CHAPTER ONE MAPPING THE JOURNEY AHEAD

1.1 IN THE BEGINNING

It all started in a garden...humanity, relationships and sexuality.

I love gardening. When I am gardening, I often find myself thinking about the different narratives of my life: that of therapist, wife, mother, local preacher and woman. Gardening is such a basic activity, almost primitive, which again reminds me of our sexuality ... Is sexuality basic and primitive, or is it very complex and highly evolved?

I began having conversations with sexuality, trying to hear its voice. I was never embarrassed by sexuality and am very comfortable in my own skin, and it has often surprised me to hear and see that so many women do not enjoy their sexuality. When I told women I have conversations *with* sexuality, many felt uncomfortable. They would rather have conversations *about* sexuality because that makes sexuality an object, not part of them, but outside them. When you are in a conversation with someone or something, it almost implies that you are friends or partners and, in this case, it would seem, 'partners in crime'.

In my conversations with Christian women, it became apparent that many were very curious about sexual intercourse and about how they experienced their own sexuality, but they dared not ask or talk about it. Although the subject of sexual intercourse and our sexuality is often covered in a mystical cloud of privacy, all are aware of its presence. I was intrigued by the power lurking within the word 'sexuality' and its potency.

I began to wonder about the secrecy surrounding sexual intercourse and its link to religion. Why are so many religious women reluctant to say or uncomfortable with saying that they enjoy sexual intercourse? Is it because they feel that they are not supposed to enjoy sexual intercourse, or could it be that most Christian women do not enjoy sexual intercourse? Why do we seldom see a minister's wife dressed very sexily or revealingly, even if she is a voluptuous person on her own account? Why were so many women so surprised to hear that although I am in the ministry, I am comfortable with my own sexuality and sexuality in general? Why do we not hear sermons about sexual intimacy and how to enjoy our sexuality? Why do we find that the clergy focus almost

exclusively on two extremes of sexuality for women, namely the image of a woman as either a prostitute or a serving mother and wife (Proverbs 31)? Why is it that most preachers focus on these two extremes, rather than on the Song of Songs? Why is there a reluctance to talk about sexuality – and perhaps a risk in doing so?

Although women are present in our congregations, we seldom, if ever, hear them speak about their sexuality or lack thereof in the church context. It is almost as if we separate our sexuality from our womanhood when we are in church. In church, our gender is acknowledged, but not our sexuality. Our sexuality is almost denied within the church; but outside the church setting, it is almost as if we cannot escape from constantly being confronted with women's sexuality.

The emphasis on sexuality is omnipresent in most Western communities. We only need to look at television advertisements, movies or bill boards, listen to the radio or explore the Internet to see that sexuality is a pervasive element. In the marketing industry, one often hears the truism that 'Sex sells anything!' I have become very aware of this since my son became a teenager and began to remark on all the sexy images that are displayed wherever one goes. Why then is there a silence on this matter in the church? I believe that each of us relates to God and our faith as a person, which could include both our constructions of gender and of sexuality. Does this silence about sexuality in the church imply that it is something distasteful or even sinful, therefore something that is rather to be disregarded?

I also wondered how women's experiences of their sexuality affect their partners¹. I believe that this study is not only of importance to women, but also to men, as it would seem as if it is not only Christian women's voices that are silenced, but also the voices of Christian men regarding women's sexuality – particularly in their sexual relationship with their partners or wives.

When I pondered these questions, I got the distinct impression that the sexuality of Christians, especially of Christian women, is embedded in a discourse which seems to marginalise and silence women's experiences of their sexuality. Within this discourse, women's sexuality is covered with shame and guilt. The prevalence of such a discourse

¹ I am aware that a woman's partner can be male or female, but for the purpose of this study I focus on heterosexual couples.

would provide an explanation for why discussions of sexuality in Christian women's lives are so often avoided.

Weitz (2000) states in her essay *A history of women's bodies* that, 'throughout history, ideas about women's bodies have been used to reinforce and, occasionally, to challenge women's social position'. From this statement I deduced that this would also be true for Christian women's position regarding their sexuality and the discourses which constitute their experiences with sexuality. Weitz (2000:1) states that the early Christian philosophers, like most of the Greek philosophers who preceded them,

conclude[d] that women's presumed moral weaknesses endanger any man who come[s] under their spell. For centuries thereafter, Christian theologians argue[d] that Eve succumbed to the snake's tempting and caused the fall from divine grace because women's nature makes them inherently more susceptible to sexual desire and other passions of the flesh, blinding them to reason and morality and making them a constant danger to men's souls.

If one accepts the above claim regarding women, one immediately sees a contradiction, as many Christian women do not express or experience themselves as sexually passionate beings. One of the most common gendered 'jokes' is the old saw about the wife who pretends to have a headache to avoid sexual intercourse. I therefore wonder whether Christian women are not willing or able to express themselves as sexually passionate beings due to the negative image associated with their sexuality. Many comments have linked women's sexuality to sin and evil, which may cause Christian women to be silent regarding their sexuality, and, to a certain extent, almost to deny their sexuality. I believe that this historical discourse regarding Christian women's sexuality is still present today.

Haught (1997:1) states that 'Western religions have spent millennia inflicting shame, guilt, repression, and punishment upon human sexuality – especially women's sexuality'. Western religions, which include Christianity, present an ugly story regarding sexuality, 'a long chronicle of religious hostility to lovers – for no rational reason' (Haught 1997:1). The discourse that constitutes Christian women's sexuality is embedded in Christian history and is one of shame, guilt and repression. For the purposes of this research report, I took the above-mentioned discourse as the dominant discourse that informs Christian views on sexuality.

When I was asked whether I would be comfortable speaking about women's sexuality in a sermon, I hesitated – not because I was uncomfortable with the subject, but because I felt that the congregation would be uncomfortable with it. This made me realise that even now, in the postmodern era, I, as a liberated woman, still felt inhibited about speaking openly about women's sexuality to a mixed gender audience. Women supposedly have access to information and are supposed to be emancipated in the third wave of feminism, but we are in the main still silenced.

In my friendships with Christian women, I found that women were willing to speak about their sexuality once they trusted me, especially when we were in a one-on-one situation. Once they felt safe, they expressed their real hunger to hear about and discuss sexuality in the context of Christian faith and life. When I spoke to Christian women about their views of sexuality, most said that they felt that it should be something positive and enjoyable. Most of them rejected the notion that sexual intercourse should be viewed with shame, guilt and repression. In fact, quite a few women expressed frustration with what their mothers had told them about sexual intercourse. Many shared the experience of being told that sexual intercourse was something a wife has to endure, as it is her duty. Chaste wives do not enjoy sexual intercourse and do not discuss anything sexual. This speaks about the discursive effects of embedding sexuality in an aura of shame, sin, guilt and repression. Some felt that an injustice was done to them by their mothers' attitudes towards sexual intercourse. These women felt that they had such deep-seated prejudices regarding the enjoyment of sexual intercourse that it had taken them years to overcome these prejudices. Some of the women I spoke to, wanted their daughters to have a more positive attitude towards sexuality, but even so they still felt uncomfortable about acknowledging their enjoyment of sexual intercourse to their daughters. This puzzled me - most of these women, although they had very firm points of view, were not willing to express these views publicly. My puzzlement led me to formulate my curiosity into the following research focus.

1.2 RESEARCH CURIOSITY: TIMES HAVE CHANGED, OR HAVE THEY?

If most Christian women feel that sexuality, as experienced and expressed by Christians, should be seen as something positive, why do we not voice our opinions regarding the implied guilt, shame and repression imposed by the dominant discourse publicly in the church? Why do religious women, particularly Christians, allow this dominant discourse about women's sexuality to silence them and to speak on their behalf outside the safety of a private discussion? What makes this discourse so powerful? What are the effects of

the silence this discourse enforces on South African Christian women's experiences of their sexuality?

I formulated the following research aims in line with my belief that we need to challenge this discourse and break the silence it imposes on Christian women.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS

My pastoral commitment within this study was to strive to create a space where participants could explore freely and safely their ideas and experiences of sexuality, without any fear of rejection or rebuke. Furthermore, this commitment involved wanting women to embody² their sexuality within their faith experiences, where their sexuality could enhance their spiritual experiences instead of alienating them from such experiences. By means of narrative pastoral conversations I wanted to challenge this dominant discourse and break the silence surrounding women's sexuality. I wanted to explore the effects of this dominant discourse regarding Christian women's sexuality and how these effects presented themselves in the intimate relationships of the participants. To facilitate this commitment, I identified the following research aims:

1.3.1 Exploring Christian women's life-giving experiences of their sexuality

In our pastoral conversations, I wanted these women and me to explore the stories about their sexuality that they experienced as being life-giving to them. It was important for me to assist participants in co-constructing rich and thick descriptions of the life-giving experiences of their sexuality and of the positive effects that the dominant discourse had on their sexuality, if this was applicable to their narratives.

1.3.2 Co-constructing alternative narratives about Christian women's sexuality with the research participants

Part of the conversational journey we undertook involved exploring and challenging lifedenying or life-restricting experiences that resulted when the dominant discourse marginalised a participant in her experience of her sexuality. This research project aimed to use narrative pastoral conversations to create a context in which a participant could negotiate alternative narratives for life-denying and life-restricting experiences of her sexuality, should she wish to do so. It was important to me that the participants could

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² The word embody could mean literally 'to make it physical rather than abstract', to 'put it into flesh'. However, I use this word in an abstract context, to refer to the internalisation of an experience.

voice their autonomous ideas about sexuality, and challenging this dominant discourse regarding their sexuality assisted them in this. The possibility of change was important to me. However, the focus of change was not so much on whether a participant negotiated a new or other preferred ways-of-being towards her sexuality or not. Rather, change in this context could also be the result of an exploration of the effects of the dominant discourse which could alter and/or enrich the participant's understanding of her own sexuality as a Christian woman.

1.3.3 Breaking the silence regarding sexuality in the church

Through narrative pastoral conversations I wanted to create a space for the participating women in which previously unspoken or unspeakable matters of sexuality could be voiced.

1.3.4 Challenging the dominant discourse publicly and corporately

Using narrative pastoral conversations, I sought to explore with the research participants why women do not challenge this dominant discourse when they are in the corporate setting of the church by voicing their opinions concerning Christian women's experiences of sexuality.

I became aware of and concerned about women's experiences of sexuality and the silencing of these experiences within larger cultural and religious discourses such as patriarchy because of certain discourses within which I am positioned as a researcher. In the following section, I briefly reflect on my own discursive positioning as a researcher.

1.4 DISCURSIVE POSITIONING – VOICES OF THE PAST ECHOING TODAY

Over many years, a variety of voices have found my ear to be receptive and they have shaped my approach to pastoral therapy into the construction that represents my understanding today. Many schools of thought and theories have moulded me. The most influential voices that directed me as researcher were the voices of social constructionism, feminism, participatory pastoral care, and contextual theology. These voices are echoed in my research as the voices of intimate companions and co-authors in this study.

1.4.1 Social construction discourse

Social construction discourse supports my understanding of a multiplicity of truths. Thomas Kuhn (cited in Kotzé 2002:9) writes that today's knowledges stand on the shoulders of the knowledges of the past. Gergen (quoted in Burr 1995:11) argues that 'all knowledge.... is historically and culturally specific and that we therefore must extend our enquiries beyond the individual into social, political and economic realms for a proper understanding'. In line with Gergen's suggestion, in Chapter Two, I explore the voices of the past that have informed the history and development of our views of sexuality to understand the narrative of sexuality today.

What we perceive as a 'reality' is constituted and sustained by the dominant discourses and social processes in which we are engaged. According to Freedman and Combs (1996:22), this implies that there could be multiple constructed realities. Burr (1995:8) regards knowledge (in terms of my understanding, this includes what is termed 'reality' in popular parlance) not as something a person has or does not have, but as something people do together. Thus, our current ways of understanding the world are not a product of objective observation, but a product of the social processes we engage in, such as our interaction with other people. Social construction discourse insists on a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding and defining the world. It challenges the view that conventional knowledge is based on objective, unbiased observations of the world and definitions of it. It is therefore in opposition to what is known as positivism and empiricism, as found in traditional science (Burr 1995:3).

My own discursive positioning within social constructionism has led me to regard sexuality as a social construction. According to Ussher (1994:150), sexuality is 'constructed at the level of culture and history through the complex interrelationship of many different social and historical factors'. We are taught what is expected from us as women, regarding our sexuality. Fredman and Potgieter (1996:50) share this view – they regard sexuality as a part of identity which is constructed by social forces such as patriarchy and a heterosexist social context. These knowledges are imparted to us by our parents, the media, the school system, the church and other influences, disguised in discourses.

The socialisation processes imparted via these discourses constitute what boys and girls and later men and women perceive to be accepted/'natural' or deviant expressions of

their sexuality and gender roles. Fredman and Potgieter (1996:52) argue that boys and girls are socialised differently, as boys are encouraged to be assertive, active and ambitious in contrast to girls, who are taught to be compliant and reserved, especially in terms of sexual behaviour. Generally accepted sexual behaviour differs from one society to another, as what is accepted tends to represent the dominant discourse of the time (so, for example, until a few years ago, homosexuality was deemed deviant sexual behaviour and was classified as such in the DSM classification system, but today it is no longer scientifically classified as deviant behaviour³).

We constitute our world by means of such discourses, as without such social constructions, we would perceive life to be too chaotic. I believe that discourses with regard to gender roles and sexuality are necessary, and it is not my intention, nor view that all forms of gender socialisation should be abolished or condemned. However, we need to ask ourselves at what point such constructions become life-denying and therefore lose their usefulness in today's culture and who should determine this usefulness or the redundancy of particular constructions.

Therefore, I looked critically at socialisation and the constructions constituting women's sexuality through the lens of feminism. I am aware that there are many positives in the current socialisation process, even as prescribed by patriarchy. However, due to the limited scope of this dissertation, I do not represent the positive patriarchal voices. Instead, my focus is a feminist discursive position. I am also aware that my views are only partly representative of the views of White Christian women in South Africa. I am aware that other cultures, such as Black African cultures, are not represented in this study. This omission is again due to the limited scope of this study. It could have been interesting to compare the similarities and differences between the experiences of their sexuality by Christians from different cultures as constituted by their cultures.

In the past (and even at present), many of these socialisation understandings and constructions for women were defined and determined by patriarchy, which represented and privileged the voice of White, educated men (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:12). However, women have begun to challenge the voice of patriarchy and gave birth to feminism.

³ There are many discourses about homosexuality and different ways of viewing it. We should note that even if homosexuality is no longer classified as deviant behaviour, many still view it as such and react to this discourse by resisting and/or rejecting it.

1.4.2 Feminist discourses

Keane (1998:122) defines feminism, in terms of its most basic perspective, as a movement for the liberation of women. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:9-10) provide a more elaborate definition – they see feminism as a social analysis which reflects on societal inequality, rather than simply as demanding equal access for women in an unequal society. They also see feminism as a vehicle for women to own and express their own experiences without feeling alienated, as feminism gives women space to accept their experiences as legitimate in a patriarchal world.

Keane (1998:122) sees patriarchy in its most basic form as 'rule by the father', which perpetuated a 'system of male domination at the expense of women'. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:19) explain that feminism was motivated by sexism, which resulted in the undervaluing of one half of humanity, women, by defining the other half, men, as superior. This made women the prisoners of their biology.

Within feminism we find many streams and interpretations of feminism, such as revolutionary feminists and reformist feminists (Keane 1998:123). Feminism is representative of the rich and varied experience of women. Revolutionary feminists, such as Mary Daly, promote separatism between men and women to ensure an alternative female-centred community and social life purged of male control (Keane 1998:123). By contrast, we also find reformist feminists that share the views of Rosemary Radford Ruether, who cautions against seeing men as the enemy, because it would result in dehumanising men, and actions that dehumanise others ultimately dehumanise oneself (Keane 1998:123).

I identify with the reformist feminists who advocate mutuality between the sexes and 'recognise the importance of examining "her-story" as well as "his-story" (Keane 1998:123). Reformist feminists opt for a steady programme of consciousness-raising, in order to make women and men more aware of the effects of systems such as sexism and racism on both women and men (Keane 1998:123). The reformist feminist approach supports my focus of personhood as it leaves the space for both sexes' stories, rather than excluding one or the other. Within the South African context, the voice of Denise Ackermann resonates with that of reformist feminism, as she believes that we need to actively seek change through collaboration between all in order to make progress in our quest for healing at both the personal and the political level (Ackermann 1998:80-81).

In this regard, Hoffman (1990:7) is also concerned with generating a more balanced cultural repertoire for both genders and consequently prefers to position herself as 'gender sensitive' rather than 'feminist'. This preference for gender sensitive positions resonates with my concern for equality for both sexes.

For me, personhood refers to all the behavioural and mental characteristics that make a person unique, irrespective of gender. I believe that we need to move beyond the boundaries of gender towards a wholeness of personhood, which integrates wholeness of sexuality. My understanding of a wholeness of personhood is that we are more than just our gender, and therefore our gender should not be our focus. As a woman I am not only constituted by gender discourses, but there are many other discourses that constitute me, and this makes me aware that my experiences of myself are more than a gender identity. I want us to look beyond gender and see first the person, and only then sex and gender constructions related to sex, *if* they are relevant to the situation. In some instances my sex and accompanying gender constructions will play a crucial role in an understanding of me and the situation, and in others they will not, but my personhood will be present regardless. I believe that the focus of personhood could become the vehicle which we can use to move towards a gender-sensitive society. I find support for my view of a gender-sensitive society with its focus on personhood in the words of Isherwood and McEwan (1994:27):

The social identity of women and men needs to be based on the concept of the personhood of the individual. This would mean an end to the role-playing which assumes that each sex is only capable of certain restricted actions and inhabits separate spheres. 'To expand the space we share' is a good description of the aims of feminism, ultimately the recognition that no space should be exclusive to one sex.

My ideas regarding a wholeness of personhood resonate with reformist feminism, as it incorporates endless possibilities of stories and texts of both genders and beyond. These multi-texted possibilities speak of a postmodern view of reality, which sees 'reality' as socially constructed and could include a multitude of realities, which can be multi-levelled (Freedman & Combs 1996:22).

This inclusivity of both sexes resonated with my pastoral commitment towards women as well of men, as we do not live in separate worlds, but we share space and interact and influence each other's constructions. Landman's (2002:26) ideas of partnership theology combine well with my reformist theological approach, which invites both men and

women to be heard and to participate in a gender-sensitive society that allows both men and women to express and experience themselves as persons rather as of a particular gender.

Women's voices regarding their sexuality have been silenced by patriarchy, which has an impact not only on women but also on men, and especially on their experiences as heterosexual couples. The participatory approach to practical theology emphasises the need to challenge oppressive discourses and to negotiate ethical ways of living (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8).

1.4.3 A participatory approach to practical theology

I am comfortable with a participatory approach to practical theology, as it embraces the notion of a contextual approach with an emphasis on doing theology. I believe that we should no longer 'speak' theology, but need to *do* theology. Doing theology implies the participation of many knowledges and contexts. Rossouw (1993:903) formulates it as a shift 'from being right to doing right'.

I believe Christians need to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Jesus addressed the context of people; his words and actions were relevant as he journeyed with people in the narratives of their lives.

Jenkins (cited in Pattison 1993:85) elaborates on this idea, stating that the process of growth towards becoming more like Jesus is not an individual process. He feels that the term 'the individual' is a myth, and a dangerously dehumanising myth, as we are not individuals, we are persons. Jenkins also feels that no-one can be human until we are all human.

Bosch (cited in Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:4) sees a contextual approach to theology as a break from traditional theology, in that it does not see the world as static. Therefore one needs to address the context of people, and travel with them to understand their narratives, instead of assuming that all stories are universal. Heitink (1993:174-175) speaks of the political-critical current of practical theology. The political-critical current focuses on the praxis of raising an awareness of the needs of the poor and considers the balance of power and the way in which people are dependent in modern society. Bosch (cited in Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:4) is in agreement with Heitink (1993) and believes that a

contextual approach sees a commitment to the poor and marginalised as the first act of theology.

It is with this emphasis on the marginalised that I personally identified. My commitment to giving a voice to the voiceless implies that I will be working with the marginalised. I want Christian women to be able to speak about their sexuality in relation to their faith, something which very few have done before. I found support for my participatory approach to practical theology in the political-critical current of Heitink (1993:175), and his use of terms such as hermeneutical and empirical from this perspective. Heitink states '[t]he knowing subject must not remain detached from the object of the inquiry. The aim is not just the increase of knowledge, but also a change in the oppressive situation of those with whom the researchers have established a close bond.'

Bosch (quoted in Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:5) argues that a contextual approach to theology affirms 'justice against oppression and moves from the general to the local, co-constructing a variety of "local theologies". A contextual approach to theology is at heart an attempt to liberate and to heal (Pattison 1994:31-35).

Ackermann (1998:83) supports this view in terms of healing, and she believes that for a 'healing praxis to be truly restorative, it has to be collaborative and sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and passion'. This collaborative action with those who are marginalised resonates with a participatory approach to practical theology.

A participatory approach takes the ethical action of introducing previously unheard voices to the world of theology, and this includes the voices of women: 'This is a participatory process in which [researchers] collaborate with people in challenging oppressive discourses and negotiating ways of living in an ethical and ecological accountable way' (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8). We need to hear women's voices regarding their sexuality as Christians and this could happen if we challenge the dominant discourse.

Ackermann (1998:78-80) prefers to speak of a feminist theology of praxis with healing as the core hermeneutic of such a theology. I identify with this focus on healing. Ackermann (1998:78) sees a feminist theology of praxis as critical of current models of practical theology, because traditional forms of practical theology involved an

'inherent[ly] male orientation and inability to deal with the reality of the lives of women, children and the poor'. Ackermann (1998:84) suggests that the point of departure for a feminist theology of praxis is an acknowledgement of the unending, relentless quality of human suffering, balanced by the resilient longing of human beings for wholeness. I find a vast sense of hope in Ackermann's view, and hope is the motivation of my theology. As long as we are able to address and redress injustice and oppression, there is hope, even in the face of long-standing suffering. Weingarten (2000:204) refers to this approach as doing hope – she says that hope is 'something we do with others. Hope is too important – its effects on body and soul too significant – to be left to individuals alone. Hope must be the responsibility of the community'. Instead of theorising, feminism is a doing theology, an attitude and activity which I support in my preference for a participatory approach to practical theology.

Feminist theology did not develop in the church, but emerged from a secular women's movement of the 1960's (Keane 1998:122). Thus the feminist approach to theology arose in the context of oppressed women, just as liberation theology arose from the oppression of Black people. Both feminist and liberation theology reside within the field contextual theology.

1.4.3.1 Feminist theology

According to Keane (1998:122), Christian feminist theology pays special attention to the situation of women within the church, as traditional forms of theology were part and parcel of the oppression of women. Following on from some of the voices of reformist feminists, Ackermann (1994:99) describes feminist theology as follows:

Feminist theology aims at the liberation of all women and all men and the transforming of religious structures. This means that male hierarchies are no longer held to be normative in determining people's worth. It means that women and men together will be able to contribute to naming and shaping their realities in such a way that all people's humanity is affirmed in just, loving, liberating and healing praxis.

In collaboration with those who are marginalised and voiceless, feminist theology strives to, transform their realities and to seek ways to assist them in healing the wounds inflicted by oppressive discourses such as patriarchy, racism, sexism and ableism (McClintock Fulkerson 1994:15).

This study needed to explore the voice of feminist theology particularly because in most religious traditions women do not feel equal and valued (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:11-12). Most religious scriptures and other historical documentation do not reflect the dignity of women. By employing a feminist theological approach, I attempted to highlight the disgraceful way in which women's sexuality is treated in religious traditions and in which both women and men have been silenced. Ackermann (1994:198) regards feminist theology as an interpretative key which 'begins with an attitude of suspicion towards existing doctrines and interpretations of the Scriptures, centuries of male scholarship, which has quite naturally seen the world through men's eyes and experiences, [and] cannot be accepted unquestioningly as normative for women'.

Through the interpretive lens of feminist theology, I explore, in Chapter Two, some of the historical discourses regarding Christian women's sexuality. Sometimes it was necessary for me to re-read Scripture through a feminist interpretive lens to de-construct religious understandings of sexuality, as it has for very long mostly been constituted by patriarchy. Many of the great religious fathers of history perpetuated degrading attitudes toward women, for example, the great reformer Luther said: 'Let them bear children till they die of it. That is what they are for' (quoted in Isherwood & McEwan 1994:50). I agree with Isherwood and McEwan (1994:39) that these attitudes stem from a patriarchal interpretation of the creation story as portrayed in Genesis 2 and 3 and interpreted in 1 Timothy 2:12-14 and 1 Corinthians 11:7 – 8, which implies women's inferiority in three ways. Firstly, God appears to be solely male. Secondly, women are created from man and are therefore secondary in human creation. Thirdly (and probably the most damning), the male God, having made the perfect world, has it shattered by a disobedient woman. The suppression by patriarchy of the Lilith story (Hefner 1997:1-2) of course adds this slant, and it is revealing that even most trained Christian ministers today do not know about this text.

The participatory approach to pastoral care aligns well with my commitment to challenge oppressive discourses in which both men and women are silenced and their experiences are marginalised.

⁴ The use of the singular 'sexuality' is not meant to imply a monolithic view of women's sexuality (or rather sexualities), since the study is concerned with individual sexuality. Thus sexuality in the context of the study is meant to imply diverse views and experiences throughout.

1.4.4 A participatory approach to pastoral care

A participatory approach to pastoral care ignited my desire to change what is unspoken and unspeakable to what is voiced, as it creates space for those who are marginalised and lends an ear to unheard voices (Kotzé 2002:18). According to Ackermann (1994:206), there is a critical theological and pastoral need to create spaces for women to be 'heard into speech' (Nelle Morton, cited in Ackermann 1994:206). Poling (1995:117) also emphasises the importance of giving those who are voiceless a voice, especially in the context of sexuality:

[I]f persons in and out of the church are suffering because of conflicts between their sexual behaviours and the church's ethical positions, this phenomenon merits careful attention and pastoral understanding, not condemnation,...God is speaking through these new voices of suffering even if the church does not want to hear.

The voices of women are silenced in the presence of the dominant discourse regarding their sexuality which we looked at in this research project. I tried to create a space for women to voice their experiences with sexuality. Together with the research participants, I explored and challenged the selected dominant discourse which constitutes our experiences with sexuality. Only once silenced voices are heard will we be able to re-author the narratives of women and their sexuality within their faith context.

Through narrative participatory pastoral conversations, I was able to re-author the participants' narratives of sexuality with them. Participatory pastoral care beckons us to care *with* rather than to care *for* (Kotzé 2002:7). The principles of narrative therapy helped me to care *with* the research participants and not *for* them, as narrative embraces the philosophical position of the client being the expert in his/her own life. With the help of deconstruction, we looked at the discourse of 'therapist as expert'. I used Anderson's (1997:95) views of the therapeutic relationship and applied them to the research relationship. The narrative research situation is a relational system and process in which the participants and the researcher(s) become conversational partners in the telling, inquiring, interpreting and shaping of their narratives. In this approach, the expertise of the client(s)/participant(s) and the therapist(s)/researcher(s) are combined and merged:

A client brings expertise in the area of content: a client is the expert on his or her life experiences....When participants are narrators of their stories, they are able to experience and recognize their own voices, power, and authority. A therapist brings expertise in the area of process:

a therapist is the expert in engaging and participating with a client in a dialogical process of first-person story telling.

(Anderson 1997: 95)

In acknowledging the expertise of the client, a pastoral therapist participates with the client in re-authoring his/her narrative(s) in ways that can be more life-giving to the client. A narrative can be understood as an account of a person's life as told by himself or herself. Specific experiences of events (as storied by the participant) of the past and present, and those that she/he predicts will occur in the future, is connected in a lineal sequence to develop this account (White & Epston 1990:10). The aim of therapy is the generation of alternative stories that include vital and previously neglected aspects of the person's story and these 'new or alternative' stories can be incorporated as alternative knowledges (White & Epston1990:15-17).

Flaskas and Humphreys (1993:37) see narrative therapy as a therapeutic conversation that recognises the role of the cultural meanings and beliefs that underpin the process of change and intervention. White (cited in Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:42) has adopted many of Foucault's ideas regarding discourse and the constitutive effects thereof for narrative therapy. It is therefore important to de-construct discourse(s) to allow alternative stories to present themselves. Morgan (2000:46) defines deconstruction as '[t]he pulling apart and examining of "taken-for-granted" truths'. Freedman and Combs (1996:57) call this process of deconstructing dominant discourses 'deconstructive questioning': 'Deconstructive questioning invites people to see their stories from different perspectives, to notice how they are constructed (or *that* they are constructed), to note their limits and to discover that there are other possible narratives'. Narrative therapy supports my commitment to journey *with* people through their lived experiences and is also supportive of my participatory approach of pastoral care that cares *with* people and rather than cares *for* people.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was motivated by my personal experience. In my discussions with other Christian women, it became apparent that my experience of my sexuality, as a Christian woman, did not conform with the dominant discourse. This in turn aroused my curiosity. Reinharz (1992:260) says that 'experience can be the very starting point of a study, the material from which the researcher develops questions, and the source for finding people to study'. My personal experiences and curiosity, embedded within my religious

construction as a reformist feminist Christian, initiated this study. As a researcher operating from a postmodernist perspective, I realise that '[s]tarting from one's own experience violates the conventional expectation that a researcher be detached, objective and "value neutral" (Reinharz 1992:261). I did action research, which does not claim to be objective – on the contrary, Hall (1996:28) states that researchers' 'context[s] will inevitably be constitutive of the data they collect and of the way in which it is interpreted and analysed'.

When I asked myself what I would like to achieve with this study, my answer was to create the possibility of change. It frustrated me to see so many Christian women struggling to mesh their sexuality with their faith experiences. I believe that our sexuality should enhance our spiritual experiences instead of alienate us from them. With the possibility of change in mind, I decided to follow the process of participatory feminist action research. McTaggart (1997:7) describes participatory action research as political 'because it is about people changing themselves and their circumstances and about informing this change as it happens'.

To clarify my position, I need to explain that, although I accepted and appreciated the fact that participatory feminist research could initiate change, I did not enter into this study assuming that there would be change. Walker (1998:240) states that participatory action research 'incorporates social action and change as part of the research process itself'. However, I felt change should be optional, and, if any change should occur, it should be because the participants wanted it and constructed that change.

Due to the possibility of change, I needed to be mindful of the ethical implications of my research. I had an ethical obligation and commitment to facilitate any change, but only if the participants chose this. I strongly support Maguire (2001:62) in her view that '[f]eminist-grounded action research affords participants the power and space to decide for or against action'. I could not expect, demand or force change, but in the event of change I needed to be ethically accountable by giving therapeutic assistance in the transition phase of change if the participants required it.

My decision not to assume change was motivated by my appreciation of the unique personhood of all humans. It would seem that Reinharz (1992:4) also appreciates the uniqueness of personhood, and the concomitant implied uniqueness of experiences, when she, like Sexton (quoted in Reinharz 1992:4), emphasises the use of the plural

forms of nouns because '[w]omen have not one but many voices....[b]oth the themes and the variations, the individual and the collective voices need to be heard'. It was my sincere desire to hear the voices of the participants, especially the voices of those who differed from my understanding of sexuality. To ensure that I heard all these voices, I took cognisance of the power-relations that might have come into play between myself as the researcher and the participants during the research. My awareness of power was informed by Foucault's work on power:

For Foucault, power cannot be seen as something in itself, but rather 'shows itself' through the evidence that can be found in everyday interactions, in institutionalised social practices, in discourses, in the objects that are chosen for study, in the knowledges that come to exist, and in subjectivities or the ways we are able to think about 'the person'.

(Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:40)

Thomas (2002:85) discusses the power that is attributed to therapists and other professions in her discussion of structuralism. Thomas (2002:85-86) states that structuralism has encouraged society to believe that therapists and other professionals have the ability to know, interpret, diagnose and treat 'emotional and psychological "truths" about those [they] are working with'. From this comment I deduce that many people might see a researcher in the same way, and therefore assume that a researcher has privileged knowledge, with the result that she/he may be elevated to an 'expert position'. A position of knowing implies that the researcher is superior in the power/knowledge relationship with the participant and should or could exercise dominance. Foucault (cited in White & Epston 1990:19) states that power and knowledge are inseparable and support one another inter-relationally. Thus those with knowledge have power and those with power can create knowledge or 'truths'. I was aware that my voice might be seen as constitutive and could therefore entice or coerce

It was important to me that the participants would feel empowered in the research process, and therefore I believed that it was relevant to restructure the power relationship between the participants and myself as researcher. The restructuring of power can be achieved in two ways. Firstly, it can be promoted by an approach of power-sharing. Therefore, I did not do research *on* women, but researched *with* women, and invited them to be co-researchers. I am also aware that one can never completely neutralise the effects of power (Foucault in Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:40-41), but that within every power relation, there is the possibility of resistance. The possibility of resistance by the co-researchers was facilitated by inviting the participants to reflect on our respective

participants to conform to my views.

positions during our conversations. I disclosed my own biases, feelings, choices and multiple identities as far as I was aware of them, and located them within the research process. By doing this, I was able to be self-reflexive.

Secondly, developing a self-reflexive consciousness enabled me as the researcher to look closely at my own practice in terms of how my constructions could play a constitutive role in the knowledge construction process, as suggested by Hall (1996:36). This was not only an internal audit of my contributions to the process. In accordance with the ethical practices described by Hall (1996:36), I have made a conscious effort to reveal to the participants (and the readers of this research report) how my constructions influenced me in this process of meaning-making. Hall (1996:36) states that such a disclosure of the researcher's personal involvement in the knowledge construction process may enable participants (and readers) to decide for themselves whether they accept the data or reject it.

This self-reflexive practice was in line with my social constructionist and discursive position, as it acknowledged the discourses that I, as the researcher, use and am shaped by, as well as to acknowledge the pluralism of women's stories. My conviction that each participant would experience her sexuality in a unique way was confirmed in the course of this journey. The research procedure facilitated the process of accepting the uniqueness of each voice.

1.6 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

I chose participatory feminist action research as the most appropriate vehicle to facilitate my research, as it highlights women's diverse situations. It also focuses on problematic institutions and structures (Olesen 2000:216), for example, the church, which influence their experience of sexuality. In this study we explored how one dominant discourse with regard to Christianity and sexuality influenced participants' experience(s) and expression of their sexuality as Christian women. This dominant discourse has many effects on women, and in many ways, it silences them. Participatory feminist action research aims to uncover and disrupt silencing mechanisms by creating knowledge and facilitating change (Maguire 2001:64). I used feminist interviews to gather as much information as possible concerning narratives of women's sexuality.

1.6.1 Inviting participants

Some feminists feel that good personal relations are a prerequisite for studying women (Reinharz 1992:264). Taking into consideration the sensitivity of my research topic, I felt that it was important that I experienced a bond with the women I was going to invite to journey with me through sexuality. I believed that an existing acquaintance would be beneficial to their participation. I approached four women to participate in the journey to explore sexuality. I had no previous intimate or privileged knowledge about their histories, current contexts or their views of sexuality. I knew these women from my involvement in different activities and they were not connected to one another in any way. The only common denominator was that all four these women were Christians and I felt that they were approachable.

Three of the women I approached agreed to participate, but the fourth lady said that she felt she did not have anything to contribute.

I spoke to these women in person, sharing the research topic with them. After our initial conversation, I gave each potential participant a letter that contained information pertaining to the topic of the research journey, my commitment and aims for the study, as well as what would be expected of participants (see Annexure 1, 2 and 3).

The participants who accepted the invitation were Cathy (a pensioner, single), Marlene (in her late fifties and happily married) and Marelise (thirty something, happily married). (The names are fictional and were chosen by the participants.) I was the fourth coresearcher (I am in my forties and happily married). My journey with these participants is described in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Our exploration of the participants' approaches to their faith experiences was important for our understanding of their socially constructed and constructive narratives of sexuality. In all the participants' narratives, it became apparent that the ways in which they understood, interpreted, created meaning and lived were directly linked to their approaches to religion. All the participants, except myself, followed a confessional approach to religion.

According to Wolfaardt (1992:6), the focus of a confessional approach is the study of the Bible, which is seen as the sole source of knowledge and norm for the subject.

Within a confessional approach, Scripture is studied, and the insights the person gathers about what the world should look like are brought to the world; the believer attempts to bring his/her practice into line with the Bible (Wolfaardt 1992:7). Social sciences are seen as only a means to serve theology. Those who follow a confessional approach tend to subscribe to the guidelines for ministry derived from Reformed theology. The participants in this study were members of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Methodist Church and the Assembly of God (Baptist Church) respectively. The church and its ministries acted as their general orientation for their personal behaviour and life style.

