has authority – not that they can each bring their own knowledges to the process. At school, teachers (adults) give students access to the knowledges through which they will be judged competent or incompetent and treated accordingly. Davies (1993:45) explains how a child has to accept the knowledges of the author or teacher as his/her own in order to survive and be worthy of the teacher's respect: 'Maintaining perceptions and knowledges at odds with the teacher's is to position oneself as marginal in educational terms and to risk being positioned as a failure.' Young people may come to believe that the solution to the dilemma of making 'mistakes' and 'behaving badly', is just to wait until they are older and wiser before they make decisions. Adulthood is seen as the time when people are less likely to make mistakes. Anyway, everyone is told all the time that children are seen but not heard! Often, young people are told not to ignore their parents, since they would only discover, through painful mistakes, that adults are right after all.

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Although the participants of this research live in a time where the division between adulthood and childhood is disappearing, they experience reluctance on their parents' part to include young people in the adult world. The sharp division between adulthood and childhood can still imprison people. It can silence their voices about who they are.

The underlying epistemology of a narrative approach is the view that people constitute themselves, each other and the world through stories. How can young people be taught that there are no singular, linear truths, but a multiplicity of possible readings and understandings of any one event? In order to achieve a narrative that makes sense, young people must learn the ways of seeing made possible by various discourses of the social groups of which they are members. In the narrative conversations I had with young people, I tried to ask deconstructing questions about the ways they are perceived as children by the adults in their lives, to assist them to find alternative stories of agency. Until people invent new storylines, they are still enmeshed in the old stories, and then the old stories can still claim their lives.

Adults are responsible for the care of young people. One way of stepping outside the modernist paradigm of adulthood/childhood, can be to look for ethical and accountable ways to care for young people. Sevenhuijsen (1998:19) states that ethics of care cannot but be political, because 'it wants to break with the patterns of domination that have surrounded caring activities and moral feelings for too long and to establish new modes of being "truly moral" '. The challenge is to find new ways of thinking **with** children, and not about them. Adults need to listen to young people. Young people deserve a chance to be heard.

2.3.3 Gender

2.3.3.1 A structuralist view

The traditional perspective of gender is that it is something fixed, tied to a cosmic and moral order. The fact that men and women differ on a physical level has led people to believe that men and women form a binary pair as opposites. The differences between men and women are seen as absolute; men and women are believed to have fundamentally different natures:

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'We are part of a culture that has taught us all, men and women alike, to behave in particular ways based on our gender' (Freedman & Combs 1996b:32).

The structuralist understanding of reality provided an organic account of reality and the claim that 'there are permanent structures behind or beneath things' (Palmer 1997:3) which are universal: they are the same for everybody, everywhere, and always. According to Palmer (1997:146), structuralism is 'the theory of social reality that applies the principles of the science of linguistics to all social phenomena, such that social meaning is reducible to a system of oppositional relationships ("structures") which define "sameness" and "otherness" '. The ideas of Levi Strauss (Palmer 1997:133) were an attempt to depict the human mind as busy constructing categories of binary opposites like the nature/culture one: for example, raw/cooked, male/female, light/dark. These binary oppositions were regarded as intrinsic to human thought and are manifested in language. This means that discourses exist because of the binary oppositions on which they feed. Discourses constitute dualities. Discourse constitutes 'man' by opposing 'man' to 'woman'. These patterns, consisting of binary oppositions, point to the deep structures on which a text is based, that is, to the dominant discourses underlying the text. Structuralism, of course, acknowledges that the elements of binary oppositions are not equal, and that dualisms imply that one of the elements of a duality overpowers the other; one is given more power by the discourse itself (Landman 2000:7).

The prioritising of one pole over the other displays purely cultural manipulations of power, as in the discourse of patriarchy, which created a certain hierarchy between males and females: 'Patriarchy is a system of values, beliefs and practices that maintains certain small numbers of people in positions of power over large numbers of other people, according to distinctions such as race, class, sexual orientation and gender' (Freedman & Combs 1996b:32).

2.3.3.2 Different gendered roles

Certain gender roles have developed from the patriarchal stories about men and women that circulate in Western culture. Ellman and Taggart (1993:379) argue as follows: 'Gender norms are actually the culture's list of prescriptions and proscriptions considered appropriate to that

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sex, and individuals are assessed as properly "feminine" or "masculine" in terms of their attitude toward, and degree of compliance with, these social expectations.' In a 'normal' family, the father is the head of the household, and the mother the caretaker. Women bear children and are responsible for their nurturing and upbringing. To be able to do this properly, they have to stay at home. Men are responsible for providing for the material needs of the family. They must go out and work and have a career. Men are taught to be in charge and women are taught to be in supportive roles – to be rescued if you will. Cultural stories about male heroes rescuing female can dominate people's lives, perpetuating a society in which men control women and both women's and men's lives are limited.

Gender relations are based on power: 'Not only do men as a group exert power over women as a group, but the socially derived definitions of masculinity and femininity reproduce those power relations' (Ellman & Taggart 1993: 380). The power difference between men and women is institutionalised by culture and finds expression in the everyday relations of men and women. Belenky et al (1986:167) claim that conventional feminine goodness means being voiceless as well as selfless.

Davies (1993:67) interviewed boys and girls and observed that: 'Female inferiority is achieved through the unquestioned assumptions in [patriarchal] models, through observations of social rules and structures that discriminate against women, and in part through the boys' positioning of the girls as inferior, as objects of sexual talk and speculation, and as beings with no right of access to male/heroic storylines.' Freedman and Combs (1996b:33) argue that the fixed roles allocated to men and women have an effect on relationships: 'Patriarchal gender stories interfere in men's and women's relationships, promoting different sets of values and ways of being and maintaining different levels of power and privilege.'

Dominant gender stories restrain our imaginations and creativity. They specify normative roles for men and different normative roles for women. They construct anyone who lives outside their specifications as abnormal, perhaps as even sick or evil. They make it difficult for women and men to collaborate freely and fully in overcoming life's problems. This is not to say that both men and women do not have access to more liberating discourses. It is clear that gender norms, as they have come to be understood in predominantly white Western

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culture, have been changing in the last thirty years with unprecedented speed and reach. At the same time there is increasing recognition of the need for more radical change as members of society continue to challenge themselves and their cultural presuppositions about gender.

2.3.3.3 Deconstructing gender

How do people become gendered beings? How are 'male' and 'female' constituted as opposite categories of being, with 'male' superior to and more powerful than 'female'? Is it possible to deconstruct and move beyond the binary categories of 'male' and 'female'?

The feminist critiques initiated an appreciation for the importance of gender (Ellman & Taggart 1993:379). Post-structuralist theory looks at gender as a social construction. Meanings are historically situated and constructed and reconstructed through the medium of language; Davies (1996:42) believes that language is 'both extraordinarily powerful in its capacity to give us new ways to see the world, and equally powerful in its capacity to hold in place the very things we are trying to interrupt'. Davies (1993:1) thinks that 'gender is constituted through the discourses with which we speak and write ourselves into existence'. Lather (1991:111) explains how the recent linguistic turn in social theory focuses on the power of language to organise our thought and experience: 'Language is seen as both carrier and creator of a culture's epistemological codes. The ways we speak and write are held to influence our conceptual boundaries and to create areas of silence as language organises meaning in terms of pre-established categories.'

In post-structural theory, the inevitability of having to belong to either the one or the other category of any binary pair, the inevitability of being powerful or powerless, depending on which category a person belongs to, is called into question:

Feminist post-structural theory recognises the need to act on the basis of principles of justice, where equal access to educational opportunities are denied on the basis of group memberships such as sex or ethnicity. The aim is the dismantling of the conceptions of the natural and 'correct' hegemony of the

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particular group that has traditionally held unquestioned power... It draws attention to the metaphysical nature of binary divisions between people (such as male/female, white/black, and heterosexual/homosexual). It shows that they are not 'natural' divisions, but constructed ones. It further shows how these binary divisions systematically disadvantage one half of each binary.

(Davies 1996:12)

Feminist post-structuralist theory questions the construct that man, in the pair man/woman, is necessarily superior. It goes on to deconstruct the very binary discourse through which the system of privilege is constituted. Rather than an exposure of error, deconstruction is a way of thinking about the danger of what is powerful and useful (Lather 1991:13). Central to any feminist deconstruction is the journey to discover the very mainsprings of power that have held women and other marginalised groups in place: 'Deconstruction includes the development of a Foucauldian awareness of the oppressive role of ostensibly liberatory forms of discourse' (Lather 1991:13). Davies (1993:8) argues as follows: 'To know how oppression is achieved is the essential first step to knowing how to change it.' Post-structuralist theory defines discourse and structure as something that can be acted upon and changed. Post-structuralist theory seeks to understand the processes to which the person is subjected and by which he/she is constituted. This means that the language or discursive practices through which these patterns of privilege are spoken into existence must be located and made observable. This leads to a search for alternative ways of constituting identity; the creation of 'a more fluid and less coercive conceptual organization of terms which transcends a binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither the binary terms' (Lather 1991:13). 'The heart of the idea of empowerment involves people coming into a sense of their own power, a new relationship with their own contexts' (Lather 1991:4).

Narrative therapists' task with regard to patriarchal stories is to highlight the gendered roles that have developed from them, to ask questions to examine these and their implications more closely, and to create a context where people can begin to inhabit stories that offer more choice and affirmation of their self-experienced gender. Dominant stories must be deconstructed and new stories must come forth, stories that offer expanded role choice. Because members of society are participants in a patriarchal culture, gender stories and their

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effects offer a challenge to society. People are often blind to these stories and challenges. Dominant ideologies of power distribution are demonstrated in the structure of the family, the school and the society in such a way that people learn to see these ideologies as natural and inevitable, and come to accept and live by them. It is important that everyone, even the people who experience the problematic effects, begin to recognise different gender stories. To be able to re-author gender stories, society must constantly be educated (by itself) to recognise patriarchal culture and its effects, to listen for discrepancies that might open onto non-patriarchal gender stories, and ask questions that might bring forth non-patriarchal gender stories.

Questions which remain: Will the deconstruction of binary oppositions, as well as fundamentalist ideas regarding gender, create a context that will affirm self experienced gender? Will inclusivity open the boundaries to bi-gendered, gay and lesbian, cross-gendered, and trans-gendered people, or people being born with somatic intersex and/or ambiguous genitalia?

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THE UNIVERSE CONSISTS OF STORIES

3.1 STORIES OF THE PRESENT RE-VISITED AND RE-VISED

'I tell stories and my life is shaped by stories' (White 1991:127). Through the stories people tell they each constitute each other and themselves as beings with specificity. Who people are depends on the stories available at a given time: 'We not only read and write stories but we also live stories' (Davies 1993:41). In post-structuralist thought there are multiple possibilities for ways of being in the world. It is by entering into other stories that it becomes possible to see different possibilities for meaning. Narrative conversations can help people to enter into a universe of alternative stories. Narrative conversations with young people and their families are exciting and challenging at the same time. I constantly need to remind myself of the discourses of power that make society believe that adult knowledge is privileged above the knowledge of children. Such discourses, discourses which imprison people, must be deconstructed and challenged. Adopting a post-modern epistemology, where 'truth' can have multiple possibilities, following the movements of post-structuralist thought in the deconstruction of cultural and gender issues, and taking a narrative stance in therapy which values young people's knowledge and stories helped me to move towards a more collaborative way of being with children.

In my conversations with young people, I want to value and understand the wonder they express when describing their world. I find it exciting, and, of course very new, to explore ways of consulting young people as the experts on their lives and relationships. I was scared and apprehensive too. I was never consulted as a young person about my preferences or experiences, and never before had I consulted children on their lives. At first I was not sure whether a narrative approach would be helpful to the people who consult me. I am deeply indebted to all the young people who had conversations with me; they allowed me to become

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a part of their lives by sharing their stories with me. Together, we discovered ways of talking which were respectful and sensitive to the values of these young people.

Conversations with young people are often not straightforward and may not follow a clear linear path. They may be focused in one direction for a while until a client's interest changes. To ensure a rich description of the research project, and to be true to a post-modern epistemology (knowledge as a social construct), I have included the voices of the young people in this report in the form of excerpts from transcripts. I present the conversations in themes. In this chapter, I retell the story of Ann, a young woman whose voice had been silenced by depression. I present snippets of different conversations we had over a period of almost two years. I interrupt Ann's personal story with self-reflection as I engage in conversation with different perspectives present in theoretical texts.

3.2 INTRODUCING ANN

When I first met Ann, she was almost sixteen years old. We had a few conversations before I asked her to become a research consultant. She gave me permission to retell her story as part of this research project. Ann wrote her own introduction:

Where does one start without sounding like you don't have a clue of who you are? I would like people to see me for who I am and not for what I appear to be. What I live by is mildly contradicted by my upbringing. I want people to know that my thoughts run free and I am open minded about a lot of issues. I have very strong beliefs about life – but I never force my opinions on others. Although I believe in myself, I am insecure and emotional at times and that frustrates me.

Ann consulted me (as school counsellor) regarding a problem she had with a former friend who was using drugs. Ann said that she had struggled with depression for the preceding year or so. She had been to a psychiatrist over a period of six months and medication for depression had been prescribed. She also said that she and her parents had many arguments. She was always seen as the 'weird' party; things were different when her parents

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were young; they had different ways and perspectives. She told me that her father was over-protective. I asked her whether she felt she had a voice at home, and her answer was this: **'Yes, but they don't hear it.'** She wrote a poem about being a teenager:

**My head is not mine
You own it
My own thoughts
aren't allowed to
be provoked
You must control it.**

**I don't know what
I think because
You probably think
I am from the devil.**

**After all I am
just 16 years old
and still so
young
and far from being
an adult.**

**You insinuate all
kinds of lies
about me and
you summarise
me as a little
lying manipulative bitch
who think only herself
important.**

I was aware that Ann's introduction of herself and her problem was a reflection of how she perceived her situation: in terms of the dominant problem story. I regarded our first conversation as highly important because the atmosphere had to be set for re-authoring and ascribing new meanings to problems. When a client presents a therapist with a problem a primary consideration should be this issue: 'How can we as therapists act so that the problem does not define the person's identity, dominate the agenda, ...yet still show concern for the problem and the effects in the client's life?' (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:34,35). I agreed with these authors that, for a start, I should attempt to get to know Ann apart from the problem. I wanted to create opportunities from the start to develop a conversation about a person's interest, abilities, knowledge and characteristics. The advantages of this approach are numerous:

Invaluable information maybe discovered or rediscovered that connects us with the young person and gives clues to resources for dealing with the problem. Such discoveries can become the foundation upon which an alternative story is built, one based upon the child's and family's competencies and sufficiently compelling to stand up against the problem-dominated story.

(Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:35)

3.2.1 Exposing Depression¹⁰ for what it is

I asked Ann if she would mind if I got to know her a little better, and not focus on the problem straight away. The fact that she had seen a professional person before to talk about her problems compelled her to start immediately on the problem – a problem that the therapist was supposed to fix. She told me that 'small talk' helped her to relax. We talked a bit about her family, interests and hobbies. When I asked Ann about the things that make life difficult for her, she said that she battles to deal with the loss of a friendship that had meant a lot to her in recent years. Ann thought that her friend's older friends had had a bad influence

¹⁰ Depression is capitalised here, and throughout this chapter, whenever it is personified/externalised.

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on Sue (her friend). Ann noticed that Sue looked pale and noticed a change in her behaviour. She suspected that Sue was using drugs with the group of older friends. Ann confronted Sue about this. Sue denied it and, after an argument, their friendship was no longer the same.

Lynette: Do you have a 'voice' among your friends?

Ann: I have no fear of expressing my opinion even if it makes me unpopular. I believe in myself and I want to make it clear to people what my beliefs are.

Lynette: Would you call this 'speaking up'? If so, how did 'speaking up' change the way you see yourself?

Ann: I felt proud about the caring I have for Sue...but I also feel sad and guilty because my words ended our friendship. I think the friendship meant more to me than to Sue...actually I am fine now. It's just that this guilty feeling bothers me a lot at home as well. I have feelings of guilt when I fight with my parents. We fight a lot. It makes me depressed.

Lynette: Do you want to talk about Sue or about Depression that seems to bother you?

Ann: I think....my depression....yes definitely, because this is the cause of many problems at home. My parents say that I am weird. They even say that the music I listen to makes me more depressed. A few months ago I drank pills after a big fight with my parents. For a while they were very friendly. But I feel guilty...because I don't want to use suicide threats as a weapon against them.

