

(RE)–CONSTRUCTING A LIFE-GIVING SPIRITUALITY:
NARRATIVE THERAPY WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

by

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DECLARATION

“I declare that (RE)-CONSTRUCTING A LIFE-GIVING SPIRITUALITY: NARRATIVE THERAPY WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.”

.....
JOHANNA CATHERINA MARAIS

.....
Date

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Thank you,

To God for guiding me in this research project and for opening doors to me.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative participatory action research project examined how the spiritual dimension in pastoral therapy served as a life-giving resource to facilitate healing and growth in the lives of three Christian female university students. A postmodern epistemology, social construction theory and a contextual feminist theology informed the praxis of pastoral narrative therapy. The themes of subjectivity, meaning, religious development and religious experience were the focus of this study. Narrative practices were engaged in to utilise spiritual talk in the co-construction of an alternative relational identity with the research participants. The theory of religious development is discussed from a social constructionist perspective with an accent on a personal relationship with God as central to the developmental process. The religious experiences of the participants contributed to a spiritual awareness of being connected, in a dynamic way, to God, that transformed the clients' perceptions of problems and ways of addressing problems in their lives.

Key terms: spirituality, narrative therapy, social constructionism, pastoral therapy, participatory action research, theory of religious development, God-talk, transformation, feminist contextual approach, relational identity.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

As the deer pants for streams of water,
So my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
Ps 41:1,2

Het hart de menschen is tot God geschapen
en het kan geen rust vinden,
tenzij het rust vindt aan zijn Vaderhart.
Augustinus¹

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research project aimed at encouraging university students to reflect on their spiritual experiences in therapy and to participate in the meaning-making and re-authoring of their spirituality in such a way that it would become a life-giving force that will sustain them in their journey through life. The need to talk more about personal spiritual experiences was voiced by many a student at a local university where I work as pastoral therapist. A student at the Seminary voiced her disappointment: *"I expected more spirituality from the Seminary; to be guided spiritually and pastorally; I did not expect it to be just another department of the university"*. Within this research project I endeavoured to open up a safe place for university students to reflect on their spiritual experiences during therapeutic conversations. In this regard Melissa Griffith (1995:124) reported that:

Clients and persons who have participated in our research have told us that they want to reflect on their spiritual experiences in therapy, and that they feel fragmented by attempting to delegate psychological, relational issues to conversations with their therapist and spiritual issues to conversations with their priest, rabbi, or pastor.

1.2 THE INSPIRATION TO THE STUDY

As a novice therapist, I have always wondered how many experienced therapists can engage in therapeutic conversations without opening space for spiritual talk. I have always regarded spiritual beliefs and practices to be an important resource in addressing problems in my life, even though I can side with St. Paul (Romans 7:14) in the discovery that I am unspiritual. Thus, my assumption that many people would like to include

¹ Augustinus, quoted in Grosheide, F W, Landwehr, J H, Lindeboom, C & Rullman, J C (eds), 1925. *Christelike Encyclopaedie Eerste Deel A tot Dyamisme*, s v 'zijn leer'. p196. S I: J H KokteKampen.

conversations about their spiritual experiences in times of trouble, inspired me to pursue a study of the spiritual dimension in therapy. This research journey broadened my scope of therapeutic endeavours and enriched the lives of the research participants.

1.2.1 My own spiritual journey

For many years I have had an unsaturated yearning for a closer walk with God and have found myself constantly buying and reading books about the Christian faith and people's stories about their search for a deep spiritual connection with God. Narratives of the lives of saints, like those of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Teresa of Avila filled me with awe and reverence for their single-minded dedication to honour only God in Christ Jesus. I was struck by the humility and simplicity of their lives and the continual practice to dwell in the presence of God while going about their daily routines. In a little book, *The practice of the presence of God* (Lawrence 1982), spiritual insights into the heart of God are revealed through letters and conversations of Brother Lawrence that were written over three hundred years ago. As a humble cook he learned to serve God with the same fervour, whether on his knees praying, or whether working in the kitchen with several people asking questions at the same time. This practice resonates with what Pamela Couture (2000:50) refers to as "our primary learning, if we are open to it, is about [finding] the presence of God where God is not expected to be found". Our own spiritual poverty can be addressed by reconnecting with God and living from the image of God in ourselves which will provide the ground to see the image of God in others (Couture 2000:50). I can echo Trevor Hudson's (1995:16) confession that I also struggle to live the Christ-following life. In my search for a deeper spirituality I have discovered that "clinging to people, books, events, experiences, projects and plans" (Nouwen 1998:14, 15) did not satisfy and led me to believe what Henri Nouwen (1998:14) explains in the following story about a spiritual guide's advice:

Daiju visited the master Baso in China. Baso asked:
'What do you seek?'
'Enlightenment,' replied Daiju.
'You have your own treasure house. Why do you search outside?' Baso asked.
Daiju inquired: 'Where is my treasure house?'
Baso answered: 'What your are asking *is* your treasure house.'

In the same vein Gerard Hughes (1985:x), who introduces himself as a Catholic, a priest and a Jesuit, uses Jesus' metaphor (Matthew 13:44) about a treasure found in a field:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Hughes (1985:x) extends this metaphor by suggesting that the hidden treasure might be detected in what may be considered "a most unlikely field, yourself."

I also believe that faith and spirituality are never a one-person affair but always require participation in a community (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:190). I was not disappointed in my trust that this research project would be my treasure in discovering with others spiritual resources, previously hidden, in the lives of others and myself. This project was a viable option because pastoral theology has always asserted that we learn about God in the midst of humanness (Couture 2000:50). Walsh (1999:xi) contends that both client and therapist can experience the healing and growth that occurs in the therapeutic process, as a profound spiritual experience.

1.2.2 Fulfilling a need

In a society marked by relativism and agnosticism it is necessary to name the Name of the One in whom we believe (Bosch 1991:420). Paying attention to the spiritual dimensions of one's life can be a source of strength and security in an unsafe and fragmented society. Postmodernism with its pluralism of values and contexts, poses a challenge to people to define and re-define their own identity. Gerkin (1986:15) describes the individual's experience of fragmentation in daily living, brought about by pluralism, by means of an example of a young man "who came for pastoral counselling because he felt confused about who he wanted to be". This young man seemed to have experienced *a loss of moral context* (Gerkin 1986:16) and spiritual resourcefulness (Walsh 1999:x). Sixteen years after Gerkin's account of the fragmentation of the social context, VanKatwyk (2002:111) confirms such a quest for meaning in daily living:

In the Western world the decline of organised religion is matched by the ascent of spirituality as the deeply personal quest for enlightenment, integration, and meaning.

Froma Walsh (1999:x), a professor in the School of Social Service Administration and the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Chicago, counsels therapists to embrace the following stance:

If we are to understand our clients and assist in their healing and growth, it is crucial to explore their spiritual beliefs and practices, attend to spiritual sources of their distress, and encourage them to draw on spiritual resources.

Exploring the spiritual meaning of experience is recommended for *all* clients and not just with those who initially present spiritual concerns (Walsh 1999:x). Opening up a space where clients can feel free to talk about what is most significant to them, can be hampered by what Melissa Griffith (1995:124) identifies as “*proscriptive constraints* – that this God-talk is not to be spoken of here; and by *prescriptive constraints* – that God can and should be spoken of here, but only in a certain way”. Proscriptive constraints correspond with Sperry’s (2001:169) observation about psychotherapists who still persist in “the belief that it is inappropriate to discuss religious and spiritual issues in therapy”. Likewise prescriptive constraints can be just as inhibiting to clients and will also stifle therapeutic possibilities. Prescriptive constraints are more likely to be imposed upon clients by therapists from a religious counselling culture (Griffith 1995:124). My intention was to be wary of any such constraints and to rather follow the client’s lead than to coerce her into a spiritual or religious discussion. A statement about spirituality could be harmful. Wulff (quoted in Doherty 1999:186) makes the incisive point that:

every religious claim implicitly asks for the listener’s assent. For me to tell a depressed client that I know God loves her is more than a statement of my faith. It is a statement that asks for agreement and appropriation by the client, and it could be a misuse of my position of power and responsibility in the therapeutic conversation.

Today, there are however, more and more individuals who seek greater meaning and fulfilment in their lives, believing that spirituality is vital for growth and essential for helping them deal with life’s problems (Sperry 2001:1). The concept of spirituality becomes more and more important as the need for spiritual support increases.

1.2.3 Spirituality in vogue

There has been a phenomenal rise of the concept of spirituality in the health sciences (VanKatwyk 2002:109). The spiritual aspects of the therapeutic process has previously been regarded by mental health practitioners as best left to clergy, pastoral counsellors, or faith healers. At the close of the 20th century there has been a resurging interest in religion and spirituality as people sought greater meaning and connection in their lives. Health

care practitioners of a variety of disciplines now seek to bridge the longstanding divide that has separated clinical and faith-based approaches to therapeutic practices (Walsh 1999: ix, xi, 4). The spiritual dimension of therapy no longer seems to be the exclusive domain of the clergy. Walsh (1999:4) posits that “family therapists and trainees are beginning to show keen interest in exploring and developing the spiritual dimensions of *our* [italics mine] practice”. Many therapy course curriculums and teaching seminars include the topic of spirituality as “the new frontier in therapy” (VanKatwyk 2002:110). The resurgence of spirituality in many different helping professions poses a challenge to pastoral care workers to highlight the spiritual dimension of pastoral therapy.

1.2.4 Pastoral therapy as a spiritual practice

Another inspiration to the study is my choice to do research as a pastoral therapist and not as any other health care professional. I consider pastoral therapy, compared to other health professions, as a distinguished profession to provide in clients’ needs for having their spiritual experiences addressed in therapy. Wyrzten, quoted in De Jongh van Arkel (2000:186-187) explains that to be engaged in pastoral therapy:

presupposes that pastoral clinicians have a pastoral identity, regard clinical care as a form of ministry and interpret pastoral identity and ministry in terms of theological reflection....[T]he pastoral psychotherapist¹ identity [also] includes...community components (participation in faith group and professional group).

I am aware of the identity crisis of pastoral care professionals in the post-modern context and consider the spiritual dimension inherent in pastoral work to be of prime importance in re-defining its identity. VanKatwyk (2002:109) mentions the threat to the identity of pastoral care professionals:

In a crisis of identity, pastoral care professionals find that their specialised role, history, and resources of ministry have been largely ignored in the new research and implementation of spirituality in health care.

As an example of this refusal to recognise the specialised work of pastoral care professionals, VanKatwyk (2002:109) refers to “a current research study on the topic of spirituality” where professional chaplaincy is described as “*an absent profession*”. I trust

¹ De Jongh van Arkel (2000:184) admits that the concepts being used at the level of professional pastoral work where specific training and accreditation are needed, are still not sorted out. The terms pastoral therapist, pastoral psychotherapist and pastoral counsellor are often used interchangeably.

that this research serves as a validation of the spiritual dimension of pastoral therapy and contributes to the process of (re)defining the identity of pastoral work.

The need to re-claim the spiritual and theological perspective inherent to pastoral work has been voiced by people like De Jongh van Arkel (2000:187), Gerkin (1986:12) and VanKatwyk (2002:109). In the year 2000 De Jongh van Arkel (2000:187) referred to pastoral psychotherapists' struggles for identity which were exacerbated by challenges posed by its ecclesial and therapeutic milieu as well as challenges posed by society and the need to stay relevant in changing situations. These struggles added to the need for a clear articulation of what the pastoral care profession stands for. Fourteen years earlier, in 1986, this need for a re-definition of pastoral care as a discipline, was voiced by Gerkin (1986:12). He admitted that "the discipline...is in a state of transition and flux", but that the encouraging sign was "that pastoral care theorists...are searching for theological roots, probing for the primary sources of the discipline's identity" (Gerkin 1986:12). Again I see the spiritual dimension, and more specifically the "ultimate focus – which is God" (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:210) as an inherent distinguishing characteristic of pastoral care professions. For De Jongh van Arkel (2000:211) there is a difference between psychotherapy and pastoral work in the observation that "psychotherapy usually leaves the relationship to the living God aside". It is this difference between pastoral work and other health care professions, especially people's relationship to the living God that I focussed on in my research.

I consider the fear that pastoral therapy "will lose its own biblical and theological identity" (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:214) as not justified if pastoral therapists reconsider the essence of their work, as voiced by Faber in De Jongh van Arkel (2000:211):

But the essence of pastoral therapy is pastoral work: helping people to see their lives in freedom, ultimately directed towards a life lived in the light of God.

To pay attention to human's spiritual side is to pay attention to human's will-to-meaning (Frankl 1969:10). Sperry (2001:1) confirms this perspective when he talks about people's search for greater meaning and fulfilment in their lives, through pursuing a spiritual journey and engaging in spiritual practices.

1.2.5 Spirituality contributing to meaning-making

In engaging in narrative pastoral therapy, the focus is on the clients' accounts of their experiences and meaning-making of events in their lives. Spirituality is not seen as something separate from a person's life-experiences, "but rather as streams of experience that flow through all aspects of people's lives" (Walsh 1999:x). People's problems are not limited to physical, economic and material issues, but because people are also spiritual beings, "they ask the most fundamental question: what is the meaning of life?" (Louw 1998:20). Thus, the core of pastoral ministry, *cura animarum*, implies caring for the whole person within a specific faith relation with God and from a specific spiritual perspective (Louw 1998:21). Spirituality is the experience of making meaning informed by a relationship with the transcendent or divine in life (Anderson 1999:157). What someone believes influences all meaning-making; e.g. how problems are defined, what possible causes or solutions for these problems might be and what meaning can be made of adversity or suffering. A person's personal spirituality may enhance or block healing (Walsh 1999:xi). Victor Frankl, (1969:10) world renowned psychiatrist and father of logotherapy, (a form of psychotherapy), stresses the importance of appealing to human's spirituality which is inherently linked with human's will-to-meaning:

A therapist who ignores man's spiritual side, and is thus forced to ignore the will-to-meaning, is giving away one of this most valuable assets....Again and again we have seen that an appeal to continue life, to survive the most unfavourable conditions, can be made only when such survival appears to have a meaning. That meaning must be specific and personal, a meaning which can be realised by this one person alone. For we must never forget that every man is unique in the universe.

Thus, in this research I invited spirituality to be part of my therapeutic conversations in the process of meaning-making. A person's spirituality influences his/her meaning-making and meaning-making is made through stories. "...persons generally ascribe meaning to their lives by plotting their experience into stories" (White & Epston 1990:79). By making use of the narrative metaphor, I worked with people "to experience their life stories in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling" (Freedman & Combs 1996:1). This included their spiritual experiences. By making use of the metaphor of social constructionism (Freedman & Combs 1996:1), I was able to consider the ways in which every person's interpersonal reality, including their relationship with God, had been constructed and what the influence of this "reality" was on their meaning-making.

In summary, the inspiration to this study was to learn about God together with clients, to fulfil the needs of those desiring to talk about spiritual matters in therapy, to meet the challenge posed by the health care profession to develop the spiritual dimension of therapy, to contribute to the process of re-defining the identity of pastoral work and to explore how people's spirituality contributed to their meaning-making of life experiences.

The term spirituality is often used, but exactly what is meant by it, cannot be easily determined. Some clarification is needed about what is meant with the term in this study.

1.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The meaning of spirituality differs not only for people of different religions or faith orientations, but also for people of the same faith affiliations.

1.3.1 What is spirituality?

Although spirituality is fundamental to our being as humans, it nevertheless denies us the security of a circumscribed definition (Thayer 1985:13). Spirituality is not a clearly defined or logical concept but, rather, can be described as a 'natural' or 'fuzzy' construct, without a finite list of necessary and sufficient conditions (VanKatwyk 2002:110) or as a slippery word (Hudson 1995:15) with a variety of descriptions. It can be described as an inclusive concept, denoting all experiences and ideas about the Other whom some call Friend/God/Goddess/Divine and so forth (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:1) or as beliefs and practices that can be experienced either within or outside formal religious institutions (Walsh 1999:xi). This inclusive concept of spirituality spans a wide multifaith and cross-cultural spectrum and is not confined to theistic belief systems (VanKatwyk 2002:110). This means that spirituality as a broad and inclusive concept does not necessarily imply a God-centred focus. The inclusiveness of the term spirituality is also confirmed by Anderson (1999:157) who explains that spirituality cannot be limited to a particular religious tradition, because it is not linked to dogma. It is rather a highly personal reality.

According to Nelson Thayer (1985:13,14) spirituality is described in the following way:

Spirituality is not merely inner feelings; it has to do with the integration and coherence of ourselves as experiencing and acting persons....[and it is] influenced by historical, cultural and social circumstances....[I]t transcends the intellect and is formed by and gives form to our relationships, our experience of our bodies, our commitments, our ecstasies, our aesthetics.

The notion of relationships in Thayer's description of spirituality corresponds with Griffith and Griffith's (2002:15) focus on "one's relatedness with all that is". It also corresponds with VanKatwyk's (2002:110) main assumption for spirituality, namely, "the sense of connectedness...of the ordinary to a spiritual and transcendent reality...".

Although I position myself as a Christian belonging to the faith community of the Dutch Reformed Church, I endeavour to create a safe space for each and every client as a place where his/her personal spirituality could be nurtured and elicited as a source of healing and empowerment, whether his/her religious convictions differ from mine or not.

1.3.2 Christian spirituality

Whereas spirituality per se cannot be limited to a belief in God or to religious traditions, the word 'Christian' in the term 'Christian spirituality' narrows the term down to a basic belief in Jesus Christ as the source of ultimate power and meaning in believers' lives. Here it is necessary to caution against a simplistic description because a diversity of meanings can be found within the distinctiveness of any religion.

Rossouw (1993:899) poses a challenge to Christians' faith to restore a spirituality of wholeness which depends doubly on a narrative approach to theology. He suggests that believers need to understand the story of the Bible and have to relate the stories of their lives to the bigger story presented by the Bible, which will inform them "on a proper attitude to life" (Rossouw 1993:899). This bigger story corresponds with what Niebuhr (quoted by Gerkin 1991:57) calls "the context of the actions of God in creation and history", which is the "ultimate context...for evaluating all human actions". The Christian's ultimate context, ultimate source of power, ultimate source of meaning, is God; and one way of God being revealed to us, is in the Scriptures. Christian believers find meaning in their lives in the ultimate source, in the story of the people of the Old Testament and in the story of Jesus in the New Testament. These two stories reveal a divine perspective on reality (Rossouw 1993:899). The biblical and Christian narrative, including its images, themes and metaphors, contains a normative vision of what life is and should be (Gerkin 1991:17). Christian spirituality has to do with Christians' yearning to live their daily lives according to this "vision of the good and Christian life [as] disclosed in the biblical and Christian narratives" (Gerkin 1991:17). A re-interpretation of the Scriptures is the source for Christian believers to make meaning of their daily experiences and to discover what the

good life is supposed to be as lived in the face of God. As mentioned before in section 1.3.1, spirituality always has to do with connectedness. From a Christian perspective this connectedness is a relationship with God in Christ and with your neighbour. Gerkin (1991:16) refers to the Christian community as “a people who saw themselves as the people of God whose primary relationship was to (that) God”.

Christian spirituality is defined in Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterson (1991:75) as:

a way of speaking about discipleship, the following of Jesus Christ as Lord, in relation to the resources of the Spirit and the means of grace which enable us to be disciples. This includes our life together in Christian community, prayer, meditation and worship, study and reflection on the scriptures.

The centrality of Christ is also emphasised in Hudson’s (1995:15) definition of Christian spirituality:

Spirituality is being intentional about the development of those convictions, attitudes and actions through which the Christ-following life is shaped and give personal expression within our everyday lives.

People’s varied understandings of the Christian faith, or any other religious convictions alert me as therapist not to assume that I know what someone means when he/she is talking from a Christian perspective, just because I am also a Christian. Melissa Griffith (1995:125-126) warns therapists against the ‘entrapment of knowing’ and the closing off of therapeutic possibilities if we think we know. She warns against the temptation to be seduced into certainties, to attempt to provide rather than co-create the meaning of an experience with a personal God (Griffith 1995:137). Varied understandings of the Christian faith required of me, the researcher, to scrutinise my own biases and assumptions that I might not have been aware of at all times.

In seeking to foster a life-giving spirituality, it is necessary to conceptualise this term.

1.3.3 A life-giving spirituality

To cultivate a life-giving spirituality would mean to discover spiritual resources that would sustain someone while coping with personal problems. It would also mean that such a spirituality will facilitate healing, growth, resilience and transformation, rather than constrain it. It will empower someone to transcend the problems of the present situation and supply hope against the odds of a seemingly hopeless situation. A life-giving

spirituality appeals to the imagination to enable the person to “act other than life really is” (Brueggemann 1993:14). It will enable a person to embrace “a different claim of reality” no matter how much the “long-established ‘givens’” prevail as unquestioned by society (Brueggemann 1993:15). It will also enable a human life to be creatively transformed – in a way beyond the categories of reason. This will be possible because “ordinary people do not live primarily by the rule of reason” and this requires conversations in no “other way than by the way of story, image and metaphor” (Gerkin 1991:21). A life-giving spirituality will “buffer existential crisis states and counter their adverse influences” and it will sustain “hope, purpose and self-agency” and “play a role in countering illness” (Griffith & Griffith 2002:267). It will lead to what Froma Walsh (1999:4) sees as the essence of “meaningful change”, namely change “ultimately spiritual in nature, fostering personal transformation, wholeness, and relational connection with others”.

A life-giving spirituality enables one to encounter the sacred in ordinary daily life. What Thomas Moore (quoted in VanKatwyk 2002:113) describes as spirituality, I would like to add the qualification of ‘life-giving’ to it:

Spirituality is seeded, germinates, sprouts and blossoms in the mundane. It is to be found and nurtured in the smallest of daily activities...the spirituality that feeds the soul and ultimately heals our psychological wounds may be found in these sacred objects that dress themselves in the counterments of the ordinary.

I agree with Sperry (2001:24) that the spiritual dimension is foundational to all other dimensions of human experience, namely somatic, social, psychological and moral. The spiritual dimension may or may not involve any formal affiliation with a religious tradition, but it reflects the beliefs, effects and behaviours associated with the basic spiritual hunger or desire for self-transcendence that *all individuals* [italics mine] experience (Sperry 2001:25). This assumption formed the basis of my curiosity and my intention to invite discussions about spiritual matters when it seemed fitting.

1.4. RESEARCH CURIOSITY

I was curious about the possible beneficial effects and the possibilities for healing for a client if talk about spiritual matters would be invited. I also expected people’s spirituality to play a major role in their meaning-making of lived experiences. I wanted to explore in what ways people’s spirituality influenced their perceptions, actions and relations and also how sources of personal spiritual strength could be utilised in addressing problems in their

lives. I did not pursue this topic if there was any indication that the client was not willing to discuss such matters. Not all clients would be willing to openly discuss their personal spiritual experiences.

Narrative therapy was the means by which I explored the above curiosities. An overarching question regarded the role of the narrative metaphor in the research journey.

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTION

The overarching research questions were:

1.5.1 In what ways can a narrative approach in therapy contribute to making the spiritual dimension salient in pastoral care?

1.5.2 In what ways can a narrative approach in therapy invite spiritual talk that would be healing and empowering to students?

1.6. RESEARCH AIMS

Working in an ethical way entails co-researching with clients in a collaborative way. This meant that space was opened up for alternative constructions of how spirituality and problems in people's lives interrelate. Rather than discovering 'universal truths', the aim was to discover if people benefit from engaging in conversations about spirituality and how, in the context of their unique personal circumstances. The aims were as follows:

1.6.1 To explore how narrative therapy elicits and shapes alternative personal spiritual ideas.

1.6.2 To explore how narrative therapy contributes to the co-construction of a richer meaning-making of life events by engaging in spiritual talk with clients.

1.6.3 To explore the transformative effects of conversations about a personal spirituality on a client's perception of and ways of addressing problems in his/her life.

1.7 RESEARCH APPROACH

My research approach will now be discussed from the perspectives of qualitative research, participatory action research and feminist inspired participatory action research.

1.7.1 Qualitative research

In working with the personal experiences of students and the meanings they make of their personal spirituality, a qualitative approach seemed most appropriate for my research project. Qualitative research “implies a direct concern with experience as it is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’ “ (Sherman & Webb, quoted in Merriam 1998:6). Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena – in this research, students’ personal spirituality. My personal interest in sharing in students’ meaning-making of their problems and of their God-self relationships, was to develop an “ability to be a spiritual growth enabler” which means according to Clinebell (quoted by De Jongh van Arkel 2000:98), to gain insights and methods of spiritual counselling and growth. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) defines qualitative research in the following way:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

No single methodology is privileged in qualitative research. To gain knowledge of a student’s situation, a choice could be made from different methods, e.g. therapeutic conversations, qualitative interviews, therapeutic letters. In using different methods or data sources, a term called triangulation, the research question was approached from different angles and explored in a multi-faceted way which enhanced validity (Mason 2002:190). An in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question was secured in this way.

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality which is contextual and specific and they do not intend to capture objective reality. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:3,4). This orientation in qualitative research corresponds with the social constructionist approach I chose (see section 2.2.1) which lead me to inquire how cultural and religious beliefs impacted students’ spiritual ideas and practices as lived in the privacy of their lives. “It is at this level of the details of private life and decision-making that the social problems become visible to pastoral and lay church leaders in ways that can prompt fresh inquiry concerning cultural norms” (Gerkin 1991:31) and I want to add - concerning

spiritual beliefs. The Roman Catholic theologian, David Tracy (quoted by Gerkin 1991:31) states: "life is...always lived in the details." Qualitative research is interested in such details. A social constructionist approach allowed for many possible interpretations and meanings, and thus richer, more detailed descriptions, which qualitative researchers consider to be very valuable by (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:6).

Qualitative research also allows for a more egalitarian relationship between researcher and participants. My approach was guided by what the participants regarded as significant and what was helpful to them. Such an approach was necessary to make the research participants the primary beneficiaries of my research. They determined if and how their spirituality was life-giving and what steps were needed to move towards a life-giving spirituality. Such an approach implied participation on their part to co-create the meanings, realities and decisions that lead to their preferred ways of being.

1.7.2 Participatory action research

Authentic participatory action research means ownership, that is, responsible agency in the production of knowledge and improvement of practice (McTaggart 1997:28). In believing that the client is the expert on her life experience (Anderson & Goolishian 1992), my aim was to develop agency and self-determination in clients' lives. My approach to this research did not focus on the principle issue of being a group activity, as proposed by Kurt Lewin (quoted by McTaggart 1997:28), but on the idea that participatory action research is not "doing research *on* people, making the people the objects of the research" (McTaggart 1997:29). 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. But it is important to emphasise that these changes are not impositions: individuals and groups agree to work together to change themselves, individually and collectively. Their interests are joined by an agreed 'thematic concern' (McTaggart 1997:31). The thematic concern in this research with its focus on narrative therapy, was to discover the influence of spiritual talk on our meaning-making and transformation in the lives of the participants and myself as the researcher. Welch (1990:135) contends that mutual transformation occurs when there is the power of empathy and compassion, of delight in otherness and strength in solidarity of listening to others, bearing together stories of pain and resistance.

My expectation for this research was founded on James and Melissa Griffith's (1994:6) findings that questions about God-self relationships can offer a rich resource for therapy and can provide alternative perspectives that might introduce new options for clients in therapy. Such an alternative perspective was introduced in several ways, for example, by using Griffith and Griffith's (1992:65) ideas on *Working with the God-construct* and by asking questions based on Hughes' (1985:11) model of religious development. This also invited self-reflection from the students regarding their personal spirituality. Hughes (1985:11) uses Von Hügel's idea that religion must take account of and nurture the needs and activities of three stages in human development, namely infancy, adolescence and adulthood. This theoretical model facilitated, in an indirect way, a richer meaning-making of our spiritual experiences and facilitated the co-creating of a life-giving spirituality and transformation. See appendix C for a summary of this model.

1.7.3 Feminist inspired participatory action research

A feminist approach to participatory action research fits with what I consider to be an ethical way of doing research. Ethical questions are heightened in feminist research because feminists try hard to avoid perpetuating the exploitation of women (Reinharz 1992:27). Feminist methods tend to put a high priority on a trusting relationship and respecting what the client/interviewee chooses *not* to reveal. Spiritual talk was engaged in only after a trusting relationship had been established between the client and myself. Hillary Graham (quoted by Reinharz 1992:30) encourages her "informants" to tell stories:

In stories, data and interpretation are fused, the story-line providing the interpretive framework through which the data are constructed. The story, moreover, marks the boundaries of what the individual is prepared to tell....It is a method, too, consistent with a feminist research program which seeks to involve women in the faithful recording of their experiences.

This approach resonates with the highly respectful approach of the narrative therapist. Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centers people as the experts in their own lives (Morgan 2000:2). In feminist methodology narration is considered a valuable explanatory route for women to share their experiences (Hoek 1997:231). The opportunity to speak out should be an empowering and liberating experience for a woman (Hoek 1997:233). When a client tells her story and she is asked to consider God's perspective on her situation, a perspective of justice is invited into the therapy. This will happen if the client considers the watching eyes

of a personal God as an ultimate standard of justice (Griffith & Griffith 1994:6). The important concept of justice can be found in both feminist methodology and narrative therapy. Furthermore, Ackermann (1994:206) paraphrases Nelle Morton's immortal phrase, to allow women/victims to be 'heard into speech', and argues for this to be both a theological and critical pastoral issue. This research concern - listening to young women's spiritual stories – has thus important implications for the pastoral therapeutic field.

1.8 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

1.8.1 Selection of participants

The selection of participants in participatory action research is according to non-probability principles (Mouton 2001:10). Non-probability samples do not use random sampling and in this study it would be acceptable to say that the participants selected themselves. A notice was placed in the church bulletin to invite students to come and discuss any personal problem with a narrative pastoral therapist in her final year of study. Three students were later identified and approached by me to be part of this study. The in-depth therapeutic conversations that I engaged in, lasted for many sessions and are still continuing with one of the research participants. The fullness of detail given about these conversations compelled me to limit discussions in this study to three participants only. Each of these three students talked spontaneously of their Christian faith and their relationship with God. Choosing three students in this way, meant that available samples at hand were taken. This way of sampling is called "accidental" sampling (Kerlinger 1986:120), and the common denominator, in this case, was their Christian faith, their gender (female), and they were students at the same university. "Accidental" sampling necessitates extreme circumspection in analysis and interpretation of data (Kerlinger 1986:120) and findings cannot be generalised. If theories and 'truths' are only valid until proven wrong, and if we take Foucault's (McHoul & Grace 1993:viii) question 'Who are we today?' seriously, and if it is true that "life is...always lived in the details" (Tracy, quoted by Gerkin 1991:31), and if qualitative research is interested in such details, then in-depth conversations with these three students rendered valuable data that can be considered to be true within the particular contexts of the participants. Lincoln and Denzin (1994:580) comments:

The truth of a text cannot be established by its verisimilitude. Verisimilitude can always be challenged. Hence a text can be believed to be true even as it lacks verisimilitude.

Focusing on the local and personal situations of the participants that may not be generalised, does not mean that the data have no value. It is necessary to take into account what Rossouw (1993:896, 899) writes about the 'value' of data that can be generalised and the value of people's faith in understanding their world:

Sophisticated research in quantum physics, for example, indicated that a mechanistic Newtonian worldview, which emphasizes the rational orderliness of our world, is an inaccurate representation of reality. Probability, coincidence, and sheer chaos also have to be accommodated in our understanding of physical reality....If their [Christians'] faith brings them to an understanding of reality – an understanding of the nature, meaning, and value of life, and the lifestyle that fits that understanding of reality, then they can make a valuable contribution to restore a sense of wholeness wherever they are involved...Their faith then fosters a spirituality of wholeness that provides them with the bigger picture, in which the different dimensions of personal and social life find their place and meaning.

If this research truly succeeded in fostering such a faith in the lives of the three students, then they will have much to contribute to the people in their communities.

Details of what participation involved, were discussed with each participant individually, as well as what was expected from them. They received an information sheet (Appendix A) and they signed a consent form (Appendix B). The terms of the study as well as the ethical implications were negotiated with each participant.

1.8.2 Data gathering methods

Sperry (2001) recommends a comprehensive assessment using several measuring instruments, scales and indices, of which some will even render quantifiable data. He utilises measures like a "Spiritual well-being scale", "A measure of spiritual maturity", "Measuring the image of God", etc. (Sperry 2001:119). In contrast to these methods, I preferred building a trust relationship and a sense of connectedness with each client. To do justice to the importance of language usage in narrative therapy, I preferred to listen to "every utterance, even repetitions and noises" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero quoted by Merriam 1998:157) and noticed non-verbal cues which were regarded as part of the data to be considered. Most sessions were audio-taped, with prior consent of the student. These recordings were transcribed for reflection and to facilitate in the writing of therapeutic letters. Open-ended questions instead of structured questions on a questionnaire permitted me to come closer to understanding the world as seen by the respondent. Keeping the research aims (see section 1.6) in mind, I asked questions that

elicited the participants' meaning of spirituality in their lives. First-person accounts of experience formed the narrative "text" of my research (Merriam 1998:157). Being engaged in therapy in a participatory mode of consciousness meant being aware of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known (Heshusius 1994:16). It meant that I, the researcher, came to knowledge, not by means of separation, but by way of care and love.

1.8.2.1 Therapy sessions

Therapy sessions with each student continued after the signing of the consent forms, with the only difference of focusing more on the spiritual dimension of their situation. The title and aims of the project were negotiated with them. To ensure that the participants were the primary beneficiaries, it was important to discuss *their* concerns and address issues that were relevant for each individual.

I preferred to adhere to the view that people are storytellers by nature and that people's self-narratives *are* people's identities and that people reveal themselves to others by the stories that they tell (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber 1998:7). Narrative therapists are interested in joining with people to explore the stories they have about their lives (Morgan 2000:10) and therefore narrative therapy is considered an ideal way to explore people's spiritual narratives. We constantly construct and re-construct ourselves to meet the needs of situations we encounter; we make up a story about who and what we are, what's happened, and why we're doing what we're doing. But our self-making stories get out-of-date, because we grow wiser and new circumstances demand new self-making stories (Bruner 2004:4).

In caring for the whole person it seemed paramount to me to take the spiritual dimension into consideration regarding self-narratives. It is the spiritual dimension that makes us human (Frankl 1969:9). De Jongh van Arkel (2000:187) admits that pastoral psychotherapists often have to deal with "the usual struggles for identity". It seemed to me that students often struggle with self-identity in a possible transition to adulthood. The uniqueness of pastoral psychotherapy is according to Clinebell (quoted in De Jongh van Arkel 2000:186) its focus on a depth-transformation towards "Spirit-centered wholeness". This aim can be accomplished, according to Clinebell, only if changes in one's spiritual life, values, meaning and ultimate commitment is attended to first. In listening to students' stories, I did not intend to take their stories at face value, as complete and accurate

representations of their reality, because self-making is partly from “inside” – memory, feelings, ideas, beliefs, subjectivity – and partly from “outside” – the esteem and expectations of others (Bruner 2004:4). I believed that their stories allowed a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, which was utilised in therapy.

Assuming that individuals define their world in unique ways, my manner of conversing with the students was in an open unstructured way. Open-ended questions, e.g. about how each individual saw her own spiritual or religious development and what influences and factors seemed to be relevant, were asked. One must always keep in mind that the view people have of themselves in their mutual communication must always have priority over interpretations of the view of humanity (Heitink 1999:263). Informal conversations about what constituted growth and how each student considered her experiences, regarding religious development, lead up to a tentative explanation of the three elements, the institutional, critical and mystical elements, that, according to Hughes (1985:18) should be present, to a certain extent, to ensure a healthy religious development.

1.8.2.2 Research letters

With the permission of the student, I made notes, especially to capture the precise words of the student. I wrote therapeutic letters after each session, which served as an edited version of our conversations. Students had the freedom to edit these letters. In some cases the students wrote letters themselves. One such a letter, for example, was a letter of dismissal to the problem of temptation that the student experienced (see section 4.3.2.2). Another student wrote me a letter to further explain her position regarding the problem she was experiencing (see section 4.3.3). A third student wrote a letter to her ex-boyfriend, not to be sent to him, but to discuss in therapy (see section 3.5.2). 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 furthermore remark that one of the merits of using letters is that equality is established between the researcher and the participants (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:421). I recommended journaling as a means of reflecting on their journey and to give them the opportunity to choose meanings and interpretations in the journal to be discussed and renegotiated. Two students kept a journal.