It became evident that the participants accepted the patriarchal view of the Bible and faith experiences. When they embarked on this journey, it was at first inconceivable for the participants to question the way in the Bible is interpreted or that there were alternative ways to 'hear' the Bible.

My approach to practical theology is a participatory approach, which includes a contextual approach, as discussed in Section 1.4.3. of this research report. My postmodern understanding of theology enabled me to position myself within a participatory approach, as it recognises a multiplicity of realities. Postmodernism is open to non-conceptual ways of knowing. 'The aim of Postmodern Theology is not to provide a rational or exact explanation of God, but to point to coherence between our experience of God and the way we experience the world physically and morally' (Herholdt 1998:224). I agree with Herholdt (1998), as I believe that as humans, with our human limitations, we can never explain or understand God; therefore we can only focus on our experience(s) of God and how we live our lives in relation to our faith. My spiritual focus is therefore not on understanding, but on being and doing. My understanding of God is that God is omnipotent, omnipresent and all-embracing and God expands over all the generations – it is we as humans that need to discover meaning in each generation. Meaning cannot be transferred from one generation to the next, as we do not live in a static world (Herholdt 1998:222-225).

During this conversational journey, the participants expressed their own interpretations of biblical views concerning sexuality and what they defined as sexual transgressions. As a participant in this research journey, I also stated my interpretations of the biblical views on sexuality. This was a difficult process for me, as my interpretation was often in conflict with a patriarchal view of sexuality. I shared Ackermann's (1998:78) experience, which she described as follows:

The dominant model for practical theology in South Africa emanates from a male, Reformed world. Not surprisingly my experience as a practical theologian has been one of writing and speaking from the margins. It is a place which I have found lonely, challenging and rewarding.

1.6.1.1 The other voices

During our journey, a number of voices other than those of the formally invited participants emerged. These were the voices of friends, family, colleagues and those of others who engaged in pastoral therapeutic conversations with me. These voices made valuable contributions, and their views were often very different from those of the participants. I have included their perspectives and refer to these contributions as 'the other voices'.

1.6.2 The data collecting process

Hancock (1998:9) states that qualitative approaches to data collection usually involve direct interaction with individuals on a one-to-one basis or in a group setting. She adds that such data collection methods are time-consuming and that consequently data is collected from smaller numbers of people than in the case of quantitative approaches. Hancock (1998:9) believes that '[t]he benefits of using these approaches include richness of data and deeper insight into the phenomena under study'.

The main methods of collecting qualitative data are individual interviews, focus groups and/or observation. Below, I reflect on the various processes that I used to gather and document data for this research project.

1.6.2.1 Feminist interviews

According to Reinharz (1992:19), feminist interviews tend to be semi-structured or unstructured. Hancock (1998:9) defines a semi-structured interview as 'a series of open ended questions based on the topic areas the researcher wants to cover'. An open ended question defines the topic under investigation, but provides opportunities for both the interviewer and the interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail, thus allowing for a more elaborate inquiry and response.

I interviewed each participant on three different occasions. The initial interview was semi-structured, as it was important for me to address specific questions that would provide a framework for our journey and to negotiate consensus of meaning (clarifying

terms used). I also believed that some structure would be helpful to participants, as all of them felt a little uncertain about what to expect from the process. I hoped that providing some structure would assist me in re-assuring the participants and helping them to feel safe. I had a set of broad questions (see Annexure 4) and provided some prompts to help the participants.

The focus of the first interview was to explore the history of the participants and the contexts in which their sexuality was constituted. Sexuality is a vast field to discuss; therefore, I decided to research the following areas of the participants' past experiences:

- early childhood;
- the teenage years, with the focus on sexual education, virginity and the discovery of the participant's own sexuality and role models;
- entering adulthood; and
- later experiences of sexuality.

The second interview was unstructured. Unstructured interviews are also referred to as 'in depth' interviews (Hancock 1998:10). Such interviews have very little structure. Hancock (1998:10) explains that the researcher 'goes into this interview with the aim of discussing a limited number of topics, sometimes as few as one or two, and frames subsequent questions on the basis of the interviewee's previous response'. Even though we dealt with only a few questions in this interview, we were able to explore the issue at hand (this was determined by the participant), in great depth. The unstructured interview assisted me to create space for the participants to guide our discussion, thus giving them the power to determine the agenda of the conversation. During this interview, we explored the participants' understanding of and the meanings they allotted specifically to their understanding of sexuality within their faith context. One of the questions I asked was: 'I wondered how you view the church's role in your understanding of your sexuality?' We explored the four periods of the participant's life (see the list above), looking at her understanding of her sexuality in terms of her faith experiences.

The final interview was again a semi-structured interview. In this interview, we explored the different discourses that had emerged in the previous interviews.

Using open ended questions in all three interviews allowed me to access the participants' ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words, rather than in my words as the words of the researcher (Reinharz 1992:20). This interactive method was appropriate to my

choice of social constructionism as my research discourse, which was to allow a multitude of realities to be expressed in narratives (Freedman & Combs 1996:29-30).

White (1991:28-29) believes that we make sense of our lives through stories, both the cultural stories we inherit as well as the personal stories which we construct in relation to our cultural stories.

Because these interviews were fairly informal, they felt more like conversations (Hancock 1998:10). This was important to me, as I believed that this made it easier for the participants to release me from the 'expert position', because our interaction felt like a conversation. An interview could easily have had a formal feel to it, which in turn could have emphasised my aims as the researcher, instead of the spontaneous flow of the participant's narrative(s).

Reinharz (1992:37) states that multiple interviews could provide a more accurate version of a person's narrative(s). Therefore I had three interviews with each participant, as I believed that this would allow a more accurate and richer narrative to emerge than in a single interview. Multiple interviews created an opportunity for corrective feedback, and I was able to ask additional questions to elucidate information we had previously co-constructed.

1.6.2.2 Narrative as data

As a person's sexuality consists of vast and different experiences, I thought it would be helpful for each participant to explore her construction(s) of sexuality through a retelling of her life-stories. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:4) suggest that narrative can be used to represent the character or lifestyle of specific subgroups in society, defined by their gender, race or religion. Narrative as data collection refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials, thus life stories. Bickman and Rog (quoted in Lieblich et al 1998:5) recommend that '[n]arrative methods can be considered "real-world measures" that are appropriate when "real-life problems" are investigated'. For these reasons I decided to use narrative in the process of data collection. I believed that through an exploration of the life-stories, the participants and I could search for (the sometimes invisible) discourses of sexuality within their stories. For me, feminist interviews with a focus on narrative were the most appropriate method of data collection, because sexuality is such an abstract concept. The only way in which I was able to sketch this phenomenon was with the narratives of the participants. If I have been

researching the effects of breast cancer, by contrast, most people would be able to find a clinical description of what breast cancer is. But how does one describe sexuality? What does it look like and does it look the same to all people? Only by journeying through the narratives of people would one be able to 'see' this elusive phenomenon.

I met with each participant for three conversations in which we explored our constructions, contexts, practices and understanding of sexuality. Although I participated by sharing my constructions and experiences of sexuality, we mostly focused on the participant's narrative. I entered into these conversations with what Bird (2002:55) refers to as a 'willingness to discover'. Bird (2002) advises researchers that in order to situate themselves in a position to discover, they need to acknowledge that they, as the researchers, bring with them, into every conversation, their accumulated knowledge. However, each conversation is unique and may challenge or add to what you know. Because of my adoption of a social constructivist stance, I used contextual enquiries. Our understanding of the world we live in is formed by our context, because it is constituted by cultural, religious, social and many other discourses. There could be many ways to understand a narrative, and therefore we need the context to guide us. White (1991:28) sees this as follows: '[O]ur culturally available and appropriate stories about personhood and about relationship have been historically constructed and negotiated in communities of persons, and within the context of social structures and institutions. Inevitably, there is a canonical dimension to the stories that persons live by.'

Bird (2002:65) formulates the process of contextual enquiries as a reflection and continual re-viewing in order to 'situate our enquiry beyond the bounds of the individual and family, to the [faith] community within which the individual and family is immersed'. We therefore explored ideas and experiences and asked questions to connect our experiences with their context and discourses that could have informed and constituted our understanding(s). The discourses that we identified are discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this study. These discourses were formulated and recorded in the therapeutic letters I wrote after each conversation, as suggested by Epston (1994:31–37) and Morgan (2000:85-111).

1.6.2.3 Documentation

To document our conversations I used letters. These letters had several purposes. They served as a summary, as a further exploration of the conversation, as well as an invitation for further responses. Clandinin and Connelly (1994:421) regard letters as a

research method which can be used between participants, between research collaborators or between researchers and participants. They add that one of the merits of using letters is that equality is established. Due to the participatory nature of this research project, it was important that there was equality between the participants and myself as a researcher. These letters helped us to create a sense of equality, as I asked the participants to reflect critically on the content of each letter. Most of these letters were 'translations' in a sense, as some of the interviews were in Afrikaans, but the letters were written in English, due to the fact that I would quote extracts from these in this research report. It was important to ensure that my understanding and translations were accurate; therefore corrections were invited and made to promote transparency and accountability in the research procedure.

These letters were extensions of the conversations, as suggested by Epston (1994:31–37). They gave us an opportunity for corrective feedback, as well as space to reflect on and explore the meaning(s) of the conversations further. Although I invited all participants to respond to my letters in writing, only one accepted this invitation. I believed it might be meaningful for participants to have access to each other's letters, as it could possibly create a sense of community. However, it became apparent that this idea of mine was not logistically practical and therefore I could not implement this letter-sharing. In this research report, I have included some of the original texts of the letters I wrote, as well as that of the participant who responded in an attempt to enhance transparency. It was important to me that I would be accountable and respectful towards the participants. Being as transparent as possible promoted this, especially in the documentation of their narratives, as suggested by Morgan (2000:101–104).

All the participants expressed their appreciation of the letters. The participants felt that the written word gave acknowledgement to their narratives. They felt that the letters gave them space to re-view and re-search many of their understandings and new meanings. The spoken word can be fleeting, but the written word can be re-visited. It was interesting that all the participants felt that reading their narratives gave them a sense of legitimacy. It made them feel that their experiences mattered, and the letters affirmed this. All the participants used these letters to engage in conversations with their significant others, families and friends. It would seem as if our conversations and the resulting letters stimulated many conversations.

1.6.3 Data analysis

Because I used narratives as data, narrative data analysis was the obvious method to choose. Lacey and Luff (2001:3) explain that the mass of words generated by interviews need to be described and summarised. During each interview, I made notes of the narratives told, often *verbatim*. After the initial reviewing and recording of these notes, I re-wrote this data as a summary in the form of detailed letters. After receiving each letter, the participants had an opportunity to give feedback and advice on corrections and to elaborate on the content of the letters. Once the additional information or corrections had been incorporated in the letters, this was followed by the critical stage of organising the data in terms of various themes and seeking relationships between the various themes that had emerged from the narratives.

Lieblich et al (1998:12) discuss a model for the classification and organisation of types of narrative analysis. There are many approaches to narrative data analysis. For the purposes of this study, I used the holistic-content (Lieblich et al 1998:13) approach to narrative data analysis. Within the holistic dimension one considers the life story of the participant as a whole (Lieblich et al 1998:12). This approach accommodated my desire to see the person as a whole, in the context that developed and constituted the person to her current position(s) in respect of sexuality. The second dimension of the analysis process was to focus on the content of an account, in other words, what happened and who participated and why, according to the understanding of the participant (Lieblich et al 1998:12).

I chose to use the holistic-content mode of analysis, because it considers the complete life story of an individual and it focuses on the content presented by it. This approach allowed me to concentrate on one major theme, that of sexuality. I also believed that I would only be able to grasp the context of the participant if we explored her complete life story.

Lacey and Luff (2001:3) state that in qualitative research data analysis is an interpretative and subjective exercise in which the researcher is intimately involved. This was my experience as well, as after the initial recording of data, I explored the narratives for themes that related to religious constructions, for example, nakedness in terms of biblical interpretations. I then searched for possible links between theory and historical views regarding sexuality and these 'identified' themes. Moreover, it was not only I who was involved in the interpretative process, but the participants were involved as well.

After I had identified themes, I compared these with existing theory, as discussed in Chapter 2. Within the letters I would present these 'identified' themes in a tentative manner, with relevant theory that could possibly illuminate present or new understandings of the narrative, inviting comment from the participants regarding the legitimacy of my understanding. I included in these letters the possible interrelated meaning of themes, linking their narratives to discourses that could have been constitutive in their lives.

We discussed these interrelated meanings and, in our last interview, I again invited input. These discussions generated new knowledges and a refinement of themes. Only once the participants had confirmed that such discourses were constitutive in their lives, did I include them in the final letter. The final stage of this process was the re-writing of the refined themes in relation to theory and the context-based life stories of the participants to formulate the meanings that had been obtained (see Chapters 3 to 5 of this research report).

1.7 ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND WAYS TO ADDRESS THESE

Before I embarked on this journey I was already confronted with several ethical dilemmas. Being a Christian, I had a definite approach to sexuality and worked on the assumption that the sexual relationship of a couple as a sacred space. For most people, this space is private and they feel vulnerable when asked to expose their views and to discuss their activities. This left me with the following question: How was I going to respect the person's vulnerability and privacy, but still be curious and explore sacred ground?

Sexuality is a realm in which personal freedom and social control are often pitted against each other. On the one hand, in our society, sexuality is seen as a highly private matter. On the other hand, both the church and society have publicly disapproved of certain sexual practices, which imply that sexuality also has a public dimension (Poling 1995:118). We often find ourselves caught between the private and public dynamics of sexuality in our society. The contradictions between what is said publicly on the one hand, and what is experienced privately on the other, are usually left unspoken, particularly in the church. It was a matter of concern to me that speaking about these issues might cause the participants to feel exposed and vulnerable. I argued that the only way in which I would be able to create a safe space for exploration was if I participated and shared my own story with the participants. This notion of mine is in line with the

argument presented by Reinharz (1992:32–34) that a researcher's self-disclosure during interviews is good feminist practice. Many feminist researchers, such as Jody Esper, Christine Webb and Ann Bristow (cited in Reinharz 1992:33) support this notion and feel that self-disclosure by the researcher will initiate true dialogue by allowing participants to become co-researchers. Because I was exposed to the same risks during our exploration of sexuality, it heightened my awareness of the need to be sensitive, respectful and understanding. My narrative had to become part of this journey.

I regard therapy as a process in which we create space to enable others to explore new preferred-ways-of-being, thus change. Taking into consideration that both therapy and research share this possibility of change, one can apply many principles used in therapy to the research situation, notably ethics. Therefore, to ensure that I, as a researcher, stayed accountable and transparent with regard to my motives and methods, I had to ask myself the following questions, as suggested by Kotzé (2002:8) during our journeys: Whose knowledges are these? To whose benefit are these knowledges? Who is silenced or marginalised by these knowledges? Who suffers as a result of these knowledges?

Developing a participatory consciousness assisted me to journey ethically with the participants. Heshusius (quoted in Kotzé 2002:5) describes participatory consciousness 'as a freeing of ourselves from the categories imposed by the notions of objectivity and subjectivity; as a re-ordering of the understanding between the self and the other to a deep kinship of "selfother",.... an attitude of profound openness and receptivity'. I believe that my participation and self-disclosure assisted me and the participants in our journey to participatory consciousness.

However, my participation led me to my second concern. My participation had the potential to influence the conversation and the power relations that were present in the conversations. Foucault's (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:40) work on power relations, discourses and the normalising gaze, made me aware of the subtle power play that is present in everyday contexts, and thus also present in the research context. Simply by conducting an interview, a researcher can easily take an expert position, directing and controlling the situation. The discourse regarding researchers and academics is that they are the experts and should be in control of the study. Hilary Grahams (cited in Reinharz 1992:20) says that if a researcher abdicates control, a sense of connectedness can develop between the researcher and the participants. Hence, as a researcher, I needed to acknowledge the political nature of therapeutic and research work, thus the power of the

researcher in relation to those participating. I addressed this dilemma with the restructuring of power as I actively promoted an approach of power-sharing, as discussed in Section 1.5 of this study.

Being a participant in this research project, and yet aware of my own discourses, was a very difficult position to maintain. I wanted to centralise the research participants' views and this resulted in my being reluctant to state my own position at times. I overcame this dilemma by sharing my dilemma with the participants. Whenever I felt that my disclosure would not be to the advantage of the process, I stated that reservation clearly. In most such instances, the participants accepted this silence of mine, but on a few occasions, a participant insisted that I voiced my opinion. In these instances, I honoured the request and shared my position on the matter at hand. I believe that this addressed the possible imbalances in our power relations, and created an egalitarian relationship. Susan Noffke (cited in McTaggart 1997:61) refers to this dilemma as 'a tension between democracy and social engineering'.

It would seem that many feminist researchers experience this dilemma. Maguire (2001:64) discusses this dilemma, saying that withholding information such as one's own opinion could allow space for the other to speak, but at the same time can also be an act of power that forces the other to carry the burden of speaking or acting if any relationship is to be maintained. However, I believe that we were able to journey with this dilemma in a life-giving manner. Both the participants and I felt respected in the way we dealt with this issue and the participants felt that our democratic participations allowed for this. The democratic participation allowed for authenticity.

McTaggart (1997:29) defines authentic participation in research as 'sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership, this is, responsible agency in the production of knowledge and improvement of practice'. I negotiated the agenda of my inquiry with the participants. I invited them to state what issues they would like to research and discuss. This democratic action in our setting of our agenda addressed a possible imbalance in power. Participatory action research can never be research on people, but needs to be research with them. And although this study was brought into being due to my curiosity, I felt that it was important to negotiate the agenda with the participants.

Rajesh Tandon (cited in McTaggart 1997:29) has identified several determinants of authentic participation that I also employed in this research. These determinants are that (i) participants negotiated with me as the researcher the agenda of the inquiry, (ii) they decided how they wanted to participate in the data collection and the data analysis, and (iii) the participants helped decide how the outcomes were used. It is important to emphasise that any changes which the participants might experience due to their participation in the project were not imposed on them. The participants requested or suggested that we work together toward a change within themselves, individually and collectively, and their interests were added on the basis of an agreed thematic concern.

My final concern was that participatory action research could initiate change. McTaggart (1997:31) states that participatory action research is 'concerned simultaneously with changing individuals, on the one hand, and, on the other, the culture of the groups, institutions, and societies to which they belong'. Thus, for this research to be meaningful, it needed to produce new knowledges and *maybe* new ways-of-being for the participants. Such possible changes could have resulted in negative or positive changes within the relationships of the participants.

We tried to ensure that our journey was ethical, not only to ourselves as participants, but also for our husbands and significant others, who were influenced by this journey. We included the partners of these women in order to address this last concern, by sharing with them the letters that I wrote and inviting the partners to comment on the process and the content of the letters. It was interesting that all the significant others expressed a greater understanding of the participants' constructions of sexuality after reading the letters. I also offered to engage in therapeutic conversations with the couples, or just with the individuals if there was a need for this. Marelise accepted this offer.

1.8 SUMMARY

I became aware of the silence by which Christian female sexuality is veiled. This made me curious regarding Christian women's experiences of their sexuality in relation to their faith. I became aware of many discourses that constitute Christian female sexuality and wanted to explore these discourses and their effects. This curiosity helped me to formulate my aims for this study. I also reflected on the variety of voices that have shaped my approach to pastoral therapy, namely social constructions, feminism, participatory pastoral care, and contextual theology. I discussed ideas and principles of

feminist participatory action research, as this was the framework for the research process in this study.

1.9 THE STORY CONTINUES

This introductory chapter created the basis for our exploration of the story of the sexuality of Christian women.

Chapter 2 explores some voices from the past that could enhance our understanding of the constructions of sexuality of Christian women, as we see that sexuality today.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 narrate the conversational journey with three Christian women and their experiences of sexuality and how these relate to their faith constructions. In these chapters I attempted to reflect on the cultural and religious discourses which constitute these experiences and what the effects of such discourses were on these women's experiences and understanding(s) of their sexuality.

Chapter Six includes my reflections on my personal experiences and new ways of understanding that resulted from this journey. I also reflect on the changed narratives of this journey, which included the reflections of the participants. Finally, the question arises: Is this the end or the beginning? I reflect on new understandings that were constructed regarding Christian women's sexuality and possible narratives about the future of Christian women in relation to their sexuality.

CHAPTER TWO

JOURNEYING BACK IN TIME – A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN'S SEXUALITY WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Due to my discursive positioning within social constructionism, I believe that sexuality is a social construction. Freedman and Combs (1996:23) define social construction as a process in which people construct their realities as they live them – this includes beliefs, laws, social customs, habits of dress and diet, in other words, all the things that make up the psychological fabric of 'reality'.

Burr (1995:3) maintains that our current accepted ways of understanding the world are a product, not of any objective observation of the world, but of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaging with each other in attempts to make meaning of the world. Burr (1995) adds that the ways in which we commonly understand the world and the categories and concepts we use are historically and culturally specific. In other words, our present understanding of sexuality is constructed by the cultural, social and religious norms/discourses of the past and present. For a Christian woman, the church is a very important normative voice in her understanding of her sexuality. Within Christianity, there are very specific discourses that constitute women's experiences of sexuality. In order to become aware of the discourses that constitute women's sexuality, I explored the voices of the past informing history of the church and its views regarding sexuality to understand the narrative of women's sexuality today better.

2.2 A RELIGIOUS HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

My journey back in time, exploring historical perspectives of women's sexuality, left me astonished and perplexed. It was like being in a maze – at times I was inspired and pleased with history of the church, and at other times I was disgusted, disappointed and disillusioned.

Due to the limited scope of this dissertation this is a very brief historical overview. I am aware that there are many omissions and that many traditions and viewpoints are not discussed or recorded in this study. Christianity is by nature comprehensive, and with

regard to most issues, with the exception of the most essential tenets of the faith, there is much diversity and there are considerable differences of opinion amongst members (Crawford 1990:234).

In my exploration of the history of the church, I sought to establish the connection between the discourses that became dominant in the past to those believed today with regard to female sexuality and Christianity. French philosopher Michel Foucault wrote book-length histories of madness, clinical medicine, the social sciences, prison, and ancient and modern sexuality. However, Gutting (1994:10) states that many of Foucault's histories fall under the category Foucault designated as 'history of present'. A of discomfort history present arose from a certain with some ideas/knowledges/discourses of the present, when Foucault expressed a need for historical explorations into the past in order to understand the present:

[Foucault's] motive for embarking on a history is his judgment that certain current social circumstances – an institution, a discipline, a social practice – are 'intolerable'. His primary goal is not to understand the past but to understand the present; or, to put the point to more nuance, to use an understanding of the past to understand something that is intolerable in the present.

(Gutting 1994:10)

Thus, acknowledging Foucault's ideas on a 'history of present', my initial awareness of many Christian women's discomfort with sexuality led me to an historical overview of Christian sexual ethics.

Social construction discourse posits that knowledge and meanings 'are not skull-bound and may not exist inside what we think of as an individual's "mind" (Hoffman 1990:3). They are part of a general flow of constantly changing narratives (Hoffman 1990) situated in historical discourses. Thus social construction theory helps us to understand that our meanings of the world are derived by looking and seeing the world through particular lenses, and an awareness of these lenses helps us to realise that 'that what you thought looked one way, immutably and forever, can be seen in another way' (Hoffman 1990:4). If one uses Hoffman's (1990) description of social construction theory as a lens to look at lenses, there are many lenses (for example, feminism, patriarchy and traditionalism) through which we can examine the history of the sexual ethics of Christianity and sexual theology.

The first lens through which I choose to look is a reformist feminist theological lens, which challenges some of the 'present' life-taking effects of patriarchy, when it is afforded the status of truth (refer to Section 1.4.2.). I agree with Neuger and Poling (1991:25), who stress the importance of recognising the distortions that have emerged from a patriarchal mind-set in terms of religious symbol systems, theological interpretations and the structuring of culture. Neuger and Poling (1991:26) believe that recognising the distortions that have emerged from a patriarchal mindset is not only important to women, but is vital to dismantle systems of power arrangements and stereotyped role limitations for both women and men. This view is compatible with a reformist feminist theology.

I believe that our understanding and making sense of our world is a social construction and that our sense-making is governed by discourses which circulate in a given period and context. Foucault (in McHoul & Grace 1993:27) thinks of discourses in terms of bodies of knowledge. As discussed in the foreword to the study, I have highlighted one discourse that I believe holds a dominant status for the purposes of this study. This dominant discourse is one that has historically encapsulated Christian women's sexuality in a discourse of repression, shame and guilt. Carter Heyward (1990:262) states that we find one commonality in the history of the church – that of an anti-sexual bias that is linked inextricably with the church's anti-female foundations: 'The church historically has taken the shape of a misogynist (woman-hating), erotophobic (sex-fearing) institution.' To understand sexuality and Christianity as we experience it today, we need to explore this statement by Heyward (1990) by journeying back to the roots of Christianity⁵.

2.3 A PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORICAL OVERVIEW THE PHILOSOPHERS AND THE CHURCH FATHERS

Having talked about truths being socially constructed within a historical discourse, I would now like to take a look at some of the historical beliefs and attitudes of Christianity to which Heyward (1990) refers to acquaint ourselves with the philosophies of the past. St Augustine has had a great influence over our understanding of what

⁵ Please note that my journey back into the history of Christianity is not necessarily in chronological order (according to the historical timeline), but rather in terms of the relevance of details to the history of women's sexuality. I looked from the present to the past and therefore my discussion of the early philosophers and Christian Church fathers precedes the discussion of Judaism. I am aware that in my discussion there is an omission of a 900 year span from Plato (428 BC) to Aristotle (384 BC) followed by Augustine and Aquinas (after AD 600). This leap was made due to the limited scope of this dissertation.

constitutes sexual morality, and continues to be considered authoritative among both Catholics and Protestants today (Porcile-Santiso 1990:195). Consequently, this research journey needs to explore the content of St Augustine's philosophy relating to female sexuality and faith.

2.3.1 Patriarchy

Rosemary Radford Ruether (1990:220) argues that St Augustine denied that women possess the image of God in themselves, as they could only be included in the image of God under the headship of their husbands. This speaks of the system of patriarchy. In a patriarchal system, the male head of a family represents both himself as an individual and the whole family as its collective head. Women, children and slaves fall under the collective headship of the patriarch. Sons can grow up and become heads of families and male slaves can be emancipated and thereafter become heads of families. Only women remain 'by nature' permanent dependants (Radford Ruether 1990:222).

There were philosophers who did not agree with this view, for example, Francis of Assisi and the women leaders in the early church, but Radford Ruether (1990:221) explains that the patriarchs held authority and thus the power to decide what was seen as the 'truth', thus prescribing the dominant discourse. According to St Augustine's thought (and implicit in biblical and Christian views before his time), the patriarchal concept of headship was used to interpret the biblical doctrine of the image of God – implying dominion over lower creation, thus all that was not a free propertied male. There was no equality between men and women. Due to this inequality, sexual intercourse was not seen as an expression of love, but only in terms of procreation.

2.3.2 Sexuality, sin and procreation

St Augustine professed that sin has brought concupiscence (a desire for sexual intimacy), and if it were not for original sin, shameful concupiscence would not exist. St Augustine claimed that before the Fall, sexual intercourse was rational and not pleasurable, but, due to Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, sexual intercourse became pleasurable and passionate and this led people to forget God. This forgetting of God was seen as a sin, and therefore pleasurable sexual intercourse became sinful (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:46). St Augustine also claimed that matrimony would exist even if no one had sinned, but marital intercourse would be without the excitement of sexual desire (Porcile-Santiso 1990:196). Without concupiscence, 'male semen could be introduced into the womb of the wife without the heat of passion, in a natural way

similar to the natural menstrual flow of blood emitted from the womb' (Bacchiocchi 1991:1). For St Augustine, the satisfaction of lust through intercourse was a necessary evil required to bring children into this world. Thus, the only justification for sexual intercourse was procreation.

These historical discourses were developed even more in the 19th century church in Europe and appears to be similar to some beliefs in Islam. I believe that these ideas of St Augustine's still contribute to Christian women's reluctance to acknowledge or experience sexual pleasure today. I experienced St Augustine's views echoing in many elderly Christian women's understanding of the purpose of sexual intercourse, which they claimed to see only as a means to have children, implying that sexual intercourse for the purpose of intimacy and pleasure is sinful. The discursive effects of this powerful and lingering discourse are that sexual enjoyment and expression are seen as shameful and sinful and as such can cause guilt and repression.

This guilt and repression has silenced women, which in turn indicates a denial or concealment of female enjoyment of sexual intercourse. This silence by and about women also has an impact on men, as free communication and expression of the sexual has become a taboo subject for all, especially for Christians. It came to be seen as improper to speak about sexual matters, as sexual intercourse was viewed as lustful and sinful. From this silence many myths emanated, resulting in fear, guilt and troubled relationships. Some of these myths and some guilt surfaced in the narratives of the participants and they are discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this dissertation.

2.3.3 Female inferiority

Another factor that contributed to women's repression of their sexuality is St Augustine's denial of male and female equality. Porcile-Santiso (1990:196) states that St Augustine's denial of women's equal human status with men is extended in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas believed in the biological theory of Aristotle, who taught that the male alone contributed formative potency in reproduction (Radford Ruether 1990:222). The female was viewed as only the passive incubator of the male seed, which determines the embryo. Aristotle believed that every male seed would normally produce a male and that females are born only through a defect in gestation. Thus only if the male seed fails to form fully does a defective human, the female, result. Accordingly, females are physically weaker, less capable of moral willpower or intellectual insightfulness than males. Therefore it was believed that all females are 'misbegotten

men' and 'monstrosities' (Weitz 2000:1). Other Greek scholars extended these ideas, declaring that a lack of heat makes women smaller, frailer, less intelligent, emotionally weak, morally suspect, and, as a result, a danger to men.

[Females'] defective nature, morally, mentally and physically, makes them non-normative humans, unable to represent the fullness of human nature. They cannot exercise dominion in society, but must be governed by the male as their head.

(Aristotle, quoted in Radford Ruether 1990:230)

As I thought about these ideas of female inferiority, they offered me some explanation as to why women in the past and even today prefer not to speak about their own sexuality. If women acknowledged or expressed their enjoyment of sexuality, it could have been interpreted as a confirmation of the above discourse that placed female morality under suspicion due to women's 'inferiority'. It was believed that women were more susceptible to sexual desire and other passions of the flesh, blinding them to reason and morality and making them a constant danger to men's souls (Weitz 2000:1). This could have translated into women's not expressing their sexual needs, in an attempt to protect their moral integrity.

Radford Ruether (1990:222–223) reflects on Aquinas's view of women. Aquinas defined women as a necessary evil in creation, as women are necessary to males as helpmeets in procreation. Since Aquinas regarded women as inferior to men by nature, he reasoned that women could only have a servile helping relationship with men. The understanding of friendship in the patriarchal system was that friendship is only possible between equals, therefore a woman was not seen as a suitable help and could not give assistance of a more spiritual or cultural kind. It might be that this view of women as inferior was a contributing factor in the belief that sexual intercourse had a procreative function only. If sexual intercourse was viewed as intended for play and pleasure, this could imply that the woman's role was more than that of just being servile, creating a sense of sharing and equality in the sexual act. Such equality of women was inconceivable in the patriarchal system of the time.

2.3.4 Pederasty versus marriage

In her overview of the history of the church, Porcile-Santiso (1990:196) speaks about the dualist view of human beings. Dualism is the doctrine that believed that reality consists of two basic opposing elements, often taken to be mind and matter (or mind and body),

or good and evil, or the rational over passion. Because of this dichotomous view of body and soul, all functions pertaining to the body were viewed to be in conflict with the soul.

Foucault (in McHoul & Grace 1993:116–117) looks into the argument of the earlier philosophers regarding pederasty. In Platonic times, sexual intercourse with a woman was seen as a natural act to procreate and it would always contain the basic element of pleasure. Due to the notion that sexual intercourse with a woman was natural, heterosexual intercourse was seen as animal and improper for rational beings, by implication men. The love of boys was not a natural love, thus not animal, and therefore this was seen as a purer love (Eros) that had the potential for nobility and spirituality. Therefore, due to the dualistic view of humans in the Platonic times, pederasty was a known and accepted practice.

The later Greek philosopher Plutarch challenged this argument regarding pederasty. He denounced the philosophers of pederasty as hypocrites, as Plutarch believed that pederasty was only about the physical side of sexual intercourse with boys. Plutarch argued for heterosexual relations, stating that marriage was supposed to lead to true and pure friendship, resulting in the fusion of the man and his wife, thus the conjugal relation itself. Marriage was to be the domain of pleasure (McHoul & Grace 1993:116–117).

In Porcile-Santiso's (1990:197) historical overview of patriarchy, she indicates that the medieval author Albert the Great presents a similar view of marriage as Plutarch. Albert the Great regarded marriage not only as a biological act for the purposes of procreation, but also as an expression of commitment. The view of sexual intercourse can be an expression of commitment still resonates today in many Christians' perceptions of sexual relations. Many Christians see marriage as the only permanent expression of commitment. Thus any sexual intercourse outside a stable, permanent and committed relationship such as marriage is, according to their beliefs, immoral and sinful.

2.3.5 The Reformation – reverting back to St Augustine's views of sexual intercourse

In the 1500's, the Reformation began, followed by the Council of Trent in the 16th century. Here the totality of marriage, including its physical aspect, was evaluated from a sacramental perspective – 'Grace perfects that natural love' (Denz quoted in Porcile-Santiso 1990:197). Denz's view challenged the Augustinian pessimistic view, namely that heterosexual intercourse was the satisfaction of lust through intercourse as a

necessary evil to bring children into this world. In the late 15th century, Martin le Maistre, a professor at the University of Paris, maintained that sexual intercourse could be engaged in for motives other than procreation and his argument broke the chain that linked sexuality to biological procreation.

Unfortunately, the Protestants, especially Calvinist purists, reverted once more to the Augustinian view. Jansen (cited in Porcile-Santiso 1990:197), a Calvinist church father, started a very conservative movement and once again stated that 'procreation alone justifies the use of marriage'. This view of sexuality remained present among Protestant Christians for many centuries and continued until very recent times. I experienced this belief in my personal history. My paternal grandmother was a very pious and religious woman and I always got the idea that she believed that sexual intercourse was only for procreation.

We can conclude that it was not only philosophy that had an impact on the social construction of sexuality, but also the dominant religious discourses. Burr (1995:3) states that social constructions are historically and culturally specific. The ways in which we as a society commonly understands the concepts we use are in relation to our context and our history. To understand sexuality within a particular faith context, we need to look at the origins of Christianity, thus Judaism and explore how women's sexuality was viewed in the Hebrew context. Dussell, an Argentinean philosopher (quoted in Porcile-Santiso 1990:192), wrote, that the 'Christian understanding of man took shape within the horizon of Hebrew thought and developed homogeneously in primitive Christianity'.

2.4 JUDAISM, SEXUALITY AND BODILY FUNCTIONS

Judaism is an ancient religion, almost four thousand years old. In 1800 BC, Abraham embraced monotheism and entered into a covenant with God, thereby binding himself and his descendants in an everlasting relationship with one God, Yahweh. The Jewish people co-ordinated their lives according to patriarchy and the Torah. The Torah contains the Ten Commandments and the corpus of sacred writings which tradition holds were received by Moses during his encounter with God at Sinai. This became the core of the Jewish religion and the basis of all Jewish law and theology. Over the course of centuries, a vast literature was developed to contain and transmit Judaism. Primary among these texts is the Talmud, a vast body of rabbinic literature (also known as the Oral Torah) (Greenberg 1990:1). Most female bodily functions figure significantly in certain areas of the Jewish law and were managed accordingly.

2.4.1 Puberty and menarche

In Judaism, puberty rites, like birth rites, were focused primarily on spiritual, communal and covenantal dimensions and not so much on bodily functions. The Rabbis established a uniform age for marking puberty (twelve for girls and thirteen for boys) and did not take the individual's own bodily development as the determiner. According to Greenberg (1990:6), the female body was enshrouded in modesty. This modesty was often carried over to bodily functions, such as menarche (the first occurrence of menstruation in a woman), menstruation, conception, pregnancy, lactation and menopause. To my mind, this 'prescribed' modesty must have carried an implication that these functions were unbecoming and this therefore had an inhibiting impact on women.

Even today, many female bodily functions are still treated as secret within the Judaic and Christian tradition. I believe that anything we keep secret carries an expectation of judgement. According to Bird (2002:77), secrecy can 'elevate a sense of shame, blame and fault'. Secrets are oppressive, as within secrecy oppressive power can flourish.