Ann opened the door for us to speak about Depression. She spoke about depression as her depression; as if the problem were an intrinsic part of her being. When people think of a problem as an integral part of their character, it has an immobilising effect; moreover, it is difficult for them to change as the problem seems so 'close to home' (see 1.2.3.5.2 where externalising is discussed as a narrative practice). Externalising conversations open space to create a lighter and more playful approach to the seriousness of painful problems:

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In recent years, the more fluid idea of 'developing externalising conversations' has replaced the idea of simply 'externalising the problem'. [It] includes a sense of evolving through time...it acknowledges that the conversations take twists and turns and meet surprises and that people are often caught by multiple problems that get tangled together.

(Winslade & Monk 1999:46)

Lynette: I sometimes like to look at a problem as something that is outside of a person and then ask about the influence it is having on them. Will it be OK if we talk like this for a while and see what you think?

Ann: I guess so.

Lynette: When did you notice Depression has a place in your life?

Ann: Eight months ago the psychiatrist diagnosed depression and prescribed medication. I was relieved because I could name my feelings of unhappiness. He told me that I had obsessive-compulsive thoughts.

Lynette: I wonder what Depression does to you? Can you tell me what he tells you to feel, to say, to believe? Wait a minute, is Depression a he or is it a she?

Ann: [Laughing] It is a he.

Lynette: What is different when Depression is in your life?

Ann: I am sad, very emotional and I cry a lot. It's like....small things can bother me. Yes, I worry about other people and what happens to them.

Lynette: Does Depression influence the way you see yourself? What I mean is does he make you like yourself more or maybe less?

Ann: I like myself less when I am depressed. I think that I am weak and unimportant and fat and ugly. Yes, he makes me like myself less.

Lynette: Is it fair to say that Depression tries to rob you of your self-worth?

Ann: Yes.

Lynette: What percentage of your life has been taken over by Depression?

Ann: I would guess about twenty percent. But last year it was more...I think about seventy percent.

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Lynette: Am I right when I say that you took some control away from Depression this year?

Ann: Yes...you know I never thought about it until you said so just now. I guess Depression has lost its hold a bit.

Lynette: What were the things that were on your side against Depression? What helped you to take control over your life and reduce Depression's hold?

Ann: The medication definitely helped me to feel better. Talking about my problems helped. And ... also I wanted to be better – yes, I helped myself as well.

Lynette: When we spoke about Sue you told me that you can stand up for yourself, yes?

Ann: That's right. I don't care what my friends say or think. I stand up for what I believe in.

Lynette: Do you think Depression is happy with this skill that you have? What I mean is, do you think that standing up for yourself and making your voice heard is on your side in your life, or on the side of Depression working against you and making you like yourself less?

Ann: I feel better about myself when I can speak my mind...so I definitely think that it works for me. Depression cannot be happy about it...but at home I can't speak my mind. My father says I'm looking for trouble and I am weird.

Lynette: Would you say that you are seen as weird or could it be that you're open-minded?

Ann: Yes, I am open-minded about things. At Sunday school I always ask the questions that they don't want to hear. And then I feel guilty because I think differently.

Lynette: Would you say that feelings of guilt are on your side or siding with Depression?

Ann: When I feel guilty I also feel depressed.

Lynette: I am interested in this feeling of guilt that bothers you. Can we talk about it for a while?

Ann: I would like to, because it makes me feel bad about myself.

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Lynette: What is it that Guilt¹¹ tells you to believe?

Ann: He tells me to feel bad when I do something that hurts my parents...like fighting with them and thinking how bad they treat me.

Lynette: What about standing up to them?

Ann: I feel guilty because I should respect my parents and be obedient. But...[raising her voice] what about the respect that they should have for me! Everybody is always telling us that we must have respect, but they conveniently forget that they should treat us with respect as well!

Lynette: Where do you think this voice/idea of Guilt comes from?

Ann: My father feels guilty because he cannot give us everything we need. And maybe the way I was brought up can add to the feelings of guilt.

Lynette: Are you saying that the society, school and maybe even the Church made a sort of list about the things that we should feel guilty about?

Ann: Exactly! And no matter what you do there are always things to feel guilty about! It's like...if I stand up against an adult I have to feel guilty because I did not show respect; and if I disagree with all the little stupid rules at school I am labelled as a rebel and I must feel bad; or when I want to make my own choices about my clothes (more expensive than my father's choice) I am ungrateful and I should feel guilty; or if I like a guy and I call him, then I am a slut because he should do the 'hunting'.

Lynette: Do you think it is fair that the loud voice of Guilt can rob us of our self-worth and make us want to hide all the time?

Ann: No, it is definitely not fair. It makes me furious. I want to say what I want and believe what I want and not feel as imprisoned as I feel right now. I can't always accept what they say is true and right. I want to figure things out for myself.

Lynette: What are the things that can help you to stand up against Guilt?

Ann: I think as I get older I believe in myself more, and I sometimes trust my own gut feeling of how I like things to be. Yes, I think that can help me to feel better about my understanding.

Lynette: Do you think it takes courage and maybe strength to fight Guilt?

¹¹ Guilt is capitalised here, and throughout this chapter, whenever it is personified/externalised.

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Ann: Yes. Once, after a huge fight with my dad, I screamed: 'How would you feel if you had no rights at all?' I think that took some courage. He did not answer me.

Lynette: Are you saying that if we persist in our demand for the right of speech and keep believing in our understanding of the world, we can chase Guilt away?

Ann: Maybe.

3.2.2 The power struggle

During our conversations, the power imbalance Ann experienced between adults and herself as a young person was always part of the therapeutic conversation.

Lynette: You seemed very cross when you told me that 'they' are always telling you what to do and how to think. Who are 'they'?

Ann: My parents... and teachers...in general adults.

Lynette: Is it your experience that adults almost always seem to know the 'truth'?

Ann: Yes. If I dare to tell them how I think and feel, they say that I am cheeky, and that I 'backchat' and I do not respect them. Adults (especially teachers) can treat children as if we don't know anything. It makes me very angry when adults belittle and humiliate children. I think that one should earn respect.

Lynette: How can parents and adults earn the respect of children?

Ann: Well, they can start by listening to their children! And I think they can set examples for us.

Lynette: Where do you think this idea comes from that adults know everything?

Ann: That is a stupid question! Everybody tells you all the time that children know nothing! I hear it all the time in school, at home and even at church. It's like children have no chance to speak and be heard.

Lynette: When was the first time that you became aware of this 'truth' about adults and children?

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Ann: When I was about four or five years old, my mother had a Tupperware party at our house. I was chased out of the room and my grandmother said that children should be seen and not heard. And sometimes when I fight with my mother she says: 'You must remember that you are a child and you will always be a child.' That really means that I should keep my mouth shut.

Lynette: Do you agree with this view that adults know the truth about the world and about their children?

Ann: No, I mean I accept it that you guys know a bit more about the world and how it works, but you definitely don't know more about what's in our heads.

Lynette: Do you find that you get into trouble when you question and challenge the 'truth' about adults who think they know what is best for children?

Ann: Yes, my mother says I complicate life when I always question everything. But I can't help it, because I think a lot about things and I wonder about life.

Lynette: Mark Twain once said: 'Education is the organised fight of grown-ups against youth.' Do you sometimes feel that your life is a fight against adults?

Ann: Yes. I feel like an object being controlled...I feel so incompetent, like I cannot make any worthwhile or good decision.

Lynette: You told me that standing up for yourself and speaking your mind is on your side against Depression. Do you think that maybe these skills can help you to free you from the powerlessness you experience at home?

Ann: I guess if I can manage to do that without screaming. It is very difficult for me to keep my voice down when I'm frustrated and angry.

Lynette: Can you think of times when you stayed calm and composed during a fight at home?

Ann: Yes. My father always has a problem with the neatness, or should I say the not-neatness, of my bedroom. When he tells me to fix my room I calmly tell him that I refuse to. I mean, my bedroom is the only place on

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earth where I can do what I like as I like it! Nobody will tell me how it should or should not look like.

Lynette: How do you manage to stay calm during fights over your room? Do you think that you have self-control?

Ann: I definitely have self-control. This weekend my sister picked a fight with me and I almost threw a glass at her – but I did not. I am still surprised that I managed to stay calm.

Lynette: Can you think of other people who would tell me that they know that you have self-control and not be surprised that you held on to the glass?

Ann: I think my friends would say that I don't 'lose it' when in their company; maybe my teachers would also have something positive to say.

Lynette: How does self-control influence the respect you have for yourself? Do you respect yourself more, or less?

Ann: I think this is the time to take you up on that invitation to comment on the questions you ask: that is really a silly question! Of course I have more self-respect when I have and show self-control. Others also have more respect for me.

Lynette: What other qualities do you have that are on your side in the power struggles you experience at home and at school?

Ann: You might not say it when you look at me, but I have a very strong will. I know what I want from life. I also think a lot about issues and I write it down in poems.

Lynette: Are you telling me that pondering helps you to clear your mind on what you want from life and what your goals are?

Ann: Yes. Every night I think back on the day and analyse all that's happened to me. I think about all the things I said and could have said. My mother says I'm too serious about life.

Lynette: Do you think you are too serious?

Ann: No. But I think that people should take life more seriously – especially adults. What I mean is that adults should pay attention to what their children tell them.

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Ann and I spoke about Depression during the first two sessions. This topic did not come up during the third or fourth time we saw each other, and I did not mention it. When we met for our fifth conversation, one month after the first, I casually asked her what happened to Depression that had had such a big hold on her when I first met her. She frowned, laughed and asked me: "What Depression?" She told me that she had a firm grasp on her own life and Depression had a mere one percent of her life – "because I know the word, you see!" She also said that she felt confident she could survive without the prescribed medication, but I advised her to speak to the doctor about that. When I reflected on our conversation at a later stage, I realised that I had taken an authoritative position and had given her advice. Although my intention had been to protect her and help her, I had stepped into the trap of misusing the power I had as an adult-therapist. I should have asked more questions to help her to make the decision with her doctor. She told me that the thoughts of worthlessness did not bother her as much as before. Although the fights at home were still present, she felt that her parents were trying hard and sometimes succeeded in hearing her voice.

Another two months passed and we met again. She was eager to tell me that the communication between herself and her parents was fantastic – her mother had even started listening to the local student radio station. Ann told me that she still felt 'down in the dumps' at times, but it was distinctly different to Depression. She still had problems with the misuse of power present at school, but she could live with that, since things at home were better.

Lynette: I notice some changes in your life. What do you think contributed to that?

Ann: I think I have shown the people that I accept myself and that I like myself...people can see that I am in control of my life. I also started to read philosophy and positive literature. It helps me to see things in perspective.

Lynette: What do you do when things happen which make you doubt your abilities?

Ann: When people say bad things to me or about me, I simply shut myself off; I do not listen.

Ann and I had many conversations over the two years since we have come to know each other. I used every possible opportunity to 'thicken' the special individual qualities and strengths which helped her to stand up against Depression. I listened carefully to the stories she told where she made her voice heard in the relationships she has with adults, and looked for ways to re-author her preferred identities. It so happens that 2001 is Ann's last year at high school, and she participates in many activities at school as well as outside school. She is confident and popular and has many friends. Ann has given me hope that situations can change, and I hope that the narrative conversations we had contributed in some way to the change from single-storied Ann to multi-storied Ann.

3.3 REFLECTIONS

3.3.1 Identity, self and agency

Ann's poem, as well as her introduction, made me think about the struggle young women have regarding identity. How can people think and talk about self or identity? Is it possible to obtain knowledge about 'who people really are'?

Gergen (1991) thinks that the vocabulary of self-understanding has changed markedly over the past century. 'As we enter the post-modern era, all previous beliefs about the self are placed in jeopardy...the very concept of personal essences is thrown into doubt' (Gergen 1991:7). What are the 'previous beliefs' that Gergen speaks of? The modernist perspective on identity is that it is autonomous, given and discoverable. Within a modernist framework which assumes an objective reality, 'taken-for-granted' truth exists about how things are: 'The mainstream Western concept of person-hood, or of one's self, or of one's identity, stems from assumptions based on what we take to be true and universal about human selves' (Myburg 2000:99). The quest for identity is the quest for the true and accessible self. According to a structural view, a person has a core-self/identity -- certain attributes and characteristics which are essential to that individual. To have agency, a person must see him/herself as a knowable, recognisable identity, who speaks for him/herself and who accepts

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responsibility for his/her actions. According to Polsen (2000:3,4), the modernist view of the self and agency implies the following:

Self is a natural entity with attributes that can be empirically studied. Agency, as understood by the social sciences, is synonymous with being a person. The concept of agency is hooked to a humanistic version of the person and is, therefore, associated with concepts like freedom, autonomy, rationality and moral authority. Agency in this definition is an essential feature of a sane, adult human being. Such an individual has identity that is expressed using language.

Language is used to describe the world 'out there', the 'things that are'. The same language is used to describe the person of self, to give an account of the 'inner person', the 'essence' of an individual. This means that the self is knowable. According to this point of view, people have a reliable and/or objective way of knowing their subjectivity (Heshusius 1994:16). A modernist perspective on psychology treats the person as open to observation, what you see is what you get – what sort of character you are dealing with. Final knowledge of an objective reality as it is, is possible through systematic observation. Knowledge about identity can be defined, labelled, categorised and diagnosed: "The idea seems to be that we can construct what we call "subjectivity" as something more or less separate from ourselves, something we can be in charge of" (Heshusius 1994:16). Heshusius also points out that this dualism of objectivism and subjectivism can create a distance between the knower and the known:

The belief that one can actually distance oneself, and then regulate that distance in order to come to know, has also been referred to as alienated consciousness, as the disenchantment of knowing, a mode of consciousness that has led to undreamed of technological advances, but has also left us alienated from each other, from nature, and from ourselves.

(Heshusius 1994:16)

Within social construction discourse the 'self' is constructed in the same way as knowledge (See 1.2.1.3 on social construction discourse). Self is constructed and reconstructed in a

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social and historical context. Interaction through dialogue (language) constructs knowledge and personal identity, thus self is the result of social interactions: 'In the post-modern world selves may become the manifestations of relationships, thus placing relationships in the central position occupied by the individual self for the last several hundred years of Western history' (Gergen 1991:147). This means that each 'truth' about the self is a construction of the moment, true only for a given time and within certain relationships: 'One's identity is continuously emergent, re-formed and redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships' (Gergen 1991:139). According to Gergen (1991), there is no individual self. Self is always in a relationship. People are interdependent and therefore they cannot separate their deeds from their contexts and relationships. Els (2001:37,38) describes Gergen's understanding of self as follows: 'We all have different relationships with different people in different contexts and these relationships have very real effects on the construction of who we are. A social self is constructed which positions us in society. It seems clear that the stories of our lives are constituted through several different relationships and conversational contexts.' This view on personal identity as being created and re-created in relationships is slowly replacing an eroding belief in essential selves (Polzen 2000:7). The modernist obsession with a single identity has cleared the way for a celebration of identities. It is relationships that construct the self: 'A new era of self-conception may be entered where self is no longer seen as essence in itself, but relational' (Polzen 2000:7).

The discourses of society co-construct people's selves and their identities. Feminist post-structuralism places great emphasis on language and how personhood is constituted and positioned through language in the different discourses that effect or affect people's lives. These discourses address individuals as particular kinds of person like female, male, adult, child, therapist or client. These discourses can either be accepted or resisted (Els 2001:138). Ann expressed herself and her understanding of identity in terms of the categories available to her in discourse. Her sense of who she was and what she was allowed to do was derived from her position in the particular discourse. She positioned herself in the dominant discourses about identity in her culture, discourses that stand in opposition to ideas of relational identity. She used words like 'identity crisis', low 'self-esteem' and a lack of 'self-confidence'.

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Davies and Harre (1990:46) claim that feminist post-structuralist theory recognises the constitutive force of discourse and at the same time recognises that people are capable of exercising choice in relation to those practices. In line with post-structuralist theory, I had the opportunity/responsibility to look at different ways in which possibilities could be opened up for to Ann recognise the different relational identities available for her to choose from. 'At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory practices that each person could engage in' (Davies & Harre 1990:46). 'Positioning ourselves according to the choices that we have, implies that we have agency and advocacy to construct or author our lives according to our preferences' (Els 2001:139). Agency means that people can recognise the way that they are situated in discourses that affect their lives. Combs and Freedman (1999:27) think that people can negotiate their position according to their preferences and beliefs:

We make ourselves and each other up through the directions that we choose. Different possibilities for identity are opened through examining and revising relationships with problems and relationships with particular discourses and cultures. Equally significant possibilities are created by exploring ways of further developing thick and rich experiences of the relationships we have in our lives with other people.