1.8.3 Data analysis

The right way to analyse data in a qualitative research study, is to do it simultaneously with data collection, otherwise the data retrieved can be unfocussed, repetitious and overwhelming (Merriam 1998:162). My focus was guided by my research aims. Observation, reflection and interpretation were employed to make meaning of the data.

The sacred is embedded in everyday life (VanKatwyk 2002:117) and to explore the sacred thus requires an interest in the nitty-gritty (Perry & Rolland 1999:275) of a person's life. Recording people's exact words contributed to thicker descriptions of the details of their lives, and thicker descriptions made thicker interpretations possible. An analysis encompass a balance between description and interpretation. Geertz (quoted by Schwandt 1994:123) understands theory (interpretation) as follows:

[it is] always grounded and local, not speculative and abstract. He explains that "theoretical formulations hover so low over the interpretations they govern that they don't make much sense or hold much interest apart from them".

Mouton (1996:168) indicates that in qualitative data analyses there is a reluctance to generalise features of social worlds. Mouton (1996:169) explains:

Analysis...means reconstructing the inherent significant structures and the self-understanding of individuals by staying close to the subject. This approach is known as insider perspective. The overall coherence and meaning of data is more important than the specific meanings of its parts.

Janesick (1994:217) likens the researcher to a dancer "in seeking to describe, explain, and make understandable the familiar in a contextual, personal and passionate way". Knowing that there is no single 'correct' interpretation, my aim was rather to give possible explanations that fit given descriptions that would seem credible (Janesick 1994:216) to the participants and potential readers.

This dissertation is written in the first person because of the need to clarify the researcher's position in many respects and because of the qualitative researcher's close involvement in this research project, as stated by Bruner (quoted by Lincoln & Denzin 1994:576): "The qualitative researcher is not an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text...[and] is...'an all-too-human [observer] of the human condition". Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:10) emphasise the personal involvement of therapist-researchers by aligning with Dudley-Marling's perspective: "Acknowledging

the 'I' allows me to reveal myself and my feelings". The use of the third person may also cause awkward wordiness.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world of the research participants. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict (Stake quoted by Merriam 1998:214). Actual ethical practice comes down to the individual researcher's own values, ethics and conscience (Merriam 1998:218).

I was committed to doing ethicising research (Kotzé 2002:25) and found participation a very helpful value and practice. The aim was to do research *with* the participants who were to be the primary beneficiaries of the study. They had the opportunity to negotiate all aspects of the research.

1.9.1 Participatory ethicising

Participatory ethicising means that we co-create the understandings, realities and decisions we make (Kotzé 2002:29). Heshusius's (1994:15) ideas on participatory consciousness are a movement toward kinship and merging with the other. With an approach like this, the unconventional term 'participants' is used instead of 'subjects'.

1.9.2 Accountability

Being accountable to the client implied inviting her to question my interpretations and ideas behind questions (White 1991:37). Reflecting on and deconstructing my comments, responses, questions, thoughts and opinions can be considered as a condition of transparency, a term suggested by David Epston (White 1991:38).

Pastoral therapy becomes co-research with people in search of alternatives whilst ethical research cannot but also be therapeutic for all involved (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:9). In translating the world of everyday life into the world of science and scientific research, I endeavoured to produce knowledge that, although "not 'absolutely' true for all times and contexts" (Mouton 2001:138), reflected an approach that was ethically accountable, liberating, just and prophetic. Therapists are often witnesses of the pain and suffering of people.

VanKatwyk (2002:112) quotes from a poem, *Genesis* by TS Elliot:

And when there were men, in their various ways,
they struggled in torment towards God.
Blindly and vainly, for man is a vain thing,
and man without God is a seed upon the wind;
driven this way and that,
and finding no place of lodgement and germination.

I trust that the therapeutic situation was a place of lodgement and germination.

1.10 OUTLINE TO THE REST OF THIS STUDY

In Chapter Two, I discuss how ideas of postmodernism, social constructionism and feminist contextual theology inform my praxis of pastoral care and narrative therapy.

In Chapter Three, I discuss how narrative practices are used to utilise spiritual talk in the co-construction of an alternative relational identity with one of the research participants, that was more life-giving.

In Chapter Four, I discuss how praxis informs theory in a never-ending spiral with particular reference to the theory of religious development and the praxis of narrative pastoral therapy. This is done from a social constructionist perspective. The focus is also on the religious experience of the participants and on transformation as an outcome valued in action research and valued as an aim for this study. In this discussion two more participants are introduced.

In Chapter Five, I reflect on the aims of the project and summarise my reflections and experiences in participating with the clients in the re-construction of a life-giving spirituality. In wanting the participants to be the primary beneficiaries of this research, I include their first-hand accounts of what this research journey has meant to them.

CHAPTER TWO

EPISTEMOLOGY:

A POSTMODERN APPROACH TO PRACTICAL THEOLOGY, PASTORAL CARE AND THERAPY

...to cultivate a spirituality of wholeness, believers need not only understand the story of the Bible, but they also have to relate the stories of their lives, and the stories of the different dimensions of their lives, to the bigger story presented by the Bible.

(Rossouw 1993:899)

What do we and the people of the Bible have in common? The anxieties and joys of living; the sense of wonder and the resistance to it; the awareness of the hiding God and moments of longing to find Him.

(Abraham Heschel, quoted by Gerkin 1984: 63).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Research, as a human activity, cannot be done without some preconceived ideas or assumptions (Dreyer 2004:2). In the same vein, therapy is not done from a position of neutrality. Madigan (1996:59) identifies a discursive practice as all the ways in which we, therapists, create social and psychological realities. He continues to stress that discourse is never neutral and that we all position ourselves “along rhetorical lines of right and wrong”.

A postmodern epistemology, social construction theory and a contextual (practical) feminist theology is the framework of my approach in the doing of pastoral care and narrative therapy. I shall now discuss how the ideas of postmodernism, social constructionism, including the role of power are related to the forging of a personal relational identity to God.

2.2 A POSTMODERN EPISTEMOLOGY

A postmodern epistemology influences my approach as to how knowledge is constructed as well as my approach to practical theology, to pastoral care and therapy.

Thirteen years ago, Brueggemann (1993:11) wrote in a chapter called *Funding Postmodern Interpretation*, that postmodernism was at that time a new reality that “touches each of us”; “it touches the economy” and “it touches home and domestic authority in families”. The inevitability of postmodernism penetrates all contexts, including the contexts

brought to the therapeutic situation. A postmodern framework requires a critical stance towards all knowledge, including knowledge about spiritual matters. Cochrane et al (1991:22) write about the “hermeneutics of suspicion” in the following way: “If we have any critical discernment, we no longer simply accept as true that which we have received on authority as having been handed down to us, even if this happens to be an interpretation of Scripture”. Knowledge and truth are considered to be pluralistic, temporary, local, and contextual. Therefore, I was interested rather in *how* knowledge was constructed in therapy, than in *what* the knowledge was. I chose to position myself in agreement with a pastoral situation as described by Brueggemann (1993:10) as a shift from an objective claim of hegemony to a contextual, local perspective. In therapy conversational space was created that welcomed the plurality of meanings attributed to the concept of spirituality.

Spirituality, broadly conceived, is concerned with “the deep life lived intentionally with reference to something larger than oneself” and “the quest for meaning and relationship....in light of levels of reality not immediately apparent” (Downey, quoted by McCarthy 2002:2). More than one level of reality is present in the therapeutic conversation, which would apply to the particular spirituality of the client that is culture and context specific. This particular (local and contextual) spirituality will “tend to include explicit reference to God and [will tend] to be expressed in tonalities reflective of particular traditions” (McCarthy 2002:2). Marie McCarthy (2002:2) asserts that a particular understanding of spirituality does not contradict the broader based understanding (mentioned above), but rather concretise, contextualise and enliven these understandings. A local, contextual perspective, regarding the Christian faith, for example, implies that a person’s knowledge of the Divine developed in a particular situation and is influenced by a particular branch of Christian tradition. Our notion of God is mediated to us through parents, teachers and clergy – the institutional element of religion (Hughes 1985:35, 11). Our notion of God also implies a direct personal knowledge of the Divine, believing what is written in Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 36:27, as an act of faith, that the Divine will write His/Her law in human hearts (Bons-Storm 1998:17). In co-constructing a life-giving spirituality, I was interested in the client’s direct personal knowledge of the Divine, honouring her ‘truth’ that developed in the particular situation and context, and that was influenced by a particular branch of Christian tradition (Bons-Storm 1998:18). This ‘truth’

can be understood as the ultimate value, developed in context, which becomes the point of orientation of one's endeavours to give meaning to all one's experiences (Bons-Storm 1998:18). This approach was necessary, because I believe that spirituality is fundamentally concerned with meaning and relationship (McCarthy 2002:3). The essence of *meaning*, *relationship* and *linguaging* become apparent in the following description of spirituality by Prest and Keller (1993:138):

Spiritual belief systems are a product of the individual's ideological linguaging within a relationship context and include the process of conceptualising the individual's connection with others, the world, and the Creator (Campbell & Moyers, 1988)....and explain the ultimate meanings of life and existence. It may also serve to construct meaning out of the seeming chaos and randomness of life, thereby alleviating anxiety and providing a heightened sense of security for those involved in its construction.

The construction of spiritual belief systems, or any other 'truths', happens within a particular social system. The role of *language* and *relationships* in the constructions of *meaning*, are emphasised in a social constructionist approach.

2.2.1 A social constructionist approach

According to social constructionism people, together, construct their realities as they live them (Freedman & Combs 1996:23). In the classic work of sociologists, Berger and Luckmann, namely *The Social Constructionism of Reality*, they describe how ideas, practices, beliefs, and the like come to have reality status in a given social group (Freedman & Combs 1996:23) and how a socially constructed world, an institutional world, is experienced as if the nature of their (people's) world is pre-given and fixed (Burr 1995:10). Just as human beings evolve their own languages and create their intersubjective meanings regarding their daily experiences through dialogue, so people generate meanings surrounding their spirituality (Prest & Keller 1993:140). From a perspective of social constructionism, an individual's religion/spirituality is regarded as being constructed in conversation, in the social networks in which the individual finds herself. A study of James Day (quoted by Van der Lans 2002:29) demonstrates that the religious beliefs of an individual person are not the outward expressions of an inner state but elements in an ongoing process of negotiation about meaning. He concluded that "there is no belief independent of the narrative forms that fund its construction, reformation, and communication" (Day, quoted by Van der Lans 2002:29). Religious

experience, from a social constructionist perspective, is a relational action (Sundén, quoted by Van der Lans 2002:29). Van der Lans (2002:32) states:

It is important to note that it would be a mistake to focus solely on manifest transactions within a physical social network. The psychological study of an individual's religiosity should also cover the internal dialogue between the self and another who is virtually present in memory or imagination. What matters is that religiosity must always be studied as dialogical activity in which meanings are negotiated.

It is thus important to attend to the *dialogical activity* and the languaging that are involved in the shaping of spiritual beliefs. The way language is used by the therapist, for example, the positioning of the subject in a sentence, is crucial (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:140). A student I had conversations with, positioned herself as the passive object of God's agency and expected either a miraculous intervention from God or a miraculous solution to her problem from me, the therapist. She also believed that she was a passive character in the story that God wrote for her life. Davies (quoted by Drewery & McKenzie 1999:140) suggests that it is not always necessary to 'counterpose another discourse' as in the given example, namely that no power is invested in the individual, regarding the authoring of her life. Resourceful languaging was needed to position the client as the author of her story, without opposing or confronting the way she constructed her spiritual position. In dialogue it was possible to construe an alternative positioning and a richer description of her relationship with God, by identifying times when she was actively contributing to the blessings she received from God. She was positioned as the active subject, and not the passive (receiving) object in her relationship with God and others in her life. The client and I together made meaning as we conversed in a dialectic process of questions – that do not expect specific answers - and answers, that lead to new questions. In this "speech-event" I considered the words of the client simply as an explanation of her way of being in this world, rather than hiding some meaning or understanding that must be discovered by me (Herholdt 1998:456). The creative and creating power of language, as acknowledged by Boyd (1996:215), should evoke a re-appreciation of pastoral counselling – as conversation. Pastoral conversation, influenced by the hermeneutic perspective, assumes that the God who is active in human history is active in human language. Barth (quoted by Boyd 1996:221) refers to the mystery of revelation and human language when he says:

To the question how we come to know God by means of our thinking and language, we must give the answer that of ourselves we do not come to know Him, that, on the contrary, this happens only as the grace of the revelation of God comes to us and therefore to the means our thinking and language, adopting us and them . . . We are permitted to make use, and a successful use at that, of the means given to us .

People's faith concepts and knowledge of the Divine are the accrual of what tradition has handed down to them in the form of discourses, as well as the knowledge of their own spiritual experiences. The important role that discourses play in people's faith need to be discussed.

2.2.2 Discourses

Discourses are social practices that organise and regulate power relations between people and they are the frameworks we use to make sense of the world (Drewery & Winslade 1997:35). From a social constructionist perspective nobody has access to ultimate truths and to the 'right' way of being and doing. Therefore I chose to take a position of not-knowing and regarded the client to be the expert of her life experience (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:25-39). Explorations of spiritual issues and discourses were undertaken with respect for the client's spiritual framework, and with the understanding that her belief system, as informed by discourses and personal experiences, represented her view of reality (Prest & Keller 1993:141).

In therapy "we [therapists] try to understand the beliefs that support people's problems. We inquire about where those beliefs come from and what processes of social construction have recruited people into those beliefs" (Freedman & Combs 1996:36). Prest and Keller (1993:147) have found that the active incorporation of religious or spiritual content into the process of therapy, can facilitate increased understanding of clients. They (1993:147) also claim that an understanding of clients' personal spiritual belief systems allows for more effective gathering of information regarding the forces which may have helped to create, maintain, and/or perpetuate the presenting problem(s). Griffith and Griffith (2002:9) have also found in their spiritual conversations with clients that religion has the potential to both heal and harm. People's ideas of spirituality and religion are also derived from certain religious discourses, e.g. that a Christian should always be submissive and should not voice her opinion if this would cause conflict. This is an assumption I often discovered in therapy which allowed feelings of frustration, inferiority

and even depression to enter the client's life. Madigan (1996:54) alerts therapists to acknowledge that they are never alone with persons who come to see them: "A therapist is in conversation with a variety of discourses that has trained persons toward certain ideas and away from others." In an effort to enrich the meanings made in therapy, I focussed on deconstructing discourses.

2.2.3 Deconstruction

Derrida's term 'deconstruct' means to undo, not to destroy (Sampson 1989:7).

Deconstruction consists of a systematic inquiry that makes explicit the interpretive assumptions out of which a particular belief emerged. This inquiry seeks both to identify these interpretive assumptions and to delineate their cultural and political origins. This process places the belief in a particular historical context and situates it within a particular cultural discourse.

(Madigan & Law; White quoted by Griffith & Griffith 2002:151)

According to Johnella Bird (2000:70) "we engage with practical deconstruction of everyday ideas and practices when the meanings given to commonplace roles, attributes, relationships and words are not taken for granted". Male-dominated interpretations of Scripture, for example, may have become internalised discourses that need deconstruction. In her book, *Texts of Terror* (1984), Professor Phyllis Trible engaged in deconstructing the male-dominated versions of Scriptural interpretations and recounted the stories of women in the Old Testament from a feminist perspective. The new mode of theology, according to Brueggemann (1993:17) acknowledges that "all claims of reality, including those made by theologians are fully under negotiation", and I assume these claims include interpretations of Scripture. A preacher telling people that they may not ask for God's help until they have forgiven others, may cause a serious hindrance to healing for those who have suffered or witnessed abuse. Asking for God's help, that means literally what is the 'sayable', in this example, is determined by the discourse, 'forgiveness is a pre-requisite'. According to Foucault, discourses determine what are the seeable and the sayable (Townley 1994:2), as illustrated by the following example.

Griffith and Griffith (1994:59,60) recount the story of a woman whose husband repeatedly raped their two sons. In answer to the question "Do you talk with God about this?" she responded passionately: "*Oh, no! I never talk about this. I pray a lot but always for other people. See, I can't ask for God's help, because I haven't forgiven my husband ... and I*

can't go to God unless I've forgiven him. No, I've heard my preacher say ... and the Bible says ... you can't ask God for help until you have forgiven ... Maybe God gives me this hurt, so I can hurt like my babies hurt when they got raped." Griffith and Griffith (1994:60) suggest that the aim should be to create a therapeutic relationship that shows both reverence and interest in her intrapersonal dialogues with her God, and in her interpersonal dialogues with her pastor. This would help to create a story where her God can listen to her anger. Thus, the deconstruction of this discourse would not be direct confrontation as to whether forgiveness is a pre-requisite or not, but rather a deconstruction of her relationship with God and with the pastor, with the possibility to include the pastor in a therapeutic conversation with her.

Griffith and Griffith (1994:48,49) address the difference between self-narratives and beliefs and their resultant wariness to deconstruct a belief directly. A story, in temporally language, is seen as the immediate experience to which only the client has access; while a belief is similar to an opinion in that there exist multiple interpretive possibilities. Griffith and Griffith (1994:48) prefer to focus on the influence of stories rather than on the influence of beliefs. They aim to work collaboratively with a client¹ to revise current stories and towards change in the quality of experience, instead of the content of the construed 'reality' or beliefs that construct that reality. Griffith and Griffith (1994:48) report: "Although a change in beliefs naturally ensues, the therapist² attempts to freely follow, rather than to guide, the client in interpreting their new beliefs from the new stories." Another reason why they find it problematic to address beliefs instead of stories, is that the story the client brings to therapy is more compelling than a belief in its immediate presentation. The therapist can only serve as a consultant in reconstructing the client's story, while challenging a belief would require an authoritative stance. Constructionist thinking in therapy is not about competing 'truths', but rather about using the constitutive power of language to reposition the client as the agent of the discourse within which her subjectivity is inscribed (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:147). Griffith and Griffith (1994:49) have discovered that it is easier to maintain a position of 'not-knowing' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992) when talking about immediate, storied experience, rather than the beliefs drawn from it. Discourses 'speak themselves into existence' and no personal story, adhering to

¹ I substituted the word 'patient' with 'client'.

² I substituted the word 'clinician' with 'therapist'.

certain discourses, is so self-consistent that it is not open to challenge in its own terms (White quoted by Drewery & McKenzie 1999:140). Thus, deconstruction in therapy can take several forms. Drewery and McKenzie (1999:140) give some examples of how the therapist can challenge discourses in the therapeutic situation:

The therapist is curiously interested in the presuppositions, usually unstated, which enables the person whom they are working with, to make this sense rather than some other kind of sense of their life at this time. The therapist actively resists the common thinking pattern which blames some internal attribute of the person for 'failure'. The therapist relentlessly conveys the assumption of the capacity of the person who is working to change their life. The therapist is always listening for alternative ways of being which are already happening within the person's life, and which contradict their dominant understanding of the problem story.

A chosen posture of noncertainty when conducting therapy (Griffith & Griffith 2002:48) and a reflecting/listening position serve to distribute power among all the different voices in the discourse, dominant and nondominant (Griffith & Griffith 1994:160,166). I shall now discuss how the role of power and resistance are related to developing personal agency and in the forging of an identity, as well as the importance of relatedness in the construction of an identity.

2.2.4 Power

The dominant understanding of power is that of a negative force that acts as a constraining form of 'corporeal control' (McHoul & Grace 1993:63) and as a force that subjugates people to normalising 'truths' which are handed down by 'experts' (White & Epston 1990:19-29). This resonates with what Rossouw criticises as a certain style of communication. Rossouw (1993:901) challenges the church to abandon a style of communication that aims at downloading religious information and at offering pre-cooked solutions. Rossouw (1993:901) invites clergy and other communicators in the church to step down from a dominating position and to become "fellow players in the search for a meaningful Christian life in our contemporary culture".

When clients struggle with problems, it usually makes them feel disempowered. Traditionally there is a power imbalance between therapist and client, but in agreement with Anderson (1997:107), "I purposely want to be open, genuine, appreciative, respectful, inviting and curious...in a therapy relationship that is mutual, collaborative, cooperative and egalitarian...because I value it". People might think that a referral to an (all powerful)

pastoral therapist will necessarily mean that faith issues will be discussed or that spiritual direction will be indicated. As a pastoral therapist I want to echo Wally McKenzie's (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:139) words that I am not interested in attempting conversion within therapy. I am, however, committed to do pastoral care as participatory ethical care in caring *with* people who are in need of care and not to care *for* people (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7) which means that the content of discussions will be collaboratively negotiated. Such a stance is not a caring response borne from a Christian sense of guilt or from paternalistic care and undue protection, but rather, one of 'caring solidarity' that acknowledge that care is interpersonal and needs to be negotiated by all participants (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7,8). An egalitarian relationship in the therapeutic situation, is usually strange to clients as they expect of me, the pastoral therapist, to supply the answers to their questions and even tell them what God would think about their decisions. This principle of caring *with* clients is in contrast with an authoritarian power, where the therapist is the source of knowledge and where theories are deductively imposed on clients.

The egalitarian position, described above, between therapist and client within a collaborative therapeutic approach, is in contrast to a traditional perspective concerning power relationships within a therapeutic context. Traditionally it is a common practice of psychologists and psychiatrists, to assess clients according to a classifying system, the DSM IV - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - that subjugates them to normalising 'truths' (Freedman & Combs 1996:21). This system operates as a labelling technique of power that has a totalising and pathologising effect on the person. A nonpathologising approach, derived from collaborative/constructive therapies, is according to Boyd (1996:216) one of the central tenets of pastoral theology. "Our ultimate relatedness to God takes place in the context of radical nonpathologising grace in which God accepts us without judgement and even without a DSM-IV diagnoses. Rather, God-in-Christ participates with us in a hope-filled conversation toward salvation and wholeness" (Boyd 1996:216).

The power of discourses, also plays a constitutive role in the way people's identities are created and re-created. The sources of discourses vary. Family, the church and popular media are a few sources of discourses that are invested with varying and competing amounts of power. For example, the discourse of the virtuous churchwoman, or the

submissive wife, may be a constitutive force in the construction of a woman's "Christian" identity.

Luckily, Foucault's ideas on power have had significant impact within the narrative therapeutic field (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:35-46). Foucault introduced the idea that power is not the exclusive possession of one person or group that dominates over another. Power must be analysed as something that circulates, as Foucault (1980:98) puts it succinctly, "...individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application". The relational aspect of power, implies resistance within power relations. Therefore women can resist the effects certain discourses have on their identity and related experiences.

2.2.4.1 Resistance

Although the individual is situated in power relations, it is important to remember that relationships are often contradictory and unstable and therefore there is the possibility of challenge and redefinition (Townley 1994:12). It is not only the oppressive forces of domination that hold the monopoly to invent tactics of resistance. We can conclude that nobody is the passive recipient of power or even of abuse. Even to cry can be regarded as a form of resistance. The therapist's task is to search for any slight indication of resistance to the dominant problem-narrative that can be utilised to create the opportunity for an alternative interpretation. Carol's story, recounted in chapter three, tells of her questioning of God's purpose for giving her another chance at attempting to resume a relationship with an ex-boyfriend, if He had known how much pain it would cause her. If we have to believe in a God the way people tell us to believe and not have the freedom to ask questions about God's purposes, then such a faith or teaching "will split off and become a part of our consciousness which has nothing to do with the rest of our human experience" (Hughes 1985:16). Such a faith will not be our own personal-experienced-faith or lived-through-faith that we have (painfully) made our own. To draw closer to God, we need to ask questions. "True Christianity will always be critical, questioning and continually developing in its understanding of God and human life" (Hughes 1985:17). I saw Carol's questioning of God's purposes, as a form of resistance that could enable her to develop a closer relationship with God in the end. Faith, as St Anselm wrote, 'seeks understanding', for it is the nature of true faith to trust that God is at work in everything and there is no question which falls outside the scope of religious enquiry (Hughes 1985:17).

Hess (quoted by Neuger 2001:84) refers to two kinds of resistance, namely creative resistance and bold resistance. Kathleen Billman (quoted by Neuger 2001:84) gives an example of creative resistance by referring to two midwives, ordered by Pharaoh to make sure that Israelite women did not safely give birth to sons. They found a way to disobey Pharaoh without sacrificing their own lives. They told him that the Hebrew women had babies so fast that the midwives often couldn't get there in time. Neuger (2001:84) comments: "Often it is necessary to learn to be subversive in order to both survive and develop a sense of agency". This example of creative resistance resonates with Carol's dream (see section 3.5.4). In her dream she obeyed the devil's command to sing him a song – no resistance – but she sang a gospel song about surrendering to Jesus – creative resistance.

The other kind of resistance, bold resistance, is according to Hess (quoted by Neuger 2001:84) direct opposition to the power of harm which needs a great deal of support or the costs can be devastating. Bons-Storm (quoted by Neuger 2001:85) notes that bold resisters, e.g. women who resist patriarchy's rules for womanhood, often come for counselling, because, if support for resistance is inadequate, then it is hard to maintain a healthy sense of self. The pastoral therapist is also interested in finding traces of resistance of which the client is not even conscious herself. "There is always a history of struggle and protest – always" (White cited in Wylie 1994:43). I am also thinking of Griffith and Griffith's (2002:59) recommendation to ask persons who have experienced hidden abuse or injustice: "What in this situation do God's eyes see that no human eyes see?" Here a relationship with a spiritual being can stand as witness to what is just and unjust and support a client in resisting the unjust act committed against her.

Bons-Storm (1998:23) talks of her experience of working together with women who are afraid to speak their minds in their communities of faith because of traditional roles assigned to them in their socialisation in a patriarchal society and church. Even traditional ways of interpreting Scripture can have a silencing effect on women. As an example, I would question the literal adherence of a child to the Scriptural instruction to "honour your father" (Genesis 20:12) or of a woman to submit to her husband (1 Peter 3:1), in the face of abusive acts committed by the father or husband respectively. Neuger (2001:85,86) identifies women as bold resisters, nonresisters and semi-resisters that come to

counselling and she stresses the need for every woman to find a context that helps to “hear her into speech”. The problem is that as long as a woman’s role remains that of ‘obedient daughter of a father, Fathers, or God the Father’, she cannot speak her mind without being tortured by feelings of guilt and insecurity (Bons-Storm 1998:23). The task of the pastoral counsellor is to help the client to discover alternative/new stories, that give her the authority to speak and resist cultural and religious practices that support her problem saturated story. Neuger (2001:231) proposes a four-phase pastoral counselling framework, and in the second phase, helping women to gain clarity, she identifies the need for resistance. In counselling, alternative knowledges are co-created, but these knowledges often have to resist the dominant forms of discourse found in society. In this phase of gaining clarity, the pastoral counsellor assists the client to re-member and remember experiences and knowledges that contradict the oppressive narrative that limits her options and hope. It is however necessary to also identify and re-member people (see section 5.2.5) that can support the client in the face of dominant forms of discourse in society.

Helping a client to voice her resistance in a safe context, will bring her closer to developing a sense of personal agency.

2.2.4.2 Personal agency

From a narrative perspective, therapy is seen as indicated when a form of agency over one’s life has been lost. Therapy in this mode is about restoring, finding or enabling agency on the part of the client (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:135). Tina Besley (2001:82) acknowledges that although “some discourses are prescriptive and constitute dominant cultural stories, yet within these dominant narratives there are different subjective possibilities for constructing our own distinctive narratives of identity”. A person has the agency to construct very different subject positions. Construing one’s own identity resonates with Foucault’s question, ‘Who are we today?’ and should be considered in terms of the impact of discourse and power on the subject’s sense of identity (McHoul & Grace 1993:viii). Drewery and McKenzie (1999:135) worked with people with strong Christian beliefs that situated power in an external authority that could not be challenged. In this way the clients allowed themselves no agency to address their problems. Drewery and McKenzie (1999:135) give an account of how it was possible to both acknowledge

external authority or power and invoke personal agency while working with a client. They found that by couching the context, language, content of challenges (deconstruction) and the reconstruction of ideas in the language of the belief structure of the client, it was possible to position the person as the author of his story – ‘the actor, rather than as its object – the acted upon’ (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:141). They illustrate, for example, how the therapist looked for a story which would enable the client to move from his powerless position. The therapist invited the client (by means of a story) to comment on when it would be fitting to ask for God’s help, and the therapist also used some of the contradictions in the client’s ideas, that helped the client to accept agency (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:142). Later in their conversation, the therapist was able to respond to the client in the following way: “I’ve heard you give me plenty of evidence that through your life you’ve actually made choices that were the best you could make with the information you had available” (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:142). Such a response indicated personal agency. The therapist continued to ask the client questions about where he (the client) thought the line should be drawn to ask for God’s guidance and help about choices. Later in their conversation this led to the client’s following response: *“I really hadn’t considered the possibility that maybe I can do a few things just by thinking about it, in my own mind so to speak. That is a new concept for me”* (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:142).

If we believe that clients are not wholly constituted by discourses, the implication is that “choice is possible” and “agency is possible...for the one who has the eyes to see that more than one meaning is possible” (Dunlap 1999:137). Keeping in mind that there is no one, eternally correct way to be Christian in the world (Dunlap 1999:138), opens the needed space to consider alternative ways of relating to God.

2.2.4.3 Identity

Taibbi (quoted by Prest & Keller 1993:137,138) identifies adolescence as a time marked by identity development struggles which have been conceptualised as having a spiritual dimension. I do believe, however, that such identity struggles can appear any time in a person’s life cycle, for example, after a divorce, death of a loved one, retirement, etc. Some of the students I had conversations with, struggled with identity issues and with finding out what their own particular truths were in their particular contexts. Bons-Storm (1998:18) argues that one needs allies and dialogue partners to really find out where one’s

own truth lies. She sees 'truth' as the ultimate value, which becomes the point of orientation of one's endeavours to give meaning to all one's experiences. In my therapeutic conversations with students, I sought to be their dialogue partner and to co-construct with each client an avowed truth for the time being, from a position where she stands for the time being (Bons-Storm 1998:18). This position, 'for the time being' indicates a temporary position that is flexible and allows for reconsideration. It means choosing a truth or truths amongst the plurality of possible truths. Foucault (quoted by Dunlap 1999:136) views the individual, or subject position, as the site of continually competing discourses. Subjectivity is fluid because it is constantly being constituted and reconstituted by discourses at battle, and being attentive to this battle, the pastoral care giver can empower people to choose where they will stand (Dunlap 1999:136.137). A subject position for the time being is characterised by the client's awareness of her own ultimate commitment and by the client's own avowed situated contextual truth that she chooses to adhere to and with which she is comfortable for the time being. For Bons-Storm (1998:18) this 'being', understood as being-in-reality, means "realising who one is, ...what the ultimate value is by which one lives...". In bringing a person's situated truth into dialogue with other truths from other discourses, an ongoing dialogue is formed about what could be a shared truth and thus a shared normativity (Bons-Storm 1998:19). A temporary truth, co-constructed in therapy, will give the client the agency needed to commit herself to a preferred ultimate value, and to a preferred relational identity.

The notion that people speak from a fixed identity can be challenged by Derrida's concept of difference (Sampson 1989:11). This term defies the logic of identity, because identity is rather seen as process forever in motion. Choosing to pay attention to a client's self-narratives of e.g. "I've always doubted myself" or as "My own insecurities are causing this problem" from a social constructionist perspective – and not from an essentialist perspective that situate a person's identity as an inner core-identity – had important implications for my therapeutic practices. Instead of focussing on what the client labels as a deficit or one aspect as totalising of her, I chose to focus on the multiplicity of possible ways of construing a self-narrative. Narrative therapy views people's lives as multi-storied and it is impossible to insert all of one's life stories into one dominant story line. Consequently many stories are left unstoried – stories that could result in alternative identity conclusions. I regard people's self narratives as indicative of how they see

themselves (their identity) and how they endeavour to maintain a level of consistent attitude, vision and response in what otherwise would be a situation of fragmentation (Gerkin 1984:99). Gergen (1991:139) describes identity in the following way:

In the postmodern world there is no individual essence to which one remains true or committed. One's identity is continuously emergent, re-formed, and redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships. In the case of "Who am I?" it is a teeming world of provisional possibilities.

The social constructionist idea of identity being constructed within relationship, opens up a space to explore the individual's relationship with God as a way to understand her identity constructions. Inviting God-talk and how God sustained/blessed the client on other occasions, introduced alternative ways of looking at 'self'. I found that it was often the client's faith-talk that helped to give her a sense of who she was in God. For example, one client commented that she realised that God trusted her more than she trusted herself. Her experience of 'self-doubt' could be juxtaposed with God's trust in her. The language people use constructs their world and themselves, but, because language inadequately gives meaning to people's experiences and faith, individuals are "both the site and the subject of a discursive struggle for their identity" (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:138). This struggle is according to Weedon (quoted by Drewery & McKenzie 1999:138) never final, and so one's identity is never beyond challenge.

To be created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28) implies a spiritual dimension to a person's identity. Cochrane et al (1991:23) place the development of a spirituality of the kingdom as central to the pastoral task, which enables the Christian community to discover "the resources of *empowerment* - becoming the human being God intended in the *imago Dei* - one who is full of dignity among others". Self-identity can thus be languaged as being created in the image of God. The theological understanding of the human being created in the image of God has been conceptualised in a number of ways, but traditionally it has been seen as a capacity given by God to humankind, a capacity associated with power (Patton 1993:16). A newer theological interpretation of the term '*imago Dei*', is one that specifies a relation rather than an attribute or a specifiable quality (Patton 1993:17).

2.2.4.4 Relatedness

The concept of *care* and the concept of *relatedness* are included in the interpretation of the term '*imago Dei*'. The concepts of care and relatedness are found to be naturally incorporated into women's descriptions of their identity (Gergen 1991:168). Gergen (1991:168) refers to Carol Gilligan's exploration of the ways in which women set out to solve moral dilemmas. Gergen (1991:168) reports that Gilligan found:

that women typically reach solutions through relating to others...[and] see themselves as existing in a web of relationships held together by bonds of caring. "In all of the women's descriptions," Gilligan concludes, "identity is combined in a context of relationship".

Thus the post-structuralist understanding of identity is that the membership we have in our lives, influences our experience of ourselves (Russell & Carey 2002:25). Archbishop Desmond Tutu described this succinctly: "people become people through other people" (Morrison, quoted by Russell & Carey 2002:25). In the same vein, Gergen (quoted by Russell & Carey 2002:25) says: "Our relationships create our selves, rather than our selves create relationships".

A therapeutic tool that can assist clients in the process of (re)storying a preferred identity, is the practice of re-membering. Michael White introduced Barbara Myerhoff's term, re-membering into narrative therapy by developing the idea that people's identities are shaped by what can be referred to as a 'club of life' (Russell & Carey 2002:24). The practice of re-membering offers the client the opportunity to re-organise the membership of her club of life as a supportive device in the process of creating a preferred identity. One client mentioned to me that she welcomed the 'interdependence' as it helped her to find direction in her life. She also commented that the re-connecting with significant people in her life, invited the obligation of then being accountable to them, regarding certain commitments she made to change certain habits.

Spirituality is according to McCarthy (2002:3), fundamentally concerned with meaning and relationship. This relationship is a connectedness to a tradition and a community "that mediate and hand on the traditions and practices that facilitate the encounter with the sacred" (McCarthy 2002:7). This relatedness is according to Buber (quoted by Kornfeld 1997:84) founded in God: "Buber reminds us that we are in community not because we have so much in common, but because we have God in common" and "Our relationship to

God binds up the space between us; creates community". In the same vein, De Gruchy (1994:6) states that the knowledge of God is inseparable from the knowledge of ourselves and the world. Thus, exploring a client's relationship with God, is connected with the client's understanding of herself and her world.

A postmodern epistemology impacts my approach to practical theology. Practical theology is not something out there waiting to be discovered; it is constructed within our local community, as we engage in it.

2.3 A FEMINIST CONTEXTUAL APPROACH TO PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

During this research process, I chose to listen to the voices of contextual theologies such as liberation and feminist theologies, because I am committed to social transformation (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:4). The understanding in feminist theology is about justice for all as explained by Isherwood and McEwan (1993:79):

...as we find space for ourselves for that which offers integrity and justice, so we change the concrete reality of others. In finding our justice, our liberation, we hold it out to others – namely the oppressors and the oppressive structures. In naming our experience we pose questions, the answering of which will radically change society....faith means responsibility for shaping one's own life in the trust of God, the God experienced in everyday life and in Jesus

Re-constructing a life-giving spirituality *with* clients implies engendering the responsibility (referred to in the above quote) for shaping their own life in the trust of God which will empower them to become agents in creating a more just society. The slogan in feminist theology, 'the personal is political', expresses the interconnectedness of everything and thus an acquired life-giving spirituality will have an impact in the wider community to which the person is connected.