Thinking back to my personal menses as a young girl, I experienced it as natural. My mother, a trained medical sister and midwife, related to bodily functions in a very factual manner, without any concealed messages or exaggerated modesty. Therefore, great was my bemusement when most of my peers referred to their menstrual cycle by saying 'ek is siek' (I am ill). Most of them did not speak openly about menstruation and viewed it as rude to discuss this. I believe that these attitudes originated from their Calvinist background, which in turn was connected to the prescribed modest behaviour regarding women's bodily functions in Judaism when Plato's philosophy of dualism was widely accepted. Casaleggio and Janse van Rensburg (2002:370) explain that St Augustine, and later Calvin, accepted Plato's ideas and with their influence this philosophy was established and maintained in the church. According to Plato's philosophy, body and mind were split, with all pertaining to the mind seen as more important and spiritual. All functions pertaining to the body were seen as less important and, in some instances, even as sinful. Female bodily functions were classified under the latter (Casaleggio & Janse van Rensburg 2002:370).

In ancient Judaism, menstrual blood was assigned a special power far beyond its biological function. Menstrual blood was seen as polluted, taboo and impure. The absence of menstrual blood signalled new life, therefore the presence of menstrual blood signalled death, as no conception took place. Over time *niddah* (the menstruating woman and the laws of family purity) changed and could be interpreted in many ways, for example, the laws pertaining to separation during menses from the community or the state of the menstruating woman's being sexually unavailable for her husband. Greenberg (1990:26-29) explains that the laws of separation during menses had two different contexts. Firstly, contact with a menstruating woman was seen in the light of defilement and impurity - forbidding sexual relationships in this time. The second association concerns the integrity of family relationships.

When one looks at the notion of defilement, it becomes clear that the purification rituals had more to them. Purification was needed before one was able to enter the temple. After the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (70 BC), access to the Temple was no longer possible and there was no need for purification to enter the temple. However, some people were still subject to purification rites, namely married menstruating women. Widows and unmarried women were excluded from these rites, because they were not engaged in sexual relationships. This indicates that menstruation was seen as impure and that a sexually active woman could contaminate her husband if they had sexual intercourse during or directly after her menses, therefore necessitating a monthly purification after her monthly bleed before she could engage in sexual intercourse.

When a woman has her monthly period, she remains unclean for seven days. Anyone who touches her is unclean until evening..... If a man has sexual intercourse with her during her period, he is contaminated by her impurity and remains unclean for seven days, and any bed on which he lies is unclean.

Leviticus 15:19-24

I believe that many of the negative attitudes regarding sexual intercourse stem from the above attitudes of the past. Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:65) state that even many modern day Christians still accept and believe the Old Testament notion that sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman would defile one. Many also see the bodily fluids produced during sexual intercourse as dirty. It is interesting to read the story of a woman who had been bleeding for many years and touched Jesus – she broke a taboo. It is equally remarkable that the story was thought worth recording in Scripture and that the story was not subsequently erased, although this detail in Scripture is seldom emphasised.

The purification ritual prescribed that after the minimum of twelve days of separation, the woman went to a *mikvah*, the ritual bath located in Jewish communities. The waters had to be 'living waters', gathered from rainfall, a lake or sea. Upon her arrival at the *mikvah*, she was ushered into a private room where she bathed herself as usual, taking particular care of hygiene. This shows that the *mikvah* immersion was not for hygienic purposes, but rather for the purpose of purification and renewal. After the pre-cleansing ritual, the woman entered the *mikvah* basin. A *mikvah* lady supervised the woman's complete immersion and needed to pronounce the immersion as *kosher*. The woman recited a ritual blessing, thanking God for sanctifying her with His commandments and the immersion, after which she was immersed two more times.

According to Greenberg (1990:26-29) the second association dealt with the integrity of family relationships. No explicit reason is given for forbidding sexual intercourse during menses and the separation of the menstruating women from the community, yet in Leviticus, it is associated with the curbing of incest. The explanation of this is not explicit, but it would seem as if the notion existed that there might be some temptation to have intercourse with a menstruating daughter or sister, as this was supposedly the only time when she could not conceive. Incest would go unnoticed without a pregnancy as proof of such a sexual transgression. Thus by separating a daughter or sister from the community during her menstruation, this prevented incestuous behaviour from taking place without being noticed or punished.

2.4.2 Virginity and sexual intercourse

Not only were there strict rules to regulate female bodily functions in Judaism, female sexuality in terms of virginity was closely guarded and controlled.

2.4.2.1 Female virginity

The Talmudic law prohibited sexual intercourse outside the marriage, as it was seen as an act of promiscuity and immorality (Greenberg 1990:33-36). A very high value was placed on female virginity. We see this in the marriage contract, as it stated that for a virgin, a payment twice as large as that for a non-virgin could be asked. A priest was not permitted to marry a widow, a divorcée or a prostitute, because these women had already lost their virginity. Virginity was important, as it was a tangible proof of fidelity and fidelity was the only way in which a man could ensure his paternity of his children. For this reason, adultery was considered a grave sin and moral crime, punishable with death by stoning.

I have not found any explicit information regarding male virginity, but in contrast to this, the importance of female virginity becomes very apparent in the Judaic rape laws. According to Greenberg (1990:32), if a virgin was raped, she had lost her virginity and was shamed. She was no longer quite as marriageable, and the likelihood was that no one else would have her. Within a patriarchal system, such a woman faced the possibility of going through life unmarried, leaving her very vulnerable. For her protection, the rapist had to offer to marry her. The woman did not have to accept the man in marriage, but if she was willing, he was compelled to marry her and be responsible for her for the rest of his life. Furthermore, a fine was paid to the father to compensate him for his loss of a bride price for a virgin. The Code of Hammurabi (circa 1800 BC) is the earliest recorded legal system in the Western world – this code defines women's bodies as men's property and defines rape as a property crime (theft from her male relatives). Under this code, a convicted rapist had to pay a fine for 'damaged goods' to the raped woman's husband or to her father, if she was not married (Weitz 2000:1). When I first read the rape laws I found them very oppressive and abusive, but I have come to a different understanding, realising that these laws were written for the protection of women, who had to be married in the patriarchal system to enjoy lifelong protection and security.

The valuing of virginity has persisted into modern times among some groups. It is interesting that so much emphasis is placed on female virginity, yet males are often seen just to be confirming their maleness when they are 'sowing their wild oats'. I remember that as a young Christian woman, I often encountered the belief that it was unacceptable for a Christian woman to engage in any sexual activity before marriage. If she did, and this became known, her reputation was ruined and she was seen as an 'easy' girl. An 'easy' girl was not seen as a good potential marriage partner, but she was a great resource for young men to gain some sexual experience, objectifying her. It was not acceptable for teenage girls to experiment with sexual intercourse, but teenage boys were seen as 'just being boys' when they did. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:49) concur that the emphasis on female purity within the patriarchal system was a way of controlling women and keeping power in the hands of men. It would seem that this patriarchal value is still present in our society today.

Just as with virginity, there are double standards for men and women with regard to fidelity.

2.4.2.2 *Adultery*

It is interesting to note the double standard that existed in the past (and still exists) regarding adultery. Greenberg (1990:33) illustrates this fact, explaining that in Ancient Israel if a married man engaged in a sexual act with an unmarried woman, it was not considered adultery, but if a married woman engaged in sexual intercourse with another man (married or unmarried), this was considered adulterous and both were liable. This double standard is still present today. Women are judged much more harshly than men when they are involved in an extra-marital affair. A husband's infidelity may be implicitly tolerated by such a permissive discourse, but a wife who is unfaithful is often regarded as devious and irresponsible.

Hare-Mustin (1994:27) explains this phenomenon with the 'permissive discourse'. The permissive discourse is one that seems to challenge monogamy and claims to give both sexes the right to express their sexuality freely. Therefore, women are often made to feel they have no right to be hurt or betrayed by male infidelity, as women theoretically have the same rights. According to Hare-Mustin (1994:27-29), permissiveness has different effects for men and women, because of their different positions in society. For men, permissiveness can mean open sexual access, but for women it can mean pressure to accede to men's urging them to engage in sexual activity. This discourse operates in the presence of the 'male sexual drive discourse', which sees men's sexual desires as compelling and argues that women arouse these desires by being provocative and seductive. Hare-Mustin (1994:27) states that these discourses 'justify men's sexual freedom while punishing women who object to this by denying the validity of their objections'.

In a patriarchal system a woman only had access to security through her childbearing potential. Virginity, marriage and fidelity were all of the utmost importance to ensure a line of descendants that a man could claim.

2.4.3 Childbirth

In Judaism, currently there is no formal rite, not even a blessing, celebrating one of the most significant (and for some miraculous) experiences in a woman's life, that of childbirth. This speaks volumes about the place, or rather lack thereof, of public celebration of women's experiences (Greenberg 1990:10). This attitude towards women's sexuality is seen in the following words:

When a daughter is born, a man gains worry for the rest of his life. He cannot sleep at night out of fear for her. When she is small, he worries that she might be seduced; when she grows to be a maiden, he worries that she will become promiscuous; when mature – that she will not marry; when married – that she will not have children; when old – that she will produce witchcraft.

(Sanderin quoted in Greenberg 1990:37)

2.4.4 *Onah*

The discovery of the practice of *onah* compelled me to look at the history of women's sexuality through a lens more empathetic to patriarchy. The empathetic understanding was one of the most unexpected turns of this background study, as I found myself for the first time embracing patriarchy in this instance. Greenberg (1990:38) enticed me into the lives of the Hebrew people, explaining and describing a system, *onah*, which was at heart designed not to harm women, but to protect and honour them. Greenberg's (1990) understanding of patriarchy was totally different from that of most other female authors that I have read, for example, Yee (2003), Radford Ruether (1990) and Crawford (1990); they see patriarchy as serving only male interests. Greenberg (1990), by contrast, believes that many of the ancient patriarchal traditions and rites of passage were engineered to ensure the prosperity of the tribe and not necessarily to exploit women to benefit men.

Onah is the Hebrew word for the conjugal rights or the sexual satisfaction of the wife, incumbent upon her husband. The concept of onah is underpinned by the principle that the woman is endowed with a sexual drive and that the satisfaction of this drive is as basic to her well-being as that of other human needs and drives (Greenberg 1990:22). Interestingly there is no corresponding obligation for a woman to satisfy her husband. The Talmud introduces a general concept (which we also see in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 7:5) that a woman may not consistently and unreasonably refuse sex with her husband. However, in terms of legal protection, attention is focused on her sexual needs, not the husband's (Greenberg 1990:22). This positive precept is also seen in Deuteronomy 24:5 where there is an injunction that a newly wedded man should not go out to join the army nor will he be taxed at home. He must be left free of all obligations for one year in order to bring pleasure to his wife.

According to Greenberg (1990:23-25), there are two etymological derivations of the word *onah*. The one is linked to seasons or proper times, the other to causing suffering, thus referring to the frequency as well as the quality of sexual intercourse.

Rabbis were very explicit regarding set times for intercourse, some even linking a husband's minimum obligation to his profession. A camel driver, for example, had to comply at least once a month, but a man of independent means every night. A man was also required to observe the laws of *onah* during pregnancy and lactation.

The second factor was the quality of a woman's sexual life. Greenberg (1990:23) observes that while 'the ascetic, modest and even prudish view does crop up in the literature (particularly during the medieval period), the definitive rabbinic decision is that any type of sexual activity, foreplay or position is permissible'.

I find the concept of *onah* confusing, as in the ancient scriptures sexual intercourse was not seen in a positive light, as we see, for example, in Leviticus 15:18, that it is said that after 'sexual intercourse both the man and the woman must have a bath, and they remain unclean until evening'. Why then this very explicit instruction regarding the sexual pleasure of the woman? Was this to ensure that she would stay agreeable to sexual intercourse and so ensure procreation and the continuation of the paternal line? If so, why then did the husband have to observe the laws of *onah* during pregnancy and lactation when conception was unlikely? I was not able to find a clear answer to this question in the literature study.

2.5 PATRIARCHY, POWER RELATIONS AND WOMEN'S SEXUALITY

Understanding the social structure of tribal Israel is important in our exploration of patriarchy, power relations and women's sexuality. According to Yee (2003:35), the extended family was an important social structure. Patrilineal kinship as practised in ancient Israel was supported by a number of social practices that privileged men. The locus of power and authority over a particular family household was the oldest living male. Ownership of goods and resources lay with this patriarch, who passed his assets on as a birthright on to his eldest son, according to the customs of primogeniture. According to Yee (2003:37), endogamous marriages (marriages with one's closest kin) were the preferred form of conjugal union – strengthening the lineage and guaranteeing the greatest number of males available for conflict situations.

The *pater familias* had complete control over a household's resources on behalf of all his dependants. Older siblings took precedence over younger siblings and the oldest son ranked above his other brothers. Unequal family relationships are very evident in respect

of gender. A husband had authority over his wife, and older brothers had authority over their younger sisters. As adults, younger brothers had authority over their older sisters. A mother exerted her authority over her son in his younger years, but was eventually dependent on her son when her husband died (Yee 2003:38).

Yee (2003:38) notes that love and romance were not important factors when a couple married in Ancient Israel. Marriages of daughters were used to forge or strengthen alliances with other families. A new wife occupied an ambiguous position when she entered her husband's household. Although she retained ties to her own family, she no longer belonged to her natal home, nor to her husband's house entirely. She only became a member of her husband's household once she bore a son to ensure the continuation of the patrilineage. A wife's primary contribution to a household was her sexual fertility, bearing legitimate sons, who would ensure claims to limited commodities such as land. Yee (2003:38) concludes that this meant that the sexuality of wives, daughters and sisters was fully guarded and controlled, because it constituted the material basis of an ideology of honour and shame which legitimised this androcentric hierarchy.

Men became honourable by virtue of their lineage; wealth, age and status were autonomous and free from dependency on others. Their patronage and protection of the 'weak' (lower-status men and all women) operated under a code of honour.

However, men's honour was particularly vulnerable to the actions of women. The social system ran harmoniously based on the voluntary deference of its weaker members, but women could adopt various strategies to exploit the vulnerabilities of male honour and patrilineality. Sexual transgressions or the threat thereof left men exposed. Yee (2003:57) named such actions or intentions 'weapons of the weak' and these need to be taken into account in any diagnosis of power. With these 'weapons of the weak', women not only resisted male authority, but also exerted control over their own lives in a male-dominated world. Shame was cast on a male if his subordinates did not respect him, especially if his wife rejected him sexually. A man's personal honour was vulnerable to the defiance of his authority – leaving women dominant in the power-relation. This reversal of power challenges Foucault's (cited in Rabinow 1991:239) statement, 'where there is power, there is resistance' and could be turned around: where there is resistance, there is power. Yee (2003:49) argues that resistance can become an exercise of power, rather than a reaction to it.

Yee (2003:47) researched society operating under patrilineal and honour/shame-based ideologies and found that adultery committed by the wife was usually regarded as a first-class offence. It violated a man's absolute right to the sexuality of his wife and placed his paternity in question. This was a very threatening and disruptive prospect in a society governed by a patrilineal kinship structure. Adultery resulted in a considerable loss of honour, not only for the husband, but also for all those reciprocally involved in his honour, thus his family and his lineage. The extent of a man's disgrace correlated inversely with the status of the one who shamed him: the lower the status, the greater the shame.

Yee (2003:57) describes ancient Israel as two gendered worlds 'with the female world encapsulated by the male world, but for the most part invisible and inaccessible to the males'. Men and women lived separately from one another. Yee feels that the women welcomed this segregation, as it prevented men from having unlimited passage into their separate world. This world could provide camouflage and shelter for women's subversive acts of defiance. In this separate world, women were able to set the rules and their own structures of dominance and power.

After researching the power-relations of the Old Testament, I came to the conclusion that women's sexuality could possibly have been turned into a moral issue to tip the power scales back into the favour of patriarchy. To disarm the power of women's sexuality, sexuality was changed into a moral issue. In order to discourage women from challenging the patriarchal system, sexuality was placed within the realm of morality. The patriarchal system could not have foreseen that sexuality could challenge and conquer the male-oriented world of the Old Testament. The only way to curb this challenge was to make sexuality a moral sin, if it was not engaged in the manner prescribed by men. With these prescriptions, women's sexuality was controlled and managed – if only in the minds of men. Even daughters became the objects of the male fear of disgrace and manipulation.

Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter,
Or else, when she finds liberty, she will make use of it.
Be on guard against her impudent eye,
And do not be surprised if she sins against you.
As a thirsty traveller opens his mouth
And drinks from any water near him,
So she will sit in front of every tent peg
And open her quiver to the arrow.

(Sirach 26:10-12 quoted in Yee 2003:51)

I found support for the idea that sexuality was 'moralised' in Bishop John Shelby Spong's (2002:3) discussion of morality, sexuality and Hebrew tradition. It became clear that the concept of intercourse and marriage changed throughout the centuries and that many of our recent interpretations of biblical moral patterns were, in fact, misinterpretations of the ancient texts. He comments that marriage was not ever universally required to legitimise sexual activity, even in western Christian society. It was not until the Council of Trent in 1565 that a Christian ceremony was necessary in order to have a valid marriage. Looking at our understanding of sexuality since the sixteenth century, Foucault (in Rabinow 1991:297) sheds some light on how sexuality came to be misinterpreted.

2.6 FOUCAULT'S VIEWS ON THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY

Although Foucault's work on sexuality is today seen as an influential and authoritative voice, it only has a limited bearing on this dissertation, as Foucault focused on the history of sexuality in terms of the earliest moral codes (Bernauer & Mahon 1994:145). Foucault intended to explore Christianity and sexuality (*The Confessions of the Flesh*), which would have been highly relevant for this study, but unfortunately he did not do so before his death. Therefore I refer only briefly to some of the contributions Foucault made to my understanding of the history of sexuality.

Foucault (in Carrette 1999:120) identified three periods in the development of sexuality. During the first period, sexuality was allegedly free (in Greek and Roman antiquity) and was able to express itself without difficulties. During this period sexuality developed effectively and was devoted to a discourse in the form of an erotic art. This period supposedly came to an end when Christianity intervened and for the first time in the West a great prohibition was imposed on sexuality. This imposition said 'no' to pleasure and thus 'no' to sexual intercourse and this led to a silence on sexuality, enforced by moral prohibitions – or so history would like us to believe. Foucault challenges the idea that Christianity introduced the constriction of sexuality. Foucault argues that restrictions already existed in antiquity, but that Christianity implemented a system with which sexuality could be controlled.

Foucault states (in Carrette 1999:120) that '[p]olygamy, pleasure outside of marriage, valorisation of pleasure, and indifference toward children had already essentially disappeared from the Roman world before Christianity'. Thus the principles of sexual morality which are often attributed to Christianity were already present in the Roman

world before the appearance of Christianity. Christianity, however, brought with it new mechanisms of power to inculcate these moral imperatives which already existed earlier. Foucault calls this mechanism of power 'the pastorate'.

The representatives of the pastorate are those people in Christian society who fulfil the role of pastor/shepherd to the others, who are their sheep or their flock. The pastor teaches and takes care of his flock, but he also must know everything that his sheep do and what goes on inside the soul, the heart and the most profound secrets of the individual (Foucault in Carrette 1999:125). The church prescribed detailed confessions, particularly when sins of a sexual nature were committed. Such sexual sins could be committed either in thought or in deed. These prescribed detailed confessions meant that Christians were obliged to tell their pastor everything that occurred in the secret world of their souls. It would seem that the threat of confession operated as a deterrent for sexual sins. Foucault (in Carrette 1999:120) reasons that although sexual morality already existed in the Roman Empire, it was this enforced confession or the 'power of the pastorate', as he calls it, which compelled obedience to these sexual rules. This 'power of the pastorate' resulted in prohibitions, disqualifications and limitations of sexuality.

I became aware of the 'power of the pastorate' during my conversations with women about their sexuality and sexual practices. All the participants had a deep need to tell their stories - stories which often sounded much like a voluntary confession (see Section 5.14 for a more detailed discussion of this).

The second period, according to Foucault (in Carrette 1999:121), started with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the sixteenth century and lasted till the nineteenth century. During this period, total asceticism reigned. Foucault (in Rabinow 1991:292) explains that, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a certain frankness regarding sexuality was still common. There was little need for secrecy about sexual practices, words were said without reserve, and things were done without too much concealment. There was a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. The codes regulating the coarse and the obscene were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. During the Victorian age, talk on the subject of sexuality was silenced, and this became the rule. Marriage once more became the exclusive legitimate space in which sexual intercourse was supposed to exist.

According to Rabinow (1991:301), Foucault speaks of modern prudishness – resulting in censorship. If people were not even supposed to pronounce the word, it was possible to ensure that one did not speak of sexuality, imposing a silence. Foucault states that if sexuality is repressed and silenced, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. This explanation by Foucault could offer us an answer to my question why the dominant discourse is able to silence South African Christian women so effectively regarding their experiences of their sexuality. There is a reciprocal relationship between the dominant discourse and silence. The discourse enforces silence, and the silence in return maintains the discourse. Thus, the silence contributes to and maintains the discourse of guilt, shame and repression that enfolds Christian women's sexuality.

According to Foucault (in Carrette 1999:115), a third period started with Freud. Freud broke the silence imposed on sexuality and spoke the unspeakable. Although many other researchers from the social and medical sphere (for example, Masters and Johnson) followed Freud, within the Church the silence continued. It was this 'silence' within the Church that propelled my curiosity, resulting in this study.

Although I have experienced a silence in the church, the picture outside the church is very different. Due to Freud's exploration of sexuality, it has become acceptable to talk about sex (that is outside the church). In the secular world today, it is almost impossible to avoid sexuality. One is bombarded daily by reports of rape, violence against women and pornographic portrayals of women. Many advertisements use sexuality to sell products, resulting in a constant awareness of sexuality. This I call 'the sex in your face' mentality. Sadly, although today there is a new freedom and openness regarding sexuality, this openness is neither honest, nor transparent. I relate the use of sexuality as a commodity to patriarchy. Most attitudes regarding sexuality in society still smack of patriarchy, and even so, the system of patriarchy is still denied or defended by many. Many people are not even aware of the system of patriarchy, as they just believe that this is way things are, and therefore they are not empowered to question or challenge this system. Kathy Weingarten (2000:395) calls this state of being 'being unaware and not empowered'.

The history of sexuality is inseparable from the patriarchal system. This patriarchal system was established and supported by many of our historical church fathers and many present day clergy still maintain patriarchal ideology. Patriarchy has left society with a

legacy of the sexual objectification of women. I believe that only the church can address and change the *status quo* effectively in the long term.

2.7 PATRIARCHY – A LEGACY OF SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION: THE IMPACT OF THE PHILOSOPHERS AND THE CHURCH FATHERS IN 2005

The views, beliefs and practices of the ancient philosophers and church fathers still have an impact on constructions of sexuality today. I want to link the patriarchal notion that women are only meant to be servile and are not equal partners to the sexual objectification of women in society today. The sexual objectification of women is seen in phenomena such as pornography, rape and violence against women and children.

2.7.1 Pornography

Casting women in a role of sexual objects (for example, in the printed media, in television advertisements and in pornography) reinforces male dominance. The sexual objectification of women dehumanises women and implies that female sexuality is only meant to be in service of the male, leaving women without equality or dignity. I found that some of the literature I read confirmed these views of mine. For example, according to Isherwood and McEwan (1994:124-126), some feminists argue that pornography should not only be judged as a morally questionable issue, but as a political issue. Showing naked female flesh to a wide audience encourages people to see women as objects. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:124-126) state that in pornographic material, any suggestion of a relationship is totally absent, and this alienates women from respectful egalitarian relationships and contributes towards asymmetrical power positions in favour of men. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:126) continue, stating that in pornography, women are not portrayed in relationships that are mutually empowering, but are rather seen as being controlled and dominated by men.

Isherwood and McEwan (1994:125) believe that feminist theology should challenge patriarchal theology and reclaim women bodies by understanding them as good and powerful. Erotic power should be seen in the light of a partnership which expresses a desire to relate and to find pleasure with one another. One cannot find pleasure through violence and domination. They argue for a new understanding of women's bodies, which will see women's bodies as whole, not deficient, and as sacred, not sinful. I believe that we should move to a position where both men and women's bodies are seen as sacred

and not sinful or deficient. There is an urgent need for a new social construction of sexuality.

Borrowdale (cited in Isherwood & McEwan 1994:125) states that research has shown that pornography enables men to feel power over women and that 'many men think of sex[ual intercourse] as a weapon with which to hurt and punish women and they regard rape as a way of putting women in their place'. According to Borrowdale (quoted in Isherwood & McEwan 1994:125), 'pornographic mind is at work whenever men assume the right to buy women, or control their lives, [or] whenever women are subordinated to men'.

2.7.2 Rape

Rape is the most graphic power display of male domination. South Africa suffered under White patriarchal domination for many decades. During this time of domination, South Africa was known for its disregard of humanity and disrespect of persons, which had catastrophic effects on its societies. For many men in South Africa, this has changed since democracy, but for many women and children in South Africa, nothing has changed. I believe that colonialism, as well as apartheid, left the South African society with a legacy of disrespect. One such an act of disrespect is rape. Rape is often seen as act of domination, thus a political act. Many women still have to endure the most brutal, most disrespectful and most soul-violating act – that of rape. Many of the discourses pertaining to rape, such as 'a woman's place is in the home', or 'a woman's body becomes the property of her husband', serve the ideology of patriarchy. In the next section I discuss some of these discourses.

2.7.2.1 A woman's place is in the home

Isherwood and McEwan (1994:31) discuss some of the discourses surrounding rape and believe that these discourses originate from the patriarchal view that a woman becomes the property of her husband and the notion that a woman's place is in the home. This discourse implies that if women want to venture out, they must accept the risk of rape, assault, sexual harassment and verbal abuse. Thus, those who have been disobedient and leave the safety of their homes do not deserve any better and must expect and accept rape and harassment.

2.7.2.2 A woman's body becomes the property of her husband

Sadly, women are not only at risk when they leave the 'safety' of their homes, but they are equally at risk also within their homes. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:49) quote Luther as saying that a woman is 'never truly her own master. God formed her body to belong to a man, to have and to rear children'. This belief has been perpetuated into the twenty first century. Due to the fact that a wife's body was/is seen as her husband's property, many women have had to endure marital rape with no recourse. Men claimed the right to sexual intercourse with their wives, with or without the consent of their wives. Until very recent times, marital rape was not recognised by the law and was therefore interpreted as an accepted practice. In the United Kingdom, British law only declared marital rape a criminal offence in 1991. Weitz (2000:1) states that in America between 10% to 14% of married women are subjected to marital rape. In South Africa marital rape was only inscribed in the Prevention of Family Violence Act of 1993. Cases of marital rape are seldom reported or prosecuted. Vetten and Bhana (2005:8) state that in their study of marital rape with twenty-two wives (which included women in longterm relationships), at least a third of the women had not disclosed their experiences of rape. The women believed that disclosure would not only tarnish their public image and their relationship to the rapist, but it also would affect their self-esteem.

My understanding of the attitude towards marital rape was confirmed when one of my clients recently disclosed to me that she had been subjected to marital rape in the early years of her marriage. When we explored this, she stated this was her husband's way of punishing her, as she had, as a student, had a sexual relationship with another man. When I asked her why she had accepted this abuse, she stated that she had never even considered the possibility that a wife had the right to refuse sexual intercourse with her husband.

Kottler's study (cited in Vetten & Bhana 2005:8) on rape confirmed the discourse that 'men are entitled to conjugal rights and this left some women feeling obliged to have sex[ual intercourse] with their husbands because sex[ual intercourse] was their duty'. Kottler states (quoted in Vetten & Bhana 2005:8) that most participants believed a refusal indicated 'frigidity', which then 'justified the partner's use of force to obtain sex[ual intercourse]'. Most of these women did not define their experiences of sexual violence as marital rape, but rather as 'forced or survival sex', as they believed that 'real' rape occurs between strangers in traditionally unsafe areas and involved the use of weapons. Some of the participants saw marital rape as obligatory sexual intercourse

required to pay their husbands for the food and shelter provided for them and their children (Kottler, cited in Vetten & Bhana 2005:8).

2.7.2.3 Woman, the seductress of man

Another deep-seated discourse is uncovered when one explores the transcripts of rape cases. The defence attorney of the accused often uses a strategy of blaming the woman for inviting sexual attention. Heschel (2003:155) states that women are regarded as fountains of sexual temptation and can seduce even the most pious man. This belief is closely linked to the creation story, in which Eve is portrayed as the temptress of Adam. This discourse becomes very evident during the cross-examination of an 'alleged' rape survivor, when it is often implied that the woman dressed or acted in a seductive way, and has therefore supposedly welcomed sexual attention. Vetten and Bhana (2005:8) found that many women prefer not to disclose rape for the fear of being blamed for the rape. This is linked to the discourse that Hare-Mustin (1994:24) describes in which women are seen as objects that arouse and precipitate men's sexual urges and they are often seen as inflaming men's natural sexual urges.

2.7.2.4 *Male sexuality is instinctive*

Closely linked to the above-mentioned discourse is the discourse that men have no control over their sexual arousal or desire. Hare-Mustin (1994:24) describes this discourse as suggesting that 'men's sexual urges are... natural and compelling; thus, the male is expected to be pushy and aggressive in seeking to satisfy them'. In popular parlance, we often hear expressions such as 'boys will be boys' or 'all men need to sow their wild oats'. Teenage boys are often referred to as 'a bundle of walking hormones'. These idioms imply that it is acceptable for men to express and pursue their sexual desires, because 'this is just the way men are'. Men have no control over their desires and therefore they cannot be held accountable for any sexual indiscretions. In my exploration of this discourse, I have come to believe that the core of such thought is that men become animal-like in their response to female sexuality, therefore men sexually react instinctually, not rationally. This belief can be linked to the dichotomous view of Plato, splitting mind and body.

I regard these views of men as animal-like in their response to female sexuality as dehumanising to men. As a Christian, I believe that we (men and women) are created in God's image, therefore, I find it insulting if men's sexuality is seen as animal-like, irrational and out of control. God has created men and women with the ability to choose, and therefore we are accountable for our actions, including our sexual actions.

2.8 RECENT CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF FEMALE SEXUALITY

In my research, I was unable to locate any recent officially documented information of a specific faith community pertaining to women's sexuality. Catholicism has official documents that instruct and comment on issues such as gender, abortion, contraception, the ordination of women and homosexuality (Radford Ruether 1990:222–232). However, none of these address heterosexual women's sexuality in terms of women's education and experience of sexual relations and personal sexuality. It would seem as if gender is addressed, but not sexuality. As a Methodist, I contacted my resident minister and the presiding bishop to trace any official documents regarding views on women's sexuality within the Methodist Church. Neither of these members of the clergy were aware of any official documents. It would seem as if the only literature available (other than the Bible and academic textbooks) on women's sexuality within a faith context are bible study guides for women. I myself have read many such bible study guides and, although much of the content is enriching, it is a matter of concern to me that these aids are usually written with a patriarchal slant regarding marriage and sexual intercourse. Some of these bible study guides are misguided, conservative, naive and out of touch.

At the time when I was conducting the literature study for this dissertation, I was reading Rick Warren's (2002) book *The purpose driven life* in my personal quiet time. Yet again I was appalled to see how women and sexuality are still being depicted in a very negative way even today. In his chapter *Transformed by trouble*, Warren (2002:193-200) explains how everyday problems are used to make us more like Jesus. He explores Romans 8:28-29 in this discussion, and he concludes that not all that happens in our world is good, but that God can even use evil to bring good to a situation. Before this chapter, all the examples used to illustrate a point focused on male figures, but to illustrate trouble, Warren uses female examples:

Tamar seduced her father-in-law to get pregnant. Rahab was a prostitute. Ruth was not even Jewish and broke the law by marrying a Jewish man. Bathsheba committed adultery with David, which resulted in her husband's murder.

(Warren 2002:196)

Warren could have argued, for example, that although Tamar was raped and Bathsheba seduced, God still used them, and that Jesus came from this patrilineage. Instead,

nothing is said about Tamar being raped by her brother, but Warren focuses on her seduction of her father-in-law. Nor is it said that it was David who took the initiative and approached Bathsheba. After their sexual encounter, it was once again David who planned and arranged for Bathsheba's husband to be killed to conceal his adultery.

I was disheartened even further when to my dismay I found that Warren (2002:201) continues in the next chapter, *Growing through temptation*, to use sexuality and lust as examples of temptation. There are a multitude of issues that could be used to illustrate temptation, yet he uses sexuality. Warren is currently deemed one of the most influential Christian writers in South Africa and it saddens and infuriates me to see that he still chooses to depict women and sexuality the same way as it was done in the eighteenth century. Warren's depiction of women and sexuality serve as a confirmation of my conviction that women's sexuality is still entrapped by patriarchy and power-relations.

2.8.1 Disturbing discovery in recent liturgy

In my search for recent views on Christian sexuality, I made a disturbing discovery. I was shocked by Janet Crawford's (1990:239) discussion of the changes that have (thankfully) been made to the Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican Church in New Zealand. In her discussion, Crawford looks at the baptismal service used from the Book of Common Prayer before 1976. Sin and sexuality are linked by implication in two places.

The first occurs in the preamble to the baptism, where the priest states the reason for baptism as follows: 'forasmuch as all men (sic) are *conceived* [my emphasis] and born in sin; and that our Saviour Christ saith, None can enter into the Kingdom of God, except he be regenerate and born anew of Water and of the Holy Ghost...'. The second reference is when the parents and godparents promise to renounce 'the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glossy of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the *carnal desires of the flesh*' [my emphasis].

In the baptismal service performed for my own children in the Dutch Reformed Church, there was also a reference to children received in sin. My understanding of this was that it referred to the fall from Grace and that all persons are born with a sinful nature. I am not sure if the reference to sin in my children's baptism services was actually to the sexual act or to the fall from Grace. But if it did indeed refer to the sexual act, and I had known this, I would have never accepted these vows.

What we as Christian women believe about our sexuality has been socially constructed by the dominant discourse, patriarchy, and therefore we need to deconstruct i.e. reexamine in detail, such knowledges. We need to look at the way scripture is interpreted and how liturgy is employed in the church.

Plaatjies (2003:148) discusses the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 as well as Ephesians 5:1 and 1 Peter 3:7 as concluded in the formulary service book (1988) of the Dutch Reformed Church. The above mentioned Scriptures were applied in such a way that they created the idea that men were sanctioned to guide, teach and protect women, because females are the weaker sex and dependent on care and guidance. This formulary was used to justify the claim that wives should be submissive to their husbands, because Adam was 'supposedly' created first and in God's image, seeing that God was male, and therefore this order was justified and true to God and all Christians had to obey God. This interpretation of a husband as superior to his wife, reminds one of Aristotle's philosophy (as discussed in Section 2.3.3). It is quite evident that this formulary served only patriarchy and is an example of how Scripture has been manipulated to serve, maintain and protect the ideology and power of men to the disadvantage of women.

2.9 THE CHARACTER ASSASSINATION OF WOMEN

After exploring the history of female sexuality, I am convinced that women's sexuality has been and still is used to assassinate the character of women. Female sexuality has become the means to deride women's moral character and mental ability. Sexuality is used by patriarchy as a power tool to maintain its dominance over women, trying to regulate women's morality and dependence. Throughout the ages, faith and doctrine have been employed to rationalise and defend the *modus operandi* of patriarchy. During my journey through history and taking into consideration the way women's sexuality has been twisted and manipulated to serve patriarchy, I am not surprised that so many women do not experience or express themselves as sexually passionate beings.

I found a summary of my commitment to practical theology using a reformist feminist approach in the words of Isherwood and McEwan (1994:59), who say that as women 'it is our task to bring the absurdity and injustice... to the attention of those who perpetuate it. In the field of theology and religion this will mean that women's awareness of themselves will reawaken'. My understanding of this is that I need to be committed to identify what is oppressive to women and men in the present practice of theology and its

interpretation and to create a space to empower women and men to become agents of transformation by creating a more just theology.

I agree with Heyward's (1990:262) view that we need to re-imagine Christian theology and anthropology on the basis of a profound respect for women's lives and moral agency, as well as of an affirmation of sexual pleasure, play and integrity. This will move us towards a startling, fresh and sensual apprehension of the power and love of an incarnate God in our midst.

This research journey has become the vehicle that enabled me to challenge the patriarchal system by re-interpreting Christian female sexuality and by giving a voice to Christian women and men. It has created a space for new understandings that are respectful towards women and worthy of Christian personhood.

CHAPTER 3

PORNOGRAPHY, DIVORCE AND HOPE

3.1 NARRATIVES OF CONSTRUCTIONS OF SEXUALITY

In the next three chapters we will journey through the narratives of the participants. In order to understand their contexts, we need to explore some details in their histories. Their histories are very important, as they make visible the contexts and discourses that constituted their experiences with sexuality. Sexuality is an abstract concept and within the church context it is very silent – so silent, in fact, that it is almost invisible. We can only make sexuality visible by exploring details of each participant's history.

All the participants felt that their contexts, and more importantly, their Christian contexts, constituted their construction of sexuality. By exploring their histories, I hope to include the reader, to promote some understanding of these social constructions and the constituting factors that were present and formative in the narratives of the participants' sexuality/sexualities.