How could I help Ann to value her identity not as a fixed product, but as a multiplicity of selves – someone who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which she participates? What narrative practices could I use so that Ann could honour the relationships that shape and sustain her preferred identities? And how could we deconstruct those relationships that shape and sustain the identities she does not want?

Ann's poems were her stories about identity, the struggle of who she wanted to be. I asked myself: 'Was Ann, through the form of writing, uncovering herself, or reinventing herself?' Foucault (McNay 1992:88,89) emphasised the idea that the art of producing the self should no longer occupy its own private niche, but it should give birth to life forms directly:

From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art. It is

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important to note that Foucault sees the exploration of the self not as a liberation of a true or essential inner nature, but rather as an obligation, on the part of the individual, to face the endless task of reinventing him or herself. 'Modern man', he says, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; 'he is the man who tries to invent himself'. This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels him to face the task of producing himself.

Who one is, is always an open question with a shifting answer, depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices, and, within those discursive practices, the stories through which people make sense of their own and others' lives (Davies & Harre 1990:46). Ann was within a dynamic process of producing herself as a work of art acceptable to herself and her world. She thought that 'acceptable' meant arriving at a fixed end product; getting it right. I agree with Davies (1993:9) that effective claims to identity require a knowledge of how to 'get it right'. At the same time, 'getting it right' does not mean behaving exactly as everyone else behaves, but rather it means practising the culture in an identifiably individual way.

3.3.2 The therapeutic relationship/ethical responsibility

As a person/adult/therapist I embrace certain ideas that are associated with post-modernism, feminism and narrative therapy. Elliot (1998:45-59) offers useful ideas about the position of the therapist within the therapeutic relationship. The ethical responsibility I have with regard to the real effects and consequences of therapeutic conversations leads me to situate myself with clients in ways that are consistent with these modes of thinking. It means that I have to take certain positions, at the practice level, in relation to clients. It involves taking a stance with regard to those ideas, adopting practices that are consistent with, and part of, those ideas. Ann initially saw me as a professional who was capable of fixing her problem. I believe that I have to take an ethical stance with people who come to see me, and one way of being ethical is to be transparent. I use the practice of asking their permission, at the beginning of the first session, to share my views on therapy with them. I told Ann that I did not see myself as an expert with the knowledge and skills to 'solve' or 'fix' her problem, but

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that we would embark on a journey together to open up possibilities for her to reposition herself in relation to the things that she experienced as problematic.

It is important to me that young people feel comfortable in an open and egalitarian relationship between the adult/therapist and the young person. Trying to establish an egalitarian relationship is very difficult. There are power differentials between people based on ethnicity, class, race, gender, age and sexual preference which act as restraints to people's sense of choice. I use the practice of being accountable about my position of power. 'A therapist risks reproducing the relations of power simply by being a member of a dominant group' (Elliot 1998:52). Therefore I have to be ever alert about my place as a privileged, middle class, white, educated adult and how that influences my perspective on the world. I try to take a position which makes the power difference between adults and young people clear. I deconstruct this power relation. I talk to young people who consult me about my lack of knowledge on their lives and needs, and tell them that I might ask questions that come too close to them, and that they have the right to choose whether or not to reply. I make it clear that the conversation will go at their pace and that the content and length of our conversations are mainly up to them. I also invite them to voice any questions or worries they might have about me, my values and biases, or about the questions I ask. I hope that these practices allow these young people to experience a voice in the construction of therapy.

3.3.3 Narratives of therapy

White (1995a) suggests that most people's stories draw on dominant discourses. People have their stories set in place for them by a society that is structured through the availability of 'tellable' stories. The dominant discourses have power: they include some stories as tellable and exclude others as marginal and abnormal. The personal problems that people bring to therapy, tend, first and foremost, to be problems of 'fit' between their lived experience and the story that a dominant discourse imposes on these experiences. Narrative therapy seeks an externalising conversation about the story that the dominant discourse imposes, including the labelling of the client's problems as his/her own pathology: 'Dominant culture stories limit change for people. Therefore they must be deconstructed and taken apart to reveal the impact on life' (Winslade & Monk 1999:33).

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The practice of externalising (see 1.2.3.5.2) helps people locate the problem as separate from their identities. This practice is based on the narrative belief that problems actually have their origins in the discourses that surround people in society and get mapped onto people's bodies and into their lives. Externalising problems puts problems back where they belong. As a result, the 'externalising of a problem relieves the pressure of blame and defensiveness. Instead of being defined as inherently being a problem, a person can now have a relationship with the externalised problem' (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:xv). Seeing oneself in relation to a problem instead of having a problem or being a problem, creates the possibility of imagining oneself in a different relationship to the problem: 'one can talk about the effects on the person of the current relationship to the problem and also imagine the effects of a preferred relationship. This may avoid pathologising statements that inadvertently encourage people who are struggling with problems to blame themselves, or to feel guilty, wrong or bad' (Weingarten 1998:9).

A narrative perspective on the problem of depression which has a grasp in a young person's life involves the recognition that the adolescent/child is in the best position to report inner symptoms of depression that may escape adult observation: 'Children must be allowed to speak as subjects who have expertise about their own lives, rather than be spoken about as subjects who are acted upon by others' (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:8). If therapists take a stance that the client is the expert on his life, they are not only deconstructing their own position of power, but the client is accorded the recognition that his/her feelings and experiences are real. I have experienced many times how a young person's face lights up when I admit that I am not an expert who knows it all and holds all the solutions.

3.3.4 Depression

Depression and suicide among young people is serious. Many books and articles have been written on this subject (Brage D & Meredith W 1994; Harrington R 1995; Kendall P C, Cantwell D P & Kazdin A E 1989). Young people face numerous challenges in society. This factor plays a big role in the way that depression can affect a person. It is my responsibility as a professional to listen to the voice of professionals on depression, but I also have an

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ethical responsibility as a narrative therapist to privilege the local knowledge of the client. The literature I read on depression provided me with useful knowledge, for example:

Young people go through a time of immense change in the physical, emotional, cognitive, moral, religious and social arenas. These factors make young people vulnerable, and a prime target for depressive feelings....Feelings of low self esteem and self worth are likely related to depression....The adolescent's major concern is establishing a strong, worthwhile identity, and issues of status, independence and competence are important...The other side is that people with low self esteem often harbour feelings of sadness, depression and lethargy....Low self esteem is often embedded in an interrelated set of self-defeating cognitions and behaviours that impair social competence and cause people to be at risk of loneliness and depression....Depression among young people can, and sometimes does, lead to suicide. A study on suicide in the United States had the following results: between 1980 and 1995 suicide rates among persons between the ages of fifteen and nineteen have increased with twenty-three percent, and among young people between ten and fourteen years it increased by one-hundred-and-twelve percent.

(Brage & Meredith 1994:463)

The parents, teachers and counsellors who are responsible for the well-being of young people in society should never dismiss signs of depression as a 'stage' or 'just looking for attention'. Depression convinced Ann to think less of herself. She told me that she felt sad, emotional and cried a lot. Depression had been successful in convincing Ann that life was not worth living and she 'took some pills'. These were some of the stories that Ann was living. It was my responsibility to extend the externalising conversation on depression. The alternative story that emerged from our conversation about depression and guilt described Ann as a person who does not conform to unreasonable norms of the family or church. The resistance Ann expressed as a difference between the story she was living and the story that the dominant discourse offers gave her new possibilities on meanings for her life. She was beginning to view problems in a different light: as external and not as part of her identity. Moreover, she was beginning to realise that it is not her experience that is wrong, but the dominant story imposed on that experience.

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Therapeutic conversations move towards change: 'Change may involve helping people think differently, which will usually lead to their behaving differently' (Durrant 1995:7). The therapeutic task is to give experiences their own interpretative story – a story that affords meaning to the person's life – and to recognise how the dominant discourse works to deny this story. The therapist becomes a partner in resistance. The goal of therapy is not just to help people to put 'problems' back in the cultural and social context from which they originate, but also to assemble alternative stories – not just any alternative stories, but stories that are identified by the person who seeks counselling as stories by which they would like to live their lives. In order to assist people to break away from the influence of the problem they are facing, I have to seek out the stories of identity that can enable people to have thicker descriptions of their special qualities. It is not enough simply to re-author an alternative story; it is also necessary to 'ask questions that assist people to more richly describe their abilities and draw attention to the knowledges they find helpful and sustaining' (Morgan 1999:12). 'Narrative therapists are interested in finding ways in which these alternative stories can be "richly described". The opposite of a "thin conclusion" is understood by narrative therapists to be a "rich description" of lives and relationships' (Morgan 2000:15). Together, Ann and I discovered individual ways and means which helped her to challenge the hold depression and guilt sometimes had on her.

3.3.5 Power imbalances

The conversation I had with Ann made me think about the presence of power struggles in the lives of young people (see 2.2 on discourses informing concepts of power). In institutions such as the family and school, truth is generally seen as the way things are. Adults have the truth and know the truth, because they are older, wiser and have the necessary experience. This means that adults also have power: 'Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power' (Rabinow 1984:72).

The power at work in schools is of the disciplinary type:

Disciplinary power not only punishes, it rewards. It gives gold stars for good

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behaviour. And the tendency is for that which transgresses its dictates to be defined not only as bad but as abnormal. It is a more subtle use of power that works on the transgressor from the inside, and consolidates the ranks of the 'normal' against all others.

(Fillingham 1993:125)

Young people are subjected to examinations which can constitute them as objects: 'The examination is the ceremony of the objectification of people....The examination constitutes the individual as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge' (Foucault 1979:187,192). The basic principle of this 'science of discipline' is this: 'A place for everyone, and everyone in his place. Where someone is indicates who and what he is; in schools the best student moves to the head of the class' (Fillingham 1993:121).

Ann questioned this form of power/knowledge, the form of power which subjugates and marginalises her local knowledge and makes her a subject to someone else by control (school, church, family) and dependence (family). Foucault (1982:211) called this type of fight an anti-authority struggle. He looked at a series of oppositions against power imbalances that have developed: opposition to the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live:

These anti-authority struggles have a few things in common. They are 'transversal' struggles – not limited to one country. The aim of these struggles is the power effects as such. These are 'immediate' struggles – people criticise instances of power which are closest to them. They are struggles which question the status of the individual. They are an opposition to the effects of power which are linked to knowledge, competence and qualification: struggles against the privileges of knowledge.

(Foucault 1982:212)

3.4 YOUNG WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ann's story made me reflect on the conversations I have with other young women at school. The struggle Ann has is neither unique nor universal. I did not include her story as being representative of that of young women in general, but because many of the themes that we discussed during therapy are also present in the stories of other young people. I valued our conversations in particular because Ann has a gift for expressing through poetry her thoughts about the struggles and challenges a young woman experiences. Davies (1993:116) gives a perspective on the value this form of art has for providing the story lines:

The part stories play in shaping the unconscious, the traces and the enabling limits is difficult to capture. What slides into, informing the unconscious is, by definition, not open to inspection. It surfaces through dreams, in tranquil meditative moments, in poetry and other forms of creative writing and in powerful, inexplicable emotions. It can also provide the story lines through which we organise our talk and our relations with others without any recognition on our part that we are doing so. Although we cannot know precisely how the unconscious functions, we can nevertheless observe some of the effects.

Ann gave permission for her poems to be used in therapy with other young people. Many young women showed their delight about the way in which Ann could capture and express their own thoughts.

My personal therapeutic experience shows that more young women battle with the effects of depression than young men. Depression remains one of the most difficult struggles in a person's life because of the many factors that may be creating and maintaining it. The conventional wisdom has recently declared that depression is biologically and genetically derived and must therefore be treated by sophisticated chemical interventions. This explanation seems very alluring, but too many questions that need to be asked by a therapist are ignored by this point of view. Is it only biology that makes women twice as prone to depression than men? Could depression occur among women who have no voice in a relationship? To successfully address depression, we must understand it in context. It takes more than a pill to win the struggle against depression:

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Women who lose their voice in relationships often become depressed, and the best antidote is being heard. Addressing the power imbalance in the parent/child relationship and creating a sense of safety for depressed children to express the thoughts and feelings they have suppressed is a key piece in the work with young people.

(Papp 1997:55)

Patriarchy has silenced women's voices (the system of patriarchy was discussed in section 2.3.1 to 2.3.5). This system gave the power to men as the dominant party to whom women should be submissive. In the Church and society, women have been marginalised. Sexism results in the undervaluing of one half of humanity, by defining the other half as superior; it wants to and makes women prisoners of their biology. Religions have enforced the narrowly prescribed roles of wife and mother, where the woman is firmly positioned as a second-class citizen whose power is limited to sexuality. From seeing women as weak, incapable beings came the myth of the 'helpless female': 'This myth serves two purposes for patriarchy: firstly it keeps women out of certain "male preserves", thus reducing competition, and secondly, it allows women who are wives to become symbols of male power' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:22). Patriarchy is bad because it divides the world, creation, into a rigid two-caste system. Any system which can force one to live a restricted life, regulated and declared 'God-given' is damaging. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:28) state: 'Such is the extent of patriarchal power that women have internalised these demands of restriction so that many women have never developed a positive self-image. They have encountered men having power over them.'

Patterns of patriarchal authority are still visible in society today. In some situations, women's voices are not heard. Many young women have a desire to speak up about feminism. They are faced with the dominant message that feminism is about being equal to men, about having the same choices, as opposed to changing the fabric of Western culture. But young women in this culture are also faced with pressures from a variety of directions not to speak out about their beliefs – from peers, school structures and sometimes also from within

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families. It is not surprising that it can be difficult for young women to claim a feminist identity.

I believe that my role as a pastoral therapist is to increase women's awareness of themselves as beings with value. The narrative practice of deconstruction helps me to expose the cultural conditions of religious belief. During conversations with young women we re-think and re-examine traditional forms of worship as meaningful or meaningless. I agree with Isherwood and McEwan (1993:59) that 'as women it is our task to bring the absurdity and injustice of a situation (where women are pushed to margins) to attention of those who perpetuate it'.

My theological background gives me the ability to challenge the notions and beliefs of traditional theology during narrative conversations. The Judaeo-Christian Theological tradition has become the mainstream Western interpretation of God and his/her involvement with humanity. This reflection has been carried out by men; God has been viewed as male and the society that sprung from such reflection is patriarchal. For most of human history, women have found themselves operating in a world that does not contemplate women's experience. To enable women to question patriarchal structures and the resulting inequalities and to reclaim their voice, the precepts of feminism are essential: 'Feminism in its broadest context is social analysis reflecting societal inequality rather than simply demanding equal access for women in an unequal society. Feminism is the vehicle for women to own and express our experience without feeling alienated – it gives women space to accept their experiences as legitimate in a patriarchal world' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:9).

Today discrimination on the basis of gender is still with society in some churches, despite legislation forbidding gender discrimination in secular professions. When I was a full-time minister I was so caught up in the dogmatism of traditional theology that I sadly neglected to challenge sexism from the pulpit. I agree with Isherwood and McEwan (1993:78) that the overwhelming task of feminist theology is to face the fact that christian theology is guilty of sexism, as it has been guilty of racism and classism, but also that this faith, this theology, is not irredeemably sexist. Feminist theology gives me a key to deconstruct power inequalities through narrative conversations with young people, especially young women.

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According to the social construction discourse, the patriarchal patterns presented to society as 'natural', as the way things should be, are really a social reality imposed on and written into history by men. Patriarchy presented the 'truth' that a woman is a man's most valued possession. Women were stereotyped as sex symbols and society formulated normalising judgements about women's bodies. For women today, Western gender stereotypes that might silence their voices include the belief that they have to be beautiful (a culturally determined virtue at best), slender and sexy. These normalising judgements about their bodies can also lead to eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia. During conversations with young women whose lives are controlled by constant feelings of self-blame about their bodies and their looks, we co-deconstruct the pressures of society's norms and judgements regarding what women need to be. The effects of these discourses on young women are depression, self-abuse, feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness and eating disorders, to name but a few. The whole concept of pornography developed where women's bodies were exploited to sell everything from cars to cat food. Basically, pornography is financial: men make fortunes out of female flesh, and women have no choice but to sell their bodies in this way. Feminist theology questions pornography as a tool of patriarchy, because men are in charge, enabled to feel power over women. Feminist theology wants to guide women and men to find and value their common and shared humanity in each other and to liberate each other from gender-specific restrictions (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:113).