2.3.1 The inevitability of context

Bosch (1991:425) contends that "there is no socially and politically neutral theology". If knowledge is considered to be local, then practical theology is inevitably contextual. Schleiermacher (quoted in Bosch 1991:422) "pioneered the view that all theology was influenced, if not determined, by the context in which it had evolved". Bosch (1991:423) concedes "that *all* theology...is, by its very nature, contextual". In doing theology, whether it is interpreting a biblical text or engaging in a dialogic, interpretive process in therapy, it

involves all relevant contexts. Dreyer (2004:v) sees the relationship between research and theology as a contextual contingency:

A contextual approach to theology implies that we have to relate Christian tradition(s) to our current situation. One way to gain insight into the current situation is by means of empirical research....[which] is ultimately done to deepen the contextual nature of our theology.

Starting with local meanings of God in therapy, means that the contextual theology I engaged in, was theology “from below” (Bosch 1991:423). In this way the dialectic relationship between theory and praxis is turned upside down. Working with people’s local meanings of their spirituality and with their personal relationships to God implies a contextual approach. The participatory approach to theology (Kotzé 2002:4) requires ‘connective understanding’ that is more than mere empathy and implies ‘connecting’ with a person at her level in her context.

Each pastoral therapist works from a basic theological orientation that informs the practices that he/she engages in. Neuger (2001:10) states that it is the pastoral counsellor’s responsibility to be able to articulate his or her theological commitments, especially as theological and faith commitments tend to shape other narrative commitments that we carry. I choose to work from the standpoint of Christian, feminist theology and embrace Neuger’s (2001:x) theological commitments of empowerment, justice, grace and interdependency. Feminist theology is directed towards liberation and is born of a reflection on the pain of sexist oppression in the light of faith (Ackermann 1991:107).

2.3.2 A feminist perspective regarding practical theology

The feminist theological perspective with regard to practical theology, is one of liberating praxis with the aim of social transformation, especially concerning marginalised and oppressed people. Feminist liberation theology seeks to base theological theories on the ethical demands of the commonwealth of God resulting in praxis which is just, loving, freeing and which leads to peace and wholeness (Ackermann 1991:107). With this as my focus of commitment, I trust that I have cared *with* the participants in a genuine and ethical way. Being praxis orientated, a feminist liberation theology values people’s experience, including spiritual experience, knowing that all theology is in a sense experiential and experimental (Ackermann 1991:107). Basing theology in experience is not in itself a new

departure, as human experience has always been the starting point for theological reflection and people tend to forget that scripture and tradition are only 'codified collective human experiences' (Ruether, quoted by Isherwood & McEwan 1993:80). Valuing women's experiences in therapy, including unique spiritual experiences, means to value their feelings as good and healthy, and to re-define their experiences beyond the prescriptions of male definitions (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:82). Elaine Graham (1998:145) points out that feminist theology has often been accused by conservative commentators, of being obsessed with so-called 'inclusive language' as if the tendency is to merely swap all references to God as Father with those of God as Mother. Language about God is crucial to our experiences of God, and to our spirituality, because language does not simply reflect, but also actively shapes, human consciousness (Graham 1998:146) and I assume human experience. I believe that if a woman can only relate to God's saving power from the standpoint of God being a Mother, it is preferable to use language in this way in therapy. Joan Groff (2001:1), for example, mentions one woman's comment: "*The powerful Mother God is one who saves from torment*". Inclusive language like this, is one means of enabling women to envision new models of divine agency. Fageol (quoted by Elaine Graham 1998:146) refers to the Hebrew bible as a rich source for finding images of God as Holy Wisdom who teaches us spiritual discernment and God as 'ruach', the feminine wind-energy who brings creation out of chaos.

Joan Groff (2001:1) says: "So many of us hunger for meaning in our lives and search for who God is amidst the turmoil and stress of daily living. But how often do we take time to reflect on how we perceive God is working in our everyday lives?" Groff (2001:1) argues that theological reflection is indeed powerful and those who take time for this reflection, will be richly blessed. The important element in therapy, where spiritual talk is invited, is to learn and understand the client's belief system and how this may contribute to or maintain the problem, as well as how it may be a resource for solutions (Prest & Keller 1993:141). Thus, the way a client perceives God's working in her life, is a key element to be utilised in addressing the problem(s) in her life.

Feminist theology recognises as one of its tasks the overcoming of old dichotomies and the ushering in of an understanding of pluralism which gives speech to the speechless, which empowers the powerless and which lets outsiders participate (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:91). All people should be invited to share in the dialogue of faith. Bons-Storm

(1998:22) believes that even very shy and marginalised people can put their personal knowledge of the Divine into words and contribute to the dialogue of faith from their contexts, provided they feel that others are interested in dialogue and not merely critical. Curious questioning is one of the hallmarks of narrative therapy. One of my research questions, namely, 'In what ways can a narrative approach in therapy contribute to making the spiritual dimension salient in pastoral care', was aimed at uncovering new stories with clients, as explained by Bons-Storm (1998:23,24):

She [the client] needs new stories, that give her the authority to speak....A woman needs an image of the Divine which will encourage her to raise her voice....Pastoral communication should be a true dialogue of faith.

In a 'true dialogue of faith', faith is understood, not as a static object, but as a process that is the outcome of the willingness to relate experiences in everyday life to stories of the Christian tradition, convinced that the Divine uses ordinary people to fulfil Her/His longing for justice and abundant life for all (Bons-Storm 1998:24). My conversing with clients about faith issues became a two-way traffic where, despite my training in psychology and my theological knowledge, I could learn from clients about their skills to be faithful to what they believed, while living their lives amidst many challenges.

The goal of enabling 'abundant life for all' (Bons-Storm 1998:24) is a confirmation of Denise Ackermann's (1991:111) quest for an "affirmation and promotion of the full humanity of all" as a starting point for practical theologians who want to contribute towards social transformation in our context. Pastoral care needs to be exercised by people who subscribe to women's full humanity in such a manner that God's concern is expressed (Ackermann 1991:110). Inviting God's perspective in the therapeutic conversation, can be a comfort to a woman who experienced an injustice, and can be an affirmation and promotion of her full humanity. A relationship with a spiritual being can stand as witness to what is just and unjust (Griffith & Griffith 2002:59). When a student told me about an injustice she experienced, I asked her about God's perspective. She said that God did not want her to hurt so much and that God is always there for her, no matter what. She also believed only God knows how much she is hurting and what she is going through. Griffith and Griffith (2002:59) propose that the awareness of an omniscient witness may make the unbearable situation bearable. I believe that opening space for this student to describe

what she considered to be significant and a resource, made her spiritual resource more sustaining and available to her.

Healing is a core concern of a feminist theology of praxis (Ackermann & Bons-Storm 1998:7). Healing praxis is concrete, rooted in the understanding that daily living is not separated from the life of faith. The cry for healing is also inseparable from the need for justice (Ackermann 1998:83). Griffith and Griffith (2002:6) have found that asking questions about how spirituality and religion matters in people's lives, often opened therapy to the healing possibilities inherent in the spirituality of clients that consulted them. In my conversations with students, their faith in God often gave them the assurance that all will be well in the end, no matter how much they struggle at the moment. Inviting talk about a client's relationship with God, is a challenge "to honour the indeterminacy of the relationship [the client's relationship with God] by open-heartedly receiving that relationship into the room, by believing that it holds numerous possibilities for movement, and by conversing in a way that brings forward its many possibilities" (Roth 1995:142).

The focus in feminist theology on pluralism, lived experience, individual worth, equality, justice [and transformation] supply the tools to make a shift from seeing religion as controlling life to seeing it as a way of understanding life (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:135,92). Isherwood and McEwan's (1993:61) position on religion is as follows:

Religion is not about standing still, repeating established 'truths', being limited by accepted interpretations; religion is about the communion of community in the present, the inter-relatedness of everybody, connecting and networking, carrying and caring. Thus feminist theology presents a radical critique of religious and theological thinking stuck in notions of patriarchal supremacy.

The social transformation envisaged by feminist thought is not seen as just a change in action against the injustices caused by the dualisms of patriarchy, but also "a change in attitude on a level we could call spiritual" (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:11). This type of change is indicated by Isherwood and McEwan (1993:11) as:

'metanoia' in the language of theology and [it] means turning around, going in the opposite direction....These changes cannot be legislated for; legislation catches up with these changes once they have occurred.

I questioned a student about her seemingly passiveness regarding the disrespectful way her boyfriend treated her. Her comment was that men usually dominate women and this is

just the way the world is. I asked curious questions about what values she treasured in a relationship and how this influenced her preferred identity, as well as God's perspective of her own worthiness. By thickening her preferred way of being, it gradually dawned on her that she need not comply to the dominant discourse she referred to, namely that 'this is the way the world is, that men dominate women'. Pastoral narrative therapy can thus be a way of bringing about transformation, not by legislation, but by highlighting people's own experiences and their worthiness in God's eyes and referring to Jesus' treatment of women.

Feminist theology places authority firmly within the individual's own experience within a concrete situation. To co-create a life-giving spirituality does not mean relying on religious 'truths' as understood by the faith community to which the client belongs, but rather becoming involved in the details of the client's everyday life, making meaning of her personal faith experiences and finding ways to utilise her own theology to give hope and enhance her self-determination.

2.3.3 My action domain: Humanity and Religion

Practical theology as a theory of action is defined by Heitink (1999:6) as the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society. The theory of action is the core of an integrative approach to practical theology which is rooted in the theological and "action-theoretical" character of practical theology (Heitink 1999:240). Heitink (1999:249) discerns three action domains of practical theology.

This research project was positioned within the action domain of humanity and religion (Heitink 1999:260) and uses an anthropological point of departure. During this research project, I was concerned with the individual's perspective "in relation to the manner in which one gives meaning and significance to one's life, by religious means" (Heitink 1999:259). Regarding my research aims (see section 1.6) I would like to add that the meaning given to one's life, by religious means, will also include the way the client regards the problems she experiences. The core of practical-theological anthropology comprise a combination of the themes of subjectivity, meaning, religious development and religious experience (Heitink 1999:263). The themes of subjectivity, meaning-making and experience are naturally part of the practice of narrative therapy and focusing on these aspects was concomitant with my actions in this study. These themes are also found to be

inextricably connected with each other, and each one implies the other. However, the discussion in chapter three focuses on the student's relational identity (subjectivity), but not at the expense of the meaning-making and experience-components. The focus of the discussion in chapter four is on religious experience and religious development, but also not at the expense of subjectivity and meaning-making.

The anthropological segment of practical theology places the individual subject in a central position with the focus on how religion and faith can contribute to the process in which the individual becomes a subject (Heitink 1999:264), or as elsewhere stated, the process of individualisation (Heitink 1999:260). Paying attention to this process seemed to be most needed as was found in a study of young people, executed in 1993 by the Institute of Practical Theology of the Free University in Amsterdam (Heitink 1999:260). According to this study the church cannot contribute much in the process of opening space for the unique experiences of individuals, and it is recommended that the individual competencies of self-worth, self-reflection and flexibility are to be developed by a "recognisable community" (Heitink 1999:260). Heitink (1999:260) writes:

The world in which young people live consists of a large number of subordinate worlds that are detached from one another. The differentiation in society leads to fragmentation of the world of experience. There will have to be space in the transmission of faith...for "questioning and searching" rather than for "stating and knowing", and for the search for one's individual path.

This is where I see myself as a narrative therapist in a position to open this space for students where they can feel free to question and to search for their individual path (within relational connectedness) and where a nurturing climate will facilitate the development of the competencies of self-worth, self-reflection and flexibility. These competencies are important components in the construal of identity. In chapter three my journeying with one student, Carol, in search of her individual path, is described. The social constructionist idea of relational identity or subjectivity¹ is used as a focal point in the discussion of her personal story. Carol's relationship with God can be seen as a golden thread that is woven into all our conversations that contributed in a life-giving way to her process of individualisation. In chapter four, the theme of religious experience and religious development is a focal point in the discussion of my conversations with two other students,

¹ Subjectivity is in essence directed toward a relationship with other (Heitink 1999:264), hence the term relational identity. Also see a discussion of the relationality of identity in section 3.4.

Sally and Ruth. Ruth also found her individual path as illustrated in section 4.3.3.3, 'A new identity in Christ'.

2.3.3.1 *Religious development as a basic theme of practical theology*

Religious development is a fourth theme discerned by Heitink (1999:266) who asserts that people give religious meaning to their lives on the basis of a religious development that has taken place in their lives, and he sees an understanding of this process of religious development as a prerequisite for the development of instruments for assisting people in this aspect of their lives. Such an approach of applying instruments to identify a person's developmental position and helping her to move toward more mature religious judgement or faith activity, is however, not suitable for a researcher working from a social constructionist perspective (Day 2002:83). James Day (2002:63–85) outlines many reasons why such an approach is not tenable, for example, "subjects speak at more than one developmental level at a time, and how they appear developmentally is more a function of how they wish to be heard than 'how they are'" (Day 2002:71). Several theories about religious development have been developed, of which Fowler's (1981) stages of faith is the most well-known. Day (2002:72) states his opposition to such an approach (e.g. using Fowler's stage-faith-theory as normative) as follows:

...we have seen how the constructivist case for universal, invariant, and irreversible stages in religious development leaves much to be desired. On grounds of internal consistency, empirical verifiability, and the breadth and depth of religious experience which we might wish to better appreciate, the cognitive-developmental project appears at once conceptually misbegotten and empirically weak. Reducing religious experience to the supposed deep structures of religious logic (which as we have seen, has been shown to be of questionable value on both epistemological grounds and grounds of empirical testing) and hierarchies of relative developmental sophistication might seem, on other grounds an objectionable endeavour.

Alternatively, Day (2002:83-85) presents a constructionist approach to religious development that stresses seven features, starting with the narrative features of psychological functioning, to be taken seriously by the pastoral counsellor. To understand religious development, the focus is, (as an alternative to applying instruments), on speech, language and narrative embedded in interpersonal relationships (Day 2002:63,64). It is especially the fourth constructionist feature, the notion of audience, (Day 2002:84) regarding religious development, that is centralised in my discussions in chapter four. Day (2002:84) reflects on the notion of *audience*, of not talking about, but talking to (the

implication is that the client talks to God) and he suggests that this notion becomes the focus of pastoral work. The notion of religious development plays an important role in the process of re-constructing a life-giving spirituality. This will be further discussed in chapter four.

What I found useful, concerning religious development, were the three elements distinguished by Hughes (1985:11), namely the institutional, critical and mystical elements that should always be present in the adult's religion to some extent. In listening to students' meaning making, knowledge of these elements was utilised in posing questions that created an awareness of a possible over-emphasising of one element at the expense of the other elements. Knowledge of these elements also alerted me to the competencies of 'self-worth', 'self-reflection' and 'flexibility' (Heitink 1999:260) and informed questions like the following: "Where does this idea come from that you had to comply with their wish for a transfer to this congregation?" This question links with my first aim, to explore how narrative therapy elicits and shapes alternative personal spiritual ideas as well as with developing a sense of self-worth. Another question might be "If you look back over what has transpired, what do you think were your contribution, apart from God's protection, in achieving your aim?" This question might enhance the development of the competency of self-reflection, as well as contribute to the co-construction of a richer meaning-making of life events, as indicated by the second aim of this research. A question that engaged the competency of flexibility, was, for example: "Can you draw me a picture in words of how you think God would want your future to look like, regarding this problem of yours?" This question might also have encouraged the client to shift from being pre-occupied with her problem to welcoming other perspectives that were more life-giving. This question links with the third aim of exploring the transformative effects of conversations about a personal spirituality on a client's perception of and ways of addressing problems in his/her life. The competencies of self-worth, self-reflection and flexibility correspond with Hughes' three elements in the following way: (See Appendix C for a summary of these three elements).

Firstly, the institutional element fulfils the need for protection and affection that helps the person to develop a sense of self-worth. The utility of this element was to explore how the handed-down-religious-truths influenced the student's sense of self-worth. Secondly, the critical element invites people to question, criticise, systematise and theorise about experiences (Hughes 1985:16) that helps the person to make meaning of experiences.

Self-reflection as a competency can be developed and utilised to assist in meaning making during the stage of critical evaluation. Opening space for “questioning and searching” endorse the need for self-reflection as highlighted by Heitink (1999:260). The third element, namely the mystical element, enables the individual to come closer to self and to God who communicates Him-/Herself through mysterious inner experiences (Hughes 1985:18). The competencies of flexibility and imagination are needed to make room for the mystery of God. The use of metaphors, stories, visualisations, etc. encouraged and extended students’ use of their imagination. These three elements are all experiential contingencies that were explored in therapy. In chapter four, for example, the focus is on students’ image and experience of God that provided alternative and new knowledge about their personal faith.

2.3.3.2 Spirituality as a sub-discipline of practical theology

Spirituality is identified by Heitink (1999:271) as one of three sub-disciplines that warrant a separate action domain with the focus of maintaining and recovering personal faith in a society where a revival of spirituality is most needed. Furet (quoted by Heitink 1999:272) defines spirituality as a personal and/or corporate, fundamental, more or less continuous life orientation of a religious nature.

The concept of ‘fundamental life orientation’ corresponds with what Gerkin (1991:16) requests for Christians, namely, a normative vision of what life is and should be. I explored with each student what her preferred way of being and preferred identity was and how it would be possible to live comfortably in a situation that was not considered to be ideal. Heitink (1999:272) proposes that it is also necessary to “give attention to differences in spirituality and to a plurality of ways of experiencing faith, in particular among Protestants” (Heitink 1999:272). The three different spiritualities that Heitink (1999:272) discerns, corresponds with the three elements that Hughes (1985:11) distinguishes as elements in people’s religious development. These are presented in a table for the sake of clarity:

| Elements identified by Hughes (1985:11) | Spiritualities identified by Heitink (1999:272) |
|---|--|
| The institutionalised element | Conservative, charismatic, evangelical, and sacramental spiritualities |
| The critical element | A spirituality that is critical of social structures |
| The mystical element | A mystical or experiential spirituality |

Attention should be paid to these elements or spiritualities as they are considered to be essential to maintaining and recovering personal faith. Consideration of these elements as critical in religious development, is something the pastoral therapist can include in therapeutic conversations when it seems appropriate. Fowler's (1981:xiii) theory of growth in faith can also be considered as knowledge that can inform questions with the aim to develop the competency of self-reflection. Fowler's growth theory is presented in seven developmental stages of faith, namely, infancy and undifferentiated faith, intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-conventional faith, individuative-reflective faith, conjunctive faith and universalising faith. Heitink (1999:266) points out that progression through the stages is desirable and that it is crucial, for example, to move from a conventional faith to a personal conviction faith. This latter faith stage is expected to be reached at the age of seventeen years and older. Considering students' age level, this may be the time when some of them had not yet found the freedom or need to question handed down truths that might trouble them. In the pastoral therapeutic situation an opportunity was created for such questioning, re-interpretations and re-positioning regarding their personal faith convictions. This may even, unknowingly, prevent a student from turning away from the faith altogether if personal questions about faith/religious issues do not receive attention.

2.4 PASTORAL CARE AND THERAPY

The action of pastoral care has been traditionally categorised in the four modes of guidance, healing, reconciling and sustaining. Pattison's (1993:13,15) definition of pastoral care counters the negative image of struggling with sin and suffering, by having a positive goal of growth and fulfilment for *all* people, not solely directed towards Christians:

Pastoral care is that activity, undertaken especially by representative Christian persons, directed towards the elimination and relief of sin and sorrow and the presentations of all people perfect in Christ to God.

Pastoral care is not just for the church but for the world, and practice confirms the example of Jesus who set out to serve the needy of the world (Pattison 1993:16). I am currently having conversations with a twenty-one year old student who struggles with addiction to drugs and dagga and who refuses to have anything to do with Christianity or with the church, even though his parents are Christians. My aim is not to convert him to the Christian faith. My activity is rather “directed towards the elimination and relief of [the] sin [the harm he is doing to himself] and [the] sorrow” that he is experiencing (Pattison 1993:13) and “to help [him] to know love, both as something to be received and as something to give”, also to himself (Campbell, quoted by Pattison 1993:16). I believe that it is the work of the Spirit to convince someone of sin in his/her life and not that of the pastoral caregiver.

Thomas Moore (1992:20) found that care of the soul requires a different language from that of therapy and academic psychology. He describes it as an art and he stresses the need for the reverence of the mystery of human life and a negation of the secularisation of experience. Moore (1992:20) contends that it takes a broad vision to know that a piece of the sky and a chunk of the earth lie lodged in the heart of every human being, and that if we are going to care for that heart we will have to know the sky and earth as well as human behaviour. As analogy Moore (1992:21) refers to the Greek story of the minotaur:

...the bull-headed flesh-eating man who lived in the centre of the labyrinth. He was a threatening beast, and yet his name was Asterion – Star. I often think of this paradox as I sit with someone with tears in her eyes, searching for some way to deal with a death, a divorce, or a depression. It is a beast, this thing that stirs in the core of her being, but it is also the star of her innermost nature. We have to care for this suffering with extreme reverence so that, in our fear and anger at the beast, we do not overlook the star.

I consider the star to be every human being created in the image of God. Saint Teresa (1957:308) refers to St Augustine who puts this particularly well when he says that neither in the cities, nor in pleasures, nor in any other place where he sought Him, did he find Him as he did within himself. Saint Teresa (1957:308) also refers to a vision she had of her soul being a mirror of the Lord:

It was explained to me that when a soul is in mortal sin this mirror is covered with a thick mist and remains so dark that the Lord cannot be reflected or seen in it, even though He is always present and gives us our being. In the case of heretics, the mirror is much worse than darkened; it has the appearance of being broken.

When things go terribly wrong, doubt is an amenable visitor; doubt if God really cares and doubt in one's own judgement. I was not able to give Carol (see chapter three) the answers she cried for so desperately. I could not explain God's will in the dilemma she was finding herself in. But by being a witness to her pain and confusion, and by co-creating possible alternative meanings, and by extracting God's blessings in other areas of her life, hope was rekindled and a much wiser Carol survived the grief of a broken heart. Although the unhappiness still shows itself occasionally, she testified to being more appreciative of what life offers her, "*even little things like being able to walk and having friends that care*". Exploring someone's awareness of God's presence amidst the pain and incomprehensibility of events, may bring hope and highlight the spiritual dimension as life-giving, also to the physical, emotional and social aspects of life.

For therapists working from a social constructionist perspective, the uniqueness of the client and the uniqueness of the situation will determine, moment by moment, how to proceed. A pastoral counsellor enters a pastoral conversation in the spirit of the One who calls him or her into that kind of relationship (Boyd 1996:222). For Boyd (1996:220), who is a pastoral counsellor, the collaborative interaction between therapist and client, focuses without judgement on the client's definition of problem and solution. Reality (and change) goes where the conversation goes (Boyd 1996:219). Boyd (1996:220) quotes Goolishian and Anderson's description of the therapeutic process:

The process of therapy is not to reveal the truth or to impose a reality, but to explore through conversation, through languaging, realities that are compatible with a particular client's unique tendency to attribute meaning and explanation in his or her own life.

My task in pastoral practice is to create a safe space in which human *and* divine encounters can flourish (Graham 1998:149). It is within such encounters that the opportunity is created to co-construct meaning that will enhance a life-giving spirituality. To be truly a life-giving spirituality, pastoral therapists should regard their work with clients from a holistic perspective.

2.4.1 Holistic thinking

Holistic thinking suggests that individuals must not be isolated from their social context in either conceptualisation or action (Pattison 1993:89). Thayer (1985:76) contends:

Religion and spirituality have to do not only with intellect and volition, but also with behaviour, affect, intuition, and aesthetic sensibility. The full human being creates and responds to the world on the basis of a diversity of “mental” and sensory capabilities. The response to the world and the effect of the world’s response upon the person alters or reinforces the basic way in which the person understands and interprets reality.

A holistic approach thus transcends dualist understanding of mind/body, psychology/spirituality. People today are still caught in, what Gerkin (1986:15) called, the fragmentation of daily living, brought about by the pluralism of values and the pluralism of languages for interpretation of what human life in the world is about. This causes people to experience identity problems and other related problems that lead them to seek counselling. Likewise, Moore (1992:xi, xiii) advocates the necessity of a way out of dualistic attitudes that cause divisions between mind and body, psychology and spirituality, and between therapy and spiritual practice. Moore (1992:x, xi) contends that a spiritual life of some kind is absolutely necessary for psychological “health”, but he warns that excessive or ungrounded spirituality can also be dangerous, leading to all kinds of compulsive and even violent behaviour. Margaret Kornfeld (1997:79) a pastoral psychotherapist, agrees that “dualism is an idea that makes us sick”. Clinebell (quoted by Pattison 1993:89) argues that “pastoral care and counselling must be holistic, seeking to enable healing and growth in all dimensions of human wholeness”. An inclusive perspective of human nature, taking the emotional, volatile, non-cognitive and even the irrational side of human nature into account (Rossouw 1993:900), influence the practice (action) of pastoral therapy. Part of the postmodern culture is a growing consensus that human behaviour is not exclusively motivated by independent rational thinking (Rossouw 1993:900).

I paid attention to Carol’s dreams (see sections 3.5.3 and 3.5.4) that can be considered the irrational side of human nature and I also asked about her bodily awareness when she mentioned certain emotions. When she described the comfort she found in worshipping God during a church service, she put her hand on her chest and said she felt the peace and comfort in her heart. My aim was to encourage an awareness of other faculties, apart from the cognitive. Griffith and Griffith (2002:107-184) reported on client’s descriptions of bodily experiences when talking to God:

“It (the ‘I am God’) radiates warmth and feeling...around the middle part of my chest” (p.107)...In answer to the questions: “Where has this conversation taken you in your body?” and “Where do you experience it?” the client answered: “I feel it from here (points to center of chest)” (p. 131)...“Through my head and upper body, kind of from the waist up” (p. 184).

These reports of bodily experiences, which may be interpreted as manifestations of a spiritual awareness, are according to Griffith and Griffith (2002:107) real dialogical conversations and not monologues: “Person-God conversations, like human conversations, need to become dialogical rather than monological if they are to provide the creativity needed to solve life problems”. My role as therapist is to be a witness of clients’ relationships with God and to find a way to invite God’s voice in therapeutic conversations. In referring to Satre’s characters in *No Exit*, Griffith and Griffith (2002:110) say that we can see ourselves only as we are witnessed through the eyes of others.

Peoples’ spirituality impacts various aspects of personal mental health and interpersonal behaviour. It has an impact on the satisfactions and the stresses that people experience, and it impacts the problems they bring into counselling – whether these be regarded as explicitly spiritual or not (Everts & Agee 1994:293). Inviting spiritual talk into the therapeutic situation, can facilitate the defragmentation of peoples’ fragmented lives. The following quote (McCarthy 2002:5) stresses the encompassing, merging, unitive nature of spirituality:

...every authentic spirituality is unitive, integrative, and holistic. It is “concerned with the full range of human experience, every inch and ounce of it and with integrating the whole of one’s life in the light of more than meets the eye” (Downey 1997, pp.22-23). As Lucien Richard says, “A spirituality that involves the person, must include body and soul, individual and community, the inner and outer life” (2000 p. 78). Authentic spirituality is rooted in an intuitive apprehension of the interrelatedness and unity of all things and is expressed in non-dualistic thinking and action. It has the ability to “reconcile opposites (including its own opposite) under an ultimate unity...” (Dupre 1979, .p.18).

Counselling becomes pastoral when either the dialogue partner or the pastor aligns the relationship with God’s relation to the process of their lives (Oates, quoted by De Jongh van Arkel 2000:139). De Jongh van Arkel (2000:139) points out that: “Although people come seeking personal help, they do not merely want to reorganise their relationship to themselves and others but also their relationship with God”.

I believe if someone reorganises her relationship with God, it impacts all aspects of her life. Downey (quoted by McCarthy 2002:14) suggests:

...we as selves are related to other in mutual ties of trust and loyalty, of reliance and care; but that dyad is grounded in our common relatedness to a third member, a center of value and power that bears the weight of ultimacy for us. Our relatedness to a spiritually engaging center affects all the other relations of our lives.

Thus, paying attention to a person's spirituality, implies a holistic approach to both the conceptualisation of what being human means, as well as to the action I engage in, in attending to the client.

Clients have to be encouraged to challenge themselves to change (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:229), but the final confidence to bring about change, will be placed in the power and work of the Spirit (Gerkin 1984:70).

2.4.2 Towards transformation

David Tracey (1983:72) comments that the principle praxis criteria for practical theology are criteria of transformation. From a feminist perspective the aim of spiritual direction is not an adjustment to circumstances, but rather transformation based on a vision of the reign of God which might include a recognition of the harmful effects of oppression based on gender, class and race (Fischer 1988:15). The feminist conviction that the personal is the political, may lead to a revolutionary vision of human life that will enable people to move toward greater freedom and wholeness, while challenging the structures that impede this (Fischer 1988:14,15).

Healing and growth means change. People may both want it and fear it. Change and growth can be brought about through therapeutic conversations. Berkhof (quoted by De Jongh van Arkel 2000:141) points to the singular importance of dialogue: "...we know from experience that many people owe their religious growth to discussion far more than to the church's officially recognised means of salvation". The rule, however, is "help towards self-help" (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:142). Although the responsibility for change rests with the client, genuine empathy, genuine dialogue and collaboration between therapist and client can provide the client with the freedom to choose actions consistent with her faith. Willingness to be transformed, taking responsibility, personal agency and discernment come into play. Richard Niebuhr (quoted by Gerkin 1986:20) in his book, *The*

Responsible Self, grapples with the meaning of responsibility in an increasingly pluralistic world. For Niebuhr (Gerkin 1986:20) the first element of responsibility is simply the idea of response. I think that the mere fact of making an appointment with a counsellor, indicates the person's reaction to something in her life that she wants to be addressed and changed. I regard this to be a significant first step. Transformation does not happen all at once, but through constant, tiny choices that alter a person in almost imperceptible ways (Bidwell 2004:73).

A logical outcome of the postmodern debate is to develop a tentative and eclectic approach to therapy by integrating ideas from quite different models, rather than an evangelical allegiance to one approach (Hart 1995:187).

2.4.3 A narrative approach to pastoral therapy

I choose the narrative metaphor as a workable lens to consider how meanings are constructed, while being open to the usefulness of different therapeutic perspectives. In choosing a narrative approach to therapy, I also attempt to "originate" while "copying" (Hart 1995:188):

White states, using Geertz's proposition, that "it is the copying that originates" and that copying only provides the point of entry from which a new journey can be undertaken; that the story about therapy is not the journey itself.

Not adhering to one approach, implies a critical stance that will encourage dialogue between different views and models. It will also prevent a particular therapeutic theory to become a unitary body of knowledge and to become a practice of power, particularly over clients in a therapeutic relationship. I hold lightly onto narrative therapy as a means of engaging in therapeutic conversations, because I recognise that narrative therapy is a socially constructed reality supported by many assumptions, just as much as any other set of ideas (Doan 1998:385).

The social constructionist idea of how we make meaning, can be used as a rationale for using a narrative approach to therapy:

We live with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories and self descriptions.
(Anderson & Goolishian, quoted by Hart 1995:184)

From a feminist perspective, I consider my engagement with people's stories in therapy, as essentially "creating the space in which human and divine encounters can flourish" (Graham 1998:149). Gerkin (1986:52) proposes that, by means of stories of the self and of the world around us, we hold together events, persons and experiences that would otherwise be fragmented. White (2004:42) explains that the narrative structures provide the basis for conclusions about people's own purposes, values, beliefs, hopes and commitments in life – and I would like to add, about their own spirituality. The ways in which narrative therapy engage with people's stories per se, do not differ from ways of engaging in their spiritual talk. In their book, *Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy*, Griffith and Griffith (2002:83-102) explain how the narrative metaphor guides their work with spiritual stories.

Narrative therapy supports the notion that people are capable of re-authoring the narratives in which they have been acculturated. It is the task of the narrative therapist to assist people in deconstructing the plots imposed on them and assist them in transforming themselves by opening space for new stories to develop. Freedman and Combs (quoted by Neuger 2001:54) reiterates that counselling involves facilitating experience of new stories – life narratives that are more empowering, more satisfying, and give hope for better futures. If a woman has been shaped into a meaning-making framework that says women don't have the gifts or the right to make a meaningful contribution to the world, then finding the flaws in that story line and the exceptions to it, won't change the fact that she lives in a sexist world with all of its dangers, but she will be able to resist some of those dangers and build a future that is less problematic and more satisfying (Neuger 2001:55). This is an example of narrative change that comes about by the process of deconstruction.

Deconstructing a belief entails an enquiry to discover the interpretive assumptions and cultural origins out of which a particular belief emerged. The task of the therapist is to enrich the person's understanding and to provide a choice as to the role the belief is to play in the person's life. New openings often appear when alternative stories surface. I am thinking here of the well-known story of a man's dream about two sets of foot prints in the sand, indicating that the Lord had been walking with the man on his journey through life. Then the man noticed only one set of foot prints when he experienced the lowest and saddest times in his life. He asked the Lord why He abandoned him when he needed Him

most. The Lord then replied that those were the times when He carried him. Transformation was possible for this man as a result of deconstructing his narrative. Transformation is possible when “the twisting of a familiar theme into a new shape is sometimes more revealing and ultimately more significant than acquiring new knowledge and a new set of principals” (Moore 1992:xvii). In 2 Corinthians 6:9-10 St Paul sets an example of twisting a familiar theme into a new shape when he describes his hardships: “dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrow-full, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

Through a narrative therapeutic conversation, the world can be construed differently. “It is the claim of our faith, and the warrant for our ministry, to insist that our peculiar memory in faith provides the materials out of which an alternatively construed world can be properly imagined” (Brueggemann 1993:17,18). John Lee (1993:16,17) refers to the transformative or therapeutic power of narrative and expresses his belief that stories “can be a vehicle for God’s incarnation” and that a story can be used to embody God. Lee (1993:17) explains that “a person who shares his or her own story of rebellion and reconciliation may invoke the presence of God, full of mercy and grace.” In my own therapy, I recall a student’s sharing of a significant spiritual moment that she designated as an invaluable learning experience. She told me that many ideas in her studies of theology confused her and the continuous invitation to think critically caused her to often think of the church and religion as a farce. She decided to attend religious meetings with a diverse group of people from different denominations, age groups, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and different educational levels. Her spiritual moment was a deep feeling of kinship with the human race when an elderly German man recounted what Christ meant to him and the time when he felt totally lost and could not believe any longer. She said she could feel his trepidation as he shared how he acknowledged his ‘doubting faith’ to a minister and then his ensuing surprise when the minister did not question this, but responded only with a nod, saying “Mm”. This might sound very trivial, but in that moment, he experienced God’s grace. The student witnessed what she called an honest sacred moment that brought healing in the welcoming of doubting God’s presence. Paradoxically, her faith was strengthened in that moment and also in her re-telling of this story to me as a witness. I find the connectedness or relationality of this experience significant. A series of connections can be observed, namely, all the relationships amongst one another, e.g. the

student's relationship with me, the therapist, the man and the rest of the (witnessing) group; and God's relationship with each individual as well as with the group as a whole. God's healing was manifested here in relationship – and therefore I assume that a therapeutic relationship that invites conversations about God is fertile soil where stories can be used to embody God.

The heart of narrative theory is a firm belief in the client's resilience, her possibility for change and the firm belief in the transformative effect of languaging stories into new meanings. I subscribe to Neuger's (2001:56) conviction that this approach to counselling is deeply grounded in and compatible with the theology of God's constant invitation to possibility, co-creation, and a closer approximation of God's kingdom.

2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed how ideas of postmodernism, social constructionism and feminist theology informed the praxis of pastoral care and therapy I engaged in. In the following chapter I discuss how narrative practices were used to utilise spiritual talk in the co-construction of an alternative relational identity with my co-traveller, Carol, that was more life-giving.

CHAPTER THREE

NARRATIVE PASTORAL THERAPEUTIC PRACTICES

But we have this treasure in jars of clay
to show that this all-surpassing power
is from God and not from us.