Reinharz (1992:267) believes that including the reader can give the reader a sense of the participants which could lead to a better understanding of the contexts of the participants. Thorne (2000:3) states that using narrative to analyse a phenomenon is a strategy that recognises the extent to which the stories we tell provide insights about our lived experiences. However, my choice of narrative analysis goes beyond promoting understanding.

For me, the telling of the participants' histories is a way to honour the constituting voices of their pasts. All the participants felt that the voices of their past experiences of sexuality as Christians had not yet been heard. By honouring the voices of the past, I am able to attain my research aim of co-constructing rich and thick descriptions of the participants' stories. Furthermore, in order to respect these unheard voices, I will narrate (although only briefly) the explorations of such constituting voices of the past. In accordance with my desire for an ethical research process, these chapters are thus not only for the benefit of the reader, but also my way of honouring unheard voices from the past. Kotzé (2002:18) calls this 'doing participatory ethics', which 'requires an ethical consciousness situated in the participation of all, especially those who are usually marginalised and silenced'.

The explorations of the participants' histories and the voices of the past served not only to expose my discursive positioning within ethical practices, feminism and a participatory approach to pastoral care (as this gave a voice to those who had been silenced and/or marginalised), but also to clarify my position in terms of social construction. I believe that the voices of the past have a constituting effect on our construction of sexuality. Freedman and Combs (1996:23), like Burr (1995:3), believe that historical, cultural, social processes and our interaction with people construct our 'reality' and our understanding of our world (see Section 1.4.1 for a more detailed discussion of the social construction discourse).

In order to understand the participants' constructions of sexuality, we journeyed to their sexual education, their awareness of their sexuality and their practices in various phases of their lives and how all this related to their religious beliefs and dominant discourses. I relate these explorations to my research aims (as formulated in Section 1.3.1 to 1.3.4 of this research report).

In this chapter, we journey with Cathy.

3.2 CATHY: AN UNDYING CONVICTION OF LIVING WITH HOPE

This participant preferred to use fictitious names in the telling of her narrative. Cathy introduced herself as single at the moment. She has been committed to Christianity for 12 years. Although Cathy is a pensioner, she works part-time. She is not very active socially, but is very involved in church activities. Cathy was married for 20 years, which were mostly unhappy years. She has been divorced for 23 years.

Many elements of Cathy's construction of sexuality were influenced by her sexual awareness as a child, a young teenager and a young adult. We will journey through her history only briefly to create the context that will illuminate Cathy's later life-giving and life-restricting/life-denying experiences of sexuality.

3.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEXUAL AWARENESS

We journeyed back to Cathy's childhood years and it became clear that as a youngster Cathy never really thought about sexuality. She was completely unaware of sexual relations. When she was about fifteen years old, she noticed that her aunt became 'fat'. When Cathy asked her mother about this, her mother replied that her aunt was going to have a baby. This shocked Cathy, because never before then had she thought about how

people came into this world. Even after this 'discovery' of pregnancy, she did not connect babies with sexual intercourse, nor did she have any idea of the birth process. Cathy shared this incident with me to illustrate how naïve and uninformed she was as a child. There was a definite silence and absence with regard to sexuality.

It is this silence that I am interested in, because I am curious whether this silence could be oppressing to Christian female sexuality. It became apparent that it is very difficult to research silence, as most ideas and actions were informed by unspoken but implicit norms or understandings. Therefore, in many instances, we have to rely on Cathy's interpretations, impressions and understanding of the past as she sees it today. As no one spoke to Cathy about sexuality, she presumes that most of her constructions were informed by the actions of her mother.

3.4 CATHY'S MOTHER AS A ROLE MODEL ON SEXUALITY

We explored Cathy's memories and impressions of her mother's sexuality. Cathy described her mother as a lady-like person, well-groomed but not flashy and definitely conservative in her attitudes. Cathy felt her mother was very dependent on her husband, as she battled with insecurity and low self-esteem.

Cathy experienced her mother as straight-laced, and her mother never discussed anything relating to bodily functions or anything sexual. Her manner was very prudish and Cathy remembered that when her father had to rub ointment on her mother's back, her mother always insisted on being covered. As a child and young adult, Cathy never saw her mother naked. She first saw her mother naked when she had to take care of her mother due to the frailties of old age. Cathy reflected that her father probably also never saw her mother naked. Cathy could not imagine how her parents had children, as she was convinced that conception must have filtered through the sheets.

In those years it was seen as improper to appear naked, and Cathy felt that this might have came from a biblical view of nakedness. This view of Cathy's is also expressed by Vosloo and Van Rensburg (1993:14), who explain in their commentary on the creation story that for many centuries there was a belief that Adam and Eve's shame about their nakedness in Genesis implied sexual intercourse as the original sin, and therefore this implied that nakedness was also sinful. I remember from personal experience that many older people that I knew as a child were very scornful of nakedness and about wearing

revealing clothes. Cathy's mother and her disapproval of nakedness speak of this discourse.

In the New Testament we also find references to the body and the implication that some parts were 'unpresentable' and needed to be covered. In 1 Corinthians 12:23-25, Paul uses the human body as a metaphor for spiritual gifts. He says that 'the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty'. This detail from Scripture could be interpreted as suggesting that nakedness is improper (Grosheide, cited in Bredenkamp 2002:345). Roetzel (cited in Bredenkamp 2002:346) reasons that Paul sees the body as potentially sinful, due to the influences of the philosophy of dualism in the Hellenistic society of ancient Greece which would have influenced Paul's contemporaries. Dualism is the doctrine that believes that reality consists of two basic opposing elements, often taken to be mind and matter (or mind and body), or good and evil. Because of this dichotomous view of body and soul, all functions pertaining to the body were believed to be in conflict with the soul and potentially sinful. The soul was a person's potential connection with God, and the body had the potential to derail this connection with God. The body and its functions were approached with modesty.

Foucault (cited in McHoul & Grace 1993) reflected on the modesty of sexual desire relating to the naked body in terms of dualism. Foucault (cited in McHoul & Grace 1993:111) speaks of modesty and sexual desire as they were seen by the ancient Greeks. The Greeks believed that one had to avoid the mind's leading the body. The mind was not supposed to be active in sexual intercourse by means of imagination. The practice of sexual intercourse had to be seen as and executed as just a function of the body, without images of desire. At the same time, sexual relations had to be organised so as not to induce images of desire. Hence it was thought favourable to have sexual intercourse modestly, in the dark when the sight of the lover's body would not produce its own excitement. This philosophy could possibly be used in an attempt to understand the discourses that informed her mother's attitude towards the naked body.

In the above history, we see that negative views of nakedness amongst Christians have an elaborate history and although many do not all understand the body and soul in terms of dualism today, other still do and this history possibly still has an impact. We explored what this avoidance of nakedness and silence of sexuality indicated to Cathy, but she could not recall what or how she thought about sexual matters and how it related to religion. Cathy explained that her family were not religious and morality was interpreted in terms of 'the done thing' (the dominant discourses) in society and not necessarily in terms of religion. Foucault (in White & Epston 1990:19) speaks of this conformity to the accepted norms in terms of the normalizing gaze or judgement of the dominant discourse. Payne (2000:70) explains that the normalizing judgement 'provides for a system of social control in which persons' performances are judged according to certain standards or specifications'. Foucault (in Payne 2000:71) believes this system does not judge a person for an offence or doing wrong, but rather any departures from the norm and the rules are judged. This system of power recruits persons into an active role in their own subjugation and results in persons' 'actively participating in operations that shape their lives according to the norms or specifications of the [dominant discourse]', thus 'policing' their own behaviour.

In the late 1950's, when Cathy was a teenager and a young adult, the National Party was in power and totally controlled the South African population. Almost all socialising structures served as mouthpieces of this regime. The Doctrine of Reformed Theology was the most powerful constituting factor for the 'White population' and was used within the school system, the radio and the printed media (Ackermann 1998:78-79). Therefore we can suppose that morality was interpreted in terms Christianity even if a person was not a Christian or did not attend church. The norms of society were based on the constituting voice of Reformed Theology as interpreted by the patriarchal system. Landman (2002:25) identifies some of these discourses, stating that in the late fifties, men were seen as the breadwinners and women were not supposed to have a career, other than to eventually become a wife and mother; young girls' sexuality was policed and young women were never supposed to initiate a heterosexual relationship. Many of these discourses become visible when we look at the sexual education that girls received.

3.5 SEXUAL EDUCATION

Cathy's first memory regarding her own womanhood was when her mother gave her a sanitary pad and said that when she started bleeding, she must tell her mother. Her mother did not explain what the pad was for or how it was used. When Cathy started to menstruate, she got a terrible fright and she was not sure what was happening to her. Cathy's mother used to refer to Cathy's period as the time 'when you are unwell'.

In my discussion of bodily functions and religious beliefs (see Section 2.4.1), it was noted that there was a religious practice that created the understanding that women were

'unwell' during menstruation. Cathy's mother said to her 'when you are unwell you should not wash your hair or go swimming, as it is bad for you'. Menstruation was never discussed and a girl ensured that no one knew when she had her period; therefore Cathy believed that one's period was something you had to hide. The implication of this for Cathy was that she thought her monthly bleed was dirty. This was the totality of Cathy's sexual education.

Houppert (2000:1) speaks of the discourse of menstruation as a curse. Many mothers pity their daughters when they start to menstruate, as they have now started a body function that supposedly causes monthly agony and has to be endured. I believe that this discourse could be life-denying to women, yoking their first tangible proof of (possible) fertility to pain, misery and shame. However, it is important to note that some women do experience pain during menstruation, even dismenorea. Many women also suffer from pre-menstrual stress and it is therefore important to inform girls of the possibility of menstrual discomfort, but I believe that it should not be assumed.

I was delighted to encounter a positive discourse regarding a girl's menarche as Hill (1998:1-5) proposes in his guidelines for a Christian Bar Mitzvah. Hill (1998:5) suggests that Christians adopt and adapt the practice of a Bar Mitzvah to serve as a Christian ceremony of blessing and celebration. Within Jewish practice, boys are given a Bar Mitzvah to celebrate their entrance into manhood. Hill (1998:39) proposes a female Bar Mitzvah, called a Bar Barakah or sometimes a Bat Mitzvah, to celebrate a girl's entrance into womanhood accompanied with a blessing. In such a blessing celebration, the mother, together with other significant women in a girl's life, will celebrate her menarche with her as proof of health and youth. I believe that this positive approach to menstruation should be encouraged, as it is life-giving. The message conveyed with such an approach is that female sexuality is to be celebrated and appreciated. It also conveys the message that human sexuality should be blessed in terms of Christianity, not shamed. However, we should note that menarche is not necessarily proof of fertility and an emphasis on fertility as the only accepted norm can be devastating to a girl's sense of self if she turns out to be infertile, not to mention that it privileges a discourse of sexuality linked to procreation. Emphasis on fertility could also suggest that all women should have or want to have children, which could alienate women who prefer not to have children.

3.6 MOVING INTO WOMANHOOD

Fredman and Potgieter (1996:50) discuss some of the discourses surrounding childhood sexuality. The sexual libertarian movement is positive about childhood sexuality and would like to acknowledge, promote and discuss childhood sexuality as natural. This could contribute to children's becoming adults who function better (Weeks, cited in Fredman & Potgieter 1996:49). On the other hand, there are groups that believe that the acknowledgement of childhood sexuality would damage or corrupt the innocence of children (Fredman & Potgieter 1996:49). The sexual libertarian movement believes that if a parent denies childhood sexuality, this often translates into not talking about sexuality at all; thus, by implication, body functions, sexual desire, masturbation and sexual intercourse are not discussed. All the participants and many of the other women I have spoken to felt that they moved into womanhood without sufficient information about sexuality, bodily development or the art of love-making. Haught (1997:1) supports this view, and claims that only the Eastern cultures prepare people in the art of giving sexual pleasure.

Cathy's narrative reflects the above discourse – there was an absence of guidance or discussions of sexuality. Cathy had her first sexual experience was she was sixteen years old. Cathy had a boyfriend who came to visit her. One day the two of them sat on the couch and he kissed her. While he kissed Cathy, he ejaculated, resulting in his pants' being wet. Cathy was very naïve and did not realise what this wetness was, and assumed that the boy must have urinated. Cathy could not remember seeing him after this incident or that she spoke to anyone about this. When we explored this silence, Cathy thought that she somehow must have felt that this romance and kissing was wrong.

When Cathy was seventeen years old, she met and fell madly in love with Kevin, her first love. A relationship developed between the two of them. Although her parents approved of Kevin, the two of them were seldom allowed to be alone.

3.7 POLICING OF SEXUALITY

Cathy's sexuality was policed by her parents, especially her father. The policing of female sexuality reminds me of the practice of policing virginity in Judaism, as discussed in Section 2.4.2. I have already discussed Foucault's ideas of the normalizing effect of 'policing' in Section 3.4 of this research report. The following extract from a letter provides a summary of the discussion we had regarding the policing of sexuality:

You remembered an incident that happened when the family was sitting in the sitting room. You went and sat on Kevin's lap. Your dad was furious and scolded you in the presence of everybody. He said: 'You don't sit on a man's lap because you are asking for trouble. Things would happen.' You knew that the 'things' your father referred to meant sexual intercourse. You felt terribly embarrassed and humiliated. You meant nothing by sitting on Kevin's lap, but your dad implied that you had ulterior motives. What was the effect of your dad's assumptions on your interpretations of your own sexuality?

Cathy remembered that her dad used to spy on Kevin and her. This made her feel untrustworthy and enshrouded her sexuality with suspicion. At times Cathy's father accused her of leading Kevin on and trying to seduce him. Cathy's father warned her that once a man was aroused, he had no control over his desires or actions. The belief of Cathy's father speaks of the discourse of male sexuality seen as instinctive (see Section 2.7.2.4), which implies that men do not have control over their sexual arousal and response and therefore cannot be held responsible for sexual indiscretions. Linked to this discourse is the view of women's seductiveness (see Section 2.7.2.3). Hare-Mustin (1994:24) explains that women supposedly welcome sexual attention and are seen as the objects that arouse and lure men into sexual deeds. I link these discourses to the creation story in which Eve is portrayed as seductive, followed by mistrust of female sexuality within the church for many centuries thereafter. Such discourses were not life-giving to women's sexuality in antiquity, nor thereafter. In this instance these discourses contributed to Cathy's construction of the sexuality of unmarried women as something negative. Due to this negative view of female sexuality, Cathy never spoke to anyone about sexual intercourse, not even marital sexual intercourse. This once again confirms the silence regarding female sexuality.

3.8 AND THEY WILL BECOME ONE IN THE FLESH

Cathy married her first love, Kevin, when she was twenty-one. Cathy was very naïve and innocent when she got married and no one had ever discussed sexual intercourse with her. Kevin was seven years older than Cathy, and she trusted him. Cathy had a positive view of marital sexual intercourse and believed that marriage legalised sexual intercourse. Cathy's initial experiences of sexual intercourse were positive, and she was able to enjoy their intimate relationship. Cathy was not sure what or who informed her positive ideas of marital sexual intercourse. Interestingly, Cathy was comfortable with both her and Kevin being naked, despite her mother's excessive avoidance of being seen

naked. Cathy could not recall why she was able to be comfortable or how she then viewed nakedness.

Cathy could also not remember whether she at first felt anxious about sexual intercourse, nor if her parents' attitude towards sexuality had any impact on her experience of sexual intercourse in the early years of her marriage. We explored Cathy's thoughts regarding sexual pleasure and religion, but due to the fact that she was not a believer then, she had no recollection of any such discourses.

Davies (1993:153) uses the metaphor of a pane of glass to describe the invisibility of discourses. Discourses take on the qualities of a pane of glass through which one observes the world. It is only when the glass fractures or breaks that one's attention is drawn to the glass. Discourses are thus usually invisible to people and we have little or no conscious awareness of discourses. I believe that we are not aware of discourses regarding sexual pleasure and religion, due to the silence in which this subject has been ensconced and how it has been controlled by the patriarchal system in our society and churches. However, when we come across a situation where we are unable to accommodate or adapt to a given discourse, we start to become aware of the discourse.

3.9 PORNOGRAPHY, DISILLUSIONMENT AND ISOLATION

After six months of marriage, Cathy made a shocking discovery. She discovered pornographic magazines at the back of a drawer. The sight of this shocked, frightened and confused her as, at the time, she was not even aware of the phenomenon of pornography. Cathy was horrified and disgusted by the images in these magazines. Kevin nonchalantly explained that they were his magazines and did not show any embarrassment or remorse about Cathy's discovery.

Kevin's nonchalant response to pornography resonates in many ways with the views of Coleen McEneany (n.d.:1), as she believes that pornography is not necessarily a menace. McEneany (n.d.) does not condone the consumption or distribution of pornography that depicts illegal acts such as rape or paedophilia. Nevertheless, she does support the production, distribution and consumption of pornography that portrays legal acts between consenting adults, no matter how lewd one may perceive such acts to be. McEneany (n.d.:1), is 'opposed to all efforts of censoring such materials'. She resents anyone's attempt to pass any law that stipulates what she as an adult is allowed to read, watch, or hear.

Many feminists would be in conflict with McEneany's (n.d.) views of pornography, as they condemn all pornography, because they view it as demeaning, degrading and disrespectful towards women. Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon are at the forefront of feminists' fight against pornography in America. Dworkin and MacKinnon (cited in McEneany n.d.:1) see pornography as sexism. They insist that all types of pornography harm women and prevent them from exercising their full citizenship and participation in the public life of a nation.

I agree with those feminists who feel that the defining theme of pornography is a male pursuit of control over women's sexuality. To my mind, pornography should not be seen in terms of a sexual force, but rather as a political force. Sexual objectification is the primary process of the subjection of women (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:125). For me, pornography objectifies a person, women and men alike, and therefore could never be acceptable. Objectification of any person de-humanises, which denies dignity, respect and ultimately God's creation – a human being. Cathy also experienced pornography in the above manner, which was extremely life-denying to her and for the marriage. Cathy and I believe that Christianity is justifiably outspoken against pornography.

Yet another voice in the pornography debate is the rising voice of feminist pornography, which is produced especially by and for female gay persons. According to Wood (1996:9), the aim of feminist pornography is to challenge pornography which depicts women in oppressive positions in service as objects of pleasure for men. Feminist pornography chooses to depict women engaged in sexual activities on an equal level of power and for the pleasure of same-sex relations.

In her discussion of different approaches to pornography, Wood (1996:9) challenges Lorde, an outspoken feminist against pornography. Lorde (cited in Wood 1996:9) distinguishes between the erotic and the pornographic, because for her the erotic is the legitimate female experience which she acknowledges. Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:83) define the erotic as sexual pleasure between two consenting parties within a relationship that is not abusive, and pornography as sexual actions outside any relationship that are used only to depict sexual acts.

Wood (1996:9) criticises feminists like Lorde, who sees pornography as 'the nasty side of sex[ual intercourse]'. Wood believes that such attitudes set up dichotomies between

good and bad forms of sexuality, leading sexuality to be totalised in a binary mindset. Wood (1996:9) feels that definitions of 'normal sex[ual acts]', as defined by White heterosexual women, are not representative and calls this 'vanilla sex[ual intercourse]'. Wood believes that 'vanilla' sexual intercourse excludes and denies the wide range of women's experiences that exist, thus marginalising some women's experiences. Butler (cited in McClintock Fulkerson 1994:82) supports the notion that commonality cannot be prescribed to women as '[j]ust as there are no natural woman bodies, there is no natural woman's experience and no experience that is identical to itself'.

Butler (in McClintock Fulkerson 1994:82) argues that not only should we move from the binary of man and woman, but also from woman and woman. Her alternative to these binary identities calls for heterosexuality to be contested, along with its fixed sexed identities with the notion that gender is a performance. Although I can understand why some feminists would want to move from the oppressive regime of heterosexuality, I share Modleski's (cited McClintock Fulkerson 1994:84) reluctance to abolish all gender definition. I believe that this would be counterproductive to the original idea of liberating women, and therefore I used the term 'women' as a unitary term to represent women as a pressure group. If we declare the term women redundant, how would we represent issues to facilitate change and liberate women? I believe that although there are many different streams of feminism, we should hold on to our commonality, being women, even though we find many different ways of being a woman.

3.10 FEMALE SEXUAL DESIRE AND PLEASURE

Kevin was very open about his magazines and would often demand sexual intercourse after 'reading' his pornographic magazines, as it would sexually excite him. Kevin would then satisfy his lust by having sexual intercourse with Cathy. Cathy seldom enjoyed sexual intercourse at this stage, because Kevin only satisfied his own urges and he was not concerned about Cathy's sexual needs. This attitude of Kevin's might have stemmed from the belief that women are not as sexual as men and therefore did not enjoy sexual intercourse. This belief is in contrast to a Biblical view of sexual needs and satisfaction for both sexes. Bredenkamp (2002:344-347) discusses Paul's teaching regarding conjugal satisfaction in 1 Corinthians 7:3-4. Paul encourages and prescribes sexual satisfaction for both husband and wife and emphasises the importance of a healthy sexual relationship. Paul appeared to have understood that a healthy sexual relationship could contribute to men and women's experiencing regard and respect within the marriage.

Mayer and Mayer (cited Mager 1996:19) believe that it is important to acknowledge that women, like men, have sexual desires that require fulfilment. This discourse could be life-giving to Christian couples' experiences of intimacy. I wonder what difference it would make if ministers preached about the satisfaction of sexual pleasure between both husband and wife more often, rather than the negative side, namely adultery. I also wonder in what ways such preaching would challenge negative and silencing constructions of sexuality.

The effects of disregard for a woman's sexual needs became apparent in Cathy's experience. Kevin's disregard of Cathy's sexual needs left her feeling used and humiliated. Because Kevin read these magazines, Cathy started to believe that she was not attractive, and therefore Kevin needed the magazines to arouse him. In this instance, pornography was not only demeaning to those who posed in these magazines, but it was also injurious to Cathy's sense of person- and womanhood. Cathy felt betrayed and it was as if there was a third party present in the relationship. Sexual intercourse with Kevin became something dirty to Cathy and sexual intercourse with Kevin 'did not feel like the real thing', but rather left her feeling empty and let down. Thus the presence of pornography in their relationship was thus life-denying to Cathy. At that stage, Cathy did not speak to anyone about this, and as she put it, 'I cried the disappointment away'.

Mager's (1996:20) research of sexuality, fertility and male power in a Black community in the Eastern Cape in the 1950s showed that many persons in these Black communities, also believed that women are there only for men's pleasure. Mager (1996:20) found that in this Black community it was believed that girls must obey boys as well as men. It was a male prerogative to 'shape' a girl's desires to suit male needs. On an internet chat site with the topic, *Do women even like sex?* (n.d.), I came across the following statement that echoes this idea: 'Women are the product and men the consumers of sex[ual intercourse]'.

Mamashela (1996:40) provides some insight on the perception that many women do not have sexual needs and why women possibly do not express these needs. Mamashela (1996:40) says that many women do not express their sexual needs because they do not really know what they enjoy sexually. This silence feeds the discourse that women do

⁶ Due to my Christian belief, I view adultery as unethical sexual behaviour. However, I am aware of other discourses with regard to adultery, such as arguments that adultery is acceptable or that it is not unethical from a sexual point of view, but only because it could creates problems regarding trust in the marital relationship.

not need or want sexual fulfilment, as in 'it's OK, as long as the man enjoys it. For [her], it doesn't really matter'. Many interpret women's silence about female sexual needs as an absence thereof. Cathy confirmed that initially she did speak to Kevin about her disapproval of pornography and that he was only concerned with his own pleasure and sexual satisfaction, but that eventually she lapsed into silence. The silence about female sexual needs and desire is not life-giving to women, nor conducive to marriages. Cathy experienced this silence and extreme verbal abuse as contributing to the disintegration of her marriage after twenty (mostly unhappy) years. Cathy felt that she stayed that long in the marriage because society was so outspoken against divorce.

3.11 DISCOURSES REGARDING DIVORCED WOMEN

Cathy has experienced very specific stereotypes about divorced women. It was Cathy's experience that divorced women are usually condemned and seen as the guilty party in the disintegration of the marriage. Women are often blamed if a marriage disintegrates, and the ex-husband is seen as the victim.

Cathy felt that divorced women are sneered at and that they are seen as loose women who are hunting for a man. Crowe (2001:1) depicts this discourse with the disturbing metaphor of 'a promiscuous she-bitch in heat looking to use men for her whims and toss them away'. Crowe (2001:2) challenges the legitimacy of this discourse, stating that not all divorced women are oversexed vixens looking for a quick one-nighter without a name, but that many women prefer a monogamous relationship. Crowe (2001:3) feels that this stereotype of the divorcée is perpetuated in modern films such as *American Pie*. Crowe intimates that some women do fall into the trap of casual sexual relations⁷ because failed marriages often result in low self-esteem and attention from men makes women feel sexy. Unfortunately, such actions are often generalised to all divorced women, as Cathy experienced.

Cathy and I believe that many women stay in abusive relationships because of these negative discourses regarding divorced women, as well as the religious discourse that divorce is sinful (Harvey 1994:12-14). When women eventually leave their husbands, it is a very difficult process which is exacerbated because they do not get support or

Although neither Cathy nor I support casual sexual relations, due to our understanding of Christian ethics with regard to sexual relations, we acknowledge that other Christian and non-Christian women might understand and interpret casual sexual relations differently from the way we do.

acceptance from their communities. I believe that as a faith community we should be aware of this and embrace persons in such situations. According to De Klerk (2002:15-16), pastoral care for divorced people is scarce within faith communities and therefore he also expresses a need for more organised attempts to provide pastoral care for divorced people.

According to Statistics South Africa's (2005:1) report on marriages and divorces, the overall number of officially recorded marriages in South Africa for 2003 was 178 689. For the same period, the number of officially recorded divorces was 28 587. According to this report (Statistics South Africa 2005:1), 'Whites had the highest number of divorces (11 890) followed by the Africans (6 637), Coloureds (3 394) and Asians/Indians (1 486)'. I was surprised to learn from the statistics of 2003 that the highest number of divorces of Whites was recorded for marriages that were solemnised through religious ceremonies. I make the deduction that most White divorced people in South Africa are related to a faith denomination. Therefore I believe that pastoral care for these people is the responsibility of their faith communities.

Cathy and I agreed that we should never judge people because they are divorced, but should embrace them. Nor should we assume what their hurts, needs or dreams are, but rather respect them as persons and allow them to voice their views. Assumptions about the emotional and sexual needs of divorced women could result in such persons being marginalised and isolated.

3.11.1 Divorced women need sexual intercourse

Cathy had the experience that many people assume that a divorced woman, is 'hard up' for a man and is available for casual sexual relations. One of her neighbours, a married man, approached Cathy, offering his 'services'. He said that he was 'quite prepared to service' her. Cathy experienced this as very offensive and told her neighbour she was not interested. Cathy said that the suggestion to 'service' her, made her 'feel like a bloody motorcar'. These actions of Cathy's neighbour spoke to her of objectification – looking at a person as a sexual object and no longer as a person.

I have also been exposed to the assumption that divorced women are available for sexual intercourse, and to the discourse that divorce is a sin. Someone once said to me that if a woman is so immoral as to divorce her husband, then surely she will be not object to

casual sexual intercourse – needless to say, I found this comment disrespectful and demeaning.

The discourse that claims that divorced women are sexually frustrated and that they are therefore available for casual sexual intercourse reminded me of the practice of *onah* (the word for conjugal rights or sexual satisfaction of the wife) as discussed in Section 2.4.4 of this study. Collins (2000:25) explains that 'in first-century Palestine, it was unthinkable for a woman to divorce her husband' and in terms of the law she had no recourse. Some decades later, rabbis taught that if a husband deprived his wife of her marital rights and did not 'please her sexually', thus neglect of *onah*, she could ask for a *git* (a certificate of divorce). In other words, a woman could only ask for a divorce if she was sexually frustrated. I presume, seeing that a wife's asking for a divorce was unusual in ancient times, it would have been widely discussed in a society if this happened. I suppose that this would not only be a shameful event for the husband, but the wife could have been seen as a very sexual being. I wonder whether the discourse regarding the idea that divorced women are in need of sexual intercourse could be linked to our religious history in that a wife could only request a divorce if her husband did not satisfy her.

Cathy and I explored actions by men that are sexually suggestive. Women often find sexually suggestive actions by men offensive to their (women's) personhood. Cathy shared her sense that at social gatherings many men would touch her inappropriately and without asking, just because she was divorced. We wondered why some men believe that it is their right to behave in such ways. We both felt that such actions speak of disrespect and disregard of women and violate a person's dignity. These powerful discourses were not only present in the assumptions of relative strangers in Cathy's life, but even in friends' actions.

3.11.2 Marginalising discourses regarding female desire in divorced women

The years of abuse left Cathy feeling insecure and of little worth. Being divorced did not help, as most of Cathy's friends suddenly saw her as a threat to their marriages. Cathy found that many people believed that once a woman had had sexual intercourse, she could not live without it. It would seem as if female sexual desire is viewed differently once a woman is divorced. Married women are viewed as asexual, but divorced women are seen as having excessive sexual needs and desires. Cathy had to endure many crude jokes about divorced women in need of sexual intercourse. Many of her friends tried to introduce her to men because they assumed that Cathy needed to have sexual

intercourse. Many of the women in Cathy's social group felt threatened by her and Cathy lost her best friend because of this. Just after Cathy's divorce, her best friend said to her: 'Ek hoop jy gaan nie nou op my man lê nie.' (I hope that you are not going to lie with my husband). This remark was so hurtful to Cathy and so injurious to her sense of morality that she never spoke to this friend again after this remark. Cathy felt as if her integrity was suddenly in question just because she was divorced: her friend did not appreciate nor understand her way-of-being. Cathy was in need of support, not suspicion and jealousy.

3.12 IN NEED OF SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

As we spoke about the discourses regarding divorced women, Cathy remembered a very hurtful incident. Cathy needed spiritual guidance and went to see her minister. Cathy experienced a spiritual void in her spiritual life and wanted to serve God more completely. The minister's response to this was that Cathy should join a social club for single persons. This stunned Cathy and she felt extremely hurt. Cathy felt her minister had confused her spiritual need with a sexual need. She felt that the minister did not ask questions and she was very disappointed that he made this assumption. Cathy said her minister did not look beyond her words and this was devastating to her. She believes that if her minister had not presumed anything, but had asked questions about her needs, he would not have made this mistake. For me, this confirmed and emphasised the importance of having a 'not knowing attitude' when one is in a caring profession. We should never assume we know another person's needs, hurts, joys or fears. We need to ask and to check whether our understanding is correct. Anderson (1997:100) states that a therapist who assumes a 'not knowing' stance will be involved in an interactive, mutually influential process, putting the therapist in the position of 'learner'. I believe that this should be the approach of anyone in the position of caregiver.

I wonder whether the minister's assumption regarding a divorced woman's sexual needs in any way mirrors a discourse of the church regarding divorced women's sexuality. Interestingly, Cathy did not challenge this view of the minister, but instead fell into silence, retreating with feelings of deep hurt and isolation. Cathy experienced the minister's response as life-denying and marginalising – resulting in her silence. Once again we see that powerful discourses taken as representative of a belief of the church can silence those who are marginalised.

In Besley's (2001:82-83) discussion of Foucault's ideas on power and knowledge she concludes that power/knowledge relations operate discursively, determining whether a person can speak, what can be verbalised and by whom and whether it is listened to. In other words, if a person does not support the dominant view of a recognised authority, such as the church, his or her view can become marginalised and silenced. I believe that if the church wants to be relevant today, it needs to de-construct all taken-for-granted knowledge or 'truths' and engage in life-giving conversations with people's lived experiences and understandings, especially those who are marginalised and silenced. I found support for my view in Brueggemann's (1993:17) argument that theology can no longer take a muted marginal position, such as that which has been assigned to it by the dominant position of positivist sciences and positivist politics in the twentieth century. Theological discourse should now participate in negotiations of reality: 'Thus theology can no longer pretend to be a privileged insider, nor to be a trivialized outsider as all claims of reality, including those by theologians, are fully under negotiation' (Brueggemann 1993:17).

3.13 THE SOCIAL NEEDS OF SINGLE PEOPLE AND THE CHURCH

At first I was not able to understand how Cathy had concluded that her minister had mistaken her spiritual need for a sexual need when he proposed she should join a club for single people. My understanding of such a club was that it is a gathering where single people could safely and respectfully interact with members of the same and opposite sex in a social context. Cathy experienced single/social clubs very differently and believes that many people use this situation to provide 'pick-up' opportunities for casual sexual encounters.

I wonder what we as members of a faith community can do to support single people. Should a faith community not create support groups and opportunities where the single members of its fold can engage socially safely and respectfully? The only South African Christian single club/society that I was able to trace on the internet was a website for single people. Participants enter their details and requirements and wait for a response.

I am pleased to say that since I started this study project, a divorced member of my home church started a divorce support group for female members of our church, which will include social activities. Such actions are life-giving to members and address relevant experiences of its flock. However, it would seem as if such support groups within a faith community are the exception rather than the rule. Yet again, I wonder what role a faith

community should play in the social care of its members. The church is hasty to criticise casual sexual relations, but what alternative does it provide for single persons?

3.14 THE SEXUAL NEEDS OF SINGLE PEOPLE

Cathy and I looked at the implications of being single, particularly regarding sexual desires and needs. Cathy shared with me the fact that at first after her divorce she was comfortable to take care of herself sexually. At that stage she did not see masturbation as a sin. However, after Cathy completed a bible study, she became convinced that masturbation is sinful and prayed to God to take her desires away. Cathy described her sexual needs as now being in 'cold storage' and she believed that God has frozen her desires until she can enjoy a physical relationship in the right context, which is, for Cathy, marriage. Cathy believed that masturbation is wrong, as it is lustful. Cathy defines a lustful action as being 'when one satisfies one's hunger in an unnatural way'. Cathy felt that her idea of the sinfulness of masturbation was based on Scripture which she thought speaks of sexual self-control and avoiding lustful behaviour. She was not sure where this text occurs in the Bible. After further exploration, she realised that this view was repeatedly expressed in the above-mentioned bible study guide, not in the Bible itself.

Providing an alternative perspective to the aforementioned bible study's conclusion that masturbation is sinful, Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:99) state that masturbation is an acceptable practice for Christians and could fulfil the sexual needs of single people. Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:99) believe that masturbation is not only important for single persons, but could play a very important role within a Christian marriage. Masturbation could assist the wife to learn what is enjoyable to her and to reach an orgasm and help the husband to obtain better control over ejaculation. Masturbation could also be helpful in a marriage where there is a considerable loss of libido or a great difference between the partners' libido.

We explored the possibilities available to a single person to release sexual tension. I shared my belief with Cathy that many interpretations of Scripture regarding the sexuality of single people cause hurt, hardship and isolation. For many years, the church condemned masturbation as sinful. Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:97) explain that the interpretation of masturbation as sinful is often based on Genesis 38:9, which tells the story about Onan and Tamar. It was an Old Testament practice that if a married man should die before any children were born from the union, his brother had to sire a child

with the widow. Onan did not want to comply with this tradition, and therefore he ensured that he ejaculated outside Tamar's vagina, on the ground. God was displeased with Onan because he refused to impregnate Tamar, and therefore God killed Onan. Many Christians interpret this 'spilling of seed on the ground' as masturbation, deducing that God killed Onan because he masturbated. We see this in the term 'onanism', which is used to refer to masturbation. For many years this discourse was life-denying to single and even married Christians, resulting in feelings of guilt. Yet, although most churches have revised their view of masturbation, this new view is seldom aired, thus allowing silence to continue to marginalise many who are unsure about the practice of masturbation.

I shared Holtzhausen and Stander's (1996:99) view of masturbation as a normal process and not a sin with Cathy. As with all things in life, it needs to be approached and practised with balance and responsibility. Masturbation could be a healthy release of sexual tension for people who are not able to enjoy an intimate relationship. Cathy was liberated by our deconstruction of masturbation and felt she will be able to masturbate if she felt the need to release sexual tension. It reminded us that many of the teachings that are available are still just interpretations of God's word and will. Our deconstruction of masturbation in the light of our re-reading of Scripture changed Cathy's understanding and liberated her from a previously life-restricting discourse.

McClintock Fulkerson (1994:143) explores the act or process of re-reading Scripture and the influence of our understandings of Scripture and the interpretations thereof on our experiences of faith. McClintock Fulkerson (1994:143) argues that the same part Scripture or text could either be 'the enslaver or the liberator' – depending on the context of the woman who reads it. Post-structuralists believe that we must move away from the notion that there are 'right readings' of specific sections of Scripture, as we all relate to Scripture from the perspectives of our constructions and our contexts. I agree with McClintock Fulkerson, as within churches in a South African context most Scripture is interpreted and explained from a patriarchal perspective. In my experience, Scripture is seldom interpreted in terms of a pro-feminist context.

