

**THE PERFORMANCE OF HOPE: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-STORIES EMBEDDED IN GOD-STORIES IN THE CONTEXT OF A SHORT-TERM REHABILITATION PROGRAMME FOR ADDICTION**

by

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## DECLARATION

I, Gerhardus Johannes Engelbrecht, declare that **THE PERFORMANCE OF HOPE: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-STORIES EMBEDDED IN GOD-STORIES IN THE CONTEXT OF A SHORT-TERM REHABILITATION PROGRAMME FOR ADDICTION** 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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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Thanks to my wife Anli and son Chris for their support all the years, also through difficult times. Thanks to Elize Morkel for introducing me to narrative therapy, and to my supervisor, prof. Dirk Kotze for the way he tried to get the best out of me, for all his hard work and patience. Also thanks to Idette Noome for finalising the text. I am indebted to the participants and the Ramot rehabilitation centre for their involvement.

## SUMMARY

The purpose of the research, which shaped the research question, was exploring the social construction of cultural stories of substance abuse and the difference that God-stories can make in these circumstances. The research is about the difference that the positioning of the self in the biblical and Christ-stories, the stories of faith, can make in the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

This study thus studied the social construction of self-stories embedded in God-stories in the context of a short-term rehabilitation programme for addiction. I had conversations with 12 participants in Ramot, a rehabilitation centre for alcohol and drug addiction in Parow, Cape Town in the year 2005. A narrative approach was followed, because it is particularly suited to exploring the interaction between stories of identity or self-stories, stories of faith or God-stories, and stories of the struggle with substance abuse. The concept of stories opens up issues and ideas that initially seem to be fixed 'realities' to change, as alternative meanings can be applied and stories can be told differently in different contexts. This approach therefore correlates with people's lived experience. Stories as texts are constitutive of our worlds, but are open to re-visioning and editing. With regard to problematic stories, hope can thus be performed in telling stories differently (recognising different contexts) or in telling different stories (previously marginalised texts).

The main body of the research is a theoretical consideration of the way self-stories, God-stories and the stories of a struggle with substance abuse are socially constructed. Particular attention is paid to the way in which self-stories are socially constructed, because that is the basis for the narrative approach adopted in the research. This includes the postmodern, social constructionist and poststructuralist emphasis on the discursive positioning of the self, with the alternative positionings that this makes possible. Religion/spirituality are explored as part of the narrative resources or context that contribute to the social construction of self-stories. For a believer, this relationship with God through biblical stories informs other relationships and influences the construction of the person's self-stories.

This research report therefore also reflects a critical interaction between the contemporary situation in respect of the struggle with substance abuse and the stories of the Christian tradition for the sake of improved praxis by the faith community.

**Key words:** addiction, faith, God-stories, identity, narrative therapy, postmodernism, Practical Theology, religion/spirituality, self-stories, social constructionism, substance abuse.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 MY INTEREST IN SELF-STORIES

My interest in the experience of the self started during my school years when I read the novel *Bart Nel* by J. van Melle (1973). I felt a certain amount of respect for the ability of the protagonist, Bart Nel, to remain true to his sense of himself, but the main impact that the book had on me was horror at the senseless destruction that this rigidity caused on many levels. I started to question the idea implicit in the characterisation of Bart Nel that one's identity is cast in stone, and that one's destiny cannot be changed. Faith, and a commitment to what he saw as God's will, played important roles in the development of Bart's self-story.

A second source for my interest in self-stories is the well-known first line of the bestseller by M. Scott Peck (1978), *The road less travelled*: 'Life is difficult.' I have experienced my own life thus far, to a great extent, as a struggle. My fight against the limits that a chronic illness wanted to impose on me was probably the main reason for this experience of my life as a struggle. Despite being ill and shy, I became a minister in the church, and that also brought a lot of introspection and inner tension into my life. The question of my sense of self became critical when I was professionally marginalised because of my illness. My wife and I also had to cope with the challenges of infertility, adoption and raising a child who was diagnosed with mental and physical disabilities at the age of 11 months. All the dominant, taken-for-granted discourses about identity eventually became obsolete, and, with faith as my companion, I found myself journeying along many less travelled roads.

My sense of struggle was complicated when I became dependent on painkillers. The abuse of painkillers in my life invited self-doubt into my life, and led to a sense of a self that was disintegrating. The domination of drugs of any kind is 'representative of a paucity of options of ways of being' (Smith & Winslade 1997:22). At the heart of reclaiming my life from the influence of painkillers was reclaiming my preferred self-stories. It involved '[b]reaking from addictions and/or the excessive consumption of substances [which] usually requires a very major shift something akin to a migration of

identity, an act of intentionally leaving one's life behind in order to make a new life for oneself' (White 1997a:39).

All this contributed considerably to my life-long search for identity and personal growth. I have come to understand my own illness narrative mainly as a quest narrative (Weingarten 2001:6), which can be described as a search for meaning within one's illness. The quest for meaning is actually a quest for identity, because meaning is related to a sense of being a self in this world. In this way, through my own story as a search for meaning, I was and remain involved in the research. We live in a time in which negative identity conclusions have a profound effect on people's lives: 'After all, the sense of personal failure has never been more freely available to us, and has never been more willingly dispensed as it is in these contemporary times' (White 2001:3). In this research, through a theoretical study and research conversations, I want to contribute to a library of self-stories that can be enriching and enabling in the midst of a struggle with substance abuse.

## **1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

My basic research question is the following:

**How do the God-stories of persons troubled by substance abuse contribute to the construction of their self-stories in relation to substance abuse?**

This central question raises sub-questions about the social construction of self-stories and God-stories, and questions about the difference that God-stories can make to self-stories in the context of problems with substance abuse. By unpacking the central research question and uncovering multiple relevant sub-questions, I want to describe in more detail what the research is about.

## **1.3 ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED**

Below, I use a series of questions to cast some light on the background, the scope and intentions of my research.

### 1.3.1 Why stories?

Clandinin and Connelly (1991:259) suggest that narrative is a primary phenomenon of life, a basic way of perceiving reality. Schrag (1997:26) talks about the human being as *homo narrans* rather than *homo sapiens*, the narrator rather than the wise or knowing person.

We organise our experience of self and of God in terms of stories. We (consciously or unconsciously) exclude, include and mould events and meanings in our lives according to a theme (Burr 1995:137; Morgan 2000:5). To be a self means to be able to tell the story of your life (Schrag 1997:26). This argument is examined in more detail in Chapter 3. To believe in God is to participate in the stories of God and His people through the ages. This idea is discussed further in Chapter 4.

White and Epston (1990:12-13) shows that stories, as texts, are also subject to the relative indeterminacy of all texts. As I will show, this argument is linked to the notions propounded by social constructionism (I discuss social constructionism as an epistemological point of departure in Section 1.5), with its view of multiple realities. Texts can have different meanings for different readers. Every reading or performance of a text constitutes something new that encapsulates and expands on the previous telling. The same can be said about self-stories: 'With every performance, persons are reauthoring their lives' (White & Epston 1990:13). This view is opposed to a structuralist approach, which assumes that there are underlying structures beneath the surface that are fixed and that determine a person's identity. Narrative work is about a continuous shifting of horizons: 'A narrative is always tentative to a degree. It produces likelihood, not certainty' (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:263). Each 'story' opens up possibilities for movement, for change, for the making of new stories. The concept of a 'story' is also more capable of expressing the complexity and multiplicity of life, since all our lives are multi-storied, with dominant stories and alternative stories. Different stories can be lived simultaneously, and this correlates with our lived experience.

Another reason for the use of the concept of 'stories' that is also a link between narrative ideas and social constructionism is the importance attached to context in these approaches. Just as 'reality' is socially constructed, so our self-stories are social constructions. Constructing a self-story is not a private matter: 'Narratives are subject to

social sanctioning and negotiation' (Burr 1995:137). Because a narrative identity is socially produced, Carlson and Erickson (2000:68) proposes that the term 'identity story' would be better understood as a 'relational identity story'. The word 'story' emphasises the necessity of connectedness to enable the rich description of a person's life. Each 'story' is also anchored in the context of daily life. This is the context in which I want to have conversations about the self and God. I wanted my research to be informed, not primarily by systems of thought or by ephemeral phenomena, but by individual 'stories', natural, embodied, daily life, with all the surprises that stories can make possible.

I also want to use the concept of 'stories' in relation to faith and its productions:

In a post-Kantian context, theology cannot be seen as a direct description of some external world with which we can make direct contact. It is rather an attempt to construct interpretations of God, the self, the world and appropriate categories for describing our experiences in the world. Our very ability to construct interpretations and to take responsibility for them must also be accounted for in our understanding of ourselves and our worlds.

(Proudfoot 1976:227)

For this reason I prefer to talk about God-stories. In this way I want to affirm that what we know and experience about God are constructs, interpretations, ways of speaking the unspeakable. God-stories are elements of an ongoing process of negotiation about meaning (Van der Lans 2002:29). In this way I also wanted to be inclusive regarding the range of thoughts, beliefs, convictions, feelings, experiences, and so on that people want to bring to conversations. God-stories even include what is sometimes called theological theories: 'Theological theories can be understood as narratives, constructing consistency and meaning in the multitude of stories and ideas about the Deity and its relationship to this world and humanity' (Bons Storm 1996:117).

### **1.3.2 How is the self narratively constructed and experienced?**

Identity is a complex concept which can be defined as people's images of themselves, including the feeling that a thread runs through their lives, and that their self-images and the views others have of them are essentially in agreement (Erikson, cited by Meyer, Moore & Viljoen 2003:201). Modern humanism has tried to convince us to accept the notion that certain essences or elements at the centre of human nature, called the true or authentic self, are a fact (White 2001:6). For this reason, 'Erik Erikson proposed that the

major achievement of normal development was a firm and fixed sense of identity' (Gergen 1991:41). Also, 'For Carl Rogers the quest for essence took the form of becoming the self one fully is' (Gergen 1991:41). However, in social constructionism and poststructuralism, the very concept of any personal essences that must be realised is thrown into doubt (Gergen 1991:7).

Caputo (1997:113-114), Freedman and Combs (1996:34), Madigan (1996), Sampson (1989), White (2001) and others have, mostly in conversation with thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida, deconstructed and undermined the Western view of the self as an integrated, bounded motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness with an inner essence. As is discussed in this study, they point in the direction of a self that is discourse-dependent and enmeshed in a complex web of social interchanges mediated by various forms of power relationships (Madigan 1996:50). We are not immediately present to the world or to ourselves: 'We gain access to things and to ourselves only through language' (Meyer et al 2003:216). An individual person obtains his or her own identity through language. Our self-concept is produced by the grammar, logic and underlying metaphors present in our language (Burr 1995:131; Harré 1987:48-49), and they in turn are products of history and culture (White 2001:6). As I have already indicated, we organise and structure our experiences in terms of stories (White & Epston 1990:10). Constructing a self-story is not a private matter. Our stories interact with others' stories, we depend on others to support us in our version(s) of events. The social and linguistic construction of the self and the disappearance of the autonomous ego are discussed in more detail in this report.

One's life story, thus one's identity, is embedded in one's communal relationships (Gergen 2002b:17). In fact, relations precede the self, for without relationship there is no language with which to conceptualise the emotions, thoughts or intentions of the self (Gergen 1991:157).

The social and linguistic positioning of the self means that we are surrounded by and immersed in discourses as systems of signification. In taking up a certain position in a discourse, a person's subjectivity is constituted (Davies 1991:43). This positioning provides a sense of self and co-determines the self-narratives we use to think and talk about ourselves. There is no core self; identity is discursively performed (Graham 1996:30).

In my research, I chose to take the constituting effects of language, of the conversational process and of knowledge/power relations seriously, as research is never neutral, but is constituted through these social environments. I consciously took on the ethical responsibility for the real effects of my conversations with the people I consulted with. I tried to conduct conversations that will help people to refuse forms of social control based on normalising judgements of people's lives through humanist discourses, to open up to knowledges and skills that are associated with preferred identity conclusions, and to encourage the embodiment of multi-storied complexity, as suggested by White (2001:101).

### **1.3.3 How do God-stories and self-stories relate to each other?**

The relationship between ideas of the self and God has a long history in Christian thought: 'Augustine's use of autobiographical reflection to inform and to dramatize his quest for God, and the place of memory in his understanding of the Trinity are examples of the way in which knowledge of the self has been understood to qualify knowledge of God, and vice versa' (Proudfoot 1976:18). The mystical tradition also propounds the idea that one is able to know oneself fully only in relation to God. This correlation is explicitly worked out by Calvin: he constructed a theology on the link between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self, meaning that one story is necessary for and influences the other story or stories. Throughout my years of working as a minister in the church, and in my continuing conversations with people in more or less formal contexts, I have experienced how people's faith (or lack of faith) has contributed substantially to their views of themselves, or to their behaving like a certain kind of person and experiencing life in a certain way. For example, guilt and shame can be a person's life-long companion if he or she has a picture of God as judging him or her negatively. By contrast, a person's acceptance of a story of God's unconditional love can be a powerful source of energy in difficult circumstances.

Proudfoot (1976) considers three different conceptions of the relation of self-stories to God-stories. I introduce each conception with a relevant quotation.

The first is the monistic conception: 'The **monistic conception** is one in which the fundamental unit is God as the whole. The finite self has no integrity of its own'

(Proudfoot 1976:23; my emphasis). Knowledge of God is the basis for knowledge of the self. The individual's ontological participation in God brings a mystical experience of oneness with the whole. There is no room for the distinct, autonomous person with individual expressions. The second is the individualistic conception: 'The **individualistic conception** is one in which individual finite substance has its own integrity. Nothing essential is lacking to it. Finite individuals (self and God) are the basic constituents of reality' (Proudfoot 1976:24; my emphasis). The separateness of God and human beings is emphasised. This type is deficient on account of social and relational concerns. These first two conceptions are not featured in this research. I mention them only in order to contrast them with the conception that is relevant for this research, namely the social conception.

The third conception that Proudfoot (1976) describes is the social conception: 'The **social conception** is that in which the notion of community or society is taken to be fundamental. A person is a system of social relations as well as an individual entity. Relations are not external or accidental. They are intrinsic to the development and the constitution of each individual. ...Being is social' (Proudfoot 1976:25; my emphasis). The development of the individual 'is mediated by events that occur in time, by language, and by the entire context of social and cultural relations' (Proudfoot 1976:26). Knowledge of the self and of God is always mediated. It must be interpreted, it takes time, and has a social character. The development of a knowledge of God and knowledge of the self are related.

I mention these conceptions to emphasise my preference for taking an approach that recognises the social character of self-knowledge and God knowledge, as will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. My positioning within social constructionism and poststructuralism (see Section 1.5) resonates with adopting the social conception in which God-stories and self-stories grow together in our social interaction and influence each other through continual contextual interpretation and meaning-making. For example, a story of God as relationally involved can construct self-stories of interdependence and commitment in all the extremities of embodied living.

Saussy (1991) discusses the relation between God- and self-stories from a feminist and psychoanalytic viewpoint. She sees God images as an extension of parent images and



corresponding self-images (Saussy 1991:47). It confirms the correlative and mutually constituting constructions of self- and God-stories, as expressed in the next quotation:

Because God is often one of the most significant people in a religious/spiritual person's life, this relationship has a very powerful constitutive effect. The way a religious/spiritual person views God's perception of him or herself as a person plays a powerful role in the development of a relational identity story. For example, if a woman thinks that God is disappointed with her or that God thinks she is not a worthy person, it will have a powerful influence on her story of herself.

(Carlson & Erickson 2000:70)

For several participants in Saussy's (1991:71) research, the discovery of female images of Deity has been central to their move to a more positive 'self-concept'.

In my research, I created space for the introduction of people's individual God-stories, and how these God-stories relate to their lives. According to Griffith and Griffith (2002:149), the first step toward relating God-stories to people's lives, is helping people to articulate beliefs that are important beliefs to them but that are often only in the background of their awareness. After that, the impact of people's beliefs on their life and relationships can be uncovered. An inquiry into a person's relational identity story with God can illuminate where problems may be supported by that story, or where that story can be an empowering resource to challenge the problem's influence in a person's life. In the end, self-God conversations can sustain the integrity of a person's sense of self (Griffith & Griffith 2002:109). Selfhood is composed not only through others' eyes, but also through the witnessing of God's eyes.

#### **1.3.4 How can limiting self- or God-stories be transformed or revised to create new possibilities for living?**

Although this research is not about the process of change as such, change or transformation is relevant, as the research is about the possibility that alternative self-stories can be performed, that there is hope for living a different, preferred story in the context of substance abuse. This implies that a person must have agency in order to make different choices.

A well-known expectancy style regarding agency is related to a person's locus of control. If people believe they can exercise control over what happens to them, they

have what Rotter (cited by Meyer et al 2003:299) refers to as an internal locus of control. If they have this characteristic, they see what follows their behaviour as a result of their actions or their attributes. People who tend to believe that the outcome of their behaviour depends on extraneous influences such as good fortune, coincidence, fate or the influence of other people have little control over their lives. He calls this characteristic an external locus of control (Meyer et al 2003:299). Person-centred therapy usually focuses on the capacity of the self to transcend the self through the freedom of choice, thus on developing an internal locus of control (Meyer et al 2003:435). The social constructionist approach works with a particular kind of intermediate view, as I discuss below.

Social constructionism and poststructuralism have a different point of departure, namely that '[w]e appear to stand alone, but we are manifestations of relatedness' (Gergen 1991:168). The self is relational, non-autonomous and non-individualistic. Freedom, agency and change must have quite different implications in this context. Also, from a Christian point of view, one can level a legitimate critique against developmentalism and triumphalism in its humanistic form and in its religious manifestations (Moseley 1991).

My question about the transformation of self- and God-stories and the creation of new stories is therefore something of 'an invitation to the impossible' (Roux & Kotzé 2002:146). In many ways, it is a challenge 'to live in the space between the possible and the impossible, between what we know and what we don't know, between what can be said and what is not yet said' (Roux & Kotzé 2002:146). The 'impossible' consists of straining to go beyond the horizon, to push against the limits of the possible, to open up to what we cannot foresee or foretell (Caputo 1997:133). 'The experience of the impossible is the experience of the aporia of the non-road, the need to act where the way is blocked, the urgency of acting in the midst of paralysis, the necessity to push against paralyzing limits' (Caputo 1997:134). It is refusing to let the doors of the possible close, and instead to keep on looking for openings for the unforeseeable to come in. The impossible becomes the possible when the unforeseen takes us by surprise.

Anderson (1995:31) defines the agency that we are looking for as 'the ability to act, feel and think in a way that is liberating, that opens up new possibilities or simply allows us to see that new possibilities exist'. The therapist's main interest and intention, and

therefore also my interest and intention in this research project, are ‘to establish a dialogical occasion and through dialogue to create the opportunity for self-agency, freedom and possibilities that are unique to a client and his or her situation, and in which a client has participated in the invention and enhancement’ (Anderson 1997:94). Views of agency within the social constructionist and narrative framework involves a return to human agency and a shift away from the behaviourist view of a mechanistic dependency on environmental inputs (Gergen 1987:59-60). It is not the agency of the autonomous self-actualising self of individualism. **It is a social, dialogical event embedded in language and story.** It is co-constructed, and therefore depends on a person’s mastering of and/or contributing to the rules of understanding within the social sphere (Gergen 1987:60). This includes Foucault’s (1980:93) idea of the constitution of the self through its embeddedness in discourses of power (see also Graham 1996:30). I expand on this argument in Chapter 3.

Agency can be internalised and change can become a possibility through narrative practices such as deconstruction and the co-authoring of alternative stories. These narrative constructions are discussed more fully in Chapter 3. There is a possibility that people can deny their own personal stories in favour of so-called ‘grand narratives’ that reflect the shared beliefs of a particular social or cultural group in a given context. However, the non-dominant stories can hold clues to making new meaning and creating the change that can overtake us by surprise (Meyer et al 2003:486). The thin threads of possibilities can be thickened in various ways that are made visible in this research report.

Because agency is discursively performed, it is discourse-dependent. In this broader sense, agency and change can be achieved by positioning oneself differently within problematic discourses. Davies (1991:50) claims that dramatic changes become possible by taking on different subject positions within discourses. She reminds us that change is a bodily process that requires new habits. There is no inner unchangeable core. One can continually speak/write oneself into new ways of being (Davies 1991:52).

One often marginalised God-story argues that God alone brings about the wholeness of the self (Moseley 1991:97-98). Transformation is then defined as ‘a radical change of perspective in which some newly gained cognition brings about a changed way of understanding’ (Moseley 1991:99). The impact of faith is not merely conversion, but

transformation (Rom 12:2). God is the one who gives faith. Through faith, the impossible becomes possible. When one's self story becomes embedded in this God-story, a new (impossible) life and purpose can be sustained: 'The recognition of the crucified Jesus as the Christ brings about a whole new form of self-understanding, indeed a new identity that is centred in a new community of faith, the body of Christ' (Moseley 1991:100). This God-story brings me to the last question.

### **1.3.5 What difference can God-stories make to the self-stories of people troubled by substance abuse?**

This question is the focus of the research. Narrative ways of working aim at a deconstruction of dominant discourses about addiction that are restricting and limiting in their effects on people's self-stories. Modern discourses about addiction tend to provide a pervasive, fixed deficit identity to a person struggling with substance abuse. For this reason, the discussion of addiction is related to the other concern of this research, namely the social construction of self-stories. In line with narrative approaches, I prefer to talk about addiction in ways that positions it outside a person, as something with a life of its own. In this way, the person is not the problem, but the problem is the problem. It enables a person to take responsibility for the relationship he/she has and preferred to have with substances and the abuse of substances. Through this externalisation, it becomes possible to focus on the abusive nature of substances, on the destructive effects it has on a person. The most effective result of the abuse through substances is, as mentioned earlier, the limiting of options for living.

I make the assumption that self-stories that relate to a re-connection with God-stories can provide alternative resources for the construction of self-stories. It can provide more opportunities to choose from – a library of templates for living in a preferred relationship with substances. There are many reasons for making the assumption that God-stories can provide the material for alternative stories to self-stories of substance abuse. The works of many writers over the last 200 years testify to the role of religion/spirituality in the struggle against the effects of substance abuse, and I mention a few in the relevant chapter (Chapter 5). The work of Alcoholics Anonymous (the AA) has also played a defining role in the recent history of this struggle. The AA programme was originally a faith-based programme, and today still includes a spiritual dimension. I also consider the traditional 'clash' between religion and drunkenness and the value of

sobriety. There is also personal experience, together with the testimony of a sea of individuals that religion/spirituality has made and continues to make the difference for them.

In Chapter 5, I therefore discuss God-stories in the literature that suggest that such God-stories are capable of making a difference in a person's struggle with substance dependence. Although I do discuss God-stories that are on the side of substance abuse (and therefore collude with it), the emphasis is on God-stories that are on the side of the person in providing alternative stories to being abused by substances.

In the conversations that are reported in Chapter 6, I focus on the difference that the God-stories of the participants are making in their self-stories in the context of substance abuse. This includes stories of making God-stories part of one's own story, stories of the effect of God's grace and stories of the transformation of identity.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH PURPOSE**

There are six things that I would like to accomplish with the research:

- I want to show that participation in the languaging of the idea that the self is a construction can in itself create room for negotiating preferred outcomes in people's lives. This can happen, for example,
  - by unpacking thin identity conclusions (through 'externalising conversations') and thus depriving such thin conclusions of their 'truth' status, as suggested by White (2001:3); and
  - through re-authoring conversations in which people step into more positive identity descriptions (White 2001:4).
- More specifically, I want to demonstrate that the deconstruction of prevailing addiction discourses in itself will contribute to the creation of doors in the walls of thin conclusions.
- I would like to trace and deconstruct the kinds of God-stories that isolate, disempower and demoralise a person who is struggling with substance abuse.
- I hope that the articulation and performance of previously marginalised God-stories and God-stories that can be interpreted differently through the process of co-constructing in conversation will bring about new meaning-making possibilities. This hope is based on the assumption that God-stories create the possibility of

enhancing relatedness and personal agency in the lives of people troubled with substance abuse.

- Identifying the kinds of God-stories that enhance people's lives will be affirming and strengthening of their preferred self-stories. It is my aim to show how the performance of these God-stories can constitute real hope that things can be different. The literature study, in addition with the conversations, may also be helpful to others, and therefore it may become part of the body of circulated knowledges in the therapeutic domain.
- I hope that my research will have an emancipatory effect on all participants, including myself, and on faith communities, by resulting in alternative understandings and changes towards people's preferred ways of being in the world.

## **1.5 EPISTEMOLOGY: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM**

The research was done within a social constructionist framework. I have already mentioned this a few times, but here I would like to clarify it as my epistemological point of departure. It is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Social constructionism is a broad term for the family of approaches that regards all our ways of understanding as negotiated and constructed in the interaction between people (Burr 1995:4; Gergen 1985:267). The way we make sense of our world is informed by our interaction with the particular social and cultural context that we exist in. Reality is socially constructed by the use of shared and agreed meanings communicated via language. This position has consequences for my research.

In the first place, it means that research is not an attempt to reveal the truth about a reality or to determine whether a particular representation of the reality is true or correct. Research is an exploration of different realities. My research is therefore undertaken within the paradigm of a relativist ontology. The aim of the research is pragmatic and political, namely to bring about change for those who need it, as advocated by Burr (1995:162) and White and Epston (1990:29), and it is therefore not intended to be authoritarian or prescriptive. Knowledge that is context-dependent takes the place of universal truth claims (Gergen 1985:272).