2 Corinthians 4:7

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I focus on the narrative pastoral therapeutic practices that I engaged in while working collaboratively with students. To illustrate these practices, I give an account of one student I worked with in therapy. The focus of this chapter is more specifically to illustrate how the practices of narrative therapy were used to deconstruct the student's problem saturated identity descriptions and to co-construct an alternative, more life-giving, identity description within her belief system. A concern with subjectivity (identity) and meaning-making connects with Heitink's themes within practical-theological anthropology, as explained in section 2.3.3, my action domain, where the themes of subjectivity, meaning and experience were highlighted as inextricably connected with each other and as being naturally part of narrative therapeutic practices. In the following chapter, two other students will be introduced to illustrate how our conversations – as praxis – and theory are intertwined in the “action-theoretical” character of practical theology (Heitink 1999:240) where the focus will be more on religious experiences.

Narrative therapy with its foundations in a social constructionist epistemology, is especially apposite to elicit spiritual talk during therapeutic conversations.

3.2 NARRATIVE PASTORAL THERAPY AND SPIRITUAL TALK

The practices of a pastoral therapist is of necessity founded in her personal theological position. This position and commitments of the therapist need to be clearly stated in order to work ethically. Cochrane et al. (1991:16) require of practical theologians to make explicit “the role of our prior commitment to a particular way of being in the world”. I choose to comply with De Jongh van Arkel's (2000:189) expectation that:

Pastoral therapists work from a spiritual and theological perspective, caring for people who are troubled, hurt, abused or oppressed, using the resources of forgiveness and renewal to heal and make whole, helping them to discover the possibility and presence of God's grace in their lives....By helping people

reconnect their own narratives to what Gerkin (1986:30) calls the grounding narratives of faith, it gives human life meaning, affirms people, help them to discover self-worth and rekindle hope (Van den Blink 1995:205).

In responding to De Jongh van Arkel's expectations of pastoral therapists, narrative therapy is my preferred therapeutic approach that guides my pastoral interactions with people in need. Narrative therapy is not a formula and not a set of techniques, but rather a philosophical stance and a way of being in the world. Narrative therapy is a deliberate activity that seeks to have a respectful, non-blaming approach to clients and regards clients to have all the knowledge and frameworks to create meaning in their own lives. Narrative therapy has an optimistic approach that believes in the resilience and strength of people, and in their possibilities for change and for re-authoring their lives. These tenets, as well as the tenet of empowerment are in keeping with what I consider to be God's will for our lives and, importantly, with my foundational theology.

Like Cochrane et al. (1991:16), Christie Neuger (2001:56) also advises pastoral counsellors to make sure that every counselling theory they use, are "in keeping with and informed by his or her foundational theology". A foundational theology informs a pastoral counsellor's perspective, her focus of attention and the practices she engages in. Neuger (2001:11) believes that every pastoral counsellor, by virtue of their vocation and training, has a set – either implicit or explicit – of theological pathways for interpretation and meaning making. Neuger (2001:57) calls for all pastoral counsellors to be conscious of their theological commitments that guide them in their ministry and states that: "Their faith commitments deeply shape the ways in which they listen to their counselees and the directions they take in trying to offer help". Narrative therapy as my preferred therapeutic approach is influenced by my personal foundational theology in the following way: I work from a standpoint of Christian theology and I believe that we are all created in God's image, and that we are all equal, but unique, before God. This supports my striving to create an egalitarian relationship with every client and to honour her uniqueness in every aspect. I believe that Jesus did not come to judge the world (John 8:5) and that I therefore have no right to judge others. I live by God's loving grace. I believe what is written in Psalm 145:8,9: "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made". I have to try to mirror this attitude to clients. I believe that God's will is not an impersonal blue-print for living, forced on us, but that God invites us to explore possibilities and to co-create with Him the

meaning of our lives “...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). I believe that God endowed us with a free will to choose how we want to live our life and my task as pastoral therapist is to co-create alternative meanings with clients that will be more life-giving to them. I also believe that God is more than our limited understanding of the dualism of male and female. Isaiah 66:13, for example, testifies to God’s motherly qualities: “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you”. The implication for therapy is to invite the feminine nurturing qualities of God in spiritual talk with a client that can be healing and restorative.

The compatibility of my foundational theology and the practice of narrative therapy supports and facilitates the invitation to spiritual talk that would be healing and empowering to students (see research question 1.5.2).

Narrative therapy enables me to work with people to experience their narratives and their re-storying as meaningful, and not necessarily to find solutions to their problems.

Listening to White, we no longer tried to solve problems. Instead, we became interested in working with people to bring forth and “thicken” (Geertz 1978) stories that did not support or sustain problems.

(Freedman & Combs 1996:15,16)

...an acceptable outcome would be the identification or generation of alternative stories that enable them [persons seeking therapy] to perform new meanings, bringing with them desired possibilities – new meanings that persons will experience as more helpful, satisfying and open-ended.

(White & Epston 1990:15).

Carlson and Erickson (2000:67) found that the principles of narrative therapy offer a unique way to enter into the spiritual stories of people’s lives. The respectful not-knowing approach of the narrative therapist, for example, enables her to ask questions about how the client is experiencing God with regard to her problem. Practices of narrative therapy that enable the therapist to enter into the spiritual stories of people’s lives, are for example, externalising, deconstructive listening and deconstructing questions (see sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2 for a discussion).

The narrative therapist assumes that people make meaning and live their lives through the stories (also stories about spiritual matters) they create in relationship with others to give their lives coherence. But these stories have gaps and inconsistencies and alternative meanings not yet spoken. “Derrida and other deconstructionists believe that it is fruitless

to search for the one 'real' or 'true' meaning of any text, as all narratives are full of gaps and ambiguities" (Freedman & Combs 1996:46). Inconsistencies and ambiguities in clients' meaning making are 'discovered' by the narrative therapist by listening deconstructively. Clients may be asked how they are dealing with the ambiguities and the therapist may summarise her own understanding and meaning-making and thus alternative perceptions may be introduced and realities inevitably begin to change in the process (Freedman & Combs 1996:47). New meanings and new constructions begin to emerge. An example of a question that would invite spiritual talk, may be: "If you look back at that situation now, can you see something different concerning God's perspective on the situation"? A client may, in hindsight, change her perspective of God as being absent or indifferent, for example, when she perhaps discover blessings in disguise, or proof (interpretations) of how God protected her from other dangers. The inconsistency of seeing God as indifferent and simultaneously seeing God as protecting her, may then be challenged.

Before I discuss the narrative practices and the social constructionist ideas that informed my practices, I would like to introduce the student with whom I had therapeutic conversations.

3.3 INTRODUCING CAROL

When Carol, a young twenty-year-old girl, came to see me, she sat on the edge of the chair and hesitantly said that she was not sure if it would be acceptable to talk about a problem like hers. She was convinced that all people have to deal with the hurt of a broken relationship some time in their lives, and while other people get over it on their own, she also expected to deal with it on her own. She was in love with a young man whom she had known for seven years. They had had a very close relationship of about two years. She saw him only during holidays in her hometown in the country. During one holiday he ignored her and she prayed to God for another chance to resume the relationship. She was granted this opportunity, but she was left with doubt and questions about the future of the relationship. Ten months before she came to see me, the boyfriend¹ openly courted another girl at a gathering where Carol was also present. She

¹ After reading this chapter, Carol pointed out that Craig was not her 'boyfriend', but that at the time she wished he had been. The word 'male friend' was acceptable to her.

still hoped for some miracle to bring her male friend back to her side. She struggled to accept the circumstances and was confused about the meaning he must have attributed to the close relationship they had had. She said: *“I gave him my heart and he threw it back into my face”*.¹ She came to see me because after ten months the confusion she still experienced, took a toll of her ability to study, her relationship with the Lord and her social life. She said: *“I am no longer the same person. I gave up everything that was important to me. This problem dominates my life and makes me feel inferior. This is driving me crazy. Many days I do not have the courage to go on. I feel like quitting”*. She could not understand why the Lord gave her a second chance, knowing how much pain it would inflict on her. She felt ambivalent towards God, not knowing what to make of His role in her dilemma. She still hoped for the guy she was in love with, to return to her.

In their article, *Re-authoring spiritual narratives: God in person’s relational identity stories*, Carlson and Erickson (2000) draw our attention to the importance of the social constructionist ideas, particularly the relationality of constructions, that are inherent in narrative therapy, but which are often missed by some narrative therapists. Therefore, Carlson and Erickson (2000:68) prefer the term “relational identity story” that signifies the co-production, rather than the individual production of an identity story. In re-authoring spiritual narratives, Carlson and Erickson (2000:65) draw on a person’s relationship with God and explore how this relationship influences the relational identity story of the person. To re-construct a life-giving spirituality together with Carol, I also focused on the relationality of identity as exemplified by Carlson and Erickson in their therapeutic work.

3.4 THE RELATIONALITY OF IDENTITY

The structuralist notion of identity as a fixed entity in one’s inner being, developed during a time, sometimes referred to as the ‘Scientific Revolution’, when everything was believed to be comprehensible by discovering the laws (structures) governing all physical phenomena (Thomas 2002:85). Therapists started interpreting people’s behaviour as if it was in some way related to the workings of this inner-self or inner-nature (Thomas 2002:86). Psychologists like Erik Erikson, for example, proposed that the major achievement of normal development was a firm and fixed “sense of identity” (Gergen 1991:41) and failing

¹ *Afrikaans is the mother tongue of both Carol and myself. Her words quoted in this study are my translations and I trust that I captured the essence of what occurred in our conversations.*

to possess this “basic essence” or fixed identity, was tantamount to illness. Therapy functioned to restore essence and, for Carl Rogers, in particular, to help the client in “becoming the self one fully is” (Gergen 1991:41).

Poststructuralist thinking, on the other hand, endorse notions of ‘no essential truths’, subjectivity and relationality, fluid identities constantly being created in relationship with others. Relationality, a key concept of poststructuralism, poses a challenge to the concept of an autonomous self. Gergen (1991:157) proposes one has an identity only because it is permitted by the social rituals of which one is part and one is allowed to be a certain kind of person because this sort of person is essential to the broader games of society. A relational identity is fluid, yet recognisable as a persistent identity in a process of becoming within “the multiple power dynamics, social forces, economic pressures that are continually forming, reforming, or deforming persons” (Dunlap 1999:138). Abandoning the idea that it is a ‘deep structure’, e.g. an inner-self that shapes life, narrative therapists can pay attention to how language is used, how meaning is made and how relationships effect a person’s sense of identity. When focusing on relational identity stories, the therapist explores not only a person’s relationship with the problem in her life, but also the relational stories that support the problem’s influence in her life (Carlson & Erickson 2000:69). For example, it is possible that a problem of self-doubt can convince a person to experience herself in a significant relationship as not worthy and not measuring up. It is important to note that the problem is not in the person’s relationship, but rather in the relational identity story the person has been recruited into (Carlson & Erickson 2000:69).

Significant relationships have the most power in constructing a dominant identity story and God is often a most significant Other in religious people’s lives (Carlson & Erickson 2000:70). Our relationship with God, which impacts our identity, is also explicated by Brueggemann (1993:68) as a genuinely other character in the drama of life who takes a decisive role, but who does not dominate the drama so that we have no role to play. Our relationship with God is depicted by Bakhtin (quoted by Hermans 2002:125) as a relationship with either a monologic author-God or a polyphonic author-God. The monologic author-God is authoritative, but will not abuse his power, because of His self-sacrificial love. This model of religious communication between people and God fits better into a pre-modern context where God envisions the life of a person and knowing the ultimate meaning of that life, bestows it on them (Hermans 2002:135). The polyphonic

author-God, on the other hand, is better suited to a post-modern context with its polyvocality characteristic (Bakhtin, quoted by Hermans 2002:135). In order to give value to our own life, we must search for our own authorial voice amongst “the social heteroglossia” (Hermans 2002:131) and amongst the polyphony of voices within ourselves (Hermans 2002:137). The polyphonic author-God renounces control over his heroes (people) and allows them to seek and express their own meaning. The polyphonic author-God remains in a position of ‘outsidedness’, in order to have dialogic communication with the hero/person that retains his/her own self-consciousness and who has the right to self-definition, and more importantly, the right to wrestle with the meaning of life, however difficult that is (Hermans 2002:130). The pastoral narrative therapist can engage dialogically with the client in this wrestling to find meaning. An interesting assertion of Bakhtin (quoted by Hermans 2002:132) is that Christ helps people towards self-understanding. Bakhtin (quoted by Hermans 2002:131) asks the question: “How can the polyphonic author exist in a dialogic universe where the author participates together with the hero [person] in creating the meaning of his or her life” and by implication his identity? Hermans (2002:132) reasons that Christ, as the model of silence, does not have to assert His individuality because He does not have to find Himself in the other. As the model of self-assertion through self-denial, Christ aims at helping people towards self-understanding without imposing a definition on them (Hermans 2002:132). This implies the gift of agency in the individual’s construction of her identity and fits with the principles of narrative therapy.

Concomitant with the notion of relational identity, or as Dunlap (1999:136) prefers, of subjectivity¹, is the liberating idea of agency. If one’s identity is fluid and constantly being created in relationship with others through languaging and alternative meaning making, then it is possible to re-construct one’s identity through re-storying one’s life to a “rich description of preferred stories of identity” (Thomas 2002:87). This agency is explained by Neuger (1999:128): “...we draw our identities through our own particular experiences in the midst of the social contexts in which we are embedded and which we have chosen to

¹ For Dunlap (1999:136) the notion of “subject” and “subject position” is preferable to that of “self”, because it places the subject within social discourses, whereas a “self” indicates a prelinguistic “substance”, disconnected from community, context, power relations, traditions and the constitution by language.

claim as our narrative frameworks". Subjectivity is constantly being constituted and reconstituted by discourses at battle (Dunlap 1999:136), but it does not mean that the discursively constructed subject is passive and has no agency. The narrative therapist can listen for the competing discourses in clients' words and actions that offer competing subject positions, and empower them to choose where they will stand (Dunlap 1999:137). Agency is possible for the one who draws on memory and alternative sources of knowledge, and for the one who has the eyes to see that more than one meaning is possible (Dunlap 1999:137). I would like to add the dimension of spirituality to what Dunlap (1999:137) sees as the task of caregivers: "Caregivers can increase agency by actively invoking alternative [spiritual] discourses that may lie dormant in a person's memory, by nurturing new sources of [spiritual] knowledge, and by empowering care receivers to make choices for creative and life-giving [spiritual] discourses". This links directly with my research aims (see section 1.6).

Cultivating an awareness that meaning is plural (Dunlap 1999:137) is a valuable key in enhancing personal agency. Weedon (quoted by Dunlap 1999:137,138) reminds us:

Although the subject in poststructuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she nonetheless exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also a subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available.

As pastoral caregivers, we can influence these choices by acting as bearers of Christian discourse (Dunlap 1999:138) and by helping the client to engage her spirituality and to recognise that her ability to be in relationship is a reflection of the image of God in her (Neuger 1999:129). Carlson and Erickson (2000:71) found it useful to explore clients' perceptions about how God sees them as persons to discover what their relational identity story with God is. As Christians we find our spiritual identity in our relationship with Christ as our Redeemer, although each Christian may have a personal interpretation of what that relationship entails. If this relational story is empowering, like Carol's basic story of faith in God, it can be used to challenge the problem's influence in a person's life. Her relationship with self-doubt and feeling not good enough, was challenged by her testimony that God believed in her and trusted her more than she trusted herself.

The relational storying of oneself is explained by Bruner (2004:13) in the chapter, *The Narrative Creation of Self*, and he concludes that “selfhood is profoundly relational” and “that self, ...is also other”. We create our identities through the stories we tell about ourselves. These stories are embedded in relationships with others and God. Bruner (2004:13) maintains that selfhood involves a commitment to others as well as being “true to oneself”; thus a balance between commitment and autonomy. Bruner (2004:10) relates the story of a twenty-three-year-old-man, who chose the extreme end of autonomy and deserted life as it were:

[His] dead body was found...in a deserted bus in the Alaska wilderness. Some autobiographical fragments...tell the story....Dealing with things on his own was his ideal...eating only edible plants, and after three months he died of starvation. Shortly before his death, he went to the trouble of taking a self-portrait, the film of which was found in his camera. In it the young man is seated, with one hand raised and holding in the other a block-letter note on which he has written, “I have had a happy life and Thank the Lord. Goodbye and may God bless All.”

Bruner (2004:10) comments that even this poor man felt some commitment to others, and I want to add ‘to the Other’.

To construct a selfhood we need to communicate. To listen to others respectfully, is to validate them and to enhance their feelings of self-worth. Elaine Graham (1999:197) calls this “hearing one another into speech”. Bruner (2004:13) concludes

The construction of selfhood...cannot proceed without a capacity to narrate. Once we are equipped with that capacity, we can produce a selfhood that joins us with others, that permits us to hark back selectively to our past while shaping ourselves for the possibilities of an imagined future.

The capacity to narrate is utilised in a very special manner in narrative therapy. Externalisation and deconstruction, are for example, significant languaging practices that help people to narrate and re-author their lives and relationships. People are in multiple relationships and have different relational identity stories. Carlson and Erickson (2000:69) contend that it is usually the most significant relationships that have the strongest influence in people’s lives and if these relationships are destructive in any way, they support the problem in a powerful way. The problem can recursively influence the relational identity story. For example, the problem of rejection can convince a person to experience herself in a significant relationship as unworthy, not measuring up (a relational identity) and then the rejection (the problem), is afforded a very dominant power over this person’s life as

she interacts with others. If the rejection no longer succeeds in subjugating the person, the relationships in her life “have the potential of being empowering and wonderfully transformative” (Carlson & Erickson 2000: 69). The aim is to help people to experience their relationships with others, and in this study, especially with the Other, differently, and to be able to re-author their lives. The practice of externalising the problem’s version of their significant relationships can provide a wonderful source in this regard. Such a focus is explained by Carlson and Erickson (2000:70):

Focusing on the relational identity story allows therapists working from a narrative metaphor to more clearly see the relational nature of the self, and thus the significance of culture and social influences. This focus also allows therapists to be more clearly aware of the principles of social constructionism and its distinction from essentialist and modernist notions of an individual self.

Carol’s relational identity stories were explored regarding her relationship with Craig, the man she loved, with her father, her mother and God.

3.4.1 Exploring Carol’s relational identity stories

Carol’s story of her relationship with Craig and her mother seemed to have a negative influence on her construction of her self-identity. These negative relational stories sometimes succeeded in influencing her relationship with God in such a way that she was confused about God’s role in her dilemma and confused about how she “should” approach God about her problem. However, her trust in God stayed intact despite the attacks of the problem on her personal relationship with God. Her relational story with God later became a powerful resource in coping with her problem.

Dunlap’s (1999:136,137) advice to care givers seemed appropriate in this case: “...we can listen for the competing discourses in their [clients’] words and in their actions....[that] offer competing subject positions....[and] empower women to choose where they will stand”. On the one hand her relationship with her father was one of mutual love and respect that contributed to her identity construction of an accepted, loved daughter, worthy of her father’s love. On the other hand, her broken relationship with Craig and perhaps to a certain extent, her mother’s conditional love and acceptance, contributed to her identity construction of self-doubt, of no self-respect and of being not-good-enough or worthy of Craig’s love. These contradicting relational stories probably contributed to her fluctuating, often ambivalent feelings towards God.

3.4.1.1 Carol's relational story with Craig

Narrative therapy is not a neat set of techniques and often conversations can seem very disordered and confusing. The simplicity reflected here are not found in the work of therapy itself. The therapist doesn't set an agenda for the conversation and does not control the conversation by wanting it to move in a particular direction or outcome (Anderson 1997:97). Instead, my goal was to facilitate dialogue, internal and external, (Anderson 1997:98) and to be a witness to Carol's story of rejection and pain. I wanted to be what Johnella Bird (2000:30) envisions for therapists: "In connecting with another person's experience, we act as witnesses. We stand beside and engage with people (clients) as they find ways to understand, describe, and feel the experience while telling and retelling, remembering and re-remembering". I wanted to give Carol the opportunity to gain voice, to gain clarity, to make choices and to stay connected (Neuger 2001:64). In our first meeting, Carol tried to explain her confusion to me:

Craig made me feel special. My friends warned me against him and told me I deserve better..., but I did not listen. I wanted to have my own way. It was as if everything was a big joke to him; as if what he did was unimportant. Some days I feel I did not deserve him and I deserve the pain. I tried to get over him on my own; I tried to convince myself that he did not really care for me, but I still hope that he will realise he was wrong and return to me. What happened seems like only a holiday romance to him. It was as if he faked everything. When I questioned him about his behaviour, he changed the subject. I personally need answers. I don't know what to believe.

Carol's version of her story seemed saturated with confusion and powerlessness. The meaning she made, had a totalising effect on her relational identity story of a rejected, not-good-enough-woman. She often said "I've lost" and wondered why she could not be the new girl Craig chose to be with. She also said she lost her self-respect, because she was prepared to do anything for him. In her own words: "*If he had asked me to climb Mount Everest for him, I probably would have done it for him*". She said she was very submissive to him so that he could know that she would be there for him always. I asked her what did she risk in being so submissive to him and she immediately answered: "*My own worth*". I explored the effects of the problem of not-feeling-good-enough in her life by using the practice of externalising and deconstructing questions. I asked, for example, what this problem's intention was in getting her to think this way and what would be different when this problem would no longer have a foothold in her life. Carol's meaning-making of her

relationship with Craig, namely that she failed in retaining his love, was regarded by her as so overwhelmingly important, that her identity construction was exclusively constituted by this interpretation of hers. This interpretation had a totalising effect on her identity construal. Despite her experience of rejection and humiliation, she was able to carry on with her life for ten months without talking to other people about her pain. Such behaviour testified to a certain strength, but this significant act of courage and strength was not part of her story at the time of our initial meeting. The meaning she gave to this experience was that *“other people go through the same kind of stuff and I just have to get over it”*. Her dominant identity construction of not-being-good-enough and of having-lost-his-love, made it impossible to be conscious of this strength.

She said she wanted to erase all memories of Craig. This was noteworthy, as the creation and re-creation of selfhood relies strongly on memory. Impairment of memory about the past, is highly disruptive of one’s sense of self (Sacks, quoted by Bruner 2004:13). I gathered that Carol probably wanted the memories to be erased in order to “erase” also the relational identity story of not-being-good-enough. This made me realise how deeply she was hurting. Anderson (1999:160) asserts that troubled souls often seek prescriptions that will eliminate emotional pain or erase ambiguity. Carol hoped for a prescription from me that would make the pain go away. She later acknowledged that she indeed wanted me to make the pain go away as if by magic.

3.4.1.2 *Carol’s relational story with her father*

Carol’s father had been diagnosed with cancer two years before she came to see me. This was devastating news to her. She said:

“It should rather have been me. A big fear came over me. I was afraid of losing everybody and everything that was dear to me. At a church service the minister said that we are sometimes self-indulgent and that God wants to show us that He is the most important person. I believe He wanted to bring our family closer to Him. I feel guilty for not praying to God enough, concerning my father’s illness at the time, because I mostly prayed about my relationship with Craig”.

Here the problem of fear worked hard at putting a wedge between Carol and the significant relationships in her life (Carlson & Erickson 2000:73). Here she had an identity story about her relationship with God and her father that was centered around guilt. I asked her if it could have been possible that the fear invited the guilt in. She said she sometimes

thought that she deserved the pain, but often she contradicted herself (a unique experience) by saying that God did not want her to hurt so much. I also asked her how she thought the guilt influenced the way she saw her relationship with her father and also with God. She was very positive about the mutual trust between her and God, as well as her father's love "*no matter what*". She said that now that her father has recuperated, she no longer felt guilty about not praying enough for him. I asked what her father appreciates in her relationship with him. She answered: "*My obedience. Even when I know I'm right, I won't talk back to my father, because I care for him.*" I asked whom she would want to take with her if she had to go to war (like a soldier). She immediately said her father and a few of her girl friends, because they support her and trust her. She said that her father was the most important man in her life and will always be. I asked what her father and friends value in her, even if it was a weird characteristic or ability. She mentioned her stubbornness, her perseverance, her ability to work hard, her trustworthiness, her cheerfulness (that had been absent for some time) and her ability to play the piano (that she hadn't done for some time). I asked how their perceptions of her influenced her feelings about herself. She acknowledged that she had all these attributes and we started talking about the positive effects of these qualities on the way she regarded herself in certain contexts and within her relationships with others. Her story about her relationship with her father and girl friends contributed to a more positive relational identity construction, and, in her own words, to "*a feeling of belonging*". In this way we explored relationships where the problem of not-feeling-good-enough had less of a foothold, that helped her align more with a preferred way of being.

3.4.1.3 Carol's relational story with her mother

At first Carol steered clear of any conversation that would include talk about her mother. Much later in our journey, Carol responded to a question of mine and talked about her mother for the first time. I referred to her initial conviction that her problem was not important enough to ask for assistance or to discuss it at length with somebody. I asked if there had been anybody in her past that expected of other people to 'just get over it and carry on with life'. She said, "*No one*" and I kept on enquiring about other relationships with significant people, like her siblings, mother or relatives, etc. She said her relationship with her mother had not been "too close". She said:

The difference between my mother and my father is that she will always push me to get 100% and it always felt as if, ... especially regarding my school work. When I did not get, say 90%, she always had a problem with that. She would then say that this other girl or that one got higher marks than I did, and, yeah (little laugh). It made me feel that she felt that whatever I did was never good enough. And my father is not like that. He will always say my best is his best. I think it is because my mother is a teacher at the high school where I was and perhaps this is why she wanted me to do so well.

I asked who would join her father in saying that her best is good enough. She said God, because He knows of her struggle and her pain. I asked if she could think of any other reason why she now worked so hard and she said she was doing it for herself, because she wants to carry on with an honours degree the next year. I asked if she could remember a time when the problem of not-feeling-good-enough had less influence in her life. She said that while she is here at university, the feeling is not as strong as when she is at home, because Craig is not here. The contextuality of the problem supplied an opening for agency when she realised that her feeling of not-being-good-enough was not a “true” measure of her perceived identity. I asked what inspired her most to work so hard. She said that she realised in standard six that she could do well in school and then she started to work very hard and ever since she did well in her studies. I asked if it means that the problem does not always have a foothold in her life and also how she managed to side-step its influence. She said her perseverance and hard work helped her to not think of Craig too often. I asked what God and her father would think of her, if she failed this year. She said she would still be valuable to them, because they love her. We also spoke about what her friends appreciated about her in their relationships with her.

Carol’s construction of her identity in her relationship with her mother was one of conditionally being-good-enough. This relational identity story of only-good-enough-when-I-excel was countered with her identity constructions that she created in relationships with her father, with God and her friends. This opened space to choose how she would prefer her identity to be constructed. Later in our journeying together, she said that hard work is often not enough in life. She referred to her being more appreciative of “*little things*” in her life like being able to walk and being grateful for the friendships she had. She mentioned a friend at the hostel that brought her a basket with sweets as a token of wishing her good luck for the exams. She said she had drawn closer to this friend lately. This reconnecting with others may have come about because of her adding other attributes to her

construction of her identity, e.g. being appreciative of the *little things in life* and not only the good academic results. The hard-working attribute was no longer an all encompassing necessity to be a worthy person. Experience of experience questions, that is questions about what the person thinks others may be thinking (Payne 2000:113), might have attributed to Carol's reconsideration of her own worth.

3.4.1.4 Carol's relational story with God

Carol was confused about what God allowed to happen to her. On the one hand she stated her firm belief that God loves her and cares for her, and on the other hand she questioned God's intentions. She asked: "*If God wanted the relationship [with Craig] to go wrong, could He not make me realise this in a more gentle way, and not make me see Craig kissing another girl? It was so cruel!*" She said she was angry with God. She also said God was not sensitive in saying 'no' to her, regarding her prayer requests that God would instil thoughts in Craig's mind that would cause him to change.

I asked Carol if she talks to God about her unhappiness and the issues that bothered her. She said that she felt guilty because she prayed too often about her relationship with Craig instead of praying for her dad. She believed that God was angry with her, because she kept on praying about the same issue. This restrained her from talking to God about what she considered His unfair treatment of her. It seemed as if Carol could even find it presumptuous to bother an Almighty God, to whom she relinquished all power. Drewery and McKenzie (1999:132) acknowledge that faith can be a problem for therapists if it is understood as a non-negotiable belief in a greater authority, especially if the therapy is thought to be about changing something which is under the jurisdiction of that authority, but they do give an account of how it is possible to both acknowledge external authority of power *and* invoke personal agency. Drewery and McKenzie (1999:137,138) explains: "The issue for therapists...becomes one of how to work within a client's framework, using good and effective professional practices, and at the same time not deny the client's values – indeed to send the clients forth, validated as people". I used the therapeutic practices of narrative therapy to answer to the requirement of "using good and effective professional practices" (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:137) and in particular "opening space questions to construct unique outcomes" (Freedman & Combs 1996:124). Carol often referred to the Bible as a norm that directed her life. I saw this as an opening to introduce

a perspective and an experience of a Biblical character that could serve as a possible alternative way of looking at her relationship with God. Freedman and Combs (1996:127) suggest that:

As the person considers the meaning from someone else's perspective, she can adopt the meaning as her own (or at least try it on). It may provide an opening to an alternative storyline.

I considered the use of a Biblical reference to be in line with what she valued and to be within a framework for reference (a Biblical framework) that suited her preference. I said: "I do not know if God would be offended, but what comes to mind is Jacob's wrestling with God at the Jabbok River" (Genesis 32:22-31). She could not recall this story and I briefly told her the story. I was thinking of the stubbornness she mentioned earlier and wondered how this attribute could be utilised in re-authoring her relational identity story with God. I asked if she knew of any other Biblical character that also struggled with problems and asked for God's help. She mentioned how the Lord encouraged Moses when he felt he was not fit for his task. I asked how this could apply to her situation. She said that she feels her problem is too big for her, but God is someone who cares, understands and protects us and that God is always there for us. This contradicted her restraint to talk to God over and over again about the same problem. Prest and Keller (1993:143) also recommend therapeutic strategies that stay within the client's belief system. The process of dialogue regarding incongruent spiritual maps, involve challenging the client, from within her belief system, to re-examine a belief and generate change from within. Griffith and Griffith (1992:70) have also found that "problem-engendering discourse is typically characterised by participants speaking from monological perspectives – participants ask the same questions over and over and hear the same answers over and over, leading to....a stagnant state". Carol probably had a perspective of God as a monologic author-God (see section 3.4) that actually caused dialogue to stop between her and God. When dialogue stops between the God-construct and the self, the consequences are much the same as when dialogue stops in other relationships, in which two parties from their monological perspectives continue nevertheless to impact one another despite the absence of dialogue (Griffith & Griffith 1992:70).

I introduced Jacob's story in an attempt to open space for Carol to consider an alternative perspective, as suggested by Freedman and Combs (1996:127). Instead, she preferred

Moses' relational story with God as an analogy for her own relationship with God. Carol became personally involved in her struggle for self-interpretation and author of her own meanings in this way when she said that God will support her as He supported Moses. Drewery and McKenzie (1999:138) describes the therapist's role in this regard:

The therapist's role is to develop a discourse within the therapy which is cast in terms of the client's own frameworks, but which extends and challenges these everyday understandings where appropriate....The focus of narrative therapy is not to give the client personal control over their entire life, but to install the client as an agent of their own life stories.

At our next meeting, Carol reported that she now did not mind talking to God about the same issue over and over again. She said the example of Jacob and Moses helped her to do that. Here is an excerpt of our conversation:

Carin: What did it mean to you over the past two weeks to feel free to talk to God about the same issue repeatedly?

Carol: *I feel much better. God knows how much I struggle with this problem and He'll help me. It feels as if a mountain has been lifted from my shoulders. It is the same with my studies: I ask God to help me to remember the work I have studied.*

Carin: And how did that influence your relationship with God?

Carol: *I feel good about our relationship. God trusts me. I feel more at peace.*

Carin: Could you draw me a picture (in words) of this talking to God about your problem?

Carol: *Yes, it's like a little girl that fell and hurt her knee and then she goes to her father and he comforts her and tells her that everything will be okay.*

Carin: Did the talking to God in this way strengthen your relationship with Him?

Carol: *Yes, it is stronger now.*

Carin: What does the comforting of God mean to you? How does it impact your life?

Carol: *I have found relief; I am more relaxed and more calm now.*

Carol's relationship with God as the sole author of her life probably engendered passiveness which helped to maintain the problem. This was further addressed by exploring God's blessings in her life (see section 3.5.3). At the same time, her faith in God, supplied a valuable source of help in the healing process. I asked how she thought

God felt about her as a person. With this re-authoring question I invited the possibility of “forgotten” experiences to enter the conversation that might contradict her totalised identity construction of not-being-good-enough. This directly linked with my research aim, namely to explore how narrative therapy elicits and shapes alternative personal spiritual ideas that would be more life-giving. She believed that God loved her. She believed God knows everything and He knew what she was “going through”. She said that God would never give one a burden that would be too heavy to carry. Her faith and hope for a better future never changed. Her belief that God writes a story for every person’s life and then that person lives out that story, is also indicative of her relationship with a monological author-God. She believed every story has a fantastic ending.

3.5 RE-CONSTRUCTING A LIFE-GIVING SPIRITUALITY

Following Carlson and Erickson’s (2000:65) example, I focused on some of the practices they used, namely externalising conversations, deconstruction, exploring unique outcomes and re-authoring in our collaborative effort to re-construct a life-giving spirituality for Carol. I also focused on the thickening of the alternative relational identity stories that evolved. I realised Carol’s quest for answers may never be gratified sufficiently. This was not my aim. My hope for re-constructing a life-giving spirituality rather embraced what Anderson (1999:160) envisioned for clients:

When spirituality informs our therapy..., the aim of care is to empower people to *embrace paradox, seek justice, and glimpse the contingency of life* in order to live with both feet planted firmly in midair.

3.5.1 Externalising conversations, deconstructive listening and deconstructing questions

The liberating aspect of narrative therapy is that people make meaning and that meaning is not made for them. “This puts people in the driving seat of their lives” (Drewery & Winslade 1997:33). The argument of narrative therapy is that the ways of making sense are susceptible to change and if we change the way we speak, we can also change much about the way we organise and understand our worlds. Our words influence the way we feel and think, and in turn, the ways we think and feel influence what we speak about. How we speak is an important determinant of how we can be in the world (Drewery &

Winslade 1997:34). The assumption that language doesn't reflect reality, but creates reality, is the basic principle of social constructionism.

Speaking of problems as if internalised leaves people with no agency. For example: Carol said, *"I have always doubted myself"* as if the self-doubt was a fixed inherent entity. In her book, *The Heart's Narrative*, Johnella Bird (2000:7) describes a particular language strategy, namely a relational externalising conversational process. A relational 'I' is constructed that creates linguistic space that provides people with a perspective of distance between 'self' and the problem (Bird 2000:7,8). In this way people are granted the responsibility to take a position on how they would want to counter the influence of the problem. A question like, 'Are there times when the self-doubt is less likely to intrude into your life?' creates a relationship between the problem of self-doubt and the person that renders the person the agency to choose how she wants to position herself regarding the problem. Tomm (1989:57) emphasises that externalising the problem does not remove personal responsibility; it focuses and refines it as clients are invited to choose whether they want to continue to submit to the influence of the externalised problem or to reject the invitation to submit to the dictates of the problem.

Deconstructive listening is guided by the belief that stories have many possible meanings and that all narratives are full of gaps and ambiguities. "Derrida and other deconstructionists believe that it is fruitless to search for the one 'real' or 'true' meaning" (Freedman & Combs 1996:46). Not only the gaps and ambiguities are keys to different interpretations, but also the therapist's understanding, which is, more often than not, different from the meaning that the client has intended. By capitalising on this, the therapist asks deconstructive questions that invite the client to reconsider and explain what she meant. "Realities inevitably begin to change in the process" (Freedman & Combs 1996:47) as clients consider the questions asked. Freedman and Combs (1996:47) have discovered that people can't help but examine their stories in new ways and that the very presence of the therapist "makes their [clients'] world a new and different reality". More importantly, Freedman and Combs (1996:47) have discovered that when people hear that we (therapists) are making different meanings from theirs, they can reconsider their own meanings and modify them. Deconstructive listening is a way of joining with the client, paying full attention to her story, believing and affirming her; and listening not to solve the problem, but to discover how the client experiences the problem. Connecting with another

person's experience, we act as witnesses (Bird 2000:30). Listening attentively is important. Listening entails making a judgement call, picking up on a word, paying attention to the emotional resonance of the client's words, and words that imply movement (Bird 2000:14). For example, Carol's remark that she wanted to get on with her life, was significant as it implied movement, probably frustration and probably a readiness to deal with her problem for the first time in a constructive way. By picking up on this, I could deconstruct the meaning she intended with this remark and explore ways with her that would create a climate that would take her closer to this goal.