Cathy and my discussion about the sexual needs of single people resulted in my asking Cathy whether she as a single woman could approach a single man if she felt attracted to him. Cathy had mixed feelings about this.

3.14.1 Men are the hunters

The discourse that suggests that men are the hunters was projected in what Cathy was taught and believed with regard to heterosexual relationships. Cathy was taught that a woman should not approach a man first, as this would mean that she was 'throwing herself at him'. Landman (2002:25) also experienced the effects of this discourse and confirmed Cathy's experiences. '[M]eisies kon nie self met 'n verhouding begin nie, maar moes sy wag tot sy gevang word.' (Girls could not initiate a relationship, but had to wait to be caught. – free translation). Cathy believes men do not like women who are sexually/socially assertive, because men want to be in control.

However, Cathy did not believe that men were in control of their sexual desires. Cathy felt that a woman who is brazen in her ways can be very persuasive. Such a person can make it very difficult for a man and if she proves herself to be available, approachable and agreeable, most men would succumb to the temptation. Cathy sees men as the weaker sex when it comes to sexual relations. This view of Cathy's reminds me of the discourse that men's sexuality is seen as instinctive (see Section 2.7.2.4), which implies that men do not have control over their sexual arousal and responses and can therefore not be held responsible for sexual indiscretions (Hare-Mustin 1994:24). This view of Cathy's view also reminded me that her father had similar views (see Section 3.7) and speaks of the constitutive effects of discourses. This discourse is life-restricting or denying to both men and women, as it totalises the male as animal-like without responsibility for his sexual actions leading to women's having to accept inappropriate sexual behaviour.

After our deconstruction of female sexuality, patriarchy and other discourses, this idea of Cathy's has changed, as she no longer believes that a man always needs to make the first move. She believes that this view has changed due to the feminist voices that are present in our society. These voices have shown us different ways of doing things that are still respectful and accord with God's will, even if it differs from previous interpretations.

3.15 DOING HOPE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

Cathy lived with emotional abuse in her marriage for many years, as Kevin used to shout and swear at Cathy, called her names and demanded sexual intercourse without considering Cathy at all. Even so, Cathy kept her belief that an intimate relationship between two people is supposed to be precious. She still believes that sexual intercourse in the right context (for Cathy this means within a marriage) is the most beautiful creation of God. I was amazed at Cathy's determination to hold onto hope. We explored how Cathy came to the belief that sexual intercourse is a beautiful creation of God, but Cathy was not sure about this. She believes that God, by His Spirit, protected and guided her views of sexuality.

We discussed some of the discourses that were present in the early church, such as the notion that the only purpose of sexual intercourse is to procreate (Radford Ruether 1990:222–223). Although Cathy was aware of this discourse, she was untouched by it. Cathy felt that she had never shared the view that sexual intercourse should only be engaged in for procreation, but rather that marital sexual intercourse could be a wonderful way of communicating. She believes that marital sexual intercourse should be something beautiful and she would want to be happily married with a fulfilling intimate (sexual) life.

For many years Cathy prayed for a companion and it was only recently that she has made peace with the idea of growing older alone. Cathy feels that God has filled her loneliness and that serving Him fulfils her life. Cathy would still love to meet a special friend, but is no longer waiting for this. If it happens, it happens.

3.16 SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AND SIN

I was amazed that Cathy was still able to view sexuality positively although she had been exposed to very abusive sexual practices. We explored the question: What caused sexual intercourse to become such an abusive practice today?

It would seem that there is a great deal of sexual perversion present in all sectors of life. Cathy's understanding of perverted sexual intercourse is any sexual action that involves abusive practices or any sexual aids, as well as extra-marital sex. Cathy believes that perverted sexual intercourse is the result of the 'first sin', which related to sexual intercourse. Cathy came to this view due to Adam and Eve's shame about their nakedness in Genesis. Cathy felt that sexual intercourse was not a sin, but that Adam and Eve had sexual intercourse without God's permission and therefore they became ashamed of their nakedness. The act of disobedience found expression in sexual intercourse.

She feels that sexual desire should only be satisfied within marriage and without the aid of any instruments. Thus, a couple should only make use of what God has given them, thus their hands, mouths and genitals, which Cathy named 'natural sexual intercourse'. Cathy based her ideas of sexual perversion on the afore-mentioned bible study course she did. It was alarming for me to see that this bible study guide classified feminism, masturbation, homosexuality, schizophrenia, homeopathy and many other matters as rooted in rebellion against God and involvement with the occult. Cathy included in her definition of perversion 'being vulgar in the act' and sadism.

According to Wood (1996:10), the 'issue of sadomasochism has been contentious in the feminist movement'. Many feminists have refused to recognise the experiences of women who engage in queer sexual intercourse. In Section 3.9 of this dissertation, I discussed Wood's criticism of feminists who only approve of 'vanilla' sexual intercourse, which is sexual intercourse as defined by heterosexual White females within the context of marriage. Wood believes that role-playing between sexual partners could provide women with a safe space to explore areas that are taboo experiences for women, which in return could be very empowering. Women can move from being powerless to being powerful, for example, in sadism.

Christianity informs my ideas of respect, sexuality, sexual intercourse and perversion and I believe that any abusive action should be questioned. I define a perverted sexual act as any action done to create sexual pleasure, which in the performance thereof disregards, humiliates, demeans, dis-empowers, endangers or disrespects the other party in any way (in other words abusive behaviour). Feminists like Wood (1996:9) might accuse me of having 'vanilla sexuality ideas', and I can accept that, for some, being in the role of a slave, for example, might afford them pleasure, but in terms of my Christian values, I view such actions as degrading and life-denying. Even when one enjoys a practice, it does not necessarily mean that it is life-giving. A drug addict might enjoy taking drugs and it might even afford him or her momentary pleasure, but it is still a life-denying and life-endangering practice. Therefore I find sexual acts such as sadism life-denying, even though I am a pro-feminist. I prefer to support life-giving practices, living with hope and challenging life-denying discourses.

3.17 REFLECTIONS

Cathy has shown the tremendous power of doing hope (Weingarten 2000:204 – see Section 1.4.2). I am inspired by Cathy's ability to forgive. It would seem as if Cathy is

not bitter, nor envious of anyone. Cathy has accepted the hurts that injured her sense of self in the past and today she can act with self-confidence. I believe that there are many women who need to hear her voice. Many women may become bitter and experience hopelessness due to emotional, spiritual or physical injury. Cathy's story is about how we can do hope and how to live with a spirit of reconciliation. She has a steadfast conviction of God's goodness and how we as women can challenge and change the world around us. There are many women that can learn from Cathy's courage, endurance and faith. Cathy has an undying will to believe in a better life.

In Chapter Four, we journey with Marlene and in her narrative we also see the tremendous power of doing hope and how challenging dominant discourses could assist her to create life-giving practices in Christian female sexuality.

CHAPTER 4

THE NARRATIVE OF A FARM GIRL'S SEXUALITY

Lieblich et al (1998:7) state that 'one of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal account and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality'. In other words, by means of context-related life stories we can see that which was not visible before. No two stories are alike and the uniqueness of narratives is manifested in extremely rich data (Lieblich et al 1998:7). It is this rich data that assisted me to achieve my aim of co-constructing rich and thick descriptions of the participant's experiences of her sexuality in terms of the dominant faith discourses that constituted her lived experiences and constructions.

4.1 MARLENE

Marlene introduced herself in the following way: 'I have been happily married for 38 years. I am in my late fifties, I have two daughters and I am a granny of one grandchild. I am working full-time. Both my husband and I have been committed Christians for many years.'

4.2 SEXUAL AWARENESS IN CHILDHOOD

Marlene had a carefree and happy childhood. She grew up on a farm and felt that it was important to mention this, because it is her impression that 'farm children' have different experiences to 'dorpskinders' (urban children). Marlene added that farm children are exposed to nature and witness birth, death and procreation, as it is quite visible on a farm.

Marlene's parents were deeply committed Christians and their faith was very important to them. She described her parents' relationship as very happy, but they were very shy. Marlene remembered that her parents never appeared naked in front of each other. Both her parents were uncomfortable with being seen naked. She remembered that when her father went for a bath, and her mother had to fetch his laundry, she would not enter the bathroom, but just put her hand around the door to take the laundry from her father. Once Marlene's father was unwell and had dizzy spells, and her mother said that he should not lock the bathroom door in case he fainted. He was very indignant about this suggestion and said: 'Ek gaan liewers dood as wat julle my kaal sien'. (I would rather

die than have you see me naked). It was interesting to note that both Cathy and Marlene's parents (both from the older generation) were very uncomfortable with the naked body. In Section 3.4 of this research report I explored possible historical links to Christianity and discomfort with nakedness. It would seem if there was a very definite disapproval of revealing the naked body, implying that anything sexual should be covered. Maybe this is why Marlene was never aware of her parents' sexual relationship. She wondered how they managed to have intercourse if they did not take off their clothes. Marlene felt that her parents' attitude towards the naked body was linked to their faith.

4.3 PUBERTY AND SEXUAL EDUCATION

When Marlene was about ten years old, her mother spoke to Marlene about the 'birds and the bees'. Marlene's mother spoke to her about menstruation. She gave Marlene some pads with a belt and explained how to use it. Marlene's mother told her that she was growing up and that she might soon start to have her monthly bleed. She said to Marlene: 'You might get a little blood on your panties, but this is normal, as it just shows that you are becoming a woman.' Marlene did not get the impression that her mother was embarrassed to talk to her about this. However, her mother did say she had to put the pads at the back of the cupboard were no one could see them. She also said that one is not supposed to talk to friends about this. This created the impression for Marlene that one needed to be ashamed about menstruation (for a religious-historical perspective of menstruation, please refer to Section 2.4.1). Marlene started menstruating when she was 11 and, although her mother had prepared her for this event, Marlene still had a fright.

Marlene reflected that later, in high school, girls had various ways of referring to their period, such as 'ek het oumatjie gekry', 'ek het siek geword' or 'die rooi Engelse is in die Kaap' ('my grandmother has arrived', 'I became unwell' or 'the red English are in the Cape').

4.4 SEXUAL AWARENESS IN TEENAGE YEARS

Marlene went to a girls-only boarding school during her secondary school years. The ethos of this establishment was very conservative. Every Sunday all the boarders went for a walk through town. Modest conduct was prescribed and the girls walked in a specific formation. When they passed boys or men, the girls were supposed to look in the opposite direction, because it was 'bad manners' to look at men or boys. This

conservative ethos contributed to Marlene's having very rigid moral values. She believed for many years that this conservative approach was the only 'correct' approach to social interaction. Marlene did not have a serious boyfriend when she was in high school, and she had her first French kiss only after matriculating.

4.5 VIRGINITY, PRE-MARITAL SEX AND THE CHURCH

After Marlene had matriculated, she started to work. Marlene shared a flat with her brother's fiancée. During the next three years, Marlene had some romantic relationships, but nothing serious. Marlene engaged in relationships with specific moral values. She ascribed these moral values to being a Christian. Marlene became a committed Christian when she was in Standard Seven. It was important to Marlene to be chaste in physical relationships. Marlene would kiss a boyfriend, but she did not allow any touching of her body. Marlene experienced her chastity as an enhancement of her faith. She felt positive about being a Christian and living according to very specific rules and within prescribed boundaries.

Marlene felt that her sexuality was indirectly policed by her beliefs, but this served as a protection from possible abuse or hurt. It would seem that Marlene internalised the prescribed church code of her time, namely that pre-marital sex is sinful. Marlene 'policed' herself, whereas Cathy felt that she was 'policed' by her father. Cathy did not experience her father's 'policing' as a positive contribution to her construction of her personal sexuality, but instead it caused her to feel mistrusted and accused. I wonder if things would have been different for Cathy if she had been allowed and trusted to 'police' her own sexuality? Do boundaries become a positive experience to us when we experience a choice in them, and if so, why do imposed boundaries become a negative experience?

After her brother and his fiancée got married, Marlene got a new flatmate. Marlene became aware that her flatmate was having pre-marital sex. Marlene was very disappointed and told her flatmate that she did not approve of pre-marital sex. The flatmate felt that she and her boyfriend were serious and intended to get married and therefore pre-marital sex was acceptable.

Because Christians look at the Bible through different lenses, they have different discourses regarding pre-marital sex as sinful or not. This results in many conflicting beliefs about various controversial topics within Christianity, and pre-marital sex is no

exception. Bacchiocchi⁸ (1991:16) condemns all extra-marital sex as sin and states that '[n]owhere has Christian morality come under greater attack than in the whole area of sexual intercourse outside marriage. The Biblical teaching [is] that sex is *only* for marriage ...'. An opposing argument is that of Mamashela (1996:40), who believes that sexual problems result in many unhappy marriages and divorces, which could have been prevented if a couple had experimented with sexual intercourse before a permanent marital commitment.

Robinson (2001:1) states that some feminists believe that the availability of good birth control methods, financial support programmes and safe sexual intercourse practices allow couples to engage in safe sexual intercourse. Some conclude that sexual intercourse between a committed monogamous couple who practise safe sexual intercourse is not a sin. They argue that, since the interval between puberty and marriage is now in the order of fifteen years, it is impractical to expect most youths to abstain from sexual intercourse until marriage (Robinson 2001:2). However, some women disagree with Robinson as they feel that teenage couples are unlikely to be monogamous or committed or to practise safe sexual practices. Robinson's claim is supported by the figures of the report of Statistics South Africa (2005:1) on marriages and divorces for 2003, as the report shows that the age distribution of first time marriages is skewed towards the older age groups and that it peaked for the age groups twenty five to twenty nine years for females and thirty to thirty four years for males. The Marriage and Divorce report (Statistics South Africa 2005:1) shows that in 2003, 'the median age for females at first registered marriages was 29 years, which was similar to the one observed in 2002, while the median age for males was 34 years, which was a year more than the one observed in 2002 (33 years)'.

We looked as Marlene's perceptions of pre-marital sex. It was her belief that neither men nor women should engage in pre-marital sex. Virginity was very important to Marlene, and she felt that although both men and women should stay virgins until they got married, it was worse if a woman lost her virginity before marriage. Marlene was taught that a girl's virginity was her honour. A teacher in high school who did life skills talks with the girls once a term, informed these perceptions.

⁸ I do not cite Bacchiocchi because I agree with him or see his interpretations as representative of the majority of Christians, but to illustrate (as I see it) a very conservative and life-restricting discourse with regards to female sexuality.

Virginity is still a matter of honour in some cultures in South Africa today. In the SABC2 programme *The Big Question*, virginity testing was recently debated. In some South African Black cultures the ancient tradition of virginity testing is still enforced. It is now illegal to test a girl under the age of eighteen in terms of the *Child Protection Act*. During the debate, some participants reasoned that virginity testing prohibits girls from becoming sexually active and thus protects the family honour: 'A pure woman stands a greater chance to meet a man, and is accepted in the community for having abstained from any misconduct.' It became apparent that this practice was not only about the honour of the family or to prevent teenage pregnancies. It would seem that the *lobola* system has a motivating influence, as a virgin bride commands a higher *lobola* price than a non-virgin. This reminded me of my discussion of the importance of virginity in Judaism in Section 2.4.2.1 of this research report. For a virgin, according to the Talmudic law, a payment twice as large could be asked than for a non-virgin.

Personally, I disagree with virginity testing, as I feel it is an infringement on human rights. Under South African law, women have a right to refuse virginity tests. Refusing this test, however, is often not an option, due to tradition and the pressure exerted by the community, and therefore testing becomes an abusive practice. A woman who is no longer a virgin brings shame to the family, and is discriminated against by others. Rape and sexual assault also occur, and this test discriminates against girls who have been subjected to such sexual violence. Young men are not required to undergo such a test and often get away with indecent behaviour or criminal activities. This speaks of the unjust differentiation between male and female virginity.

4.5.1 Silence in the church on sexuality

Marlene regards the marital sexual relationship as sacred, although she has never heard a sermon about sexuality or sexual intercourse. These ideas were informed by other Christians, religious books and her interpretations of the Bible. She also felt that the church viewed marital sexual intercourse as sacred, but she was not sure how she had come to this view. We explored why one never heard sermons about sexuality in the 1960's, and Marlene responded: 'Dit was 'n onding!' (It was unheard of to speak about such things in church). We wondered about implications of this silence or this taboo on speaking about sexuality and what it might have said to congregations. Marlene felt that there was a very definite understanding in the church that pre-marital sex was a sin, but that marital sexual intercourse is sacred.

We speculated that it might be difficult for many Christians to reconcile sexual pleasure and sacredness, as many people of the older generation regarded sexual pleasure as unchristian and believed that sexual intercourse was only to be used for procreation. Marlene does not share this view, as she believes that marital sexual intercourse is a good gift from God, and is to be enjoyed. For Marlene, sexual pleasure can be a sacred experience. Meteyard and Alexander (2002:8) support this view of Marlene's as they believe that it is appropriate for married Christians to explore the gift of their sexuality as a bridge to both greater relational and spiritual intimacy with God and with each other: 'Our sexuality can be the key vehicle for disclosing core aspects of self as lovers look into each other's eyes and souls, while experiencing eroticism in other words to know one another' (Meteyard & Alexander 2002:8). In the Old Testament, 'to know' (Meteyard & Alexander 2002:3) means to have sexual intercourse, thus to know deeply and intimately. Meteyard and Alexander (2002:3) also interpret 'to know' in a metaphorical way, seeing it as God's desire to be known and to know us. Therefore they argue that spirituality, just like sexuality, requires that a person is willing to bare him/herself physically and emotionally, without inhibition.

In my pastoral conversations with young Christian adults and teenagers, I have found it helpful to deconstruct ideas of sexuality, as many of these congregants did not see sexual intercourse as having the potential to draw them closer to God. Most of the teenagers saw sexual intercourse in a predominately physical way, with possible emotional links, but seldom linked it to spirituality or Christianity. I believe that most young Christian couples need to deconstruct their ideas of pleasure, sacredness and spirituality in order to be able to see sexuality as an act that could unite a couple with God. Many young persons that I spoke to felt that pleasure excluded spirituality and that spirituality excludes physical and/or sexual pleasure. MacKnee (cited in Meteyard & Alexander 2002:3) suggests that by positively embracing and integrating our understanding of sexuality in our faith experiences, we can grow spiritually.

4.6 MARRIAGE AND PRE-MARITAL COUNSELLING/CONVERSATIONS

Marlene knew her husband, Charl, at school, but at that stage she did not like him much. When Marlene was twenty one, she boarded with Charl's parents and got to know him better. Soon after a relationship developed, they entered into a long distance relationship for about a year and then got married.

Charl was also a Christian and it was important for both of them to get married in church. They had one conversation with the minister before the wedding regarding the arrangements for the service. In South Africa, the Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA n.d.:1-2) offers a pre-marital course, 'Prepare' which Jewish, Anglican, Methodist and the Dutch Reformed congregations use for their pre-marital counselling. The subjects discussed in the Prepare course are varied. They include conflict resolution, marriage expectations, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relations, parenting, spiritual beliefs, family closeness and couple and family flexibility. Pam Diamond (n.d.:1), who headed the *Prepare* course for FAMSA, believes that premarital counselling allows couples time to get matters into perspective and help a couple to 'focus solely on their relationship and learn how to keep it alive'. FAMSA (n.d.:1-2) sees a pre-marital course, such as *Prepare*, as a preventative tool that could help couples to identify areas that require work before they develop into insurmountable issues. The purpose of this course is to identify potential problems and to address idiosyncrasies in order to lessen the possibility of conflict at a later stage in the marriage. Many married couples I have spoken to expressed regret that they did not receive counselling in preparation for marriage.

According to Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:156-158), many young couples may be disillusioned by their intimate relationship, as it takes time and practice to know and understand each other's sexual needs and how to address these. I believe that in this regard, pre-marital counselling could provide a reference foundation that could support a couple and the marital relationship as they journey through getting to know and understand one another more intimately at an emotional, spiritual and physical level. Pre-marital counselling could inform a young couple and address unrealistic expectations, for example, an expectation of simultaneous sexual climaxes every time they have sexual intercourse, as often portrayed in the secular film world.

In a discussion with my minister, he informed me that some ministers do discuss sexual relationships in pre-marital counselling, but, sadly, some ministers still prefer not to and would only recommend relevant reading material and therefore they perpetuate the church's silence with regard to sexuality within the church.

I asked Marlene what her experience was of pre-marital conversations/counselling and whether the minister discussed the conjugal act or matters relating to the marital bed with them. Marlene was quite amused and told me that in those days (the late 1960's) a

minister most certainly would never discuss sexual relations with anyone. Marlene was convinced that a minister would only discuss sexual matters if a couple had marital problems as a result of their sexual relationship, but she also believes that very few people would disclose this kind of problem to their minister. Marlene remembered thinking ministers looked so prim and proper that she wondered if they could have sexual intercourse. Due to this perception that Marlene had of ministers, she said that she would have been uncomfortable to ask advice or questions with regard to sexual relations.

4.7 THE WEDDING NIGHT AND THEREAFTER

Charl was Marlene's first serious boyfriend. They shared more intimacy than either of them had shared with any other partner, but pre-marital sex was unacceptable to both of them. On their wedding night, Marlene was quite nervous. Many of her friends had told her 'horror' stories about how it feels when one's hymen is broken. Marlene was told that it is very painful and there is a lot of blood. These images scared Marlene and she was anxious about the 'first night'. Marlene believes that many of her friends, like herself, experienced tension due to such (mis)information, and this could be detrimental to a relaxed, comfortable and pleasurable grounding for an intimate relationship. Charl addressed Marlene's tension by introducing his Christian beliefs into the consummation of the marriage.

On their wedding night, Charl and Marlene read from the Bible, prayed and thereafter they consummated the marriage. Marlene believes that because their faith became the foundation of their sexual relationship, she was able to see sexual intercourse in a positive way and as a blessing from God. She also found that this religious foundation assisted her in experiencing their sexual intimacy as a way in which she and Charl connected with God, as Marlene experiences their sexual relationship as spiritual. In this regard, Meteyard and Alexander (2002:2) suggest that human sexuality and spirituality are very close to one another, as both have to do with an intimate relationship, both have to do with deep desire and both have to do with nakedness (being known for who we are without any masks). Meteyard and Alexander (2000:2) argue that both sexuality and spirituality are primarily and deeply about connection and communion – '[t]he relationship between our sexuality and our spirituality as human beings lies in their common focus on self-disclosure and being "known" by another.'

Marlene described losing her virginity as a spiritually precious moment. Charl was a very considerate and gentle lover and he handled her with tenderness. Marlene believes that these gentle and loving actions by Charl during the first week of their marriage was a building block towards a very fulfilling and exciting sexual relationship between them. Marlene and Charl communicate their individual needs, concerns and preferences to each other. Marlene feels that because Charl and she were able to read from the Bible and to ask for God's blessing on their sexual relationship, it enabled them to communicate about their sexual needs despite the larger Christian discourse in which she is positioned, which covered sexual needs and sexual expression in silence. Charl viewed sexual intercourse as a gift from God and to be enjoyed. These views of Charl's had a great influence on Marlene and created openness and transparency in their sexual relationship.

Marlene mentioned that although she felt comfortable with Charl, in the early years of the marriage, she preferred that he did not see her naked, even though she had a positive body image and was confident about her well-formed body. Marlene believes that her discomfort with nakedness was a direct result of her parents' being very uncomfortable with the naked body. Today, Marlene is comfortable with and positive about being naked, because she believes that her body is a gift from God.

Marlene and Charl are at ease with one another and enjoy a fulfilling sexual relationship. Both of them are happy to experiment with different techniques. Sexual intercourse is important to Marlene and she describes herself as "in vrou wat warmer is as normale vroue' (a woman who is more hot blooded than the average woman) as she enjoys having sexual intercourse quite often. We talked about discourses regarding women's sexual desire. For many Christians, female sexual desire is taboo and it is seldom mentioned. It would seem as if female sexual desire is not only frowned upon by some Christian women, but also by many in the secular world. On a secular website, The-Clitoris.com (n.d.:1) this is worded as a discourse where 'male desire and masturbation are acknowledged and often requited, but female desire and masturbation are frequently denied, suppressed and ridiculed'. When teenage boys express desire, they are 'studs', but when teenage girls and women express desire, they are frequently labelled 'sluts' (The-Clitoris.com n.d.:1). Furthermore, according to Zak and McDonald (1997:905), women are socialised differently and acquire a different sexual script from men. Gender role socialisation usually trains women to be passive in sexual activity and to wait for men to initiate sexual contact (Reilly & Lynch 1990:23; Blyth & Straker 1996:253).

4.7.1 Embarrassment and reluctance to express sexual pleasure

Marlene and I explored the discourse that implies that women should be passive with regard to sexual activity. We wondered whether women, even subconsciously, linked sexual pleasure with lust and therefore experience embarrassment and reluctance to express their sexual pleasure. Marlene and I discovered that for both of us (in the first few years of our marriages) it had been difficult to show our enjoyment during sexual intercourse or when we were sexually aroused. As a young bride, Marlene felt that expressing enjoyment was animal-like and that women should not express sexual desire. According to Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:15), many Christians view sexual pleasure as being too animal-like and as something to suppress. After some years of marriage, both of us were able to overcome this shyness and to reach transparency within our marriages regarding sexual pleasure.

Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:16) relate this understanding of sexual pleasure as being animal-like to the ideas of Plato, Augustine and some Calvinist church fathers. Marlene and I agree that our shyness was informed by the idea that 'proper' women (by implication Christian women) do not show their sexual enjoyment. Mothokoa Mamashela (1996:40) says many women are uncomfortable to express pleasure due to a social construction that would view such expression as belonging to a loose woman. This construction was confirmed in our discussion, as both of us we were almost sure that promiscuous women and prostitutes would show their sexual enjoyment and excitement. Both Marlene and I were unsure how we had reached this idea that promiscuous women and prostitutes show their sexual pleasure.

4.7.2 Female desire and bodily functions

Many women that I have spoken with said they do not particularly enjoy sexual intercourse and they seldom experience sexual desire. Marlene wondered if this is a common experience for Christian women and felt that some women pretended they do not ever experience sexual desire, because it is thought to be unbecoming, especially among the older generation. It has been my experience that especially Christian women find it difficult to talk about their sexual desire. I wonder if there is a connection between the Christian view of chastity and its influence on women's constructions of sexuality and their inability or unwillingness to express sexual desire, even within the marital context. There is an entire doctrine with regard to chastity, celibacy, and the Virgin Mary image as a role model for female sexuality. Isherwood and McEwan

(1994:54) state that the church fathers, faced with the dilemma of Mary's femaleness and sexuality, declared Mary as 'ever virgin', which, according to Isherwood and McEwan (1994:54), contributed to women's experiencing sexuality as something negative. The Virgin Mary 'is not a model that empowers women through their sexuality, but rather a model that encourages the repression and denial of women's sexuality' (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:54). Although this discourse is a very important perspective on female sexuality and desire, I have to omit a detailed exploration of this doctrine, due to the limited scope of this dissertation. Linked to the elevation of Mary as 'ever virgin' is the influence of the dichotomous view of body and soul in the early church. This binary view of body and soul excludes desire and pleasure from holiness (Bredenkamp 2002:346) and many Christians interpreted texts such as 1 Corinthians 7:25-38 as a condemnation of anything sexual.

Today, neither Marlene nor I relate to the dichotomous view of mind and body. Marlene and I agree that a discourse that advocates that 'proper' or 'chaste' women are not supposed to enjoy sexual intercourse or have sexual desires can be inhibiting to Christian women's experience of sexuality. In Section 3.10, I discussed female desire and pleasure in detail, and therefore this discussion does not need to be repeated here. I agree with Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:18-24, 160-164), who believe that if Christian women were encouraged within their faith context to explore, enjoy and express sexual pleasure, many marriages would be saved from inhibitions and guilt. Honest and frank communication about sexuality could be a life-line for a couple, especially when faced with a crisis such as cancer.

4.8 A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

A year ago Marlene and her husband had a life-changing experience. Charl was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Charl had different options to treat the cancer, one of which was a prostatectomy, which might result in impotence. Charl did not want to take this decision on his own and asked Marlene what she wanted him to do. Marlene immediately said she wanted him to choose the safest possible option, thus have the operation, as she would rather live without a sexual relationship, as they knew it before, than lose her husband. Marlene believed that even though their sexual relationship would change, the two of them would still be able to have an intimate relationship. Marlene felt that because they had been able to experiment in the past with many techniques to give pleasure to one another, the possibility of impotence was not very threatening to them. Marlene felt that their decision was easier because they had the

conviction that they would still be able to enjoy a physical relationship. For Marlene, open communication and honesty about their sexual needs and practices was life-giving to their sexual relationship and even life-saving in this situation.

Marlene is extremely grateful that the operation was a success and feels as if the two of them have been given a second chance. This experience has deepened their relationship, and Marlene and Charl are experiencing a deeper level of emotional intimacy and closeness than ever before.

Due to the operation, Charl's sexual functioning has changed. Erections are now more difficult to achieve, even more difficult to maintain and there is not the same penile rigidity as before. This has resulted in many challenges for both Marlene and Charl, but with a sense of humour, compassion and love they are able to make the most of the erections that Charl still has. Charl has used Viagra, but in their experience this does not make much of a difference. With patience, tender love and care Marlene and Charl are still able to enjoy a fulfilling sexual relationship.

At times both of them are a bit frustrated and disappointed with the situation, as it is now more difficult to be sexually spontaneous. Marlene is often concerned that Charl might experience frustration or guilt because of this. Marlene believes that the two of them must just keep faith and practise, and that with time it will become easier.

Marlene was able to share with me a rich description of this experience of theirs. They were able to address the restricting and potential alienation due to the effects of the operation by re-negotiating new-ways-of-intimacy. Charl and Marlene challenged the discourse that promotes the penetration of the penis in the vagina as a pre-requisite for satisfactory sexual intercourse. Negotiation became their tool to unlock new meaning and new ways of relating sexually. According to Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:57-59), the discourse of penile penetration for satisfactory sexual intercourse is often associated with another discourse, namely that penis size, and by implication the size of the erection, is directly coupled to the pleasure afforded. The penis size discourse could easily have been undermining to Charl's sense of manhood after the prostatectomy. It would seem as if this discourse could be especially relevant for Christian men, as we find that concerns about the size of the penis deeply rooted in Old Testament times.

4.8.1 Size counts

According to Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:57-60), erections are important to men. Both Marlene and I spoke to our husbands about the meaning of an erection to a man. Both our husbands confirmed this view and felt that it is very important for a man, as it makes him feel manly and able. Many men believe that the size of the penis (and by implication the size of the erection) is related to the sexual pleasure afforded. The discourse regarding the size of the male penis seems to have been circulating even in the biblical times. Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:57-59) explain that in 1 Kings 12:10, King Reroboam boasts that his little finger is thicker than his father's waist to indicate that he, Reroboam, was a more capable and powerful king than his father. According to Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:58), the Hebrew word that was translated as 'little finger' could have referred to his penis, as in antiquity a man's penis size was seen as an indication of his power and abilities. I wonder how a man who has had a prostatectomy relates to the 'size counts' discourse and whether believing this discourse could not make a man who is struggling with impotence feel even less capable sexually. It might have more positive effects if one rather focuses on support and new ways of intimacy other than the size of the penis and erection.

4.9 SUPPORT DURING LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCES

Marlene feels that their faith has supported and helped them to negotiate new ways of intimacy. However, Marlene believes that if she or Charl had been able to talk to someone who had experienced the same intimacy challenges (especially a Christian), about their sexual experiences and expectations, it could have made a difference to their initial frustrations.

We talked about support groups for men and women who are not able to function in the same way as before due to surgery, illness or an accident. We looked at what it meant to live with the effects of surgery to remove cancer (for example, a mastectomy or prostatectomy) and how this could affect sexual relationships. I wondered how a husband deals with it when his wife has lost a breast or even both breasts without the possibility of reconstruction of the breast(s). I had a friend who was in this position and it was her experience that this was very detrimental to their sexual relationship.

Breast cancer is very common in South Africa, and the statistical report for 1997 of The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) estimated that the risk of developing

breast cancer among South African women (aged 0 to 74 years) was 1 in 31 (CANSA 2005:2). If living with cancer and its effects are this common in our society, surely faith communities should become involved in support groups for cancer survivors. I believe that if we have someone to talk to who has experienced a similar situation, it could be very helpful. Truter (2002:25, 83,104-105) has found in his research with heart patients that when patients shared with other patients their experiences, worries and fears, these relationships became 'healing relationships'. The support such patients experienced created fertile ground in which they were able to cultivate new ways of relating to their disease. Truter (2002:105) emphasises that a serious illness invades the entire network of relations around the sick person, especially with their significant others. Truter (2002:83) believes that serious illnesses and life-changing experiences should be addressed by not only the individual and his or her immediate family, but that it should be the joint responsibility of the faith community and support groups in such a faith community. Pattison (1993:89) expressed a similar view and promotes the notion that pastoral care should be holistic, suggesting that individuals must not be isolated from their social context in either conceptualisation or action because this results in harmful and unreal dichotomies and separations.

CANSA (2005:13) states in its statistics report *Cancer Statistics 1997* that the 'lifetime risk of developing prostate cancer among South African males aged 0-74 was 1 in 24'. CANSA's (2005:13) figures have shown that 'Coloured and [W]hite males comprised 63,4% of all prostate cancer cases.... [and] in 1997, 1 in 12 [C]oloured or [W]hite South African men were at risk of having prostate cancer diagnosed'. Kogan and Pato (2005) state that prostate cancer is the most common cancer amongst South African men, but even so, there are currently no support groups for men who have had a prostatectomy. After I made some inquiries, it became clear that churches in the Western Cape did not offer support groups for Christian couples who face such challenges with regard to their sexual functioning.

As a participatory approach informs my ideas of pastoral care, I believe that the pastoral caretaker should not prescribe, but should rather journey with couples who have lived through life-changing experiences and create a platform for them to voice their experiences and to inform others with similar experiences. A Christian support group could be such a platform for mutual and reciprocal pastoral care, where all the voices of couples with such experiences are invited to be heard. Part of my commitment to pastoral care is to state that the church can only be relevant if we address the contexts of

people (Wolfaardt 1992:11-13). This would also imply the contexts of their sexuality and the functioning, supporting and finding of new ways of relating for sexually challenged couples, if necessary. Among sexually challenged couples, I include any couple that is not able to function sexually in the way the couple did before, due to illness, an accident or surgery.

Although Charl did not enjoy the support of such a Christian support group, he was very fortunate, as his doctor gave him as much information as possible and still keeps contact with him. Charl experienced this support as extremely helpful and it encouraged him to live with hope and to have faith in the healing process.

4.10 NEW BEGINNINGS

Marlene talked about the difficulties they experienced due to the erectile inconsistency Charl experienced. These difficulties saddened and frustrated both of them at times. During our last session, Marlene started the conversation by saying, 'I've got something big to tell you. I am not sure how to say this...'. Marlene seemed a bit uneasy and a little unsure, but mustered the courage to share a new experience they had had with me.

Charl decided that it might be helpful if the two of them made use of an aid in the form of a mechanical device, an erectile enhancer/vibrator. Charl and Marlene had not discussed the use of an aid before. Charl took Marlene by surprise during an intimate moment when he introduced an aid. Charl then told Marlene that he had bought the device, as it could be helpful at the moment, seeing that he is not yet able always to have and maintain an erection. This was a tremendous shock for Marlene, and she felt confused and also a little sad. At first, Marlene thought that Charl wanted to use a device only for her benefit and this was unacceptable for her. Charl explained that it might relieve some of the tension that he experienced due to the inconsistent erections. He expressed the need to be able to achieve a climax. After a discussion, Charl was able to convince Marlene to experiment with this new way of lovemaking.

Marlene and Charl's willingness to explore a new dimension in their intimate relationship spoke of courage. Marlene felt that because of her deep love for Charl, she was prepared to venture into new territory. The first time they included this aid in their lovemaking, it was not really satisfying to either of them, but the second time it did improve. It was very helpful to Charl and he was able to achieve an erection without Viagra and he climaxed. This was a great relief to both of them. Marlene felt that the

tension and performance anxiety that both of them had experienced before was now lessened. I asked Marlene what advice she would give to a couple if the husband had recently had a prostatectomy, to which she replied that she would encourage them to use an aid, as it can prevent tension and frustration. Marlene believes that Christians especially might have concerns about using an aid.

We explored Marlene's initial reaction to the use of an aid. Marlene realised that she associated the use of a vibrator with lust ('Dit is 'n wellustige besigheid'). Lust is often condemned in the Bible and Marlene was concerned that the use of an aid might be perverse. Bacchiocchi (1991:23) interprets Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4:2-5 as admonishing those who acted 'in the passions of lust like the heathen who do not know God', and speaks of sexual immorality. Bacchiocchi (1991:23) believes that sexual immorality is serious, because it affects the individual more deeply and permanently than any other sin.