Secondly, my research does not claim to adopt an objective, value-free scientific approach. The researcher is not only an observer, but a participant in the interaction process within the system that is being investigated. My own interests, relations, questions, values and so on play a role in the research process. For example, my own assumptions influence each interview, what questions I ask, and even the way I represent the interviewee's responses. In this way, the research is a co-production between myself and the participants – as Burr (1995:160) puts it: 'Researchers must view the research as necessarily a co-production between themselves and the people they are researching.' Acknowledging and being transparent about this approach brings a therapist the freedom to participate creatively in the therapeutic process with his or her complete repertoire of human experiences (Meyer et al 2003:494). Such an approach requires a transparent research process, in which the material and its organisation are revealed to the reader for his or her own interpretation.

The recognition that the researcher is an engaged participant in the research is also a key concept of feminist methodologies (Dreyer 1998:6). My research is thus also constructed according to feminist interpretive epistemologies (how feminism informed my research is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

A third consequence of social constructionism for my research is the process of continuous reflexivity. The idea of reflexivity has different meanings. It can refer to the equal status of researchers and their respondents, to the critical reflection of researchers on themselves and on how they are contributing to the research process, as has been discussed above. It includes the self-reflection of researchers on their lifeworld, their scientific *habitus* (Dreyer 1998:14). In line with this, reflexivity also refers to the fact that social constructionism is not free from criticism of its own theories (Burr 1995:161). Reflexivity is intended to expand and enrich the vocabulary of understanding. My hope is that by engaging in a process of continuous reflexivity, I can help new forms of linguistic 'realities' to emerge, in line with an emancipatory aim.

In addition to social constructionism, I am also positioning myself within a poststructuralist paradigm (I expand on this point in Chapter 3). Structuralism leads us to believe that there are deeper structures beneath the surface of our existence which determine, for example, how people behave. Poststructuralism questions many of the taken-for-granted 'truths' that have been established by structuralism (Thomas

2002:86). Thus poststructuralism invites us to look at the real effects of having to live with these 'deep structures' or 'essential truths' and to question the objectivity of such knowledges. It is therefore political in its approach. In poststructuralism, language and the meaning we give to things play important roles. The approach intersects with social constructionism in that the stories we live our lives by are the stories that shape our lives. Who we are is socially and culturally constructed and always in flux.

## **1.6 PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL POSITIONING**

Faith in God plays an important role in the lives of many South Africans (Ackermann 1996:39; Pieterse 1998:177). Carlson and Erickson (2000:66) point to the growing appreciation for an exploration of religious and spiritual dimensions of clients' lives in therapy. This research project is based on the idea that a Person-God relationship has constitutive effects and is able to sustain (or conversely, undermine) the integrity of a sense of self (Griffith & Griffith 2002:109). The research is a revisiting and reconstructing of the history of this relationship in participants' lives, as proposed by Carlson and Erickson (2000:78) from the perspective of research in pastoral therapy, a discipline within Practical Theology.

Practical Theology can be described as a critical reflection on transformative communicative praxis in the light of the Biblical message (De Gruchy 1994:11). I would like to position myself within a Practical Theology that takes the context of our world and our living seriously as an epistemological point of departure. It means that a careful analysis of the context in which the gospel is communicated is necessary (De Gruchy 1994:10), in order to improve the communication of the text or gospel in the world. It also implies that our context co-determines our interpretation of the Biblical text, which is also situated in a specific context (West 1994:18). Postmodernity sees text and context in conversation as part of an intertextual world that constitutes a new text (Herholdt 1998:454). This movement from cultural context and experience to the Biblical text is called an 'inductive approach' (Pieterse 1998:181), as opposed to the 'deductive approach' (from text to context). This correlates with the movement from praxis to theory and back to a more adequate praxis in a process of critical interaction (Ackermann 1996:42; Pieterse 1989:181). In this way, practice itself is a source of Practical Theological constructions: 'It is the task of theology to understand practice itself as a source of truth' (Ackermann 1996:42). This contextuality of Practical



Theology enables me to take seriously the value, importance and uniqueness of every human being, as manifested in God's love, in my research. It also allows for a more productive convergence of the Biblical text and the reader's context. Biblical stories and self-stories can be related to each other: '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).

Relatedness, community and communication are constitutive elements in a contextual Practical Theology. This is confirmed by feminist images of Practical Theology. For Isherwood and McEwan (1993:74), faith without a social commitment is empty. But more than this, feminism involves a movement from dualism to relationality, from separation to mutuality (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:11-12). The faith community is one social context that constructs 'truth' through its communicative actions (Graham 1996:42). This theological discourse or story (Bons Storm 1996:117) confirms the social constructionist positions that language has a performative character, that personal identity is shaped by the community, and that people's life stories are embedded in their communal relations. It underscores the importance of and creates space for the narrative practices of re-membering and engaging with a community of persons in the telling and re-telling of the preferred stories of one's identity (White & Epston 1990:16,23-24). The telling and re-telling of self-stories in community results in multiple contexts for the construction of self-stories: 'The outcome of this is the production of lives that are multiply contextualized' (White & Epston 1990:16). This generates more narrative resources for the rich descriptions of preferred selves and thereby enhances the range of options for action.

I will expand on this Practical Theological positioning in the second chapter.

## **1.7 METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH**

The main focus of the research is the theoretical discussion of the issues relating to the research question. This includes extensive consultation of the literature regarding discourses and narratives of self-God constructions in the context of substance abuse.

In addition to this, I also had conversations with participants in order to illustrate how these concerns translate into the ordinary experiences of everyday life. In the light of this, the kind of research that I am involved in falls within the parameters of both qualitative and quantitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) define qualitative research as ‘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’. In the part of the research in which I work with participants in conversations, I bring their stories and their meanings to the research in their own terms, and work with these stories and meanings from there.

This approach implies that I used a phenomenological approach in qualitative research as opposed to a positivist approach. Maykut and Morehouse (1994:2) describe the difference between quantitative and qualitative research as follows:

Quantitative research is based on observations that are converted into discrete units that can be compared to other units by using statistical analysis. Qualitative research, on the other hand, generally examines people’s words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants.

This research is concerned with both description, which tends more towards a quantitative methodology, and understanding, which tends towards a qualitative methodology (Mouton & Marais 1985:172-173). The research contains both nomothetic elements (the search for the constant in human actions) and ideographic elements (the search for the unique in human actions) (Mouton & Marais 1985:49). While the conversations tend to emphasise understanding and the uniqueness of human behaviour, the theoretical part of the research contributes to a description of the relevant issues and the search for more general or universal tendencies. Thus the theoretical aspects of the study are more closely related to a quantitative methodology, as opposed to the qualitative methodology (Maykut & Morehouse 1994:13) followed in the conversations.

Regarding the classification of the research as theoretical or quantitative, Mouton and Marais (1985:159-165) emphasise three elements that are relevant with regard to theoretical research. The first is the way concepts are used. Theoretical research is usually more formal in its use of language. In theoretical research, concepts (such as the self, religion or substance abuse) have a more specific meaning than in qualitative

research, as described in the text of the research (Mouton & Marais 1985:162). This also necessitates the need for definitions. Hence, this study includes a literature review on the concepts of the construction of the self, the relationship of the self with God and the struggle of the self with substance abuse. The second element is stating a hypothesis or positing a research proposition that, in the end, can be accepted or rejected, as I am doing in Chapter 8 (Mouton & Marais 1985:163). I explore such a proposition in the form of the research question: the research tests the assumption that God-stories can provide alternatives to stories of substance abuse. A third element in theoretical research is the way in which the observation of data is controlled (Mouton & Marais 1985:165). On the one hand, I am not as subjectively involved in the outcome of the theoretical work as in the conversations. On the other hand, I impose my own structure on the research as a whole as well as on the chapters in a more objective way. I thus control the context of the research.

Both methodologies lie in different points on a continuum, and there are areas in which they overlap. Because the self, faith and substance abuse are complex phenomena, elements of a qualitative methodology are also present in the theoretical discussions. I listened to these voices as conversational partners in the light of the research question. The literature study, together with the conversations, can contribute to more adequate results, because more than one indicator is used (Mouton & Marais 1985:69).

As already mentioned in the context of the brief discussion of social constructionism above (see Section 1.5), I want my research to be collaborative or participatory. Methodologically speaking, I collected data from the literature and from interviews that were semi-structured and were conducted in accordance with narrative practices (Morgan 2000; White & Epston 1990). Because a part of the research is of a qualitative nature, and I am therefore myself a participant in the research, the interviews were limited to 12 participants with two interviews per person. The sharing of power is only partial, as I initially identified the research problem and determined the broad parameters of the research questions and aims. I believe that multiple interviews and reflection added to the free interplay between the participants and myself, and to an egalitarian relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. In order to enhance the participation of interviewees, I was transparent about my own positioning and accountable to them in all issues of meaning-making by being honest about my position, asking questions to make sure that I understood correctly and sharing my notes with

them, as recommended by Kotzé (2002:27). Because I co-authored stories with participants, the participants had an influence on the outcome of the interviews, and therefore on the research itself. I strove to situate myself as a decentred, self-reflective participant in the research process, adopting a position of indwelling as an engaged participant (Dreyer 1998:14; Gergen & Gergen 1991:93; Maykut & Morehouse 1994:39).

The research had an emancipatory effect on the participants that I interviewed, as well as on myself, and has raised hope that it will in future have an effect on a community of concern regarding substance abuse, as advocated by Ackermann (1996:35). I hope that the literature review and the interviews and the reflection surrounding the interviews will lead to alternative understandings and changes towards preferred ways of being in the world for all the parties concerned.

In a sense, as can be seen from the above descriptions, the term ‘action research’ (McTaggart 1997) is also relevant to a part of my research to some extent. Some kind of improved action or change, as mentioned above, is part of what I envisioned for this project, as described by McTaggart (1997:26). However, this research did not use the kind of rigorous and systematic groupwork emphasised by McTaggart (1997).

The writing of the research report itself is also in line with a participatory and action-oriented research process. This means that the conversation part of the research product (Chapter 6) is a co-production by and is accessible and beneficial to all the participants in the research (McTaggart 1997:29). Again, the focus in the research is not on change as such, but on the possibilities of the construction of alternative self-stories in the light of God-stories in the context of substance abuse. I also consulted extensively with other conversational partners regarding my research questions by reading as much of the applicable literature as possible. This theoretical unpacking of the issues is central to the research. Therefore the research also contributes to the theoretical discussions it engages in a kind of dialogue and to hopeful alternatives with regard to self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse. Thus the transforming effect of the research is hopefully in line with the idea that the task of science is therapeutic – it should contribute to the healing of the brokenness of humanity and nature (Mouton & Marais 1985:13).

Regarding the conversations reported in this study, my approach was informed by a stance of ‘careful curiosity’, as described by Griffith and Griffith (2002:31). We work as outsiders that are curious, in what Anderson and Goolishian (1992:27) call a ‘not knowing’ position. This is a different role from that of insiders in a specific spiritual tradition. Being a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, I had to be very sensitive to possible power imbalances, and also diligent in taking up this ‘not knowing’ position. The trap of knowing is contradictory to the aims of story development in narrative practices.

Due to potential power imbalances, a therapist is called to ‘radical listening’ (Weingarten, cited by Griffith & Griffith 2002:84), which involves, first and foremost, listening to what the storyteller thinks about the story he or she is telling. The teller’s expertise about its meaning is privileged over the therapist’s impressions (Griffith & Griffith 2002:84). This requires a forgetfulness of self and attentiveness toward the other that Heshusius (1994) calls a participatory consciousness, in this case, a deep sense of kinship between myself and the participants in the research. Kotzé (2002:30) pleads for the return of the morally and emotionally engaged knower, and I tried to become involved in the participants’ stories in this way.

I have already mentioned my interest in narrative practices, as developed by Michael White and David Epston (Freedman & Combs 1996; White & Epston 1990). In this regard, I used the methodology of narrative therapy in the conversations with participants and in the discussions of self and God-stories in the context of substance abuse. I drew on the basic structure of narrative therapy in eliciting the telling and exploration of the difference God-stories make in people’s self-stories in relation to their struggle with substance abuse. That implies the use of methods such as externalisation, deconstruction, the development of dominant and alternative substance abuse and God-stories, a focus on landscape of action and landscape of meaning issues, and the co-authoring and affirming of preferred self-God-stories (Section 3.7). The research method is complemented and guided by the therapeutic method.

## **1.8 RESEARCH PROCESS**

The first step in the research process was to find and co-opt participants. I did my research at Ramot, a rehabilitation centre for alcohol and drug addiction in Parow, Cape

Town in the year 2005. I believe that questions of identity are especially relevant in the rehabilitation situation, and that self-stories and God-stories are central to the process of reclaiming one's life from the influence of alcohol or drugs. This context also makes it possible that the research can be of transformative value to the participants. Lastly, because of my own history, as mentioned before, I have a special interest in working with people who struggle with the misuse of drugs.

I negotiated with Ramot, a rehabilitation centre for people who live with an addiction, for permission to have consultations with persons interested in working with me (see Appendix A for the letter asking permission). The permission from the centre was negotiated by means of personal consultations, via e-mail and over the telephone. I then negotiated the journey with the participants themselves, and discussed information letters and consent forms with them.

The second step was engaging in the conversations with the participants with the aim of co-constructing meaning in their self-stories in the light of their God-stories.

Although the direction of the conversations could not be determined beforehand, I used the points below in the discussion as broad markers for the content of the conversations. The first question was an indication to the participants that I wanted to have a conversation with them about God-stories that are important to them, and then reflect together on the meaning of these stories in the light of the remaining questions:

- What God-stories (things that happened, ideas, convictions, feelings, etc.) are important to you at this stage of your life?
- In what way do these stories influence your struggle with substance abuse?
- In what way do these stories influence your view of yourself?
- How does your faith influence your relationships? What relationships are important to you and why?

After the conversations, I also consulted with the participants about the reporting of the conversations.

Simultaneous with the conversation process, I consulted a wide variety of texts from the literature on relevant topics. The second-last step was interweaving the results of the conversations with the literature review about God-stories and self-stories in the context

of substance abuse. The last step in the process was a reflection on the whole process of the research in the light of the research purpose (see Section 1.9).

## **1.9 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

The chapter divisions in the study are in line with an unpacking of the concerns touched upon by the research question.

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In Chapter 1, I introduce the research project, its purpose, the questions it attempts to address, the epistemology and the methodology applied in the study.

### **Chapter 2: Self-stories and God-stories in Practical Theology**

In this chapter, I discuss my own Practical Theological positioning and its relevance to the research.

### **Chapter 3: The social construction of self-stories**

The area of concern addressed in this chapter is to show that identity is socially constructed, and that therefore self-stories are constituted in ever-changing social, cultural and political spheres. This concern resonates with the overall interest in this study in narrative ways of working, and in narrative therapy in particular. In this chapter, I consider how self-stories are socially constructed, starting with the postmodern context of self-stories and moving on to narrative therapy as a particular context for self-stories. I also argue that self-stories can be a context for hope, because, if self-stories are indeed socially constructed, they can be changed – they can be differently structured and constructed. The value of a narrative approach to identity is the possibilities for change this approach embodies. Possibilities for change are opportunities for therapy, and therefore also contexts of hope. Because self-stories are socially constructed, it also means that they are open to the influences and effects of other social constructions, such as religion/spirituality (see also Chapter 4) and substance abuse (see also Chapter 5).

#### **Chapter 4: The relationship between God-stories and self-stories**

This chapter looks at the constitutive effect of religion/spirituality on self-stories. I expand on the notion that God-stories are social constructions that can be part of a context for the development of self-stories. I show in what ways God-stories can make a difference to self-stories. In this case, I focus on God-stories as a context for hope, thereby linking the discussion to that on the social construction of self-stories in narrative therapy. Chapter 4 also sets the stage for the next chapter, which is about self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse.

#### **Chapter 5: Self-stories and God-stories in the struggle with substance abuse**

The area of concern in this chapter in the light of the research question is establishing the social, cultural and political contexts of substance abuse. More specifically, it explores the way self-stories are influenced by stories of substance abuse. I look at the dominant substance abuse stories that totalise and pathologise people's identities. I also wanted to explore how a narrative approach to substance abuse can make a difference in the construction of self-stories. In this way, I discuss problems with substances as a context for hope.

Another area of concern in this chapter is considering how God-stories contribute to the social construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse. What difference do God-stories make for a person struggling with substance abuse? What is the effect of self-God-stories on stories of substance abuse? My assumption was that God-stories can work on the side of substance abuse stories that disempower, isolate and restrict a person's options for living. I also assumed that God-stories can provide alternative self-stories in relation to substance abuse, and that self-God-stories can therefore also be a context of hope regarding problems with substance abuse.

#### **Chapter 6: Conversations about self-God-stories**

Chapter 6 reports of the interviews with the participants, with some reflections and interpretations. As far as possible, the participants' own voices are reported. I explore the self-God-stories that are on the side of substance abuse, as opposed to self-God-stories that provide alternative living possibilities to substance abuse stories.



## **Chapter 7: Hope: self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse**

Chapter 7 integrates the findings from the conversations with the ideas found in the literature (as reviewed in Chapters 2 to 5). It provides a conclusion in respect of what was asked in the research question.

## **Chapter 8: Reflection on the research process**

In this last chapter, I reflect on the whole process of the research in the light of the intention and purposes of the research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SELF-STORIES AND GOD-STORIES**

#### **IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

I have already discussed the background and implications of the development of Practical Theology as an operational science in a previous study (Engelbrecht 1996). In this chapter, I want to position myself within Practical Theology in the light of its relevance for the research.

I am a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, and associate myself with the Reformed tradition. For me this implies a number of realist<sup>1</sup> assumptions that I discuss in this chapter. Nevertheless, I see the 'Reformed' tradition as a tradition that is historically and socially constructed and that can be critically reflected on. Even important Reformed notions such as the existence of God, Jesus Christ, Biblical inspiration, sin and grace are experienced relationally and receive meaning in the interaction with God and between humans. This is the content of this chapter.

The first context for Practical Theology that I want to mention is the broader theoretical or epistemological positioning of Practical Theology within a postmodern discourse. This is important, because this research is informed by postmodern assumptions. This is followed by a discussion of contextual theology, feminism, social constructionism and narrative as manifestations of postmodern discourses, and their effect on a Practical Theological methodology. I share a few ideas on a Practical Theological view on the self. I discuss postmodernism in relation to the social construction of the self in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I therefore only make a few remarks about postmodernism that is relevant for a Practical Theological positioning.

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<sup>1</sup> from Realism, the philosophical theory that phenomena exist in 'reality', independently of their being perceived by human senses – Deist 1984:213

## 2.2 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AS POSTMODERN THEOLOGY

The concept of postmodernism can be described and understood in many different ways (Dockery 1995a:16). It is often seen as the consummation of modernism, characterised by the despair of ultra-modernity (Oden 1995:26). Alternatively, it is seen as an intellectual and epistemological break with modernity, a change in the game rules for science, literature and the arts (Mohler 1995:70). It can be described as the rejection of the Enlightenment project of a unified grasp on objective reality. Postmodernism is said to be a rejection of ‘superior’ meta-narratives<sup>2</sup> (Shotter 1993:34; Van Huyssteen 1997:269). The story of global progression and rational development is challenged by a preference for the local and the marginalised, for contextual mini-narratives (Lyotard 1984:xxiv). Even the meta-narratives of the Christian tradition that are referred to in this study can be given ‘one text at a time, one miracle at a time, one poem, one healing, one pronouncement, one promise, one commandment’ (Brueggemann 1993:25).

A common characteristic of postmodernism is a broader view of rationality (Grenz 1995:99; Striver 1995:215; Van Huyssteen 1997:14). Knowledge includes the contribution of things such as experience, mystery, tradition and community. This broader view of rationality includes contextuality. In this way, more counts as knowledge, not less. This makes it possible to justify theology as a rational activity that works with interpreted experience, tradition and passion, just like other scientific disciplines (Van Huyssteen 1997:15). Faith is the interpretation of an experience. Religious beliefs, and therefore theological theories, are creatively constructed through the language of the tradition, models and metaphors, in the same way as any science (Van Huyssteen 1997:19,131). This opens up the possibility of a postmodern theology that considers the affective, bodily and intellectual aspects of a person, as well as the person’s social and environmental context (Grenz 1995:100). It emphasises the often local, discontinuous, disqualified and illegitimate knowledges of modernism. One implication of the postmodern return to the other marginalised by modern reason is in fact this reclaiming of the spiritual and the numinous (Graham 1996:38). Postmodernity,

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term ‘meta-narrative’ in the same sense as Lyotard (1984) does, namely in the sense of a grand or overarching narrative. This should not be confused with the way in which the term is often used in postmodern literary criticism, where it is employed to refer to a narrative about narrative, in analogy to the terms ‘meta-poem’ (a poem about poetry), ‘meta-drama’ (a play about a play), or ‘meta-novel’ (a novel about the novel).

with its shift in its description of what counts as knowledge, can be an ally that presents new possibilities to theology (Mohler 1995:77; Striver 1995:250). Another implication for theology of this emphasis on the other marginalised by modernity is a move away from a focus on propositional truths to a focus on the knowledge and experience of the faith community. As will be discussed further, theological propositions have meaning in the narratives that embody and constitute them.

In postmodern discourse, reference is sometimes made to postfoundationalist views that pertain to both theology and science (Van Huyssteen 1997). Foundationalism believes that all knowledge is structurally supported by irreversible foundational 'truths'. To have certainty and clarity, an appeal is made to a foundation that could guarantee results (Striver 1995:244). The new physics started the process of undermining the notion of objective and universal truth (Dill & Kotzé 1997:8-9; Van Huyssteen 1997:242). The process is powered by the failure of modernism to provide a better world than the world of isolation, divisions, exploitation, oppression, manipulation and war.

As I have already mentioned, epistemologically, postmodernism is the rejection of the claim of a universal objective 'truth'. The source from which meaning is made possible is unfathomable. This does not imply relativism or nihilism, for relativism and nihilism are only relevant within modernism, as the opposite of modernism or as the 'ultra-modern'. In spite of realist assumptions in Christian theology (for example, that God is a reality outside discourse), postmodernism invites theology to reflect critically on its theories, to be accountable for the choices made, and to be experience-adequate (Van Huyssteen 1997:23-24). Practical Theology is a contextual and critical theology focusing on religious praxis (Pieterse 1998:176). For the purposes of this study, it includes the praxis surrounding the ways of talking about substance abuse and its interaction with God-stories.

Van Huyssteen (1997:41) and Herholdt (1998) talk about critical realism as a way to hold on to the realist assumptions of our faith, but also to be accountable for our theological theories, for example, regarding experiential adequacy as an epistemic value, or intelligibility. Critical realism distances itself from positivist objectivism in favour of the truthfulness of intersubjectivity. The use of the term 'realist' can be a problem, for the constructionist notion derives from its contrast to a realist epistemology. This is not to reject the realist tradition, but to realise that it is a tradition

that can be reflected on (Gergen 2002a:280). Postmodernism thus sees theology as mediated through historical social processes. I agree that a ghetto theology, a theology that works with unmediated divine revelation, holds no alternatives for theological subjectivism (Van Huyssteen 1997:109). Any theory in theology can be altered or developed on the basis of a good and reasonable argument in order to come to the best possible explanation (Van Huyssteen 1997:177). Theoretical views (also theological views) are always corrigible, because in a postmodern approach, we are not interested in amassing knowledge for its own sake, but for the sake of transformation, that is, of a better world.

Postmodernism is also postindividual (Grenz 1995:98). The self is decentred through the telling of a narrative that is embedded in the stories of the communities in which we participate. Personhood is not a set of metaphysical or ontological qualities, but the result of a discursive performance within the culture that the self inhabits (Graham 1996:30). This invites theology to take seriously the reality of community as the context in which the self is embedded. I will say something more about the self in a Practical Theological context below (in Section 2.8).

In a postmodern world, the dualism between the transcendent and the immanent in theology is overcome: 'The postmodern reader lives in an integrated world where spiritual reality and worldly reality are part of the same multi-leveled reality. Consequently, spiritual matters are not approached as an esoteric realm' (Herholdt 1998:468). Gergen (2002a:288) also sees the realm of the sacred as part of everyday life, and Practical Theology as involved in cultivating relationality. The body/soul dualism is replaced by an interest in all aspects of a person within relationships. This all means that theology is constructed and relevant in its relationship to all kinds of human endeavour. In the context of this research, God-stories are part of the narratives out of which self-stories are constructed.

Brueggemann (1993:8-9) mentions three characteristics of the change in our ways of knowing that can be called 'postmodern':

- Our knowing is inherently contextual. What a person knows and sees depends on where the person sits or stands.
- It follows from this that our knowing is local, and cannot be seen as universally applicable.

- This results in the view that our knowledge is pluralist, that there is not only one knowledge, but many perspectives on so-called reality.

I added this reference of Brueggemann with the purpose of making a link between postmodernism and contextual theology. Although contextual theology is not always postmodern, postmodern theology shares the emphasis on context with contextual theology.

### **2.3 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AS CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY**

I use the term ‘contextual theology’ as an umbrella term for a family of theologies that have an epistemological interest in the context of a text. The ‘text’ in question, in Christian circles, is usually the Bible.

Some contextual theology features are:

- A Suspicion that western science, philosophy and theology were designed to serve the interest of the West.
- A refusal to endorse the world as static, as something that only has to be explained, but rather as something that has to be changed.
- A commitment as the first act of theology and then especially commitment to the poor and marginalized.
- The notion that theology (spirituality) can only be done with those who suffer.
- An emphasis on doing theology since doing is more important than knowing or speaking (hermeneutic of the deed) and
- The notion that hermeneutic circulation starts with praxis or experience, and shifts to reflection on theory with an intersubjective relationship between the two.