Neuger (2001:91) distinguishes three elements of deconstructive listening, namely externalising, naming the problem and looking for deconstructive possibilities (unique outcomes) within the story that work together to plant seeds for gaining voice, for gaining agency and authority to make meaning and to make choices. Constructing alternative narratives does not eliminate the harsh realities, but the client can now face them with a sense of being a subject in her narrative, rather than a character in a story written for her. This is what gaining voice is about (Neuger 2001:91).

The narrative therapist assumes that problems recruit people into certain ways of being and thinking. Carlson and Erickson (2000:73) assert:

Problems work hard at putting a wedge between people and the significant relationships in their lives, leaving them isolated. For religious/spiritual persons, this isolation can occur as they are recruited into impoverishing stories about their relationship with God. If a person has an identity story about her relationship with God that is centered, for example, around worthlessness, it can be helpful to explore how the problem has influenced the development of this relational identity story.

Deconstructing questions like the following examples would offer the client a different way of looking at her relationship with the problem and how the problem is promoting particular beliefs about her relationship with God: "How do you think the self-doubt has influenced the way you see your relationship with God?" "How do you think the self-doubt has influenced your not-talking-to-God about the same problem?" "What might happen to the self-doubt if you were able to see your relationship with God differently?" Deconstructing questions allow a person to separate the problem from the client's relational identity. As a result clients' tendencies to inflict blame on themselves or others begin to be undermined. "The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem" (Monk 1997:26). Carlson and Erickson (2000:74) believe the person's relationship with God to be potentially

transformative and that the deconstruction questions are aimed at revealing the problem's influence in stealing the transformative aspects of this relationship from the religious person.

3.5.2 Externalising conversations with Carol

Many concepts were externalised to enhance Carol's self-agency. We spoke about the little voice of hope for Craig to return that she did not want to silence at first. We explored the truthfulness of this little voice and the impact on her wish to get on with life. When I asked what the chances were for this little voice of hope to get its way, she said her head told her there was no hope, but in her heart she still had hope. I asked if it would be possible to both allow this little voice in her life - as an unwelcome guest - and also pay attention to another voice of hope, namely "to get on with her life". This enabled her to take a position on how much room she would like to give the little voice of hope in her life.

We externalised her relationship with Craig by measuring it on a scale, normed by her own requirements for a "good" relationship. She allocated a mark of three out of ten, with her contribution to the relationship 2.5, and his contribution 0.5. We discussed what contributed to this imbalance and what she regarded as an "ideal" relationship. We created a time-line and plotted significant events to discuss the impact of time lapses between events and to consider where she would like to be in relation to the problem, at a particular time in future. We also used the analogy of a graph to plot growth towards a preferred way of being. During our third session, she remarked that the "ups" were slightly more than the "downs".

Deconstructing questioning contributed to Carol's discovery of feelings that was then externalised. During our fourth conversation Carol discovered that she hated Craig, but she was worried about this emotion. She desired retribution. Hughes (1985:49) says, "It is only when we are free to express our negative feelings that we can reach deeper feelings in us of tenderness and compassion". Carol's desire for retribution reminded me of what Denise Ackermann (1998:91) wrote about the work of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) as an exercise in accountability: "Processes of truth-telling and justice-seeking...should ideally become part of the fabric of our society, ...in order for healing to continue". Carol said: *"I'll feel better if he is sorry. I want revenge, even though I know it is wrong, but if he would feel the pain like I do, he'll know what I have to endure"*.

She asked: “*Is it wrong to hate him, because in the Bible it is written that we may not hate? Do I have to forgive him?*” Denise Ackermann (1998:93) comments:

Forgiveness takes time and it is not to be hurried. Anger and pain are expressed, over and over again, articulated and experienced in a process in which the causes of suffering are probed, questioned and railed against by each victim according to her or his needs. Forgiveness is also linked to the need for justice, repentance and reparation.

To give her an opportunity to express her anger as suggested by Denise Ackermann in the quotation above, I asked her if she would like to write Craig a letter, not to be posted, but to be discussed during our next conversation. I hoped that the letter-writing would be a substitute, although not adequately, for an opportunity to tell Craig how she felt and to probe the causes of suffering in a more concrete way. Peggy Penn (1991:43) proposes in an article, *Letters to ourselves*, that one way of inviting the client’s own creativity in the process of re-storying, is by means of writing a letter to address different issues that the client might be struggling with. Engaging in the letter-writing would also be a process of deconstructing the meaning she made of what happened to her. Carol wrote three different letters before she finalised one letter that was read in our session together. The letter-writing led to the discovery of both the hate and love-feelings. The letter contained many questions, but also spoke of the pain, the hate, as well as of love and affection.

I wrote several therapeutic letters to Carol. Therapeutic letters are structured to reiterate what has been externalised. The value of therapeutic letters are eloquently described by Freeman, Epston and Lobovits (1997:112):

[It tells] the alternative story that is emerging along with the therapy, it documents history, current developments, and future prospects....[It enquires] what might happen next....[T]he words in a letter don’t fade and disappear the way conversation does; they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalising it.

A translated version of an excerpt out of one of my letters to Carol illustrates something of our externalising conversations regarding the anger and hate-feelings. Quotes are from a book by Kathleen Fischer (1988:179,180):

Carol, I read somewhere that one can regard the rage/hate that sometimes invades one’s life, as a gift from God and a message or revelation that wants to tell us something. What do you think of such an idea? Do you think God wanted to reveal

something to you when you discovered the rage/hate? See what you think of the following quote by Fran Ferder:

Anger was purposefully and lovingly created and shaped by God as a source of energy, as a source of fire. The only aspect of anger about which we have choices is how we let it move us. We do not have choices about whether or not we will experience it, unless we choose to cut off a very significant dimension of God's life in us.

What other emotions, do you think, may be hidden underneath the rage/hate? We also talked about the negative influence the rage/hate has on your life and that it is sometimes a burden. I asked if you know about someone in the Bible that also had to carry a burden. You referred to Moses and said he had to ask for God's help to lead the people of Israel. You said God convinced him that he will be able to do it. This reminds me that you said that God puts more trust in you than you have in yourself. Does this mean that God reassures you that you have the strength to address this problem of anger in your life? Do you think God might perhaps want you to get rid of this burden altogether? In what way would this be possible? Harriet Lerner wrote a book, *The Dance of Anger*. She thinks it is not possible to change other people, but she says we can change our own behaviour and thus make it impossible for the dance to continue as before. I am thinking here of your question if God would think it is okay if you just ignore Craig in future. Do you think this could possibly be a way of changing the dance of anger?

I asked Carol if the anger might be considered as a gift from God and if so, what she thought God wanted to reveal to her. She said it was possible that God wanted to show her that Craig was not to be her life partner. I referred to her comment previously that God was insensitive. She laughed and said that it (witnessing Craig kissing another girl) had to happen in exactly such a cruel way, otherwise she would not have believed it and God knew that.

Carol was not ready to forgive Craig. We explored the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation, and between forgiveness and sanctioning someone's behaviour. Reconciliation is, according to Tomm (2002:66), the restoration of trust in a relationship that has been damaged and both parties must contribute to a resolution. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is something that is granted by the person who has been wronged and can be carried out alone or in interaction with the other (Tomm 2002:67). Carol and I also discussed what she thought God's Will was and who would benefit most if she forgave Craig. Carol wanted to forgive Craig, but she struggled. She said: "*If someone hurts me, does it mean that I just have to say 'okay, it's cool, you can do it again' and I just have to go on forgiving every time?*" She recounted how she followed a minister on television that preached on forgiveness and asked viewers to say certain words after him. She said she

was able to follow the preacher's instructions, but when she had to say Craig's name, she could not say it. She said: *"I do not know if I perhaps do not want to forgive him, because on the one hand, I think this might be the reason why I struggle with this problem of not getting over him. Maybe because I cannot get it inside my heart to forgive him. If I can manage to do that, everything might just be fine"*. Tomm (2002:67) comments that it is important that the person recognises and let go of certain needs and/or desires that may never be fulfilled as a result of the offence. Carol's desire was that Craig should feel the pain she felt and that he would apologise to her. In exploring God's perspective on this, with Carol, I engaged in role play as suggested by Griffith and Griffith (1992). See chapter four, section 4.3.1 in this regard. Carol said that she was not ready to forgive Craig and that she would know when she was ready. I consider her attempt to forgive as a significant step in the direction of what she considered to be healing, as stated in her words: *"If I can manage to do that, everything might just be fine"*. Tomm (1989:57) reminds therapists to remain mindful of the problematic effects of high expectations for constructive change as this might invite experiences of failure, discouragement and hopelessness. Very small steps may be all that is realistic and what is most important is the direction of the client's evolution as a person, that is, a direction towards greater health, not the size or the frequency of the steps (Tomm 1989:57).

Externalising conversations with Carol and deconstructive questioning broadened the landscape of the problem by mapping its effects on her life and her relationships. This offered the opportunity to find openings in which unique outcomes might appear (Freedman & Combs 1996:67).

3.5.3 Unique outcomes, re-authoring and alternative stories

Boyd (1996:221) writes:

A pastoral conversation...entered into in the spirit of the Healing Creator means that the process of the conversation participates in the promise of transformation.... Pastoral conversation, influenced by a hermeneutic perspective, assumes that the God who is active in human history is active in human language. For Christians, the name of that divine active presence is Christ, through whom God invites us into a new and renewing conversation in which we encounter a divine self-disclosure and a new relational narrative.

If deconstruction means to undo and not to destroy (Sampson 1989:7), then 're-doing' is expedient. Gergen (2002:16) writes: "forms of deconstruction are only preliminary to the

more exciting and expansive challenge of *reconstruction*". Change and reconstruction occur in a never-ending process. Change is inherent in the process of looking for new ways to make sense of things. Boyd (1996:220,221) writes about change in the following way:

Change is defined as the evolution of new meaning, new narrative identity, and new self-agency. It is a dialogical creation....A pastoral conversation motivated by agape-love and entered into in the spirit of the Healing Creator, means that the process of the conversation participates in the promise of transformation.

An alternative story can be created by looking for evidence of what White and Epston (quoted by Wylie 1994:43) call, unique outcomes. These unique outcomes contradict the problem-saturated story. White (quoted by Wylie 1994:43) believes: "There is always a history of struggle and protest – always". When the therapist notices events and experiences that do not fit the dominant story, they can be explored to give the client an opportunity to consider these events as part of her identity. As more and more unique outcomes are traced, grounded, linked and given meaning, a new plot emerges and an alternative story comes more to the foreground (Morgan 2000:59).

In taking Carol's life back from the I-did-not-deserve-him-identity and the I-have-lost-identity, we explored (hidden) truths and experiences that were proof of an alternative relational identity.

Carlson and Erickson (2000:74) have found that with religious/spiritual people, a problem such as worthlessness or disappointment, has gotten them to take responsibility for themselves for all the bad experiences in their life, and often think that God is punishing them for being bad. Carol's problem of disappointment about the broken relationship and her feeling of not-being-good-enough, has gotten her into saying: "*I sometimes think I did not deserve Craig and I deserve the pain*". She also thought that God was angry with her. Carlson and Erickson (2000:74) continue to say that the dominant story has not allowed these religious/spiritual people to notice and/or accept any responsibility for the blessings and good things in their lives. Carlson and Erickson (2002:74,75) have found:

that helping religious/spiritual people internalise personal agency (Tomm, 1989) concerning the blessing of their lives can be a powerful tool to fighting the destructive influence of the problem and helps open space for a preferred identity story about their relationship with God. Often this personal agency seems to come

from simply realising or noticing the blessings God has given them, that they are agents and have choice to see God in their lives or not.

During one conversation I asked Carol if she could imagine watching a film of her story and imagine herself talking to the young girl (herself) in the movie. Freedman and Combs (1996:125) suggest that therapists can ask about unique outcomes in the realm of imagination through hypothetical experience questions. I asked what she would want to say to this girl. She said, *"I know what you are going through; I know how you feel, because I understand. You are not alone"*. I asked her if there were times when she experienced the comfort that these words carried. She referred to the comfort she experienced while worshipping with the congregation in church. I asked if this could be seen as a blessing from God. She affirmed this and we explored other blessings in her life. She mentioned that receiving a bursary after matric was actually a miracle; that not giving up on her studies yet, and her father's healing were all blessings from God. We explored the role she played in recognising and bringing about these blessings to help her realise that she had taken steps of faith that resulted in these blessings. For example, she had to go to church, physically, to find the comfort in worshipping God; she had to apply for the bursary in order to be considered for it; her family's and her own prayers for her father's healing were answered. This gave her a sense of agency. Regarding her relationship with herself, I asked: "What does it say about you that you recognised these events as blessings?" She said: *"It means I'm a grateful person"*. In realising how God actually blessed her, the destructive influence of her problem-saturated story of not being good enough was diminished and space was opened for a preferred identity story of being a confident, strong person. She discovered three processes at work in her life: Firstly, how her version of her relational identity story had kept her from seeing God's blessings and that she was worthy of God's blessings. Secondly, she recognised that she had the personal agency to either notice God's working in her life or not. Thirdly, she recognised that she played a part in receiving blessings from God. I asked what these experiences say about how God feels about her as a person. She responded, *"He cares what happens to me. He is always there for me"*. These conversations we had, were faith promoting and a witness of being worthy of God's interventions in her life. She said at a later stage: *"I discovered that I am stronger than I thought and I am capable of much more ...I did not deserve what Craig did to me. Ek kan beter kry (I can get someone better)"*.

Metaphors are multi-layered in meaning and a useful 'tool' to use in therapy in assisting in re-authoring conversations. Brueggemann (1993:24) argues that people change in a conversation when new models, images and pictures are offered – of how the pieces of life fit together – models, images and pictures that characteristically have the particularity of narrative to carry them. This change will occur gradually, often imperceptible.

The conversations Carol and I had, revolved around different images, metaphors, dreams, poems, a TV-film she saw and a story she read.

In discussing how it would be possible to get rid of the rage/hate, we used an Afrikaans expression, “n sak patats”. She said she will open this bag wide for the Lord to have a look. I prompted her to envision what would happen next. She said when God sees how big the hate is, He would want to make it lighter. I asked “How?” She answered that He would throw it away or He would command it to go out of her life. I asked her to describe how this would happen. She laughed and said it would physically grow little legs and run away. This metaphor now had another layer of meaning, for the two of us that we created together. Her relationship with the hate/rage-experience changed and rendered her more agency in coping with it. Johnella Bird (2000:76) proposes that the “description or image is suggested as a possibility that people can take up or not. If taken up, it provides the foundation point of an enquiry that may move beyond the original metaphor”. The original meaning of “a sak patats” is that you are burdened by something that you did not want in the first place. Carol’s creative way of dealing with this metaphor, extended it in a humorous way by envisioning how God makes it grow little legs and makes it run away. This image may remind her in future of our discussion about getting rid of unwanted feelings.

Carol’s dreams also became a useful 'tool' that was utilised to bring about change. After our first meeting, Carol had a dream consisting of two scenes. She interpreted this dream as an illustration of the double-bind she was finding herself in. In the first scene she was with Craig, enjoying his company and thinking “*this is what I want*”. In her dream she was thinking that she must ask me (the therapist) whether it was okay to want to be with him. In the second scene, the two of them and some friends were leaving to attend a music concert. She ran ahead of Craig, hoping that he would come after her. Double-mindedly she wanted to stay *and* run away. Craig did not follow her.

We discussed this dream in our next meeting. What became apparent was that she wanted to move on in her life, but her 'stuckness' with Craig, was holding her back.

Carol's perspectives and feelings changed in several ways. In re-visiting the past and in re-tellings, new meanings were attributed to experiences. Bruner (1986:12,16) comments: "Life consists of retellings....For Turner, experience structures expressions and expressions structure experience, but it is less a static circle than a historical evolutionary spiral, a progressive construction and reconstruction". Carol's feelings towards Craig changed from love to hate and back to love again; from wanting revenge to not wanting revenge; to not wanting anything to do with him. Her view of him changed "*from so big to so small*" – indicating with her fingers to me. Other statements by Carol that indicate the changes were: "*I accept I cannot get everything I want*", "*This experience showed me a side of myself I had not known before. I know better now who I am and what I want*", "*I have regained my self-respect*". Just before she went home for the university holidays, I asked, "If you look back to the first time you came to see me, do you think you are now more ready to cope with the situation if you happen to see Craig?" She said, "Yes". I asked "How much more are you ready now?" She answered, "*Then, only 10%, now, 70%*". Here I used the *language of the in-between* that Johnella Bird (2000:23) recommends in moving away from the polarities of, for example, ready or not ready. The *language of the in-between* generates an experience of movement, away from the stuckness.

3.5.4 Thickening Carol's alternative identity stories

As a preferred relational identity begins to emerge, the task of the therapist is to find ways to assist the client to hold onto it. If a client had a relationship with self-doubt, for example, for a long time, it is understandable that the client might revert back to old patterns of thinking and doing. Carol's statements: "*I got to know myself better*", "*I regained my self-respect*" and "*I know what I want*" are powerful alternatives to the earlier self-doubt stories. One way of thickening an alternative relational identity story, is to find witnesses who will act as an audience to performances of the new story (Morgan 2000:74). Carey and Russell (2003:15) contend:

When someone is endeavouring to author new stories about their lives, stories that are free from the constraining effects of various problems, then witnesses will be

required – witnesses who can powerfully acknowledge and authenticate the steps taken, the skills and knowledges this has required, the intentions and hopes involved, and who can make links between lives around shared themes. As Dean Lobovits once wrote, 'It takes an audience to solve a problem'.

Carol preferred not to tell other people of her struggle. She said her friends would just say that she will get over it and that she will meet someone else sooner or later. She told one friend at the hostel where she stays, but she reckoned this was to no avail. When we discussed the vulnerableness and the hurt again at a later stage, she professed that hurting is part of life, that it taught her to appreciate things in her life, not to take things for granted, especially relationships with family and friends. I asked who will be able to testify to this change as a means to identify and recruit an audience. She mentioned her new friend at the hostel and another one she became friends with. I asked what I would observe to indicate these friendships. She said little things, like supporting each other and being there for one another. She professed that previously she did not have close relationships at the hostel. She said these friendships are characterised by mutual appreciation, caring and trust. Carol also re-connected with two friends in her home town and she said "*For the first time now, I really enjoyed the social gatherings during the last holiday*". This was a sign of re-remembering significant people in her life and attributed to the construction of a more life-giving relational identity. The term, re-remembering was originally coined by Barbara Myerhoff (Russell & Carey 2002:24) and describes a special type of recollection, calling attention to the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one's life story. Carol preferred to liken her self-doubt to that of Moses's self-doubt (see section 3.4.1.4) and later she said: "*Moses lost faith in himself, just as I did, but God Almighty showed us otherwise. We are strong*". This statement enriched her alternative identity of a strong woman.

Concerning Craig, Carol wanted them to become strangers to each other, that indicated that he was to be released from her club of life. Michael White (quoted by Russell & Carey 2002:24) introduced the term 'club of life' that consists of members that played a role in the shaping of one's identity that can be revised and re-organised by the person. Carol's letter-writing to Craig was an important step towards moving him out of her 'club of life'. I asked her if she would like to write an imaginary letter from Craig in response to her letter, but she declined. She preferred to get on with life as described in the following words: "*I don't care any more what he thinks of me, or what he is up to. He can live in his own little*

world, and I'll live in mine, because I no longer wish to have anything to do with him. I prefer that we become strangers to each other".

Carol's frustration in not understanding God's will, changed from accusing God of being insensitive, to *"He knew that I would make it"* and to *"He will never ask from us more than what we can bear"*. She also acknowledged that God trusted her more than she trusted herself and that He knew what she was capable of. Her fear of not pleasing God all the time, changed to *"I do not think my hatred will be such a big deal for God, because He accepts us with our good and bad qualities"*. Once she felt free to pray about the same problem as often as she needed, she commented: *"It felt as if a mountain was lifted off my shoulders"*. When we reflected at a later stage, she professed that her relationship with God grew stronger. I asked if she moved closer to God or if He moved closer to her. She said they both moved closer. I asked: "How close?" She said: *"God is closer than my skin."*

She dreamt the second dream later in our journey together. She dreamt that she was woken when her bed shook violently. She saw the devil in the darkness. He looked like the devil in the film, *The Passion of the Christ*. He wore a black cape with a hood that covered his face. Carol and the devil were both standing on her bed. He asked her to sing to him. She sang the following song:

*Jesus we're living for your name
We'll never be ashamed of You
Our praise and all we are today
Take, take, take it all
Take, take, take it all*

It was the song on a CD she listened to, before she went to bed. The devil was angry. She asked him *'How am I doing so far?'* He shook his head. She heard music that sounded like a deadmarch. She wondered: *"Does he want to kill me now?"* She sighed deeply and thought: *"The devil is silly to let me sing to him. He is wasting his time, because I know my faith in God is strong"*. She continued her story: *"When I woke up, I was scared at first and wondered if it really happened and if my bed would start shaking again. I got up, went to the bathroom asked God if I did the right thing. I thought it was okay, because I felt peaceful. Back in bed I was thinking that I had won. I slept soundly after that"*.

Carol's explanation for this dream was that God wanted to test how strong her faith was and she passed the test. Her statement: "*I've won*" was in contrast to her statement during our first conversation: "*I have lost*". Her identity construction of not-being-good-enough have been replaced with "*God accepts us all with our good and bad characteristics*" and "*God trusts me more than I trust myself*" and "*God knew that I could make it*". This dream gave Carol's relational identity a firm foundation in the God in whom she believes. Carol's dream was an affirmation of belonging to God on a very personal level and re-memorizing Him in a more intimate way. VanKatwyk (2002:114) refers to Jacob's wrestling at Peniel and concludes: "When the story is life-creating (and name-changing), we know that the place is sacred".

3.6 REFLECTING ON OUR JOURNEY

Carol's faith and hope for a better future never faltered. Her faith language sustained her all along. She came to see me out of desperation when she could not 'get over the problem'. Her solution was to block out the memories, to stay busy and work hard, and to withdraw from a social life. The importance of connectedness in re-defining the 'self' eluded her. She did, however, attend church services regularly and found consolation there. What Carol needed was dialogue with someone she could trust. Prest and Keller (1993:140) stresses the need for dialogue: "Just as human beings evolve their own language and create their inter-subjective meanings regarding their daily experiences through dialogue, so people generate meaning surrounding their spirituality". It is through languaging that realities are co-constructed. I trust that co-working with Carol succeeded in helping her to see new possibilities within her belief system that helped her to achieve the flexibility needed to change how she viewed her relationships (Prest & Keller 1993:140). Carol's belief system was both maintaining the problem – for example, she expected a miraculous intervention to take away the pain – and it supplied a resource for encouragement and support. Frankl (1969:57) writes: "Life requires of people spiritual elasticity, so that they may temper their efforts to the chances that are offered". I was also required to entertain this elasticity in order to enter into Carol's world, to value what she believed and to use her framework to address problems from 'within'. The gift I received from her, was her trust in me and allowing me to enter into the personal intricacies of her life. Despite our huge age difference, I believe we shared what Heshusius (1994:16) calls

a participatory mode of consciousness that was valuable to both of us. Thomas Moore (cited in Anderson 1999:158) has suggested that “care of soul...includes knowing that a piece of sky and a chunk of earth lie lodged in the heart of every human being” and that “embodied spirituality links earth and sky”. I often asked Carol what she was experiencing bodily. The comfort she found in worshipping God was felt in her chest and in her thoughts. The embodiment of experiences are stressed by feminist theologians. Denise Ackermann (1998:87) describes “a feminist theology of praxis as embodied in practical theology. It accepts that all perceived reality and all knowledge is mediated through our bodies. Our senses are sources of our knowledge....We *are* our bodies”. Being in touch with what happens in one’s body may help with meaning-making of one’s experiences.

Carol and I are still in contact via e-mail and if she would want to have more conversations, I am available. However, on reflecting on what has transpired so far, I recognise Carol’s cry of anguish, “*I don’t know what to believe*” as mirroring my own and many other people’s struggle to reconcile God’s ultimate meaning for our lives with the ‘realities’ we encounter. To put God in control of one’s life, means surrendering to an Almighty Being in an asymmetric relationship with an imbalance in power. Carol’s desire was to please God. She desired to discover the ultimate meaning of events in her life. Trying to find it on her own, confused her even more. She needed answers from God, the ultimate meaning. Hermans (2002:128) writes:

People are incapable of seeing their life as a whole. God is the author who consummates a person’s whole life. By doing so, the author-God saves the ‘I-for-myself’ from being undefined....The hero [person] must surrender to the mercy of the author-God, in order to obtain ultimate meaning in their life. Finalisation by the author-God is redemption or justification.

Justification could not happen by bringing Craig to ‘trial’; so redemption/liberation from unwanted feelings, from an inability to understand, were needed. I believe such a simplistic analysis does not do justice to the multi-layered, complicated and unknown other ‘realities’ that are also embedded in Carol’s story. Finding peace with God is sometimes, however, sufficient.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored and summarised the narrative practices used in this study, their theoretical bases and application. In the following chapter, I shall discuss how praxis informs theory in a never ending spiral with particular reference to the theory of religious development and the praxis of narrative pastoral therapy. This will be done from a social constructionist perspective. The focus will also be on the religious experiences of the participants and on transformation as an outcome valued in action research and valued as an aim for this study. In this discussion two more participants will be introduced.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SPIRAL OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands;
so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

“Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.”
Jeremiah 18: 4, 6b.

...we need to balance the hope for certainty and clarity in theory with the
impossibility of avoiding uncertainty and ambiguity in practice
(Stephen Toulmin quoted by Cochrane 1994:26).

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the notion of religious development will be addressed from a social constructionist perspective. The focus will also be on the religious experience of the client as stipulated by Heitink (1999:263) as one of the themes of practical anthropology (See action domain, section 2.3.3). Transformation is an outcome valued in action research and valued as an aim for this study (see section 1.6.3). Therefore, the focus will also be on transformation created in the lives of the students regarding their spiritualities, whilst having narrative pastoral conversations.

An assumption of conventional research is that the action in research is some kind of direct reflection of theory with a one-to-one relationship between the concepts of the theory and the variables of the experiment (Gustavsen 2001:17). However, most proponents of action research argue that theory alone has little power to create change and that there is a need for a more complex interplay between theory and practice. Most proponents of action research do not assume that theory can be directly expressed in action and they believe that the scientific pattern of thought in a theory rather blocks practical discourse when theory is used in real-life settings (Gustavsen (2001:17).

This is what happened when I mentioned Hughes' (1985:11) theory of religious development as a tentative means of discussing a student's awareness of her own spirituality. She replied smiling: “It sounds like the literary analysis of a poem or an

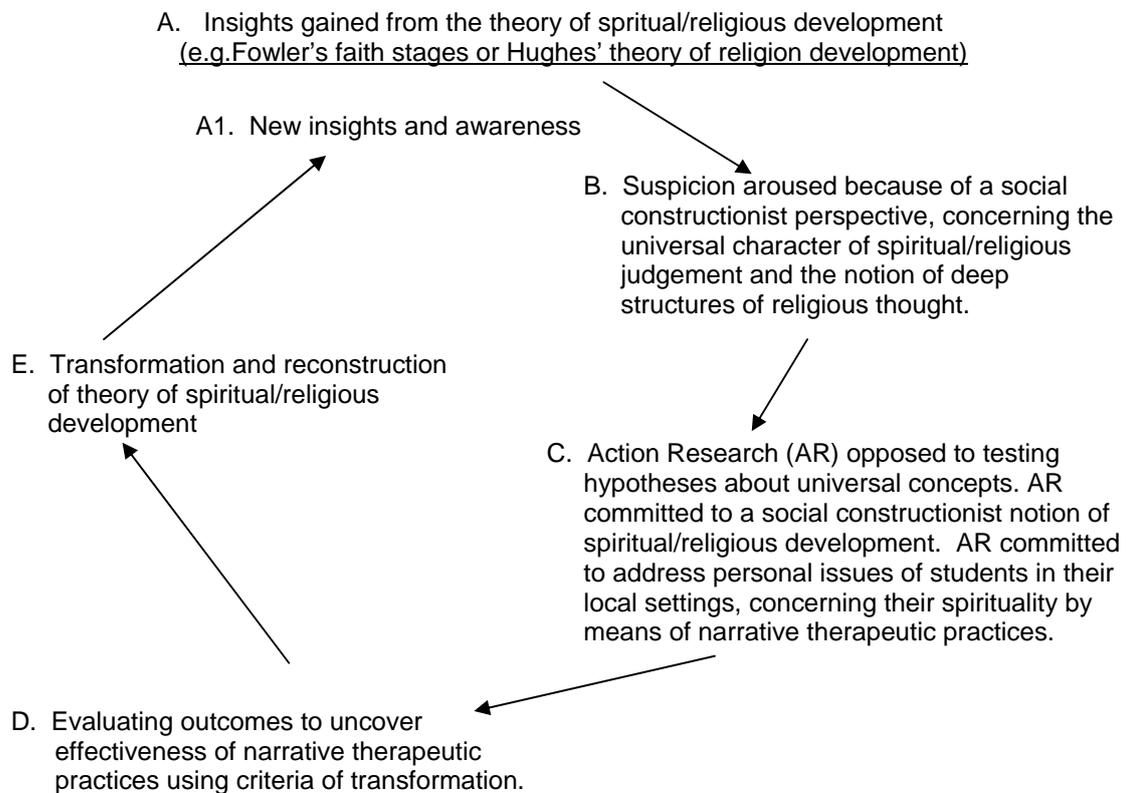
essay". This was the beginning and the end of a formal discussion on religious development. I do believe, however, for research to be of value to other researchers, the insights gained, can serve as a theoretical starting point for new research to emerge. Habermas (quoted by Gustavsen 2001:17,18) perceives the creation of theory and the development of practice as rather *different* activities and he continues to say:

While in constructing theory the aim is to reflect the truth, ...the aim in developing practice is to achieve success in the real world...[T]here is no question of a *direct* relationship [between theory and practice]. The link is a discursive one where ideas, notions and elements from the theory can be considered in the development of practice but with no claims to being automatically applicable.

The interchange between theory and practice in my practical theological approach to this research, will now be discussed.

4.2 THE SPIRAL OF THEORY AND PRAXIS

Theory for the constructionist is not a map of the world, but a communicative act within a range of relationships. To create theory which can function only within the narrow range of the academy is perhaps a squandering of dialogic resources (Gergen 2002:14). Theory may, however, inform the questions the therapist asks, but interpretation and the struggle to understand, is always a dialogue between the client and therapist and not the result of predetermined theoretical narratives essential to the therapist's world of meaning (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:38). The narrative therapist does not expect particular answers, but rather aims at generating new questions, as explained by Roux and Kotzé (2002:147): "In this way a participatory process that generates questions that generate answers that generate questions in an unending spiral opens up possibilities for a continuous search for ideas about the impossible". Certain ideas do guide these questions and these ideas come from probabilities stated as theories by other researchers. Being inspired by Pattison's (1994:61) diagram that represents an integration of the methods and insights of liberation theology, I structured a diagram to illustrate how theories inform praxis and vice versa in a never ending spiral. I present the following diagram that applies to my research:



A methodological spiral that designates the process of a hermeneutical inquiry about the use of theoretical insights in narrative pastoral practices, regarding clients' religious/spiritual development.

The methodological spiral has five stages. It starts with the insights and methods of how a person's faith develop according to "a shared master story or core story" (Fowler, quoted by Day 2002:64). This basic theoretical starting point can be designated stage A. The insights and methods of this theory of religious development with its constructivist emphasis on internal constructions of reality, lead to questions and concerns, from a constructionist perspective, about its internal consistency and empirical verifiability and its practical value/use in pastoral theology (Day 2002:63). The questions and concerns were about the notion of "internally located cognitive states" *within* the individual, and the notion of "ever increasing cognitive sophistication in an ever more autonomous subject, liberated from the constraints of social determination" (Day 2002:73). This is stage B of the spiral. These concerns and suspicions lead on to a third stage, C, where a social constructionist perspective and narrative pastoral practices were used to investigate the viability and applicability of the theoretical ideas. The focus was on exploring how a more "authentic"

experience of God, as an indication of a client's religious/faith development, could be made more visible by means of a social constructionist approach and by means of narrative pastoral practices. The next stage, D, required that the practice engaged in were analysed to uncover its significance and implications for future practical applications in narrative pastoral therapy. Evaluation of the narrative pastoral practices leads to stage E, the reorientation of narrative pastoral therapy towards an awareness of the dialogical and relational character of religious development. This leads to stage A1, new insights and theoretical awareness where one can start the spiral again.

4.2.1 Outcomes in Action Research

The primary aim of action research (AR) is to explore with participants – in the social settings in which they are involved – the possibilities for creating some “practical” way of addressing what are deemed to be problematic issues of concern to them (Romm 2006:18). This resonates with the third aim of this study, namely to explore the transformative effects of conversations about a personal spirituality on a client's perception of and ways of addressing problems in his/her life. An example of such a direct relationship between the consequential transformative effect of our conversations and the client's changed perception, was Ruth's (one of the participants) comment: *“I remember you (Carin) asked me previously to search my memory for what worked in the past”*. When I asked her what ‘tools’ she could use to address a certain problem, she replied: *“I have to talk, have regular quiet times with the Lord and journaling”*. Lewin (quoted by Romm 2006:18) defined AR as a cyclical inquiry process that involves diagnosing a problem situation, planning action steps, and implementing and evaluating outcomes. This evaluating of outcomes seems to be problematic as the criteria for determining transformation, are debatable. Different types of criteria are offered, for example, criteria that have the ability to convince others (who have not participated in the project) that the results are believable (Romm 2006:18). Another suggestion is “that it (AR) can be judged in terms of its success in aiding people to indeed address practical issues of concern” and in aiding people to extend or alter their options for action (Romm 2006:18,20). However, the criteria for evaluating outcomes or success or transformation remain debatable. David Tracey (1983:72,80) believes that the principal praxis criteria for practical theology are the criteria of transformation, but he acknowledges that there is no one set of criteria to decide different issues. Tracey (1983:80) concludes: “There are, rather, different sets of relevant

criteria applicable to the various aspects abstracted from the concrete whole that is theology.” Tracey (1983:80) stresses the relatedness and collaborative character of all theology - of fundamental, systematic and practical theology – ranging from:

the relative abstraction of the understanding of God as the one strictly necessary individual (in fundamental theology) to the greater concreteness of a Christic envisionment of God as the comprehensible-incomprehensible, revealed and hidden God of pure unbounded love (in systematic theology) to an understanding of God’s transformative action in the self, society, and history in the transformative praxis of faith-working-through-love and justice and guided by the hope of God’s eschatological future (in practical theology).

Working from criteria (the abstract) to the practical situation (the concrete) in evaluating outcomes, requires co-ordination between theory and praxis. Greenwood and Levin (quoted by Romm 2006:20,21) note that “often AR reports are called mere storytelling, an insulting attempt to disqualify the general knowledge gained in a specific AR case” while “individual cases and stories, the stuff of most AR, have immense power to alter theories”. This altering of theories, however, is regarded as less important than the fact that a contribution can be made to addressing issues in the setting under study which can be called the “internal credibility” of the research by those involved therein (Greenwood & Lewin, quoted by Romm 2006:21). The ideal of this research to be relevant both to theory-building and to participants in addressing their problems, might require that hypotheses are formulated and tested in a way that puts the researcher in a controlling position that is not acceptable for someone working according to the principles of narrative therapy. Narrative therapy can be distinguished from many other therapeutic interventions by its endeavour to create an egalitarian relationship between therapist and client where “the client is the expert” (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). Therefore, rather than testing hypotheses and making statements about the research outcomes/results as having truth status about “the realities” apparently uncovered, AR rather aims at “the unravelling (and documentation) of multiple realities and rhetorics that are in mutual and simultaneous interaction” (Weil quoted by Romm 2006:21).