Marlene believes that her association with a vibrator as lustful was also informed by some people's way of referring to vibrators with distaste. We agreed that crude jokes and distasteful remarks have tainted our perceptions of sexual aids. Marlene was able to re-negotiate her understanding of sexual aids, changing it into a supportive practice for their intimate relationship.

Marlene was surprised that Charl had taken the initiative and had had courage to buy an aid. Marlene realised that it is very important to Charl to satisfy her sexual needs. This realisation was constructive to their emotional bond; Marlene felt cared for and respected as a sexual being.

4.11 TRANSPARENCY WITH REGARD TO ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO ACHIEVE SEXUAL PLEASURE

I wonder what it says to a man if he knows that he can satisfy his wife sexually. In Section 2.4.4, I discussed the concept of *onah*, which refers to the Old Testament practice of conjugal rights or sexual satisfaction of the wife, incumbent upon her husband. In Marlene and my discussions, we explored alternative ways to sexual pleasure, leading us to an exploration of the topic of individual and mutual masturbation.

In our discussion of masturbation, Marlene shared the information that since our conversations, Charl and she had been able to discuss subjects which they had not

focused on before, such as masturbation. For me, this was a significant moment in the research journey, as Marlene's words affirmed one of my research aims (see Section 1.3.3 of this research report), that of creating space to voice previously marginalised experiences. Charl sees masturbation as a private act, but not as a sinful act. As a young man he was aware of masturbation and did not have any hang-ups about it. Due to our research journey, for the first time, Charl was able to tell Marlene that the doctor had encouraged him to stimulate himself in order to hasten the recovery process after the prostatectomy.

It was interesting to see that in some Black communities sexual issues are addressed with a very matter of fact approach – which is in contrast to the way White, especially Afrikaans-speaking, communities approach such issues. Mager (1996:19) states that in the Black communities of the Eastern Cape during the 1950's, female sexual desire was acknowledged and sexual practices were used to fulfil the sexual needs of a wife in the absence of the husband. At a time when Black men in South Africa had to leave their wives to go to work on the mines, some husbands nominated a male substitute for their wives. This 'substitute' was responsible for attend to the wife's sexual needs by external intercourse, in other words, mutual masturbation. At first I thought that this was a very liberated attitude, but Mager (1996:19) explained that this practice was motivated by the husband's fear of adultery and unwanted pregnancy. He wanted to control his wife's sexual activity, even when he was absent. This system gave the husband the power to hold the 'substitute' responsible if the wife became pregnant and curb autonomous sexual activity by the wife. Many wives experienced this practice as oppressive rather than as constructive (Mager 1996:19).

What fascinated me was the openness about the practice of mutual masturbation between a 'substitute' husband and a woman. It is my experience that most White Christian couples that I know would not speak openly about mutual masturbation or alternative ways of sexual satisfaction. Within the White Christian community, sexual satisfaction is still immersed in silence. Marlene was willing to explore with me the topic of mutual masturbation, thus breaking the silence on this discourse.

4.11.1 Discourses regarding masturbation

Marlene told me that although she is comfortable with mutual masturbation as part of sexual intercourse, she is not comfortable with masturbating herself. We wondered if there could be a relation between being uncomfortable with touching oneself and the way we have been socialised as children. When we were children, parents would often tell young children not to touch themselves. When a baby girl discovers her hands or feet she is adorable, but when she discovers her vagina it is embarrassing. I wondered if Marlene would advise her daughter to socialise Marlene's granddaughter in a different way than Marlene had been. Marlene felt that she would advise her daughter to be relaxed about self-discovery in children, as it is a normal process. Marlene and I agreed that it could have an inhibitory affect on one's experiences with sexuality if a person were told that self-discovery and masturbation are sinful. It would seem that many Christian men and women see masturbation as sinful.

Our exploration of masturbation as a topic later resulted in an amazing conversation between my husband (Pieter) and myself. Pieter shared with me that he was told as a boy that masturbation was a grave sin and therefore would cause blindness and that hair would grow on one's palms. Pieter remembered that some of his male family members would say to him in a mixed gender conversation, 'Ek hoop nie jy slaan jou hand aan jou eie liggaam nie, dit is sonde' (I hope you do not masturbate, this is sin). Pieter's experience was totally alien to me, because I was informed in a very different way, growing up with the understanding that masturbation is a normal part of personal discovery and development.

Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:101) confirm Pieter's experience as quite common in their discussion of myths regarding masturbation. It would seem as if it was general practice to warn teenagers not to masturbate, as this would cause madness, blindness or hair growth on the palms. This myth caused Pieter much distress and whenever he did masturbate as a teenager, he experienced tremendous guilt and would immediately pray for forgiveness afterwards. This discourse of masturbation as sinful has caused Christians many years of guilt, fear and ambivalent feelings, as we saw in both Cathy's and Pieter's experiences. In Section 3.14 we explored the restricting affects of the ideas that informed Cathy's understanding regarding masturbation and how she was able to deconstruct these ideas. We are often socialised in ways that might be restricting to a development of our sexuality and such ideas have even more power if they are perceived to be based on Biblical teaching or Scripture.

4.11.2 Learning 'proper behaviour' – foe or friend?

Our exploration of how we had been socialised regarding the meaning of masturbation led our discussion into an exploration of other constituting socialising practices. As young girls we were taught that decent girls (implying chaste or girls with moral values) sit in a lady-like manner, thus 'knees together'. For most young girls, the 'knees together' lesson is probably one of the first gender lessons we learn. Marlene said that this lesson caused some difficulties for her in the early years of her marriage. It was very difficult for her to open her legs and to relax during sexual intercourse. I experienced the same, as lying with my legs apart made me feel sluttish. We felt that the instruction of sitting in a 'decent way' was deeply imprinted in our minds. The 'knees together' discourse contributed to our difficulty to take advantageous body positions to facilitate comfortable, relaxed and enjoyable sexual intercourse. Maybe we should rather not speak of decent (moral) girls sitting with their 'knees together', but should rather discuss the contexts in which it could be considerate to sit in such a way that one does not cause other people embarrassment or unease. It is not about being decent or chaste; it is about being considerate towards others in one's presence.

To understand our sexuality as Christian women, it could be to our advantage to deconstruct discourses that are supposedly biblical, which are actually social constructions. Nicolson (1994:7) states that 'to understand scientific explanations of women's sexuality, sexual etiquette and moral values, an analysis of values underlying patriarchy and the established bases of power [such as how the Bible has been interpreted] in the contemporary society provide more clues than any direct empirical investigation of biology and psychology'. Another interpretation of biblical texts that has usurped truth status is that of the division of gender roles.

4.12 A WIFE'S ROLE AS THE NURTURER AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HER SEXUALITY

Marlene's perception of a Christian wife is that of a nurturer. Within Marlene's gender role construction, she sees the wife (to a greater extent than the husband) as taking care of the children and seeing to their emotional, spiritual and physical well-being. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:18) argue that patriarchy established the role of the woman as nurturer with the aid of religion, '[r]eligions have reinforced....[and] prescribed roles of wife and mother [to women]'. For many centuries the Bible was used to justify and maintain the construction of the wife within the nurturing role (Landman 2002:25). This belief infiltrated all spheres of life, especially theology and psychology

(Nicolson 1994:12). It would seem as if there is a close link between seeing the woman as nurturer and the exclusion of female desire and an expression of female sexuality.

Choi and Nicolson (1994:2) states that although biology plays a significant part in the way human sexuality is defined, such a definition is 'subject to layers of psychological experience mediated by personality and socialization, and sexuality and gender divisions are themselves socially constructed'. One such social process is the different ways in which boys and girls are socialised. We are born with a specific sex and are socialised according to the accepted gender prescriptions for that sex. This socialisation process informs our ideas regarding our gender roles as well as our sexuality. Fredman and Potgieter (1996:51) state that boys are actively encouraged to engage in behaviour that affirms discourses of masculinity, autonomy, assertiveness and ambition. This influences their construction of sexual meanings. Fredman and Potgieter (1996:52) believe that boys are much more likely to organise their sexuality around the satisfaction of their needs. Girls, on the other hand, often learn that their worlds are much more limited and compliant. They learn not to be too 'forward', as this is considered unladylike. Fredman and Potgieter (1996:52) conclude that girls would experience their sexuality as something that others do to them and define for them.

Women are taught to see their sexuality in terms of the sexual needs of their partners instead of focusing on their own sexual needs. In modern times, Freud and Ellis perpetuated this view. Nicolson (1994:12) discusses Freud's theory of female sexuality. Freud theorised that women cannot act towards their own sexual satisfaction, but are dependent on the male to ensure a vaginal orgasm for the woman. Furthermore, according to Nicolson (1994:12), Freud believed that women were essentially nurturing in their actions, and their sexuality was only defined by their ability to conceive and bear children and nurture infants and men.

Not only Freud casts women's sexuality in the role of nurturer, thus only nurturing her partner sexually and not herself, but so did other social and religious constructions. According to a religious discourse prevalent in the 1970's, women were to seek fulfilment not in sexual expression and enjoyment, but in motherhood. Plaatjies (2003:219) researched constituting literature in the Dutch Reformed Church and how it projected the Christian girl and women's role in society and women's sexuality by implication. In these articles the ideal Christian woman was portrayed as gentle, meek, soft-spoken, dependent, chaste, domesticated, accommodating of others' needs and not

outspoken or opinionated. A Christian woman was also not supposed to express her sexual needs or desires verbally.

Marlene confirmed that she was exposed to this discourse and for many years she had accepted this as the rightful norm for a Christian woman. She did not question this discourse. For a woman to question authority or to think for herself was condemned as unbecoming and unchristian.

In Patricia McFadden's (2003:1-3) discussion *Sexual pleasure as a feminist choice*, she states that, for many years, African women's sexual and erotic inclinations have been suppressed by the patriarchal system which merged female sexuality with reproduction within a hetero-normative culture and social matrix. This suppression was linked to the policing of female sexuality in terms of tradition and religion, linking it to being a mother and a nurturer. McFadden (2003) believes that there is an extremely intimate relationship between sexuality and power. Therefore, for many African women, even the suggestion of sexual pleasure and eroticism is seldom recognised, as this would imply that women could enjoy and should have the right to express their sexuality in ways that they should choose, instead of prescribed tradition and religion. If such a position was recognised or accepted, it would empower women and place them in the powerful position of deciding and expressing their sexuality autonomously from patriarchal views. McFadden (2003:1) claims that patriarchy sees the notion that sexual pleasure is a fundamental right of all women and that it is important to a wholesome lifestyle as defying male authority.

In recent years, female sexuality has emerged and is moving towards independence. People have started to challenge traditional views that link female sexuality only to procreation. Unfortunately, HIV/AIDS crushed this liberating shift. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has once more imposed 'hegemonic notions of sexual cultural taboos and claims that define sexual pleasure and freedom as "dangerous" and "irresponsible" (McFadden 2003:1). Sexual freedom for women is still a paradox and it is now defined in terms of reproductive health and choices, in other words, safer sexual intercourse, and safe motherhood instead of the right of a woman to enjoy her sexual desires and the expression thereof. Female sexuality is yet again defined in terms of motherhood, excluding the active pursuit of female desire and pleasure by females. Thus, patriarchy has defined female sexuality in terms of motherhood and being a nurturer, and, just as we moved away from these prescriptive views, HIV/AIDS emerged. This resulted in a

constriction of female sexual freedom to the right to have safe sexual intercourse as the focus, and once more female sexual desire and expression are being overlooked or ignored. This binary approach to gender roles is limiting in many instances and perpetuates a patriarchal discourse. I would prefer to define female sexuality as inclusive of female desire and pleasure in the presence of safe sexual practices instead of only focusing of safety.

Marlene raised the issue that gender roles and the expression of female sexuality are often constituted and enforced by dress code prescriptions.

4.13 POLICING OF SEXUALITY THROUGH DRESS CODE

In the 1960's when Marlene was a young adult, Christianity prescribed very definite norms and dress codes for women. These prescriptions were directly linked to sexual chastity, faith and gender roles as interpreted and policed by patriarchy. Marlene was taught that 'chaste' girls dress modestly and neatly. Their use of make-up should be discreet and they should be proud of their bodies. The discourse regarding the way Christian women should dress was prescribed and officially formulated.

According to Plaatjies (2003:145-148), the prescribed dress codes for women in the Afrikaans Reformed tradition were discussed at synod level. Since 1928, *The Commission to Combat Social Evils* (a free translation of *Die Kommissie vir die Bestryding van Maatskaplike Euwels*) started to report on dress codes, especially that of women, at the synod. It would seem as if women's sexuality had to be controlled, especially in the way they dressed. Once more the female body became the object of fear and suspicion with the dangerous potential of morally corrupting men and seducing even the most pious of men and therefore prescriptions reverted back to a very conservative dress code for women (Heyward 1990:262). Marlene remembered that in their premarital conversation, the minister did not address the sexual relationship of a husband and wife, but instead warned Marlene that her shoulders should be covered by her wedding dress, as he would not marry her otherwise. This minister told Marlene that the previous week a young bride arrived in a shoulder-revealing dress and he had then stepped down from the pulpit and had covered her with his vestment (clerical gown). He made it clear that he would not tolerate such indecency again.

The Commission to Combat Social Evils (free translation) recommended that the dress code set out by the late Reverend Andrew Murray should be seen as the norm for

Christian women. This same commission would yet again address the inappropriate dress code of women in the synod of 1949, and the matter was then referred to the newly appointed commission, 'Vrouewaaksaamheidskomitee' (freely translated as The Commission to Guard Women's Morals) with the recommendation that Christian women should dress in a modest and chaste manner (Plaatjies 2003:146). In the 1965 synod, The Commission to Combat Social Evils officially declared that, according to biblical standards, no woman should dress in a revealing manner, nor in a way that reminds people of a man's clothes. This school of thought continued, and in 1978 this commission declared that women should continue to wear a hat to church services, as this is what the Word of God prescribes (Plaatjies 2003:147).

I came to a renewed sense of the powerful position that the church enjoys, as many Christians would never dream of challenging the authority of the church or its policies, even when these policies are irrelevant or absurd. I find it very disturbing to know that while young men that I knew died on the border of Angola during national military service and while apartheid was destroying communities, killing hundreds of people, the leaders of the most powerful church in South Africa were debating whether women should wear hats to church. To my mind, this in itself was an atrocity.

Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:10-11) speak about the ambiguous history of Christianity in South Africa and how Christians and their churches have been part of 'horrendous feats of oppression'. I share Cochrane's et al (1991:10) theological convictions and believe that the common theological concern and commitment must be relevant to the political, economic and social crises of our context. I believe that, in the past, the church, by focusing on ways to impose a subordinate role on women (in the form of forcing them to wear hats), ignored the context of oppression for women, as well as ignored the effects of apartheid on the majority of the population.

Cochrane et al (1991:10) argue that the 'common goal of ministry would be transformation/liberation'. I understand this to mean that the church should seek ways to address and transform unjust social structures and attitudes and policies which perpetuate and reinforce such injustices (Cochrane et al 1991:10). Thus, we need to look at how women's sexuality and the expression thereof have been twisted to serve patriarchal views. We need to find ways to liberate Christian female sexuality and to restory it according to how we as women could experience and express our sexuality within our faith in a way that would be live-giving to ourselves and our relationships.

One way in which we could establish such processes of transformation is to address people's context. Cochrane et al (1991:16) state that to confess Jesus as the Christ is to perceive history from a particular perspective, which implies a prophetic mode of doing theology. This doing of theology points towards God's justice and peace within the particular contexts in which theology is lived.

Landman (2002:25) confirms and comments on gender roles, pre- and post-feminism, as well as theology. Landman recalled her school days, a time when many gender discourses based on the interpretation of theology were represented by the wearing of a hat. Landman states that feminism took off the hat that represented gender roles and challenged patriarchal and often theologically motivated discourses. It struggled for women to have access to the economy, to free women from religious stereotypes of womanhood and to give women equality in relation to men. Landman (2002:26) believes that it is now time for women theologians to move beyond feminism to post-feminist theology, which she terms a partnership theology. Partnership theologians seek to free women from limiting stereotypes, but are also convinced of the importance of inviting men to engage in this freeing process.

4.14 REFLECTIONS

I was deeply touched and inspired by Marlene and Charl's appreciation of and regard for sexual intimacy within a Christian marriage. It was inspiring to see their willingness to adapt and to find new and different ways of expressing their sexuality. Their approach was like a refreshing breeze. I was revived and enriched by this journey. I enjoyed our journey and I appreciate her sense of humour and willingness to discover.

In the next chapter we journey with Marelise and her experiences of the relations of abusive power and sexuality. Marelise experienced many discourses that were lifedenying in her experiences of her sexuality as a Christian.

CHAPTER 5

POWER RELATIONS, CONFESSIONS, HEALING AND A NEW NARRATIVE

Narrative therapeutic practices assisted me to create a space which was conducive to the generation of alternative realities and which allowed vital and previously neglected aspects of the co-researchers' stories to be heard. My research aims, namely to construct alternative narratives for Christian women's sexuality with the research participants and to break the silence regarding sexuality in the church, were supported by narrative analysis, which enables the unheard voices of frequently discriminated-against minorities – from a social, cultural or ethnic point of view – to be heard (Lieblich et al 1998:5).

The possibility of alternative stories was very important in this journey, as it created the possibility of change, if the participant voiced a desire for such change. In this journey these 'new or alternative' stories were incorporated as alternative knowledges, or, as Foucault puts it, 'the insurrection of the subjugated knowledges' (quoted in White & Epston 1990:32). To facilitate change in the journey with Marelise, it became important to challenge dominant discourses and the power of religious institutions.

5.1 MARELISE

This participant used the fictitious name of Marelise. She introduced herself in the following way: 'I am in my early thirties. I have been married for four years. I always thought that I would like to work with children, because I love children very much. However, I do not want children of my own, but enjoy children and would still love to work with kids in the field of physical education, for example, motor skill development. I am working full-time as a manager and instructor in a health and fitness club. I am trained as a social worker. I have five years experience as a social worker and have worked at three different organisations. I was involved in research with the street children in Cape Town CBD. I also worked in the coloured and black communities and did children's court work.'

When we started our conversation, I asked Marelise whether I could use her husband's name or if she would prefer to use another name. Marelise replied, 'Dis fine, dit is nie hy wat onder verdenking is nie.' (It is fine, as it is not he that is under suspicion).

Marelise embarked on this research project with me wanting to talk about her past, but she felt that her negative sexual experiences might have a negative impact in some way. With this remark of Marelise, the constitutive force of the power (as described by Flaskas and Humphreys [1993:41]) of the church showed itself. Doehring (cited in Graham 1999:198) speaks of this as the power of religion to hold captive or to release. Marelise has, in the past, expressed her sexuality differently from the dominant or prescribed norms of the church, and therefore she expected me to judge her because I am a local preacher.

5.2 CHILDHOOD AWARENESS OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY

Marelise started to narrate her childhood years with the following description: 'Ek is verwek as 'n buite-egtelike kind, maar gebore binne die eg' (I was conceived out of wedlock, but born within a legal marriage). Marelise explained that she was aware of being a 'love child', but she was not sure who had told her about this - she assumes it was her mother. As a young child, this knowledge did not bother her much, but later in her life this knowledge had a negative impact on her understanding of her mother's sexuality. Marelise became a Christian and viewed her mother's sexuality as sinful. These perceptions of Marelise's were reinforced by her maternal grandmother.

Marelise did not have a carefree childhood, as poverty was a constant companion of the family, due to her father's struggle with alcohol. Marelise's father often ran up debt and the family had to rely on charity. Marelise rarely got new clothes and she became aware of the fact that her parents did not have much money after she turned ten. Marelise remembered that her mother once had to pawn her wedding ring to get money for food. This made a great impression on Marelise, because for her a wedding ring was a symbol of the sacredness of marriage.

When Marelise was in Standard Three, the family relocated to another area. Marelise's reputation as a great sportsperson preceded her and she was accepted in her new school and was popular. When she was in Standard Five, she became head girl. As a child, Marelise had many rules for herself. She was very religious and her faith was very important to her. Marelise enjoyed being faithful and respectful towards God and it was important to her to be obedient: 'My first Bible was given to me by my maternal grandma, who made a great impression on me in terms of spiritual importance and God's love. I felt God loved me and I saw God as a great authority figure. Both my grandmas instilled faithful spiritual following.'

Marelise experienced her parents as fun people with a fun relationship, but when her father drank, he became physically violent towards her mother. Although Marelise did not have a good relationship with her mother, she tried to help her mother when her father assaulted her mother. Marelise loved her father very much, and she was the apple of his eye. The relationship between Marelise and her mother was strained. Marelise's mother never took much interest in her, as her mother tended to focus on the younger siblings. Marelise's mother had to protect her sons from her husband, as he also became violent towards the boys. As our conversation continued, it became apparent that there was a lot of conflict in her parents' marriage.

Marelise remembered an incident when her mother went looking for Marelise's father. They found her father at the house of a woman known for promiscuous behaviour. Marelise remembered her mother dragging her father out of this woman's bed, saying 'Kom net huistoe' (Just come home). This was not a pleasant memory for Marelise, as it served as proof of her father's infidelity. Marelise connected extra-marital sex with sin and adultery, due to her faith convictions and, with this incident, sexuality became tainted for Marelise. She believes that her father's infidelity contributed to her awareness of his sexuality and she described him as a flirtatious person who charmed women.

Even before the above-mentioned incident, Marelise had experienced her parents as very sexual people, but she does not know why she had this idea. She was never aware of them having sexual intercourse, nor did she ever see them showing affection towards one another. She thought that her perceptions of her parents might have been influenced by their relaxed attitude about being naked. Marelise said there were no boundaries in their home and her father would often walk around the house naked or sit naked at the dinning table while doing a task. Marelise's father was comfortable with being naked and did not conform to the norm of being dressed in the presence of other family members, in other words, the children of the family.

In contrast to her father, Marelise was very protective of her personal space and she did not appear naked before either family members or friends. Marelise related her need for privacy regarding nakedness to the religious views of her grandmothers. (Some discourses regarding Christianity and nakedness were discussed in Section 3.4 of this research report.) Marelise's identification with religion overrode the daily 'reality' of nakedness to which she was exposed. This speaks of religion being a constitutive force that constructed and maintained Marelise's ideas of nakedness even though it was

challenged by her father's approach to public nakedness as being acceptable. On the other hand we see that her father resisted the 'normalizing gaze' (Foucault in Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:40-43) of religion that would not approve of public nakedness. Nakedness in Marelise's home held within it both the constituting force (dominant discourse) as well as the resistance to it, as explained by Foucault (cited Flaskas & Humphreys1993:40-43).

Some Christians are uncomfortable with the naked body, as I have already discussed in Sections 3.4 and 4.2, but others have a naturist approach. Marelise did not share the view of naturists. A Christian nudist and naturist defines this position (Fig Leaf Forum 2005), as redeeming nakedness because humans are the bearers of the very image of God. Therefore the writer of the article argues that it is unthinkable that 'image-bearers' of God should find themselves so ashamed of human nakedness that they would insist that it should always be covered. The writer continues that Christian nudists can present a healthy alternative of nakedness to that of Hollywood and Madison Avenue. The writer believes sexuality sells; and therefore nudity is commercialised and produced in a seductive manner with perfectly proportioned young men and women. This misrepresentation of the human body creates an expectation that people need to strive towards the perfect body, and many young people try to obtain this impossible body image, resulting in bulimia and anorexia nervosa. The writer believes that Christian nudism presents a healthy alternative view by presenting a higher view of the human body and nakedness, one marked by dignity and sacredness and representative of God's image.

5.3 TRAGEDY STRIKES

Marelise's father died when she was fourteen. This was a very traumatic event for her. Her father had internal bleeding and started to vomit, which resulted in suffocation. Marelise was with her father when he died. She felt that this was a very undignified way to die and she did not want to see or remember her father in this way.

Miss Ford, Marelise's Xhosa teacher, was a source of comfort and consolation to her during this time of loss, particularly because she adored Miss Ford and she felt that Miss Ford represented all that a Christian woman and mother should be. Marelise describes Miss Ford as 'feminine, warm, affectionate, very real and down to earth. She was a loving woman and she loved the Lord with all her heart and shared this with everyone'. As a young girl Marelise experienced this view of a Christian woman as a positive and

encouraging influence to her, as it allowed her to embrace her own femininity. Marelise felt that her mother betrayed these values as she was unwilling to embrace either her own or Marelise's femininity.

According to Butler (cited in McClintock Fulkerson 1994:82), femininity is a social construction, as defined by heterosexism. These heterosexist definitions relate to a patriarchal view of maleness and femaleness. Butler believes that definitions of femininity are not natural, but socially constructed. Due to the fact that femininity can be viewed as a social construction, it implies the possibility that the way in which a woman projects her femininity could change, as we will see in the experiences of Marelise's mother. Being feminine in different contexts might look different (Butler, cited in McClintock Fulkerson 1994:82).

5.4 A PICTURE-PERFECT LIFE

After the death of Marelise's father, the family's lives changed completely. With the money paid from his pension, Marelise's mother bought a spacious home in an upmarket neighbourhood. Marelise's mother started to take care of her personal appearance and she started to dress in a feminine way. Marelise appreciated this and thought her mother looked pretty ('Dit was vir my mooi'). Marelise attended a good high school and she had most of the things she needed. Her life was 'picture-perfect'.

At this time, a family friend, Oom Koos, used to help her mother as a handyman with all kinds of jobs around the house. Marelise never suspected that these visits were anything other than platonic, as there was a longstanding friendship between the two families. The children of the families were friends and used visit each other's homes.

5.5 TRAGEDY STRIKES AGAIN

About a year after the death of Marelise's father, one morning, she discovered her mother and Oom Koos in her mother's bed. At the time, Oom Koos was still married to someone else. As a deeply religious person, Marelise was terribly shocked, as infidelity and extra-marital sex were totally unacceptable according to her religious beliefs. Interestingly, Marelise did not express the same intensity of shock and disapproval about her father's infidelity when she saw him in another woman's bed. I wonder if this confirms the discourse that female infidelity is judged more harshly than male infidelity, as discussed in Section 2.4.2.2.

Marelise said that infidelity and extra-marital sex were totally unacceptable to her and that biblical scriptures such as Matthew 5:27-28 informed her condemnation of adultery. This text is interpreted as indicating that Jesus emphasises that to entertain lustful desire towards a person of the opposite sex outside marriage means to be guilty of adultery. Bacchiocchi (1991:23) argues that the Bible strongly condemns sexual intercourse outside marriage because sexual intercourse represents the most intimate of all interpersonal relationships, expressing total commitment. If one has to look at this relationship from as Old Testament perspective, it is interesting to note that the relationship between Marelise's mother and Oom Koos would not have been seen as adultery, as the marital status of the man was irrelevant. Adultery could only be committed against another man's marriage, therefore if the woman was not married, such relations would not have been seen as adulterous (Greenberg 1990:33).

However one defines adultery, this incident was detrimental to the relationship between Marelise and her mother, as it further alienated Marelise from her mother. After some time, Marelise's mother decided to move in with Oom Koos. She sold their beautiful home and moved to a dilapidated, ramshackle house on a smallholding outside town. This destroyed Marelise's 'picture-perfect life', as once again debt and alcohol became constant companions of the family and her mother once more became unkempt and slovenly in her appearance. The fact that Marelise's mother once again moved away from a feminine appearance and manners were a great disappointment to Marelise. It was during this time, when living with Oom Koos, that Marelise became involved with older men.

5.6 A CHILD'S AWARENESS OF OTHER PEOPLE'S SEXUALITY

One of Marelise's first sexual memories was of when she was in primary school and found her mother reading a book in the sitting room. Although her mother was fully clothed, she was masturbating. At the time, Marelise did not realise what her mother was doing, but she remembers it as having a sexual connection for her. Marelise could not recall why she made this connection.

Another memory Marelise had was riding her bicycle home from sport as a primary school pupil. Marelise passed a man who sat in his motorcar masturbating. That time she did understand what he was doing, but could not recall how she knew what masturbation was. 'He was sitting with his pants down in the car and I knew that was not ordinary

behaviour. My thoughts were of him being sexually excited – I also thought this about my mom.'

Marelise felt that this awareness as a child of other people's sexuality was not a positive experience. Instead, she experienced it as tainting her ideas about sexual excitement and sexual pleasure. Our exploration of Marelise's awareness of other people's sexuality led us to discuss the development of her personal awareness of sexuality.

5.7 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDHOOD SEXUALITY

In our exploration of the development of Marelise's sexuality, she remembered masturbating as a young child, but she did not know what the action meant at the time. Marelise's grandmother and nanny were aware of this and when they saw Marelise masturbating they used to scold her, telling her to stop, as it was bad behaviour. From Fredman and Potgieter's (1996:51) discussion of childhood sexual activity, it is apparent that this is a common reaction from an adult to childhood masturbation. They have found that adults will often discourage masturbation, especially in girls. Fredman and Potgieter (1996:51) see sexuality as a social construction, stating that academic, legal, media and social discourses also give particular meanings to society's notion of what a child should be and do. In the South African context, such notions are closely linked with the Jansen Calvinistic approach to sexuality (see Section 2.3.5) that sees sexual intercourse only in terms of procreation and insists that sexual pleasure is not to be encouraged or expressed. We also saw this approach reflected in the discussion of masturbation as a sin in Section 4.11.1 of this research report.

The only sexual education that Marelise received was from the School Sister and some of her friends' mothers. Marelise's own mother never talked to her about bodily development and Marelise had to fight her mother on issues such as shaving her legs. Marelise experienced a lot of frustration because her mother did not tell her how to use sanitary pads or what to expect in her bodily development. Her mother's silence about bodily development had a restraining effect on Marelise, as this left her feeling unsure about her own sexuality and bodily functions.

5.8 DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUAL PRACTICES

Marelise had a few platonic relationships with boys when she was at primary school. In high school she was interested in boys, but was shy and reserved. In Matric, Marelise had a relationship with a schoolboy, but again this was a platonic relationship without any physical engagement. However, Marelise had two separate lives, one at school and a totally different one on the smallholding.

When the family lived on the smallholding, many of Oom Koos's friends came to visit. When Marelise was sixteen, one such friend, a man of thirty, started to show considerable interest in her. He used to chat to Marelise and he would prefer being with her to spending time with the adults. Marelise felt that her mother had to be aware of his attraction towards her, as it was quite obvious, but, even so, Marelise's mother never expressed disapproval of this developing relationship. Marelise experienced ambivalent feelings about the relationship. On the one hand, she felt that the relationship was wrong, but, on the other hand, she felt special because she was dating an older person.

Marelise never realised that this man had sexual intentions towards her and when he suggested this to her, she was horrified. Marelise was disappointed when she realised that he was more interested in her body than her as a person, but she still believed that he loved her and that he wanted to take care of her. An intimate physical relationship, which did not include sexual intercourse as such, developed between Marelise and this man. He would place Marelise's hand on his genitals and he would also stimulate himself in her presence. Marelise did not enjoy the physical side of the relationship and this made her feel dirty and guilty. Her Christian beliefs informed her that this physical relationship was wrong and she felt emotionally trapped.

Varga and Makubalo (1996:33-34) have researched factors that contribute to or have resulted in African teenage girls' becoming sexually active. The majority of girls participating in their research saw the following as contributing factors: proving their love and commitment to the partner, a refusal to engage in sexual activities resulted in threats, rejection and the termination of the relationship, financial dependence, emotional and/or physical abuse. It would seem as if Marelise also experienced pressure to engage in sexual acts and it is plausible that one or more of the above factors would have been present – Marelise felt that emotional abuse was a contributing factor in this relationship.

According to Marelise, her conviction that pre-marital sex was wrong prevented her from having sexual intercourse with this man, but it did not protect her emotionally in this physical relationship. It was interesting to note that Marelise would have wanted her mother to police (protect) her sexuality. Marelise felt that the absence of parental

policing of her sexuality left her vulnerable and unprotected. She believes that if her mother did police her sexuality, it would have had a positive effect on the relationship between herself and her mother. She would then have viewed her mother as a more caring mother who was really able to protect her child (Marelise).

5.8.1 A mother's role is to protect

Laing and Kamsler (1990:166) discuss the dominant discourse of motherhood, which is based on 'society prescribing certain standards against which mothers are judged... [and] according to their adequacy in meeting the standards' such as protecting their children and providing in the physical and emotional needs of others. This ideology of motherhood is often used to blame mothers for abusive behaviour of others, which could render the offender's role almost invisible. This societal approach of mother-blaming causes many difficulties in the mother and child's relationship and both could experience damaging guilt and blame in their interaction with one another (Laing & Kamsler 1990:167).

Marelise felt that her mother contributed indirectly to the abusive relationships she was trapped in, as it was often her mother's friends and acquaintances that were the perpetrators. 'My mother exposed me to men that made me feel cheap and unsafe. This is not the type of people she should hang out with. My maternal grandma often used to say that she did not raise my mom to be the way she is, to socialise with the kind of people she was with.'

This comment of Marelise's resonates with the 'mother blaming' discourse. Jenkins (1990:40) comments:

Partners of abusive males may believe that they are responsible for preventing and controlling the man's abusive behaviour and for the consequences of the abuse. This is evident when some victims of incestuous abuse appear to be less forgiving of and attribute more blame to their mothers for not protecting them, than to their fathers for abusing them.

It would seem as if mother-blaming discourse does not only circulate within contexts of incestuous abuse, but abuse in general. Marelise's experiences that her mother neglected to protect her from the sexual advances of older men caused Marelise to view her own sexuality with suspicion. She felt exposed and vulnerable and like a sexual object for men to toy with.

The approach of mother-blaming shifts the responsibility of the abusive behaviour from the perpetrator to the mother, thus creating the idea that the guilty party was the mother, not the perpetrator. This leads the perpetrator not to take responsibility for his actions and society not to demand such accountability (Laing & Kamsler 1990:163-166). I believe that we can link to this discourse the discourse of women as the seductresses of man (as discussed in Section 2.7.2.3) and the discourse which sees male sexuality as instinctive (as discussed in Section 2.7.2.4), which blames women and even children for inappropriate sexual behaviour by men, as the men can supposedly not control themselves.

5.9 SEXUAL ACTS IN NON-MARITAL RELATIONS

After this relationship, Marelise had another relationship with an older man. A very physical relationship developed and this man also tried to pressurise Marelise into having sexual intercourse with him. Marelise always refused, as she still believed that extra-marital sex was wrong. The two of them used to masturbate each other, but Marelise was not comfortable with this. It was interesting that Marelise only reflected on the act of masturbation and not on the level of intimacy that was present in the relationship. Marelise linked her idea of the sinfulness of mutual masturbating to the religious discourse regarding masturbation and sexual intimacy at the time among the White Christian population of South Africa. This discourse condemned masturbation as a grievous sin (see Section 4.11.1). This discourse caused Marelise to experience guilt. However, although she then felt mutual masturbation was wrong, she also felt it protected her from having pre-marital sex. It would seem as if, in this instance, this discourse simultaneously had life-restricting and life-giving effects for Marelise's experiences of her sexuality as a Christian woman.

In the research of Laubscher (cited in Mager 1996:14) we find a stark contrast to this condemnation of mutual masturbation within the White Christian community: the practice of *metsha or ukuhlobonga* (external sexual intercourse), which was practised by boys and girls in a Black community of the Eastern Cape in the 1950's. Parents were quite aware of this practice and knew which boy or girl was their teenager's *metsha* partner. It would seem as if there was a greater sense of transparency about teenage sexuality among Black communities than within White communities, which reminded me of the many ways in which sexuality is experienced and expressed due to cultural and social influences and understandings.

While we might be tempted to view the practice of *metsha* as liberating, it is important to note that *metsha* was intended for male rather than female sexual release and unwilling girls were sometimes aggressively coerced. I find this coercion comparable to Marelise's situation, as it would seem that Marelise was also aggressively coerced, not in a physical way, but by the emotional manipulation of older men.

5.10 ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUAL PRACTICES

Marelise was involved in several abusive relationships, thus relationships that were detrimental to Marelise, but to the benefit of the other partner (the older man). Marelise often mistakenly understood older men's kindness as their wanting to take care of her. Unfortunately, it often became apparent that these men only had a sexual interest in her. Marelise shared Cathy's experience, and also felt objectified by men whose interest in her was mostly sexually motivated. Marelise felt that the emotions that she experienced with regard to such relationships were negative and that they caused her to experience her sexuality as hazardous. These situations left her with self-blame. She used to blame herself for not seeing these men's ulterior motives from the outset.