(Bosch 1991:424)

Contextual theology is always provisional and hypothetical, with continuous dialogue between the text and its context (Bosch 1991:426-427). It is seen as a theology from below (Bosch 1991:426-427) and grows out of a self-other participation and not from a privileged position of knowing as reflected in Western theologies. The emphasis on the context and on experience is clear, implying an inductive approach to theology, starting from the context, instead of a deductive approach, starting from the text (Pieterse 1998:181). It is also clear that contextual theology is aimed at a liberating praxis. For this reason, contextual theology is narrowly linked with liberation theology (Villa-

Vicencio 1994). The goal of theology is transformation and emancipation – spiritual, social and economic (Pieterse 1998:188). The implication of this is that a social and political analysis of the context of theology is required. This study therefore includes a critical assessment of the social and political context of substance abuse and the possibilities that this context provides for theology. How Practical Theological methodology is informed by contextual theology will become clear in the discussion of a methodology for Practical Theology (see Section 2.9).

Feminist theology is another theology that is contextual in that it takes the experiences of women as a starting point for its descriptions and constructions of theology.

## **2.4 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND FEMINIST THEOLOGY**

Another context of Practical Theology today is made accessible by feminist critiques of society. Patriarchy makes women prisoners of their biology. Feminist theology is a critique of patriarchal religious and theological thinking: ‘Feminist theology is a signpost and method to enable patriarchal theology to grow out of sexism’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:136). For Isherwood and McEwan (1993:11-12), feminism is a move from dualism to relationality, from separation to mutuality, from unchanging absolutes to process.

The key resource in theology for feminists’ relational anthropology is ‘God in relation’ (Ackerman 1994:203). Analogies between feminism, postmodern theology, contextual theology and social constructionism, as discussed in Sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, are evident in their critique on modernist values with their emphasis on relationality. The aims of feminist theology can be described as expanding the space we share: ‘To expand the space we share is a good description of aims of feminism, ultimately the recognition that no space should be exclusive to one sex’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:27). This implies a deconstruction of the struggle behind the Biblical text that contributes to the oppression of women and a re-claiming of the Biblical text without its patriarchal prescriptions (Bons-Storm 1996:127-129).

Feminist theology shares the postmodern rejection of the body/soul dualism. Feminist critique is body-based and body-directed; it aims to reclaim our bodies. It emphasises the importance of all human experiences as vehicles for the Divine: ‘We see from this

that in reclaiming our bodies we are stating not only that the material, the physical, is a vehicle for the divine, but that change is holy, that passion is sacred and self direction the path of divinity' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:113).

Feminist theology also emphasises the ecological nature of pastoral care. It criticises the so-called theological basis for a hierarchical chain of command, subject-object dualism and the dominion over creation that is destroying our life-support system. It is opposed to the notion of human dominion over Creation in favour of our being ecosystemically inspired custodians of nature (Ackermann 1991:110).

Another important aspect of feminist theology is its insistence on emancipation, on change towards Kingdom (Christian) values (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:73). That includes an emphasis on praxis and a growing concern for the social and political dimensions of care (Graham 1996:50). Faith without a social commitment is seen as empty. The praxis is important in theology: "The verification principle of every theological statement is the praxis it enables for the future" (Ackerman 1996:42).

The exploration of gender issues regarding substance abuse and the criticism in this study of modernist assumptions about substance abuse are informed by these feminist values. Feminist concerns also translate into an emphasis on relationality in the self-God-stories discussed in the research. The references to ways our bodies are abused by substances, as well as the disruption of our ecosystem through disordered consumption are relevant in such a critical feminist point of view.

Feminist approaches are aware of one of the postmodern discourses that are definitive of this research, namely social constructionism. Working with the social construction of self-God-stories, it is necessary to situate Practical Theology within a (social) constructionist framework.

## **2.5 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM**

I expand on the concept of social constructionism in Chapter 3, but mention it here briefly in order to relate it to Practical Theology. Social constructionism is born out of the criticism of positivist empiricism, which sees scientific theories as direct representations of reality. It locates the processes of knowledge acquisition in a social



context, overcoming the subject object dualism constituted by modern science. 'Meaning and understanding are socially and intersubjectively constructed' (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:372).

In social constructionist terms, reality does not determine the meaning of words, but words determine the meaning of reality. This does not imply that all reality, natural and social, can be reduced to language, but it does mean that reality cannot be mapped in a decontextualised way. The way it is described and the meaning given to these realities in a specific context are relevant. For social constructionism, the question is what the implications or results of certain ways of talking about reality are. The aim of social constructionism is to unmask the apparently self-evident nature of our worlds, to see our realities as constructed and to deal with them in a critical and reflective manner in order to make transforming choices (Hermans 2002:xvii).

An endless variety of meanings and social realities are constructed that provide the meta-narratives within which a person orients him- or herself as a self. These meanings, socially constructed realities and meta-narratives also include theological discourses. This implies that theology is not a set of contextless theoretical concepts, but includes experiences that are part of a concrete contextual human history. Although theology refers to a reality outside language (God), this reality is not known outside of human interaction and communication. From a social constructionist point of view, religious experience can be described as an internal imaginative dialogue in interaction with religious narratives; and thus religious experience is open to the constitutive effect of social constructions (Van der Lans 2002:29). Religious beliefs are also not only the outward expression of the inner state of an individual, but also elements in ongoing social communication about meaning (Van der Lans 2002:29). It is the performance of language before an audience.

In the light of these communicative aspects of religion, Practical Theology can be seen as the study of religious communication processes in an ongoing negotiation about religious meaning in the life of an individual embedded in a specific community. In Reformed language, the relevant community in relation to Practical Theology is the faith community established as a covenant community. In contrast to an ontotheological or philosophical tradition in theology that understands God as the supreme cause or ultimate being, theology can best be served by a returning to its roots in the Biblical

narratives and images (Wallace 2002:97). Social construction invites theology to be a conversational partner on the same level as other sciences and discourses, overcoming of the modern dualisms such as material/spiritual, objective/subjective, etc. In this way, Practical Theology can be a form of dialogical engagement with a wider culture that offers scripturally rich visions of reality.

This research therefore engages in an exploration of the social construction of cultural stories of substance abuse and the difference that God-stories can make in these circumstances. It also discusses theological views on substance abuse (see Chapter 5). In the end, in interaction with religious/spiritual narratives, this study is a theological communication about the social construction of transformative self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse.

Social constructionism also emphasises the idea that a researcher is a participant in the research process. In this study, it means that the interviewer played a part in the social construction of self-God-stories during the interviews that were conducted (see Chapter 6).

## **2.6 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE**

A way to God is through the metaphoric concepts of the Christian tradition; therefore the Bible is part of our epistemological access to God. It has authority as the original book<sup>3</sup> of the faith community, and is therefore a critical part of Christian theological arguments (Van Huyssteen 1997:141). The Bible contains the founding events of God's revelation in history in the form of stories, especially the story of the people of Israel and of Jesus, in which a divine perspective on reality is revealed (Rossouw 1993:899). There is a reality that the Biblical text refers to, but it is not objectively accessible. The realism of the text refers to the fact that the continuity of metaphors refers to the Reality of God in our midst (Van Huyssteen 1997:156). It is constructed in language, metaphorically, narratively and relationally (Herholdt 1998:462).

The Biblical text does not have a closed meaning, but comes alive in relationship with the reader (Van Huyssteen 1997:148). The truth of the text is not locked up in a core

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this study I talk about the book of the Bible as a monolithic text, although it is actually a set of books. The interviewees in Chapter 6 understand it in this way.

beneath the surface, but in the relationship between local readers and the text. In postfoundationalist theology, the text of the Bible becomes a contextual conversational partner, rather than a decontextualised collection of absolute truths and norms (Deist 1994:258). The interpretation of the text of the Bible is tied to the observational position that the reader takes. This implies that the meaning of a text is always context-specific. The faith community is the context in which the text is given meaning. The reader and the text become part of an intertextual world in which a new text is constituted. The 'truth' is dynamically co-determined by the relationship of the text and the reader (Herholdt 1998:468).

In a non-dualist world, the meaning of a text must correspond to the way people see their worlds and live their lives every day. And, as I have already mentioned, metaphors and narratives are central in our understanding of this reality and can transcend our rational limitations. The God-stories that are reflected in the conversations, as well as the God-stories that are discussed in the literature study, have been constituted in the interaction between the Biblical text and the context of substance abuse. It is the interpretation of Biblical images, metaphors and stories that provided the material for the construction of preferred self-God-stories in this study.

## **2.7 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AS NARRATIVE THEOLOGY**

The narrative approach is a postmodern approach based on social constructionism. It emphasises language and stories in the construction of the self and the world that the self inhabits. Narrative is an interpretive resource that I privilege in this research.

People tend to give meaning to their lives by weaving contextual chronological events into a narrative plot. Moreover, it is the stories that we have about our lives that actually shape or constitute our lives (White 1995:14). The self is constructed in accordance with the narrative patterns that exist within a culture or society. Religion and spirituality can function as part of the narrative resources that contribute to the construction of the self. God's dealing with creation is through stories (Hauerwas 1989:307). The Christian message is carried by the stories of God's people and more specifically Jesus Christ, whose presence is revealed by stories. In this way, the Christian tradition is carried by narratives.

As I discuss in Chapter 4, theology is not a set of objective or direct descriptions of some external world, but social and historical interpretations and constructions of God and His relationship with the world. Therefore theology is metaphoric, an attempt to say something about the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. Narrative is a fitting vehicle for the transmission and constitution of a thick diversity of knowledges and experiences. In this light, theological theories can be understood as narratives that bring a sense of coherence and meaning into all the different stories we have about God's relationship with the world (Bons-Storm 1996:117). They also create a world of consciousness and the self oriented in it (Crites 1989:71). Doctrines are understood and experienced through stories; narratives are the basic constituent of theology (Metz 1989:252). This implies that the Christian tradition is taken seriously as concrete and contingent God-stories, and that there must be a critical interaction between the meta-narratives of the Christian tradition and the contemporary self and God-stories. Narrative makes possible and comprehensible the relation between Christ and Christians, as it reflects the experience of the Christ-story and the self-story as two sequences within a single larger story (Root 1989:266-267).

Narrative theology is political in its intentions, conscious of the influence of meta-narratives on people's stories, aware of cultural expectations and ambitions that restrict people's lives. It is aimed at improved action, new, alternative and better stories and therefore a better praxis in the faith community. This can include a deconstruction of power/knowledge discourses and the reclaiming of marginalised self- and God-stories. Practical Theology wants to help the faith community to become aware of social scripts and conventions that restrict a person's self- and God-stories, and to generate more options for living.

A narrative theology is interested in pushing against the boundaries of perceived reality, in providing narrative resources for the construction of meaning and action in the world, in expanding the space in which a relationship with God can be known and experienced. In this study, the boundaries of cultural narratives about substance abuse are explored with the view to finding places where God-stories can be performed.

## 2.8 A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL POSITIONING OF THE SELF

Practical Theology is aimed at the subject and his/her life world, the way faith and religion become part of and are worked out in the life of the human self and human community (Putman 1998:50). The modern self was built on the dualism of Descartes, with his distinction between the knowledgeable self and the reality outside the self, *res cogitans* and *res extensa* (Urmson 1960:71-77). This contributed to the perception of a fixed and static objectively existent self, ‘een statisch-idealistisch-individualistisch mensbeeld’ (Berkhof 1975:189-190) that is a reduction of the experience of being human. The postmodern self is recognised to be embedded in relationships and manifested differently in different contexts. I have already mentioned that the postmodern self is post-individualist. In reaction to the dissolution of the self in postmodernism (Schrag 1997:8), I agree that a sense of self is made possible through communicative practices, as Schrag (1997:8-9) argues.

As I show in the next chapter, I see the self as constituted within a language community, therefore as a contingent and contextual social construction. Even a so-called ‘inner life’ is something that is on the boundary between the others with whom I am in conversation: to be means to communicate (Shotter 1993:109-110).

In the words of Charles Taylor (1989), some of the sources for the construction of the self are spirituality or an orientation to what people regard as the ultimate good that transcends the self. In this way, religion functions as a context for a social construction of the self. For Taylor (1989:42-43,92,97), this positioning within a frame of ultimate reference is inevitable, it qualifies what it means to be human. Schrag (1997:87-88) refers to this orientation as ethico-moral considerations regarding the meaning and worth of our lives. In this way, the ultimate good or spirituality is an expression of being human.

It is relevant to this research that this orientation becomes evident in narrative, in terms of the stories of our lives, of how we have become and of where we are going (Schrag 1997:19; Taylor 1989:47). In social constructionism, identity is viewed in terms of narrative constructions (Gergen 2002b:16). Our stories give continuity and meaning in our lives. The self is a constructor of and actor in narratives about a life. I expand in Chapter 3 on how the possibility of human identity is tied to the notion of narrative. It is

important for social constructionists and for theology that narrative is embedded within the social. In contrast to the modernist abstract, theoretical concept of a self severed from lived experience, the narrating self finds unity and context in the multiple and changing communicative endeavours of the self (Schrag 1997:33).

Religious faith is primarily sociological, not psychological, as becomes evident from the emphasis on tradition and relationality in the covenant community (Van der Lans 2002:31). The search for identity is the search for community (Lee 1993:14). A person's life becomes meaningful in this spiritual sense through connecting one's life to some greater story or 'reality' (I use quotation marks here, because I use the term 'reality' in a social constructionist sense). One example is the meaning that can be included in the metaphor of humans being created in the image of God. This image is sometimes interpreted as signifying that we are created to live in relationships and that this relationality is characteristic of being human (König 1993:5). The first relationship that gives meaning to our lives is the historical relationship with God. This encounter with God is experienced in humans' ability to respond to God's initiatives, to be responsible, to answer and communicate with Him (Berkhof 1975:191; König 1993:232). God's initiatives can be described with the metaphors of *sola Scriptura* [scripture alone] or *solus Christus* [Christ alone]. It relates to the Biblical text and the extratextual reference of the Biblical text, namely God's speaking as highlighted in Jesus Christ.

Reformed theology is not based on natural religion, but on the confession of externally revealed perspectives on humanity and the world in relationship with the Divine. The metaphors *sola Scriptura* and *solus Christus* express the privileging of the Biblical and Christ narratives as the originating narratives of the Christian faith. As discussed already, this reference to a revelation does not necessarily imply a positivist theology, but it is something that is historically and socially constructed and confessed in communicative exchanges between people. For a believer, this relationship with God through the Biblical stories informs other relationships and influences the construction of the believer's self-stories.

Another example of one's life being connected to a greater story or 'reality' is the religious stories that are part of the cultural repertoire of stories that contribute to the construction of self-stories (Rossouw 1993:894-899). The self-story of a believer is incorporated in the Jesus-story, thereby receiving a personal identity *extra se in Christo*.

In the light of the changeability of the self, the believer has one comfort: ‘...dat ons eigentlijke identiteit met Christus verborgen is in God’ (Berkhof 1975:190). It involves retelling one’s own narrative and hence making sense of one’s life by means of the self’s ‘emplotment’ in the Jesus narrative (Grenz 2001:329). This meaning-making can be described with the metaphor *sola Fidé* [faith alone]: faith is a form of human meaning-making that contributes to the transformation into the image of God (Moseley 1991:43). Faith is thus relevant to the interpretation of human experience in the light of the repertoire of religious stories that contribute to the construction of self-stories.

*Sola Fidé* expresses the privileging of a hermeneutic of relationality as the basis for action. This happens in the community of which the person is part. The Christian identity is thus a shared identity that reflects the relational life of the triune God. Therefore the self is truly ecclesial (Grenz 2001:331), meaning that the self is a system of relations, that the other is constitutive of the self, that the self is multiple and a social analogy to the relationality within the Trinity. Faith thus provides additional narrative resources for a thick description of identity (White 1997b:16-17). In taking up a subject position within the discursive practices of the faith community, the self sees the world from the vantage point of that subject position, with the images, metaphors, storylines and concepts relevant to that position (Davies 2000:89). In this way, the self emerges through the processes of social interaction. The processes of social interaction reveal the decentred character of the self that is sometimes seen as analogous to the Christian notion of finding the self through self-loss in love for God and neighbour (Wallace 2002:108).

The processes of social interaction also reveal the experience of sin as a moral failing or human brokenness in our commitments to God, people and things. This does not negate our being created in the image of God, or the constitutive identification with the story of Jesus, but it makes it apparent why we are in need of an uncommon goodness in the forms of the grace of God (Brueggemann 1993:32). This dependence on grace can be metaphorically described with the concept of *sola gratia* [grace alone], the belief in the enduring reality of God’s love in spite of human sinfulness and the frailty of our limited efforts to love God (Moseley 1991:37). It implies that God accepts us without judgment. *Sola gratia* is an expression of the privileging of the concept of salvation as a free gift over any form of moralism. Grace is about the impossible becoming possible. The impossible comes about when the unforeseen overtakes us by surprise (Derrida &

Caputo 1997:134). Grace keeps hope alive in the presence of despair. Grace makes it possible that something like failure can become a doorway to new, unforeseen possibilities for one's life.

Culturally or religiously subjugated self-stories can become more central in the constructing of a self-story. One example is that failure, in the narrative approach, can also be viewed as an act of resistance or refusal of venerated cultural notions of health and normality (White 1995:141). In pastoral therapy, these self-stories as texts need to be scrutinised in these different contexts with the same diligence previously reserved for the study of the Biblical text (Gerkin 1984). Any decontextualised or disembodied way of speaking about the self fixates a person in a problem-saturated discourse that limits possibilities for action. Any kind of change or growth is not so much an individual or intra-psychic process, but something that happens contextually in a person's relationships with God, others and the self. Thick or rich descriptions of the multi-storied self embedded in additional (Christian) narratives create space for different possible ways of being (White 1997b:16-17). The research is about the difference that the positioning of the self in the Biblical and Christ-stories, the stories of faith and of grace, can make in the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

I expand on the relationship between ideas of God and the social construction of the self in Chapters 3 and 4.

## **2.9 THE COMMUNICATIVE CHARACTER OF THEOLOGICAL ACTIONS**

Research has shown that people feel most comfortable with a panentheist view of the relationship between God and creation (Putman 1998:142). For me, this view has more possibilities for theology in postmodern and social constructionist terms. Whereas theism emphasises the distance between God and creation, pantheism sees God as the same as creation. In a panentheist view, God is not the same as creation, but is working in creation. His presence is positive and meaningful. Humanity is distinct from God, but in a mutually constitutive relationship with Him. However, God can only be God with us if humans are constitutively involved in the meeting with God (Putman 1998:80). I have tried to show how this is relevant with regard to elements of contextual theology and the influence of social constructionism on Practical Theology. It also provides a



basis for a Practical Theological methodology in which the God-human relationship is mutually constitutive.

Since 1974, consensus that Practical Theology has to do with communicative actions in service of the gospel has grown (Burger 1991:7; Pieterse 1993:3). The praxis of God happens in and through human communicative action (Pieterse 1998:181). Divine discourse is mediated through human discourse. In line with this argument, Ackerman (1996:35) describes Practical Theology as an operational communicative science in which the emancipatory theory/praxis dialectic is central. This is also reflected in the description of Practical Theology by De Gruchy (1994:11) mentioned in the introduction (see Section 1.6) as a critical reflection on transformative communicative praxis in light of the Biblical message. This communicative action includes the study of faith experiences and actions, faith questions and life questions. It is about the working through of Scripture and tradition into the actual life situations of human beings (Putman 1998:31).

In contrast to the approach of Practical Theology as applied theology, through the praxis/theory/praxis dialectic, practice itself is a source of knowledge. In a reconstruction of South African society, theology needs to reflect on Christian praxis for the sake of a better and more adequate praxis. Practical Theology moves from practice to theory and back again to a more critical, considered practice (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:26-48). This includes a critical interaction between an interpretation of the Christian tradition and the contemporary situation.

The first project in Practical Theological research can be seen as a social-ecclesial analysis in which a more complete understanding of a social situation can be obtained through exploring historical and structural relationships in relevant communities. This is then followed by normative or theological reflection, in order to understand experience in the light of faith and its tradition, Scripture and the church environment. This results in a new praxis, that is, a praxis that is subject to critical reflection and that is engaged in social transformation. As opposed to a search that may benefit the survival of economic privilege, the church in South Africa is called on to be obedient to the gospel's emphasis on choosing to benefit the poor (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Peterson 1991:38,61). For example, for the majority of South African women, oppression and poverty are a daily reality. Faith cannot be separated from political praxis. Christian

spirituality is about keeping alive ‘hope against hope’, the conviction that a new day will dawn (Cochrane et al 1991:82).

In a broad sense, this research is part of Practical Theological reflection for the sake of improved praxis. In a simple and logical way, this research involves an analysis of the discourses and praxis that constitute subjects, and, more specifically, subjects that are being abused by substances. It then includes a discussion about the possibilities of religion and spirituality for people struggling with substance abuse; that is the way theology can be practical in this context. This resulted in practical conversations with people struggling with substance abuse, conversations carried by the performance of hope inherent in the stories of the Christian tradition. Chapter 7 is informed by the theoretical discussions and the conversations in order to propose a better praxis, one that is engaged in social transformation. In a more complex way, the research presents a continual interplay between theoretical and practical concerns, with the aim of a continual movement toward improved praxis in the long run. It is my hope that the research will contribute to the communication about and the communication with people struggling with substance abuse.

## **2.10 PASTORAL THERAPY**

I am working more specifically in the communicative field of pastoral therapy. The term ‘pastoral’ is indicative of a certain direction: that God’s stories with human beings must feature in the therapeutic process, implicitly or explicitly. To be pastoral, self-narratives have to be informed by the Christian tradition and Christian values as embodied in the faith community. In line with the value given to each human being as reflecting the image of God, the graceful incorporation into the hopeful Christ-narrative and Christian ethics, the therapy or care in pastoral work, must be ethical. This implies that the care given is the product of collaboration between care-givers and those who receive care; care is socially constructed as care with, and not care for, those in need (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:7). The emphasis is on equality and mutuality in the pastoral encounter instead of the old hierarchical client/expert, sheep/shepherd metaphors (Graham 1996:49). From a social constructionist point of view, the therapist is a participant in a conversation.

The God that is active in history is active in human language (Boyd 1996:221). In line with the idea of Practical Theology as communicative praxis, pastoral therapy can be seen as a dialogical occasion that creates the opportunity for exploring alternative possibilities for living (Anderson 1997:94). From a constructionist point of view, pastoral work emphasises the building of relationships as narrative resources, because a religious transformation of the self is related to the acquisition of authorship competencies (Day 2002:81). As conversational partners, people are helped to construct new and better stories that are healing and liberating. Therapy is discourse-sensitive, as it aims at freeing people from self-narratives that keep them locked into disempowering grand narratives. Pastoral therapy brings into play a person's whole network of religious meaning in order to co-create a preferred sense of selfhood (Schilderman 2002:229). In this way, therapy is a way of keeping alive the hope that things could be different, despite everything that discourages this outcome (White 1997b:142).

Pastoral therapy works in dialogue with other human or social sciences. In pastoral therapy, various disciplines, such as psychology, sociology and theology, can contribute to the process of discernment to bring about a disclosure that is in the best interests of the parties concerned (Hamman 1999:40). During this process, the community of interpretation and local narratives must be emphasised in its interaction with scientific truth claims. In this research, there is interaction between the literature study informed by multiple disciplines about self-God-stories in substance abuse and the conversations about these issues.

Pastoral therapy takes place in the context of a Christian community. Pastoral therapy is aimed at bringing people back to the normal caring practices of the faith community (Gerkin 1984:179). The faith community provides the indispensable plausibility structure for the living of new stories (Berger & Luckmann 1966:178). The implication of this is not that the church itself is necessarily the space for pastoral therapy, but rather that it is the area where the faith community and a person's daily existence overlap. In my understanding of it, pastoral work can include people that are not associated with any church denomination, because pastoral therapy is distinguished mainly by the involvement of God-stories in a living context. In such instances, pastoral therapy will work towards establishing social support structures that suit the needs of the person involved. Although this research is not therapy as such, it was concerned with caring for

people struggling with substance abuse within the communities of which they are part. It was about the performance of hope through the interaction of self- and God-stories

## **2.11 SUMMARY OF MY PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL POSITION FOR THE RESEARCH**

I am doing this research from within my own theological position. This influenced the research in profound ways, for example, the questions I asked, the language I used, the sources I consulted and the conclusions I drew. All this emphasises the necessity of adopting a stance of openness and humility, of transparency and reflexivity, in fact, from a postmodern sensibility, of celebrating difference and responding to those who are marginalised.

The research is framed by Practical Theology in that it explores theological communication about the construction of transformative self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse. In this construction, the Christian tradition, community and Biblical images, metaphors and stories played a role.

Practical Theology as a postmodern theology invites an emphasis on stories in the research that implies a broader view of rationality which includes people's own contexts, experiences, meanings, communities, hopes, etc. In the research, stories of the self and of God are decentred through their embeddedness in the social domain, as is characteristic of stories. The concept of stories also connects with the social constructionist approach to Practical Theology. The research emphasises the socially constructed character of self- and God-stories, and this opens up possibilities for alternative constructions in the light of stories that have become problematic.

In this study, the contextual emphasis in Practical Theology contributes to the exploration of the social, cultural and political context of stories of substance abuse and takes into account these stories in the construction of God-stories.

Feminist perspectives in Practical Theology also bring about an awareness of the restrictions imposed on people by modernist assumptions about substance abuse, including their relation to gender issues. It contributes to an emphasis on relationality,

also of the whole person in all his or her relationships, in the construction of self- and God-stories throughout the research.

The narrative metaphor makes it possible to integrate concerns about the originating sources of Christianity and Christian issues such as faith and grace seamlessly with issues of daily living. The critical realist assumptions of Reformed theology are part of the same multilevel, socially constructed reality that includes constructions about the self and about substance abuse. The concept of narrative empowers Practical Theology to use its multiple opportunities for the communication and performance of preferred self-God-stories.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-STORIES**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The first area of concern in this study is to show that identity is socially constructed, that self-stories are constituted in our ever-changing social, cultural and political spheres. This concern is related to the study's overall interest in narrative ways of working, more specifically, narrative therapy.