To conclude, I present the following questions that I consider to be the criteria for the evaluation of this research. A constructionist perspective of religious development stresses the uniqueness, the contextuality and the incompleteness of a person’s religious journey. Rather than identifying the developmental position of a client as if the person has

reached a certain stage and has arrived, the approach in this study is to consider the client as being on her way in an ever evolving process with a past, present and future. In shifting from a “constructivist case for universal, invariant, and irreversible stages in religious development”, to a constructionist approach, Day (2002:72) invokes the “notions of *narrative*, of *dialogical appropriation*, *ideological becoming* and *authorship*, and of *supplementation* and *joint action*” to describe ways to “think of development as belonging both to the sphere of the person and of the socius, the network of relationships of which s/he is part” (Day 2002:74,80). The notions mentioned here, support the following criteria of transformation.

4.2.2 Criteria of transformation

Firstly, was the spirituality that was re-constructed life-giving? A life-giving spirituality would indicate that God had been invited into the conversations and that this lead to new perspectives and meanings, and consequently to growth and healing. The relationship with God would be more intimate and this relationship would be (re)positioned as primary in the life of the client.

Secondly, did the students benefit from participating in the project? First-hand reports by them (see section 5.6) are needed to testify to this. Even if the student testifies to have benefited, it is impossible to truly understand another person’s experience fully and we can only rely on communicative acts. In addition, neither the client, nor the therapist would know what the long-term effects of our conversations would be. In serving God, Paul said: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow” (1 Corinthians 3:6,7).

Thirdly, did our conversations help the clients to gain voice, to gain clarity and to make choices? (Neuger 2001:64). To gain voice the competency of effective communication is needed. Bakhtin’s (quoted by Day 2002:81) notion of *authorship* requires of a person to actively participate in the shaping of her world through language:

The person comes to view herself as a self insofar as she is counted on to *speak* in her own *voice*, and to *answer* to others, to become part of the dialogues of which her world is composed, to respond when spoken to, to offer moves which will incline others to speak, to participate in the making of the world through her place in the way it is linguistically constructed and shaped.

To gain voice in this way also implies the accomplishment of “a well-developed sense of self-worth” (Heitink 1999:260).

To gain clarity, the competency of welcoming alternative meaning-making of events is needed as well as a consciousness of the multiplicity of knowledges and ‘truths’. Dunlap (1999:137) advises caregivers “to cultivate the awareness that meaning is plural” and to invoke “alternative discourses that may lie dormant in a person’s memory”. This competency resonates with the second aim of this research, namely, to explore how narrative therapy contributes to the co-construction of a richer meaning-making of life events by engaging in spiritual talk with clients. A richer meaning-making of events may help the client to gain clarity and it may also render more “ways of defining...options for action” or extending existing repertoires of action (Romm 2006:20). To gain clarity it is necessary for the client to gain a sense of self-reflection (Heitink 1999:260). Action research is specifically aimed at activating people’s potential to reflect on their own and others’ experiences and to consider ways of improving their actions in the light of these reflections (Romm 2006:20).

To make choices, a client needs a sense of self-agency that refers “to a personal perception of competency for action” and “having the ability to...*choose* in a way that is liberating, [and] that opens up new possibilities” (Anderson 1997:230,231). In narrative therapy the development of agency is paramount. Self-narratives can permit or hinder self-agency and often clients’ problems emanate from social narratives and self-definitions that do not yield an effective agency for the tasks defined (Anderson 1997:233). Weil (quoted by Romm 2006:20) notes that people can become sensitised to recognising and accounting for their embeddedness in the realities they are creating (through language) and to examine the way they, and others, might be affected by their choices. The notions of making choices, self-agency and the notion of selfhood/self-identity/self-storying are thus linked and combine as a criterion for investigating if transformation had occurred.

Fourthly, was relatedness/connectedness increased in their lives and what are the qualities of those relationships, e.g. to God, to self, to others and to things/activities? Day (2002:85) puts “an accent on those skills which contribute to the building of relationship and which expand, through discussion, the relational resources of communities of which the student is part”. Day (2002:85) further elaborates this notion of relationship:

“...we would want to explore ways of evaluating whether and how groups (from dyads to larger groups) build, and sustain, relationship in the midst of conflict and dissonance. With Gergen (1993), we would want to explore pastoral responses to the notion that belief might be conceived of as a relational resource, and to better understand how it happens that in some lives talk of belief contributes to the building and sustaining and enhancing of relationship, whereas in some lives, or in some domains, talk of belief works as a kind of destructive conversational convention, obstructing rather than permitting or opening to dialogue.

In stead of discerning whether a student had reached a certain faith stage, I would rather “privilege relational competence as a desirable goal of development” (Day 2002:82). This kind of development requires “a kind of...communicational balancing, which is at once concerned with the maintenance of interpersonal functioning and with personal differentiation (Day 2002:82). This resembles maturity in a constructionist sense.

Fifthly, did the students arrive at a position where they participated in the defining of “what could be” and in appreciating the possibility of “what could be, rather than what is?” (Romm 2006:20). A well-developed sense of flexibility (Heitink 1999:260) and imagination are needed to appreciate possibilities of what could be, rather than what is. Using the analogy of dancing in an uncertain/uncontrollable world, the aim is, not to tell students that some things in life cannot be changed, but rather to invite them to discover for themselves how to change their dancing steps. Where it might not be possible to change circumstances, and options for actions are limited, self-agency still renders the possibility to change our perceptions and behaviour in a way that enable us to “live more comfortably with uncertainty and ambiguity” (Romm 2006:21). This criterion resonates with what Gerkin (1984:187) refers to as “a tendency to interpret the events of everyday life as parables of transcendence” and where “the extraordinary is revealed in the ordinary” with concomitant “transformative possibilities found in the unexpected”.

The spiral of theory informing praxis, and vice versa is not a simplistic process. “...we need to balance the hope for certainty and clarity in theory with the impossibility of avoiding uncertainty and ambiguity in practice (Stephen Toulmin quoted by Cochrane 1994:26).

In the following section, I return to a re-telling of the research journey with the participants where the focus is on their religious experiences which is stipulated by Heitink (1999:263)

as one of the themes of practical anthropology. The focus will also be on religious development, but not as seen from a constructivist's viewpoint that honours a universal, invariant, and irreversible stage-theory of religious development that would render a developmental analysis, "pinning down subjects' places on ladders of developmental hierarchy" (Day 2002:72). Religious development is approached in this study from a social constructionist perspective. Here the criteria of transformation (section 4.2.2) are relevant, as this indicate a contextual level of 'spiritual maturity' which is dependent on the dialogical and relational character of religious development. The focus will also be on transformation created in the lives of the students regarding their spiritualities, whilst having narrative pastoral conversations. The transformative effects of our conversations on their lives is considered from a social constructionist perspective that puts change in a sub-ordinate position to the importance of addressing the burning issues of the clients. From a narrative perspective "[t]herapy becomes a transformative event – the natural consequence of dialogical conversation and collaborative relationship (Anderson 1997:234). Transformation was uniquely experienced by each participant as we were involved in the first-person narratives of each person. Change is, according to Anderson (1997:233):

inherent in dialogue: change is the telling and retelling of familiar stories; it is the redescriptions that accrue through conversation; it is the different meanings that are conferred on past, present, and imagined future events and experiences. Change becomes developing future selves.

One of the features of a constructionist's perspective on religious development is the notion of *audience* where the person talks to God instead of talking about God (Day 2002:84). The next section explains how this notion was explored, and an account is given of how 'talking to God' was reflected in the student's experience of God.

4.3 EXPERIENCING GOD

God being a mystery to us, can only be known to the extent that we know ourselves, and to the extent we understand our relationship with God. Theology, literally meaning word (*logos*) about God (*theos*) (De Gruchy 1994:4), confronts the problem of talking about God, who is a mystery. De Gruchy (1994:6) concludes that it is better to speak about the subject of theology as God in relation to the world and ourselves, rather than God in God's own essence or being. This suggestion serves as a rationale for exploring students'

relationship with God and students' image of God as done by Griffith and Griffith (1992) where the student imagines what God would say to her and what He sees in her life. They have found that the features of a person's God-construct do not bear any necessary relationship to the person's stated beliefs, doubts, dogma, or theology (Griffith & Griffith 1992:65). A God-construct is specific and unique for each individual. It is a privately perceived and experienced image of God that is not only a visual image, but may involve other sense-perceptions as well (Griffith & Griffith 1992:65). In exploring this relationship as presented by the person's God-construct, the focus will be more on the student's unique experience of God, rather than on the content of her beliefs.

To discuss an example of exploring a student's unique experience of God, I shall now turn to my conversation with Carol, regarding her God-construct.

4.3.1 Carol's God-construct

I asked Carol if it would be all right if we invite God into the room and if we engage in a role play that would help us to discover how she sees God in her relationship with Him. I followed some of Griffith and Griffith's (1992:76-80) suggestions in my conversation with Carol. We switched chairs several times. When Carol described how she saw God, her following words were significant:

Carol: *... with love in His eyes and maybe a longing...*

Carin: A longing...?

Carol: *Maybe a longing for me...*

Carin: Why does He long for you?

Carol: *because I'm perhaps a little too far away from Him and He wants me to stay with Him; ...that we must not leave each other or drift apart.*

Our conversation continued and she said that God saw her confusion, her longing to forget about Craig, her longing to forgive him and to carry on with her life.

Carin: And what do you see (as God), how does she (Carol) manage – or does not manage – to do this?

Carol: *...that she does not manage, because she is – maybe – not 100% with...not yet, totally open with God about this.*

Carin: So is this part of the longing that you see in God's eyes?

Carol: Yes.

The longing of God for Carol was a revelation to both Carol and myself. She was surprised by this. Imagining her relationship with God through our role play, elicited an experience of God that was probably more authentic than what a mere cognitive response to the question: 'Who is God for you?' would have been. The first research question of this study, is relevant here, namely, 'In what ways can a narrative approach in therapy contribute to making the spiritual dimension salient in pastoral care?' Our role-play opened space for the *God of Surprises*, which is also the title of Hughes' (1985) book, to enter into our conversation.

Hutsebaut and Verhoeven (1991:59-72) give the results of different surveys undertaken in Belgium between 1970 and 1987 that aimed mainly to study the God representations of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18, which Vergote saw as the central dimension of the Christian religion. In Vergote's (quoted by Hutsebaut and Verhoeven 1991:59) view, the modern western person can only remain religious and a believer, if he or she works out his relation to God in his personal life. Hutsebaut and Verhoeven's (1991:59-72) study focused on religious development. The representation of God was inferred from a short questionnaire and the main question consisted of an uncompleted sentence: 'To me, God means ...'. Such an approach would render a response that is filtered through the student's rational thinking only, and the "irrational (non-rational)" and "non-cognitive factors" (Rossouw 1993:900) would not be addressed in their presentation of their experience of God. The validity of using a student's sentence completion, as in this case, as an authentic version of her relationship with God, may be queried. Such a response may not represent, *experiencing God*, as exemplified by the role-play mentioned above. Melissa Griffith (1995:128) states that she has found in her therapy with clients, that *stated* beliefs or denominational group beliefs, are poor predictors of a person's *experience* of God. Suspicion was also aroused as Hutsebaut and Verhoeven's (1991:59-72) research seems like theology "from above" (Bosch 1991:439) and the question may be asked, "Who benefited most from their research?"

The religious experience of another student as well as the transformative effects of our conversations will now be discussed.

4.3.2 Sally's developing story

Sally, a 21-year-old drama student, identified her problem as a "faith issue" and wanted particularly to talk to a therapist who would deal with this. She experienced conflict because of her physical intimate relationship with her boyfriend, Sam, which she considered to be wrong in the eyes of God, but she did not know how she could possibly have a relationship with him and not yield to sexual intimacy. Her parents advised them to either get married or to "cool it". The only solution she could think of, was to separate from Sam temporarily and have no contact with him. When she came to see me, three months had passed during which they only had a few conversations and no clarity as to how they should proceed with the relationship. She talked about feelings of insecurity, frustration and confusion. She told me that she wanted Sam to have a more intimate relationship with God and that she feared that he might also turn into an alcoholic like his father, even though he had not been drinking excessively. Several times she assured me that she loved him very much and that it would be very difficult to put up physical boundaries between the two of them. She considered the past three months as a deepening of her relationship with God, but worried about the prospect of resuming her relationship with Sam, because – in her own words – *"I don't want Sam to be the reason for my being distant from God"*.

Sally remarked: *"The reason why I came to you, is because this has been a very spiritual journey for me. My dad said it might be more a psychological thing. I'm the type of person that act a lot on my emotions"*. This reminded me of Hughes' (1985:22) warning that the mystical element in religious development may be so emphasised that the institutional and critical elements are neglected. Sally said that she struggled to *"find a balance between head and heart"* and that her *"emotions determine my (her) decisions"*. She wanted to be obedient to God, but it was not clear what this obedience would mean in practice. She was sure that *"God has a calling on my (her) life"*, but the details of this was not made clear. It seemed as if Sally was inclined not to refer to the details and particularities of her situation, and she referred to issues in abstract terms. The following vague statements, for example, indicated such a position: *"I have wisdom and I am always one step ahead of Sam"* and *"Our relationship is a safety net for Sam"* and *"I released Sam when I was at that submissive place"*. Over-emphasising the mystical element may lead to an abandonment of moral and doctrinal teaching and the growth of an emotionalism which

cannot be understood because it will not submit itself to the critical element (Hughes 1985:220).

A therapist is not a tabula rasa or blank screen (Anderson 1997:97) and Hughes' ideas above was part of my pre-understanding. Reflecting on Hughes' ideas and suggesting the possibility of an imbalance to Sally, was done transparently as recommended by Anderson (1997:103):

Reflecting can encourage and assure the emergence of a therapist's multiple voices or perspectives....Reflecting and showing myself [therapist] to the other [client] permit me and the other to have more flexibility in dealing with the...sometimes conflicting opinions about the complex predicaments clients present. They allow me to have or assert a strong opinion and to participate in controversial situations without polarising or freezing positions. Everything said is provisional grist for the mill.

I briefly explained Hughes' (1985:17) concept of religious development to Sally and asked tentatively if it could be possible that she emphasised the mystical element more than the critical element. She said: "*Definitely*". I asked if it would be acceptable if we focus more on the particularities of issues and if I ask questions that would invoke a critical consideration of issues. Reflexive questions like "What plans do you have for next year?" "What would be different if Sam had a closer relationship with God?" "In what way will your relationship with Sam have to change to be acceptable to God, to Sam, to you?" My intent with these questions was to promote the development of self-reflection and to facilitate richer descriptions of concepts. By reflecting on Hughes' ideas and suggesting a more critical consideration of issues in her life, I attempted to really understand what Sally was experiencing. Gadamer (quoted by Gerkin 1984:44,45) refers to the process whereby people try to understand each other, as a dialogical process,

in which what is hoped for, is...a merger or fusion of horizons of meaning and understanding. This means...we take with us into that attempt our prejudices, our "pre-understandings," our biases. They are part and parcel of the world in which we live and experience the other; they make up the horizon of our understanding....A hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's newness...[and] this involves...the conscious assimilation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices.

I would like to add to this quote that a neutral stance, is therefore not possible.

4.3.2.1 Sally's experiences

Up to the writing of this report, Sally and I have had four conversations. These discussions were not as simplistic as stated below, but the focus of my discussion is on the changes that took place in Sally's perceptions, and on highlighting her experiences as Bruner (1986:9) observes: "Traditionally, anthropologists have tried to understand the world as seen by the "experiencing subject", striving for an inner perspective". Sally focused on different problems at different times and the relationships between these problems and their effects were deconstructed. In the beginning she named the problem, the problem of the-differences-in-spiritual-intimacy and a simplistic solution was, according to her, that Sam should develop a more intimate relationship with God. Sally said: *"I want Sam to become more teachable; to soften. But I gave him a Scripture on his character and he accepted that"*. Many deconstructing questions were asked, for example, "What do you have to give up in order to welcome Sam in your life just as he is?" and "How does pleasing God influence your relationship with Sam?" and "What do you experience that make you say that God is not satisfied with your physical relationship with Sam?" and "Under what circumstances is it easier for the insecure feelings to enter your life?" etc. Later she said she wanted to change her focus. She said, *"After these sessions with you, I just realised that a lot of it had to do with me, how I was judging him, and after these sessions I just have a deeper respect for him. It's weird, because I always thought it [my focus] had been on God, but I think I allowed Sam to be the focus. I want to get to a place where I do not judge him, like God, because I need to let God do what He wants to do, and that's where faith comes in, and a relationship requires faith"*. I honoured Sally's sincerity in wanting to please God. The conclusion she made that she was mistaken in her assumption that her focus had been on God, seemed to be the result of critically reflecting on her past. It seemed as if self-reflection and critical questioning or the critical element in religious development that Hughes (1985:11) referred to, gained ground in her perspectives. Gerkin (1984:42) refers to Dilthey's notion that self-understanding comes about through the distancing of reflection on objectifications of experience. Sally acquired an alternative perspective on how she experienced her relationship with Sam by considering what Sam's most likely perspective was and also God's perspective, as illustrated below.

We spoke about the different levels of physical intimacy that was acceptable to each of them. She assured me that Sam would be co-operative if she would explain to him where she thinks the boundary should be. This decision seemed not to be an easy one. She said, *"I just don't like those guilty feelings. I get these ugly feelings. But Sam still feels the same way. It's okay for him, but I don't think it's in God's Will, so we have this conflict in our relationship"* and *"It does not mean that I do not initiate it sometimes"*. I asked Sally if it would be all right if we invite God into the room and if we engage in a role-play that would help us to discover how she sees God in her relationship with Him.

Day (2002:84) contends that a constructionist take on religious development would make the notion of talking *to* God more the focus of pastoral work. To create the opportunity for imagining a dialogue with God, questions like the following are suggested (Day 2002:84):

When you talk to yourself that way, whose voice is it you imagine answering you? What does it sound like when that other voice speaks? Now imagine another voice responded. What would it sound like? There where you're talking about what feels like God's answer to you, can you give that answer a voice? Is there any other way in which you might imagine God answering you?

I again followed Griffith and Griffith's (1992:76-80) suggestions for role-play. Another shift occurred when, during this role play, Sally said: *"I don't actually feel 100% responsible for Sam's relationship with God. It's not up to me. I think that the Lord is doing something differently in Sam's life and ... maybe I have this expectation of how I want it to be – and God's got a different plan..."* On behalf of Sally I said the following words:

"God, I don't know if You expected too much, but I don't feel that You have revealed to me enough to know how to be the right kind of partner for Sam. I look to You as the sole provider of information. I really feel I need Your wisdom in this relationship. Maybe, I, Sally, have not done enough, or maybe I have tried too hard, I don't know..."

Sally began to cry and I asked her to speak from that feeling she was experiencing at that moment. The focus on Sally's experience is what Boisen (quoted by Gerkin 1984:38) recommends: "For Boisen the cure of souls had to do fundamentally with the raw stuff of religious experience". Van der Lans (2002:29) says that Sundén:

demonstrated in several case studies that religious experience in which a person has the sense or feeling of the presence of "a beyond", becomes psychologically understandable when it is analysed as an internal dialogue. He analysed religious experience as a process of role-play and role-taking...

Sally said. *“I’ve got such a desire to do things right – I don’t know why I’m crying, because I think I’m so sad that the relationship is not the right thing. I really do love Sam and I would wish that I would be able ... to have this intimacy with the Lord as well”.*

Sally did not think marriage was the answer, because she and Sam would be in different cities next year and she said: *“I don’t think God wants us to get married”.*

It was only after Sally pointed out that the temptation-problem was “the real issue”, that we decided to start working on a strategy against this problem. This notion of naming the problem, designing counterplots and moving towards a preferred way of being, is recommended by Freedman and Combs (1996:203):

In re-authoring their lives, many people have told us that naming problems and projects or plots and counterplots has been helpful. Once they are named, people more easily recognise when the culprits are around and when they themselves are moving into preferred territory. With this recognition people more often experience themselves as being able to choose what to do.

The temptation-problem can also be considered as a unique outcome that was used as a point of entry, whereby Sally was able to engage in “an ‘archeology’ of, and the performance of, alternative and preferred practices of relationship” (White 1991:36). This also enabled her to challenge the structures and conditions that were supportive of pre-marital sexual behaviour that she called “sexual sin”. Distinguishing the temptation as “the real problem”, came about when I deconstructed the feelings of guilt, disappointment and insecurity. I also noticed that she used the words ‘uncertainty’ and ‘insecurity’ interchangeably. (See Appendix D). I asked questions that would enable her to become aware of what happened in her body when the temptation-problem was sneaking up on her. A bodily awareness, instead of only thinking abstractly about the problem, could help to safeguard her against the attacks of the problem. Denise Ackermann (1998:87) writes:

A feminist theology of praxis is embodied practical theology. It accepts that all perceived reality and all knowledge is mediated through our bodies. Our senses are sources of knowledge. The power to love one another as much as the power to injure another begins in our bodies. We *are* our bodies.

An excerpt of our discussion serves as an example of making bodily experiences salient.

Carin: “What do you experience, in your body, when the temptation is sneaking up on you?”

Sally: *“I get such a bland feeling over my heart”.*

Carin: "What else?"

Sally: *"I become very comfortable and relaxed"*.

Carin: "Does the position and place you're in, play a role in moving into this comfortable feeling?"

We discussed several ways of outwitting the problem.

It was important to use Sally's exact words and not supplement her words with what I thought she meant. See Appendix D for an illustration of using her exact words. Freedman and Combs (1996:206) refer to Michael White and David Epston's use of the exact words of the client and often repeating them, which they find valuable in making a story more real. Freedman and Combs (1996:207) testify that their clients tell them that it is a different experience to hear something, than to say it and that there may also be differing accompanying thoughts and associations with each repetition; so each repetition thickens the story. Here it is also important which words the therapist choose to repeat. Gerkin (1984:43,44) writes:

It is right at this point that the language world out of which the pastoral counsellor shapes his or her perceptions and response to the other person becomes crucial. If that be a language world inhabited by the images of theology and faith, the counselee will be invited into a world shaped by those images....Traditionally in pastoral counseling theory this process has been spoken about in the language of empathy, rapport, and acceptance.

4.3.2.2 *Sally externalises her preferred way of being*

At my suggestion Sally chose a flower as symbol (the narrative practice of externalising) of the way she envisioned her future, in her own words *"exciting fresh newness; going back home to the family; doing a course in interior design; a life with my church; spiritual newness with the Lord"*. I asked if the feelings of disappointment and guilt that sometimes enter her life, would throw a shadow over the flower and make it wilt. She said, *"Definitely"*. She chose a scorpion to symbolise the temptation and we discussed how these two images might help her in future when she had to choose again. We discussed the many little choices she had to make before the temptation-problem would actually manage to get the better of her. An indication of realising that she had the agency to choose, was when she responded to my suggestion: "Maybe you can use the name you would like to give your own little girl some day." I made this suggestion because she could

not think of a pseudonym for her own name for this study. Her response was: “*No, my little girl’s gonna make better choices than me*”. Sally drew pictures of the flower and scorpion and brought it to our next session.

We talked about the value of her journaling as a means of recording the progress she envisioned. Sally also decided to make a declaration about her decision not to give in to the temptation again. She decided to write her declaration on a poster and put it up on her wall. I suggested that she first write a letter to the temptation to tell it that she now realises how it had influenced her life. Here is her letter to the temptation:

To Temptation,

I have come to realise that giving in to you, is the cause of most of the insecurities I face in my relationship with Sam. When giving in to you I feel separated from the awesome love of God and I become discouraged about my future in Him and the calling he has for my life. I know that you have robbed Sam and I from building on the friendship part of our relationship! I become insecure about the role I play in people’s lives, knowing that when I give in to you, I don’t set a good example to the people who look up to me. You steal my peace and take away my joy. You rob me from my free spontaneous spirit and crush my dreams for my future in Christ.

Unfortunately for you I have chosen to fight against you not only in my flesh but in spirit as well. Because the Son has set me free, I am free indeed, (John 8:32) I stand upon the Word of the Lord and in faith I take a stand against you, temptation.

By not giving in to you, I am able to live a life free from guilt and to enjoy the time I spend with Sam. I will love Sam more confidently, knowing that our relationship honours God, as we live in obedience to Him. You will loose this battle for I have chosen to no longer give in to you, temptation. I choose rather to pull down strong holds and cast down all imaginations and bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ which illuminates you!

Sally named two friends at her church to be witnesses and to whom she would be accountable. I trust that these projects will be helpful in the same way as Freedman and Combs (1996:203) found: “In re-authoring their lives, many people have told us that naming problems and projects or plots and counterplots has been helpful.” To invite Sally to reflect on her emerging narrative, I asked the following reflecting questions (Freedman & Combes 1996:191): “When you compare how you have handled this problem six weeks ago with what you are now doing, what do you learn about yourself?” Freedman and Combs (1997:192) points out that this process of moving “from being in a conversation to reflecting on it, they [people] become an audience to themselves [and] [t]his puts them in a better position to perform meaning on their own emerging narratives”.

The following words of Sally might be an indication of the transformation that was starting to take place: *“I’m realising now that my relationship with God doesn’t really involve Sam. I’ve got to live my life. I’m committed to raise the standard of my living”*.

Van der Lans (2002:30) notes that a narrative approach is sometimes used in research, in pastoral psychology and clinical psychology of religion, to investigate the role of religion in the discursive construction of identity, and I would add, in the discursive construction of a life-giving spirituality. Sally and I are still continuing with our conversations and this is my aim when conversing with Sally.

In discussing Ruth’s story, I focus on the difficulty she experienced in discerning her own preferences, the development of agency and the development of a richer, more life-giving identity.

4.3.3 Ruth’s story

When Ruth, a student at the Seminary, came to see me, she struggled to put into words the problems she was experiencing. She talked of feelings of frustration, depression, confusion, uncertainty, anger, tiredness, self-doubt, and a lack of peace in her heart. She complained of being ‘a *people-pleaser*’ and of ‘*shooting myself in the foot*’. I asked her what the main problem might be and she said, “*My being here at the Seminary*”. She cried and said: “*I feel overwhelmed and it is a question of integrity. I feel guilty because I don’t deliver*”. She said she felt betrayed and disillusioned about many things in her life. She further explained that two broken relationships and a forced transfer of her church membership from her home congregation in the country, to the local congregation contributed to her lack of motivation and personal discipline. Another contributing event, was when a bursary was awarded to her on the basis of colour, that caused a breach between her and her close white female friend who could not accept this. Ruth wrote in a letter to me: “*I moved from a private, loved, admired and spirited people’s person, secure in whom I was, to a public shamed, rejected, insecure person (loner); a big fish in a small tank to plankton in the ocean. I became small inside, because of the broken relationships.*” Ruth also broke up with the man, Charlton, she thought she would marry some day. She found it difficult to cope with his continuous efforts to resume the relationship.

Fischer (1988:118) maintains that “women’s sense of self is so organised around making and maintaining relationships, that disruption of such relationships is perceived not just as the loss of the relationship, but closer to a total loss of the self”. Ruth struggled with the academic work. She said she knew she would not give up on her studies, but, in her own words: *“My last two years were merely a struggle to survive – hardly breathing at times; often feeling like I’m sinking, battling, wrestling with the pain, the rejection, the disappointment and self-doubt.”* She continued: *“I have always expected more from the Faculty than what I experienced; spiritual leadership – living truthfully what they believed, and spiritual community/family – concerned more with who we are than what we do.”*

I sensed that Ruth might be struggling with the issue of discernment, because she said. *“I don’t trust my own judgement”* and *“I first have to sort out my thinking”*. I asked how she managed to do this in the past, and she said emphatically, *“I have to talk”*. Discernment is difficult because it is always marked by mystery and uncertainty and it is especially difficult for women who turn to a tradition that has so often betrayed us (Fischer 1988:113).

4.3.3.1 *Discernment*

Fischer (1988:113) writes:

All of spiritual direction is discernment, since the goal of both [discernment and spiritual directions] is to help us become as closely attuned as possible to God’s purposes for us, thereby discovering our own happiness as well. Spiritual direction...concerns the direction or orientation we are choosing for our lives....[and concerns the questions:] What does God want us to be and do, and how is this related to what we want?

I asked Ruth how her activities in a day were usually structured. She said, *“Last year I considered everything, that was not studying, a luxury. Before last year I drew up a program to ensure that I exercise, drink enough water, eat and sleep enough and I avoided coffee and chocolates. I realise I must look after myself and my soul”*. Fischer (1988:114) recommends a “listening to your deepest self” as a first step in approaching the issue of discernment and to reflect on decisions. Larkin (quoted by Fischer 1988:114) points out in his study, *Silent Presence: Discernment as Process and Problem*, that the process of finding God in our lives is linked with an awareness of self. To know the self and act from the deepest levels of the self is common in discussions of discernment, but this may present special problems for women, as listed by Greenspan (quoted by Fischer

1998:115), namely, “they [women] doubt their own competence, ...and they feel they have no sense of self at all”. Psychologist Jean Miller (quoted by Fischer 1988:115) reflects on reasons for this and points to what has been instilled in women from birth, namely, that “acting out of one’s self is a dangerous, frightening and evil thing”; a threatening experience for women and produce a sense of unworthiness, or at least a sense of conflict and unease. It became clear in our conversations that Ruth could have declined the ‘forced’ transfer of her church membership, but she complied. It was necessary for Ruth to discover what her ‘wants’ were in stead of the ‘shoulds’ that she imagined, or the ‘oughteries’ that Hughes (1985:37) refer to. She said, “*Someone once said that I valued his opinion more than I valued my own opinion*”. What Fischer (1988:117) says of women, may be doubly true of Ruth, because of the cultural discrimination of the past:

After centuries of having their lives defined and controlled by others, women need help in achieving some self-direction. Women’s formation inclines them to a reflective identity, one that is mediated by others and will be of benefit to others. This means that they mirror the desires and feelings of those close to them, losing in the meantime a sense of their own.

I asked if her valuing another’s opinion higher than her own, perhaps indicated that she was a sensitive person that would easily sense another person’s perspective and needs. She confirmed this. I asked how she might put this to work to reach her goals. She said, “*I would like to become involved in a ministry for families, but even if this does not happen, and everything falls flat, I still belong to the Lord and He loves me*”. When I asked if she saw herself as a co-author with God of her life-story, she first considered this and then she said: “*If this is so, I do not know how much of a co-author I would want to be*”. In terms of Hughes’ (1985:11) theory for religious development, Ruth seemed to focus more on the institutional element and was wary of becoming actively involved in appropriating ideas for herself by asking questions. Hughes (1985:16) writes:

If we are to develop as human beings we must find some unity in our experience, formulate some theory about our lives...we must have some plans and dreams for the future and some idea of how to accomplish them....To find meaning in our lives we have to question, criticise, systematise and theorise about our experience.

4.3.3.2 Agency:

At our next meeting we had the following conversation:

Ruth: *I thought about your question [if we are co-authors with God], and I think I strive for a spirituality that put other people first. If I'm the author of my own life, it would mean that I plan my life the way I see best; in the context of individualism and independence. But to God we are not puppets on a string. We do have a choice*

Carin: And how did you utilise this ability to choose in furthering your education?

Ruth: *I know that the Lord wants me to be here and He can use me more effectively...*

We discussed the role she had to play in furthering her studies. We also discussed the program that she drew up to structure her activities and she talked about the value of such a program in her first year. She said: *"The rituals in my spiritual life, like meditating in the garden, helped me to stand firm. I knew then the Lord will lead me and I just had to follow Him step by step"*. I asked if her time allocation in the previous year was one of either/or; either time for a spiritual life or time for academics only. This seemed to be a *"light bulb moment"* (her words) for Ruth, because her face lit up and she started recounting how she, two years ago, joined with other university students and *"struggled together and prayed together"*. She told of a friend in her home town and another friend in another town, as well as a couple in Namibia who were keenly interested in her life then and how they used to pray for her. She talked of her time at YWAM (Youth with a mission) when friends were asking each other *"How is your quiet time?"* in stead of *"How are you?"* She said, *"All these people upheld my arms. I have to send out newsletters again. That will make me accountable to them. I realise I have lost contact with people"*.

Interdependence and peace were two concepts Ruth often referred to (see Appendix E). Bakhtin (quoted by Day 2002:82) sees the development of authorship as follows:

[It] is a kind of *ideological becoming*...*"one's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another"* may come to be *"liberated"* from their over-population by another's voice, meanings, and authorities.

Developing towards maturity is according to Day (2002:82) fully situated on the borderline of self and other, a kind of communicative competency and communicational balancing, which is at once concerned with the maintenance of interpersonal functioning and with personal differentiation; and therefore the desirable goal of developmental processes, is relational competence. This was significant as Ruth more than once indicated that what she needed in our sessions together, was the opportunity to talk and to have the

assurance that she was heard. She regarded my therapeutic letters as valuable, because this proved to her that her talking made sense to me, whereas she often experienced that other people seemed not to understand what she was trying to get across.

Ruth was troubled about the continuous phone calls of her ex-boyfriend, Charlton. He wanted to resume their relationship. Ruth asked how she should handle this. We discussed the idea of negotiating and re-negotiating relationships and how changes in one's circumstances and changes in one's identity impact relationships. During our next session she told me how she stood firm, regarding Charlton's phone calls and she said: *"I don't know if he really heard me, but it is finished!"* She also had an argument with another student over a theological issue and was surprised at herself when she exclaimed: *"Don't bull ... me!"* Ruth said: *"I still have to get used to being assertive. It is a major leap for me, but it was a victory for me to talk, unemotionally, but honestly and openly to him."* She also said the argument was still pending, but she accepted the issue to be no longer white/black, but rather grey. If "embracing paradox" (Anderson 1999:161) is considered a mark of maturity, then this conclusion of Ruth, is a sure sign of moving towards a mature spirituality.

When I saw Ruth recently, she said that it is now much easier for her to make decisions, to say no, without feeling guilty and to assume a position when necessary. She said: *"I have that boldness again."*

4.3.3.3 *A new identity in Christ*

Ruth's faith language sustained her throughout our journeying together. We discussed the disillusionment she experienced when her 'closest' friend, Susan, turned away from her when Ruth received a bursary. Susan remarked, "Why you of all people?" These words hurt Ruth deeply. She said, *"What I heard in those words, was 'You're not good enough' and I started to believe that I was not good enough. It made me wonder 'How did she then see me all along?' I started to believe that everything, our past, our friendship, was a lie. I thought about the past and started to remember little things that were indications of ..."* To counter this totalising perspective of herself, I asked who the people were that rejoiced with her. I also asked how she thought God was seeing her. Ruth was certain that it was God's doing that she received the bursary. She countered her disappointment with: *"I may not be good enough in her [Susan's] eyes, but I am good enough as a person and in*

my relationship with God. He loves me, and He brought me here and He'll keep me here".

We discussed how the security she found in her relationship with God could be activated to address other problems in her life in the following way:

Ruth: *I need to increase my quiet time. I've managed now to get up earlier in the morning. I have a ritual of lighting a candle. I have built a little sanctuary in the fire place in my room ... It's these little things that form part of how I experience my relationship with the Lord and how I make it tangible – even though I still have a long way to go".*

Carin: Is our talking today meaningful to you? Do you feel you are on your way – making progress the way your prefer?

Ruth: *Yes, I wrote here in my letter to you: Today I feel like I've conquered the dragon. No pride, but gratitude to be out of it; alive. I feel like I am at a new beginning – scared about the unseen monsters; uncertain about my own strength, but grateful to live again and at least to see the mountain for what it is.*

Carin: And the dragon?

Ruth: *It is the battle to just realise who I am and where I am. In the past I often felt I talked to the Lord, but it was as if I talked into the eternity. It's that head knowledge – not in the heart. And now I know God again with my heart.*

Experiencing God in her heart was a transforming experience that was an answer to the need of creating a life-giving spirituality. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:145) writes: "Anything which is life-based and life-giving is primarily religious, and if it is modelled on Christ, is also Christian". The definition of experience given by Isherwood and McEwan (1993:147), namely, "a methodological term used to validate women's lives as sources of theological reflection", invites me to consider Ruth's experience in the light of a theology that would be more liberating of her personal worth, her personal values and opinions. The spiral of theory and praxis implies just this. Cochrane (1994:34) refers to incipient or local theologies and emphasises the need to uncover the effect of our social location on our current perceptions, and he reminds us that our resultant perspective will condition the kind of theology we produce. Cochrane (1994:35) writes:

Central to the task of constructing a contextual theology, therefore, is local theology: the scattered reflections by local base communities, which are the way they think about the meaning and significance of their faith in relation to the struggles and hopes of their daily lives, and the practices which communicate these reflections (including ritual and symbolic practices).