Society looks upon sex as one of the symbols of adulthood. If the definition of adulthood is control over one's life and an end to constant domination (see 2.3.2.4), it makes sense that young people speak of, and participate in sex in order to make claims to adult identity. Sexuality comes to represent freedom. Many young people are confused about sex. The voice of the Church on sexuality is restrictive and punitive. In conversations about sexuality, I use the insights of feminist theology to deconstruct the norms of the Church. The image of the perfect and ideal woman, the virgin-mother Mary, is contrasted to the scarlet woman who uses sex as a means to get what she wants. The Bible and the tradition of the Church are clear on this subject: sex outside of marriage (adultery) is a sin punishable with death.

Isherwood and McEwan (1993:53-58) discuss the image that the Church has of Mary as a woman of exemplary chastity and humility, which in turn was interpreted by the tradition of

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the church as submissiveness. They point out that Mary as a role model is contradictory because biologically a woman can either be a virgin or a mother, not both. Mary, mother of God, was exalted above all other women: perfect, ever-pure and goodness personified. Mary was placed far above ordinary women, thus increasing their feelings of inferiority. I find the insights of the feminist theologian Mary Daly particularly helpful in the deconstruction of sexuality. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:57) quote Daly's comments about the Virgin Mary: 'She is passive and obedient; she seeks nothing but to serve. Even before her birth, Mary was pure and without sin. It is an image of a woman who has no power over her own life -- by divine decree.' Feminist theology is of the opinion that patriarchy has made the 'Virgin Mary' a victim; it is the task of feminist theology to empower her once again by seeing her as the unmarried mother who through courage brought divinity to birth (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:58).

Women's struggle to be heard is not over. The road is hard and long. How can the caretakers of the young build a world where life-giving power replaces life-denying power? What can institutions like the school, the Church and family do to enable people to accept their humanity joyfully and make the journey bearable and valuable? I believe that the answers lie in finding respectful ways where individual dignity and integrity are honoured in mutual relating.

CHAPTER FOUR

JOE'S CULTURAL AND GENDER STRUGGLE

4.1 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN?

Foundationalist thought (see 1.2.1.1 on Modernism) provided several now frequently taken-for-granted terms of reference for shaping men's identity and for shaping their relationships with others. White (1992:35) states:

Foundationalist thought became dominant in recent history in Western culture. It is a tradition of thought that assumes objectivity, essentialism and representation. The assumption of essentialism proposes that we can know the truth about the very nature of material and psychological existence; that we can get to the 'bottom of things' and discover the essence of human nature.

Essentialist arguments claim that there is a core personality and character which defines masculinity, and which all men actually or potentially share: 'This tradition of thought identifies certain "truths" about men's nature, it privileges a particular knowledge of so-called "authentic", "real" or "masculine" ways of being that boys must learn from other men' (White 1992:37). Ideas about masculinity are thus important to young men as they try to identify an image of male maturity to which they might aspire.

4.1.1 Deconstructing masculinity

The question of what it means to be a man has only recently surfaced: 'Throughout most of history it was taken for granted that men acted like men because that was their nature, and women acted like women because they were made that way' (Balswick 1992:12). Society taught a traditional image of manhood that has formed the basis of masculine identity. Essentialism suggests that there is only one true way for men, only one model of masculinity that men can aspire to. McLean (1996:16) explains this understanding of masculinity as follows: 'Masculinity is often most clearly defined in terms of what it is not -- what it is afraid

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of being – and what most men definitely are not is women. Men are men because they don't cry, don't feel, don't need.' This reduction of masculinity to a singular unwavering essence can deny men the capacity to re-create themselves in new, diverse and imaginative ways. If boys' 'nature', predispositions and abilities are biologically given, it can narrow the possibilities for them. It can excuse failure and unacceptable behaviour because 'boys will always be boys'.

In this chapter I retell the story of Joe, a young man who had experienced trouble at school and at home. He struggles with his ideas of masculinity and what kind of adult man he wants to become. The story of Joe's problems at school is the story of many young men. What are the right questions to ask to find out more about young men and schooling? Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:13) believe that boys' views on masculinity 'also affect their behaviour at school, both in and out of the classroom – as well as their health and their safety in a range of cultural contexts.' McLean (1995:30) agrees with this argument: 'The root cause of boys' problematic behaviour is seen as the messages they are being given about what it means to be a man. We tell boys that their lives must be risky, wild and aggressive.' Balswick (1992:66) argues: 'The traditional definition of manhood encompasses not only what "real" men should do, but also what a real man should not do (for example not cry).' Many males today have a tremendous fear of not being masculine enough, which can lead to behaviour that they think may prove their masculinity. In the case of Joe, much time, energy and resources were spent on 'managing' him (being a bad boy). Schools are forced to develop programmes and strategies to handle disruptive behaviour, and to repair the damage done by some groups of boys to schools and school property.

To increase rather than constrain the possibilities for young men, I agree with Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:46) that we need to broaden our view beyond the biological: 'Masculinity is not a biological entity that exists prior to society; rather, masculinities are ways that societies interpret and employ male bodies.' Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:20) argue that the issue is society's understanding of masculinity:

At the centre of this struggle is the question of how masculinity is defined. Is masculinity to be understood as the destiny of biology, as singular and monolithic,

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as an essentially different and separate form of psychological development? Or is it to be constructed within the context of unequal gender relations, of multiple and plural human experience and cultural understanding, and of social and semiotic construction?

This view is in line with social construction discourse theories that hold truth and meaning as social constructs (see 1.2.1.3). Adopting a social constructionist view on masculinity opens up possibilities to explore multiple ways of being masculine. Carey (1996a:154) describes this view as follows:

Post-modernity presents a perspective on the construction of our reality that allows us to see how we have been recruited into particular ways of being that may or may not be useful or helpful. The possibility of developing new ways of being that are more in line with what we would prefer is opened up. We give meaning to our lives by interpreting the experiences we have in the light of the beliefs that we have about ourselves, and we largely dismiss those experiences which do not fit these beliefs. But these beliefs can be changed, they are not fixed or based on any essential truth about human nature. Our beliefs about gender are particularly seen as a social construct rather than as inherent and essential truths about our gender.

Becoming a man is then a matter of constructing oneself in, and being constructed by, the available ways of being male in a particular society: 'It is a matter of negotiating the various discourses of femininity and masculinity available in our culture, those powerful sets of meanings and practises we must draw on to participate in our culture and to establish who we are' (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998:46). White (1992:44) argues that although many of the subjectivities that make up a person's experience of the self are informed by dominant discourses, some are not: 'These alternative experiences of self can be considered to be sites of resistance and can provide a point of entry to the articulation and performance of alternative knowledges and practices of men's ways of being – and, of course, to the renegotiation of identity.'

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The process of deconstruction of discourses on masculinity involves looking 'at where our particular values and beliefs about ourselves as male/female come from, and making some conscious choices about what is no longer appropriate as well as what we wish to incorporate into a new identity' (Carey 1996a:155). Masculinity is not a performance by men, who have some underlying attributes opposed to those of women, but it is a relational matter which is constructed, negotiated and struggled over as humans participate in the practices of everyday life. Along with White (1992) as well as Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), I would like to explore a possibility of 'multiple masculinities': 'Masculinity is not a unified discourse...masculinity is diverse, dynamic and changing, and we need to think of multiple masculinities rather than some singular discourse' (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998:49).

How could I guide Joe to open possibilities to look beyond the dominant discourse of hegemonic masculinity? What questions could I ask to render visible alternative experiences of his masculinity and what practices of narrative therapy would enable him to weave these 'untold' stories into a preferred self narrative?

4.1.2 The construction of masculinity at school

In Australia, there is overwhelming evidence that young men are the chief culprits of disruptive behaviour in class (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998:169, McLean 1995:29). My experience as a therapist in South Africa is that teachers mostly refer young men to the therapy room for 'causing problems': the ones who 'don't do their homework', 'try to show off in front of the girls', 'talk in a rude way to teachers' and act 'aggressively'. McLean (1995:30) thinks that one of the aspects of male culture at school which is seen as particularly problematic is its anti-intellectual stance, resulting in boys' antipathy to school work: 'It is apparently just not possible to be good at school and to be a *real* boy on the way to becoming a *real* man.'

I do not agree with McLean's view. I have conversations with many young boys who study hard and show pride in doing well at school. I do think, however, that young men are confused about what teachers and peers expect from them. Most of the Afrikaans high schools in South Africa have rows with pictures of generations of the first rugby team in the entrance halls but the names of male students who passed matric *cum laude* are still missing

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from the honours role. Most young men are still under the impression that teachers expect them to excel at sport and just do well enough at school work to pass.

Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:130) state that, to young men, being successful at school does not mean being good at schoolwork, but simply being seen as 'cool', being accepted by the popular 'in-group'. To be 'cool' is based on a passive way of carrying and protecting oneself in the world; a nonchalance and a disdain for anyone who chooses or needs to exert themselves, and in this sense it is a ploy to indicate that all is under control, that everything is cool. Cool provides control, inner strength, stability and confidence.' This is an interesting contrast to the roughness and intense commitment so valued in the competitive sports young men participate in at school.

In many respects, men's sport is the archetype of institutionalised masculinity: it separates the men from the 'boys' and the qualities needed are toughness, aggression, commitment, power, courage and the ability to withstand pressure. Society teaches that to be male is to be strong, tough, rational and inexpressive of feelings (Batswick 1992:19). For many young men, sport provides entry to the world of men: '[it] is a rehearsal for and an endorsement of domination in male-female relationships' (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998:65). To exert bodily power is to some extent a necessary element of every sport, and, in a way it is almost like a war that has to be won at all costs. It is as if their struggle to achieve a satisfactory form of masculinity involves competing with and putting down others. 'Toughness' defines what it is to be a man, active, isolated, sporting, playing and masculine. This view stands in contrast to the 'weakness' of being passive, isolated, bookish, reading and feminine.

McLean (1995:38) argues that the school can shape a person's identity in terms of having worth as a human being in that 'the school itself is an organised production process which distributes images of identity.' Schools produce 'winners' or 'losers'. Getting detention or being suspended are not merely punishments, they are messages from the school structure about the student's identity.

Joe was in 'trouble' with teachers at school and Mrs Jones expected me to help him to make changes to disruptive and aggressive patterns of behaviour. The expectation is that the

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therapist must 'fix' the student. If the therapist adopts that approach, counselling can appear to be a simple extension of repressive disciplinary procedures: 'If it is used to simply bring people into line, it can inadvertently support social control mechanisms, bolster social hierarchies, obscure power relations and reproduce various forms of social mechanisms' (Winslade & Monk 1999:87). One of the questions that narrative therapy poses to therapists is this: 'How can I provide challenges that will help young people to make changes to their behaviour, and still treat them with respect, rather than colonise them against their will as objects of punishment or behaviour modification?' (Winslade & Monk 1999:87). The challenge is to engage a young person who has been behaving disruptively in a classroom in a productive and yet respectful conversation which can open doors for change.

I believe that narrative therapy offers fresh perspectives for school counsellors. I agree with Winslade and Monk (1999:82), who say: 'The freshness lies in the conversational style which young people experience as calling forth their best selves, rather than dwelling on, or disparaging, their worst selves.' The practise of 'not-knowing: the client is the expert' (see 1.2.3.5.1) position young people as beings with worth who are being listened to and whose stories are taken seriously. In this way, space is created for young people to talk freely. Externalising conversations about 'problems' allow the bypassing of guilt and shame and move directly towards taking responsibility for one's actions (see 1.2.3.5.2 on deconstruction).

Denborough (1995:86-88) discusses the responsibility of schools in the building of new ways of looking at masculinity, trouble and violence at school:

The broader responsibility of school systems and communities is to support young men's resistance to dominant gender messages. The first obvious direction is to teach young people about the process of gender construction. Teaching should be from the viewpoint of the disadvantaged. In the search for local solutions, the power relation between adults and young people needs to be challenged. To reduce violence we need to work with young men and women – they have much to learn from each other and we have much to learn from them. The adult men of society must begin to take responsibility for ending men's violence and creating new positive masculinities.

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Conversations with Joe and his family were important steps in the re-authoring of Joe's identity. But it was important to involve other people in noticing and crediting the changes as well. Durrant (1995:144) says one of the important roles of the school counsellor is to consult class teachers and school executives about students: 'It is a collaborate approach where the counsellor does not set him or herself up as an "expert who can fix things," and so is usually marked by a co-operative relationship.' Unfortunately, the teachers at Joe's school did not work with us to acknowledge the steps Joe took in his struggle against Trouble and Anger (see 4.2.2). This made me realise how the dominant discourses on childhood still limit adults in schools as institutions in South Africa. It also made me feel isolated in the struggle I have as a narrative therapist who aspires to change a system in which people are marginalised and subjugated.

The dominant discourses on masculinity affected Joe in many different ways. He positioned himself as a young man who could only be fulfilled if he could play basketball. He was not interested in schoolwork at all, and as a result of his 'laziness' he was labelled as a 'loser'. How could I challenge Joe to view his masculine identity as diverse, dynamic and changing? I had an ethical responsibility to make available to Joe the alternative messages about men which are available in the broader community, the multiple masculinities constantly challenging one another, even within the schoolyard.

4.1.3 Masculinity in the family

The essentialist assumption is that masculinity and femininity are what we are or traits we have, rather than effects we produce by means of particular things we do: 'To be a man it is not enough simply to be: a man must do, display, prove, in order to establish unchallenged manhood' (McLean, C 1996:16). What do young men learn at home about being masculine? The messages of how to be female and male are deeply imprinted in the cultural patterns of every society.

Patriarchy as a cultural system has put structures of privilege and power into place that ensured men's dominance (see 2.3.1 on the deconstruction of patriarchy). Within a patriarchal society, the man, as the head of the family, has to work and be profitable as the

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sole breadwinner of the family. Pease (1997:7) argues that men's material interests are clearly served by patriarchy, and that it is in their interest to have positions of power and control within social institutions; 'not only [in] men's economic interests – but also interests in having someone taking care of the children and doing the domestic labour, providing nurturance and support; alongside the interests in having greater opportunities to accumulate prestige and money in employment.' Since the industrialisation (over the past two hundred years), the traditional gender role was for men to go to work, and for women to stay at home. In many families and cultures, this view on gender has changed little. Men still expect to hold authority in the family; they still expect to be the main earners and to determine how the family's money will be managed; they still do little housework and spend far less time with their children than their wives do.

The home is therefore another site where young men can 'practise' gender and 'appropriate' performances of masculinity. If they learn that men are superior to women because of their bodily strength and mastery of technology, young men are offered possibilities for forming their views of themselves and their relation to others as acceptable ways of being. If they fall in line with patriarchy's 'truth' that men are men because they do not show any 'feminine' traits, they may develop contempt for women (see 2.3.1.3 on patriarchy's understanding of Eve/women as the main source of men's problems). C McLean (1996:17) says: 'This could fuel a basic masculine conflict because boys' mothers have been the source of love and security.'

In Bly's (1990) book on men and masculinity, *Iron John*, he addresses the devastating effects of remote fathers and mourns the disappearance of male initiation rites in Western culture. Bly (1990:25) is of the opinion that one of the problems of the 'absent father' within a patriarchal family is that a son receives teachings on masculinity from a feminine point of view:

If a son learns feeling primarily from the mother, then he will probably see his masculinity from the feminine point of view as well. He may be fascinated with it [the feminine point of view], but he will be afraid of it. He may pity it and want to reform it, or he may be suspicious of it and want to kill it. He may admire it, but

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he will never feel at home with it.

He continues to say that not seeing your father when you are small, never being with him, having a remote father, an absent father, a workaholic father, is an injury (Bly 1990:31). Although he makes a strong argument for the re-instatement of the father in the family, his view can lead to mother-blaming or leave the single-mother in a very difficult situation.

The teachings on what it means to be a man in the house and the experiences young men have at home can sometimes be confusing and damaging to young men's vision of masculinity. Bly (1990:96-99) explains that, on the one hand, Western culture still upholds the image of the father as the right man, the tough man, the true man. On the other hand, the father is often shown up as an object of ridicule in some television programmes (for example 'The Cosby Show', and 'Love and marriage'). In the film 'Star Wars', the father (Darth Vader/dark father) is a suspicious character. In many households the father is a bad-tempered fool as he comes home from work with despair and numbness springing from powerlessness – he has nothing to offer his son. The problem which then arises is this: 'How does a son imagine his own life as a man?'