In this chapter, I therefore consider how self-stories are socially constructed, starting with the postmodern context of self-stories and moving on to narrative therapy as a specific context for self-stories. The narrative metaphor is important in the light of the research question, as there is a close link between social constructionism and narrative ways of working (Freedman & Combs 1996:14-18; Gergen 1985:271; Hoffman 1990:11; Kotzé & Kotzé 1997; Socor 1997:17), as will become clear in this chapter. I also argue that self-stories can be a context for hope, because if self-stories are socially constructed, they can be changed when they are differently constructed. The value of a narrative approach to identity lies in the possibilities for change that it enables. Possibilities for change are opportunities for therapy, and therefore contexts of hope. Because self-stories are socially constructed, it also means that they are open to the influence and effects of other social constructions, such as religion/spirituality (see Chapter 4) and substance abuse (see Chapter 5).

In narrative ways of working, the term 'self-stories' is a way of referring to a person which sidesteps the pitfalls of modernist essentialist views of the self by affirming both the 'self' and 'identity' as social constructions. Hence, for the purposes of the study, I use the terms 'self-story', 'self' and 'identity' interchangeably.

Narrative is a basic way in which human experience is imbued with meaning (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:259). It is a fundamental given of what it means to be human. Our thoughts, perceptions, actions and choices are narratively structured. The very possibility of human identity is tied to the notion of narrative, because the self is a

function of narrative. The self is present to itself as a character, usually the leading character, in a story. Therefore, '[t]o be a self is to be able to tell the story of one's life' (Schrag 1997:26). Our stories are the way we account for our lives and also the way we live our lives. It is possible to say that we are lived by our stories, because it is the stories that we have about our lives that actually shape and constitute our lives (White & Epston 1990:40). Narrative is therefore not a representation of deeper linguistic meaning structures, but the specific mode of constructing and constituting our identities.

The importance of narrative is perhaps nowhere more evident and justified than in the portrayal of a life (Socor 1997:17). This view is useful for identity discussions, because it is located in postmodern notions about language, knowledge and power, and also because it reflects coherence and consistency through a person's life story. It accounts for fluidity and meaning in identity concerns. This is especially relevant in the light of the research question: the difference that God-stories can make in the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

Before discussing the ways in which the self is socially constructed in narrative ways of working, it is necessary to distinguish these ways from the ways in which the self is perceived in modernism. The possibilities of narrative ways of working are more evident against the background of the context from which the narrative approaches evolved.

## **3.2 SELF-STORIES IN MODERNISM**

In the sections below, I first discuss the way the self is defined in modernism, and then explore some descriptions of the self in modernism.

### **3.2.1 Definitions of the self in modernism**

The self-stories of modernism were sustained by the broader social discourses about epistemology, science and ideology. Modernism involved a break in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the social values of the time that preceded the Enlightenment and reflected an emphasis on reason, individualism and progress.

In the Western world, in primitive society, and up to the Middle Ages, personhood was not meaningfully defined apart from family and bureaucratic units (Sampson 1989:4). In the post-medieval world (in the Renaissance, Humanist and neo-classical period) people appear as autonomous subjects, as individuals who shape their own destiny. G.H. Mead's (cited by Logan 1987:15) well-known distinction between the self as the 'I', the Knower, and the self as 'me', the Known, indicates how the sense of self has changed in the course of post-Classical Western history. It is a change from the self as the self-as-subject to the self as self-as-object. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of the self as it is understood today, as an object, a 'me' to be known and influenced by its context. It involved a shift from the notion of the self as creator that was common in the Renaissance to the notion of the self as created. It was a shift from 'How do I (subject) reason about and observe the world?' to 'How does the world make me (object) feel?' (Logan 1987:21).

Within liberal and radical capitalism, the individual became a function of economic activity and progressively predetermined socioeconomic forces. Throughout this shift, however, 'the ideology of autonomy and of individuality remain[ed] carved deeply in the subjective consciousness of the culture' (Sampson 1989:5). As long as problems in society could be linked to the individual, autonomous and free person, society itself could continue to produce its ideologies and human beings that fit into it.

Self-concept and identity are linked as answers to the basic questions: 'Who am I?' 'Where do I belong?', and 'How do I fit (or fit in)?' (Oyserman 2004:5). In modernist discourses about the self, this 'I' is sometimes seen as the core, the heart, the existential 'I', which is autonomous and chooses in freedom. The 'self' or 'me' is more inclusive, as all that the 'I' has, and all that belongs to the 'I'. The 'I' is seen as the principle that regulates the way the 'self' is subjectively experienced and used. Conversely, the 'self' is continuously creating the space for the becoming of the 'I' (Wijngaarden 1969:30.)

A great variety of discourses also arose around the concept of 'personality'; and these are mostly related to the concepts of the identity and the self. The Latin verb *personare* literally means 'to sound through', referring to the voice of the actor emerging from behind the mask which an actor would wear in Roman times. Today, it refers to the individual, acting human being (Meyer et al 2003:9). Meyer et al (2003:11) define personality as follows: 'Personality is the constantly changing but nevertheless



relatively stable organization of all physical, psychological and spiritual characteristics of the individual which determines his or her behaviour in interaction within the context in which the individual finds himself or herself.’ Thus personality in modern Western culture is seen as the progenitor for thought and behaviour, the explanation for an individual’s uniqueness, stability, coherence and action. Harré (1987:42) follows a more socially sensitive approach, defining a ‘person’ as a human being as a social individual, embodied and identifiable, while the ‘self’ is the inner unity to which all personal experience belongs.

### **3.2.2 Descriptions of the self in modernism**

There are many ways in which the self of modernity can be described. In modernism, reality is named in a representational way, in that the language of the self and the world is a mirror of that self and the world. The assumption that underlies this argument is that the self is something ontologically real. The basis for modernism’s fixed and objectively existent subject is Descartes’s separation between the thinking self (*res cogitans*) and the external world (*res extensa*) (Urmson 1960:71-77). The self can be seen as a self-contained entity within a person which has direct access to the visible world through its powers of mental perception (Wallace 2002:102). As a centre of awareness, reason, emotion and action, this permanent, crystallised, core self is generally assumed to be the foundation of all knowledge of the world (Wallace 2002:102). As a prelinguistic interior ‘substance’, the self is integrated as a distinctive whole, set up against other wholes (Sampson 1989:15). In the assumption that the self is an autonomous subject, the radical freedom of the self is also emphasised. This self can also be described as ‘essentialist’ (White 2001:6). This implies that, like everything else, human beings have their own particular ontological essence or nature, which is, to a large extent, a fixed entity within a person; and it provides a rationale and explanation for the way people behave. Every human being is supposed to give outward expression to this inborn essence.

If the essence of the self is hidden beneath layers of the self, an expert is necessary to open up the core of the self. This view is the same as the structuralist view, in which surface and depth are contrasted. The surface is the expression of the depth structures within a person. The self of modernism is an abstract, theoretical construct of the mind, separated from lived experiences, a reduction of the self, independent of context (Schrag 1997:25-26).

In the context of this research, it is also relevant that faith-stories or God-stories can contribute to the achievement of a fixed, essential identity. The Biblical story of humans being created in the image of God can be understood as a qualification of an ontological, core self. The same applies to the stories of people being ‘sinners’ or having a ‘new identity in Christ’. These stories can function as contextless or acontextual essences or depth structures in the individual that must be expressed outwardly on the surface of a person’s life. This topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Problems with substances can also contribute to the sense of having a fixed identity as an ‘addict’. This particular set of stories is discussed and deconstructed in Chapter 5.

In narrative ways of working, identity or the formation of self-stories is situated within the postmodern discourses of social constructionism and poststructuralism. In the rest of this chapter, I reflect on the following question: ‘How are self-stories constituted and constitutive in these contexts?’

### **3.3 THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT FOR SELF-STORIES**

The social construction of self-stories in narrative ways of working are informed by postmodernism. I start with a few introductory remarks about postmodernism and its relevance for the construction of self-stories. This discussion is taken further in the comments on the postmodern discourses of social constructionism and poststructuralism in the rest of the chapter.

#### **3.3.1 Science as stories**

Self-stories are embedded in broader social narratives about the self and the world we live in. On a personal level, self-stories are instances of the storied nature of our collective existence. In this section, I trace Lyotard’s (1984) argument that leads to his describing science as a story, and then refer to the implications of this view for the construction of self-stories more specifically in Section 3.3.5.

Lyotard (1984) discusses the problematic nature of the need for legitimation within scientific discourses, the truth requirement of science. Modernist science refers to meta-

discourses for legitimating its findings and claims the findings as universal truths, grand narratives as Lyotard (1984:xxii) calls it. Scientific proof is thus only possible if there is already a body of power/knowledge that constitutes legitimate science. Science thus validates itself, mostly on the basis of the results in terms of efficiency (Lyotard 1984:44-47), a favourable balance of input and output.

Science is not always driven by a search for truth only, but also by economic and social needs and conditions. Science is practised within a theoretical framework that is dominant at a certain time in history. To put it differently, science is not representative of 'reality', but is legitimised within linguistic practices and communicative interaction in society, according to the rules of science discourses. Science is therefore one metaphor, one narrative, one way of being in language, on a par with many others. A scientist is therefore, above everything else, a person who 'tells stories' (Lyotard 1984:60). Science is socially constructed in the same way as local contextual knowledge, and thus invites multiplicity and marginality into the network of knowledge production.

Conversely, there is an 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984:xxiv), the narratives about a unity of knowledge, an orderly and systematic world out there, a world of progression. The certainty brought about by the mastering of universal truths or 'reality' has been replaced by the vulnerability of discontinuous, localised threads of social consensus. Postmodernism is more interested in specific, contextualised details than in grand generalisations. Lyotard (1984:82) concludes his report on postmodernism with the cry of a warrior: any longing to go back to the terror of absolutism must be answered by waging a war on totality, being witnesses to the unrepresentable and activating differences.

The consequences of this emphasis on science as story/stories testify to the rise of post-rationalism, in other words, a broader view of rationality than that of modernism: a rationality that includes ambiguity, tentativeness, humanness, values and experiences (Rossouw 1993:895). A broader view of rationality also assumes the generation of multiple possible stories about the same 'realities'. The notion of science as story/stories sets the stage for the differentiation between dominant and marginalised stories that is also encountered in self-stories and paves the way for a centralising of experience,

temporality and linguistic interactions in the formation of self-stories. As with new science-stories, contextualised details are often the building blocks for new self-stories.

Science as story/stories implies that language is used in a specific way. How does the postmodern use of language influence the construction of self-stories?

### **3.3.2 Language games**

The postmodern view of language establishes the 'story' as the key to our understanding and experiencing of ourselves and our worlds, the primary site for being a self (Socor 1997:17). In modernism, language is regarded as a reliable link between the subjective (mental) world and the objective (real) world. It is seen as an accurate representation of reality. In this, it is a secondary aspect of meaning.

By contrast, the atmosphere of postmodernity can be experienced as 'being in language'. We are not immediately present to the world or to ourselves. We gain access to things and to ourselves through language. People generate meaning and knowledge together, through language. Language is a tool or instrument in the making of meaning and creating reality, or, as Anderson (1995:30) puts it: 'Language is reality.' This implies a diversity of conflicting versions of the world, in line with the diversity of conflicting language communities. Wittgenstein (cited by Anderson & Goolishian 1988:377) uses the concept of 'language games' to refer to this dynamic social operation of language. Any speaking/writing is valid and participates in the language games whose aim it is to create new and ever-changing social bonds and meanings. (This has implications particularly for the 'other' marginalised in modernity.) What we say and how we say it matters. Our speaking/writing creates the way we understand and live (in) our worlds. Language always changes; meanings are indeterminate, depending on context. Therefore our life worlds are not fixed, but always in flux.

Acquiring a self through language indicates that our self-stories flourish in the ebb and flow of language. The way language is used in the constructing of self-stories also includes the way the self is positioned in language as a bearer of subject positions within discourses. For self-stories to become constructed a decentring of the self is required.

### **3.3.3 Decentring the self**

Postmodernism is ‘post-individual’ or ‘post-humanist’ in that our self-stories are always embedded in the stories of the contexts and communities in which we participate (Grenz 1995:98). The postmodern deconstruction of epistemological certainties includes the decentring and emptying of personal identity. This is not about the disappearance or the disgracing of identity, but about the way it is produced. The idea of a transcendental, core self has been abandoned in postmodernism – as Graham (1996:28) puts it: ‘The most abiding motif of postmodernism is the death of the subject.’ This means the subject is not a self-actualising actor or original author, nor an essentialist reality, but is constructed through cultural discourses of power. A fundamental tenet of postmodernism is that the self is not seen as a metaphysical fact or a stable and intrinsic prelinguistic entity, but as a social or literary construction; and human nature is seen as a product rather than a given: ‘While it is possible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man produces himself’ (Berger & Luckmann 1966:49; Socor 1997:3).

The self is a process that occurs in the space between people. The implication of this is that different selves appear in different contexts. The postmodern decentring of the subject makes possible the co-construction of self-stories, the co-authoring and intersubjective evolution of self-stories in different contexts. Because the self is decentred, it becomes possible to co-create meaning from the events and experiences of our lives, and in this way, in interaction with our community, we can construct self-stories that count, self-stories that are relevant.

### **3.3.4 Making meaning**

Another important factor in postmodernism is that whereas modernism tends to be concerned with facts and rules, postmodernism is concerned with meaning that is not self-evident (Cuff, Sharrock & Francis 1998:282-283). We live in a time when the meanings something has for a person have more real effects on the person than the mere fact that something exists. In postmodernism, meaning is not universal or pre-given in language or in text, but we as human beings make meaning in our ongoing interaction with each other (Monk et al 1997:33). Since we cannot know reality objectively, all we can do is interpret experience. All knowledge, also of ourselves, is interpreted

knowledge. We make sense of things from within our contexts. This does not exclude a cultural heritage that we make use of every day, because that is part of our context. The implication of this meaning-making is that meanings can be changed, as the context changes or is revised by taking up a different contextual position. Perspectivism, rather than relativism, leads to differences in meaning-making. It is even possible to have different understandings of the same word or concept. In fact, postmodernism celebrates diversity (Freedman & Combs 1996:33), the free play of discourses. That is why questions and conversations in therapy are necessary; it is an attempt at contributing to each other in the process of meaning-making.

Because of the postmodern emphasis on meaning-making, stories and storying are valuable postmodern tools. A story is a unit of meaning that provides a purposeful frame for the events of our lives (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:26). The generation of new meanings through conversation also provides a context for hope, for things to be different.

### **3.3.5 Self-stories in postmodernism**

This section encapsulates and expands on the previous four points (Sections 3.3.1 to 3.3.4) that cover the way in which the social construction of self-stories in narrative ways of working is informed by postmodernism. Narrative ways of knowing are typically postmodern, in the sense that they incorporate a broader understanding of rationality, including speculative (philosophical) knowledge, contextual knowledges, the politics of emancipation, morality and ethics, spirituality, creativity and aesthetics (Rossouw 1993:895). In this regard, Polkinghorne (1988:17) also contrasts the two basic modes of cognitive functioning, the logico-scientific mode and the narrative mode. For some, the move to a narrative metaphor represents a paradigm shift, a language and rules for its use that are different from those of previous paradigms (Freedman & Combs 1996:14).

Science works within the framework of meta-narratives about 'objective truths'. Consensus between experts in a field increases the truth-value of what is referred to. Lived experience and temporality are excluded in favour of universal, timeless constructs and theories. For Lyotard (1984:25), this modern scientific way of conveying knowledge is a reduction that leads to fragmentation and a loss of wholeness. Therefore

scientific knowledge cuts a poor figure compared to opposing modes of knowledge, such as narrative (Lyotard 1984:7), especially in the separation between science (professionals) and life (society).

In postmodernism, historically determined narrative is a preferred metaphor for considering 'reality' (Hamman 1999:42). Knowledge of different kinds (as mentioned above) can be transmitted through a narrative presentation of knowledge. While the scientific mode searches for universal truths, narrative looks for particular connections between events, for the lifelikeness of rich stories. In narrative modes of knowing, lived experience and temporality are critical in the construction of narratives. In a Newtonian universe (cause/effect thinking), science wants to push through to the smallest knowable unit that is the truth and the basis for all truths; and this truth in science is fixed and universal, whereas narrativity recognises the temporality and contextuality of all human experiences (Polkinghorne 1988:20). Science also tends to minimise its value-ladenness in order to arrive at an illusory objective truth, while narrative emphasises the values that constitute the narrative plot. In narrative, the observer is not objective, but is a co-author of the developing 'scientific' story.

With regard to therapy, postmodernism reduces the influence of the therapist as an expert to that of an expert in the arena of creating a space for and facilitating a dialogical conversation (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27). In collaboration with this facilitation, the clients demonstrate their own unique expertise regarding their lives, their problems and their social realities (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:390). A postmodern approach to self-stories opens up space for dialogical co-creation, taking the experiences, knowledges and preferences of the client seriously.

All this attests to a fundamental suspicion in narrative towards meta-narratives (because problems are manufactured in social, cultural and political contexts) and towards 'objective' truths (because they present problems as fixed and decontextualised). Narrative works in the context of multiple stories that construct reality and centres experience and temporality as the constituents of stories. This implies that postmodernism does not subscribe to universal theories of a self outside the social arrangements that produce the self. In fact, the social arrangements that support self-stories are also multiple, temporary and fragmentary.

Narrative works with the postmodern decentring of the subject, in that the essential self of modernism has been replaced by a constructed relational self. The self is not something inside a person, but a co-construction of a person's narrative. The self is a story that is told and lived in interaction with other people who are important to that self. It is a process that is forever changing, a self being storied differently in different contexts.

A narrative approach is also explicitly postmodern in its being situated within language and discourses as being constitutive of our lives. In a postmodern context, the use of language of self-stories is a way of interpreting our lived experiences, giving meaning to our lives and creating our experience. A narrative plot is an organising theme that binds events in a meaningful whole. Where language in the logico-scientific mode is used in the indicative mode to provide certainty about a fixed reality, narrative uses language in a subjunctive mode to create implicit meanings, multiple perspectives and a wide range of possibilities (White & Epston 1990:81). Because language is always changing, our life worlds are also changing. Conversation is actually an opportunity for developing new language, and therefore alternative narratives of ourselves and the world that bring forth new possibilities for living. This social environment of being part of stories, of making meaning in language, is constitutive of our self-stories.

I now want to expand on the way identity or self-stories are socially constructed within the context of the postmodern discourse of social constructionism.

### **3.4 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-STORIES**

The point of this chapter, to show how identity is socially constructed, is in a certain sense condensed in this section (3.4). I therefore refer often to social constructionist writers in this regard in order to contextualise my views. I want to show that the self and problems are socially constructed, with the implication that they can be constructed and de- and re-constructed in different ways.



### **3.4.1 What is social constructionism?**

To see how the ideas of social constructionism contribute to an understanding of how the self is socially constructed, something must first be said about the concept of social constructionism. Social constructionism is a critical reaction to positivist-empiricist claims that scientific theories are direct or decontextualised representations of reality (Gergen 1985:266). It differs from the epistemological position called ‘constructivism’, which also rejects the notion of direct knowledge of reality, and which focuses on perception and cognition from a biological and individualist point of view. Constructivism focuses on inherent and limiting ‘structure systems’ in the individual; it is therefore more in line with traditional self-conceptions (Meyer et al 2003:404).

By contrast, social constructionism involves radical doubt of the taken-for-granted world in science and in daily life, a challenge of the objective basis of conventional knowledge. The social, historical and cultural bases for these knowledges are considered. In studying and considering the way paradigms of knowledge are changing throughout history (see, for example, the work of K J Gergen, Michel Foucault, P Berger and T Luckmann, and J-F Lyotard, as referred to in this research), social constructionism assumes that knowledge is not something in people’s heads, but rather something people do together. Knowledge is socially constructed in historically situated interactions between people in their attempt to live together within this world. Social constructionism goes beyond the subject-object dualism that is found in the disputation between exogenic (empiricist) and endogenic (rationalist, idealist, phenomenological) orientations (Gergen 1985:270). Knowledge has to be removed from the data-driven and/or the cognitively necessitated domains and placed in the relationships between people. Berger and Luckmann (1966; see also Freedman & Combs 1996:24-25) have shown how subjective meanings can attain the status of reality through the processes of ‘typification’, ‘institutionalisation’, ‘legitimizing’ and ‘reification’, so that they become publicly accepted as ‘correct’ ways of being.

### **3.4.2 How are self-stories socially constructed?**

I now want to move on to the social construction of self-stories. The representations of the self in modernist jargon (mind, emotions, inner reality, integrity, etc.) are social constructions, but their use becomes problematic and imprisoning when they attain

objective or truth status (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:3). Social constructionism questions the idea of the fixed and unified Cartesian self as the unconditioned source of knowledge; that is, the common-sense (widely accepted) idea of an essential self as part of human nature that manifests itself in a more or less stable personality is interrogated. For social constructionists (Gergen 1987:61-62; Schrag 1997:78), community or society, epistemologically, comes prior to the achievement of constructions of individuality. Selves are manifestations of relationship, not the other way around, as is generally accepted in modernist discourses. Relations are more fundamental than the self, for without relationship, there is no language with which to talk about the self (Gergen 1991:157). This is why a fitting metaphor of the self as a social construction is that of the text: 'In the same way that individual words cannot be understood outside of a linguistic context, the understanding of individuals requires comprehension of social context' (Gergen 1987:63).

In today's world, the self exists in the context of many relationships, and is continually in contact with a variety of voices and values that co-exist alongside each other. From a social constructionist point of view, who and what we are is the result of how we are constructed in these various social settings. Our selves are created rather than discovered. Self-construction begins early in one's life, and it depends on the language system in which it is conducted, its opportunities and constraints, and the mastery of language itself (Bruner 2001:36).

Even something that is experienced as an 'inner reality', as a private mental capacity, emotions, is shown to be a product of social convention (Gergen 1987:56; Proudfoot 1976:220). The meaning of emotions is not linked to real-world referents, but to their context of use (Gergen 1985:267). Basic emotions are the result of interpretations within the framework of a culturally generated language code. The labelling of an emotion becomes reified over time in the emotional language provided and its use is governed by the social group. The sense of a so-called 'inner life' is not in the centre, but on the boundary between myself and the others with whom I am in conversation (Shotter 1993:109-110).

In the same way, 'personality' or 'self' does not exist as a substance within people, but between them. Who we are has to do with the things we do together with other people, not with inner psychological traits. The self is constructed in the social encounters of

one's relationships. Relationships are not 'my' relationships, but 'our' relationships. The anticipation of your reaction 'into' which I speak is the motivation for my speaking. In this way we 'in-form' each other's being (Shotter 1989:144). The self-concept is removed from the head and placed within the sphere of social discourse (Gergen 1985:271). The term 'identity' can be used to refer to socially bestowed distinctions and is therefore preferable to the term 'personality', which can imply essentialist qualities (Burr 1995:30).

### **3.4.3 Problem stories and alternative constructions of self-stories**

Part of this social construction of the self is the construction of problem-stories. In the professional discourses that are part of the modern realist essentialist epistemology, problems are removed from the social context essential to the creation of such problems. The individual is described in deficit terms that essentialise the nature of the person. The deficit is pervasive and inescapable, promising a lifetime of being a victim and a doubting self (Gergen 1994:150-151). In the context of this research, the way the problem of substance abuse is constructed is an example of this kind of social construction of problems. As someone labelled an 'addict', a person is removed from a social context and provided with a pervasive and inescapable deficit identity, as will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

Social constructionism takes seriously the existence of problems as artefacts of social interchange (Anderson 1995:33). If our realities and our self-stories are social constructions, this implies that problems are also social constructions. Problem-making is situated within the communities in which we participate. Dysfunctional behaviour depends on arrangements of social interdependency. Self-stories that are problematic for a person do not mean that the person is fixed within a problem identity, because '[a] person's identity is viewed within the politics and power plays of a culturally manufactured and constituted self' (Madigan 1996:50). Self-stories can be changed and re-constituted differently in this environment. This change is discussed in greater detail throughout the research.

The social construction of the self is a context for hope, because it opens up possibilities for different constructions. The way people behave towards other people depends on the relationship with all other people that are part of the matrix (past, present and future) of

that specific social event. This implies that different selves can be constructed in different contexts. The self is destabilised by multiplicity. Self-stories can also be realigned over time as social conditions change. What can be constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed differently (Anderson 1995:31). The possibility of having multiple selves that are not always consistent with each other is something that people relate to (Gergen 1985:268). For Gergen (1991:xi), the technological achievements of the past century have increased our exposure to each other and gave rise to the absorption of endless diversity and collective selves. Gergen (1991:69) talks about the populating of the self as the acquisition of multiple and disparate potentials for being. The self is constituted by internalised others. People experience contradictions, conflicts and fragmentation that is difficult to account for in the traditional views of 'personality'. Our social contexts can be called contexts of argumentation (Shotter 1993:86), emphasising the negotiated and changing character of our self-stories. The self is rather a role in an eternal process of being rewritten (Socor 1997:12). The taking on of different roles is not 'manipulative'; role-playing can be designated as 'manipulative' only within a modernist context in which essential, authentic selves exist. All our selves are 'real' as constructed in our social contexts.

Burr (1995:28) – like Ferro (2006:2) and Gergen (2002b:11) – likens this social construction of the self to a dance:

When people interact, it is rather like a dance in which they are constantly moving together, subtly responding to each other's rhythm and posture. The dance is constructed between them and cannot be seen as the result of either person's prior intentions. Likewise, when we interact, our talk and behaviour is a joint effort, not the product of internal forces.

The self is a new creation constituted and existing in the joint movement of the moment.

#### **3.4.4 Self-stories in social constructionism**

This section is a summary and extension of the previous sections on how the self is socially constructed, using the lens of social constructionism to focus on the negotiation and re-negotiation of self-stories, the broader cultural context of self-stories and the multi-storied nature of our lives.