Ruth's creation of her own little sanctuary is a solace and a substitute for the warm loving interdependent communion she is used to in her home town. However, her yearning for greater interdependence may require a different kind of theology that she is experiencing at the Seminary currently.

We talked about putting up road signs – or bill boards as Ruth preferred – along the path she travelled so far. We discussed the significance of each bill board as a means to sustain her in future. Much later Ruth said: *“I was in a desert where I had no clarity and your [Carin's] feedback was to look in my memory to find out what had helped me in the past. I took up those habits again and my spirituality became more life-giving to me. I have peace in my heart”*.

Hughes (1985:33) contends that we are all making the same journey, but the route is different for each and we have to discover it in freedom. I trust that I have helped Ruth to find this most needed freedom. Although guidelines may be provided by the church and other institutions of people (the institutional element), we ultimately have to find our own way and we are responsible for our own journey. I am grateful for being allowed to be a co-traveller with Ruth for some part of her journey. God is the destination of our journey, but God is a mystery and therefore the way the journey will unfold, is also a mystery.

4.4 AN AWARENESS OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Focussing on the local experiences of each student implied a theology from below. It also implied that their personal experiences were the starting point, “the moment of insertion” (Cochrane et al. 1991:17) to negotiate how a more life-giving spirituality and wholeness could be created. This reminds me of the feminist slogan, ‘the personal is political’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:146) by which the interconnectedness of everything is expressed. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:146) explains:

There are no separate spheres of behaviour which are mutually exclusive, from the human experience to the human-divine relationship....[W]e say that salvation starts in the here and now, through our lived experiences of mutuality....The more we start to look at our experiences in society and churches, the more we become in tune with our own power.

Perry and Rolland (1999:275) sees spirituality as down to earth and as the experience of spirit immersed, embodied, incarnated in the nitty-gritty of life. Focussing on the narratives

of the participants, meant regarding their expressions as structures of their experience and vice versa. Bruner (1986:6,9) states:

The relationship between experience and its expression...is dialogic and dialectical, for experience structures expressions, in that we understand other people and their expressions on the basis of our own experience and self-understanding. But expressions also structure experience....Expressions are the people's articulations, formulations, and representations of their own experience....By focussing on narratives...we leave the definition of the unit of investigation up to the people, rather than imposing categories derived from our own ever-shifting theoretical frames.

This is why my research was theology from below, rather than imposing a theoretical frame of religious development on the students. In narrative therapy questions are asked to generate experience rather than to gather information and when these questions generate experience of preferred realities, they can be therapeutic in and of themselves (Freedman & Combs 1996:113). In the spiral of theory and praxis the data rendered by the role-play, for example, may be closer to the "truth" of the student's experience than data rendered by completing a questionnaire, for example. The focus in narrative therapy is on the subjunctive mood to create a world of implicit rather than explicit meanings, and this broadens the field of possibilities through the "triggering of presupposition", to install a "multiple perspective" and to engage clients in unique performances of meaning (White & Epston 1990:81). In this way conversations are less purpose-driven (e.g. to expect a particular outcome) and more exploratory (e.g. opening space to be surprised by God).

4.4.1 New insights

Religious experience as presented in this study, concur with Griffith's (1986:616) finding that a relationship to God is discovered, not prescribed. James Griffith (1986:616), Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology at The George Washington University Medical Center, tells of his heavy yearning for authenticity before God. He tells of how he witnessed the mixture of love and hatred in people's relationship with God, and how he came to doubt the usefulness of doctrine as a tool for constructing a relationship with God. Griffith (1986:617) found psychodrama techniques, such as role reversals and doubling, useful for making visible and concrete the inner realities of a client concerning her relationship with God.

Each participant experienced change in a unique way. Each participant also met the conditions stipulated as criteria of transformation (see section 4.2.2) to a certain extent. Carol re-constructed a life-giving relationship with God and testified to God's endless love for her (see her letter in section 5.6.1). Sally refocused her attention on God when she discovered that Sam's relationship with God was not her concern. She made a commitment to be obedient to God and to raise her standard of living. Ruth's relationship with God sustained her through the process of differentiation, of finding a voice, of discernment, and of finding her security in God and re-connecting with others. Each participant moved towards a position that reflected a certain level of growth in spiritual maturity as regarded from a social constructionist perspective. Also see section 5.2.5 for a discussion of the clients' re-connecting with others as a move towards relational competence. The pastoral work done with these participants may help to better understand how religious belief as a social construction, contributed to these participants welfare.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused primarily on the religious experiences of the participants and on the transformation towards a life-giving spirituality in their lives. In the final chapter I would like to elaborate more on the effects this research journey had on myself, as the researcher, and on the participants. I would also like to comment on how each of us experienced talking about spiritual matters in the therapeutic situation.

CHAPTER FIVE

ENDINGS AND NEW BEGINNINGS

We make our own destinies by our choice of gods.
Virgil (quoted by Anderson 1997:11).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter I reflect on what I have learnt during the research journey. Reflection relates to the distinctiveness of narrative therapy, of spiritual talk in therapy, and of pastoral therapy as a spiritual practice. I shall also reflect on the aims of this study as well as on the benefits to me, as the researcher and the benefits to the participants.

This study particularly explored in what ways a narrative approach to therapy contributed to making the spiritual dimension of pastoral work salient. This statement relates to the first research question (see section 1.5.1). My approach was guided by what the participants regarded as significant and what was helpful to them. In this way it was possible to engage in spiritual talk that they eventually considered as healing and empowering, which relates to the second research question (see section 1.5.2). Such an approach was necessary to make the research participants the primary beneficiaries of my research. The personal benefits the participants gained from this study, connect with the third aim regarding the transformative effects our spiritual talk had on their perceptions of problems and ways of addressing problems (see sections 1.6.3 and 5.3.3).

In the next section elements of narrative therapy that had a significant impact on the therapeutic conversations, are discussed.

5.2 REFLECTING ON THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

5.2.1 A philosophical stance

A narrative therapist approaches the therapeutic situation in a natural, spontaneous way that “shifts away from thinking in terms of our roles and functions as therapists to considering our *relationships* with the people we work with” (Anderson 1997:94). The narrative therapist brings all of herself to the therapeutic relationship, situating herself as a discoverer on the boundary of knowing and not-knowing; investigating possibilities, rather than being an interpreter of a client’s behaviour or feelings, for example, interpreting it as a reflection of early childhood experiences. Traditionally clients are seen to have

internalised lived experiences and thus the client is “solely responsible and culpable for the psychological development of concerns; the individual is thus available for scrutiny, evaluation, diagnosis and intervention by the detached psychological expert” (Bird 2000:x) that knows what change should look like.

Alternatively, the narrative therapeutic process becomes a joint performance, characterised by respect, collaboration and negotiation of possible meanings. The therapeutic relationship becomes a resource and experiential platform to challenge ‘problems’ in a climate of safety. This approach differs from other therapeutic approaches by aiming to establish a collaborative dialogical occasion that will create the opportunity for self-agency in which the client participates in creating alternative narratives and a preferred way of being. This altered position of the therapist, is referred to as a *philosophical stance* because it represents the biases and values that we hold and the way we look at the world, from within the professional as well as the personal life of the therapist (Anderson 1997:94). Each narrative therapist will translate such a “way of being” versus a “system of doing” in her own way; a way that is natural and unique to the personhood of the therapist and all that she carries with her (Anderson 1997:98). My foundational theology that informs my practice and my way of being, is discussed in section 3.2. Neuger (2001:11) stipulates theology as a crucial lens, one of ultimacy in the work of pastoral counselling by saying: “We (pastoral counsellors) are responsible for having theological lenses that contribute to the life-giving, just, empowering, and compassionate processes called pastoral counselling”. My belief, for example, that God created us to have resilience, informs the questions I ask to bring people in contact with their own resilience. My conviction that the spiritual dimension is foundational to all other dimensions of experience, and that all individuals experience a spiritual hunger or desire for self-transcendence (Sperry quoted in section 1.3.3), form the basis for my way of being and facilitated spiritual talk in therapy and outside the therapeutic situation. These and other convictions (see section 3.2), influence the way I position myself with other people in therapy and outside therapy.

Engaging in a therapeutic conversation as a ‘real’ person, recognising my own subjectivity, required of me an ethical responsibility to be transparent and accountable regarding my intentions behind the enquiry process (see section 1.9.2). This also required of me to be “poised for action” on a moment-by-moment basis where client and therapist continually

influence each other, with no “certainty or recipelike informed behaviours (Anderson 1997:98). Taking this stance meant that I was immersed in each participant’s world not only as a therapist, but also as the person who I am outside of therapy. The surprises we encountered in therapy are evidence of such a stance, namely not knowing how therapy will develop, relying on the client to contribute in the area of experience, etc. Examples of such surprises were: Carol’s discovery of God’s longing for her (see section 4.3.1), Ruth’s “light bulb moment” (see section 4.3.3.2) and Sally’s excited response: “*I just have to share something with you! Quick!*” She then related how she suddenly realised that her expectation of Sam has changed and that she has to take responsibility for herself (see section 4.3.2).

5.2.2 An egalitarian relationship

A narrative approach, as well as qualitative research allows for a more egalitarian relationship between researcher/pastoral therapist and participants/clients. The narrative therapist considers herself to be part of an interactive cycle of negotiating meaning, including the meaning made of spiritual matters. A distinguishing characteristic of an egalitarian relationship within narrative therapy is that ideas are not imposed on clients. Therefore, only if the client considered the spiritual dimension as paramount in her life, talk on spiritual matters were invited.

Carol questioned God’s intention and was offended when He, as she believed, gave her a second chance to strengthen her relationship with Craig, knowing how much pain it would cause her. The meaning she made of God’s role in this regard, was thickened when we both participated in the re-tellings of her story (see sections 3.4.1.4 and 3.5). It is the task of the narrative therapist to facilitate and participate through especially questions in the telling and re-telling of the client’s story. Consequently, towards the end of our journey, Carol decided that God had to allow things to happen exactly the way it did, for her to believe and accept that Craig was not the man for her. The conclusion she made could just as well have been one of turning against God and deciding not to trust God anymore. This is the risk a narrative therapist takes when the client takes centre stage and when the client is allowed to negotiate her own preferred way of being. This is also the risk that a narrative therapist takes when God-talk is invited, because religion has the potential to both heal and harm as found by Griffith and Griffith (2002:9) in their spiritual conversations

with clients. I did not know how our conversations would influence the participants' relationships with God. In this way narrative therapy becomes more of an art and a way of being, than merely following certain procedures or techniques, according to a prescribed set of constructed truths.

The value of not imposing ideas is reflected in Ruth's comment: *"I knew I had the freedom to be myself. There were no preconceived ideas from your [Carin's] side; or that you came with your knowledge and I had to listen; or an attitude of 'What can I do for you?' – kind of thing ... It made me a lot more confident. When I have the space to share my story, I share it with confidence and then I experience that I can express what I feel much better"*.

Elements in narrative therapy, for example, adhering to no essential truths, an ethical stance of deep respect for the client, the use of metaphors, the belief in the agency and resilience of the client, and not focusing on finding solutions to problems but rather facilitate alternative meaning-makings, are some of the characteristics that distinguish it from other types of therapeutic interventions. Within this approach the therapist brings expertise in the area of process: engaging and participating with a client in a dialogical process whilst the client brings the expertise in the area of content, thus the stories and experiences within their own lives (Anderson 1997:95). These distinguishing characteristics opened a safe space for clients to talk about spiritual matters and about their convictions without feeling pressured to respond to certain expectancies of me, the therapist. Carol commented: *"I had the feeling somebody really understands what I am going through. We have come a long way together – and I feel comfortable to talk to you about anything"*.

The stance of "I am here to learn about you from you" (Anderson 1997:95) evoked the following response from Ruth: *"I remember you said on one occasion that I'm helping you now, and it was good to know that I was also contributing and that it was not a one-way thing"*.

5.2.2.1 A two-way account

Engaging in a two-way account of the therapeutic process affords the therapist the freedom to acknowledge the shaping effect of the process on her own life and her therapist identity (White 1997:132). Taking-it-back practices (White 1997:142), for

example, where the therapist relates to the client how the therapeutic conversations touched her life in a significant way, testifies to the value of the client's contributions and enhances agency in the life of the client. For example, I thanked Carol for the way her sincere faith and diligence inspired me in my work and private life. I also mentioned to Ruth, in reflecting on our journey together, that her continuing faith-talk amidst struggles, touched me in a special way.

As a narrative therapist I took a public stance that meant that I was open to feedback, evaluation, and critique. This stance contrasts with the more usual private or secret aspect of a professional's role (Anderson 1997:103). VanKatwyk (2002:119) concludes that one's view of spirituality is actually autobiographical. My own Christian values inevitably, and probably also unconsciously, shaped the questions I asked. Therefore, it was necessary to sometimes ask, "Is this what you want us to be talking about?" and "Is this conversation helpful to you?" (Freedman & Combs 1996:117). A public stance opened the way for faith-talk to enter our conversations in a spontaneous, natural and sincere way. Working within each client's faith framework and value system, and by using the effective professional practices of narrative therapy, it was possible to send clients forth, validated as people (Drewery & McKenzie 1999:138).

In a two-way account of the therapeutic process, a therapist is not there to tell the client what to do, or, as some clients expect, to speak on God's behalf. Thus, it challenges the client to be an active participant in constructing her preferred way of being. One-way accounts of therapy contributes "to thin conclusions about the nature of our practice" and thus "we deny ourselves that which would otherwise be sustaining of us in the therapeutic endeavour" (White 1997:130). Narrative practices, like not having to supply the answers, not being the sole supporters of clients, acknowledging unto clients how her (the therapist's) life was enriched, can also prevent that the therapist reaches a stage of 'giving up on a client'. Anderson (1997:101,102) combines the awareness, openness, and reflection in narrative therapy to become "a research-and-learning-as-part-of-everyday-practice-process" which is a source of renewal that prevents boredom or burn-out. I discovered that I felt energised after each session and also challenged, in an inviting way, to write a letter to the client that would be of value to her.

5.2.3 The art of questioning

Questions in narrative therapy are aimed at generating experience, rather than information, and thus the shyest client may feel challenged to convey her own experience. Anderson (1997:148) relates: "The right question cannot be known ahead of time; it is not a product of being smart, clever, or wise....Each question results from an attempt to understand the just-said and the unsaid". By suggesting different options, a client is freed from the dichotomy of decisions, for example, I wondered if it was necessary for Sally to decide for the present time, if her relationship with Sam was in God's will or not. Instead I asked her to step into the future and to look back on the three months still remaining this year before leaving Sam behind. This introduced another perspective on the present problem. Sally decided to live with the uncertainty of not-knowing what the future holds for their relationship and to rather shift her focus "*to make sure I'm right with God*" and "*not someone who criticises him [Sam]*". Questions that invite the client to imagine life as she thinks God would want for her, could be liberating, depending on her image of God. Sally, for example, was convinced that God had a wonderful future for her in mind, with or without Sam. This motivated her to make a commitment to be obedient to God and to raise her standard of living (see section 4.4.1). Another example of different options that might fit the client's experience, was a suggestion of different types of forgiveness to Carol: postponed forgiveness, developing forgiveness, selective forgiveness, conditional forgiveness. Different relationships with forgiveness, in contrast to no forgiveness, could also be suggested, for example: "What will create a climate that will bring you a little closer to forgiveness?" and "What creates a climate without forgiveness?" and "What and whom would support a climate of forgiveness/partial forgiveness or no forgiveness?" (Bird 2000:23).

5.2.4 Balancing connection and detachment

An egalitarian relationship entails that the narrative therapist have to master the art of balancing connection and detachment in the therapeutic relationship (Bird 2000:93). Both are needed. Connection helps with detecting elements in the collaborating process that extends languaging. This reminds me of Ruth's comment that my letters to her expressed more than the words she used. I believe that detecting more than her words, was possible because of what Heshusius (1994:16) designates a participatory mode of consciousness.

Ruth said: “*What you said – in the letters – corresponded with more than what I said in words. It reflected what I said with my whole being; with what I experienced*”. Detachment, on the other hand, helps the therapist to stand back from the meaning made, and to decide how to use this information as a partial knowing that can inform the next question. For example, Sally saw her relationship with Sam as a safety net for him, while she preferred that he would rather think of his relationship with God as his safety net. I enquired about this in such a way, so that she could refute, add or change this idea. I asked: “Does this mean that you perceive him to be relying on you too much, or what is your understanding of the safety net?” She said, “*No, I don’t think I’m a safety net for him*” and she decided not to analyse Sam’s relationship with God, but rather to focus on her own relationship with God. Such an open collaborative manner is a valuable characteristic of narrative therapy that I utilised to create a relationship with each client that served as “a place of lodgement and germination” (VanKatwyk 2002:112) where a life-giving spirituality could germinate.

5.2.5 Re-membering practices

The practice of re-membering engages other significant people in the client’s life to extend the necessary support, also after therapy has been terminated. Gerkin (1984:179) stresses the need for support: “Persons ending a counselling relationship are now in need of appropriating a faith community in new ways so that their pilgrimage may continue to find support and creative challenge”. (Re)-connecting with others came about naturally in the lives of the three participants. Carol reported that she had known a particular friend at the hostel for almost a year, but that their friendship deepened over the past few months. She reported that they talk a lot about spiritual matters. Ruth finally disconnected with her ex-boyfriend and re-connected with several people to whom she sends her newsletters and who pray for her. After a few sessions, Sally reported that she was worried about the example she set for her younger brother with whom she shared an apartment and decided to “*raise her standard of living*”. She identified two friends at her church to whom she is now accountable regarding her decision to outwit the temptation-problem. This process of re- or disconnecting with others can be seen as a move towards relational competence which is regarded by Day (2002:82) as a desirable goal of the developmental process.

5.2.6 Therapeutic letters

Therapeutic letters are written from a reflecting position to thicken the client's alternative story and help the client to stay immersed in it (Freedman & Combs 1996:208). An informal survey done by David Epston (Freedman & Combs 1996:208) revealed that a therapeutic letter was worth 4.5 sessions of good therapy. Also see section 1.8.2.2 where research letters are discussed as a data gathering method.

The participants described the value of the therapeutic letters in the following ways. Carol said: *"My letter to Craig helped me to vent my feelings and helped me to free myself from those emotions. It helped me to find peace of mind again. The questions in your letters were about things I would never have asked myself. Maybe that helped me to see my situation ... wider... in an open way"*. Ruth said: *"Your letters helped me to know that I can express myself meaningfully, when I read what you have written. And it was good to know that I was heard and understood"*. Sally wrote: *"Thank you for the letters. These helped me to understand the core issues I was facing without becoming disillusioned or confused by all the emotions which lay in the way at the same time"*.

5.2.7 Conclusion

Narrative therapy thus helped in a distinctive way to elicit a richer description of each client's spiritual experiences. Carol's perspective on her relationship with God was broadened. Her following comment proved this: *"I don't think it [the hate] will be such a big issue to God, because He accepts us with our good and bad characteristics. We may go to God with our anger and hate"*. She also said God will be patient with her and wait until she is ready to forgive Craig (see sections 3.5.2 and 3.5.3). In her letter (see section 5.6.1) she wrote: *"It [therapy] brought me so close to the God of my life, making me realise how powerful He is, that He cares for me and loves me with an endless love"*. These comments of Carol serve to prove that her spirituality was now more richly described, that her vision of God broadened and that she was now more actively involved in her relationship with God.

Ruth re-engaged with spiritual practices that she neglected before and she also became aware of God's continuing love for her, no matter what. See the description of her new identity in Christ in section 4.3.3.3.

Sally commented that she had become more honest with the Lord and learned “*the benefits of actively obeying God’s voice in the context of a relationship*” (see her letter in section 5.6.3).

In the next section the attaining of the aims is discussed.

5.3 REFLECTING ON THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

Reflecting on the aims of this study encompass the utility of narrative therapy as a means of shaping alternative spiritual ideas, of thickening constructed meanings and of transforming perceptions and ways of addressing problems.

5.3.1 First aim: Eliciting alternative personal spiritual ideas

The first aim was to explore how narrative therapy elicits and shapes alternative personal spiritual ideas (See section 1.6.1).

Initially Ruth and Carol both tended to believe that God alone determines the direction of their lives while they had to accept and endure whatever happens to them. By deconstructing the meanings they made of events and by negotiating alternative meaning-making they both shifted towards a more active part in co-creating their lives with God.

Initially Ruth said: “*If this is so, [being a co-author with God] I do not know how much of a co-author I would want to be*”. Later she said: “*But to God we are not puppets on a string. We do have a choice*”. Carol’s initial comment was: “*God is a story-book. God writes the story and a person lives that story*”. Later she commented: “*If I ask God to do something for me, I have to do something myself and not take things for granted*”.

In the re-tellings it was possible for Carol to get in touch with alternative knowledges of how God was involved in her life. She referred to her disappointment when a particular bursary was not awarded to her. Instead her application was forwarded to another organisation that gave her a bursary. This was a blessing in disguise, because she changed courses shortly after she started her studies. Changing her field of study was acceptable to the people that awarded her the bursary, while the first organisation would not have allowed this. Carol said her disappointment changed into gratefulness because

God saw to it that everything worked out for the best. God remained God in her life, but her meaning-making of God's presence in her life shifted.

Initially Sally said: *"I feel I have to slow down my relationship with God, because I'm going to be one step ahead of Sam"*. Later she said: *"After these sessions with you, I just realised that a lot of it had to do with me, how I was judging him [Sam], and after these sessions I just have a deeper respect for him. It's weird, because I always thought it [my focus] had been on God, but I think I allowed Sam to be the focus"*. Sally also thought she had to choose between God and Sam, but later she said: *"I don't actually feel 100% responsible for Sam's relationship with God. It's not up to me. I think that the Lord is doing something differently in Sam's life and ... maybe I have this expectation of how I want it to be – and God's got a different plan..."*.

These alternative personal spiritual ideas were elicited by means of the narrative practices I engaged in (see section 5.2).

5.3.2 Second aim: Constructing a richer meaning-making of life-events

The second aim was to explore how narrative therapy contributes to the co-construction of a richer meaning-making of life events by engaging in spiritual talk with clients (see section 1.6.2).

Often a richer meaning-making had to do with changing from an "either-or" perspective to a "both-and" perspective. Ruth used to consider any activity that was not directly related to her studies, a luxury. She wrote in her letter: *"Academics became all about doing, performing and delivering. It was not God through me – just me"* and *"I started my journey in faith – I continued my journey in the flesh"*. During our conversations, it dawned on her that allowing time for spiritual matters on a daily basis would bring the needed balance and peace in her life. Ruth referred to a *"light bulb moment"* when she realised that, in the past, she had separated her academic work and her spirituality.

Carol's identity-construction of not-being-good-enough was originally totalised by her interpretation of the rejection she experienced. She said: *"I have always doubted myself"* and *"Some days I feel that I deserved what happened to me; I did not deserve him"*. Tellings of not-yet-storied events and exploring God's blessings in her life, contributed to

more and different relational identity-constructions that countered her original thin totalised identity-construction. The focus on the relationality of identity constructions impacted her sense of selfhood. Towards the end of therapy I asked her if this problem of self-doubt could talk, what would it say about your resistance to it? Carol answered: *“I learnt that the severe hurting was wrong and that I was stronger than I thought and I deserved better than that. This experience showed me a side of myself I had not known before. I know better now who I am and what I want”* and *“I have regained my self-respect”*.

In the beginning Sally thought that a close relationship was only possible with either God or Sam. She regarded Sam's lack of an intimate relationship with God as the reason for their troublesome relationship. Through a richer meaning-making of God's probable expectations of her, she discovered that she was free to love both Sam and God, and that the “real” problem, according to her, was a temptation-problem.

Seeing God through a lens of “shoulds” and imagined or real expectations of self and others, restricted the clients' perspectives of and relationships with God. Inviting and exploring alternative meaning-makings of experiences of God, allowed for a richer, more life-giving spirituality to develop in the lives of these clients.

5.3.3 Third aim: Transforming perceptions of problems and ways of addressing problems

The third aim was to explore the transformative effects of conversations about a personal spirituality on a client's perception of and ways of addressing problems in his/her life (see section 1.6.3).

Change is believed to be best when it is brought about by the clients themselves. My approach in this study was not to generate change as a wilful intention, but rather to welcome it if it came about as an accompanying outcome of the process. Moore (1992:19) argues that:

If you attend the soul closely enough, with an educated and steadfast imagination, changes take place without your being aware of them until they are all over and well in place. Care of the soul observes the paradox whereby a muscled, strong-willed pursuit of change can actually stand in the way of substantive transformation.

The transformation in the lives of the participants, including my own, occurred subtly and sometimes inconceivable. Reflecting on a conversation, sometimes made me recognise, that change must have taken place in order for the client to make certain statements.

Carol's perception of the rejection-problem changed towards the end of our sessions by regarding Craig, in her own words, as *"only one of the characters in my story"*. She also said: *"God brought Craig into my life for a short while and I believed then that the happiness I experienced at the time, would last forever. But now I know many other things can still happen that will also make me happy"*. I questioned her about possible future relationships and she responded smiling: *"I think I'll stand by what I believe and if he [a future boy friend] is not prepared to adapt to some things, then he will have to go"*.

Ruth's perception of her problem was initially one of being *"a people pleaser"* and one of being *"the alien, because I would say something and nobody seems to take notice, but somebody else might say the same thing and everybody would pay attention"*. Her perception of her problem was also one of being *"in a desert where I had no clarity about issues"*. She explained the desert as the place *"where I did not make time for the little things, the tangible things like my sanctuary in my room"*. Her perspectives changed in the following way: *"I realise my expectations of a relationship were unrealistic"* and *"My understanding of a problem is sometimes the problem. In my head I work with vague ideas and I discovered that it is not the vague ideas that upset me, but rather my understanding of it"*. I asked "And what 'tools' could you use to address this problem?" She replied: *"I have to talk, have regular quiet times with the Lord and journaling"*. Ruth also decided wilfully not to be a people pleaser anymore. She said: *"I still have to get used to being assertive. It is a major leap for me ... I still wonder if the other person is all right when I give my opinion"*. After an argument with a fellow student, she said: *"I think I expected of him, as a Christian, to have the same values that I hold dear, but it was not there ... things are no longer black/white; it is now grey"*. She concluded: *"I am not the alien. I am happy to be where I am now. I have that boldness again"*.

Sally's following comment indicated her changed perception and way of addressing, what she regarded as the main problem: *"You, putting me in God's position, helped me to realise that I had to take responsibility and that I no longer could ignore it ... and to realise"*

that the physical thing was a core issue to lots of other confusions I had” and “I know now what to do; I just have to do it!”

A client’s exploration of his/her characteristic ways of perceiving and reacting (this resembles the wording of the third aim in this study, namely ways of perceiving and addressing problems), are considered by Brockman (1974:52) as the most important process when a client¹ seeks help. Even though a client may not present with a spiritual problem, a discussion on values and the meaning of the person’s life (the spiritual dimension) will probably be addressed in any event. Brockman (1974:52) asserts that if a reorientation and reconstruction is to take place, the central core (spiritual dimension) “must be uncovered, exposed, and evaluated”. Brockman (1974:52) concludes:

I believe that in any authentic, reconstructive therapy such uncovering and evaluation takes place even though neither the client nor the therapist may consciously be attempting to examine the basic religious assumptions....So as pastoral counselors we can remind some of our colleagues in the health professions that it is important to regard the client’s religious orientation as the most powerful determining forces in life, ... A person’s journey to emotional maturity, the freedom to love and work, may come after there is a change in his[her] spiritual orientation.

Each participant’s religious orientation served as a powerful resource that was utilised in this study to facilitate change, first in their relationship to God, which then generated alternative perceptions and ways of addressing their problems. In this way healing and growth was possible and in this way they came to experience the freedom to love and work in their different contexts.

The participants in this study talked spontaneously about their faith, which distinguished this therapy from some other types of therapeutic conversations.

5.4 REFLECTING ON THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF SPIRITUAL TALK IN THERAPY

The need for spiritual talk was explained in sections 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.4 and 1.2.5. It was proved in this study to be a most welcome, if not, a most needed dimension to accommodate in therapy. Spirituality can be spoken of as “a fundamental component of our human beingness” (McCarthy 2002:2). Therefore to invite spiritual-talk when addressing a problem, would mean taking this fundamental component of the client’s human beingness into consideration. The spiritual talk that we engaged in, in this study,

will be discussed in view of the following sections: how this study contributed to validating the spiritual dimension of pastoral therapy; how a life-giving spirituality was (re)-constructed with the participants in this study; how the clients' preferred identity-formulations were based on their Christian faith; how imagination played a role in our spiritual talk and how one proposed idea regarding religious development, did not work in this study.

5.4.1 The spiritual dimension of pastoral therapy

The participants in this study chose to come to me, in my capacity as a pastoral therapist, while they had the opportunity to consult a psychologist on the campus, free of charge for the first four sessions. The participants' choice in coming to me, was influenced by their expectation for spiritual talk and therefore spiritual talk was welcomed during therapy. Carol's comment was significant in this regard: *"The therapy enriched my life in a spiritual way, because I got to know God better. The therapy brought me closer to Him and helped me to begin to understand why things happened as it did. A psychologist may have talked only about how to address the problem, but now I can see that God wants me to get closer to Him and that not only the things of the world is important, but He is also important"*.

This need for religious talk in therapy and the widespread resurgence of interest in spirituality, as well as the valuable contribution of spiritual-talk to meaning-making (discussed in sections 1.2.2, 1.2.3 and 1.2.5) are all the more reasons for pastoral therapists to re-claim the uniqueness of their profession, namely engaging in spiritual-talk, as a profound validation of the worthiness of their profession. See section 1.2.4 where pastoral therapy as a spiritual practice is discussed. Spiritual care is a universal concept that embraces multiple spiritualities. In the light of all the claims on what spiritual care means, and in the light of the "crisis of identity" of "pastoral care professionals" that VanKatwyk (2002:109,) refers to (mentioned in section 1.2.4), it is advisable for pastoral therapists to articulate their own spirituality, because the person and the spirituality of the pastoral therapist influence the process inevitably. Neither of the participants asked me about my beliefs, and I assume that, working at the Dutch Reformed Church, they regarded me as a representative of this church, as was the case. All spirituality and all spiritual practices are grounded in a tradition (McCarthy 2002:14) and therefore it is also

¹ The word 'patient' (Brockman:1974:50-52) is replaced with the word 'client'.

necessary for pastoral theologians to immerse themselves within a specific tradition that will “offer a set of guidelines and spiritual practices for helping us discern the path we are to follow” (Walsh, quoted by McCarthy 2002:15). My personal foundational theology that guided me and shaped the way I interacted with the participants, is conveyed in section 3.2. I trust that this research served as a validation of the spiritual dimension of pastoral therapy and contributed to the process of (re)defining the identity of pastoral work.

5.4.2 A life-giving spirituality

At the end of this research, it is only fitting to re-consider the inspiration for this study found in Hughes’ (1985:xiv) contention that the treasure we are all looking for, is hidden “in what you may consider a most unlikely field, yourself” (see section 1.1.1). The idea of “finding the treasure in oneself” and “a life-giving spirituality” is not a destination in the sense of a stagnant condition, but rather a spiritual awareness of what one’s own life is all about. It is about becoming aware that one’s life is connected, in a dynamic way, to a transcendent Being, in this study, to the Triune God. Hughes’ (1985:xii) quotation of Carl Jung explains eloquently how the co-constructing of a life-giving spirituality came about in the lives of the participants:

I cannot define for you what God is. I can only say that my work has proved empirically that the pattern of God exists in everyone, and that this pattern has at its disposal the greatest of all energies for the transformation and transfiguration of our natural being.

Reflecting on the re-constructing of a life-giving spirituality in this study, I found that asking questions about religion and belief systems, did not contribute effectively to an ‘authentic’ experience of God. Instead, the focus on the participants’ experience in the first place and then asking questions about their interpretations of these experiences, rendered meaning-making against the backdrop of their belief systems and religious convictions that served as their grounding (ultimate) narratives. Mere cognitive reasoning about religion and beliefs did not seem to be useful to bring about change. Carol’s remark, regarding the moral values transmitted via religion, underscores this conviction: “*One’s parents can talk to one about these values, until they are blue in the face, but at the end of the day, it only depends on what you think of it yourself*”. Hughes (1985:48) contends that we communicate with God first with our hearts, but “the heart is not mindless: it has its reasons, deeper than we see at first with our conscious minds”. In focusing on experience

first, spirituality was weaved into everyday events that enabled the participants to pull the transcendent element, as it were, into the tangible 'reality' they had to confront. For example, Sally was confused about how she could have a relationship with Sam without sexual intimacy, but at the same time she said: "*I get these ugly feelings. I feel guilty and you don't want these ugly feelings in a relationship with someone you love*". By deconstructing the meaning of these experiences, she invited God's perspective and concluded: "*I was insecure about the relationship, dampening what God wanted to do in my life*". Referring to the time when she and Sam separated temporarily, she said, "*During the three months I wasn't separated from God, because I wasn't in sexual sin*". By means of such a process, spirituality or religious convictions were owned by the meaning-makers and became a more permanent and available resource – worked through painfully – that can be utilised again in future.

Hughes (1985:39) asserts that we cannot love and serve God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, if we have not yet found a mind and heart of our own. Caring thus involves, a holistic perspective of the unity of mind, body and soul. I was interested in the details of each individual's life, because "the soul prospers in an environment that is concrete, particular and vernacular" and because "to the soul, the ordinary is sacred and the everyday is the primary source of religion" (Moore 1992:25,203). To care for the soul means to look at what the soul does. Anderson (1999:159) sees soul care as art as well as science because the language of soul is not to be "found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994)" and "the art of soul care [is] not always available through therapeutic textbooks".

To find this balance between the concreteness of everyday life and the abstractness of a spiritual life, and to reconstruct a life-giving spirituality, it was necessary to focus on the relatedness of each individual; that is, relatedness with a religious tradition, relatedness with God, self and others, relatedness with the tangible, concreteness of everyday life that includes the meanings attributed to such relatedness. An essential mark of a life-giving spirituality is, according to (McCarthy 2002:5,3), "an intuitive apprehension of the inter-relatedness and unity of all things" and a fundamental concern with "meaning and relationship". In the same vein, soul is according to Anderson (1999:160), "*simultaneously individual and communal*". In the Western world the individual is mainly regarded as a uniquely bounded individualised autonomous privatised being that singularly decides how

to view her/his spirituality, while some other cultures have a non-individualistic perspective on spirituality. Mtibi (1998:145) describes the cultural values that are assimilated in African Theology:

Some of these values include a deep religiosity in which God is central, in which the spiritual world is very close to the physical world and in which life is seen as a religious phenomenon. There are values associated with life in community, human harmony with nature and the departed members of the family. The basic philosophy here is: "I am because we are, and since I am therefore we are".

Both concepts, individual autonomy and communal responsibility, are thus inextricably linked in considering the reconstruction of a life-giving spirituality. See section 4.2.2, the fourth criterion of transformation, with regard to relational competence. Also see section 2.2.4.4 on relatedness.

What I discovered in my journeying with the three students, was, that in each case, the journeying was first inward, finding the treasure in themselves, in a relationship with God, and then a travelling outward, towards reconnecting, or disconnecting, or connecting for the first time with others. A spiritual life seems to be firstly connected with the ultimate meaning in one's life, the Person of God, and finding oneself, in order to lose oneself again in togetherness. This resonates with Jesus' ironic claim that unless one loses oneself one cannot find oneself (John 12:25). Finding the treasure "in yourself" (Hughes 1985:xiv), seemed to lead to an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things (McCarthy 2002:5). Thus this discovery led to reaching out to others. This process resonates with what Henri Nouwen (1998) discusses in his book under the two headings: firstly, *Reaching out to our innermost self, the first movement: from loneliness to solitude*, and secondly, *Reaching out to our fellow human beings, the second movement: from hostility to hospitality*. I regard the collaborative process we engaged in, as facilitating the inward and outward journey, because the participants did not initiate this on their own, before we started our conversations. Carol saw her relationship with God as: "God is always there for me. He is closer to me than my skin". Ruth said: "God is to me a presence, a parent, both mother and father. I can know that He is there and that He loves me" and "My relationship with God overcomes everything". Sally described her image of God in the following way: "I just see a very warm loving Father who presents love and openness, compassion and forgiveness. His posture is quite forward, welcoming me to come in".