A social constructionist view on gender suggests that 'gendered identities are not formed simply through our families, nor simply through our peers, but through relations with individuals, communities and institutions. In order to bring about change, our approaches will therefore need to operate on all these levels' (Denborough 1995:75). Becoming a man is not a thing one can accomplish once and for all; it has to be constantly reaffirmed. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:93) see the role that mothers can play in the negotiation of masculine identities as follows:

Women need to use their knowledge of gender to work sensibly and emotionally with their sons as they struggle to insert themselves into social and cultural practices; they need to encourage their sons to interrogate and explore masculinity and its effects upon their lives; and they need to insist on equality and justice in family work and responsibilities.

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In the deconstruction of gender, masculinity is seen not as a character trait or a social role that is taught by families, institutions and societies, and which is fixed and intransigent in adult life. Instead, masculinity is regarded as ongoing processes dependent upon systematic restatement, a process which is referred to as 'performing gender' or 'doing gender work' (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998:113).

I have conversations with young men on a daily basis. The stories they tell made me realise that it could be an extremely painful process learning to become a man. Some talk about the presence of fear – fear of ridicule, fear of humiliation, and sometimes fear of physical violence from their peers. The world of men can be an intimidating and often terrifying place for young men, who face the prospect of having to 'measure up' if they are to find a place within it. They often experience a huge lack of emotional support from boys and men around them.

4.2 JOE'S STORY

4.2.1 Introduction

The story of Joe lead me to the question whether society today is still being directed by foundationalist discourse on what is required from a man. Are these 'truths' about manhood still in place in institutions such as schools and families? What are the effects of essentialist thought on young men?

Joe is a fifteen-year old young person who had trouble with some of the teachers at his school. He grew up in Germany with his father and stepmother. Since he started high school in South Africa he has been staying with his paternal grandparents. His father and stepmother were still living in Germany. The Grade Eight teacher made an appointment for Joe to consult me. She told me that they had numerous problems with his behaviour in the classroom: 'He fails to hand in homework assignments, challenges the authority of the teachers and bunks some of the classes'. Joe did not turn up for the appointment. I was not surprised – in my experience students do not respond well when a teacher tries to set the appointment.

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Six months later, Joe's grandmother, Pam, called me to make an appointment. She wanted to talk about Joe and the problems he was experiencing at school. She told me that she had had several conversations with the headmaster and Mrs Jones, Joe's teacher, about Joe and his trouble adjusting to a different school system in South Africa.

I had two conversations with Joe's grandmother, Pam, before I met him; she wanted to 'fill me in on Joe's background'. Joe was the son of Jane and Chris, Pam's son. Joe's parents divorced when he was two years old and two years later Joe moved with his father to Germany. Chris married Sue when Joe was seven. Joe lived with them, but returned to South Africa when he was thirteen years old. He lived with his mother in Bloemfontein for six months before he moved to Centurion to live with his paternal grandparents to start his high school career.

Pam told me how much she loved Joe and that she could see the devastating effects of what he had gone through in his life. He does not have a good relationship with his mother and he thinks that she has rejected him. Jane's pregnancy with Joe had not been planned, and she had wanted to have an abortion. Pam thought that Jane could never make peace with having a son at such a young age, and that she battled to accept Joe. On the other hand, Chris had always been there for Joe. Joe adored his father and they had a solid relationship. Pam said that Joe missed his father terribly.

Pam was worried about the situation at school. The school had a disciplinary/punishment system whereby students receive debit points for every trespass of the school rules. Joe was very near the point of expulsion because of the number of debit points he had against him. Joe was in trouble with most of his teachers because he failed to do homework and 'bunked' classes frequently. I asked Pam if Joe could stand up for himself and make his voice heard on his views. She replied: **'Oh yes! Joe is definitely not scared to make his voice heard. Sometimes I think he is over-confident. He can make a stand for what he believes in. But now he has been labelled as "naughty", and a "trouble-maker". When something bad has happened, the teachers blame Joe. He is not always the guilty party.'** I promised Pam that I would talk with Joe soon.

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4.2.2 Trouble at school

A week later I met one of Joe's teachers in the hallway. She told me that Joe was making life hard for all the teachers at the school. My concern over the situation was growing. I decided to address the situation immediately and not wait for Joe to approach me. I went to his classroom and called him. The young man who accompanied me to the therapy room was proud and confident and full of life.

Joe and I had our first conversation the following week. He told me that he stands up for himself and his beliefs. This is sometimes mistaken as 'backchat' and rudeness. But the biggest problem he had was the label he now has to wear as 'trouble-maker'. He gets the blame for trouble in class – sometimes even when he is not involved in the mischief. Joe told me: **'I do not trust people easily. Most of the teachers don't have a clue of what I am capable of.'** He wanted to have conversations with me, for he was 'fed-up' with the situation at school.

Lynette: Joe, I want to thank you for agreeing to have a conversation with me. I spoke to your grandmother last week and we are worried about the situation at school. Can we talk about this?

Joe: You know, Lynette, I don't give a damn about what the teachers think or how they see me. My friends know who I am and what I can be. My friends know me. And I know who I am and what I am worth.

Lynette: And are you satisfied with what is happening at school?

Joe: No, I am not, because many people blame me for things I am not guilty of. I am satisfied with myself and who I am. People think I am lazy because I don't always do my homework, but I am not lazy. I battle to do something if I'm not interested...and I am really not interested in school. I don't do well in school.

Lynette: What is your dream for the future?

Joe: My biggest dream is to be a professional basketball player. I played basketball when I lived in Germany. I am crazy about the game.

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Lynette: What words (skills/characteristics) can you think of that go with basketball?

Joe: James Small, the rugby player, has what it takes. He is a rebel. I mean, you gotta have an attitude! Otherwise you won't make it in the game.

Lynette: Would you describe yourself as a 'rebel' with an 'attitude'?

Joe: Yes, but not in a bad way like adults think.

Lynette: So you have an 'attitude' but in a good way. Your grandmother told me that you are very capable of standing up for what you believe in and making your voice heard. Can it be that you have a very strong will?

Joe: Yes. I don't care what other people think of me. I obviously care about what my family and friends think, but definitely not what teachers say or think!

Lynette: I heard that Trouble¹² bothers you a lot at school. Does it bother you in all of your classes?

Joe: No. Four of my nine teachers think badly of me. They don't know me. They underestimate me. I can do anything if I want to!

Lynette: Are you saying that you use determination or that you have a strong will?

Joe: Yes. That is precisely what the teachers don't like about me. They don't like it if I speak my mind about the 'crap' that we have to learn or the stupid rules!

Lynette: If I ask the people who know you well, will they agree that you have a strong will?

Joe: Yes...and I can tell you this: there are many people who have respect for me.

Lynette: If I understand you correctly, the people who know you are aware of your capabilities, and they respect you for that. On the other hand, the teachers do not know you, and some of them perceive you as a 'rebel' and a 'trouble-maker'.

Joe: That's right. But I choose people to be close to me and to know me. I don't want everybody to know who I am.

¹² Trouble is capitalised here and throughout this chapter whenever it is personified/externalised.

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Two weeks passed. Pam called me to inform me that the disciplinary committee of the school wanted to expel Joe. I wrote a letter to the committee on behalf of Joe:

To the Disciplinary Committee

Report: Joe Smith (Grade eight)

Earlier this year Mrs Jones spoke to me about Joe. She informed me that he was more in trouble than out of it. On the thirtieth of August 1999 I had a conversation with Joe's grandmother, Pam. She gave me useful information on Joe's background and shared her worries about the situation that Joe finds himself in. One week later I had a therapeutic conversation with Joe.

Joe is a young man of strong character. He is capable of standing up for his beliefs and to make his voice heard on his views, among friends, family and at school. Joe believes that having a strong will is one of his best qualities. Joe believes in himself and his capabilities. This is evident in the way he handles situations in the classroom. Many people mistake these qualities of Joe's with being stubborn. It does not come as a surprise, then, that Joe's strong will and his belief in himself work to his detriment in situations at school. He has a reputation of being a 'trouble-maker'. He admits that he did certain things that got him into trouble, but the perception some adults have of him lead to false accusations. People expect him to be the guilty party and they accuse him falsely. Joe told me that he is concerned about this situation, although some people might think he does not care at all.

Joe does not talk to many people about himself, his fears or his dreams. The result is that not many people know Joe's capabilities or strong qualities. He has a bad reputation and people tend to categorise and underestimate him.

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I know that Joe has potential to be a quality student. I ask that you give him another chance. We will have therapeutic conversations to enable him to realise his promising potential.

Yours sincerely

Lynette Steyn

Joe was not expelled. The disciplinary committee gave him a chance, on condition that he obeyed the rules, kept quiet in class, did his homework and did not cause any trouble. He was told that the very next trespass would lead to immediate expulsion. After two weeks we had our next conversation.

Lynette: Is there anything that you would like to share with me about the meeting of the disciplinary committee?

Joe: They were very unfair! You know, they only asked the teachers who don't like me to write a report on my behaviour. They told me how grateful I should be for another chance and if I screw up this time it's goodbye. They gave me a list of the things I must and must not do, and talked, and talked and warned. It was a bad experience.

Lynette: Do you think that you will be able to do the things expected of you?

Joe: It will be very hard to 'stay clean'. I don't know if I can do it.

Lynette: What do you need to do to 'stay clean'?

Joe: For a start I have to catch up all the homework I never did. That I can do. I have to obey the teachers and pay attention in class. And I have to keep my big mouth shut and not talk back. But I get so angry sometimes! It would be difficult to stay calm and quiet.

Lynette: Are you saying that Anger sometimes gets the better of you and you get into trouble?

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Joe: Yes. When I'm angry I say things I should not, in a way which can be offensive to teachers.

Lynette: Anger is well-known for doing that to people. When Anger takes me over sometimes I shout at my children and say things that I regret. It makes me feel bad about myself. I wonder, does Anger at times make you think bad things about who you are?

Joe: Yes. I know better than to ruin my own life by saying stupid things to stupid people who have power over me. I wish I could think before I speak!

Lynette: Don't we all! You told me before that you have a strong will – an 'attitude'. Do you think maybe your strong will can work with you to stand up against Anger?

Joe: Yes. I'm also thinking how my one friend in class can help me against Anger: he can slap me on the back if I want to talk back!

Lynette: I want to offer my help in your struggle to 'stay clean' at school. What do you think about the idea that you and I write a letter to all your teachers about your intention to 'behave' and ask them to list the times when Trouble cannot get you to misbehave?

Joe: It could work.

Together Joe and I wrote the following letter to his teachers:

Dear Sir/Madam

We want to share with you some of the things that are happening in Joe's life. Most of you are aware of the hold Trouble has had on Joe during the last few months. Trouble has made Joe's life miserable. Trouble has had success in convincing some people that Joe is a 'trouble-maker'. When Trouble was around, Joe ignored orders in class, did not do his homework as was expected from him, and let Anger take over, which led to harsh words.

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Joe is not satisfied with the hold that Trouble and Anger have on his life. He wants to be in control of his own life. He wants to stand up against the bad effects of Trouble and Anger.

Joe needs your help and support in his struggle against Trouble and Anger. We would appreciate it if you can make a note every time Joe succeeds in standing up against Trouble and/or Anger. Please share this information with Joe so that we can talk about it during therapy.

Best wishes

Joe Smith and Lynette Steyn ('Fighters' for a Trouble-free life)

Joe took some control away from Trouble and Anger. Two weeks passed without any incident. Unfortunately for Joe, no teacher responded to our letter. Joe said that he was not surprised by their lack of interest in him: **'I knew they would not write any good report on my behaviour, because it would prove them to be wrong about me as a "trouble maker". Adults think they know everything and they don't like to be wrong about children.'**

4.2.3 Trouble at home

Two weeks later Pam called me with the alarming news that Joe and his best friend had been caught by the police for damaging street lights. They had both been under the influence of dagga¹³ when they were caught. Pam's husband found dagga plants in their backyard that Joe had planted. They took Joe to see a medical doctor, who advised them to have Joe put in an institute to cure his addiction. At first the news was kept from Joe's father, but during a telephone conversation he found out and he was furious. Pam told me that Joe had been involved in 'gangs' and drugs during the time he lived in Germany. Joe's father wanted to get Joe away from the influence of his older friends in Germany and that is why he sent him to South Africa. He believed that it was in Joe's best interests to live with his grandparents and

¹³ The most freely available drug in South Africa is cannabis/marijuana/dagga. Many young people have tried this drug. It has other names like 'pot', 'joint', 'weed' or 'digarette'.

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he was very disappointed in Joe for falling for drugs a second time. He sent the following letter to his parents (Joe's grandparents):

Dear Mom and Dad

I am so awfully sorry that this has happened to you, and that you are caught in the autumn of your lives, with a problem so big as this with Joe. I am sad that Joe has not seen the privilege he has, to have a family that loves him so much.

It is therefore with very strong and hard ways we have to tackle this problem. To touch Joe with 'gloves' is now over. Joe needs tight reigns and control in all areas of his life. All these strongly controlled areas are too much for a 'grandparent family' and the last chance is now for Joe to sign a contract in which he commits himself to change and stop his anti-social behaviour. He either signs the contract and submits to your [Dad and Mom's] authority, or he is removed from his privileges and goes into a youth home here in Germany.

My suggestions for the contract with you

- 1. He hands in all pipes (dagga) and all the tools for his habit.**
- 2. He, in front of the whole family (as a unit) destroys the drug that is leading him into all this trouble.**
- 3. He admits he has a problem and we look for a solution (therapy). He turns his back on his drug problem (crutch) and looks for a new crutch (therapy) in which we all help him,**
- 4. He stops smoking!! He needs medical help.**
- 5. He accepts that he will be controlled.**

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6. He admits his wrongdoing toward the family, and apologises to you [Mom and Dad] who have the authority.
7. He falls in line to your suggestions and what you tell him to do.

My contract with Joe

1. You, Joe Smith, submit yourself to the privilege to live with Pam and George.
2. You submit to obey your grandparents who have your best interests to look after, and are acting on my behalf.
3. You stop smoking dagga and any other illegal drug you might be using.
4. You admit that you have a problem with drugs and get help, with which the family will help you.
5. You never grow dagga at your grandparents' home or any other place again.
6. You apologise to your Ouma and Oupa for your wrongdoing, and promise to fall in line to what they tell you.
7. You stop smoking before you come to Germany in December.
8. Admit and take note that the privilege of a nice life in South Africa, with all your loving family, is not your right, but that you are a guest in your grandparents' home.

Consequences

If you do not stop all this nonsense before I see you in December, your privilege of living with your grandparents will be taken away from you. Joe, you will return to Germany and be put into a Youth home where I will see that you are closely

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monitored. You have abused and misused your right to live in a family, either here or with your grandparents. You have showed mistrust and chosen of your own free will to go against the laws of the family (anti-social) and laws of the government (planting an illegal substance) and I am saying to you stop.

I have, with your last drug offence in Germany, allowed you to start again in South Africa. I cannot, as your father, allow you to destroy the love and trust of your grandparents. You will bow in love to the love your grandparents give to you. You must know they don't have to do it. They want to, because they want to give you a chance in life. They are offering up their time and energy to look after you as best as they can.

You have a chance now to change it. It's for you to decide. You don't have to sign any contract if you don't agree to my terms. If not, I will see to it that you are returned here before the end of the month.

Chris

I spoke to Joe about the fax his Dad sent. He was remorseful and told me that he wanted to continue living with his grandparents. He said that he did not want to go to a youth home in Germany and that he would sign the contract his dad proposed. I wrote to his father of my involvement in his family.

Dear Chris

Let me start this letter by introducing myself. My name is Lynette Steyn and I am the therapist at the school Joe attends. I have been working as a therapist at three schools since the beginning of last year. I was a minister in a church for five years where I was responsible for the youth groups. I am currently doing a

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masters degree at Unisa in Narrative therapy. I spend twenty hours weekly in therapy with young people.

In March this year, Mrs Jones, the teacher responsible for the Grade eight pupils, asked me to speak to Joe. It seemed that he had some problems adjusting to the school system in South Africa. My experience is that young people do not respond well if a teacher tries to force them to come to therapy, and this proved to be the case with Joe. He did not pitch up at the session. On 30 August, Pam made an appointment with me and we had a long conversation about Joe and the situation at school and at home. She told me about Joe's background, some family matters and expressed her concern about the problems he experienced at school. Joe was bothered by Trouble in some of his classes. Trouble tricked him into challenging the authority of some of his teachers, bunk school and sometimes not do his homework. Pam and Mrs Jones had had conversations about Joe, and your mom was looking to me for help and advice.