Narrative ways of working are based on the social constructionist view that knowledge is constructed through social processes. The self in social constructionism is a communicative achievement, an articulated entity. Narrative is seen as the vehicle for self-construction. Our self-narratives are not individual productions, but are co-constructions in our interaction with other people (Freeman 2001:287; Gergen 2002b:16,17; Socor 1997:17). Our identities are a function of the socially constructed stories we are continually telling ourselves and others. There is no private self, because narrative is a system in language that is necessarily public. The self does not belong to an 'I' or a 'me', but is a contextual creation with the generic 'I' as a participant in social processes (Socor 1997:12). Our self-stories are embedded in our communal relationships. In this way, we depend for our identities on the willingness of others to support us in our versions of events. Our self-narratives are therefore negotiated and socially contested and constructed narratives. Through this negotiation, our relationships inform each other's selves. It can be said that the self is 'highly negotiable, highly sensitive to bidding on the not so open market of one's own reference group' (Bruner 2001:34). Claims of identity are not only socially negotiated, but also socially acknowledged and verified. Our self-stories can be affirmed or authenticated in more than one context. Multiple authenticities are the result of different relations and institutional contexts (White 1995:7). Self-stories are also realigned over time, as social circumstances change. Because the self is a construction built on other people's responses and attitudes toward a person, an interlocutive self, it is subject to changes as these responses, inherently variable and inconsistent, change in their character (Polkinghorne 1988:150). Therefore the self is always in a process of re-negotiation.

As we have seen, the self of modernism works with an abstract, theoretical construct of mind, the self independent of a context. Narrative situates the self in a context; the dynamics of narrative provide a much-needed context for the self. For the self to have such a context is critical for ethical and therapeutic reasons. It brings the real effects of a person's social surroundings on that person into play, and it takes a person's lived experience seriously. The context of self-stories provides openings for other experiences; and the performance of real life stories embodies all dimensions of change.

Our self-stories are also situated in the stories that make up our world, in our his-stories or her-stories<sup>4</sup>, the narratives of the communities in which we are born and in which we live. It is important to listen to cultural and contextual stories, together with an individual's story. These contexts give the background for our own stories and the meaning we make of our lives.

Our cultural stories determine the shapes of our individual life stories (Freedman & Combs 1996:32). We have a wide repertoire of storylines or narrative models available to us, provided by the cultures in which we participate (Freeman 2001:287). These broader cultural narratives can include the religious/spiritual context in which a person lives. God-stories play an important role in constituting meaning through the storylines, narrative models and images they provide. Every story is 'multi-voiced', its meaning co-determined by absence and difference, its countless previous contexts of use. The dominant narratives of the cultural world in which self-stories are told have a restrictive and enabling effect on personal stories.

Because meaning is made together within our contexts, no person has complete control over the meanings in his or her life (Monk et al 1997:35). Furthermore, because the self is a manifestation of absence and difference, and of culturally patterned relationships, the self is forever incomplete and complex through its participation in ongoing and always changing relationships of intersubjectivity. This contributes to self-stories as contexts for hope, for it provides the opportunity for constraining and problematic self-stories to become obsolete and alternative self-stories to become prominent.

From the perspective of social constructionism, the self is actually multi-storied. The postmodern self absorbs views, values and visions from others and lives out the multiple plots in which we are enmeshed (Gergen 1991:15). It is because of the richness of our lived experience that our lives are multi-storied. Some narratives are dominant and become shaping or constituting of our lives (White & Epston 1990). The tendency is to regard these dominant narratives as the narratives that are totalising and that disable people's lives, as discussed in Section 3.4.3. Other narratives may be stories that

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<sup>4</sup> "Contrary to History, which is a monolithic and totalising master narrative, personal or local narratives, called "her/his-stories", are characterised by their fragmentation, indeterminacy, silences, lack of closure and particularly by their privileging the voices of the ex-centric and long forgotten of History. "Her/his-stories" account for the richness, diversity and complexity of individual experience that History neglects" (Slepoy 2000:1).

do not get told and lived, and as subjugated knowledges of our lives, become alternative stories of our lives.

Religion/spirituality can occupy a dominating role in one's life, which can be fitting and preferred, or restricting and disabling. It can also be part of the marginalised stories of one's life that one can choose to connect to. This is discussed further in Chapter 4. Problems with substances can also be part of a dominant story in one's life. One can even search for alternative substance abuse stories within the context of God-stories, as discussed in Chapter 5. Every life is also situated within a multiplicity of macro- and micro-stories, stories within stories. This provides rich narrative resources for more possibilities to choose from in the constructing of self-stories; it encourages change and hope.

Although it is not the focus of this research, it is important to mention that the construction of the self is also a moment in the construction of culture. In this regard, Gergen and Gergen (cited by Socor 1997:18) distinguish three elementary self-narratives that correlate with cultural narratives. In a 'stability' narrative, the narrator remains the same in terms of his or her own evaluation of his or her condition in the light of a possible future. In a 'progressive' narrative, the individual evaluates his or her position as a desirable change. In a 'regressive' narrative, there is an evaluation of decline or failure. These narratives have a social function, in that they provide the contrasting social needs of stability and change necessary to perpetuate social systems. Even the 'regression' narrative is necessary to motivate a shift in direction. These evaluations are attributed from within the contexts in which the evaluations are made.

From a social constructionist point of view, it may be legitimate to ask about relativity in the construction of self-stories. If all stories are equally privileged, and anything is permissible, that is, if subjectivity is decentred, does it mean that anything goes? The answer to this lies in the consensual acknowledgement of each other's subjectivity: 'A sense of "personal realness" requires that the "I" receive the affirming embrace of the "we"' (Socor 1997:21). Narrative, as an instance of the social network of language that is always already there, can provide a means to think of subjectivity as something that exists. Narrative, with its temporal dimension of the past, present and future, constitutes the self as something more than a mere function through which the codes of society are expressed. It provides a sense of continuity and coherence. In a postmodern worldview,

we are also encouraged to reflect on the effects of our constructs and stories on ourselves and others, so that we can become aware of things that are not acceptable to us. Socially constructed values, beliefs and preferences play a role in the co-construction of self-stories (Freeman & Brockmeier 2001:75).

Although the use of language is an important element of the social construction of self-stories, I want to consider it separately, because it is also linked with other aspects of postmodernism, such as poststructuralism.

### **3.5 THE PERFORMANCE OF LANGUAGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-STORIES**

Up to this point, I have referred to language indirectly as a means of interaction between people. I now want to discuss it as an important factor in the social construction of self-stories. The meaning of language in this research is that it is part of the postmodern context for the construction of self-stories. Language is therefore also a context for hope, because it is part of the changing context of self-stories. Language is also the context for the construction of the God-stories and addiction-stories that I focus on in subsequent chapters.

#### **3.5.1 Meaning and identity are achieved through language**

Language is the fabric of community (Proudfoot 1976: 152). Knowledge and identity are co-created in the naming of something. The nature or essence of an object does not reside mysteriously within an object itself, but depends on how the object is defined by the namer. The argument in this section is that the naming of something is at the same time the creation in language of that which is named. There is no objective, pure and unmediated knowledge outside language. Without language systems as forms of speaking/writing, one could not claim to have an experience (Gergen 1991:110). This suggests that we can only have an experience because we have a language to express that experience. In other words, all knowing, also of the self, is through language, thus, interpreted and negotiated knowledge.

For Lyotard (1984:15), every person is always located as a 'nodal point' or passing post, within a communication circuit, a post through which language messages come



and go. The meaning-making function of language infuses the self to be more than just a 'nodal point', but this metaphor expresses the notion of our 'swimming' in language. Knowledge is not something people possess inside their heads, but is something people do together in language. In fact, without language, no community is possible (Lyotard 1984:150). Just as the social precedes the individual, language systems pre-exist the individual. Through language, everything is always already there. Even before a human baby is born, he or she is socially positioned through the recounting of his or her stories by those around him or her. The ideas of Derrida in this regard are discussed in Section 3.6.2, on poststructuralism.

Wittgenstein (cited by White 1955:228-229) is known for his interest in the way language works as a sign system, how words can have different uses or functions ('language games') in the different threads that weave our worlds. 'Language games' refer to the way that different categories of speaking/writing are, as discourses, subject to rules and to the uses for which they can be put. For Wittgenstein, meaning is in the use of the word, thus constituted through its use; and its use is always mediated by the interpreting community (Polkinghorne 1988:26). Meaning does not pre-exist language (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:378). If our realities are socially negotiated and agreed meanings, our realities are constituted in language, meaning comes about in language. The language we live in limits and makes possible the knowledges and understandings that we can have. In this way, language and meaning constitute our lives. Thus language also constitutes problems. Problems involve those who share a language about the problem.

Vygotsky (1986:254) has done pioneering work regarding the relationship between thoughts and words; in particular, he challenged the notion of 'pure' thought, unrelated to language. Harré (1987:41) and Shotter (1993:94) both refer to the importance of his work regarding the structuring of thought through language (Vygotsky 1986:168). According to Vygotsky (1986:94), everyday conversational activities are the source for the constitution of our 'inner world' or personal psychology (see also Harré 1987:41,42; Shotter 1993:94,95). What we call the 'mind' of a person is the imposition of local language structures on a human function such as thought. To change and develop is not to focus on 'natural' potentials, but to incorporate the most important psychological tool within ourselves, the tool of language. We can shape each other in the speaking of words (Harré 1987:41; Shotter 1993:110-116; Vygotsky 1986:106). The functional use

of words plays a central role in concept formation. Concept formation or thoughts do not express themselves in words, but are realised in words (Vygotsky 1986:251).

In the same way as thoughts or concepts, our sense of self, our subjectivity, is derived from conversation, constructed in language. This means that the social constructionist view of selfhood is that the self is not an ontological 'thing', but exists as a linguistic concept in the interaction between humans. The organisation of the mind is a cultural construct based on the learning of a local language of 'self', and this concept is derived from the public-social concept of a 'person' (Harré 1987:48). I see this concept of self as being like an idea that people hold to impose order on their actions, feelings and thought; a person's concept of his or her self is then a way to organise his or her experience. The self is not pure unmediated experience, but a tool for understanding and living our experience: 'We are led to the idea of the self in order to account for the subjective unity of our experience' (Proudfoot 1976:22). Even gender, being male or female, is mediated in our relationships with others through language. Language shapes our interactions with our bodies as well (Elliott 1998:6).

In this exchanging of language between people, the 'self' emerges. As language is always contested, always temporary, so the 'self' is always in flux, ensuring 'a fragmented, shifting and temporary identity for all of us' (Burr 1995:40). Because language is always changing in meaning, alternative constructions of the self are possible. We are furnished with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self (Gergen 1991:7) that make different ways of living possible. In the light of the continuing evolution of language, no problematic self-stories will exist forever. In time, all problems will dissolve, or at least become redefined (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:379). Active selection and implementation of linguistic resources therefore implies agency. Personal development is about the acquisition of skills to perform language, to use local linguistic rules to account for oneself and the world.

To conclude, the self is created in the entry into a consciousness and communicative competence that is always already constituted by one's inherited social matrix. Therefore, we 'can replace the Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo sum* with *communicans ergo sum*, for without coordinated acts of communication, there is simply no "I" to be articulated' (Gergen 1991:242).

Language as a context for hope, as referred to at the start of this section, includes the possibility in language to create alternative worlds and lives, as well as our active participation in the languaging. I want to turn the attention now more to this positioning within language systems as discourses.

### **3.5.2 Discursive positioning is constitutive of self-stories**

In this section, I want to consider the argument that one of the ways in which self-stories are socially constructed is through the self's taking up subject positions within discourses and incorporating these positions in self-stories.

The emphasis in social constructionism is not on language as such, but on the way language is used in discourses. For example, for Schrag (1997:21), the defining event in the making of the self does not lie in the social or language system as such, but in their combination and embodiment in what we can call discourses. We exist in the realm of discourses as systems of signification. Discourses can be described as expressed fields of knowledges and practices, ways of speaking/writing about objects that operate according to rules that are socially negotiated and that construct the objects of which they speak (Cuff et al 1998:261). Discourses sustain and constitute the structures that underpin social and power relationships. Discourses are conceived historically as the product of social interchange, and are therefore not fixed and universal. Discourses construct our world for us and claim to be the truth about this constructed world. They marginalise some bodies of knowledge and privilege others, thereby constituting power-knowledge relations, relations in which knowledge has the effect of a power that influences (Foucault 1984:74). Therefore power/knowledge relations are dispersed throughout discourses (see Section 6.4, on power/knowledge), and have an effect on the self-stories that can be lived. We continuously live within these multiple discourses, complementing one another, conflicting with one another, and within all their subtly altering ways of speaking/writing about the world. People experience themselves, the world and their place in it through categories and concepts made available in discourses (Davies 2000:88).

Madigan (1996:50-51) refers to communities of discourse as a cultural creation that provides the rules about what is normal and what is not. Within the context of these communities, discourses also construct human identities, as they provide the raw

material for our self-stories. Within a discourse, a person is addressed as a certain kind of person, represented in the discourse in a certain way (for example, as a teacher, a housewife, a child or a gardener). In this way, subjectivity is constituted through positioning within discourses. 'Subjectivity' refers to our way of being an individual, our sense of self and our ways of understanding our relation to the world. It is a way of understanding and organising discourses that relates individuals to culture (Genot 1996:146).

'Positioning' refers to the negotiation of a subject position in social interaction. The discoursing and discursive self cannot avoid taking up a subject position in a variety of different discourses: the self is called into being 'as the who that is speaking or listening, writing and reading, discoursing in a variety of situations and modalities of discourse' (Schrag 1997:17). What we say or do is the manifestation of inhabiting a discursive position. The 'who' of discourse is not a pre-given entity, but the result of negotiation: 'The who of discourse is an achievement, an accomplishment, a performance' (Schrag 1997:33). This provision of subject positions makes discursive practices a constitutive force. The positioning in or emotional commitment to a subject position brings with it the views, images, metaphors, storylines and possibilities relevant to that position. This means that discourses shape a person's choices about the life events that can be storied and how they should be storied. In the current study, people's positioning within discourses of substance abuse is explored.

The stories that we use to give meaning to our lives are located in a number of different discourses (Davies 2000:89). Different subject positions can provide multiple self-stories that are contrasting and continually changing. In the light of the power/knowledge relations within and between discourses, we are continually claiming and resisting identities on offer to us within the prevailing discourses. This means that the subject of discourses is able to exercise some choice with regard to the discourses the subject takes up for its own use (Davies 1991:46). An example is the way in which cultural feminism has sought ways of positioning the self differently in subjugating discourses (Elliott 1998:9). Agency is possible because the human agent can reflect on discourses and claim or resist them in the light of the agent's own preferences. This mastering of discourses produces not only self-knowledge, but also a context for hope, as changes become possible.

### **3.5.3 Self-stories, language and discursive positioning**

This section summarises and expands on the way language and discursive positioning are involved in the social construction of self-stories. The concepts of language and discourse are closely linked to the concept of narrative. Narrative therapy is a therapeutic approach that takes seriously the effect of language and discourse on the constituting of the self.

If meaning is constituted through language, it can be said that meaning is co-created and experienced by people in conversation with each other. Thus socially constructed narratives are a more specific way in which language gives meanings to our lives and constitutes our realities, especially our sense of self. Making sense in narrative is a linguistic act, an act of communication. We organise our experiences and account for our lives in a narrative way (White & Epston 1990:10). In the light of what has been said about language as constructing what is real for us, it is important to emphasise that experience is not organised by narrative at a later stage; rather, 'experience forms and presents itself in awareness as narrative' (Polkinghorne 1988:68). Once experience is constituted the form of a story, it can at a later stage be re-organised when a story is de- and re-constructed. Narrative is a fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite. We create our stories according to a theme, leaving out some events and moulding other events to fit into the plot of our narratives. Our experiences of self are also organised into plots in the same temporal dimension as the events of a narrative.

We also share in the circulation of the stories of the groups to which we belong and how we come to be what we are and where we are. The plot is not the imposition of ready-made plot genres on a set of events, but the organising theme that binds events into a meaningful whole. Through the grid of our memories, through selecting some events and rejecting others, we are continually constructing a meaningful life-story, a personal narrative, socially performed. We continually construct and live a narrative, and this narrative is our identity.

Problems also exist in language; and they are specific to the narrative context from which they derive their meaning. Problems are socially created realities sustained by behaviour that is mutually coordinated in language. Problems as linguistic events or

positions are often described in conflicting ways (Anderson 1995:33), as will be seen in the discussion of problems with substances. All these self-stories, cultural-stories and problem-stories come about within the language we live in. This implies that change is also enabled in language (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:6). Because all communications are incomplete, there are always possibilities for new interpretations and new meanings. In 'staying together in language' through the asking of questions in the search for the 'unsaid', new stories are developed (Anderson 1995:32). Change is thus embodied in language as the telling and retelling of stories. How language is used, what is talked about and how it is talked about, can make a difference in the shaping or constituting of people's lives.

The way in which language constitutes the social construction of self-stories can be more specifically described as the self taking up subject positions within discourses. We do not always inhabit our subject positions in discourses in a reflective way, but tend to inhabit them more in a narrative way (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:5). The dynamics of narrative are a resource within discourses that provide a sense of identity (Schrag 1997:19). Without narrativity, discourses become atomistic and static elements of performance of language without meaning.

Epston (1993:170) distinguishes between internalising and externalising discourses. Positioning oneself within a problem discourse has its roots in the internalising of problems within the living bodies of individuals, thus it is called internalising discourses. Revisioning oneself through narrative in a different relationship with the problem construes the problem discourse as external, rather than as internal to one's self. This (re-)positions people in such a way that they gain access to other culturally available storylines (Epston 1993:171).

The current study is ultimately concerned with the social construction of self-stories through a positioning of the self within discourses of religion/spirituality and discourses of substance abuse. Does positioning oneself within God-language and religious discourses make it possible to take up other, preferred subject positions within discourses of problems with substance abuse? What other storylines about substance abuse become available? These questions are discussed more fully as the research report progresses. As we have seen in this section, language and a discursive positioning are

contexts for hope, because they provide opportunities for alternative constructions of self-stories.

The emphasis on the constitutive effects of language and discursive positioning brings me to the next postmodern context for the social construction of self-stories, namely poststructuralism.

### **3.6 POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-STORIES**

In order to understand how poststructuralism affects a postmodern construction of identity or self-stories, it is necessary to understand what is meant by poststructuralism. The overlap between social constructionism and poststructuralism with the theme of discursive positioning is offset in poststructuralism by the struggle for the meaning of language as experienced in competing invitations to subjectivity. Subjectivity as a site of struggle, is precarious, contradictory and in process, and is constantly being reconstituted in different discourses (Weedon 1987:33). In addition to answering the question about what poststructuralism means, this section also explores the effect of deconstruction and the power/knowledge duality on the constitution of subjectivity.

#### **3.6.1 What is poststructuralism?**

Poststructuralism is a radicalising of the critique against the Enlightenment project of centring and institutionalising reason as the way to human emancipation. Politics are therefore high on the agenda of this broad and diverse movement (Cuff et al 1998:242). Its more direct background is its relationship to structuralism, as a counter to which it developed. It uses certain ideas from structuralism, but with the overt aim of being more political by deconstructing the constraints of modernist ideologies (Cuff et al 1998:238-239).

Narrative therapies have been influenced by poststructuralist thought in various ways, specifically by the emphasis on the political, the way language is seen as an instrument of power with constitutive effects, and the deconstruction of dominant discourses which have a constraining influence in people's lives. Therefore it is important to look at poststructuralist thought in more detail.

A factor that social constructionism and poststructuralism have in common is their view of language as the site in which social organisation and its consequences, as well as our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, are constructed. The traditional view of language is that words are labels or names for things that exist in the objective world, describing the essence of these things as they really are. Language (traditionally) is seen to make absent objects present to us, and in this way re-presents reality. Because of this direct relationship between words and the things words refer to, this theory became known as representationalism (Cuff et al 1998:243).

According to the structuralist thought of Ferdinand de Saussure (Burr 1995:37; Meyer et al 2003:218; Polkinghorne 1988:25), this relationship between words and the things the words stand for are arbitrary and conventional. A sign (word) consists of a signified, as the concept in the mind of the speaker, and a signifier as the physical letter or sound. A word is thus not the expression of the essence of something, but is given meaning within the language system, in its difference from other signs. In this way, for structuralists and poststructuralists, reality is actually constructed within a sign system – language is the prime site for the construction of identity. Words determine the meaning of reality. Structuralists insist that language has a pre-given fixed structure, and that human behaviour and interaction were structured like language; an overall meaning system gives meaning to the individual elements. Thence the association with the concept of ‘structuralism’.

Poststructuralism aims to account for the plurality of meaning and change of meaning of signs. The meaning of signifiers depends on the discursive context in which the signifiers are used (Cuff et al 1998:287). For example, feminist critiques help us to focus on the way in which different discourses compete for the meaning of signifiers that imply different social and political consequences for women than for men, and different forms of feminine subjectivity as opposed to masculine subjectivity (Weedon 1987:25-27). This makes language a site of political struggle, because relations of power can work, through discourses, on behalf of certain interests, or in resistance to them.

This struggle plays out in the subjectivity of the individual. Subject positions are made available in discourses through the interpellation (hailing) of individuals as subjects of a



discourse. In taking up a subject position, a person assumes that he or she is the author of the discourse and creator of meaning within the discourse. It is therefore called an 'imaginary' subject position, because in poststructuralism, we are not seen as the authors of the ways in which we understand our lives (Weedon 1987:30). The subject is decentred (Cuff et al 1998:283). Unlike the humanist essentialist subjectivity, 'poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak' (Weedon 1987:33).

This opens up the possibility that subjectivity can change. We can take up subject positions in discourses that fit better with our preferences. We are actually continually busy choosing for and against different competing discourses, we are always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity. This insight can help us to discover that things that have often been described as the results of personal inadequacies and pathologies are actually socially produced conflicts and contradictions within shared discourses. An example is the contradictions between discourses about the freedom of consumption of substances and discourses about being controlled by substances. This can result in the experiences of a self as being inadequate, not intrinsically capable of exercising citizenship privileges.

I now want to reflect on how, within poststructuralism, the conversation about the deconstruction of dominant discourses and about the power/knowledge duality working through discourses is relevant to the social construction of self-stories. In the end, dominating discourses about God and about substance abuse will also leave their mark on the construction of self-stories, and the deconstruction of these discourses can be relevant to the research.

### **3.6.2 Deconstruction and the construction of self-stories**

Deconstruction as a discourse within poststructuralism focuses on the constitutive effects of language and discourse, thus the textual quality of our life worlds. Deconstruction provides a way to open up fixed certainties in order for the different and the alternative to become part of the (re-)construction of our realities and our self-stories.

In literary criticism, deconstruction refers to the taking apart of a text to reveal its underlying interests and prejudices. However, the concept of deconstruction has taken on a broader application than literary texts, and it is now also applied to the analysis of the dominant discourses in life as 'regimes of truth' (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:7). Lyotard (1984:61) also uses the term 'paralogy', which he describes as the destabilisation of the frameworks on which science is built. It is an erosion of the pillars of the discourses of science from the inside.

Deconstruction unravels an idea in terms of the system of meaning that supports it. Whereas structuralism still clung to the assumption that the original source or presence of reality or the subject can be recovered, for the father of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida (1981:7; see also Boyne 1996:108; Graham 1996:21), this presence is illusory. The decentring of the subject means that even the presence of the author of a text is not necessary for the interpretation of a text. We come to know people through a text, not through a presence of a writer/speaker. According to this view, the subject is not directly present as an author. In the same way, reality is not directly present to us in language, in the sense that language is only a means to an end, namely of providing a handle on the world out there (representationalism). The Western search for certainty in unmediated experience or originating speech is not possible (Boyne 1996:94).

Language as a sign system is a phenomenon in its own right. In this context, Derrida remarks that there is nothing outside the text: 'There is no metaphysical concept outside the text in which it is inscribed' (Derrida 1981:57; see also Gergen 1991:108). Different meanings can be attached to this remark (Cuff et al 1998:287-289). It can imply that the essence of what a text is saying is to be found in the text itself, and not somewhere outside the text. Signifiers refer only to other signifiers. This does not mean that meaning is fully present in one sign alone: it is dispersed over the whole chain of signifiers. It can also be a critique on the reality/language dichotomy. It is not easy to separate reality from our way of talking about it. For the poststructuralists, the struggle with language is nothing other than a struggle with reality; if reality is constructed in a sign system, the tension between reality and language becomes obsolete. I agree with the view that there is an external reality that the text refers to, but it is not objectively accessible to us (Herhold 1998:462). As mentioned earlier, reality can only be known and experienced through language. It is accessible through language, metaphorically and relationally. Language does not just reflect a pre-existing reality, but constitutes or

frames that reality for us. These views confirm that self-stories as linguistic constructions are valid experiences of 'reality'; the self is present as text, as story.

Derrida (1981:38) complicates the constitutive function of the text in his arguments against the pervasive discourses of Western metaphysics (a metaphysics of presence) which argue that language is able to grasp the essential meaning of something. I want to consider the implications of his argument for the social construction of self-stories. Derrida (cited by Cuff et al 1998:288) points out the dualist opposites in ideological thinking and then shows how one part inheres the other. In his critique of Western logocentric and phonocentrism, he proposes that the writing, in other words, the text, produces a 'trace' that is outside of awareness, and that the trace, which always already exists, is the foundation of all that is present in awareness (Derrida, cited in Sampson 1989:11). The 'trace' constitutes the text. He uses the concept of *différance* to refer to two aspects of text that destabilise clear distinctions and coherence of meaning (Derrida 1981:8). Firstly, the meaning of a word is determined by its *différence* from other words; the meaning of a word is also what it is not. When a word is used, it also implies its opposite. This is a way of expressing a concern for the 'other' marginalised by the modernist dualisms. Secondly, the meaning of a word always depends on the word(s) that follow; in this way, its meaning is never fully grasped, its meaning is always **deferred**. Words and sentences are part of a never-ending supplementing chain. That which is present, like identity, is interpenetrated by that which is absent, non-identity, that which is different and deferred. Identity is also constituted by that which is outside of awareness, the 'trace' that is always already there. This radically expands the possibilities and options for the social construction of self-stories.