Downey (quoted by McCarthy 2002:14) reminds us that: “our relatedness to a spiritually engaging center affects all the other relations of our lives” both the relations with ourselves and with other people in our lives. VanKatwyk (2002:112) writes:

Bowen posits two biologically rooted opposing forces: one that propels an organism to follow its own directives and be a disconnected entity, the other that propels an organism to follow the directives of others, and be a connected entity. For the human self that means that there is an instinctual life force towards *individuality* and another life force towards *togetherness*.

Religion, according to Hughes (1985:161) is concerned with all the ways in which we relate to others, because it is in those relationships that we relate to God. In the outward process, Sally shared her problem with two people at her church. Carol found a precious sole mate in the person of her friend at the hostel and Ruth re-connected with many friends (see section 5.2.5). Ruth furthermore developed a balance that Day (2002:82) describes as a development that is situated on the borderline of self and other where there is a concern with the maintenance of interpersonal functioning and with personal differentiation. Ruth commented: *“In the past I used to take things very personal. I think I have learnt now not to internalise everything. I can dissociate myself now from an issue”*.

My journeying with these three students, lead me to conclude that finding one’s way to God, our mutual destination, is both a journey of loneliness and a journey of communion with others in the faith community.

Foucault’s (McHoul & Grace 1993:viii) question, ‘Who are we today?’ emphasises that identity is subject to fragmentation and it emphasises our responsibility to choose the values and significant relationships that would construe our preferred (fluid) identity. The spiritual dimension of this process is highlighted by De Gruchy (1994:6):

Indeed, the study of God is inseparably linked to the study of ourselves, and we in turn cannot be truly understood apart from our relationship to God and our existence in the world as a whole....[T]he knowledge of God and that of ourselves belong together.

Thus, by discovering and choosing their personal relationships with God, the clients re-constructed a spirituality that became a resource for determining who they wanted to be – in relation to God, themselves and others. (Re)-discovering a relationship with God established a life-giving spirituality in the lives of the clients, as a resource to “buffer

existential crisis states and counter their adverse influences” and that sustain “hope, purpose and self-agency” (Griffith & Griffith 2002:267, quoted in section 1.3.3).

5.4.3 A Christian based preferred identity

I take the side of Henning Luther (quoted by Heitink 1999:264) who made a contribution to the anthropological shift in practical theology in his proposal for “a practical theology of the subject”. This position is not pleading for an egoistic interpretation of subjectivity, but for a subjectivity that in essence is directed toward a relationship with others. The relationality of identity was explained in chapter three (see section 3.4). Pamela Couture’s (2000:50) contention, quoted in section 1.2.1, synthesises the notion of subjectivity and relatedness in the following way: “Our own spiritual poverty can be addressed by reconnecting with God and living from the image of God in ourselves which will provide the ground to see the image of God in others”. The image of God in ourselves resonates with what I referred to in section 5.4.2, namely “the spiritually engaging center” (Downey, quoted by McCarthy 2002:14), the “individual” component of soul (Anderson 1999:160) and the inward journey. Seeing the image of God in oneself has to do with the way one regards one’s identity, but it also has to do with the way one relates to others; it has to do with the communal component of soul (Anderson 1999:160). See also section 1.3.2 for a discussion of the centrality of Christ and the concept of connectedness in Christian spirituality.

Ruth referred to her relationship with God as the resource that made her strong enough to “stand up” again and to be more at ease with the uncertainty of her relationship with Susan, with whom she had a close relationship previously. Her relationship with God (inward journey) facilitated her outward journey in establishing a way of connecting with Susan with whom she now had a troublesome relationship. She commented:

I remember Dr Phil said in the Oprah-show that the what-if game should be played fully. With Susan I saw the signs, but I thought I was imagining things and I was too scared how it might affect me. But my relationship with God made me strong. I stood up and I could think it through to its full consequences. We talked again. Sometimes I think I know where things went wrong between the two of us, but other times I am not sure. But it is okay. I shall leave it at that.

The point I want to make with this quotation is that she regarded her relationship with God as her strength. She also wrote to me in her letter of reflection on the therapeutic process: “Just to thank you again for your care and the time you invested in helping me to become

a human being again". I regard this "becoming a human being again" as a reconstruction of her preferred identity and when I reflect on her faith-talk, I see this identity as a Christian-based preferred identity. In section 4.3.3.3 I discussed Ruth's new identity in Christ that also touches on her way of addressing her disappointment in her relationship with Susan, where she says: "*I may not be good enough in her [Susan's] eyes, but I am good enough as a person and in my relationship with God. He loves me*".

Schleiermacher's interest in the experience of the individual is seen by Heitink (1999:260) as related to the process of individualisation and of differentiation. I regard this process as most wanting for a person to engage in a meaningful relationship with others and to find his/her preferred way of being in the world. During our last conversation I asked Ruth, "If you look back, what has changed for you?" Ruth responded:

My biggest accomplishment was discernment. I could not understand, in the past, like at YWAM, just as I felt I was on the top of the mountain, my personal emotional and spiritual experiences of stuff, would take me by surprise, and I would feel: "Here I go again!" and then I become depressed. I started now to see a pattern and I got to know myself better. In the past I took everything very personal. I internalised everything. It was always me-me-me, but now I can detach myself. I box my preconceived ideas and perceptions.

Ruth's ability to detach herself resonates with the process of individualisation and differentiation that Schleiermacher refers to above. The discernment Ruth refers to, resonates with what Larkin (quoted by Fischer 1988:114) found in his study, *Silent Presence: Discernment as Process and Problem*, namely that the process of finding God in our lives is linked with an awareness of self (see section 4.3.3.1). The process of differentiation has to be balanced with relational competence and competent interpersonal functioning as stated by Day (2002:82). The importance of self-differentiation as well as connection with others, is reiterated by VanKatwyk (2002:112): "The goal of human development and spiritual maturity is to become a balanced or *self-differentiated* human being, to be an 'I' while maintaining connected to others". Ruth and the other participants reconnected with many people in their lives. This is discussed in section 5.2.5, remembering practices.

The three participants used the Bible and what they believed is expected of a Christian, as a guiding principle and a norm, for making meaning of their daily experiences. Carol, for example, was worried about not being able to forgive Craig, and referred to Matthew 6:15.

Within a pastoral context, a grounding narrative of faith (Gerkin 1986:30) or, in the words of Brockman (1974:52), a primal myth, is needed to establish a preferred identity. I understand this primal myth as a guiding value system that informs meaning-making and fulfils an integrating function as the person grapples with the fragmentation of everyday life (see section 1.2.2). In the same vein, Fowler (1981:292, 293) contends that when people develop in their faith, they commit themselves to some images of a faithful ultimate environment and that they shape their lives in the human community so as to live in complementarity with it. Gerkin (1986:19) stresses the need for a grounding or primary narrative out of which models can come for interpreting life situations, for making choices and for maintaining a preferred identity construction. Brockman (1974: 51) regards this basic myth as “the point around which the child/adult continues to organise his/her sense of self...and his/her sense of God” and therefore Brockman sees this myth as the person’s religion or spiritual orientation. This myth (Brockman 1974:51) is “primarily unconscious” and “is a person’s own legend that integrates and unifies his feelings, perceptions, and reactions, making his/her world comprehensible”.

The three participants’ grounding narratives were that of the Christian faith with Christian values as storied in the Bible and as handed down to them by others – the institutional element (Hughes 1985:11). See section 2.3.3.1 and Appendix C for a discussion of the institutional, critical and mystical elements. Within the context of the participants’ life stories, it became necessary that their understanding of this grounding narratives were deconstructed in order to enable a reorientation and reconstruction of their preferred ways of being. Brockman (1974:51) contends that a person’s central myth is often unable to fulfil its integrating function and a person cannot continue to accept the conditions of his/her life without intense and serious questioning. This resembles the critical element. In discussing Carol’s different relational identities, I asked her if it would make a difference in her life, if she would welcome all the different pictures of herself that we discussed. She said: *“If it would make a difference, I shall respond in a different way.”* I asked: “How?” She answered: *“I’ll be more caring and appreciative of little things”*. On another occasion she said that she had become a more grateful person who appreciates her friendships. She also said: *“I feel a little selfish to ask too many critical questions, because one cannot get everything one wants. In future I won’t just accept things coming my way, but I won’t make a big issue out of it”*. This preferred identity construction reflects a balance between

self and others and is in tune with God's command to love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:39).

Ruth's remark: "*My inner man [woman] has grown a little*" may be a reflection of the process that Brueggemann (1993:25) refers to: "the new self is [not] given abruptly in psychotherapy...[O]ver time [it is] stitched together...idiosyncratically". Ruth's idiosyncratically construed inner woman may represent her "persistent identity" that is "fluid, yet recognisable" (Dunlap 1999:138) and her preferred identity that was characterised and sustained by her faith-talk right through our journeying together. Brockman (1974:52) advises pastoral counsellors to regard the client's religious orientation as the most powerful determining force in life and he believes that fundamental changes do not occur until the meanings and values of a client are reconstructed. Challenging the client to re-consider what values, beliefs and meanings she chooses to welcome in her life, helps her to engage with them as a spiritual resource that can sustain her in addressing problems in her life.

Gerkin (1986:17) asserts that many people's problems of living stem from a level of disordered selfhood which is reflected in unhappy interpersonal relationships, questions about personal faith, and empty feelings of purposelessness. The focus on a client's experience of selfhood (and identity concerns) is thus central to the task of the pastoral care giver.

5.4.4 The role of imagination

I found the employing of clients' imagination to be a rich resource that invited the clients' creativity and that rendered experiences that surprised both the client and myself. Experience instead of mere information was called forth in imagining God in our role play. God's longing for Carol came as a surprise to her (see section 4.3.1). Sally was confronted with her own responsibility to address her problem; a responsibility she said she ignored for a long time (see section 4.3.2.2). The power of role play offered multiple vantage points from which the clients could engage with new perspectives (Griffith & Griffith 1992:83). Many of the questions and suggestions in therapy made an appeal on the imagination of the clients. For example, I suggested to Sally to imagine herself in the future looking back on the present time and asked her how, what happens now, will have an effect on the future she prefers. She was looking forward to moving to Durban next

year and she was sure that God planned an exciting life for her. Her present behaviour was seen as casting a shadow on this imagined-future and made her decide to “*raise my standard of living*” (see section 4.4.1, new insights). This introduced another perspective on the way she chose to address problems. As an act of imagination, Christians are invited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:29 – 31, to live “as if”. Brueggemann (1993:14) refers to Garrett Green’s proposed shift from the “as if” to “as” as an act of imagination that accepts an alternative construal of reality as a legitimate and valid one. Carol imagined her burdens taken away by God in the form of “*n sak patats*” that grew little legs and ran away (see section 3.5.3). This image has now the power to recall a whole story as a resource to Carol for getting rid of her burdens. “It is the claim of our faith, and the warrant of our ministry, to insist that our peculiar memory in faith provides the materials out of which an alternatively construed world can be properly imagined” (Brueggemann 1993:17,18). The importance of imagination resonates with Romm’s (2006:20) claim that action research should aim “to develop ways of appreciating ‘what could be, rather than what is’”. Carol reflected on the dream she had when she sang to devil (see section 3.5.4) and said: “*I always wanted the Lord to reveal Himself to me – I think He did it through the dream*”. Maybe the stories, metaphors and poetry we used in therapy, activated her unconsciousness and imagination to give her the gift of a dream. Care of the soul does not imply understanding the soul and it is not necessary to mine a dream for its meanings, but rather to allow the dream “to influence and shape our way of imagining” (Moore 1992:296, 299, 292).

5.4.5 An idea that did not work in this study

What did not work in this study, as expected, was the idea to use the insights gained by theorists regarding religious development (see section 2.3.3) more extensively. I expected the ideas of Hughes (see Appendix C) to be useful for the participants to create an awareness of their spirituality and I considered it a useful resource for evaluating and promoting religious development. I also proposed a semi-structured interview to discuss Hughes’ ideas on religious development. This however, did not happen, as the participants considered such an approach too abstract and distant from the problems they wanted to be discussed (see Carol’s comment, for example, in section 4.1). However, insights regarding religious development were useful as background knowledge to me,

and facilitated interpretation, although to a lesser degree than expected. It was used occasionally, in the form of tentative questioning. See section 4.3.2 for an example.

To focus for one session exclusively on the person's spirituality by means of a semi-structured interview, was found to be not what the participants would prefer. This is underscored by Griffith and Griffith's (2002:19,20) experience that spirituality usually enters a therapeutic dialogue as one perspective among others, and that centralising only the spiritual dimension is not the way clients wish to spend the time in consultation. Thus the idea of a semi-structured interview proved to be inexpedient for this study and reminded me of Hillman's (quoted by Moore 1992:9) motto for his psychology, "The way through the world is more difficult to find than the way beyond it" and Moore's (1992:9,10) advice that "we may have to discard the salvational wish" and "cleanse our minds of their well-intentioned heroism".

Instead, the social constructionist approach, as proposed by Day (2002:63-89) in the chapter, *Religious Development as Discursive Construction*, was found to be a more viable option to assist clients to co-create a spirituality that had personal meaning for each client (see sections 4.2, 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.3.2.1 and 4.3.3.2).

Thus as a researcher, I had to be willing to change my plans and actions for doing this research project. In this regard Janesick (1994:218) points out that qualitative research has a certain elasticity to it:

The qualitative researcher makes a series of decisions at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. Qualitative research design has an elastic quality....[Q]ualitative design is adapted, changed, and redesigned as the study proceeds, because of the social realities of doing research among and with the living.

A discovery of what did not work, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, learning what did work in contributing to the construction of a life-giving spirituality, was of great value to me, the researcher.

5.5 BENEFITS TO THE RESEARCHER

I am deeply grateful unto the participants for the trust they invested in me and for allowing me to use their stories of pain and disappointments for this research project. They taught me the importance of listening and observing attentively. They proved to me that each person's story could be linked to my own in some way. They taught me humility. Sally

said to me with tears in her eyes: "*Carin, I have to be raw with you*". Such trust humbled me, realising my own inability to supply the 'right answers' to her questions. Being aware of the entrapment of knowing (Griffith 1995:125), required of me to embrace a certain humility, especially in the light of the potential of religious talk to both heal and harm (Griffith & Griffith 2002:9). A not-knowing approach also required a humble spirit that would be prepared to welcome the unexpected and the unpredictable. This, on the other hand, contributed to the joy of being surprised when we discovered the unexpected. An example of such surprises were Carol's dreams (see sections 3.5.3 and 3.5.4).

Our journeying together brought forth, not only tears, but also many laughs and enjoyment. Despite our differences in age, these young women allowed me into their private lives and 'taught' me how they perceived issues in their lives. I have a deep respect for the purity and sincerity of their intentions to live 'right' with God. I noticed that after our sessions I felt happy, hopeful and encouraged. This joy reminded me of the story of a Spanish nobleman, Inigo of Loyola, who later became known as St Ignatius of Loyola (Hughes 1985:1,2). He discovered that when he occupied his mind with spiritual matters and daydreams about the lives of saints, he experienced great joy afterwards. In contrast his daydreams about the lady whose love he would win, left him bored, empty and sad. In the same vein, the spiritual talk in therapy heightened my awareness of God's presence in our midst. The spiritual talk also invited God to have the final say. Ignatius of Loyola occupied his mind with spiritual matters and it gave him great joy. Occupying my mind with the spiritual dimension and God's presence and leaving it up to Him to make the seeds grow (1 Corinthians 3:6,7 quoted in section 4.2.2) gave me great joy after the sessions.

Along with Anderson (1997:101) I considered myself a privileged guest who participated with each client in a small slice of their lives. I am grateful unto the participants for giving me the opportunity to be involved in a process of caring with them, as a constitutive process of my being. Patton (1993:17) quotes Heidegger to stress the importance of caring for others to give meaning to our humanity:

Heidegger affirmed the importance of understanding care both as the anxiety that we feel about our own lives and also as the solicitude we direct toward others. He views care as "the basic constitutive phenomenon of human existence, and the clue to its interpretation". Care is what makes the human being human. If we do not care, we lose our humanity....As "constitutive of our being," it is what we in fact are – caring.

This research proved to me what I have always believed, namely, that spiritual talk should be welcomed in a therapeutic situation. I have always believed that if a problem is really disturbing, it cannot, but involve a person's basic belief systems. Talking about a problem superficially, may help a person to cope only temporarily. Inviting God's perspective, however, touches the person's deepest convictions about life that may lead to more fundamental changes. After many months Carol said triumphantly: "*Life is beautiful again*". Ruth said confidently: "*My inner man (woman) has grown a little*". These remarks brought me joy and strengthened my passion for the work.

Furthermore, the philosophy of narrative therapy and engaging in an egalitarian relationship with clients, put me at risk to be changed as a natural consequence of such a process. Being involved in such a process along with continuous reflection, concerns a journey of lifelong learning and personal growth as a professional and as a private person.

Engaging in the narrative practices proved to me its effectiveness, and also its seemingly yet deceptive simplicity. Balancing on the boundary of knowing and not-knowing, balancing connection and detachment, reflecting on the therapeutic process while busy with therapy to decide which thoughts are generated from our interaction and which thoughts are generated from my 'unconscious' assumptions, as well as centralising the client's greatest concern at the present moment, etc. will always be a challenge and an art that may only evolve with experience. Many people consider narrative therapy to be the application of certain techniques without knowing or living the philosophical stance behind it. To be a narrative therapist in the true sense of the practice, requires a re-orientation of a way of being and accepting that one will never 'arrive'.

The experience of the participants are expressed in the following section in their own words.

5.6 BENEFITS TO THE PARTICIPANTS

5.6.1 Carol

Carol wrote her letters and emails in English.

Dear Carin

The first day I walked into your office, I was so scared and confused, but now almost five months later, I feel emotionally and spiritually stronger. The sessions helped me a lot in a way I never thought possible. For the first time after a long period of pain, suffering and emptiness, I have my self-respect and confidence back. It made me realise who I truly am. A strong girl with lots of ambition who wants to be successful in life. It made me appreciate the simple things of life that we sometimes take for granted, like to laugh, to see and just to be part of the wonderful world that God has created. It brought me so close to the God of my life, making me realise how powerful He is, that He cares for me and loves me with an endless love. And lastly, to you Carin. Thank you for walking this journey with me. You were someone who understood, but most of all, you listened. Some days I felt that I was talking a lot of nonsense, but you still listened. For that I am you forever thankful. God bless you. As I look back to almost a year ago, I was lost in a life of pain and hurt, but now I am stronger and wiser and ready to face the world, with all its obstacles and challenges, again.

Carol.

Carol started her journey with the yearning: *"I personally need answers. I don't know what to believe"*. Recently she sent me the following e-mail with the news: *"Wow, after all this time, I finally got all my questions answered"*. I smiled, thinking of God's perfect timing and His perfect way of weaving the particulars of a person's life into a beautiful tapestry. The portion of Carol's pilgrimage that I was privileged to join, represents a portion of such a colourful tapestry. The pastor she refers to below, and I, her part-time therapist, were the ones planting and watering. We were the ones who have "this treasure in jars of clay", "but God made it [seeds] grow" "to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (1 Corinthians 3:6,7 and 2 Corinthians 4:7).

Carol's e-mail:

Hi Carin

Hope you are fine. I attended a church service of His People last Sunday. A pastor from America preached about the relationship between a man and a woman. I learnt a lot. He said that a man does not give a woman value but God does. I used to measure my own worthiness according to what Craig thought of me, but now I know that my self-esteem actually never depended upon him and will never in future depend on any man. I shall honour myself knowing that I am worthy in God's eyes and if the guy wants to follow, well then he can run after me. He (the preacher) also said that you must not give your heart to anyone before you've given it to God. God must first tell you that it is okay with Him to give your heart to someone. I know now that I only gave a part of my heart to God and not my whole heart, but I gave my

whole heart to Craig which he stepped on and threw back into my face. But despite everything, the One I was supposed to give my whole heart to, is healing it. The pastor also said that we must not let unforgiveness and wounds shape our lives. I made a promise to God that I will forgive Craig but that He must give me the strength to do so. Lastly he said that people usually change because they have been hurt or they change just because they want to. I changed mainly because of my hurt. Something I felt quite ashamed of at first. It was as if God had to let something extreme happen, to make me realise that I must love Him more and not partly, but with my whole heart. But I know that God is not angry with me for that. He still and always will love me. Wow, after all this time, I finally got all my questions answered and finally life is beautiful again. I just want to thank you again for everything you have done for me. I really really appreciate it.

Greetings
Carol

The following letter by Carol was her last letter to me. This letter was written six weeks after her e-mail (above) to me. She wrote this letter after she read what I have written in chapter three. What is noteworthy is that she wants to recall the memories of Craig, whereas she wanted to erase all memories of Craig previously (see section 3.4.1.1).

Reading the story about my life [*in chapter three*] of emotional pain and not knowing who I was anymore, made me realise how much I've grown and to be thankful for. It was as if I was reading someone else's story. I am not the Carol anymore that I was back then. After a long time I am ready to talk about Craig again. I want to recall our memories together. And the greatest part of it all is that I am slowly starting to forgive him. The story was a good reflection of my life back then. It made me realise again that the person whom I cared about the most, cared the least about me. But finally, I am moving on and found that God's love is more comforting and healing than anything in this world will ever be. The experience with Craig helped me find the kindness and endurance within me. After all these months I can proudly say with song in my heart – I have won!

5.6.2 Ruth

Ruth wrote the following letter:

Hi Carin

Just to thank you again for your care and the time you invested in helping me to become a human being again.

One thing that stood out for me, was that the narrative therapy reminded me of the life-giving rituals/beacons in my life – like the importance of community, to sketch, to be quiet in nature and to keep a journal – and how I became reconciled with these rituals again because of our conversations.

Another important thing was how our conversations helped me to give expression to my feelings – to open my mouth and to be able to talk with someone who listened unconditionally – to be able to express myself freely and meaningfully – and to express myself clearly - to express the noise in my head patiently and systematically in understandable, rational sentences. The most important thing of this exercise was to learn to finish my sentences!

The third aspect is an observation I made this morning in a conversation with my mentor. If I compare myself completely today with where I was a year ago, I notice definite growth in my humanity. I have peace with myself in the midst of circumstances. I have a better perspective on things that happen around me without internalising everything like I did before. I shall not be arrogant to think that I have won the battle, but I am grateful for the changes that I observe and that I increasingly become aware of.

Thanks to you again and God bless you.
Ruth.

5.6.3 Sally

Sally sent me the following letter/report:

My decision to break up with Sam at the beginning of the year was based on spiritual reasons for me at the time. However, therapy has helped me to realise that giving in to our sexual desires might have been the reason behind the break up. Giving in to temptation created the desire for spiritual freedom and peace and lead to the break up!

Therapy with Carin guided me to the crux of the inner conflict I was faced with in my relationship. It allowed me to enter back into my relationship with Sam with confidence to overcome giving in to temptation rather than run away from the problem. Answering questions allowed me to realise that the insecurities I was feeling towards Sam came from the guilt feelings of giving in to our sexual desires. Not only did I realise that I had been associating these guilt feeling with my feelings towards Sam, but I also came to realise the passive role I had been playing in the past to guard the both of us from giving in to this temptation. My relationship with God was greatly impacted as I was helped to find the truth with regards to my guilt feelings and my love for Sam. I found that as I came to the point of realisation of my feelings that I was able to be more honest with the Lord. The talking about God and role playing forced me to be conscious about what the Lord was saying to me, where as beforehand, much of my time spent with the Lord, was mixed with confusion of emotions and heartache after the break up with Sam. Therapy has been successful as it has allowed me to understand the benefits of actively obeying God's voice in the context of a relationship. As well as gain confidence in my relationship with Sam, knowing that giving in to temptation causes greater destruction within the relationship.

Thank you for the letters. These helped me to understand the core issues I was facing without becoming disillusioned or confused by all the emotions which lay in the way at the same time.

Mentioning the Lord during these therapy sessions has brought my life into such a greater place of freedom as I have learnt to face all life situations at the basis of God's moral standard. It helps to put things into perspective; it helps clear one's mind knowing that all decisions should lead to pleasing God. Realising that I live to please God only helps not giving in to temptation easier!

5.7 NEW BEGINNINGS

In an ongoing spiral of research giving birth to new research, the following suggestion by Day (2002:85) may be followed as a new beginning, after this research, for another researcher:

"...we would want to explore ways of evaluating whether and how groups (from dyads to larger groups) build, and sustain, relationship in the midst of conflict and dissonance. With Gergen (1993), we would want to explore pastoral responses to the notion that belief might be conceived of as a relational resource, and to better understand how it happens that in some lives talk of belief contributes to the building and sustaining and enhancing of relationship, whereas in some lives, or in some domains, talk of belief works as a kind of destructive conversational convention, obstructing rather than permitting or opening to dialogue.

I believe the re-constructing of a life-giving spirituality is an ongoing process. Moore (1992:12,13) asserts that care of the soul never ends and that every ending is a beginning. Moore (1992:13) explains that the life of the soul is a continual going over and over of the material of life and that out of incessant storytelling new depths and meaning are found. Carol's perception of the pain she experienced changed in such a way that she regarded the experience as a preparation for future hurts. She said: *"At first I thought I have hurt enough, but I realised, how can I expect this? It was necessary to make me stronger and wiser to prepare me for when I am hurt again"*.

In all journeys there are, however, landmarks that indicate achievements, places of transfer or turning around, or starting new directions. Each participant experienced change in a unique way and made decisions on how to proceed with their lives. The therapeutic process may be regarded as a landmark that indicated a new beginning for their lives. A new beginning may be a commitment to approach and address problems differently, the third aim of this study. Ruth said: *"I realise it was that spiritual-part that*

was absent in my life. I am not yet where I want to be, but I know now I am still me, apart from the broken relationships in my life. I just have to realise and know that God still loves me in spite of everything". A new beginning may be like seeing the answer to a mathematical problem, but the person still has to find the steps to get to that answer. The different steps in the calculation to produce that answer, is a process of living and going through the motions of interacting with others with the aim to come closer to the envisioned 'answer' or preferred way of being.

Brueggemann (1993:25) argues: "What is yearned for among us is not new doctrine or new morality, but new world, new self, new future". The two words that clients often use, according to Anderson (1997:231), to describe successful therapy, are "*freedom* (from the imprisoning past, present, and future) and *hope* (for a different future)". This different future indicates the start of a new beginning. Frazier's (Anderson 1997:231) answer to the question: "What exactly are you hoping for?", may reflect what most people want from therapy: "To find, to re-create a past with a certain certainty that I can put it behind me and go on with my life". I am at peace that the participants, including myself, can go on with our lives, after many re-creations and re-orientations of past, present and future.

5.8 CONCLUSION

To me it was important to take cognisance of what Pattison (1993:16) requires of pastoral carers, namely, to "maintain a Christian vision, a spiritual life and a sense of being rooted, grounded in and orientated towards God, whatever the means they use to undertake their caring". As long as I strive after this challenging goal, humility will be continuously invited into my life.

In the final instance, all said and done, I consider the process of narrative pastoral therapy ultimately in the hands of the One who said: "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21: 5b).

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APPENDIX A

(RE)CONSTRUCTING A LIFE-GIVING SPIRITUALITY: NARRATIVE THERAPY WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for your interest shown in this research project. This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Master Degree in Practical Theology, with specialisation in Pastoral Therapy. (UNISA and The Institute for Therapeutic Development - ITD). Please read this information sheet before deciding whether or not to participate.

ITD provides training to therapists who include collaborative conversations in their work and have special interest in issues of spirituality, religion, values and ethics. ITD has a contract with UNISA to teach M.Th. and D.Th. programmes in Pastoral Therapy, with an emphasis on narrative therapy. The training is aimed at respecting the spiritual and religious values and ethics of a person in therapy and to discover how these influence people's perceptions and actions.

Many therapists and counsellors acknowledge the importance of people's spiritual experiences, but avoid conversations about their relationships with God. However, many people want to reflect on their spiritual experiences in therapy and feel fragmented by attempting to delegate psychological, relational issues to conversations with their therapist and spiritual issues to conversations with their priest, rabbi, or pastor. Some students have also indicated a need to talk about spiritual matters. This project aims to provide students with an opportunity to talk individually to a pastoral therapist, and to reflect on their spiritual experiences concerning the meaning they make of their problems and the way of addressing problems in a way they see fitting.

I am committed to therapy that is ethically accountable which implies respecting peoples' preferred ways of being and their preferred ways of accomplishing transformation in their lives. Therefore my journeying with a person in therapy will be through participating **with**, and not based **on** the suffering of someone.

The focus of my study **with** participants will be guided by the following aims:

1. To explore how narrative therapy elicits and shapes alternative personal spiritual ideas
2. To explore how narrative therapy contributes to the co-construction of a richer meaning-making of life events by engaging in spiritual talk with clients.

3. To explore the transformative effects of conversations about a personal spirituality on a client's perception of and ways of addressing problems in his/her life.

What is meant by "research"?

For some people, the word "research" is associated with surveys, graphs and "objective information" that is used to test hypotheses. This is not what this research is about.

This research will consist of therapeutic conversations with students, where the focus will be on how students' meaning-making of spirituality impacts their understanding and coping with problems.

What will participation involve?

Three students will have individual conversations with me as the pastoral therapist about a problem(s) of his/her choice. Conversations will take place at the church office of the Dutch Reformed Church (Studentekerk) in Van Rhyneveld Street. The number of sessions are negotiable. The sessions will be conducted in either English or Afrikaans. You will be asked to give written consent for the information obtained during the sessions to be used in the research project and in the final research document. Participation will be voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality

All information supplied during the sessions will remain confidential throughout the project. You will receive confidential therapeutic letters that will also serve as an edited version of our conversations. You will have the opportunity to comment and change the information contained in these letters. Some sessions may be taped with your prior consent. You will have a choice to use your own name or a pseudonym of your choice. The information collected during the project will be locked in a cabinet and will be destroyed on conclusion of the project.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the project, either now or in future, please feel free to contact me, Carin Marais or my supervisor, Elonya Niehaus:

Carin Marais

Tel. 887 0443

Sel: 083 338 4070

Elonya Niehaus

The Institute for Therapeutic Development, Pretoria.

Tel. (012) 460 6704

APPENDIX B

(RE)-CONSTRUCTING A LIFE-GIVING SPIRITUALITY: NARRATIVE THERAPY WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

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

I know 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 to me.
3. All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential throughout the project.
4. I am aware of what will happen to my personal information (including tape recordings) at the conclusion of the project; that the data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but that any raw data that the project depends on, will be retained for three years.
5. Carin's supervisor, Elonya, will read the material.
6. I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study.

I am willing to participate in this research project.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
Date

.....
(Name of participant in capital letters)

.....
(Signature of witness)

APPENDIX C

INFORMATION SHEET (2) FOR PARTICIPANTS

Religious development

All the ideas presented here are those of Gerard Hughes, unless otherwise stated. See references.

Christ said, 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found: he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he has and buys the field' (Matt. 13:44).

Hughes ideas are presented as an invitation to Christians who seek "ways of detecting the hidden treasure in what you may consider a most unlikely field, yourself". Hughes believes that we find God in and through our human development. In drawing on ideas of Von Hügel, contained in the first volume of his work, *The Mystical Element in Religion*, Hughes identifies three stages in people's religious development that can be applied to all world religions, although he chooses to use this analysis with reference to Christianity only. Three stages, namely infancy, adolescence and adulthood, represent an institutional, critical and mystical element in religion respectively and all three elements should always be present in the adult's religion to some extent.

1. **THE INSTITUTIONAL ELEMENT** involves:
 - 1.1 our sense impressions (what we see, hear, touch, taste, etc.)
 - 1.2 our memory capacity (for stories, history, rules, etc. that facilitate the learning process)
 - 1.3 our imagination (e.g. to grasp object constancy)
 - 1.4 our understanding of instructions/rules
 - 1.5 our moral functioning (ability to distinguish right from wrong)

Even if we are not equipped to decide between absolute right and absolute wrong, we should be able to distinguish between shades of grey and to choose "for the light grey and against the dark grey" (Berkhof, quoted by Bosch 1991:431).

- 1.6 Our need for affection, attention, protection and security that enables the person to trust self and others.
2. **THE CRITICAL ELEMENT** involves:
 - 2.1 an intellectual approach that is questioning, criticising, systematising and theorising about our experiences in order to develop an understanding of human life and of God.

St Alsem of Canterbury (quoted by De Gruchy 1994:5) prays:

I do not endeavour, O Lord, to penetrate thy sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that; but I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe, - that unless I believed, I should not understand.

- 2.2 finding unity in our daily lives
- 2.3 finding sense and meaning in our daily lives in the multiplicity of impressions presented to us
- 2.4 formulating some theory about our lives, however elementary the theory may be
3. **The mystical element** involves:
 - 3.1 an awareness of our inner consciousness and internal activities (hopes and despairs, sadness and joy, fears and expectations, certainties and doubts)
 - 3.2 an awareness that we are coming closer to ourselves and therefore to God
 - 3.3 our attraction to and fear of this inner world that is unique to each of us, mysterious and incommunicable even to ourselves in its complexity
 - 3.4 our knowledge that our inner world exercises a much greater influence on us than any external circumstances and that our inner world holds the key to our happiness

Stackhouse (quoted by Bosch 1991: 431) argues that we also need the dimension of *poieses* which he defines as the "imaginative creation or representation of evocative images". People do not only need truth (theory) and justice (praxis); they also need beauty, the rich resources of symbol, piety, worship, love, awe, and mystery.

This model purports to provide a guideline for authoring or re-authoring your own spirituality. In considering how your own spirituality developed, you could start with a question, proposed by Hughes: "What have been the important events, and who have been the important people in my life?" and "What has God meant to me?"

This model serves as background information that can be utilised during our therapeutic conversations, if and when you choose to do so.

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APPENDIX D

SALLY'S DISCOVERY OF THE TEMPTATION-PROBLEM - (See section 4.3.2.1:Sally's experiences)

Carin: You started off and you said that you don't know how the uncertainty – and then you switched over to the insecurity – would impact Sam.

Sally: *Mm –mm*

Carin: You changed and said, maybe it's only uncertainty and not insecurity. Shall we go that route first? How would that uncertainty influence Sam? Do you think he has certainty about your relationship and its future?

Sally: *I don't think he does*

Carin: Is he also living with it?

Sally: Yes

Carin: And how does he treat it?

Sally: *He's not bothered about it.*

[I asked if she knew of people who have to live with uncertainties that are very difficult. I referred to Abraham that had to travel into the unknown, etc.]

Carin: Then you said you're concerned about things in your relationship and that make you feel insecure. Is that right?

Sally: Yes

Carin: Does it then mean that the security that you seek in your life, is then based on the security of the relationship?

Sally: Yes

Carin: Can you think of other means to increase the feeling of security in your life?

Sally: *When I look at it – I think I don't even have to worry about these things. All I have to do, is focus my eyes on the Lord and He'll guide us.*

Carin: That's very abstract, and when it comes to the physical side ... you said, "*It's not to say that you do not sometimes initiate it.*" And then the disappointment and guilt-feelings enter your life. Am I right if I say these two are the initiators of all the other culprits? Would it be advisable to look at these two first?

[I preferred to use only the words that she had used and I deliberately avoided using the word 'temptation'.]

Sally: *I think the temptation is the cause for all this – the disappointment and the guilt-feelings. Those two (guilt and disappointment) don't even have to come into the equation, if I can defeat the temptation. I've often thought, God's not given me answers, but all He said, was: "Sort out the physical side of your relationship", and it'll be the solution to all the problems that I ask Him for guidance.*

APPENDIX E

RUTH'S RELATIONSHIP WITH INTERDEPENDENCE AND PEACE - (See section 4.3.3.2: Agency).

Carin: How did the broken relationship with Susan impact your relationship with yourself?

Ruth: *It meant that I had to rely on myself while I actually prefer interdependence. I need interdependence to find direction in my life.*

Carin: In what way?

Ruth: *I want to share all the ideas I have in my head with others and the way they react, helps me – it's like a sounding board to me.*

Carin: Does it mean that their reaction determines what position you choose to take?

[My question emphasised the notion of agency.]

Ruth: *No, but it helps me to decide and it gives me peace.*

Carin: Are there also other ways to find the peace?

Ruth: *Yes, I have that peace again.*

Carin: How did that come about?

Ruth elaborated on how she increased her quiet time and how this had an effect on her relationship with God. She explained that her relationship with God was more in her heart now and not so much in her head.