I decided to simply call Joe and talk to him, for now I had a substantial reason to get involved in his life. We had our first conversation two weeks later, and it was pleasant and interesting. One of Joe's strong qualities is that he stands up for himself and for his beliefs. This quality is not always recognised by the teachers and the other adults in Joe's life. The perception some teachers have about Joe is that he is stubborn, aggressive and rude. He told me that Trouble gets the better of him in four classes. Trouble has managed to label Joe as a 'trouble-maker'. This means that some people expect Joe to be the instigator and wrongdoer – even if he is innocent. Joe said that he is not satisfied with this situation and the part that Trouble plays in his life. He told me that Laziness bothers him, for he is not interested in schoolwork. I asked Joe what he thought about himself and he replied: 'I know what I am capable of, I can do anything if I put my heart and mind to it. I have respect for myself and there are many people who show their respect for me.' He also told me that he does not open up to many people and therefore not many people know Joe for who he is and can be. He said: 'I choose

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people whom I can trust.' I am privileged that Joe chose me to support him to become free of Trouble.

I was sad when I heard that Trouble managed to make Joe appear before the disciplinary committee later that month. I wrote a report of our conversation and asked the Governing Body to give Joe a chance so that he can realise his potential through therapy. He was not expelled; only given a last warning. I was pleased about their decision, because I know that Joe can have a bright future.

I had another conversation with Joe during which we planned his tactics against Trouble. Together we wrote a letter to all his teachers, asking them to give Joe some written feedback on his victories over Trouble. **NONE OF THE TEACHERS RESPONDED TO THIS INVITATION.** My daughter is in the same class as Joe and she told me that Joe's situation had improved. Joe told me that he wanted to get his schoolwork up to date so that he can start studying for the exams.

We spoke a little about his mother and her lack of involvement and interest in Joe's life. He said that he has come to accept the situation and he is not bothered by her attitude. He sees in Pam the mother he never had. He told me that you mean a lot to him and that it hurts him to be parted from you.

Pam called on me and told me about the dagga plants and showed me your letters and the contract that Joe must adhere to. I promised to write to you to offer a suggestion on how to handle this unwelcome situation. I hope I can play a part in Joe's life so that we can look for ways for him to cope with this situation. I saw him yesterday and he was eager to continue our conversations. I told him that I think family therapy with you in Germany might not be such a bad idea. You may come to an understanding of where Joe is on his journey. I do not oppose your view on the rules Joe should obey. I ask your permission to continue therapeutic conversations with your son to help him and your family. I am convinced that Joe is competent to take radical steps to make the situation better and be in control of his own life.

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I have given this letter to both Joe and Pam to read before faxing it to you. If you want to talk to me at any stage, you can e-mail me.

Best wishes

Lynette Steyn

Chris did not reply. I continued therapy with Joe with the permission and consent of his grandmother. We had four conversations before it was time for him to leave for Germany. He thought it would be a good idea if I wrote to Chris about our conversations and opened up a means of communication between myself and any therapist Joe might see in Germany. I wrote the following letter:

Chris

Joe and I had four therapy sessions since my last letter to you. He thought it would be a good idea to share some of the things that we discussed. Sometimes people can exclude their loved ones from their lives by keeping important wishes and dreams from them. And we wanted to include you in Joe's journey as he tries to find meaning in his life.

Joe has made some changes in his life. Some of the changes can be seen, like staying clean of dagga and avoiding Trouble at school. Some changes are invisible to other people, like changes in one's perspective. My view is that we all grow and change into a new person every day. Joe has made some mistakes in his life. These mistakes and wrong choices have made it difficult for his family to trust him. I am sure that, if we believe in him and show him our trust, he will live up to our expectations. Joe has many qualities that can work on his side to make a success of his life. He told me that he wants people to get to know what he is capable of. He is not completely satisfied with his sense of responsibility and he wants to improve that. I appreciate the fact that Joe is always ready to carry the consequences of his choices. He does not run away or blame somebody else when

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he messes up. I never asked him where he learned that, and I wonder if maybe it was from you?

We spoke about Joe's biggest dream: basketball. His whole face lights up and he seems to get more energy when he talk about this passion. When I asked Joe about a highlight in his life, he told me about the short time that he played basketball for a club in Germany. The coach told him the team's performance lifted five levels because of his performance, and two other players' performance on the track. I asked Joe what the coach would say if we asked him to give us the reason for the team's better performance. Joe thought the coach would answer that it was his (Joe's) drive, energy, enthusiasm and passion. I know there are not many opportunities to play basketball in South Africa, and I mentioned the possibility of Joe's applying to become an exchange student to America. Joe said he is too young and his grades are not up to standard.

Joe gave me permission to share my opinion on the school system in South Africa with you. I think the cultural differences make it easy for Joe to fall victim to the voice of Trouble. He told me that a private school would suit him better. I hope that you can reach an agreement on this issue when he visits you. I hope that you, together with your wife and other child, can create a friendly atmosphere this holiday where you can get to know each other better and grow closer. Joe is also concerned about the rules concerning his social activities with his friends in Germany. I think it could be a good idea to talk about it as soon as possible for the sake of everyone's peace of mind. If the therapist wants to talk to me he/she is most welcome.

Best wishes for a festive season

Lynette Steyn

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One week before the final exams, Joe bunked a class and was told that he could finish Grade Eight, but that he was not welcome at the school to continue his high school career. I spoke to Mrs Jones and the headmaster on behalf of Joe, but they insisted that they had to stick to the final warning they had given him earlier. It was obvious to them, they said, that Joe was not co-operating and they wanted to set an 'example' so that the other boys would take the rules and warnings seriously.

Davies (1996:238) says the ideal of freedom from oppressive systems can only be realised if these structures are deconstructed and if we listen to one another. There is a need for new metaphors for school management. The authority of teachers over students is generally understood as a necessary basis for the management and control of classrooms:

Children do not have the freedom to innovate or to reject teachers' interpretations. While teachers might want children to bring 'something of their own' to the classroom or lesson, what it is that is brought must conform to tightly set knowledge boundaries and to acceptable forms of saying or knowing, and will be subjected to teachers' authoritative scrutiny, interpretation and evaluation.

(Davies 1993:39)

Joe got into trouble for bringing 'something of his own' to school and to the classrooms. His opinions did not fit with those of the school system. He was condemned and expelled. He managed to pass Grade Eight.

4.2.4 Masculinity and drugs

At the beginning of the following year Joe's father contacted me with a request that I help Pam to find a suitable school for Joe, preferably a boarding school. His first choice was that Joe be sent to Boys Town. Our application to Boys Town was unsuccessful. Other boarding schools were unsuitable because of distance. Three weeks after school had started Pam and I managed to find a high school nearby which accepted Joe. I called Pam a few times to find out how Joe was. She told me that he was managing to stay out of trouble.

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A year passed. I called Pam again. Joe had passed Grade Nine. I asked her if I could have more conversations with Joe about Trouble at home and at school which bothered him before. What follows are extracts from two conversations we had.

Lynette: It's been a long time since we saw one another and I am curious about the things that happened in your life. How was the holiday you spent in Germany?

Joe: It was okay. I never went to therapy though.

Lynette: Did your father ever speak about the 'contract' you signed, therapy or the drug tests he wanted you to undergo?

Joe: He never even mentioned therapy or the drug tests. Once or twice he reminded me about our contract and warned me about the seriousness of the matter. When we had arguments he would say something, you know, be sarcastic about drugs.

Lynette: I know, because you told me then, that you did not give up smoking. It was one of his conditions that you stop. Did he find out?

Joe: He knew I did not stop smoking the minute I got off the plane – he could smell it. At first he said nothing. Later he just told me that I should try to give it up because it is bad for my health.

Lynette: You told me once that you do not get along well with your stepmother. What happened with your relationship with Sue?

Joe: The first weekend she started with her nonsense. I freaked out and told her that she was not my mother and that she should leave me alone. She pretty much did that. We were polite for my father's sake, I did what she expected, and the rest of the time we ignored one another. There were no more fights between us.

Lynette: Joe, I am grateful that you've always been honest with me. I hope you can trust me to speak the truth when I ask you about dagga and your use of it. When I spoke to your grandmother to make this appointment, she told me that you still use dagga. Is that the truth?

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Joe: Yes, I still smoke a joint or two every weekend. During the school holidays I smoke a little bit more. But I never smoke during the week. That is my rule.

Lynette: Would it be okay for you if we talk more about drugs?

Joe: I don't have a problem with that.

The legal and illegal drug trade is the second most lucrative industry in the world, following the arms trade, but preceding oil (Raven 1997:4). Drug issues can be complex. In modern society the use of certain drugs has negative effects. Drug issues cannot be neatly divided into good and bad, soft and hard, safe and dangerous: 'Which drugs are legal and which drugs are illegal, which drugs are considered to be fine and which ones are considered only to be used if you're really screwed up, is completely political' (Moss & Butterworth 1999a:4).

Around the world, statistics show that young people are trying drugs at a very young age. Joe started smoking and using dagga when he was only twelve years old. Although general statistics on drug abuse among young people in South Africa are limited, the caregivers of young people (teachers, doctors, therapists, pastors) tend to agree that the use of illicit drugs is fairly common. The survey that Gilliomée (2000:51) did at an Afrikaans high school shows that more young men experimented with drugs than young women and that cannabis is the most likely to be offered or available. Gilliomée (2000:52) asked high school pupils: 'Have you ever experimented with drugs?' 13% of the respondents answered in the affirmative.

How is society supposed to handle young people that use and/or abuse drugs? It is important that young people are educated on the effects of these substances and become 'drugwise'. Moss and Butterworth (1999a:9) believe it is important that therapists and caregivers seek alternative ways of counselling drug-using young people and do not send them straight to clinics to 'get-cleaned-up'. Narrative therapy focuses on people's alternative stories and preferred realities (White 1992:127). Deconstructive questioning is an important discourse in the narrative approach. Moss and Butterworth (1999b:97) asked the following deconstructive questions:

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So, some drugs are sanctioned, advertised and glorified, while on others war is declared. What are the implications of declaring war on drugs – which in reality means declaring war on the people who use drugs? How did the drug laws convince us they were for our own good? How is declaring war on young users going to help them? How is a criminal record going to help them? How can workers ensure that the politics of drug use are not obscured in their conversations with young people around drugs?

During my conversation with Joe I tried to explore the 'not yet said', the alternative stories about drugs he had to offer. It was also my responsibility to help him see the effects drugs had on him.

Lynette: When did you have your first experience with drugs?

Joe: Around the age of twelve. I was frustrated after I broke my leg and couldn't play basketball – you know I did a lot of sports earlier in my life. I swam, played tennis and basketball. I had older friends who had a bad influence on me. When I look back now, I think I tried to be like older people who could do what they want with their lives. I wanted to make my own decisions on what I can and cannot do.

Lynette: If you have a son one day, what advice would you give him on choosing his friends?

Joe: I would never allow him to have nineteen-year old friends when he is only eleven!

Lynette: So you started using dagga at twelve. Did you ever use any other substances?

Joe: No. And I never will. I won't be able to stop after the first time so I won't start. It is a 'no go' area for me.

Lynette: How do you manage to stay away from other drugs?

Joe: I know that the music they have at Rave clubs can lead to the use of dangerous drugs, and the drugs are available there, so I don't go to clubs.

Lynette: Are you proud of yourself because you never took other drugs?

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Joe: Very! I never used to think ahead but as I grow older I do that more often.

Lynette: Does your family know that you've never taken any other drugs?

Joe: I told them several times but they do not believe me. They think all drugs are the same. I am fascinated by dagga¹⁴ and I know everything about it; it is actually not so bad for you as long as you don't abuse it.

Lynette: How did you become so 'drugwise'?

Joe: I read every available article, watch programmes on television and listen whenever experts come to the school.

Lynette: Are all young people your age 'drugwise'?

Joe: I don't think so. I guess only the clever ones find out about drugs so that they can use it and not abuse it.

Lynette: Would you say that you show self-care in the way that you use dagga?

Joe: I never thought so but I guess I do.

Lynette: Your grandmother tells me that you manage to stay out of Trouble's way in your new school. How do you do that?

Joe: I just try to keep my mouth shut. Teachers will always be teachers and they are all alike: they think they know everything, they try to control pupils and they degrade us. I hate that!

Lynette: Are there times when you stand up for your beliefs?

Joe: Yes. But I think that I've grown up since you saw me a year ago! I do not say everything that comes to my mind. I just say to myself that teachers are not worth all the trouble. And I have to complete school to do what I really want to do with my life.

Lynette: I am sure you will do just that!

4.3 MEN'S VOICES ON MASCULINITY

Initially I thought the story of Joe was about young men and Trouble at school. The views of Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), White (1992) and McLean, C (1996) lead me to a deconstruction of

¹⁴ Joe told me about the many uses of cannabis and provided me with more information on the drug.

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the concept of masculinity. The section I wrote was from my point of view as a woman, therapist, mother and theologian. Narrative therapy is about being accountable for what is spoken. To put this narrative practice into action, I asked four men to reflect on my attempt to deconstruct masculinity. I asked them to read sections 4.1 and 4.2 of the research report and give me their views and experiences of masculinity.

Francois is a white heterosexual male who is nineteen years old. He is a first-year medical student.

During the adolescent and pre-adolescent phases of my development, I also grappled with the construction of my masculinity, as such. In retrospect I think that masculinity was the measure in which you met the challenges and exercised control over the roles defined for you, as a male, by society.

Society in this case being collectively all the social categories you felt or were a part of. The roles I had defined for me by various of the categories I belonged to, however indirectly, clashed severely. On one hand I lived in books, where a certain kind of masculinity was emulated. On the other hand, every time I closed my book with a snap, I awoke in the classroom, surrounded by my testosterone-pumped peers, who certainly did not give a damn about the masculinity of poetry.

Although I could, and did, often balance these clashes, the resulting confusion led me to a semi-serious sexuality crisis at the age of fifteen, when I felt that my ideas of masculinity was irreconcilable with those of my average heterosexual peer. Therefore, I was either not masculine, which I didn't believe, or I couldn't be heterosexual. It was only after some half-hearted experimenting and serious soul searching that I hit upon the truth: I was not one of my peers. However much I might share with them in a social setting, my masculinity I didn't, and also it wasn't defined by them. The other important lesson I learned is that claiming that you are homosexual is an excellent way to pick up women.

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Jaco is a thirty-four year old male who practises in clinical psychology. He has a Ph. D. in psychology. He wrote the following:

When most people hear the word 'masculinity', it is immediately viewed in a negative sense. The effect is deeply felt by men: we do not know what people expect from us and we are criticised. 'Masculinity' is associated with aggression, alcoholism, oppression, crime, abuse and rape. In my work with men I hear about men's struggle to accept equality of sexes. Some overcompensate for their sense of uncertainty by being over-competitive in sport or materialism. This may result in absent fathers who spend all of their time at work, in the gymnasium and at sport events. The boys of these absent fathers have little communication with their fathers and they grow up without a role model. When they go to nursery school and primary school, the male role models are scarce. Boys need to identify with their fathers from a young age; in the case of an absent father, a boy may be confused about his masculinity.

Anthony is forty-three years old and has a degree in maths and science. He told me:

In my work I am used to cold, hard facts. I read the pages several times and I was challenged to think about masculinity. I always thought that being masculine is just part of how things are in this world.

I am forty-three years old and have three sons of my own. I grew up in a stable home with a very successful father and a housewife mother. My masculinity developed without any conscious influences in that regard. My parents never gave me any prescriptions on what a boy or a man should and should not do. It was my own free choice to play rugby, ride motorcycle and do the things men usually do. My masculine development was within society's norms of what it meant to be a well-adjusted male.

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Johan is a thirty-five year old single, white male who practises as a full-time minister in the *Hervormde Kerk van Afrika*. He has a masters degree in psychology in the phenomenology of religious experience. His reflection on the deconstruction of masculinity was the following:

I was interested on your view of the 'fall' of traditional masculinity. It became clear to me, as I read the section, that I have been thinking along these lines for a long time. It does not mean that I doubt my own masculinity, it's just that I have moved beyond traditional thinking for such a long time that I battle to join the 'traditional' struggle.