Another method that Derrida (cited by Sampson 1989) uses to undo the Western thought tradition without destroying it, is to write a word, and then erase the word, but keep it in its erased form, for example 'Being and ~~Being~~' (Sampson 1989: 6). This indicates that the word is at the same time necessary and useful on the one hand, and different and not useful on the other. The meaning of a text of any kind therefore also refers to the opposite meaning, to what is not said. In this way, deconstruction is about the preparation for the coming in of difference, of the other. Therefore it is a form of hospitality, of welcoming the stranger (Derrida & Caputo 1997:110). This in turn challenges the notion of identity: identity contains both itself and its other, it is both present and absent (Taylor 1984:49). Thus identity is the effect of difference. It also

reveals the ambiguity of texts such as self-stories, the belief that there is not only one 'real' or 'true' meaning of a text, but a number of possible meanings. The self, being a story, can be interpreted and constructed in many different ways.

Deconstruction has political consequences in that it has to do with activities that subvert dominant cultural discourses and techniques of power that subjugate people's lives. Practices of power that permeate and produce people's lives at the deepest levels and at the periphery of society are objectified and unmasked. Knowledges that are global and unitary, the so called 'truths' that hide their political interests by producing docile bodies, are challenged. Centres are decentred (Flax 1992:450). The deconstruction of power/knowledge discourses makes visible their historical construction and resistance to it, their moral and ethical implications, and the subjugation and objectification of people's lives through them (White 2000:34-37). Feminist theories have also contributed to the deconstruction of power/knowledge relations, making us aware of marginalising discourses that constitute and affect subordinated groups of gender, race and class (Flax 1992:455).

Revealing the assumptions within a system of meaning opens up space for alternative understandings. Deconstructing the inherent inconsistencies, contradictions and limits in systems opens up the possibility for what Derrida and Caputo (1997:123) call an always 'to come' democracy in which both singularity and the universal, both reason and irrationality, both common law and the different or idiosyncratic, are respected. On a more personal level, deconstruction alienates people from the prescribed ways of being of these knowledges and practices, opens up counter-practices and establishes a context where people are privileged as the primary authors of alternative and preferred knowledges and practices. It assists in establishing a sense of 'agency' that is able to play an active and influencing role in one's own life. This does not change what has been said at the beginning of this section, that the self is decentred in the construction of the self-text. It is still a **co-authoring** in which the self-story is the primary carrier of meaning.

It is evident from these remarks that deconstruction is actually a creative, generative process, propelling us toward the impossible, the opening up of space for the other, for new meanings, new knowledges, new practices, for difference, an 'open-endedness that constantly runs the risk of going adrift' (Derrida & Caputo 1997:117). God-stories can

be part of the dominant narratives and techniques of power that subjugate people's lives that, through deconstruction, can become openings for the coming in of the 'other', for establishing agency in the constructing of preferred self-God-stories. The same applies to dominant narratives about substance abuse. As will be discussed in Sections 5.2-5.6, deconstruction can make visible the assumptions that contribute to the allocation of inner deficiency to a person who has problems with substances. This visibility can open up different self-stories in relation to substance abuse.

Deconstruction is a context for hope, as it subverts the assumptions within problematic cultural-stories and self-stories, and provides possibilities for self-stories to be differently constructed. These consequences of deconstruction for the construction of self-stories are summarised in the next section.

### **3.6.3 Self-stories and deconstruction**

The broad implication of deconstruction for narrative ways of working is that it shows that stories have many possible meanings. This implication can be explained by using the metaphor of self-stories as texts. In the tradition of hermeneutical pastoral care, the emphasis is on the human being as a 'living human document' (Gerkin 1984), as a text that has to be interpreted. The text analogy was invoked when social scientists linked the concept of a text to the continuation of the meaning of human behaviour through time. The analogy makes it possible to see human interaction as the interaction of readers around texts, and the evolving of human lives in terms of the reading and writing of texts (White & Epston 1990:9). This differs from analogies that assume an underlying structure in person's lives that constitute or shape their lives and relationships.

In poststructuralism, the performance of texts is constitutive of our lives. Experience structures our expressions, but our expressions also structure our experience, so that our expressions shape our lives. In the discipline of hermeneutics, the meaning of an expression or a text is influenced by the beliefs, assumptions and intentions of the interpreter. There is no single correct account of an event. Each interpretation is only one version of the constructed truth (Anderson 1995:30). In the light of this argument and of the discussion of the work of Jacques Derrida, it can be said that the telling of our self-stories is related to the relative indeterminacy of all texts. The different

meanings of a text attributed by different readers, as well as the perpetual deference of the meaning of a text, consigns a degree of ambiguity and uncertainty to every text (White & Epston 1990:12). Every story also has inconsistencies and contradictions, ambiguities and uncertainties. There are also elements of the texts of our lives outside of awareness. Because our self-stories include the other and the context, they always contain the trace that is always already there, the absent and the different. Who we are also includes that which is not (yet) said, the opposites, the exceptions, the exclusions. This indeterminacy of our self-stories as texts provides opportunities for change in self-stories. Every time the texts of our lives are performed, the gaps are filled in, the previous tellings are encapsulated, and different selections and meanings are evoked. 'Performance' is to bring something about, to consummate something, and in carrying out, to generate something new (Epston & White 1992:93). It is the performance of texts that transforms lives.

Sampson (1989) discusses three aspects of self-stories in the light of Derrida's theories of deconstruction. Firstly, the self is not completely self-aware. Awareness is always mediated by the absent trace; we are constructed as subjects through discourse or ideology, without being in control of the process. The self has been decentred in its relation to the symbolic system (Sampson 1989:14). Self-stories in narrative are co-constructed in communicative interaction with others; they are socially produced in the flow of discourses. Secondly, the self as an integrated whole is replaced by a picture of the self as a process without beginning or end, without a centre in control (Sampson 1989:15). The modern ego as integrating master reproduces the theories of governance and authority in the Western world. Self-stories in narrative form are not the outward expression of an inner core or homeostatic system, but are endless disparate potentials for relating within the context of the ever-present past and future of communities of discourse. Thirdly, the self as an entity opposed to other entities, the logic of either/or, is replaced by the logic of both/and (Sampson 1989:15). Entities are both what they are and what they are not. Thus the subject cannot be set apart from the multiple others who are constitutive elements of the subject. Self-stories in narrative form become the container of the other, the contradictions, the ambiguities, the opposites, the absent, and the other as the reflection of ourselves. This dismantling of conventional meanings and interpretations is called deconstruction.

In the context of stories of substance abuse, this deconstruction of self-stories can have the following consequences: change in a person's relationship to stories of substance abuse implies a co-construction, a change in positioning within the social domain of stories about substance abuse. In deconstructing the notion of a core, fixed self, deconstruction also provides for an endless variety of possibilities for relating to discourses of substance abuse. In moving away from either/or positions, deconstruction also makes possible the both/and relationship with substances, as well as with aspects of the self and culture not previously considered.

The deconstruction of self-stories brings the constitutive effect of global unitary 'truths' working in discourses as power/knowledge relations to the fore. Hence, I situate the social construction of self-stories within the context of the poststructuralist discourse on power/knowledge below.

#### **3.6.4 Power and knowledge and the construction of self-stories**

In this section, I show how the effects of power/knowledge relate to the social construction of self-stories. Michael Foucault is regarded as a poststructuralist because he argues that social structures have changed at particular moments in history, accounting for the constitution of knowledges, discourses and domains of objects (Foucault 1984:59). He refers to his approach as research into the genealogy of knowledges (Foucault 1980:83). His argument implies that truth is not something fixed that must be discovered, but it is continually produced through discourses that determine the rules according to which the truth is separated from the false and power is attached to the truth (Foucault 1984:74). 'Discourse', as discussed earlier, is seen as ongoing historical conversations within a society that constitute 'realities' and function as the connection between language and social institutions. More specifically, Foucault wanted to create a history of the different modes by which human beings are made subjects (Foucault 1980:97; Parker 1989:57). For Foucault (1980:94), the self is not a universal theory, but an intersection of different discourses. The 'I' does not have complete control over the discourses in which it is embedded and through which it is produced.

Foucault's idea of the end of 'Man' (humanity) (see McHoul & Grace 1993:32) must be understood in relation to his view of the destabilisation of the modern discourse on the

formation of the self as object. This is partly because of the crises in the function of language as representation, as well as the focus on the larger epistemological structures in history that constitute the human subject (Cuff et al 1998:268). For Foucault, subjectivity is so completely a manifestation of discourse that the 'death of the subject' refers to the view that the subject has no experience of agency (Burr 1995:145). I do not agree with this extreme position, as we have already seen that narrative constitutes the self as something more than just the intersection of language or discourse. The emphasis on the self as a manifestation of discourse is nevertheless crucial in the discussion of the social construction of self-stories, as it supports the view that identity is socially constructed.

Foucault's (cited by White & Epston 1990) concept of the workings of power and knowledge in society in constituting the subject has had an important influence in narrative therapy, and is relevant for this study on the way the self is constituted. Power is never in somebody's hands, never localised, but is exercised in the form of a chain, through a web-like organisation in which individuals are the vehicles of power (Foucault 1980:98). He called this 'disciplinary' power (Foucault 1980:105). He paid attention to the way human activities have been regulated through the administration of disciplinary mechanisms to conform to rationalised bodies of knowledge. Discourses in society, through the investment of power, determine which knowledges are accepted and which are not. Because the accepted bodies of knowledge are socially and historically constructed as scientific or objective reality, they constitute the idea of normal behaviour, and in this way act as a source of power in the maintenance and development of the concept of normality in a society. This disciplinary power/knowledge also seeks to regulate or eliminate those practices that are seen as abnormal or deviant (Foucault 1977:183), contributing to the universal rule of the 'normal'. In order to do this, human activities have to be monitored, and the need for this surveillance reorders activities to be more visible and controllable, through interventions such as policing or administrative supervision – the application of the 'normalizing gaze' (Foucault 1977:184; White & Epston 1990:69). The 'gaze' requires applying language or discourse to the thing seen. In this way, mechanisms of power have been extended to all levels of society in such a way that they define personhood. Power in relations can constrain and disallow, but it also produces subjectivity. Power produces our 'realities' and 'truths' and our orientation within discourses. Power in relations is a productive network that runs through the whole social body (Foucault



1984:61). Thus individuals are not only the vehicles of power, but also the effect of power. This effect is specifically on the body and its mode of everyday behaviour.

Techniques of discipline as instruments of power underlie the emergence of the human sciences, which have created new regimes of power/knowledge relationships, and new rules for the formation of truth statements. However, Foucault's emphasis is not on the individual administrators or professionals who exercise power, for they are also subject to the pervasive power of the bodies of knowledges and power whose channels of distribution they are.

In this context, people have power in direct relation to their ability to participate in the knowledge discourses that shape that society. A result of the working of this power/knowledge duality is people that continually monitor, regulate, reflect and adapt themselves, without being aware of the extent to which they are produced by the detailed and elaborate mechanisms of power. Foucault (cited by Parker 1989:62,63; White 1990:67-76) is well known for his use of Jeremy Bentham's concept of the panopticon (a prison with a central tower encircled by individual cells that can be supervised continuously), which actually promotes self-regulation. He uses this concept as a metaphor for modern society with its rational and effective diffusion of power/knowledge, which imprisons people in the sense that they cannot escape the effects of the 'normalizing truths' of social control (Cuff et al 1998:267). People within a historically situated matrix of a dominant thought system (episteme or discourse) are seen as its prisoners, in the sense that we all are caught up in the web of power/knowledge relations within the discourse; we all undergo the effects of power; and we all exercise this power in relation to others (White 1990:22). In this way, people are actually subjugating themselves by actively participating in operations that shape their lives according to the requirements of society. The construction of identities in accordance with the dominant political social order or dominant discourses is encouraged. Cultural feminists have therefore demonstrated how identities are shaped and constituted in discourse rather than through anatomy (Elliott 1998:7).

Language is seen as the primary vehicle of this domination and control of social processes that leads to the production of 'docile bodies', bodies without voice, bodies that reproduce the dominant power/knowledge discourses (Cuff et al 1998:244; Flax 1992:453; Weedon 1987:21). In this way, the truth claims of modernist science

constituted discourses that objectified and dehumanised people. Under the practices of scientific classification, identities were specified as highly individual, and that excluded and objectified people. From this discussion, it is apparent that poststructuralists are pessimistic and cynical about the coercive and restrictive imposition of conventional or dominant social discourses as the effects of power on the individual (Cuff et al 1998:244-245). Normalising (aligning with the norm) practices are in the service of the development of such dominant discourses. Although these practices tend to homogenise, they also individualise by making it possible to measure gaps, determine levels and utilise differences (Foucault 1977:184). The consequences of the practices of inclusion and exclusion are the institutionalising of discrimination on the grounds of compliance with what is seen as 'normal'. Another failure of modernity is the splintering of the totality of life into independent specialties which are left to the narrow competence of experts and the enfeeblement of patients. In this complex interplay of knowledge discourses, power is exerted and subjectivities are produced, self-stories are constructed.

The context for the constitution of self-stories also includes the resistance and opposition to discourses in which the knowledge/power duality leads to dominating distinctions. In his consideration of the discourses that constitute the subject, Foucault (cited by Genot 1996:34) does not focus only on 'true knowledge', but also on the local discontinuities, disqualified, illegitimate, neglected, denied knowledges of modernism. Foucault (1980:82; see also White 1990:26) also pays attention to the 'subjugated knowledges', that is, the 'erudite' knowledges that have been replaced by newer dominant knowledges, knowledges that have been buried by systematising, and 'local' or 'indigenous' knowledges that are exiled from the domain of legitimate knowledges.

Criticism of and liberation from the oppressive forces can only be found in these so-called margins. Power generates resistance and opposition, albeit on the fringes or margins of society. Change is possible through the opening up of marginalised and repressed discourses, making them available as alternative resources for the co-authoring of self-stories. In the margins lie the real possibilities for new ways of being (Shotter 1993:49). Considering 'discontinuous, particular and local' criticisms can contribute to the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' (Foucault 1980:81) that can help people to lay claim to alternative possibilities for their lives.

God-stories as religious/spiritual discourses can function as a dominating context for the production of life worlds and the subjects oriented within these life worlds in accordance with foundationalist truth claims. God-stories can also be experienced as part of the insurrection of subjugated knowledges that make alternative ways of being possible. This distinction is also applicable to discourses about substance abuse. The unquestioned authority of the power/knowledge relations within the medical discourses in this regard constructs pathological identities. It is possible to refuse to perform these descriptions, and then alternative relationships with substances can be uncovered and brought back from the margins in the construction of different self-stories.

### **3.6.5 Self-stories and dominating power/knowledge discourses**

This section about self-stories and power/knowledge discourses summarises and confirms the way dominating discourses affect and effect the social construction of self-stories.

Dominant narratives in society can be ‘internalised’ in such a way that we come to believe they speak about the truth of our identities or self-stories (Epston 1993:170-173). People can experience problems when they are situated in a dominant narrative that does not allow them to live their preferred stories, or when they are actively participating in self-stories that diminish and disempower them and that ‘do not sufficiently encapsulate the person’s lived experience or are very significantly contradicted by important aspects of the person’s lived experience’ (White & Epston 1990:14). In the light of Foucault’s analysis, it can be assumed that these narratives are informed by the ‘truth’ discourses of the dominant knowledges, and that people are incited to subject themselves, through (self-)disciplinary techniques, to the demands for personhood that are carried by these discourses. Internalising dominating discourses is about the ‘objectification’ or ‘thingification’ of people, the marginalisation and exclusion of people through the totalisation of people’s identities (White 1995:43). In this way, psychopathology, disorders and dysfunctions are established (White 1995:44).

Part of the diagnosis of deficit in accordance with dominating discourses is the allocation of illness labels. At this point, I want to mention a few ideas posited by Michael White (1995:118-148) about the invitation extended by society to people to link their identity to an illness label. This is relevant to this research because the social

construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse is often about the appropriation of an illness identity. Illness labels reduce the guilt of not measuring up to society's standards, and it offers an escape from the stress of culture's expectations of people who are 'well'. This means that a person has to step into 'illness' to break away from self-accusation and the attribution of inadequacy. It is a sad comment on the state of a culture when exemption from cultural expectations is provided through illness. In this way, 'illness is a site of culture that shapes life' (White 1995:118). Labels *per se* are not the problem, but the loss of knowledges that are privileged or rendered irrelevant is, as are the real effects of the labels that are hidden in this way. The labels cover up ways of living and thought that constitute problems. Labels maintain a person's identity as a victim or a survivor and are an obstacle to more viable and liberating self-definitions (Anderson 1995:31).

Narrative ways of working challenge practices that totalise and pathologise a person's identity. If the spiralling of deficit language, and the psychologising and pathologising of identities is to be contained, marginal and local knowledges have to become available for new self-stories (Freedman & Combs 1996:39-40). Alternative sites in culture have to be found that do not require exemption through illness, and that provide other ways for living. For example, not having to comply with certain performance expectations of a given culture can, in some instances, reduce the need for the consumption of substances. Or just seeing oneself – not as a victim, but as responsible regarding one's choices – can contribute to an exploration of alternative relationships with substances.

It is not only dominant illness narratives that constrict people's lives. Poststructuralism exposes the ways in which people are coerced to reproduce the dominant forms of individuality of contemporary culture. Striving toward 'growth', 'self-actualisation' and 'fulfilment', which have become the desirable and venerated outcomes of modern Western modes of living can hide and narrow other options for thinking and being (White 1997b:227). For the same reason, narrative work is not informed by states of health and normality, including cultural notions of 'wholeness' and 'integration'. Health and normality can be deconstructed as cultural expectations and ambitions. Notions of 'wholeness' and 'integration' are based on structuralist and essentialist assumptions. Conversely, 'failure' can be regarded as an act of resistance or refusal to comply with cultural 'truths' and as the appropriation of alternative ways of being.

In this regard, Madigan (1996:53) refers specifically to the colonising effects of the discourses of patriarchy, Christianity and capitalism, as examples of dominating discourses that have to be considered. In this way, self-stories of domination, violence, father, mother, child, moral rigidity, guilt, failure, self-sufficiency, inadequacy, consumption, poverty, etc. can be located within the identity politics of cultural discourses. Dominant cultural stories that require certain operations on our lives are actually reproducing the dominant ways of being in culture.

In narrative, the emphasis is on a person's own experiences and their meaning. There are always more events in our lived experience that do not get 'storied' than there are ones that do, stories that lie outside the dominant story. Problem narratives can be changed by highlighting different, previously un-storied events, or by making new meaning of events that are already storied, thereby constructing new narratives (Freedman & Combs 1996:32). Through the deconstruction of dominant narratives, people can be enabled to resist their influence, and other alternative practices and stories can be brought to the fore to contribute to the resurrection of marginalised knowledges for the construction of preferred self-stories. These are counter-practices to the cultural practices that objectify people. One example is that self-God-stories about being accepted can function as powerful counter-stories to the self-story of being abused by substances.

It became evident in this discussion that identity is a matter of constant contradiction, change and ongoing struggle (Monk et al 1997:38). Therapy as languaging implies that therapy is a site of political conflict. These contradictions, ongoing struggles and conflicts are contexts for hope, as they provide new territories toward which self-stories can migrate.

This chapter is now culminating in the consideration of how self-stories are socially constructed in narrative therapy as a postmodern therapy in the context of social constructionism and poststructuralism.

### **3.7 NARRATIVE THERAPY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-STORIES**

This section is important in the light of the research question, because social constructionists regard narrative as a fitting vehicle for the construction of self-stories (Freedman & Combs 1996:14-18; Gergen 1985:271; Hoffman 1990:11; Kotzé & Kotzé 1997; Socor 1997:17). Although I am not doing narrative therapy as such in this research, I have already mentioned in Section 1.7 that I am using the narrative approach and the methodology and practices of narrative therapy interviewing in this research, especially in the conversations with the participants. Here in Section 3.7, I look at some ways in which self-stories can be socially constructed in the practice of narrative therapy. As mentioned before, I hope that the research will contribute to change in the lives of the participants, and to the body of knowledge circulating in the therapeutic domain.

#### **3.7.1 The narrative approach to therapy**

I first want to explore the narrative approach to therapy so that it can be clearly distinguished from other approaches in order to reveal its context.

When psychology is seen as a science in terms of modernist epistemology, its findings are presented as objective, decontextualised and depoliticised. It is given authority, because its truths about problem formation and resolution are perceived to be universal. Diagnostic systems such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* published by the American Psychiatric Association have been developed that describe abnormal or undesirable behaviour in deficit terms, as already mentioned, as psychopathology, disorders and dysfunctions. It ignores the specific, localised meanings of people in community. Through technologies of power in the professional discourses, people are coerced to enter into the continuum of normality/abnormality, autonomy/enmeshment, independence/dependence, or assertiveness/passivity (White 1997b:121). It is important to note that this professional vocabulary has fed back into popular culture. Our vocabulary of deficits and abnormality is ever-increasing. We now have a 'spiralling cycle of enfeeblement' (Gergen 1991:15). As has already been discussed in this chapter in regard to dominant discourses (Section 3.6), psychology as a modernist discourse can be an instrument for controlling people. In this discourse, the

therapist is autonomous, detached, disinterested, reinforcing the subject/object dualism, and in this way perpetuates the grand narratives of modernity (White 1997b:224).

Narrative therapy challenges the isolation of the knowledges of the professional disciplines from all the other discontinuous knowledges (White 1997b:230-233). From a narrative point of view, all psychological theories are types of narrative, with the ambiguities and possibilities that all narratives present.

In the field of family therapy, attention is sometimes drawn to the change in metaphors that occur over time and that have a definitive influence on the way therapy is practised. The so-called first-order cybernetics (*kubernetes* as the pilot or one who governs a boat) sees the family as systems like machines complete with guidance, feedback loops and goal-directedness. The point of departure is a dysfunction, and the mechanic (therapist) is there to fix it or keep it on track (Freedman & Combs 1996:2-5). Second-order cybernetics sees the family, together with the therapist or team of therapists, as part of an ecological system and talks about a 'co-creation' and evolutionary change or a continuing process (Freedman & Combs 1996:5-8). One person's views affects everyone else in recursive ways. This approach uses circular questioning that focuses on patterns of meaning in the family.

Out of this family therapy, narrative therapy evolves as the 'third wave'. Different family therapists became aware of the value of stories and the constitutive power of language in re-authoring lives through their involvement with Milton Erickson (Freedman & Combs 1996:10-12).

It was Michael White and David Epston (Freedman & Combs 1996:14-18; Monk et al 1997:7; White & Epston 1990) who introduced the narrative metaphor in a therapeutically sustainable way. In narrative therapy, the therapist does not enter the process with overarching theories of human nature and human difficulties. Narrative therapy is informed by postmodernism, social constructionism and poststructuralism, aware of the constant changing of language, meaning and narratives that are capable of infinite revision and reinterpretation, as discussed in this chapter.

White used some of the ideas postulated by Gregory Bateson (1972) on the 'interpretive method'. According to Bateson (1972:180), there is a difference between the map and

the territory to which it bears a relation. It refers to the notion that we do not have direct access to 'objective' reality, but only metaphorically, through something such as a map that we interpret. It implies that different interpretations of the territory are possible, depending on the map being used. No map is complete; the map is not the territory. White, encouraged by David Epston (White & Epston 1990:3; see also Freedman & Combs 15; Monk et al 1997:7) sees narrative as a useful expansion and elaboration of this interpretation of meaning.

Through self-stories, meaning is given to one's experiences. Actions and its meaning are situated within a plot or story-line that shapes one's self-stories into meaningful units. In narrative therapy, meaning is always locally and dialogically co-constructed in the conversation between the therapist and client. This generative conversation or shared inquiry opens the door to multiple possibilities for making meaning and for changing actions and feelings that are no longer labelled as a 'problem' (Anderson 1995:34). Bateson also draws attention to the temporal dimension as necessary for change in living organisms, because '[t]he unit of information is difference' (Bateson 1972:489). Difference is coded into events through time. In this way, the story metaphor functions as a map, a frame of reference, with the advantage that it extends through time and therefore has the possibility of creating change through difference. The present self-stories include the themes of the past and continue into an open-ended, hopeful future. Narrative therapy has the ability to keep hope alive that things could be different, despite everything that discourages this belief.

We all have many stories about different aspects of our lives. Our lives are multi-storied (Morgan 2000:8). As therapists, we want to explore with clients their stories, the effects and meanings of these stories, and the context that constitute them, in order to richly describe the clients' preferred self-stories. The reason for this is the idea that stories are not just being told, but are also lived. Our experience of agency is narrative in form. Our activities are inherently narrative in character. We also tell stories of our activities afterward to appreciate them as part of a narrative. In this way, we might say that our lives are enstoried and our stories are enlived (Fay 1996:197).

In order for self-stories to be co-constructed in narrative therapy, a specific context that is conducive to this construction is necessary.



### **3.7.2 The context for the co-authoring of self-stories**

Within a social constructionist framework, the therapist is a participant in a conversation. Since we are always participating in domains of power and knowledge, it is necessary to reflect on our own ideas and practices as they may relate to techniques of social control. Therapy, as a space where the power of 'truth' discourses are most apparent, must become a context for the challenging of the techniques of power that subjugate people to a dominant discourse (White & Epston 1990:29). This is done by the therapist's being transparent or 'public' about his or her thoughts, prejudices, questions and opinions (Anderson 1997:103), and by reflecting on his or her participation in the therapeutic process.