Jenkins (1990:13) discusses the discourse regarding causes and excuses for abuse and the self-blame of victims. Jenkins (1990) explains that often responsibility for the abuse may be attributed to external events and stresses. Perpetrators (and even victims of abuse) often blame medical conditions or psychological conditions from which the perpetrator suffers as the 'cause' of abusive behaviour. This blaming of external factors or 'internal' factors over which the perpetrator supposedly has no control, serve as an excuse for or exemption from the responsibility of the abuse. If the victim accepts the view that the perpetrator had no control or could not help his or her behaviour, victims often think that they themselves were to blame or contributed to their being abused. This leaves victims with feelings of shame, guilt and responsibility for their own victimisation. Statistics South Africa (1998 section 11:13) found in their study of Crimes: Prosecutions and convictions with regard to certain offences; that 10% of the victims of sexual crimes did not report these crimes because they felt that the crime was partly their fault. Another 2,2% of victims did not report the crime because they feared being blamed for the crime and 9,5% feared being exposed or embarrassed. It would seem that Marelise is represented in the above statistics. Marelise felt that in some way she had caused or contributed to the abusive behaviour of men, as is reflected in the following extract from a letter I wrote her after our first conversation.

You felt that you were the common denominator and therefore you had to, in some way, cause or contribute to this abusive behaviour of men who approached you with a hidden agenda of sexual motives. There are many powerful discourses regarding uninvited sexual behaviour. I am wondering, did all men that you have met and interacted with treat you with sexually inappropriate behaviour or with a sexual agenda?

Jenkins (1990:27) opposes theories that see abuse as a consequence of dysfunctional interaction. Such theories propose that abuse occurs as a result of provocation by the victim or by some other person. Interactional explanations do not invite the perpetrator to accept full responsibility for his/her abusive behaviour, but instead coerce the victims into believing they are responsible for the abusive behaviour. I agree with feminists such as Bograd and McIntyre (cited in Jenkins 1990:28) who criticise this approach because it fails to address abuse within a social-cultural context and it fails to demand complete accountability, responsibility and ownership of abusive behaviour by the perpetrator.

Waldegrave (1990:6) states that the problems that families bring to therapy are not 'the symptoms of family dysfunction, but the symptoms of broader structural issues like poverty, patriarchy, and racism'. I believe that this is not only true of problems as experienced in families, but also of those experienced in other relationships. Thus, we need to look at sexual abuse as possibly an effect of patriarchy, rather than as a sign of 'dysfunctional' relationships, for example, between Marelise and her mother or between Marelise and the perpetrator.

Through the process of deconstruction, Marelise and I explored alternative ways of understanding the sexually abusive behaviour of men and her 'implied guilt'. Waldegrave (1990:11) speaks of deconstruction conversations as a process in which new meanings are facilitated to encourage the development of new stories of resolution and hope.

Once Marelise and I had looked at the relation between patriarchy and sexual abuse and had deconstructed this relation in terms of power relations, she was able to challenge feelings of guilt and self-blame. Sampson (1998:3) sees deconstruction as a process in which we do not destroy knowledge, but where we undo knowledge. This 'undoing' is done by establishing what taken-for-granted knowledges are – knowledges which have become unquestionable 'truths'. White (1991:27) talks about 'exoticize the domestic', in other words to take a new or different approach to that which is seen as ordinary or most familiar. By doing this, one becomes more aware of the extent to which certain modes of

life and thought shape our understanding. Thus the process enabled Marelise to challenge and explore her previously held belief that sexual abuse was only motivated by sexual desire and that she must have induced this sexual desire in some way.

5.11 EMBARKING ON PRE-MARITAL SEX

We continued our journey of exploring Marelise's sexual impressions as influenced by past experiences. Ockert was Marelise's first serious boyfriend. This relationship lasted for six years and also had a large impact on how Marelise understood her own sexuality in relation to her faith.

Marelise believed that she would marry Ockert and he indicated his intention to do so many times. Due to the fact that Marelise believed that Ockert would one day be her husband, she decided to have sexual intercourse with him. Marelise lost her virginity with Ockert. The sexual intimacy between them was important to Marelise, because it made her feel safe. However, at the same time, she experienced tremendous guilt as premarital sex was wrong according to her faith convictions. Marelise felt that she was emotionally dependent on Ockert and this contributed to her having a sexual relationship with him. Marelise experienced guilt about having pre-marital sex and this resulted in her feeling separated from God. Marelise was not willing to forgive herself for having pre-marital sex and she felt that God would not forgive her either.

Ockert was a charismatic Christian and very involved in the church. Ockert went through stages when he would decide that pre-marital sex was wrong and would then refuse to have sexual intercourse. This was very hurtful to Marelise, because he did not discuss this with her, nor did he negotiate an outcome, but he made this decision unilaterally. He claimed the right to make a decision on behalf of Marelise, and she did not feel respected in this action of Ockert's. Marelise experienced this action as a punishment, because he would withdraw from her on a physical as well as on an emotional level. Ockert felt Marelise's sexual desire was the main contributing factor to the continuation of the sexual relationship. These allegations made Marelise experience even more guilt. Coupled with this perception of Ockert's, there was his impression that Marelise was perverted.

Ockert stated that the Holy Spirit had told him that a sexually perverted spirit oppressed Marelise. He said the spirit took the form of a perverted green snake and Ockert tried to exorcise this supposed demon(s) from Marelise without success. While he was praying

and rebuking this supposed spirit, Marelise sat there wondering what all this was about. Eventually the situation became so unbearable for Marelise that she insisted on seeing Ockert's spiritual leader. In the conversations with the spiritual leader it became apparent to Marelise that Ockert was disrespectful to her in his expectations and the way he treated her. Marelise also realised that although she did not have the same spiritual gifts as Ockert, her faith was solid and her understanding of God was just as comprehensive as Ockert's, if not more so. Ockert's spiritual leader confirmed this for her. Marelise was saddened by this memory and expressed regret that she believed that something was wrong with her, as it was damaging to her sense of self for many years. Marelise realised that the relationship with Ockert was not building her up as a person. After Ockert had again broken up with Marelise, she decided not to return to the relationship.

It would seem as if Ockert viewed sexual 'transgression' in a different way from other transgressions. Like Ockert, Bacchiocchi (1991:23) supports the view that sexual transgressions are more serious than other transgressions, as he believes that sexual immorality affects the individual more deeply and permanently than any other sin. Bacchiocchi bases this understanding on Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:18, 'Any other sin a man commits does not affect his body; but the man who is guilty of sexual immorality sins against his own body.' Bredenkamp (2002:344), however, gives us a different interpretation of this text. Bredenkamp (2002:344) argues that this verse was written in times when it was a custom for a host not only to provide for the nutritional needs of his/her guests, but also for their sexual needs. Sexual intercourse with prostitutes was seen within the same kind of context as dinner. Thus, Paul warns here against sexual intercourse with prostitutes, and not pre-marital sex or sexuality as a sin per se.

5.11.1 Pre-marital sex is a sin

There are many interpretations of pre-martial sex by Christians. Many Christians see pre-marital sex as dangerous and sinful. Rev John Stack (2005:1) subscribes to this discourse, saying that marriage is the only 'safe' destination for sexual intercourse: 'God's standard is very clear. Sexual intercourse is only for a wife and a husband, partners committed to each other in a marriage relationship.'

Harvey (1994:72) agrees with the understanding of some Christians regarding legitimate sexual intercourse as an act appropriate within a totally committed, exclusive and

permanent relationship between partners, thus concluding that no sexual intercourse outside marriage is allowed. Harvey (1994:63) discusses discourses regarding premarital sex in the Old Testament and notes that there was only a prohibition on adultery and stern warnings against prostitution, but he claims that, surprisingly, we do not find any specific laws or injunctions against casual sexual relationships. Harvey (1994) believes that no laws were required to restrain unmarried people, as there were very few opportunities for pre-marital sex, since young girls were closely watched.

Collins (2000:122) explores Paul's prescriptions about sexual intercourse in 1 Corinthians 6 and 7. In this discussion, Collins (2000:122) looks specifically at verses 25 to 38. Paul states that he has no command from the Lord about sex and unmarried people, but can only offer his opinion. Paul draws on his native Jewish tradition and his own common sense within a spirit of apostolic confidence. Within the Jewish tradition, female virginity was highly valued and prescribed (see Section 2.4.2.1). Harvey (1994:60) confirms this attitude towards virginity in the Jewish community by saying that any girl found not to be a virgin when she came to be married was liable to be punished by death (Deut 22:20-21), and any man who slept with an unmarried girl was obliged to marry her and to pay a substantial sum to the girl's father (Deut 22:28-29).

However, this does not mean that pre-marital sex was condemned in *all* circumstances. Harvey (1994:61) explains that marriages frequently took place when the parties were quite young by today's standards. The moment of betrothal marked the moment when negotiations had been completed and a formal contract had been agreed upon between the families. Needless to say, if the couple was in love, physically intimacy was a possibility. There would have been no legal consequences for a *betrothed* couple that engaged in pre-marital sex, other than a certain degree of social disapproval.

I believe that it is not very meaningful to talk about pre-marital sex in the abstract. What are we condoning or condemning when we speak about pre-marital sex? How would we define this act? Would it be only a physical act of penile penetration of the vagina? In my discussion of the silence in the church on sexuality (see Section 4.5.1) we explored sexual intercourse as becoming one flesh, but also as a way of knowing and a way of spirituality. My understanding of this is that sexual intimacy should not only be examined at a physical level, but also at a psychological and spiritual level.

In a therapeutic pastoral conversation with a student, she told me that most students today would define sexual intercourse as penile penetration of the vagina. All other acts of sexual intimacy, for example, oral sex, mutual masturbation or deep emotional disclosure of sexual desire or fantasies would not be seen as sexual intercourse.

5.11.2 Different standards of pre-marital sex for men and women

Marelise's view of pre-marital sex reminded me of Marlene and Cathy's views. Marelise felt that it is unacceptable for a woman to have pre-marital sex. It is Marelise's experience that pre-marital sex has the potential to trap a woman emotionally. Many women will stay in an abusive or life-denying relationship because they have had sexual intercourse with that partner.

Many Christian girls will engage in a sexual relationship if they believe that they are going to marry the partner, as was the case with Marelise. It would seem as if the intention of a marriage renders a sexual relationship more acceptable to them. If such a relationship starts to fail, the girl might feel betrayed and the guilt of having had sexual intercourse with someone that would not be her husband might compel her to stay in the relationship. Many beliefs feed this 'staying in the relationship'. It is almost as if girls feel that, if they end the relationship, it might become known that they have slept with their boyfriend. It might also be assumed that the girl will be sexually active in her next relationship. There is a very powerful discourse with regard to sexual morality. This discourse entails the notion that if a girl has more than one sexual partner, she is promiscuous. She might even judge herself to be promiscuous. It is thus safer for her to stay in the relationship she is in, in order to protect herself from her own judgement and the judgement of others.

Bacchiocchi (1991:19) is a theologian who interprets the Bible in a confessional manner. He believes that all forms of non-marital sex are sinful, even for couples that are engaged to be married. He states that '[e]ngaged couples will probably deny that when they sleep together they are not expressing genuine commitment to one another. But if they were fully and finally committed to each other, they would be married' (Bacchiocchi 1991:19).

This view ignores context and totalises sexual intercourse in a binary of being either sinful or legitimate. Niehaus (2001:67-69) has explored the practice of betrothal in the Western Church in the twelfth century. Betrothal was when a friendship moved into a

lover's relationship. Marriage was seen in terms of two stages, the exchange of consent, and sexual intercourse as the consummation. With the practice of betrothal 'time and space was given for each person to explore his/her own faults and incompatibilities as well as the other person's' (Niehaus 2001:65). This practice allowed a couple to be sexually and socially intimate and was an accepted practice in those times. Niehaus (2001:65) continues that as times changed, changes occurred within the legal system regarding the registering of the marriage. This resulted in the abandonment of the practice of betrothal.

5.12 ABUSIVE PRACTICES AND THE CHURCH

After her relationship with Ockert ended, Marelise became involved with Anton. His behaviour was at times very unstable and he became obsessed with Marelise. There was a short period in which Marelise and Anton were romantically involved and the sexual relationship between them was short-lived. Anton started to stalk Marelise and she was concerned about her own safety.

At this time, Marelise was very involved in a charismatic Afrikaans Church as the youth leader. Due to Marelise's commitment and enthusiasm, she presented an interesting youth programme that encouraged many youngsters to join the youth activities of this church. At that time, Anton was friends with the son of the pastor of this church. The pastor had many problems with his son, who was on a very 'destructive road'.

Marelise believes that Anton told this friend of his about the sexual encounters he had with Marelise. Marelise took Anton to a church service and sensed that the pastor did not approve of her relationship with Anton. Shortly thereafter, the pastor called Marelise for a meeting and told her that he believed that she was not as committed to the church as before, and asked her to step down as youth leader. Marelise felt that she was asked to leave because it had become known to the pastor that she was sexually active. She felt that the church's judging her was hypocritical, as many of its members also sinned, just in other ways.

Foucault (in Carrette 1999:124) comments on the power of the pastor in Christian society. Foucault believed that the position of pastor is vested with so much power that the pastorate could demand absolute and unconditional obedience from the members of the fold. Foucault believed that the 'pastor can impose his will upon individuals – as a function of his own ruling, without even the existence of general rules of a law' (in

Carrette 1999:124). This imbalance of power is clearly seen in Marelise's relationship with the pastor. Not only was there an imbalance of power, but also an abuse of power in the name of the institution of the church.

Marelise felt that this action by the pastor, and by implication by the church, spoke of injustice. Marelise felt that she was judged harshly because she was a woman. She felt that it was expected for a woman to stay a virgin until she got married, but if a man should not be a virgin by the time that he got married, it would not be that much of a 'big deal'. I have discussed the discourse regarding virginity in Sections 2.4.2.1 and 4.5 of this research project. The memories of these unjust actions by the pastor were hurtful to Marelise, and she said that this incident had caused her to become cynical of the church as an authoritative structure. I found it encouraging that Marelise was able to resist the pastor's view of her and to persist in her faith. Marelise showed that she was able to co-construct another narrative for herself that challenged the constitutive powers of this church.

5.13 MEETING SOMEONE SPECIAL

When Marelise met the man she later married, Craig (now her husband) and Marelise had both just ended difficult relationships and neither of them was interested in a romantic relationship. Marelise and Craig became friends and a deep and respectful relationship developed between them. After nine months of dating, Marelise and Craig married. Both Craig and Marelise are Christians and, although Craig has only recently accepted Jesus as his Saviour, Marelise experiences him as having amazing insight into faith and wonderful gifts of prophecy. Marelise feels safe and respected in her marriage and enjoys a happy and satisfying sexual relationship, as can be seen in the following extract from a letter to Marelise reflecting on what she had told me.

You feel that Craig does not have hang-ups about sexuality and his approach is spontaneous and free. During your engagement you asked Craig that the two of you would cease your sexual relationship until your wedding day. Craig honoured this. At this time the two of you did the course Portrait of a Marriage. This was very helpful to you. You also had some preparation conversations about married life with your minister. Leaders of the church gave talks about the marital sexual relationship. These talks were handled with discretion, openness, honesty, and without any embarrassment. Their approach to sexual relations in the marriage was one of negotiation, consideration and respect. Sexual intercourse was conveyed in a positive way and as an enjoyable and important part of the relationship between man and wife. You experienced this approach as enriching and liberating.

Marelise feels very sensual when she is with her husband. She is able to enjoy sexual intercourse without any guilt or fear. Marelise feels that being legally wedded (especially in the eyes of the church) legitimised sexual intercourse for her and liberated her to enjoy sexual intercourse and to experience pleasure.

5.14 CONFESSIONS

It became clear that Marelise and Craig are very honest with one another. I was surprised about Marelise's frankness and openness about her past sexual experiences, as many women, especially if they are Christian, would prefer not to disclose participation in sexual acts that they thought were wrong. Most people I have spoken to would prefer to do a private confession before God about sexual sins, and would rather not disclose them to any other person. I wondered about this and by means of a letter explored the meaning that Marelise attributed to confession and her wanting to 'confess' to both me as a researcher and previously to her husband.

Do you experience our conversations as a platform for confession? You said that it was very difficult for you to accept the grace of God and his forgiveness. It was very difficult for you to forgive yourself. Have you forgiven yourself for the previous sexual relationships? When one confesses, there is sometimes the aspiration of being pardoned. Would you like to receive such a pardon, and if so, from whom? Some Christian women would prefer not to disclose details about their sexual relationships. What made it possible for you to share intimate details about your sexual experiences?

Foucault (in Carrette 1999:125) discusses confessions as a consequence of the pastorate. Foucault theorised that the pastorate brought with it an entire series of techniques and procedures concerned with the truth and the production of truth, including confessions (see also Section 2.6 of this research project). Marelise felt that within confession there is a tremendous risk for the 'transgressor' and a very real threat of power abuse by the listener (pastor). Foucault (in Carrette 1999:124) says the 'power of the pastor consists precisely in that he has the authority to require the people to do everything necessary for their salvation: obligatory salvation'.

For Marelise, confession is very important, as she believes she needs to ask for forgiveness from God for her sins. Marelise decided to disclose very personal details of her past sexual experiences. I often reminded Marelise that it was not expected of her or necessary for the research to disclose intimate details of her past. However, Marelise

insisted, as she felt that talking about her experiences enabled her to forgive herself and set free hurts of the past, as the details were no longer a secret. Marelise experienced our conversations as honest, respectful and transparent and did not fear judgement or condemnation. This enabled her to share her experiences. Marelise had wanted to voice her experiences for some time, but she had never found the appropriate space. I am incredibly thankful that she was able to voice the unspeakable in our conversations, as giving a voice to that which was unspoken was one of the aims of this study. Marelise stated that she was able to do so due to an attitude of profound openness and receptivity, which she experienced in the conversations. Although Marelise experienced her story as a confession, I thought of it as sharing. Marelise argued that this research conversation created space for confession, because afterwards she was able to forgive herself. This was in part because I did not judge her.

5.15 INDECENT PROPOSALS

Marelise had had on several occasions had the misfortune of being subjected to indecent proposals by strangers. On many occasions and in many different circumstances, men approached Marelise with sexual propositions or inappropriate remarks. Such incidents are very upsetting and worrying for Marelise and some incidents were very bizarre.

Marelise started to believe that she had to cause such behaviour, as she was the only common denominator in all these incidents. She wondered whether she had not in some way contributed to this behaviour from the men concerned. Marelise linked these thoughts to Ockert's view of her being oppressed by a perverted spirit. I wonder if we can link Marelise's idea of contributing to this behaviour to the discourse that believes that woman seduce men, as discussed in Section 2.7.2.3.

By deconstructing the discourse that women seduce men, power-relations and patriarchy, Marelise came to the conclusion that many men do not honour or respect others and intrude another person's personal space with or without provocation or invitation. Men sometimes feel that they have a right to approach a woman with indecent proposals or to make inappropriate remarks. Marelise and I agreed that inappropriate remarks speak of disrespect and disregard of a person, objectifying her as a sexual target or trophy. Marelise confirmed this objectification of such actions and said: 'I do not feel flattered, I feel lusted over. This is a negative feeling for me and makes me unhappy.' The objectification of female sexuality reminds one of the patriarchal views of women as discussed in Chapter 2.

Marelise felt that being attractive could be a liability, as sexy women often have to endure unwelcome attention. Marelise expressed the need to look at ways that might equip her to deal with inappropriate behaviour by men. As part of my commitment to this research project, as discussed in Section 1.7, I agreed to therapeutic conversations to explore ways which might be useful to address inappropriate attention by men.

5.15.1 Narrative practices and therapy: deconstructing indecent proposals

Marelise and I continued our therapeutic pastoral conversations after the research project had been completed. We deconstructed dominant discourses and created space for different perspectives, as described by Freedman and Combs (1996:57) and to allow alterative stories or understandings to surface.

Marelise believed that the indecent proposals of men were motivated by sexual arousal or attraction. We deconstructed this 'taken-for-granted knowledge' (White 1991:26), looking at the discourse that informs this idea. We agreed that most men would be uncomfortable if one had to address their inappropriate behaviour directly and publicly. Men who engage in such disrespectful speech seem to enjoy Marelise's discomfort and loss of words. It would seem as if her silence affords them a sense of power and control. We explored possible motivations for such behaviour, such as sexual desire, power, disrespect or the wish to compliment Marelise. We decided that this type of behaviour indicates disrespect and misplaced feelings of superiority. It would seem that most men make such remarks to prove their own importance, attractiveness, virility or sexuality. Therefore we came to the conclusion that such remarks had more to do with the 'offender' than with the 'victim'. Such attitudes of disrespect and superiority, as reflected in inappropriate sexual remarks, speak of a politics of power. We believe that such actions are motivated by power, but find expression in inappropriate sexual gestures or words. I think of such inappropriate sexual words as verbal pornography. Borrowdale (quoted in Isherwood & McEwan 1994:125) speaks of pornography and abusive sexual actions as tools of power exerted to achieve a sense of 'power over women and to putting women in their place'.

According to Flaskas and Humphreys (1993:41), Foucault reasons that 'truth' is constructed by the dominant discourses of the day and by those in power. I suspect that patriarchy would challenge my deconstruction of inappropriate sexual attention, and would rather relate it to sexual attraction or male virility. However, if these men where

really interested in Marelise as a person and not as a sexual object or trophy, they would clearly not have used an approach that could be offensive to women. Their approach speaks of sexual entitlement, an avoidance of social-emotional responsibilities in respect of sexuality and intimacy (Jenkins 1990:40; Laing & Kamsler 1990:163-166). This sexual entitlement to a woman's body is rooted in the belief that a woman becomes the property of a man (see Section 2.7.2.2), which reflects a patriarchal discourse.

5.16 REVERBERATING EXPERIENCES

I was at times deeply disturbed by the experiences Marelise had with the church, and this strengthened my conviction of the importance of this study. Marelise's narrative inspired me to continue in my commitment to give a voice to the voiceless and to speak the unspeakable, even to challenge abusive discourses (such as patriarchy) within the church.

Journeying through the narratives of these women filled me with a sense of familiarity as well as ignorance. I had myself encountered and could identify with many of the discourses that emerged from these narratives, while others were distant and unfamiliar. I reflect on these familiar and unfamiliar experiences of mine and the participants in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

DIFFERENT SEASONS IN THE GARDEN OF SEXUALITY

As I journeyed through the different narratives included in this study, I experienced many different seasons. Each narrative and its landscape invited me to discover and arrive at a new understanding, just as spring brings a renewal in nature. Summer was presented by times of enrichment and the thickening of our understandings and descriptions of the different landscapes of these narratives, characterised by spurts of growth and development. Autumn was experienced in the times when the participants and I embodied our discoveries, thus internalised the new meanings we found and a time when we re-viewed previously acquired knowledges. As I reached the end of this journey, it announced that winter was becoming visible in the garden of sexuality. In nature, winter is a time in which many plants and animals go into a resting period. This resting period is not a period of inactivity, but a period of building resources and energy for a new season of growth. The winter season of this study was the period in which I reflected on this journey. It was also a time in which I contemplated future actions and the potential of journeying further into the garden of sexuality with the possibility of several new areas and activities.

As a reflection on my journey into the garden of sexuality, I used Reinharz's (1992:194) suggestion that in feminist research learning occurs at three levels, namely at 'the levels of person, problem, and method'. This suggests 'that the researcher would learn about herself, about the subject matter under study, and about how to conduct research' (Reinharz 1992:194). I used this approach in the structuring of this chapter and therefore include a reflection on my personal experiences during this journey.

6.1 REFLECTIONS ON MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF THIS RESEARCH JOURNEY

During this research journey, I experienced all four seasons, each with its own particular benefits and hardships as I moved between the landscapes of the participants' different narratives. This involved constant movement of my intellect and emotions. My intellect moved between being challenged and being overwhelmed. My emotions commuted between outrage against the system of patriarchy; and hope that the system of patriarchy can be changed by empowering women and by giving a voice to female sexuality within a Christian context – a voice that comes from women themselves (Bristow & Esper cited

in Reinharz 1992:179). It was this hope that kept me going when I became overwhelmed by the extent of the abuse of female sexuality. This sense of hope encouraged me to face the many challenges I had to negotiate on this journey. In the next section I also reflect on some of the aspects that illuminated my understanding and experiences in doing participatory research.

6.1. 2 Challenges

Throughout this research journey I was faced with several intellectual, spiritual, physical and emotional challenges.

6.1.2.1 Intellectual challenges

I was faced with many intellectual challenges throughout this journey. I was intellectually challenged as I grappled with new understandings and different ways of believing, for example, the views of feminists who challenge the system of heterosexuality (Butler in McClintock Fulkerson 1994:82). Butler's views (as discussed in Section 3.9) of heterosexuality challenged my personal views of maleness and femaleness and encouraged me to re-define and refine my views of 'what is a man?' and 'what is a woman?'. These views made me aware that we often take binary definitions of maleness and femaleness for granted and see them as accepted 'truths'.

I engaged in a process of deconstruction of my definitions of sex and gender roles. Morgan (2000:46) defines deconstruction as the 'pulling apart and examining of "takenfor-granted" truths'. During the process of deconstruction, I became more intensely aware of the continuum on which sex and gender are represented and realised that my personal experiences of femaleness and my constructions of what heterosexual female sexual experiences might be are not representative of all women's experiences or understanding. In turn, this raised questions about how the church relates to sex and gender, and I wondered why some churches are very prescriptive in their ideas of how men and women should relate to one another. For many years, I (perhaps unjustly) understood the Bible to promote very chaste sexual relations, with little space for deviation, but since I have embarked on this journey, I have come to look at sexual relations in terms of ethics (thus – are they life-giving?) and not in terms of what I might interpret as moral or immoral.

6.1.2.2 Spiritual challenges

At a spiritual level, my understanding of the Bible and my relationship with God informs my faith practices and religious beliefs. I was inspired and challenged to question the 'Biblical truths' and my 'religious convictions' that constituted my beliefs with regard to female sexuality as I considered 'normal or vanilla sexuality' (see Sections 3.9 and 3.16) and extra-marital sexual practices (Sections 4.5, 5.11 and 5.11.1). During this process of questioning my understanding of the Bible, at times I felt ill equipped, undereducated and confused.

My shift from a modernist approach to a postmodern approach enabled me to embrace a multiplicity of understandings and to decide that there is not necessarily only one way to understand Scripture. Positioning myself within social construction discourse (see Section 1.4.1), as well as a feminist approach to theology (see Sections 1.4.2 and 1.4.3.1), facilitated my appreciation for a multiplicity of understandings and eased my confusion.

Reinharz (1992:4) states that 'feminist researchers deal with dilemmas that have no absolute solutions'. I realised that my experiences and understandings of female sexuality and how I relate these to my faith context are as legitimate and relevant as those of people whose views might differ from mine. Dale Spender (quoted in Reinharz 1992:7) expresses a similar view and she believes that 'at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge'. The acceptance of no one authority is supported by a postmodern approach to theology. In line with this, I believe that all interpretations of the Bible are, at best, a human interpretation of the supernatural.

6.1.2.3 Physical challenges

I was challenged at a physical level because I pushed my body to its limits in a constant juggling act to simultaneously accommodate research, family, pastoral therapeutic conversations, friends, community involvement and personal care. I tried to continue with all the tasks I did before I embarked on this study, as well as to accommodate the extensive hours this study demanded of me. I found that I unwittingly enforced the expectation on myself of continuing to be a nurturer to my family and friends, as prescribed by society, although I found myself in the new role of being a student as a mother and wife.

Plaatjies (2003:219) researched literature in the Dutch Reformed Church (see Section 4.12) and how it portrayed a Christian woman's role in society as one who takes care of others' needs and as a homemaker. The focus usually falls on being available to one's husband and children in all circumstances. I used to belong to the Dutch Reformed Church and I was exposed to its understanding of prescribed gender roles of Christian wives, for many years. This discourse was not only present in the church, but was reinforced in the secular world by means of the printed and electronic media.

I realised that, although today I disagree with the above-mentioned prescribed gender role for women, it has still had a constitutive effect on me, as described by White (1991:26). This showed up in my continued attempt to live up to the expectations of society of what role a mother and wife should fulfil (Freedman & Combs 1996:32). I do not believe the role of nurturer should be prescribed only to women or pre-dominantly to women. Men can also fulfil this role. Furthermore, some women do not identify with being a nurturer and should not be judged for this.

I became aware of the real danger of self-abuse for researchers and therapists. At times I felt completely invigorated and energised by the research and at other times completely defeated and depleted in my energy levels. This study taught me time-management and the discipline to say 'no' to others and 'yes' to self care. It taught me to listen to my body and my emotions and to explore the voices of self-care in terms of my body, mind and emotions.

6.1.2.4 Emotional challenges

I experienced an emotional struggle within myself concerning my understandings of sexuality. I had to protect my own ideas of the goodness of sexuality as I became more and more aware of the negative and harmful ways in which sexual practices can occur, for example, pornography (in Cathy's story in Section 3.9). Before this journey, I had never had to face actual pornography and the effects thereof. I was able to ignore pornography, as it had no relevance to my experiences. Due to my participatory approach to pastoral care I journeyed *with* Cathy, and therefore I had to listen *with* her, to pornography's voice as well as to the effects it had on Cathy's marital relationship and her understanding of herself as a wife and lover.

In sharing Marelise's journey, I became aware that life-denying elements present themselves in many forms, some as blatant as pornography, but also in other disguised forms, such as patriarchy within church structures, as seen in the pastor's unjust dismissal of Marelise as a youth leader (Section 5.12). For me, Marelise's story highlighted discrimination against women in the church, especially with regard to their sexuality, in terms of discourses surrounding virginity and chastity. Marelise's story moved me to a position of awareness of patriarchy within the church and resulted in my looking critically at my own experiences and understanding of ministers whom I knew.

6.1.3 Moving to a position of awareness

Due to my exploration of patriarchy within the church, I lost my unconditional belief of the goodness of the church. I felt disappointed with the church. It was, in a sense, sad to lose my naïve belief in the goodness of the church as an ideological structure. Since my conversion in 1980, I had deep trust relationships with most of the ministers that served in the faith community I attended. I viewed these men as 'men of God' and had a deep respect for their judgement and integrity. This study sensitised me to and informed me about unjust patriarchal systems within the church. I was saddened to realise that only very few of the ministers I know, love and respect have challenged or judged the system of patriarchy, and that perhaps many ministers were not even aware of patriarchy in the church. I discussed Cochrane et al's (1991:10-11) reflections on the ambiguous history of Christianity in South Africa and how Christians and their churches have been part of 'horrendous feats of oppression' in Section 4.13 of this research report.

Although I was disappointed and filled with a sense of loss by the above realisation, it was also liberating to become aware of unjust practices within the church, such as patriarchy and ministers who abuse their power and position, as this created opportunities for me to address injustices, myths and silences.

Weingarten (2000:397-398) speaks of the position of witnesses, which could be that of being aware or unaware of injustice, accompanied with being empowered or disempowered to address such injustices. Weingarten (2000:397) explains that we can change our position in a transformation process only once we become aware of issues that we need to address or redress in the presence of empowerment.

This empowerment is promoted by knowledge, as we have seen in our exploration of Foucault's views (cited in White & Epston 1990:19), as discussed in Section 1.5. Foucault argues that knowledge and power are inseparable and support one another inter-relationally. Thus, becoming aware of these issues has supported me in recognising

and addressing patriarchal systems within the church that are oppressive to Christian women's sexuality. It is this awareness that motivates me to a 'doing' theology. Heitink (1993:175) supports this 'doing' approach to practical theology, as he believes that those who become aware, thus equipped with knowledge, need to address oppressive or unjust systems. My understanding of this is that I need to address the context of women's experiences of sexuality and the relation between their sexuality and their faith experiences.

In practice this will mean that, in order to give expression to a participatory approach to practical theology, I need to extend this 'knowing or knowledge' to a 'doing' practice. Rossouw (1993:903) formulates a 'doing' practice as moving 'from being right to doing right'. I believe that I have started such a process of 'doing' by creating a space for women to voice their experiences. By voicing our experiences, we broke the silence that surrounds female sexuality within a faith context. The participants were also able to challenge discourses regarding Christianity and female sexuality, as we have seen in their respective narratives, in Chapters Three, Four and Five. This research journey also created opportunities for the participants and myself to voice our experiences publicly, as our comments were invited, and group discussions about female sexuality have been initiated in the groups in which we participate, such as bible study groups and cell group events, in social contexts with friends and family. Bristow and Esper (cited in Reinharz 1992:178) believe that public awareness must be pursued, which means that we must make deliberate attempts to introduce research findings into arenas where access to professional literature is not likely, as well as into social-political arenas.

For me, public engagement with this subject became possible during discussions with my minister, the youth leader and the administrative staff of my home congregation. Following on from conversations about this research project with my minister, the aspiration emerged that a forum be created that could initiate conversations about female sexuality and patriarchy with a broader section of the congregation. Such a forum could offer me an opportunity to share and reflect on my journey through the garden of sexuality with a greater section of our faith community and create awareness for the marginalised voices of Christian women's sexuality. Although we had not yet implemented this plan at the time when I wrote this chapter, we are still fully committed and await an opportune situation for such a conversation.

6.1.4 Disclosure

Before, during and after the research conversations, I struggled with the possible effects that my participation in this research project might have, in that it could possibly silence the voices of the participants (as I discussed in Section 1.7). I argued that by exposing myself to the same vulnerabilities and risks as the participants, I would be able to create such a space where power-sharing could be promoted and the participants were invited to become co-researchers. This notion of mine was in line with the thinking of Reinharz (1992:32–34), who argues that a researcher's self-disclosure during interviews is good feminist practice. My participation in participatory research demanded self-disclosure (Reinharz 1992:33) of my understandings, my convictions and my interpretations of Scripture, my faith and my religious practices concerning female sexuality.

My participation also meant that I had to disclose how I related to and experienced the narratives of the participants. This caused me concern, as at times I experienced discomfort and even sadness as a witness to the hurt in the participants' narratives. All the time I was aware of the impact of my reactions and understanding of their narratives could have on their telling and exploration.

6.1.4.1 Self disclosure to participants

The emotional safety of the participants was at all times extremely important to me. Participatory action research promotes egalitarian relations (Reinharz 1992:180) and favours mutual disclosure, which enables the researcher to abandon control and his or her share in decision-making, thus power-sharing. Although I agree with the principles of power-sharing and disclosure of the researcher, I needed to reflect on the possible risks of this for participants and the difficulties it posed to me as the researcher. At times, I needed to disclose some of my experiences and some of my ideas that were in conflict with their understandings, for example, I see masturbation as an acceptable practice for Christians, but Cathy at the time viewed masturbation as sin (Section 3:14). This created some anxiety in me, as I did not want to silence Cathy's voice, but felt that I had to share my views with Cathy, as she requested this. I believed that it would have been unethical of me to deny Cathy's request that I disclose my understanding, yet to expect of her to share her experiences and understanding.

As I wrote these reflections, I was still hesitant to share the emotional discomfort I at times experienced in the process, in fear of causing concerns in the participants when

they read this chapter. I am also hesitant to share the trauma that I sometimes experienced as a witness of the participants' past hurts and injurious experiences. I would hate for them to experience guilt or responsibility for my emotional trauma. Weingarten (2000:391) also grappled with this issue and summarises a concern like my own with the following question: 'How [does one] create intimate connection through sharing one's authentic reality in a way that isn't intrusive or overwhelming to the other person?'

A participatory approach means that I care and participate *with* the participants (Kotzé 2002:7). This invites a two-way relationship between myself and the participants. Thus, just as I care with the participants, they can take a position to care with me. But I was concerned that without a narrative background (refer to Section 1.4.4 for a detailed discussion of narrative participatory practices) they might care *for* me instead of care *with* me and therefore take responsibility for my emotional discomfort. I was concerned that this could result in my experiences becoming the focus and silencing their voices, as they want to spare my feelings or emotions, and result in their voices being silenced.

When I decided to become a pastoral therapist, I was aware of and accepted the emotional consequences this calling would present. I then also already put in place structures that could support and sustain me in times of emotional discomfort or concern and protect myself against compassion fatigue. Bird (2002:153-154) states that therapists should be vigilant of compassion fatigue and should be aware of the balance between being connected and detached within the therapeutic relationship. I engage in conscious breathing exercises as well as daily swimming sessions, and use these as a way to release emotional and physical tension. My emotional well-being as a therapist is my responsibility and should never become a burden to those with whom I journey. Bird (2002:155) supports practices of self-care to combat compassion fatigue.

6.1.5 Being a witness of trauma

According to Weingarten (2000), researchers who study the interactions of trauma survivors and those to whom they would wish to tell their stories note that hearing the distress of others may produce psychological distress in the hearer. Being in the researcher position, I experienced this, especially when hearing the hurt that Cathy endured due to pornography and the injustice that was done to Marelise when Ockert accused her of being perverted and oppressed by an evil spirit (Section 5.11). According

to Weingarten (2000:400), 'it is a natural impulse for listeners to withdraw from the conversation' when they experience psychological stress due to hearing others' trauma.