I do not agree with McLean (1995:30) that one of the aspects of male culture at school which is seen as particularly problematic is its anti-intellectual stance, resulting in boys' antipathy to schoolwork: 'It is apparently just not possible to be good at school and to be a *real* boy on the way to becoming a *real* man.' Some of the most unpopular boys at school are the 'stupid' ones. The typical young man who becomes headboy holds a balance between good marks and sport achievements.

The fact that young men have no problem walking around with pierced ears, 'gel' in their hair and designer clothes, makes me think that a new era of masculinity has dawned. On the other hand the naivety and naturalness of some teenage girls, bring memories of what was expected of boys when I was young. What happened to cause this shift, this movement beyond sexual boundaries? The answer is that post-modernity was born. This new paradigm has influenced the way we look at religion, science, technology, work and sexuality. Our only security lies in the certainty that there are no certainties and truths anymore. Within post-modernity there is no room for isolation, intolerance or arrogance.

The reflections by these four men make it clear that some of the images of adult manhood provided by the popular culture (printed media, films, television) are worn out. Carey (1996a:153) says men's movements are formed because traditional definitions of masculinity no longer work: 'The models of masculinity that today's men have inherited are no longer

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desirable or appropriate; they need to be challenged and reworked.' A post-modern view on masculinity is that it is diverse, dynamic and changing. There is a need to acknowledge plural masculinities rather than to assume a singular masculinity.

4.4 CHALLENGES

Neuger and Poling (1997:13) are of the opinion that this is a critical time of transition for men in the Christian churches: 'Many men are no longer sure of their niche, their place in the Church or in society. As womanist and feminist movements redefine gender roles and challenge traditional masculine roles, men often don't know what to think or say about themselves.' It is a time of new pressures for men – to commit to relationships, to communicate innermost feelings, to nurture children, to share housework, to integrate sexuality with love, and to curb aggression and violence. Neuger and Poling (1997:227) speak of this as a crisis: 'Traditional masculine ideology has been shaken to such an extent that the resulting masculinity crisis has left men feeling bewildered and confused and the pride associated with being a man is lower than at any time in the recent past.'

Pease (1997:40) describes patriarchal masculinity as a health hazard: 'Dominant forms of masculinity reduce the possibilities for the expression of feelings and emotions in ways that build upon connectedness. As such men either learn to discard their feelings and not even show them to themselves, or they learn to express their feelings and emotions in ways that alienate others and therefore themselves. Fear is an unacceptable emotion in dominant masculinity.'

Things are changing in the culture as gender roles are successfully challenged and changed. Balswick (1992) wrote a book about men's search for new identity, *Men at the crossroads*. He describes the development of the men's movement as follows:

The early men's movement dates back to the early 1970's. As the women's movement gained momentum, men who were supportive of women's goals searched for ways to act out their support. But as men began to deal with their own issues, they quickly found that men were also held captive by the traditionally

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defined male role. The men's movement changed during the 1980's helping men to become aware of their own imprisonment in roles.

(Balswick 1992:35-37)

There may have been a time when the traditional male role was an unquestionable way of being. But given the realities of modern life, trying to perpetuate the old roles can be costly. The costs can be tallied up in a number of different areas: men's health, male friendships, men's marriages, children and women have suffered (Balswick 1992:15-19). If boys are to be shown how dominant masculinity constrains as much as it advantages them, they need to see how these images and practices are sustained, and at what cost to their opportunities to live lives which are open to diverse experiences and positive relationships with others. According to Neuger and Poling (1997:229) the real question facing men (and human/kind) today is this: 'Are there values and traits that men can claim that still respect, and even hold unique, the experience of being male, which are neither patriarchal and destructive nor harmful for men themselves?' One can condemn patriarchy and men's domination and still affirm qualities associated with masculinity. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:222-223) suggest that we see masculinity as a process; this means:

Boys will need to see the folly of believing that there is only one form of masculinity which is narrow, rigid and inflexible, and whose integrity and viability depends on its opposition to femininity and more diverse concepts of masculinity. Performing [doing] masculinity is never complete, but is always struggled over, a constant part of everyday life which pervades all its aspects.

New understandings are currently evolving regarding the ways in which gender is constructed. Whereas in previous generations there were commonly accepted beliefs about the 'nature' of masculinity and femininity, now these beliefs can no longer be accorded the status of unquestioned and unquestionable truth. This notion is affirmed by this apposite comment on the deconstruction of masculinity by Carey (1996b:85):

The raising of boy children must be looked at in the light of cultural discourses around gender, and in doing so, we can hope to find new ways of bringing up our

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children that are closer to the ideal of a non-sexist society, where neither gender is subjected to demeaning or dehumanising practices on the basis of their gender.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS ON REFLECTIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I reflect again on the reflections during the research process. The aims of this study were firstly to empower young people to stand up for their beliefs and make their voices heard, and secondly to challenge and deconstruct the structures of beliefs that may constrict the relationship between adults and young people. It is therefore important to hear the voices of the young people themselves on the research process in order to establish whether the aims were met, so, in 5.2 I give an account of the reflections I had with the research participants to establish whether the first research aim was addressed. In 5.3 I reflect on the deconstruction of the power-relation between adults and young people. I comment more fully on the second research aim with more challenges and ideas of my own. This is followed by reflections on my own position as therapist, and I ask whether I was ethical and accountable (5.4). After I wrote the section on masculinity, I asked four men to reflect on the research I had done. (Their reflections are included in 4.3). In 5.5 I reflect on their views.

My fifteen-year old daughter was involved in the research process from the start. She helped me with the typing and was exposed to a post-modern epistemology at a young age. In 5.6 I included her voice on being a young person who is not afraid to challenge discourses of power and she re-tells some of her experiences on standing up against adults in positions of authority.

According to Gergen and Gergen (1991:93), the reflecting process never ends, but is an ongoing process, where reader, researcher and participants are kept in reflecting positions. In the conclusion (5.7), I include reflections on the research process itself. This includes self-reflections on the research process and the influence of the theoretical background of this

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dissertation, the conversations I had with young people and the outcomes of this research for my work as a therapist at schools.

5.2 REFLECTIONS FROM THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The first part of the research question (1.1.4) was this:

How can narrative therapy make a contribution in supporting young people to externalise their problems and internalise their strengths? Can a richer description of their identity and skills empower them to make their voices heard in a responsible way?

In order to establish whether this aim was met, I asked the research participants (Ann and Joe) to read the account of our conversations carefully so that we could reflect on the outcome(s) and practices. I used a number of questions to elicit reflection on aspects of the conversations. These questions are included below, in bold italic.

5.2.1 Ann

After reading Chapter Three, Ann wrote the following:

Reading all this now, I realise how much I have changed. I still take life too seriously, but to a lesser degree. I used to worry about insignificant matters, and about other people – I don't do that anymore. Sometimes, just sometimes, when I am under pressure, the voice of Depression bothers me. But it is more a 'feeling' of being depressed; a feeling of being 'down-in-the dumps'. I am still who I was two years ago, but I have grown to be more mature and I handle difficult situations in such a way that adults and peers treat me with more respect.

How did the externalisation of Depression help you?

I always felt that I fit into a category of depressed people who cannot handle life. Once Depression was placed outside of my body, I realised that Depression was not part of who I am and who I would like to be. I also realised that Depression is

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not my boss and that I can beat it. Once we looked at the bad effects that Depression had on me, I started to analyse the emotions I felt when bad things happened and I am able now to read the signs of being depressed. It also helped me when we discovered my strength to fight Depression. I use that now. And as soon as Depression 'left the building', I was not so shy anymore and I started to feel like I am worth something.

How did our conversations 'enrich' your life?

Your questions helped me to discover and 'see' the maturity I developed and I use it now to my own benefit. When I was depressed I did not see my self-control or my strong will clearly enough to use it. The conversations we had made me realise that I have strong qualities and I am proud of myself for having that. The therapy helped me to be comfortable with the way I have of always questioning everything and being open-minded. You challenged me to question power relations in a responsible way, and it helped my relationship with my mother. Actually, it helps me with the relations I have with adults in general because I stand up for myself and I make my voice heard. I do not feel powerless anymore.

What do you think of narrative therapy?

I had conversations with psychologists in the past and it was very different to your way. You never told me what to do but suggested other alternative ways. I told you before that people do not automatically have my respect because of their age or position. The fact that you talked to me like I was worth something helped me to respect you. This meant that I could also trust you.

Do you think that your voice was heard during the therapy process?

Yes. You respected my opinions and never told me that anything I said was silly or dumb.

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Self-reflections on the therapy process

On three occasions (3.2.1) I repeated questions I had asked Ann, using different words. The question I ask myself was this: 'Do I sometimes fall into the trap of the discourse that adults know and understand everything and children need explaining? Am I so used to repeating a question/request with my own children that I do that during therapy as well?' This could indeed be the case and I realised that I had to be careful because young people might get the impression that I thought they need being explained to more often. I can ask them at the start of the therapy process to ask me to repeat anything I say if they are not sure what I mean.

Ann told me (3.2.1) that a psychiatrist had diagnosed her as 'obsessive-compulsive'. I could have explored her understanding of this term and the effects this sort of labelling had on her. In the same section Ann said that she wanted to get better and she helped herself to stand up against Depression. I did not explore her practices of self-care. I could have asked landscape of action and landscape of identity questions to highlight this relationship with the self.

Ann is one of many young people that I meet who struggle with depression. Through narrative therapy I explore with them new ways of thinking, feeling and acting that can help them to stand up against the bad effects of depression. Their stories help me to be in touch with myself. I am reminded how all individuals constantly deal with depression and with helplessness, and how all people move out of painful experiences.

5.2.2 Joe

Do you think that the letters we wrote to your father could have made any difference to his relationship with you?

I think at first, when he was shocked by the news of the dagga plants, he was irrational and sent me the contract with all the conditions and threats. Your letters did help to make him think more about the matter. The fact that he did not force me to go to therapy in Germany makes me believe that he was satisfied with

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what was happening between you and me. I never asked him though – I wanted to let sleeping dogs lie!

How did narrative therapy help you?

You know, all the adults in my life are always judging me. You did not do that, no matter what I said. I felt comfortable talking to you. I could tell you anything and you kept on supporting me. This made me trust you, respect you and it made me feel like I was not all that bad.

Did you learn anything new from our conversations?

Not really. But the fact that you saw that I was a strong person helped me to start believing in myself again. I realise that, although at this young age I have no control over my own life, I am in control of how I live this life. And I want to make a success in life. The conversations helped me to think before I react to what teachers say and do. This helps me to stay out of trouble.

Self-reflections on the therapy process

I realise that as a counsellor I have limited time and resources and I am therefore dependent on the co-operation of the teachers. Durrant (1995:144-149) highlights the importance of consulting school teachers and school executives about particular students, 'often with a request that some kind of program will be designed to be used in the classroom.' I did try to involve the teachers in noticing and crediting the changes Joe made – Joe and I wrote a letter to his teachers about his struggle to stand up against Trouble and Anger (4.2.2). No one responded. The situation required that I employ other strategies to get the teachers involved, which I did not do. I could have had conversations with his teachers as a group to explain the therapy process and make them understand and appreciate the importance of their collaboration. I could have asked them to suggest alternative solutions. I neglected to do this.

5.3 REFLECTIONS ON POWER RELATIONS

The second part of the research question (1.1.4) was formulated as follows:

How can narrative therapy play a role in challenging dominant discourses regarding the parent-child relationship and the power inequality that may exist in this relationship?

In order to answer this question, I used the practice of deconstruction to challenge the dominant discourses of patriarchy, gender and childhood that construct relationships between adults and young people. I asked many questions about new and alternative ways of thinking about this important issue. To summarise, I ask a few more questions about these power relations.

How can we as adults help young people to believe that what they have to say is important? How can young people learn to respect people, not simply authority figures because they have to, in order to survive schools and families?

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that we should challenge the traditional power relations between adults and young people, teachers and students, children and parents. Denborough (1996:43) agrees with this challenge when he quotes from Leanne Black:

If we're talking about real partnership, surely that means we're stepping outside of what it means to be an adult? It will mean really questioning when does the exchange take place? We expect young people to tell us their stories, fears and desires. When do we give of ourselves?

The 'big' people of society, the adults, did not create the problem, they inherited it. No one person can change traditional discourses; it must be a collective effort and young people can play an important role in changing the direction of society. Adults and young people should consult one another. There should be co-working and caucusing. The challenge for adults is to stay in touch with the experience of being young in ways that do not deny current positions of privilege. The challenge for young people is to trust adults with their experiences and opinions.

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How can adults and young people work together in respectful ways so that young people are not stereotyped and judged?

I ask this question to all the young people consulting me, and they all agree on this: 'Adults must believe us; they must trust us; they must listen to us.' I also came across this poem which is about a young person's wish to be heard and listened to:

Please listen

**When I ask you to listen to me
and you start giving me advice,
you have not done what I asked.**

**When I ask you to listen to me
and you begin to tell me why
I should not feel that way,
you are trampling on my feelings.**

**When I ask you to listen to me
and you feel you have to do something
to solve my problem,
you have failed me,
strange as it may seem.**

**Listen! All I ask is that you listen.
Don't talk or do – just hear me.
Advice is cheap
I can get that in any newspaper.
And I can do for myself; I am not helpless.
Maybe discouraged and faltering,
but not helpless.**

**When you do something for me that I can
and need to do for myself,
you contribute to my fear and**

inadequacy.

**But when you accept as a simple fact
that I feel what I feel,
no matter how irrational,
then I can stop trying to convince
you and get about this business
of understanding what's behind
this irrational feeling.**

**And when that is clear, the answers are
obvious and I don't need advice.
Irrational feelings make sense when
we understand what's behind them.**

**Perhaps that's why prayer works, sometimes,
for some people – because God is mute,
and He doesn't give advice or try
to fix things.
God just listens and lets you work
it out for yourself.**

**So please listen, and just hear me.
And if you want to talk, wait a minute
for your turn – and I will listen to you.**

Author Unknown

I often ask young people why they think the therapy helps and why they keep coming back to talk to me. Without exception they all agree that they value the fact that I listen to them. It is important that as adults, teachers, therapists and parents, we step outside of the discourse that we should always give advice and 'fix' young people's problems. This is not to say that we should never respond in terms of the help they need. I agree with Heshusius (1995:121)

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who says: 'There are times, of course, when it is necessary to listen for specific purposes...it is important to understand the difference between listening with a specific purpose and listening without a specific purpose, that is, listening without wanting anything from it.'

What are we excluding ourselves from, what are we denying ourselves in our culture, in our work, and in our own lives, by not including children's voices and young people's voices, their experiences and ways of being? How can the adult-caretakers of society empower young people to speak up about their experience of being young?

I believe the change should start in our homes where we can work towards respectful ways of being with young people. Children should grow up with the belief that what they have to say is important. Children have limited agency in their own lives; it is not up to them to make important decisions such as where the family lives, what school they attend, what church they belong to or even their holiday destinations. Could we at least hear their voices and acknowledge their opinions on these matters? Can we trust them with other choices, even if it proves to be a mistake? Adults have knowledge because they have experience; we have to allow them to make choices, and make mistakes, in order to gain experience.

The nature of human childhood is such that children are dependent on the goodwill of adults – parents, teachers, relatives, or strangers. Children depend on adults for nourishment, shelter, and, most importantly, love. Brock (1989:49) is convinced that patriarchal discourses still have a powerful influence on the way adults view control and expect obedience from their children:

Well-meaning parents use control to 'train' their children. They employ techniques such as deprivation of food or solitary confinement, entrapment, manipulation, emotional isolation, humiliation, embarrassment, cruelty, and physical pain. These techniques are supposed to teach a child love, respect for others, honesty, kindness, a love of truth, and the value of non-violence. With such contradictory messages, the only clear lesson is the value of power and authority.

The only thing that the child learns from this paradigm is to behave, keep quiet, and stay out of trouble. Often this kind of control can lead to abuse: physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

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However, if parents teach their children that they are allowed to speak up, that they have the right to question authority, they might be able to say no to the injustice of abuse.

What role can the Church, pastoral care and pastoral therapy play in challenging established discourses?