If therapists' own assumptions and the discourses that support these assumptions go unchecked, therapists may reproduce the contexts in which the problem stories have been constructed (Madigan 1996:58). Resisting such practices includes, for example, taking a position that affords women a voice, not perpetuating gender-stereotypical behaviours, dominant notions of domination, conflict and abuse. A two-way account in conversations undermines power relations in therapy. This means the inclusion of therapists' own stories in therapy, and letting the client's stories inform therapists' own lives and work (White 1997b:132). The therapist also risks changing. This therapeutic relationship is mutual, collaborative, cooperative and egalitarian (Anderson 1997:107). This kind of conversation asks for a forgetfulness of self, for temporarily letting go of all preoccupations with self and for attentiveness towards the other, a moving towards a self-other unity or participatory mode of consciousness (Heshusius 1994).

We as therapists try to connect to people's experience from their point of understanding, to become aware of the realities that shape their self-stories. In contrast to the modernist 'knowing' position so often taken in psychological discourses, narrative therapy operates from a 'not-knowing' position (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). This implies a stance that represents the assumption that meaning and understanding are socially constructed, and that therefore there is no privileged position of understanding. In fact, because the client is the expert of his or her life, the client's experience and meanings are privileged. That means continually refusing unwarranted assumptions, and fostering an attitude of curiosity. This contributes to the opening up of fixed meanings and behaviours, instead of closing down possibilities through the 'known'. Questions are not

a way to gather information, but a way to generate experience. Through questioning, self-stories are negotiated and constituted; questioning involves moving toward the 'not-yet-said'; it contributes to the co-authoring of experience. Through the therapist's efforts towards opening up of space for the social construction of preferred self-stories, the context of narrative therapy in itself is a context of hope that things can be different.

In the therapeutic context, there is an intense focus on self-stories, those that are brought to therapy and experienced as problems, and the co-construction of alternative self-stories. I now want to turn to the narrative approach to problems presented in therapy as the rationale for exploring of alternative self-stories.

### **3.7.3 Problematic self-stories**

The self-stories that people are living out include the stories that are circulating in their culture, the local and larger culture. In the light of the work of Foucault, Michael White (cited by Monk et al 1997:8) raises awareness of the damaging effects of normalising practices that 'confine, constrain and undermine people's efforts to lead a life of their own design'. Mostly clients come to therapists with a dominant story (or stories) that present(s) itself as the problem-story (or stories). White and Epston (1990:28) connect this with the dominant narratives that Foucault focuses on: the unitary power/knowledge discourses that claim to be the 'truth'. These discourses invite us to treat ourselves and our bodies as problematic objects. Epston (1993) has called these dominant discourses 'internalizing discourses' because they make us believe that our problems are inside us, speaking about who we are as people. Self-stories that 'fail' to achieve the requirements of the dominating discourses can result in an experience of self-doubt and identity crisis. Problematic self-stories can be narratives that do not sufficiently represent a person's lived experience, or there can be lived experiences that contradict the problem stories (White & Epston 1990:40).

These self-stories are called 'thin' descriptions of identity, or 'thin' identity conclusions, because of the exclusion of personal experiences and one's community of meaning-making, and the reduction of knowledge to certain dominant 'truths' and of the self to a core or essential self (White 1997b:15; White 2001:3). I want to mention two examples that are relevant to this research. The first is an identity or self-story that is anchored in the assumption that God's love means that He will never allow anything bad to happen

to someone who is His child. Because this self-story will always contradict lived experience, a person with this self-story will tend to either doubt his or her faith or that he or she is a child of God. This self-story is restricting in many ways, for example, it does not position a person adequately towards experiencing 'bad things', or provide an opportunity to hold God accountable for 'bad things'. The second example is the appropriation of the self-story of being an addict. This 'thin' conclusion of identity excludes a person as being abnormal, totalising the person's identity. It is limiting in that it ignores context and does not explore other valid self-stories.

Knowledges and experiences that have been marginalised, or in any way subjugated in Foucault's terms, can, by contrast, serve as a resource for alternative stories. Narrative therapy is to a great extent the identification, thickening and performing of these alternative stories as people's preferred identities (White & Epston 1990:31).

In narrative therapy, deconstructing and externalising is the starting point in the social construction of this alternative self-stories.

#### **3.7.4 Deconstructing and externalising self-stories**

Deconstruction is concerned with the objectification of the problems people live by (White 1991:29). Demystifying the realities we create in our construction of self-stories opens up space for alternative understandings and agency in our lives. In this way, it is a 'creative and generative process', as mentioned earlier. The deconstruction of self-stories can be described as the unpacking of identity conclusions that are problematic. Through the use of questions, various aspects of the problem-saturated story are explored. In this way, the counsellor and the client are able to reveal the cultural and communal assumptions that have contributed to the social construction of the problem in the first place. This includes the questioning and deconstructing of the power relations in everyday life. Taken-for-granted norms and truths have constitutive power and can easily be part of the problem story about the self. Beliefs and values are also considered. We inquire about the processes that recruit people into beliefs that support problematic self-stories. Deconstruction disputes the rhetoric of problems and the political scaffolding which support that rhetoric. (Madigan 1996:59).

Freedman and Combs (1996:46) talk about deconstructive listening that deconstructs the 'facticity' of people's self-stories and loosens the grip of restrictive stories. It liberates clients from the kind of self-narratives that keep them locked into disempowering grand narratives. Examples of this work are an inquiry into what views and experiences make self-acceptance difficult for people who struggle with substance abuse, or how secrecy was introduced into a person's relationship with substances. If people realise their stories have been constructed, they can see that the story is not inevitable, and that it can be constructed differently.

Through deconstructing, different perspectives become available, and new meanings can be co-created in therapy, alternative ways of being can be opened up. These alternatives can be described as taking up different subject-positions in discourses that the client finds more just or more in line with his or her own preferred views of identity. Through this objectification of the taken-for-granted realities, a person can come to choose other ways of being, and in this way deconstruction is also a context for hope.

Michael White (1991:29) explores the concept of externalising as part of the deconstruction of self-stories. Externalising is one of the key concepts in narrative therapy (Epston 1998:40; Monk et al 1997:6). It is based on the epistemological assumptions that have been discussed up to this point. Whereas modernist discourses typically enhance the internalising of person's problems in the light of the proliferation of individualisation and pathologising, externalising looks at the problem as something that is constructed in a person's interaction with his or her living environment. The aim of externalising conversations is to separate people from their problems.

This is not just a technique, but a consequence of challenging the cultural and sociopolitical context of the problem (Madigan 1996:54). Problematic concepts of self, like all concepts of the self, are actually social constructions. Problems are usually sustained by particular beliefs about the self, others and relationships, beliefs that are informed by dominant knowledges. Problems do not speak about something inside a person, the truth of his or her identity as fixed in the totality of who the person is. But because of the authority of dominant 'truth' discourses, people tend to internalise them as speaking about who they are as people. These thin conclusions do not correspond to the full spectrum of a person's lived experience. They are also totalising and pathologising in their description of a 'person-identity-as-problem' (Madigan 1996:55).

Externalising conversations unpack the thin conclusions that people have about their identity and deprive these conclusions of the truth status that has been assigned to them (White 2001:3). In this way the identity conclusions cease to have the authority they previously had in a person's life.

Furthermore, externalising separates people from the invitation of the 'truth' discourses to 'achieve certain expectations, to replicate certain specifications, or to meet certain norms' (White 1990:30). This is done by exploring the history of the influence of these 'truths' in constituting the self. Externalising is an attempt to move away from the self-attacks, blame and judgment that accompany problems. It provides space for a person to move, to evaluate his or her relationship with the problem, and take responsibility for the kind of relationship to the problem that the person prefers. Because the person is not the problem, but the problem is the problem, a whole team of important others can be set up against the problem, and not against the person. For example, a family can stop working against each other, and work together against the problem instead.

The way it is done is through naming or objectifying the problem through a linguistic shift in the kinds of questions that are asked about the life and influence of the problem. This shift in language is not just a technique, but an attitude or orientation in our conversations that the problem is not the person, but external to the person (Morgan 2000:17). Narrative therapy moves away from a deficit labelling of people that fixes a problem as something inside a person. 'Expert' definitions of a problem also de-contextualise the problem and thus reduce options for intervening in the life of the problem. The naming of a problem must be relevant to a person's experience. Problems are spoken of as separate from people, for example, like a 'thing' that is situated somewhere else in the room. Furthermore, the influence of the problem-story in all the facets of a client's life (social, spiritual, physical, etc.), as well its influence on all family members or other relationships where it is relevant, is mapped. This enhances the idea that the problem has a life of its own, and is not inside a person. It also creates experts on the way this problem works, its means and tactics in recruiting people to live a problem-story, and what plans this problem might have for people who support its life.

This careful journey into the life of the problem also helps clients to experience the therapist's seriousness about the problem-story. The separation of a person's identity

from the problem inspires hope, because it brings about a sense that things can be different. Mapping the influence of the problem can also have the benefit of stumbling upon events, feelings, knowledges and practices that have already stood against the influence of the dominant problem-story. It also ‘opens space for the identification and circulation of alternative or subjugated knowledges’ (White 1990:32). In externalising conversations, people seem to emerge and come to life as protagonists in their life stories. People are encouraged to resist ‘authenticity’, to refuse ‘wholeness’, to protest ‘personal growth’ as instances of perpetuating the taken-for-granted cultural hegemony of expert truths (White 1995:49). Externalisation is therefore also a context for hope, because it introduces new possibilities for being a self.

These deconstructing and externalising practices can provide opportunities for the construction of alternative self-stories.

### **3.7.5 Alternative self-stories**

The stated purpose of narrative therapy is the development and performance of alternative stories for living, including alternative self-stories (White 1991:29). This is based on what has been said so far about narrative as the way in which we experience our lives and the way our experiences are constituted. These self-stories are socially constructed, not only because of the conversation between therapist and client, but also because of the involvement of other people and society as such, as I discuss below.

I have already referred to the probability of crafting out events, knowledges and practices that are surprising, because they are exceptions to the problem-story. These alternative moments are called ‘unique outcomes’ or ‘sparkling moments’ (Monk et al 1997:13). These are experiences that cannot be predicted by the plot of the problem-saturated self-story. These fragments can be the beginnings or starting points for the development of a history of resistance against the techniques of power, through the performance of meaning around these refusals. It is about stories that enable a person’s own voice, stories about agency.

Gradually, by contextualising and connecting the alternative landscapes of action and the alternative landscapes of meaning through the considering of questions that encourage people to make sense of the unique outcomes, a counter-plot, an alternative

story of the self, can evolve (White 1995:28-29). Landscape of action questions plot events in a sequence over time, and strengthen the sense of agency in people's lives. Interwoven with this, landscape of meaning questions plot the implications of these events, the meanings, desires, intentions, beliefs, commitments, motivations and values that constitute people's self-stories. This questioning can specifically assist people in re-describing their relationship with themselves. The questioning is a way of staying in language with each other so that the 'unsaid' can be expressed (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:381). In the questioning, the subjunctive mood ('could it be?', and 'what if?') is conducive to the introduction of possibilities, not certainties.

Not everything that we experience through our lives is taken up in the narratives we use to talk about ourselves. Many experiences go unstoried, and can even disappear behind the overwhelming problem-story. Therefore there are always unique outcomes that can lead to a different story. It may be something that initially looks small or insignificant. Through persistent questioning, much can be learned about oneself, for example, a lot of activities and meaning-making may only show up when they are spoken about in therapy. Small, subtle changes in a person's relationship with the problem-story can also be the beginning of a new story. Especially regarding self-stories, a historical review of a person's influence on the problem can reveal events or experiences to which new meaning can be attributed in the light of the externalising of the problem story (White & Epston 1990:56). Even just a memory of someone the client knew as a child can stand against the problem story. Another doorway to alternative self-stories can be unique outcomes that relate to future-oriented intentions and hopes. The endpoints of stories are weighted with value.

It can be said that the effects of a problem constitute the problem's 'life-support system' (White & Epston 1990:63). While experimenting with performances of alternative self-stories, a person can revise the relationship with the problem. This includes a refusal to comply with the requirements of the problem, to deprive the problem of its effects as the life-support system of the problem, thereby diminishing the influence of the problem. Past experiences can become reconstructed. By being separated from the problem-saturated descriptions of the self, this new relationship with the problem can foster a sense of agency in the person's taking responsibility for the making of new choices and pursuing new possibilities. The person's experience is relocated in new narratives, and the previous dominant narrative becomes obsolete.

As I have already mentioned, on the one hand, God-stories can be the origin of problem-stories, or exacerbate problematic self-stories. On the other hand, God-stories can provide a context for separating oneself from problem-stories or for repositioning oneself differently towards problems. In the chapters that follow, I explore in what ways God-stories can make a difference in the construction of self-stories, for example, how a story of God's acceptance can bring an element of freedom into the living of a self-story. I am also interested to see in what ways God-stories can provide alternatives to dominant self-stories of substance abuse.

In narrative therapy, this process of a person's (re-)description of his or her self is actually a re-authoring and co-authoring of new self-stories, in which the client is the senior partner. The conversation as such is the author of the narrative (Freedman & Combs 1996:31). As I have shown, social constructionism implies that other people are involved in the construction of our worlds. Therefore self-stories have a varied number of characters. It is necessary to include others in the process of re-authoring of self-stories. This can be realised by asking a person to look at him- or herself from the point of view of another person, through the eyes of a relative, a co-worker, a friend, or even an imaginative other. For a religious/spiritual person, this can include looking at him- or herself through the eyes of God or the universe. Forgotten events and meanings can be revived and relived, and can become part of a person's new self-story.

Through the practice of 're-membering', a person can also choose to downgrade or upgrade membership of the 'club' of his or her life (White 1997b:23). The privileging of preferred members of a person's life-story can result in a rich description of knowledges and skills for living that are co-generated in significant relationships. In contrast to the 'thin' descriptions of a person's life, these alternative self-stories are 'thick' descriptions, which are informed by the interpretations of the person's self, as well as of the community of which one is part. It is especially by 'engaging with a community of persons in the telling and re-telling of the preferred stories of one's history and of one's identity that lives are thickly described' (White 1997b:16).

Multiple contexts for the telling of self-stories are narrative resources that enlarge the range of possible meanings and options for action in the world. I discuss other ways of



involving others in the co-authoring of self-stories in Section 3.7.6, on the extending of the story.

At this stage of the discussion, it is important to mention that alternative stories are not about the descriptions or representations of experiences, but about the performance of the self-stories. Stories become transformative only in their performance (Freedman & Combs 1996:33). Alternative stories are about the co-construction of self-stories through which people can live in preferred ways. The social construction of alternative self-stories in narrative therapy is therefore also a context for hope. It provides an alternative frame not only for interpreting experiences, but also for alternative experiences in the living of alternative stories.

The narrative construction of identity also has an ethical dimension. Freeman and Brockmeier (2001:82) see the ethical dimension in the inherent unity between narrating a life and living a life. We are responsible for the realities we construct. We must examine the narratives we construct, how they came to be and what their real effects are on ourselves and others, and make choices in this regard. In the construction of self-stories, the good life must be aimed for: 'Together we have to negotiate what is a good life for all participants in each and every specific situation' (Kotzé 2002:21). This is also applicable to self-stories in the context of the struggle with substance abuse, especially from a faith perspective.

The development of alternative self-stories in narrative therapy can be extended in various ways. It provides a temporal dimension to therapy, just as stories in themselves can contribute to the experience of change. These practices therefore also constitute a context for hope.

### **3.7.6 Extending the performance of the alternative stories**

The social construction of self-stories in narrative practices can be enriched through the consideration of an audience, documents and rituals.

### **3.7.6.1 Audience**

Stories are negotiated and distributed in communities, therefore the re-negotiation of self-stories must engage community (White 1995:26). Preferred self-stories are constituted through the performance of these stories in interaction with an audience. The audience, as a subculture, participates in the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' and is powerfully affirming of people's self-stories. This audience can be related to the re-membering practices discussed in Section 3.7.5, above. Questions can be introduced that invite persons to identify and recruit an audience to the performance of their new self-stories (White & Epston 1990:41).

A definitional ceremony can also be a place where claims of identity can be acknowledged by an audience. This involves the use of a reflecting team to enrich the counterplot that emerges in the interview between the client and the therapist (White 1995:181-192). In this performance of self-stories, the reflecting team engages in decentred sharing that is highly affirmative and motivates a person's self-story.

### **3.7.6.2 Documents**

Letters can be a valuable way of extending the therapeutic conversation and thus the social construction of self-stories. In letters, people can be challenged to resist the claims of dominant 'truths' about personhood. The letters can assist people in reinforcing their resolve to protest the operation of the techniques of power in their lives and relationships. Clients can be invited to go on strike against such techniques.

People can be encouraged to record their own stories in a form that might be available to others. Success stories can have a profound effect in distancing people from the problem story, and a record of them can be consulted by others as well as themselves if the problem re-emerges in their lives (White & Epston 1990:163). Counter-documents, documents that are situated in the domain of alternative knowledges, can re-describe a person's self-story in ways that emphasise his or her special knowledges and competencies within the larger community (White & Epston 1990:190). This includes certificates and declarations as affirmations of the new developments in self-stories, 'performed' in interaction with an audience, and contributes significantly to the

authentication of self-stories. Documents can be an enriching testimony of a person's identity journey away from substance abuse.

### **3.7.6.3 Rituals**

Rituals are the repetitive participation with body and mind in spiritual practices in a way that transcends language; and they connect a person with cultural stories, myths and sagas (Griffith & Griffith 2002:165). Rituals can mark significant steps on the journey toward the living of preferred self-stories. Rituals include rites of status elevation in relation to the dominant cultural structures, and rites of status reversal in relation to anti-structures. Rituals can be structured according to the process of re-authoring conversations. They can also be structured according to the phases of separation, the in-between or liminal, and re-integration. They correspond to the state of separation from the problem, the state of the resurrection of subjugated knowledges, and the phase of authenticating these new knowledges in the presence of others.

The liminal phase is a place of distance from normal cultural expectations in preparation for taking on new roles (Murray 1989:186; White 1995:99). This phase is accompanied by feelings of disorientation, failure and despair. If it is seen as part of the journey, the process, the chance is better that a person will not fall back. It places distress in the context of progress, disappointment is part of the journey towards something new (White 1995:101). Rituals are actually narratives in action, and govern the process of breach-crisis-redress in the creation of beings (Murray 1989:187). Rituals can be incorporated in the narrative therapeutic process in order to enrich or thicken preferred self-stories. In Chapter 5, I discuss the ritual of migration of identity as the outline of a possible self-story for a person struggling with substance abuse.

### **3.7.7 Conclusions**

These are just a few remarks indicating how self-stories can be socially constructed in narrative therapy. In this last section, I affirm that the social construction of self-stories is a context for hope, because it provides the possibility that different stories can be created and told in a therapeutic context. As a discourse-sensitive therapy, narrative therapy is an avenue for the performance of self-stories within the context of social constructionism and poststructuralism (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:12). The research is carried

by an overall interest in narrative ways of working, more specifically, narrative therapy (see Section 1.9). In the end, the aim is to make a difference in the therapeutic involvement with people who struggle with substance abuse. In order to achieve this aim, the question of how self-stories can be changed needs to be closely investigated.

### **3.8 THE IMPLICATION OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-STORIES FOR THE RESEARCH**

Below, I present a summary of the discussion about the social construction of self-stories. I focus specifically on the practices of change mentioned in this chapter, along with their implications for the research. The emphasis in the research is not on the process of change as such, but on the difference that God-stories can make for people troubled by substance abuse. Alternative stories provide opportunities for the kinds of change as I describe in Chapter 1 and hoped for. In the context of this research, it is necessary to establish the social construction of self-stories as a context for hope, because change is possible. It is important in order to insert hope in the construction of self-stories amid the struggle with substance abuse.

The basic point of departure regarding the social construction of self-stories is the assumption that the self is not crystallised into a core, but is constructed in the social interchange between people. The self as a process that occurs in the space between people implies that self-stories can be realigned or reconstructed differently as social contexts change. Self-stories are situated within the domain of language that is always changing, always new, depending on and created in the communicative context. Change is thus located within the social environment, and no individual has complete control over the process. The potential for the self is not limitless. The construction of self-stories are limited by the realities of the conversational partners. Nevertheless, social construction does not exclude agency. Agency is the ability to act on one's own behalf, to play an active and influencing role in one's own life. If knowledge is constructed by interacting individuals, the individual logically has a certain amount of agency (Gergen 1987:60). Constructive processes are in principle open to denial, rejection or modification. We are able to select and implement linguistic resources, and that implies agency. New language brings forth new possibilities for living. Change is enabled in the exploration and expression of the 'not-yet-said'. Resources for change arise in the process of expanding and saying the 'unsaid', in the development of new stories

through dialogue (Anderson 1995:32). The indeterminacy and ambiguity of our self-stories as texts provide opportunities for change in our self-stories. The story of the self is developing, always open to editing, new interpretations and new meanings.

A deconstruction of dominant narratives that are constraining in any way separates people from the prescribed ways of being that are enforced by these knowledges and practices. It enables people to resist the influence of such narratives, and it makes it possible for alternative, marginalised knowledges and practices to become available for the construction of new, preferred self-stories (Foucault 1980:82,83). Deconstruction provides a context where clients as the primary authors of these alternative stories can experience a sense of agency. The co-creation of self-stories is thus an experience and experiment in the possibility of the impossibility, the refusing to let the doors of the possible shut (Derrida & Caputo 1997:124). This research includes the deconstruction of addiction narratives, and the possibilities of alternative, hopeful self-stories in the light of God-stories. Change is possible when we position ourselves differently in these narratives or discourses.

The social construction of self-stories works with temporality as an important dimension of human existence, and therefore with the recognition that personal identity is changeable. The narrative metaphor in particular can turn out to be a laboratory of possibilities for identity construction. Narrative can bring lightness to the heaviness of reality; it can break through the limits inscribed by modernist discourses. It uses subjunctives for the world and opens us up to the possibilities of imagination (Brockmeier & Harré 2001:54-56). The future of the self-story is possibility, the ability to re-read the script of one's life and to make new inscriptions in a script-in-the-making (Schrag 1997:37). The research relates to the alternative constructions of self-stories in the context of God-stories and substance abuse stories.

This chapter has explored the ways in which self-stories are socially constructed, and the ways in which self-stories can be differently constructed in the light of problematic stories. The possibilities of self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse are explored further in this research. This chapter has also set the stage for the discussion of the way in which the construction of self-stories is influenced by the social construction of religion/spirituality and substance abuse in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 is about the differences that God-stories can make in the social construction of self-stories. It looks

at the self-stories that become available when a relationship with God is a factor in a person's life.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD-STORIES AND SELF-STORIES

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The second area of concern that this study explores is the constitutive effect of religion/spirituality (God-stories) on self-stories. I expand on the argument that God-stories are social constructions that can form part of the context for the development of self-stories. I want to show in what ways God-stories can make a difference to self-stories. In this chapter I therefore consider God-stories mainly as a context for hope in the construction of self-stories, rather than as a restraint, thereby linking it to the social construction of self-stories in narrative therapy. This chapter also sets the stage for the next chapter, which is about self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse.

This chapter is about the role of religion/spirituality in the social construction of identity. I first want to say a few words about my use of the terms ‘religion’, ‘spirituality’, ‘faith’ and ‘beliefs’. In Section 4.2, I explain why I prefer to talk about God-stories as a way to include spirituality, religion, beliefs, faith experiences, etc. In the rest of the chapter, I discuss the way in which various God-stories are constitutive in the construction of self-stories. Because of the possibility of inserting oneself into God-stories or taking up God-stories into self-stories, I write about ‘self-God-stories’ as a way to talk about the mutual influence of self- and God-stories. The chapter ends with a few remarks on ways in which to begin to include God-stories in narrative therapy.

‘Spirituality’ is a broad, overarching term that can have different meanings in different contexts. I find the following definition of spirituality as our connectedness to all that is particularly useful in the light of this study, because the social construction of the self is about connectedness: ‘Spirituality is a commitment to choose, as the primary context for understanding and acting, one’s relatedness to all that is’ (Griffith & Griffith 2002:15). Spirituality is inclusive of all experiences that relate to religious activities, theological theories and narratives about the Other, or to an ultimate human condition that we strive towards. It is an investment in a set of values that fosters a ‘sense of meaning, inner wholeness, harmony, and connection with others’ (Walsh 1999a:6).

‘Religion’ is more structured than spirituality: it refers to the cultural codification of spiritual resources, the formalisation of people’s relationship with the transcendence: ‘Religion is a structured pattern of relations (beliefs and rituals) to some divine (superhuman, other-worldly) power(s)’ (Lovinger 1984:83). It includes moral values and involvement in a faith community. Religion’s socially constructed nature is emphasised by its embeddedness in a specific culture – as Rossouw (1993:894) explains: ‘Religion is the relating of faith in God with patterns of meaning that exist in a particular culture.’ Meaning is carried or constructed in language. Religion is thus based on a shared language within a faith community and a cultural context (Van der Lans 2002:34).

‘Religious beliefs’ or ‘faith’ refers to the way in which a person positions him- or herself in relation to the transcendent, but also in relation to the self, the community and the world as such in the light of the transcendent. It is part of an ongoing process of negotiation about meaning; it is not so much an inner state or psychological dynamic as it is discursively constructed in community. Faith can be likened to the label of a filing drawer full of stories. Stories do not just express beliefs – as I have discussed in the previous chapter, stories are also a way of constructing a belief. No belief is independent of the narratives that construct and communicate it (Van der Lans 2002:29). Whereas a story is the immediate experience as organised temporally within language, beliefs are abstractions of elements within stories that are relevant in guiding future action. Beliefs, as religious orientations, are important as interpretive lenses through which believers order their life experiences. Conversely, life experiences continually constitute and shape beliefs. Regarding beliefs, a distinction can be made between loosely held assumptions and strong convictions that serve as passionately held commitments. Assumptions have pragmatic utility, convictions are held according to their power in sustaining a vision that is vital to a person’s identity (Griffith & Griffith 2002:147).