The principles of narrative therapy (Section 1.4.4) enabled me not to withdraw, as I did not feel compelled to create answers or solutions, but instead my aim was to create the space in which alternative stories could be generated (White 1990:15-17), such as Marlene's new understanding of sexual aids and Christianity (Section 4.10). The generation of alternative stories includes vital and previously neglected aspects of the person's story and these 'new or alternative' stories can be incorporated as alternative knowledges (White 1990:15-17).

With the assistance of narrative participatory conversations, I was released from having to be objective, in control and an emotionless expert (Anderson 1997:94). Embracing the principles of narrative therapeutic approach, I was able to be a person, to show my sadness about the story, yet always to keep the participant centralised by taking the position of an outsider witness. An outsider witness (Carey & Russell 2003:4) 'listen[s] to and acknowledge[s] the preferred stories and identity claims of the person'. I took care to relate my understanding and experience of the participants' stories back to their experiences by embodied re-tellings. White (1999:72) defines embodied re-tellings as the acknowledgement of the ways in which the expressions of a person's story have touched my life and how it contributed to another way of understanding. Taking the position of an outsider witness and relating how the story resonated with me emphasises a post-structuralist understanding that does not see the researcher or therapist as an objective expert, but as a co-author of narratives (White 1999:57).

I am not a neutral, untouchable professional, but a human being with my own discourses, fears and emotions, which are part of me and are present in every conversation. I employed self-reflexivity practices (Hall 1996:36) as discussed in Section 1.5, to make my own discourses, prejudices and aims visible. Doing participatory feminist action research encouraged me to engage in a discourse of self-reflexive consciousness. It enabled me as the researcher to look closely at my own practice in terms of how my constructions of sexuality played a constitutive role in the knowledge construction process (Hall 1996:36; Freedman & Combs 1996:36).

6.1.6 Self care

After the first conversation with Marelise, I was concerned about her and subsequently contacted her to ask if she was not re-traumatised by the telling of her story. However, I realised that the intensity of my concern spoke of something more than just concern for Marelise. I experienced a deeper and more pressing concern for Marelise than for the other participants. I explored this concern and wondered whether this concern that I experienced was only related to Marelise or whether perhaps it was a reflection of my concern for myself.

Journeying with the abusive sexual practices in Marelise's narrative disturbed me deeply. I realised that I have always found it difficult to understand abusive behaviour, especially towards children or teenagers, and would usually try to avoid thinking about this. Marelise's experiences broke through my avoidance of this subject, and I had to listen to the voices of abusive power and disrespect. Perhaps my discomfort with any sexual abuse of children and young people is rooted in my desire to protect my own children, especially as they are now teenagers living in a very sexually oriented world. Klein (quoted in Reinharz 1992:36) describes a similar experience:

The interview process gives the researcher an intimate view of [the] pain [sometimes present in participants' lives] and the shock of discovery may eventually force her to confront her own vulnerability.

During my exploration of my experiences of trauma, I realised that my anxiety was fanned by my feelings of helplessness to fight a system that does not protect women and children (of both sexes) sufficiently. At that stage, I had no solutions and the realisation of how many women and children are still exposed to abuse agonised me. At that moment, I felt that there were no solutions to address the problem of disrespectful and abusive behaviour, as I faced the patriarchal discourse as something unchallenged and deeply ingrained in everyday life.

Being previously deeply rooted in the modernist discourse to therapy was a contributing factor in my unease, as I felt that I had to come up with an answer –I had to provide a solution. From modernist discourse, structuralism developed (Thomas 2002:85), which encouraged researchers, therapists and other professionals to believe that it is their role to know the emotional and psychological 'truths' of people and that they could therefore diagnose and find solutions for the 'problems' of clients. According to White (1999:57-58), there is the expectation within a structuralist tradition that a therapist needs to 'fix'

the situation within therapeutic encounters. Although I do not agree with the structuralist approach, I did at times experience pressure due to my expectations in the light of this approach of fixing problems.

I was able to voice my discomfort to my supervisor, and told her how I still at times fall back into a structuralist mindset. My supervisor played a major role in assisting me to refocus my thoughts and to regain balance in my postmodern views.

6.1.7 Supervision

In the times when I felt overwhelmed by the enormity of pornography and the sexual abuse of women and children, I was able to discuss this with my supervisor. Supervision was immensely helpful, as my supervisor asked me questions about the purpose of my study and how I could implement my pastoral commitment towards the participants, as well as to myself. I realised that, as a researcher and therapist, I need to be aware of issues I find difficult to deal with or on which I need to reflect, such as being ethical while challenging discourses which participants were caught up in.

6.1.8 When should a therapist challenge discourses?

One of my research aims was to create the opportunity to co-construct with the research participants alternative narratives for Christian women's sexuality. We explored and challenged discourses that were life-denying or life-restricting to the participants' experiences of their sexuality. I grappled with the question of when to challenge a discourse that participants are positioned within, as I did not want to make a judgement on the belief systems of others.

However, in some instances I became aware of life-denying discourses which constituted the participants' sexuality, such as Marelise's idea that she was oppressed by a sexually perverted spirit (Section 5.11) or Cathy's ideas about masturbation (Section 3.14). Both of them shared their experience that these ideas had negative effects for them. When life-restricting or life-denying discourses presented themselves, I asked permission from the participants to share with them discourses that were different from what they believed. If they agreed, I shared such different views with them, but from a neutral base in a tentative manner, for example, 'Would you be willing to explore different views on masturbation?' If the participant accepted this invitation, I continued. 'Some people see masturbation as a very helpful practice for single Christians, can we look at some of these views?' Exploring literature with opposing views to the discourses

held by the participants was helpful, as it enabled us to explore alternative meanings of such a discourse, giving the participant the opportunity to re-author her understanding of such a discourse if she wished to.

Being tentative in my conversations with the participants and enjoying the support of my supervisor was invaluable and sustained me in many ways. However, I did not only find support in books and my supervisor, but I also experienced support from friends, family and the participants.

6.1.9 Additional support

I often asked myself, 'What sustained me and supported me in this research process?' When I contemplated this question, I realised that it was especially helpful to talk to my husband about some of the concepts of sexuality. I was also motivated by the belief that this research journey would make a difference in how my children would experience their sexuality within their faith contexts. I experienced such a change during a discussion I had with my son regarding pornography and its effects. Previously I would not have been able to have such a discussion without feeling emotional and wanting to be prescriptive, but due to my journey with Cathy I was able to explore pornography in a calm manner with my son, allowing him to make his own value judgement. I shared with my daughter the historical background of patriarchy and this made her aware of patriarchy today and how women's experiences are silenced within the church. She now challenges such discourses and creates a new way of relating to faith as authored by herself and not the dominant discourse, for example, using the metaphor of God the Mother.

Many women at my church and in my community became aware of my research and offered their support in various ways. Along with members of my family and friends, they became the other voices of support and perspective during the research journey.

Towards the end of this research journey, there came a time when I felt I was no longer able to continue, due to mental and physical exhaustion. But I realised that this study was no longer my research project. This research project was shared between Cathy, Marlene, Marelise and myself and therefore to honour them, I was compelled to continue and complete this journey of telling their stories. We participated and collaborated in respectful ways with one another, and this project was shared by all of us.

The participants became very supportive as relationships between the participants and myself developed. Ann Oakley (cited in Reinharz 1992:28) suggests that feminist interviewing involves commitment of the researcher to form a relationship with participants, and she found that relationships would often continue even beyond the duration of the research. I shared this experience, as all the participants would often phone me to hear how I was and how the project progressed. Cathy and Marlene became prayer warriors for me and offered many prayers for this research project. Marelise encouraged me to take care of my body and supported me in bodily health and keeping a balance. And Marlene, still a farm girl at heart, would send my family home-baked bread.

I will not even attempt to describe the support I received from God, my husband and my teenage son and daughter, as no amount of words could ever do justice to their input and sacrifices and how their love sustained me.

6.1.10 Positioning within a feminist discourse: taking a stand

This research project firmly positioned and established me within feminist discourses. This positioning was accompanied with the benefits and disadvantages of taking a stand against patriarchy.

This research project resulted in many people totalising me, labelling me a feminist. Many people distrust feminism due to how feminists are portrayed by the media. Feminists are often linked to an image of control- and power-hungry bra-burning radicals who disrespect men. It was my experience that feminists are viewed by many with much venom. At times I felt alienated, as many people do not like feminists and others reject feminist ideas outright as unchristian and as blasphemous.

It was difficult for me to accept that many people understand feminism to be equal to sexism. Many people outside the academic world (perhaps even some academics) believe that feminism's objective is revised oppression. Russell and Carey (2003:86) note that though some feminists take a radical position, thus a position that 'rejects the idea that women and men are primarily the same, [and that] of assimilation into a man's world'; today there are many other streams of feminism. Radical feminism reminds me of the views of revolutionary feminist theologians like Mary Daly (Keane 1998:123) who advocates a separatist approach, striving 'to create an alternative female-centred community and a social life "purged" of male control'. It would seem as if many people

are only aware of this radical stream within the feminist discourse. Although I respect other streams of feminism, I disagree with reversed oppression as I sincerely believe that we can never have wholeness in personhood or society if we do not respect all persons, irrespective of race, culture or gender. I do not want to be seen as the 'oppressed' who seeks to become the 'oppressor'. I believe that the only way we can address such misperceptions is by talking about the different voices of feminism and if influential men and women within the church start to voice their support of feminism as a vehicle for liberating women and all oppressed people (see Section 1.4.2 for a detailed discussion).

My reformist feminist approach to theology encouraged me to acknowledge and respect both 'her-story' and 'his-story' (Keane 1998:123). Considering the stories of both genders shows respect and consideration for many different and even conflicting voices. The acknowledgement of many 'realities' resonates with postmodernism (Freedman & Combs 1996:34).

However, at times it was difficult for me to consider some of the voices that challenged my belief systems. Such challenges did not only come from patriarchal voices, but also from some feminist voices, such as the revolutionary feminists, who promote separatism between men and women (Keane 1998:123). This listening and accommodating of many different voices at times posed the problem of relativism to me.

6.1.11 Falling into relativism

I am still grappling with the principle of how to listen to all voices without judgement, yet not to fall into relativism. Rossouw (1993:904) comments that for many the 'acknowledgement of pluralities of all kinds is fuelling debate on whether a respect for plurality necessarily result[s] in cultural [and theological] relativism, where it is a case of "everything goes". Freedman and Combs (1996:35) address this dilemma in stating that by promoting 'many possible stories about self (or about other aspects of reality), we do not mean to say that "anything goes". My Christian convictions do not allow me to agree to all discourses and realities, and I have to speak out against life-restricting or life-denying practices. Some of the discourses that feminists promote, for example, feminist pornography, or 'anti-vanilla' sexual intercourse (see Section 3.9), were problematic for me, as I felt I could not condone or relate to such practices.

I have yet to find an answer to how to accommodate all voices without falling into relativism. Perhaps it is not about accommodating all voices, but recognising the existence of many voices, even if one does not agree with all. Rossouw (1993:904-905) expresses a similar view to mine and says that when a person's Christian beliefs are challenged or rejected, a Christian has two options. Christians can either retreat into a private sphere or they can explain and defend their religious understanding of the world to others who differ from them when challenged or invited to do so. I see this process as inviting conversation and understanding in a respectful way that will acknowledge differences in understanding, but does not force me to forsake my convictions.

Because I am a local preacher, many expect of me to take a stand on 'moral issues', although I prefer to use the term 'ethical approach that will promote life'. As a Christian pastoral therapist and local preacher, I believe that I have to promote life and life-giving practices. I believe it is ethical to take a stand against life-taking practices.

Cochrane et al (1991:15) state that 'no one does theology from a position of theological neutrality'. My doing of practical theology is based on my understanding of and acceptance of Jesus Christ as my Redeemer, Liberator and Lord. This understanding has practical implications for my doing of faith, because I see Jesus as a Liberator. This conviction implies that Jesus Christ is a Liberator of all who are oppressed, whose dignity is denied, who is exposed to any injustice and therefore by implication any form of abuse (Cochrane et al 1991:15). Therefore, I find it difficult not to take a stand on certain issues, such as pornography (even lesbian pornography) as I feel that such practices are de-humanising.

6.2 REFLECTIONS ON CHANGED NARRATIVES IN THIS RESEARCH JOURNEY

In this section I reflect back on the research aims as stipulated in Chapter One and explore the ways in which this research project met the initial research aims.

6.2.1 Changed narratives and new ways of relating

McTaggart (1997:7) describes participatory action research 'as political because it is about people changing themselves and their circumstances and about informing this change as it happens'. Walker (1998:240) states that participatory action research 'incorporates social action and change as part of the research process itself'. Therefore, for this research to be meaningful, it needed to produce new meanings and maybe new

ways-of-being for the participants. I formulated in my research aims the desire to explore and challenge life-denying or life-restricting experiences with sexuality as a result of the dominant discourse that marginalizes a participant in her experiences of sexuality (Sections 1.3.1 and 1.3.2).

With the use of narrative pastoral conversations, this research project aimed at creating a context in which the participants could negotiate alternative narratives for life-denying and life-restricting experiences of their sexuality, should they wish to do so. This did indeed happen and there were changes in the participants' views regarding their sexuality (see Sections 3.14, 3.14.1, 4.10, 4.11.1, 5.12 and 5.13). Their changed views did not affect only themselves, but also their intimate relationships, thus their partners and family, as I will discuss in this section. All the participants changed in the way they related to, expressed and experienced their sexuality. Marlene and Marelise had the experience that both their husbands related to them in new ways due to their participation in this research.

Marlene's husband said: 'Dit het 'n nuwe bladsy van Marlene se lewensboek vir my oop gemaak' (This opened a new page of Marlene's life-story to me). Charl expressed his gratitude for being able to share in this process by reading the letters I wrote to Marlene as summary of our conversations. These letters stimulated many conversations and ways of relating that was not present before Marlene and I journeyed with her sexuality. Marlene felt that her participation in the research journey and the subsequent conversations with Charl about sexuality created space for new possibilities. I was very grateful to learn this, as my pastoral commitment within this study was to create a space where participants could explore their ideas and experiences of sexuality freely and safely, without fear of rejection or rebuke. Marlene confirmed that she had experienced the research as such as space and felt that her participation in this research journey was life-giving to new ways of lovemaking. Marlene said that previously she would have expected condemnation from the church, but due to our deconstruction of sexual pleasure and Christianity (Section 4.11), she was now able to explore and accept different ways of expressing love and sexuality.

Marelise experienced greater understanding from her husband after he had read a summarising letter of one of our conversations. Before he read the letters, Marelise felt that her husband did not understand the full impact of her past experiences on her present constructions of herself, as seen in the following extract from a letter to her:

Previously you spoke to your husband about the uninvited attention of men. Craig experienced frustration about these incidents and told you on different occasions that you have psychological issues. He thought that you exaggerated the incidents and he thought you saw what you wanted to believe. After Craig read the letter about our conversation, you felt that he had a better understanding of your experiences. You felt that Craig had more insight in your past and how you experience your sexuality. Was this increased understanding of Craig due to the fact that he heard more details about your past, or was it something else? You said seeing parts of your life in black and white in the letter gave you insight.

Marelise confirmed that especially the letters were very helpful to her in attaining new understandings of herself and her past. She also felt that the safeness of the space in which the conversations took place supported her in exploring new ways of seeing and hearing.

Durrant and Kowalski (1990:72-76) speak of ways to overcome the effects of sexual abuse and emphasises the development of a self-perception of competence. Durrant and Kowalski (1990:75-76) state that many societal and cultural prescriptions for the experiences of women promote a sense of impotence, powerlessness and a feeling of responsibility. Feelings of responsibility imply fault on the part of the victim for allegedly causing the abuse. Marelise confirmed this view of Durrant and Kowalski's, as she believed that she had, in some unconscious way, contributed to the inappropriate sexual behaviour of men towards her and she felt powerless in such situations (Section 5.10, 5.11 and 5.15.1).

Due to the narrative character of our conversations, Marelise and I did not focus on the abuse, but rather on its effects and the greater context in which it took place, in line with suggestions by Durrant and Kowalski (1990:71). Deconstructing sexual abuse and inappropriate behaviour by men assisted Marelise to challenge the dominant discourse of sexual abuse, namely that victims inevitably live a life pre-determined by the effects of abuse. Marelise was now able to start to move towards understanding and re-defining her self-perception as being capable and competent with an attitude of 'in-controlness', self-respect and the absence of self-blame (Durrant & Kowalski 1990:73), as discussed in Section 5.15.1 of this research report.

Cathy felt that her participation in this study gave her a voice and, due to the process of deconstruction of life-denying discourses, she can now consider different views on

sensitive issues, such as Christianity and masturbation (see Section 3.14). She felt that it will be easier for her to speak to her teenage granddaughters about sexuality in a relaxed manner because of our journey.

6.2.2 Breaking the silence

Through narrative pastoral conversations I wanted to create the space, for the women, to break the silence regarding sexuality in the church and to voice their views about previously unspoken or unspeakable matters with regard to sexuality (see Section 1.3.3). All the participants felt that this research journey achieved this aim, as it enabled them to break the silence and enabled them to speak about previously unspoken issues, as well as issues previously perceived as unmentionable.

Marlene felt that our conversations and the resulting discussions with Charl made it easier for both of them to discuss sensitive matters which they did not focus on before, such as sexual aid devices (Section 4.10). Marlene felt that the openness of the discussions during our interviews was helpful, as it created 'permission' to talk about sensitive matters. Both Charl and Marlene experienced this outcome of the research journey as life-giving to their relationship.

I was delighted to learn that Christian female sexuality's voice was heard even outside this journey. Marlene shared that her participation in the journey resulted in many conversations with other women about Christian women's constructions of sexuality at gatherings such as bible study groups and in a social context. Such conversations were previously not possible for Marlene, as she believed that it was unbecoming to speak about sexual matters, but sharing with others her experiences of this journey provided opportunities to speak about the 'unspeakable'.

Marelise shared Marlene's experience, and she too was able to address issues that previously it had not been possible to discuss. Issues such as mutual masturbation (Section 5.9) and being supposedly oppressed by a sexual spirit (Sections 5.11 and 5.12) were given a voice during our journey. This was life-giving to Marelise, as she felt it gave her experiences legitimacy. This research journey also gave Marelise a platform to 'confess' the sexual actions she was involved in the past, which she considered sinful (see Section 5.14). She felt that this enabled her to move from a very legalistic approach to her faith to an embodied understanding of grace and mercy. She experienced a great sense of liberation.

In Section 3.14, I explored McClintock Fulkerson's views of the understanding of Scripture and the effect that interpretations have on our experiences of faith. McClintock Fulkerson (1994:143) found that the same scripture or text could either be 'the enslaver or the liberator' – depending on the context of the woman who reads it. All the participants found motivation in this journey to re-interpret the Bible and to find new ways of understanding the Bible as women. The participants and I experienced that we were able to speak in a new ways about our sexuality in relation to our faith and in relation to other Christian women. We are now able to look at sexual practices and ask ourselves the following question: is this life-giving, life-restricting of life-denying for us in our respective lived contexts? We are now able to look at our contexts and interpret our context for ourselves instead of allowing the voice of patriarchy to dictate to us how or what we should experience with regard to our sexuality.

Our new ways-of-understanding, voicing and relating were not restricted to our personal experiences, but had a ripple effect on our relationships with others.

6.2.3 New understanding and increased compassion

Part of the conversational journey was to create the space in which the participants could voice their autonomous ideas about sexuality. Challenging the dominant discourse regarding their sexuality assisted in this.

Cathy experienced a new sense of compassion for people who held beliefs that were different to hers. She felt that her tolerance of those who see issues differently from her was enhanced by challenging dominant discourses which she had previously experienced as taken-for-granted 'truths', such as her views on masturbation and sexual aid devices.

Marelise felt that journeying back into her past enabled her to gain new understanding of her mother's experiences during her first marriage and after Marelise's father died. The following extract of a letter written to Marelise, reflects on this new understanding that Marelise spoke of:

You mentioned that our discussion resulted in your experiencing empathy with your mom and a new understanding that her circumstances were not always easy. You are now able to see that she must have suffered due to your father's abusive behaviour. She loved your father very much and she must have been very lonely after his death. She had five children, one still a baby. You can understand that she really needed a partner.

Marlene became aware of other couples in her faith community that also had lifechanging experiences due to illness and the struggle and frustrations they have to deal with. Marlene also noted that she now explores her understandings and the understandings of others with regard to sexuality and faith.

I was deeply touched by all the narratives and journeying with these women and this research journey created a deep sense of appreciation for their courage. Cathy's story made me aware of the devastating effects pornography can have and enabled me to speak to my son and daughter about the philosophy behind pornography and sensitise them to the dangers thereof.

Marelise's experiences heightened my awareness of the possibility of abusive power within authorative structures, even the church, and the possibility of resistance to such abuses.

Marlene's story made me aware of the many, many couples that daily need to find new ways of relating sexually due to illness, injury or surgery. It also increased my awareness of the impact of insensitive or careless remarks.

6.2.4 Challenging the dominant discourse publicly and corporately

Through narrative pastoral conversations, I wanted to explore with the research participants why women do not challenge the dominant discourse in a setting such as the church by voicing their opinions concerning Christian women's experiences of sexuality (see Section 1.3.4). This aim was not fully attained, but it was addressed in part (as discussed in Section 6.1.3). Neither the participants nor I have so far had an opportunity to address a faith community corporately about patriarchy and the sexuality of Christian women. We have, however, engaged in group discussions at our respective bible study and cell groups, as well as in a social context.

6.3 IS THIS THE BEGINNING OR THE END?

During this journey the participants and I identified areas that we believed should be addressed by our respective or collective faith communities or by us as individuals.

6.3.1 The way forward for health clubs

During this research I came across a brochure that listed the code of conduct for an adult entertainment club. I discussed this with Marelise and we agreed that if an adult entertainment club, could insist on appropriate behaviour from its members, so could health clubs. Marelise, as a personal trainer at a health club, is often exposed to inappropriate sexual behaviour by members and finds such behaviour very offensive and harassing. Both adult entertaining clubs and health clubs are very physical environments, and we believe that the staff members, as well as the members themselves, should be protected against inappropriate remarks or suggestive behaviour. Marelise and I are aware that the labour law does make provision for addressing sexual harassment, but we believe that it will be conducive to awareness of appropriate behaviour and respectful ways if all new members had to sign a code of conduct. Marelise and I intend to write a letter to the senior managements of health clubs with our suggestions.

6.3.2 Ways forward for support groups for sexually challenged couples

I feel strongly that if the church states that marriages are important to the church and that faith communities should protect and support marriages, then we need to look at Christian support groups relating to the intimate relationship between husband and wife, especially when couples need to re-negotiate new ways of intimacy after illness, surgery or accidents. Marlene and Charl believe that there is a great need for support groups for Christian couples in such circumstances. It is Marlene and my vision to start such a group for women and we have already spoken to women who are willing to support such a group, as they have had similar experiences to Marlene's.

6.3.3 The way forward for support groups for Christian divorcé(e)s

Cathy and I identified a great need for support and social interaction for Christians who are divorced. De Klerk (2002:15-16) expresses a similar view and states that pastoral care for divorced people is scarce within faith communities. He also expresses a need for more organized attempts to provide pastoral care for divorced people. Therefore, Cathy and I wanted to suggest such a ministry to our congregation. I am thrilled to relate that such a group started even before Cathy and I forwarded our ideas. Both Cathy and I intend to support this group in various ways as part of our pastoral commitment to participatory care.

6.4 THE CHURCH, SEXUALITY AND PASTORAL THERAPY

Neuger and Poling (1991:42) feel that one of the consequences of conservatism regarding theological methods and doctrines is that there is an increasing irrelevance of the church in the lives of many people. I agree with Neuger and Poling (1991:42) when they state that one of the main tasks of pastors and pastoral caregivers is to educate and

to do relevant and adequate theological reflection: 'This reflection needs to be able to help [people] to develop interpretive principles and useful methods for maintaining the trialogue between their own life experiences [including sexuality], the theological traditions, and the radical cultural shifts.'

A process of working towards wholeness in our communities needs to include the ways in which we address sexuality within our churches and a revision of those ways. This would include editing existing bible study guides, seminars addressing sexuality, sermons and open discussions of Christian women's sexuality. If the church wants to address promiscuity, broken relationships, gender confusion and promote respectful interaction in general, then we, as practical theologians, faith communities and individual persons, need to be relevant and current in our approach to faith and humanity – our voices must be heard. We will have to break the silence and contend against the voices of patriarchy, relativism and perversion.

Graham (1993:211) states '[t]herapeutic models of care in the quest for individual wholeness have replaced what is now seen as a repressive and negative emphasis on sin and conformity to Churchly discipline...' I am in accordance with Selby in the belief that we need to move beyond individual wholeness towards wholeness of context thus communities. Selby (cited in Pattison 1993:85) states that pastoral care, which is part of how we do theology, cannot be detached from the public sphere.

At the moment it is mostly the secular world's voices regarding female sexuality that are heard. In the secular world, it is almost impossible to escape a superficial projection of women's sexuality.

It became apparent that in pastoral sources there is not only an absence regarding women's sexuality, but also regarding sexology. Casaleggio and Janse van Rensburg (2002:368) conclude that although numerous theological papers have been written about sexuality, the majority of those cover the ethics of sexuality. However, 'a theologically based therapeutic model for *pastoral* sexology does not exist'. I believe that practical theologians need to address this need, hence this study.

In the pastoral conversations that I have had with men and women, it became evident that many people experience confusion and hopelessness regarding relationships and the negotiation of respectful sexual interaction. Many Christian couples are unsure of how to enjoy their sexuality within their faith context. Many parents feel too unequipped and uninformed to deal with their children's sexuality and their questions about sexuality and relationships. Many teenagers are confused and do not have the skills to brave the tremendous cynical onslaught on their construction of sexuality. Most teenagers' constructions of sexuality are informed by the distorted views of sexuality in the popular media. There are so many voices shouting with deafening volume, yet the voice of the church is mostly silent or speaks with the voice of patriarchy. This study was the start of a pastoral process, to challenge discourses and to give a new voice to sexuality within the Christian faith context. Sexuality needs to be addressed within practical theology.

6.5 IN CONCLUSION

I believe that it would be helpful if we understand sexuality in the light of common good, as sexuality is both deeply personal and profoundly public. The public sphere of sexuality became apparent in this research journey, as many women who heard about this research expressed their curiosity and requested access to the information gained. It would seem as if this research journey has encouraged a new openness to discuss a subject that was traditionally not spoken about in a social-religious context – not only among the participants, but within a broader social context.

I believe that it is important that we not only discuss Christian sexuality in a broader social context, but also within a broader cultural context. This study was only partly representative of the White Christian women of South Africa. Other cultures, such as the Black African cultures, are not represented in this study. I believe that research about the similarities and differences between Christian women's experiences of their sexuality as constituted by their cultures is of the utmost importance for our understanding of Christian female sexuality within the South African context. A greater understanding of women's experiences due cultural differences could enable greater understanding and support of women's faith experiences. It is my desire to do such a study in future.

I believe that Christian women should endeavour to continue with pastoral conversations *about* and *with* sexuality, until a time when sexuality is freed from oppression and abuse. Christian women should be encouraged to *autonomously* voice their experiences of their sexuality and how it relates to their faith experiences, instead of allowing the voice of patriarchy to prescribe or determine their experiences. Graham (1999:198) states that '[f]eminist pastoral care requires more than good therapeutic technique: it necessitates a

critical engagement with theological language, church structures and ministerial practice as crucial arenas of feminist protest and reform'.

I therefore see this journey as continuing even after the completion of this research report and I will persist in my pastoral commitment to the liberation of Christian female sexuality. Reaching the end of this journey, I am still convinced that our sexuality was intended to be a most wondrous experience of being human and connected with God.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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JOURNEYS INTO THE GARDEN OF SEXUALITY:

The Voices of Women's Sexuality in Pastoral Conversations

Information Sheet for Participating Women

As my dissertation is in English, all other documentation regarding my research is also in English. Please bear with me. All our conversations will be conducted in our mother tongue, and if necessary, I will translate sections into English for the dissertation.

Thank you for your interest in this project on Christian women's sexuality.

Why I am doing this research?

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Practical Theology, with specialisation in Pastoral Therapy.

Background Information: Why did I choose this subject?

I started to wonder about the secrecy regarding sexual intercourse and its link to religion. Why are most religious women reluctant/uncomfortable to say they enjoy sexual intercourse? Is it because they feel that they are not supposed to enjoy sexual intercourse, or could it be that most Christian women do not enjoy sexual intercourse? Why do we seldom see a minister's wife dressed very sexily or revealingly? Why are so many so surprised to hear that although I am in the ministry, I am comfortable with my own sexuality and sex in general? Why do we not hear sermons about sexuality and how to enjoy our sexuality? Why do we find in the Bible almost exclusively two extremes of sexuality for women, namely that of prostitute or that of the serving mother and wife (Proverbs 31- Spreuke 31)? Why is it that most preachers focus on these two extremes rather on the Song of Songs (Hooglied)? Why the reluctance to talk – and perhaps the risk in talking – about sexuality? Although women are present in our congregations, we seldom, if ever, hear them speak about their sexuality or lack thereof in the church context. It is almost as if we separate our sexuality from our womanhood when we are in church. In church, our gender is acknowledged, but not our sexuality. Our sexuality is almost denied within the church, but outside the church setting it is as if we cannot escape being confronted with women's sexuality.

When I asked myself what I would like to achieve with this study, my answer was the possibility of change. It frustrates me to see so many Christian women struggling to embody their sexuality within their faith experiences. I believe that our sexuality should enhance our spiritual experiences instead of alienate us from them.

I also wonder how women's experiences of their sexuality affect their partners. I believe that this study is not only of importance to women, but also to men, as it would seem as if it is not only Christian women's voices that are silenced, but also the voices of Christian men regarding women's sexuality – particularly in their sexual relationship with their wives.

While pondering on these questions I got the distinct impression that the sexuality of Christians, especially Christian women, is embedded in a discourse (houding/benadering/waardesisteem) which seems to marginalize and silence women's experiences of their sexuality. Within this discourse women's sexuality is shrouded in shame and guilt. The prevalence of such a discourse could provide an explanation for the avoidance of discussions of sexuality in Christian women's lives.

When I spoke to Christian women about their views of sexuality, most felt that it should be something positive and enjoyable. Most of them rejected the idea that sexual intercourse should be viewed with shame, guilt and repression. In fact, quite a few women expressed frustration with what their mothers told them about sexual intercourse. Many shared that they were told that sexual intercourse is something a wife has to endure, as it is her duty. Many believe that pious (*voorbeeldige/godsdienstige*) wives do not enjoy sexual intercourse and do not discuss the sexual. Some felt that an injustice has been done to them by their mothers' attitude towards sexual intercourse. These women felt that they had such deep-seated prejudices regarding the enjoyment of sexual intercourse that it took them years to overcome these prejudices. Some of the women wanted their daughters to have a more positive attitude towards the sexual, but even so they still felt uncomfortable to acknowledge their enjoyment of sexual intercourse to their daughters. This puzzles me, as most of these women, although they have very definite viewpoints, are not willing to express these views publicly. The puzzlement that I experience has led me to formulate the following research aims.

What is the aim of the project?

My pastoral commitment within this study lies with striving to create a space where participants can explore their ideas and experiences of sexuality freely and safely without fear of rejection or rebuke (teregwysing). Furthermore, this commitment lies in wanting women to embody their sexuality within their faith experiences, where our sexuality can enhance our spiritual experiences instead of alienating us from them. Through narrative (verhalende) pastoral conversations I want to challenge the dominant discourse and break the silence. I would like to explore the effects of the dominant discourse regarding Christian women's sexuality and how these effects present themselves in the intimate relationships of the participants. Therefore, the following preliminary aims have been identified:

Research aims

- 1. To explore Christian women's life-giving experiences of their sexuality. It is important to me that if a participant feels comfortable with the way she experiences her sexuality and the effects of the dominant discourse on her sexuality, that participation in this study will assist her in co-constructing rich and thick descriptions thereof. These knowledges can be very beneficial as we could learn from this how to employ the dominant discourse to suit our preferred way of personhood.
- 2. To co-construct with the research participants alternative narratives (*lewenstories*) for Christian women's sexuality. If a participant of this study experiences the effects of the dominant discourse as marginalizing her experience of her sexuality, the proposed research project aims at creating a context in which she can, through narrative pastoral conversations, be able to negotiate alternative narratives for her experience of her sexuality, should she wish to. I would like participants to find their own voices by challenging the dominant discourse regarding their sexuality. The possibility of change is important to me.
- 3. Challenging the dominant discourse publicly and corporately. I would like to explore why we do not challenge the dominant discourse when we are in the church and do not voice our opinions. However, I will only pursue this aim if the participants are comfortable with this.

Who will participate?

I will enter into individual conversations with three women from different age groups and circumstances. I will also participate in the conversations, sharing my own experiences of my sexuality. If all participants are willing, we <u>might</u> have one group discussion, but this will only be discussed and determined once we have had our individual conversations.

What will be required of participants?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to give consent for the information obtained during the individual and (possible) group conversations to be used in the research project.

If you decide to participate in the project, we will need to have three (3) conversations, of approximately one and a half hours each. After each conversation, you will receive a typed summary of the session. You will be asked to make comments, corrections and/or provide feedback regarding the summary. Although the sessions will be in either Afrikaans or English, the report will be written in English. Therefore, all the summaries as well as other correspondence will be in English. At your request, it can be translated into Afrikaans.

Free participation

You are free to withdraw from the research project at any time without any negative consequences for you.

Confidentiality

The information obtained during our conversations will be discussed with my supervisor, who lives in Pretoria. With your prior consent, the information will be used in my dissertation.

The information collected during the project will be securely stored and will be destroyed after conclusion of the project.

Results of the study

Results of this project may be published. At your request, details (names and places) will be altered to ensure your anonymity. You will have the choice of using your own name or a pseudonym of your own choice.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project, should you wish.

Questions of participants

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the project, either now or in future, please feel free to contact me:

Nicki Spies

Student Number 3513 6006

Tel: 021 – 979 2055 Cell: 082 3410 308

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or my supervisor, Elonya Niehaus at the Institute for Therapeutic Development.

Tel & Fax: +27 (0)12 460 6704

E-mail: en@itd.ac.za

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Practical Theology, UNISA and the Institute of Therapeutic Development.

JOURNEYS INTO THE GARDEN OF SEXUALITY:

The Voices of Women's Sexuality in Pastoral Conversations

Consent Form for Participation

I have read the Information Sheet concerning the project and I understand what the project is all about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I understand and accept that:

- 1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
- 2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage.
- 3. I am aware of what will happen to my personal information at the conclusion of the project.
- 4. I will receive no payment or compensation for participation in the study.
- 5. All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential throughout the project.
- 6. I am aware that Nicki's supervisor will read the material.

I am willing to participate in this r	research project.
Signature of participant	Date
Name of participant in capital letters	Signature of witness

JOURNEYS INTO THE GARDEN OF SEXUALITY:

The Voices of Women's Sexuality in Pastoral Conversations

Consent Form for the Release of Information by Participants

I declare that:

- 1. I have read the summary of the project.
- 2. I have had the opportunity to make changes to that information, including suggestions, corrections or comments to summaries pertaining to my participation.
- I agree that my suggestions, corrections or comments can be included in the research project.
- 4. I have read the final summary of the discussions and agree that this is an accurate and satisfactory account of the research process, and I therefore give permission for this summary to be used in the research report as well as in the group discussions.

I understand that the information obtained during the discussions may be included in article format for publication. I understand that my confidentiality will be safeguarded throughout the study, in the written report of the project and in the publication. I also understand that should I decide that any information that may lead to my identification should not be used, it will not be used or included in the project report or publication.

I prefer the following name (either own name or pseudonym) be used in the research report or any other publication resulting from the project.

Name to be used	
Signature of participant	Date
Name of participant	Signature of witnes

JOURNEYS INTO THE GARDEN OF SEXUALITY:

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Questions for the first interview

- 1. What were your childhood years like?
- 2. How did you understand your parents' relationship?
- 3. As a child, who or what informed your ideas regarding sexuality?
- 4. How did your parent/s address the subject of sexuality in your home?
- 5. As a young child, were you aware of your own sexuality, or of any other person's?
- 6. Did your parents inform you about or discuss with you your sexual development before you went into puberty?
- 7. As a teenager, were you aware of your own sexuality, or of any other person's sexuality? If so, can you remember how you understood this or thought about this?
- 8. What ideas were formed regarding sexuality and the church in your childhood and teenage years?
- 9. When you were a young adult how did you relate to sexuality?
- 10. Can you recall any specific incident or general ideas where the church informed your ideas or understanding of sexuality?
- 11. How do you relate to sexuality within your marriage?
- 12. How does the fact that you are a Christian affect your sexuality?