In Western society the Church has always been an important source of moral information. In a post-modern world there is a growing awareness of the need for broader rationality, which includes debates on values. Rossouw (1993:898) argues that this offers an open and standing invitation to theologians to get involved in the moral discourses of power-ethics. The church can assist caretakers to empower young people to speak up about abuses of power. Heitink (1999:319) believes that: 'The pastor attempts to understand the reality of humanity and the world in the light of scripture and tradition. This finds primary expression in proclamation and celebration.' Instead of giving children and young people lists of prescriptions about obedience as 'God's will', preachers could open opportunities in their communities to discuss the rights and responsibilities of children. I believe a pastoral narrative approach can assist young people to enjoy their rights in an ethical way. Only when the Church listens to the voice of young people, will she be able to condemn the misuse and abuse of power on the basis of gender, sexual preference, race, age and status.

Poling (1991:147-152) maintains that current shifts in paradigm offer opportunities for the church to adopt an outwardly focused stance, and get involved in moral, ethical and environmental issues. In a practical sense, the role of the Church and Christians can be described as that of a loving community. Loving communities are inclusive: they display courage to be open to other thoughts, perspectives and ways of doing. Loving communities have compassion for the full range of a person's experience. Loving communities are just. Justice may be defined as a fair distribution of the resources necessary for meaningful life by the institutions and ideologies that have power. A loving community is sensitive to potential abuses of power and is careful to provide protection to its most vulnerable members. Justice means to confront the abuse of power within the community and in larger society. Victims of power-abuse must be given opportunities and the authority to testify, to voice their powerlessness, and perpetrators must be held accountable.

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Gerkin (1991) adds a prophetic perspective to pastoral work. He attacks (1991:72) the marginalisation of people in the church by exposing the norm of the Church 'Everyone welcome' for what it really means: 'Everyone *like us* welcome'. People have an unspoken need: 'I am different, but could I please attend your church?' Pastors must be sensitive to the hidden need of people to be part of a community of believers: 'The occasion for the exercise of prophetic ministry arises unexpectedly in the normal flow of everyday events' (Gerkin 1991:74). If pastors fail to hear and respond to the cries of those who are suffering, they cannot confront injustice or a blatant violation of fundamental values. It is therefore necessary that pastors are ever on the alert to hear the cry of suffering and violation, no matter how faintly it is expressed or how conflicted the expression of that cry may be. Gerkin (1991:75 & 76) argues: 'The moment for prophetic ministry response arises at the time of the recognition that human suffering and conflict have appeared. Once heard, the cry of pain begins to transform the consciousness of the imaginative prophetic pastor.'

When I think back on my work as a minister, I realise I missed wonderful opportunities to speak up about the discourses of power that influence relationships between adults and young people, between parents and their children, and between men and women. The Church responded to the 'fall' of *Apartheid* by preaching about the terrible injustice of discrimination and subordination of people on account of their colour. However, theologians sadly neglect to respond to other injustices in society where people are marginalised and their voices silenced on the basis of their age or gender. I will contribute to the ideal of empowering young people by trying to encourage young people to stand up for their beliefs and make their voices heard in school, at home, at Church and in Sunday school classes. Mutual care of church members for each other can support young people to talk with each other about their powerlessness. De Jongh van Arkel (2000:19) describes the special function of mutual care as sustaining or support: 'Support means offering encouragement, comfort and reassurance to people in need.'

5.4 REFLECTIONS ON MY POSITION AS THERAPIST

I view the therapeutic conversation as a language event (see 1.1.3). Through language, meaning and understanding are co-created by therapist and client. I am aware of the ethical

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responsibility I have to position myself in such a way that I am transparent about my association with certain ideologies such as feminism, post-modernity and social construction. These ideas advocate certain responses toward gender and power relations about which it is my responsibility to inform the client. I choose to make my position transparent because, if I do not, young people may feel confused about my manner of questioning, particularly around discourses of gender, power and equity. Sometimes people consulting me want to know where I stand regarding particular discourses in order to feel comfortable or safe to voice their own opinions. In this regard, I found the ideas of Elliott (1998:51-59) very useful in my aspirations to be ethical, accountable and responsible in pastoral narrative therapy. Here are some questions I might ask to voice my position:

1. I normally take a stand for respectful co-working between adults as caretakers, and young people: I believe that adults can afford to grant young people the freedom and opportunity to express their opinions and voice their ideas.

The following questions might explain my position:

- What do you think of this position?
- What effects might it have on our therapy together?
- Would the relationships you have with adults change in any way if you have a voice?
- What effects might it have on the view you have of yourself?
- Can I ask you some questions about your position?

2. Narrative therapy is about challenging ideas that society holds as the 'truth'. I have some ideas about 'childhood' that I would like to share with you.

- What ideas about childhood do you currently hold?
- Do any specific incidents or events stand out for you that might have shaped these ideas you have?
- Who or what has influenced or informed these ideas?
- How do these ideas affect your view of yourself as a child/young person?
- How do these ideas affect your relationships with your parents and teachers?

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3. Every culture constructs ideas about gender. I think we need to take stock of ideas and practises around gender so that we can position ourselves regarding our identity.

- Do you think gender is fixed, something that is biologically part of who you are?
- Do you think that culture can form and shape people's view on gender?
- Do you feel comfortable with the ideas about gender that circulate in your family?
- Have there been times when you were not able to live up to gender-expectations at school?
- Do you ever find that your ideas about femininity and masculinity are in conflict with the ideas circulating in your culture?

I do not ask these questions all at the same time or during one conversation. Some young clients do not understand this kind of language and I have to explain my views or repeat the question using different words. Asking questions about dominant ideologies and ideas is part of narrative therapy's search for alternative and preferred ways of being.

5.5 REFLECTIONS ON REFLECTIONS ON MASCULINITY

From the reflection of **Francois** I learned that he also struggled with the construction of his masculinity. Through books he was exposed to multiple masculinities that clashed with the dominant ideas of masculinity in the culture in which he grew up. Francois challenged, and still challenges, the discourse of 'traditional' masculinity. However, when he says he can pick up women if he pretends to be gay, I wonder if he is still a victim of the structure that he claims to rebel against, or is he using/abusing that structure himself? He concluded his reflections with the insight that masculinity has everything to do with the social role a man has in his particular culture.

The fact that Francois started to think about his own masculinity at a young age made me realise that many young men who come to speak to me as school counsellor may also struggle with 'masculinity'. The exploration of young men's stories of their experiences and understandings of masculinity is an avenue for further research.

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Jaco reflected on the need he experiences in his clinical work with men and women. He thinks that we need to look at the negative effects of the 'crisis' of masculinity. He takes his place in the men's movement which aims to restore the communication and connectedness between sons and fathers so that young men can have positive role models. He joins Bly (1992) with his position on 'under-fathering':

Most boys in our culture are 'under-fathered'. They can experience feelings of isolation, uncertainty, 'acting-out' behaviour, rebelliousness and aggression. Boys and young men often tell me that they battle with their sense of worth because they are degraded in many ways in society. It is essential that we search for a new sense and understanding of masculinity. Communication among men, between men and young men, and between fathers and sons, needs to improve. Young men and boys need to experience trust and respect in the relationships with other men to construct their own masculinity.

However, the comment that 'under-fathering' has negative effects on boys' behaviour and their understanding and development of their masculinity, does not necessarily mean that single mothers are not doing a good job. I would hope that Jaco does not mean to blame or marginalise women in this regard.

Anthony admits that society's discourse of what it means to be a man could have had a subconscious influence on the choices he made to play 'men' sports like rugby and riding motorbikes. He told me that he does not agree with society's prescriptions in terms of specific roles for men and women; he does 'feminine' chores at home. But he believes that being masculine means to be heterosexual, and that is not shaped or formed by society, but something one is born with. He agrees with the essentialist viewpoint (4.1): **'I believe that a person is born with a masculinity 'blueprint' which is then moulded by circumstances and stimuli. Being masculine to me means to be a heterosexual man.**

Johan is a scholar of post-modernity. He accepts that our only certainty lies in the uncertainty of the world. He looks at masculinity as a journey: **'This view leads me to**

believe that the question of traditional masculinity and what it really is or was, is not important, but rather *'The meaning of masculinity in human experience / The meaning of masculinity as a way of being human'*. To me *this* is the essence of masculinity. A post-modern view on masculinity is a search for the roots of *Humanness* (Humane-ness / Ubuntu). But how is it to be known? Not by imposing but by letting reality reveal itself? Only then may you innovate and improve on it. I think the way narrative therapy is used in this section (4.1 & 4.2) to bracket the therapist's own pre-suppositions works as a way to suspend all disbelief and bias. But on the other hand I think it is easy to fall into the modernist trap of absolutism by questioning traditional discourses of masculinity. To me the most important insight is that: *'nothing is taken for granted'*; Everything is open to scrutiny interpretation and it is essential to ask *'what does it mean to be ME'*. Because there is nothing more and nothing less...

5.6 REFLECTIONS FROM LINDY

My daughter Lindy was exposed to post-modern literature and pastoral narrative therapy from a young age. I asked her to reflect on the way this world view helped her to challenge the traditional structures of power at school. She responded:

I have known from a very young age that I am different and that I have been raised differently from my peers. My parents did not treat me like other parents treat my peers for I was allowed to make many decisions other parents made for their children, like for instance what time I would like to go to bed when I was old enough to decide that for myself. I could voice my opinions; I was never told: 'You must do this because I told you so.' I grew up believing that there are good reasons for rules and discipline and I was at liberty to question or challenge any particular rule whenever I did not understand or agree with their reasons.

My mother taught me that standing up for oneself is as much one's right as it is one's duty. When my mother started with this research I often helped her with the typing. As I typed and read the pages, I realised that my mother's perspective

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of looking at the relationships between adults and young people is 'different'; I guess she was a post-modern thinker long before she started with this research paper! I was particularly interested by the sections on power discourses because I have always felt like a powerless individual in my Afrikaner culture. The words of Foucault, 'what is spoken and who may speak are issues of power' made a big impression on me because it describes the world of many children. Older people (parents and teachers) are always right and young people are being told what to do and what to say most of the time. The 'truth' about children in our culture is that children should be seen and not heard. In such a system all the power is in the hands of adults.

I agree with Foucault that there is an inseparable link between knowledge and power. In my life I have experienced that the people with the knowledge have the power to direct my life. And I have a problem with people who misuse their power. I felt empowered when I read the understanding of resistance as the other side of power. This means that I also have power; the power to choose my response. I choose to stand up against the injustice of the misuse and abuse of power. The fact that I resist the misuse of power does not mean that I rebel against society but simply that my pride precludes me from being a victim of the power-imbalance. Sometimes my 'speaking out' is mistaken as arrogance, self-importance or conceit. When I was very young other adults thought that I was 'too big for my shoes'. At school some teachers think I have a 'bad attitude'.

I almost gave up on my pride. I was tempted to become humble, submissive and modest, just so that my life would be easier and trouble-less. But as I read the wise words and thoughts of the post-modern scholars quoted in this research paper, I began to feel empowered when it occurred to me that there are other people, 'big' people, who are fighting for the rights of young people. I believe that it is the birthright of any young person to be heard. I thank my parents for raising me, and post-modern perspectives for shaping me, for I will never allow other people to trample upon me.

5.7 ANOTHER DESTINATION

The research approach of this dissertation was a post-modern epistemology; a narrative pastoral approach. This framework is a construction – temporary lenses rather than representations that conform to a social reality. Like all ideologies it is subject to evolutionary change over time. It evolves at a particular time for practical reasons. I agree with Anderson and Goolishian (1988:373), who say that: 'Ideas, understandings, theories and practices will always be evolving and changing over time.' I will therefore continue my studies, read post-modern literature and expose myself to other ways of thinking to reconstruct my own understanding of reality.

At this point in time I feel comfortable with a pastoral narrative approach to therapy. I look at stories as habituations: we live in and through stories. They conjure up worlds. We do not know the world other than as a story-world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and they keep us apart. We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories and we are lived by the stories of our race and place. A pastoral narrative approach is rooted in the question of God's praxis, God's activity on behalf of the world. Such an approach can help people to relate the stories of the different dimensions of their lives to the bigger story of God's presence in this world. The tremendous changes to which people are subjected in our society wrench them out of their world of meaning. New paradigms open different ways of looking at childhood, femininity, masculinity and power-relations. De Jongh van Arkel (2000:36) says that the challenge to pastoral care is to help people rediscover their Christian identity and live accordingly. According to Gerkin (1986:30), the primary goal of pastoral care is to 'find ways of helping people in the modern world to retain a constant awareness of the Judeo-Christian story, which tells them who they are and who they ought to be.' Pastoral therapy can assist me to point to the coherence between people's experiences (stories) of God and the way they experience the world physically and ethically through the stories they tell.

I feel privileged to be involved in the heartbeat of people's lives, reconstructing meaning and performance with them that proves to be transforming for them and for me. Through my own experience and through my ongoing training, I hope to position myself in conversation so

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that I can more readily participate in that wonderful strange mode of inquiry in which grown-ups cannot control the outcome or rely on the advantage of age and experience to maintain their position. I am grateful to the young people who help me to enjoy the special thrill that comes when insight comes unexpectedly after shared puzzlement.

The ability to act in and through love, to be non-violent, to be generous, and to respect the rights and needs of others, comes from having been generously and gently loved and respected. I hope that we as adults can teach our young people that morality is not grounded in power, but in love.

I would like to conclude with these wise words by Brock (1989:50):

I can imagine that someday we will regard our children and young people not as creatures to manipulate or to change, but rather as messengers from a world we once deeply knew but have long since forgotten. I can imagine that they [children and young people] can reveal to us more about the true secrets of life, and also our own lives, than our parents were ever able to do. We do not need to be told whether to be strict or permissive with our children. What we do need is to have respect for their needs, their feelings, and their individuality, as well as for our own.

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APPENDICES

The information sheet and consent forms (Appendix 1 – 3) are similar to those proposed by Briar A. McLean (1997).

Appendix 1: Information sheet for participants

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH NARRATIVE

Information sheet for participants

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, we thank you. If you decide not to take part, there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind. Counselling will continue as planned and we thank you for considering our request.

1. What is the aim of the project?

This project is undertaken as part of the requirements for a Masters in Pastoral Therapy at the University of South Africa. The aims of this research project are to:

- a) do narrative counselling with young people who experience powerlessness in their relationship with adults;
- b) empower participants to voice their feelings in a responsible manner;
- c) investigate the power differences between young people and adults; and
- d) explore ways to establish new relationships of mutual respect and collaboration.

2. What will participants be asked to do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to give consent for the information obtained during our counselling sessions to be used in the research project. If

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you decide to take part in the project, you will be asked to participate in the counselling that you requested, read a summary of the counselling and make comments, corrections and /or provide feedback regarding the summary.

Our counselling sessions will end only after your presenting problem(s) has (have) been satisfactorily resolved and after I have consulted with you and my supervisor. I will conduct a follow-up two months after our counselling sessions have ended. This will be to inquire as to whether the counselling has had satisfactory consequences for you and will be an opportunity for me to answer any questions that you may have regarding our sessions or the project.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind. You are also at liberty to withdraw at any time during the project.

Confidentiality of the information you reveal will be a number one priority. Your identity will not be revealed in any way.

3. What if participants have questions?

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding to this project, please do not hesitate to contact either:

Lynette Steyn

or

Dr Elmarie Kotzé

Phone: (012) 663 2655

Phone: (012) 460 6704

APPENDICES

Appendix 2: Consent form for participants**EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH NARRATIVE****Consent Form #1 for participants**

I have read the information sheet on this project.

I give my consent to use the information obtained during my counselling sessions in the research project.

I hereby declare myself willing to participate in this research project through counselling sessions.

I agree to read a summary of the counseling and make comments, corrections and/or provide feedback regarding the summary.

I understand that I may withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage to myself.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

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Appendix 3: Consent form #2 for participants**EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH NARRATIVE****Consent Form #2 for participants**

1. I have read the summary of the counselling.
2. I had an opportunity to bring about changes to that information, including suggestions, corrections or comments.
3. I agree that my suggestions, corrections or comments may be included in the research project.
4. I have read the summary of the counselling sessions and I agree that this is an accurate and satisfactory account of the counselling process, and I therefore give my permission for this summary to be used in the research report.
5. I understand that the information obtained during the counselling sessions may be written in an article format for publication. I also understand that should I decide that I do not wish my information to be published I am able to withdraw my permission for this to occur at any stage of my participation in the project.

I hereby give my permission for information concerning myself to be used in the written report of the project and in the publication. I understand that my confidentiality will be preserved throughout the study, in the written report of the project and in the publication. I also understand that any information that may lead to my identification will not be used or included in the project report or publication.

----- (Signature of participant)

----- (Date)