As I will discuss in the next section, the notions of ‘religion’, ‘spirituality’, ‘beliefs’ and ‘faith’ are included in my use of the concept of God-stories. Due to the influence of globalisation and democratisation, religious pluralism is a growing phenomenon that therapists must reckon with in narrative therapy. I have already positioned myself within Reformed Christian narratives, but I want to be careful to be open to diverse faith



orientations that can influence people's stories of themselves.

Why is the use of the terms 'God-stories' necessary? I first want to situate God-stories in the context of narrative ways of working.

## **4.2 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GOD-STORIES**

I have already mentioned in Chapter 1 why I prefer to talk about God-stories with regard to our notions about and experiences of God (see Section 1.3.1). In the previous section, I have also discussed beliefs as narratively constructed in community. I want to expand on this argument and say more about the social construction of God-stories, in order to see them as part of the variable social environment of the construction of self-stories.

### **4.2.1 The relationship with God is experienced as God-stories**

Knowledge and experience of God can be found in the communication processes, more specifically the narratives, in which religious/spiritual people are involved. The background for this statement is the social constructionist claim that pure, unmediated knowledge or experience is impossible. Chapter 2 refers to the terrain of Practical Theology as the communicative actions of human beings in service of a God-story. This, together with Chapter 3, on the social construction of our life worlds, makes it possible to infer that our experiences of God are constructed in our interaction with other people, in the past, present and future. This interaction also includes dialogue with God as a Person (as in prayer), and internal dialogue (as taking up a subject position within a well-known religious narrative). A religious/spiritual experience is therefore a relational interaction, and not a psychological phenomenon. This is in line with faith communities' emphasis on tradition (Van der Lans 2002:31).

What has been said in Chapter 3 about the self taking up subject positions within discourses in a narrative way (see Section 3.5.3) is also relevant regarding interaction with God-discourses. Our experience of God is storied in nature. Stories convey our experiences with God, but they also constitute our experiences with God, with their resulting meanings, views and beliefs. God-stories are stories that convey and perform a person's beliefs, knowledges and experiences of their relationship with God. Hence the

remark in Section 4.1 that there are no beliefs without the narratives that construct and communicate them.

#### **4.2.2 Faith, religion and theology as God-stories**

The social construction of God-stories can be taken further. Notions that in a previous paradigm would have been regarded as ‘objective truths’ about God are also constructions resulting from relational interactions. God, like the self discussed in Chapter 3, can be seen as a socially constructed concept. God-knowledge and self-knowledge are interpreted knowledge, in other words, they have a temporal and social character. This position invites narrative to be used as a more adequate way of talking about God and a self, because of narrative’s temporal, social and meaning-making character. This does not imply that God does not exist as a reality that requires faith. It means that our knowledge of God and our experience of God are not objective knowledges about how God is, in some real or factual sense, but that they are mediated through socially constructed discourses as the construction of meaning (Schweitzer 2002:173). For example, God’s existence or His attributes have no meaning outside of His relationship with creation, and more specifically outside of His interaction with human beings that can respond to His actions. His existence and His attributes only have meaning within the history of the interaction between God and humans, within the history of the co-creation of self-God-stories. God is only God with us if we as humans are constructively involved in a relationship with him (Van der Ven 2002:305).

A further indication that our concepts of God are not ‘objective reality’ but are constructed is the fact that no human expression can fully contain or refer to God as He is. We depend on the mediation of our imaginative capacities as they have been socially conditioned to grasp something of the unseen (Schilderman 2002:235). We can also say that God is always in the process of coming to us, meaning that He is present even when it is not possible to grasp Him; He cannot be captured in any expression. There will always be elements of ambiguity, uncertainty, contradictions and subjunctivity in the way we use to express God and our thoughts about Him. The use of the story metaphor is therefore fitting in respect of our interaction with God. While God-stories have real effects, they are also open to interpretation, editing and retelling.

It should therefore come as no surprise that religion is constructed through stories: ‘At the heart of a religion is an epic story or a master myth that is re-enacted through various rites and rituals and is propositionalized in creedal or doctrinal statements’ (Lee 1993:13). God can be manifested by story, just as the disciples experienced the presence of Christ in the sharing of their stories with one another. Through storying, God’s presence can be revealed and embodied: Christ’s presence is made known through stories. God is present to us in narrative, metaphor, images and rituals, as I will discuss in more detail in Sections 4.14.6 and 4.14.9. But more than this: our Christian faith as such consists to a great extent of stories (Bons Storm 1996:117). Even theological theories can be understood as constructed and informative stories about God and His relationship to humanity and the world. Even doxology, our valuation of God for being God, is an effect of the constitutive relationship of God and self-stories.

#### **4.2.3 Different contexts result in different experiences of God**

Another element in the social construction of self-God-stories is the construction of different functions in a person’s interactions with God that provide different experiences of God. In popular and professional discourses, the distinction between the mind, body and spirit or soul is deeply ingrained, with the spirit or soul as the part of the human being that is seen as the most receptive to God-stories. I do not see these as different parts of a human being, but as different functions and experiences of a person, as described from different perspectives (König 1993:230-232). In a postmodern context, a post-dualistic view of the gospel must be emphasised. Our bodies also participate in our self-God-stories. In narrative ways of working, our context gives meaning to our different kinds of experience of the self. Our mental, physical and spiritual worlds inhabit different kinds of discourses. These discourses, as narrative resources, encourage multiple self-stories in relation to God.

God-stories as social constructions situate them in a narrative context. This makes God-stories relevant as an additional context for the social construction of self-stories. Because we are dealing with God-stories and not fixed unchangeable realities, these stories can be an interactive constituent in the construction of multiple alternative or preferred self-stories. They can be part of the dance referred to in Section 3.4.3. Therefore God-stories are contexts of hope, because they hold the promise that things

can be different. I now want to discuss the way these God-stories can be part of the formation of self-stories.

### **4.3 GOD-STORIES THAT CONSTITUTE SELF-STORIES**

In this section, I want to situate God-stories within the context of the meaning of God, also referred to as the transcendent, that which is beyond the usual limits, for the constitution of self-stories. I want to consider the value of God-stories for the construction of self-stories, as well as some approaches to ways in which God-stories can influence self-stories.

#### **4.3.1 Taking up a subject position within God-stories**

Religion can be understood as a cultural environment for the construction of identity. In the social construction of religious identity, a person appropriates culturally available models of religious identity by comparing them metaphorically with his or her own experience (Schilderman 2002:218). Religious symbols present the ultimate reality in terms of a culture's ideals as realised states of affairs. The implication of this is that persuasive processes are activated in the construction of religious identity (Schilderman 2002:220). The whole religious network persuades a person to appropriate models of religious identity into self-stories, or to put it differently, to appropriate a position of subjectivity within specific religious discourses. Identity is constructed by taking up elements from the collective voice of the faith community into self-stories. These elements can include things such as commitment, values, symbols, images and practices.

From a narrative perspective, the impact of God-stories on self-stories is basically the idea of including God-stories in one's self-stories, or positioning one's self-stories within the stories of God. This influence can also be described in a different way: for religious/spiritual people, God becomes the co-author of the texts of their lives. But more than this, both God and humans are co-authors of self and God-stories, and from the unity between authoritative discourse (spoken by the author-God) and internally persuasive discourse (experienced by a person as his or her own internal truth), multiple self-God-stories are constructed (Hermans 2002:142).

This emphasis on the role of religion/spirituality on the formation of the self resonates to a certain extent with White's (2000:132) descriptions of spiritualities of the surface. This is a spirituality that influences people's material existence, a spirituality that assists in the transformation of the self from the received version of who one is into a knowing formation of the self according to an ethical, caring way of being. The only difference between my approach and White's approach is my purpose of opening up God-stories.

This inclusion of God-stories in the formation of the self, in my view, can still be described in White's terms, namely as spiritualities of the surface, as opposed to structuralist descriptions. God-stories are not about adding a depth structure to self-stories or about providing a fixed core identity or contextless 'truths' about the self. God-stories can be part of the context of self-stories, and their meaning derives from the linguistic interaction between the God-texts and self-texts, and the shifts in the performance of the self-texts they bring about. For God-stories to be influential, they have to make a difference in a person's embodied, practical way of living. As I have already said, God is only God with us if we are involved in the construction of self-God-stories.

#### **4.3.2 The need for God-stories**

There are a number of reasons why I believe that God-stories are valuable contexts for the social construction of self-stories. In Section 1.3.3, I have mentioned the Christian tradition linking a knowledge of the self with a knowledge of God. More specifically, we know ourselves to the extent that we can locate our self-stories within God's story (Marsh 2002:258). Therefore God-stories are necessary for the development of self-stories. In a religious frame of knowing, the effect of God-stories provides a useful context for the performance of self-stories.

For Taylor (1989:42), being human includes the need to be connected to what people see as good or as being of crucial, ultimate importance. Therefore, for him, a spiritual or transcendental orientation in the formation of the self is not optional. This orientation comes about when one connects one's self story to some greater story (Taylor 1989:43). In Christianity, this greater story involves the stories of the Bible and of Jesus Christ and of the Christian tradition. Being situated in God-stories as a pastor, I agree that it is

important for self-stories to be located within God-stories as part of a human need to be connected to what people see as the ultimate good.

Throughout this chapter, different aspects of our existence that can benefit from God-stories are therefore discussed, for example, the ability of God-stories to help provide answers to questions about meaning. The fact that God-stories provide an additional context or narrative resource for alternative constructions of self-stories is of particular interest to this research. As will be seen in the context of substance abuse, God-stories can contribute to a distancing from the problem-saturated story and can be a resource for taking up responsibility for one's choices. Religion also provides a reflective position, an alternative perspective that can help people to avoid being trapped in a problem-producing dilemma. As I mentioned in Section 1.6, religion/spirituality is important to a large number of people in South Africa. To eliminate the possibilities of God-stories from narrative therapy is therefore nothing short of a reduction of the possibilities for living. In addition to these arguments, there are also a number of features in narrative therapy that are closely linked to using God-stories in therapy. This will become clear throughout this chapter, especially in Section 4.14.1.

### **4.3.3 How God-stories influence self-stories**

I now want to consider some ways in which God-stories can constitute self-stories. In Section 1.3.3, I have already referred to the three conceptions Proudfoot (1976) suggests for the description of the relationship between God and the self. The relationship between God and the self can be described in many different ways. Because both the self and God are interpretive constructions inhabited in narrative, I talk about God-stories and self-stories, or self-God-stories in the discussion of this relationship. There are stories about the primacy of God and His revelation over human cultures and self-stories in a way that emphasises His transcendence as the 'wholly other', also referred to as 'theism'. According to these self-God-stories, God can transform the self directly without the mediation of language and interpretation (Ozorak 2003:255). Karl Barth (see Heyns 1978:14-15,141; Proudfoot 1976:95-96) is the best known exponent of this dialectical view of the relation between God and the self in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, there are stories of the relation between God and self in which human experience is the point of departure for knowledge about God. Paul Tillich, with his method of correlation, is a well-known representative of this liberal Protestantism (see

Marsh 2002:254; Proudfoot 1976:36). This emphasis on the eminence of God as the ground of all being can easily slide into an ontology of monism, also called 'pantheism', where any talk of a relationship between God and the self is subsumed into stories of God's existence *within* everything in creation. Despite its intensions, this account of the God-self relationship becomes an abstraction that is distant from lived experience.

I have already explained my positioning within the social conception of the self-God relationship (Proudfoot 1976:176). God-stories can include the social constructions of transcendence, such as His revelations and purposes, as well as social constructions of human experiences of Him. God reveals Himself not only in the Bible, but, as He does in the Biblical stories, also in human experiences. This position, which I identify with, is an intermediate immanent transcendency, also known as 'pan-en-theism' (Edwards 1994:99). Panentheism breaks through the God/nature dualism and allow elements of immanence and transcendence, and the development of that which is yet to come (Fox 1990:25). This relates to descriptions and experiences of God that are near and involved, but not the same as creation. Putman (1998:192) concludes that people tend to feel more comfortable with images of God that are situated within the category of panentheism, and that they have the least affinity for the distant demanding God of theism.

Self-stories of relationship with God are stories about being part of a world larger than the visible, with a sense of friendly continuity between the Ideal Power and our own lives (James [1902] 2002: 212-213). Although the work of William James is more than a century old, it is still relevant for this study, because it provides a thorough discussion of the pragmatic consequences of faith in the construction of self-stories. As I will show, his work also had an influence on the spiritual dimension of the addiction recovery movement. According to James's practical theism, God is real because He produces real effects (see Proudfoot 1976:28).

Although God's transcendent existence appears to operate outside the economics of human experience, it plays a central role in the constitution of the self through the self's immanent relationship with this transcendence (Schrag 1997:114). One can argue, in the light of the postmodern background of narrative therapy, that this transcendence is not so much a function of ontological structures of being, because it is 'more like a existential-pragmatic alterity - an alterity that registers its efficacy by making a

difference in the experience of ourselves and the world' (Schrag 1997:138). Religion as a culture sphere in history, as mentioned, has left distinctive marks on the cultural existence of humankind. The transcendence of God has become, and continues to become, incarnate in the contingencies of historical experience. As a result, there are no structural or formal boundaries between the work of God and the work of human beings. God is working in and through the historical events of human considerations and actions (Berkouwer 1950:108). This represents a narrative of how that which is wholly Other can have an impact in our lives (Schrag 1997:121). Every sacred story is a creation story, in that the story creates a world of consciousness and the self oriented to it (Crites 1989:71).

I now want to shift the focus from the effect of the transcendence on humanity, of God-stories on self-stories, to self-God-stories constructed between the discourses of psychology and religion. Because this research is positioned in the domain of pastoral therapy, this section is relevant as part of establishing the context of the research.

#### **4.4 SELF-GOD-STORIES BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY AND RELIGION**

In this research, more specifically in this chapter, my discussion of the self is positioned in the space where psychology and theology/religion overlap. This is possible and necessary because, as I have shown in Chapter 2, Practical Theology is interested in the influence of faith in daily life, in the actual experiences of human beings. This is also relevant for psychology, because psychology is the scientific study of the mind, the human psyche, and its relationship to experience (Gerkin 1984:80). In fact, the idea of pastoral therapy is itself an indication of the interface between psychology and religion. I want to consider how the reciprocal relationship between psychology and religion influences the social construction of self-stories.

##### **4.4.1 The struggle between psychology and religion**

In modernist discourses, the multitude of views of the relationship between psychology and religion are examples of the struggle to represent two different 'realities' in a language that is compatible with both disciplines. It creates a contest to find the most authoritative discourse to position human experience. There is a need to do this, according to Lovinger (1984:27), because, due to developments in modernism in the



20<sup>th</sup> century, religion and psychotherapy have become separated. Historically, psychotherapy's roots were in the spiritual healing traditions. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these two fields became two distinct domains, with psychotherapy as the dominant epistemology in the field of mental health, with a scepticism towards faith-based belief systems (Walsh 1999b:31). The alleged incompatibility of these two 'realities' rests on the perceived difference between the verifiable facts of science and the non-material 'fiction' of spirituality. When knowledge became the domain of the empirical sciences, subjective experiences and local knowledges were marginalised. In this way, rigid boundaries have developed between the sacred and the secular in an attempt to be objective and value-free.

In the light of this, spirituality has come to be regarded as a taboo subject in the mental health profession (Walsh 1999b:29). This can also be relevant to the relationship between spirituality/religion and narrative therapy. What follows is a few examples of the divergence of the ways of narrative therapy and specific religious assumptions.

The political stance of narrative therapy would be antagonistic towards some aspects of organised religion, for instance, fundamentalism, male-dominated church hierarchies, the marginalising of women and minority groups, moralism, etc. (Adams 1995:203). In this regard, it may be helpful to distinguish between religion and spirituality, especially if a client attaches negative connotations to the term 'religion'. Another barrier to an integration of religion and psychotherapy, including narrative therapy, is the potential for the abuse of power if therapists attempt to influence clients to adopt their own religious views. Religion has often been used to reinforce the *status quo*, to sanction people's own particular views and biases. The well-known comment by Karl Marx that religion is the opium of the masses implies that religion can contribute to a passive acceptance of one's destiny in the light of the promise of a just society in heaven. In South Africa, the political system of apartheid has been justified in religious discourses, thereby sanctifying minority rule and large scale injustice (Deist 1982; Jonker 1998:7; Pieterse 1998:177). Another example is the way women have been subjugated in church life through the use of Scripture (Bons-Storm 1996:127). Even claiming to be neutral is maintaining the *status quo*, leaving things as they are.

Narrative therapy as a contextual therapy is interested in the social and political contexts that are part of the construction of the problematic narratives that people inhabit.

Religion has also been used as a way to escape from grappling with serious human problems in human terms. One example is the misuse of faith to deny the emotional reality of our experience of pain and suffering (Louw 1994:19). Another is using religious authority or prayer as an escape from the demands of serious dialogue (Clinebell 1984:122). Accepting suffering as God's will can sometimes be liberating, but it can also disconnect a person from valid experiences and limit the possibilities for enriching self-stories. Through encouraging agency in the construction of self-stories, narrative therapy invites us to story knowledges and behaviours that represent our lived experiences adequately. In the light of this research, I want to assume that labelling substance abuse a sin can potentially result in somebody's not getting the help that is needed for this complex problem. This issue is discussed further in the next chapter.

In the recent history of psychology, there have been calls from within the psychological domain to include clients' spiritual or religious orientations in the therapeutic endeavour. In contrast to Freud, who defines religion as a universal compulsion neurosis (Van Uden & Pieper 2005:47), Jung acknowledges the religious instinct in people and the importance of religion for human existence:

Just as man, as a social being, cannot in the long run exist without a tie to the community, so the individual will never find real justification for his existence, and his own spiritual and moral autonomy, anywhere except in an extramundane principle capable of relativizing the overpowering influence of external factors. The individual who is not anchored in God can offer no resistance on his own resources to the physical and moral blandishments of the world.  
(Jung, cited by Meyer et al 2003:122)

The healing art of therapy has much in common with a spiritual journey (Walsh 1999a:24). Therapy can be a spiritual resource: 'At its best, the very process of psychotherapy becomes a spiritual wellspring for healing and resilience' (Walsh 1999b: 49).

Two other examples of the incorporation of the spiritual dimension into psychology are those of Victor Frankl and the transpersonal psychologists. The logotherapy of Victor Frankl (1962:67) also concerns itself with spiritual values, like the meaning of life, bearing suffering with courage and interaction between responsibility and freedom (see also Lovinger 1984:51). Transpersonal psychologists are interested in people's transcendental experiences within the boundaries of human existence, and include

meditation and other techniques in therapy to facilitate spiritual experiences (Schwartz 1999:228).

One way of addressing the modern problem of the relationship between psychology and religion is establishing Pastoral or Christian Psychology. Pastoral or Christian Psychology has found a niche in a country such as the USA, where religion is still important for a large part of the population. To psychology, the epitome of success is found in the integrated personality moving about in our streamlined society with ease, comfort and poise (Goulooze 1950:131). In Christian psychology, this theme is taken up, and our integrity lies in being centred on God and close fellowship with Him. Life becomes unified and focused in trusting ourselves wholly to Him (Goulooze 1950:133). This does not take away the need for a psychology that can teach us a lot about the mechanisms and motivations of human actions. Christian psychology can help a person to realise God's purposes in his or her life. Christian psychology can contribute to the sense of being dependent on God for resolving problem stories: 'To reject Christian psychology is to tempt people to turn to more occult sources for help. Or it is to push them in the direction of non-Christian psychology, which, like the magical worldview, will often encourage them to think that they can control their own destiny' (Mouw 1994:72).

#### **4.4.2 Socially constructed and narrative interactions**

In this research, I position myself regarding the relationship between psychology and religion within the postmodern contexts of social constructionism and narrative ways of working. In Section 2.2, I have indicated that the move to postmodernism brought about a change in the relationship between science and spirituality. The Cartesian legacy of dualism has been challenged to acknowledge the role of values, feelings, meaning and spirituality. Both science and spirituality are seen as part of one multi-levelled reality. With the postmodern shift away from the dominance of empirical science, the mental health disciplines are beginning to value the importance of the role of faith beliefs and practices in problem construction and solution (Walsh 1999b:32). Adams (1995:206) discusses studies that show that therapists are increasingly acknowledging spirituality as part of their practices. The relationship between psychology and religion is not forced or mechanistic, but organic, as parts of the varied and valid experiences of being human.

Carlson and Erickson (2000:67) connect the growing appreciation for the importance of religious and spiritual dimensions in the therapeutic context with a growing acceptance of social constructionist theory. Social constructionism encourages a multiplicity of voices and so opens up space for many previously marginalised voices to gain legitimacy in the field: 'Alternative ways of knowing and experiencing life that were previously marginalized because of their lack of scientific basis have become more viable' (Carlson & Erickson 2000:66). Specifically, narrative therapy has been found to be the most helpful theory to be used to enter into the spiritual stories of people's lives (Carlson & Erickson 2000:67). In psychology itself, social constructionism is contributing to the move from a bounded self to a relational self. As we have seen in the previous chapter (Section 3.5.1), individual minds are derivative of relationship, and therefore the possibilities of the *narrative turn* in the understanding of the self are explored (Gergen 2002b:16).

In narrative ways of working, all the different views on the relationship between psychology and religion are types of narratives. In these ways of working, the tendency is to conceive of the integration between psychology and Christian faith as being taken up in self-stories (Lee 1993:300; 1999:293). Lee (1993:300) qualifies the story of Jesus Christ as having authority over the myriad of other stories that define our self-stories. For a religious person, it is normative, in that the hearing of His voice is decisive in setting our priorities and making our decisions. As the pastoral counsellor and psychologist Al Dueck (1993:260) puts it: 'Even in the writing of my story I would seek first the Reign of God. Its language is my primary language; its plot is to become my primary plot. Its central Character I seek to imitate and assimilate.'

By contrast, there is also the view that the distinction between the domain of the spiritual and clinical practice must not be lost (Doherty 1999:179). One domain is not more important or more inclusive than the other. However, some subsume the clinical into the spiritual domain. For them, the theological is the 'big circle' that subsumes all other realities, including the psychological. For others, the clinical scientific domain is the main reality that has subsumed the spiritual domain. For Doherty (1999, the distinction between psychology and spirituality lies in the separate evolution of their own language and meaning traditions: the clinical world of mental health, and the spiritual realm of transcendent meaning (Doherty 1999:184). One domain cannot subsume another terrain into itself. Although the domain of the spiritual/religious

concerns that which is of ultimate relevance, this relevance is experienced in human functioning, including the domain of psychology. From a Practical Theology point of view (Chapter 2), the two domains need to be in a critical relationship with each other. There are areas of overlap between the different languages of these domains, a resonance across these domains. This differentiation in different language systems or discourses sets the scene for more diverse and richer constructions of self-God-stories.

In conclusion: psychological and religious experiences are all part of the same multi-levelled life-world, part of our varied experiences of being human. It is not about the melting together of two different horizons, but about our journey towards one horizon, the horizon of our ultimate experiences, also with God. On this journey, stories about the psyche (self) and stories about God interact seamlessly, but critically, towards the social construction of self-stories. As will be discussed with regard to the context of substance abuse, the space where psychological stories and God-stories overlap is a space of hope, because, through this interaction, life worlds can be recognised that are different from a person's problem worlds.

Self-God-stories are constituted in the interplay between psychology and religion, but also in the interaction between cultural and religious meta-narratives.

#### **4.5 SELF-GOD-STORIES AND META-NARRATIVES**

Historically, God-stories are linked to meta-narratives in a crucial way. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the narrative approach has an ambivalent relationship with meta-narratives.

On the one hand, there is the postmodern 'incredulity' (Lyotard 1984) towards meta-narratives, with a preference for variety and pluralism. Furthermore, universal truth claims often present themselves in the form of dominant discourses that can be the source for constructing subjugated, restricted and disembodied self-stories (White 1997b:20,30). History is full of the negative effects of the power/knowledge duality in religious discourses. The church developed systems of surveillance, regulation and discipline that engaged people in overseeing their own lives and kept them locked into disempowering grand narratives. For example, the idea that only the church could provide absolution from guilt through practices of confession was designed to enforce

an unquestioned obedience to church rules (Davis 1990:168). Postmodernism is more interested in the contextual and relational ‘truths’ in the margins. One of the effects of this interest in postmodernism is the retrieval of the concerns of ‘Others’ in the margins of history and reason who were silenced in the name of a grand narrative (Graham 1996:33). On the basis of this interest, Graham (1996:38) makes a deduction that resonates with the views of other postmodern thinkers (Carlson & Erickson 2000): ‘One of the implications of the postmodern return of the repressed “Other” of modernity involves a resurrection of the spiritual and the numinous.’ Postmodernism therefore invites a renewed interest in religion/spirituality, because of its broader view of rationality and its interest in multiple equally valid ‘realities’.

On the other hand, the social construction of the self implies the embeddedness of the self in the larger social environment. Each person is embedded in a historical, social and political fabric from which he or she cannot be teased out to be studied independently (Durr 1995:111-112). The discourses that form our identity are intimately tied to the structures and practices that are lived out in society from day to day. Our local repertoire of narrative forms is interwoven with a broader cultural set of discursive practices. Cultures provide images and stories that can be taken up in self-stories: ‘Cultures do provide specific types of plots for adoption by its members in their configurations of self. These plot outlines are carried and transmitted in the culture by mythic stories and fairy tales, by tales of heroes, and by dramatic constructions’ (Polkinghorne 1988:153). The self must be understood against the background of the dominant knowledges and truths in society that normalise and specify people’s lives (White & Epston 1990:29). The construction of religious people’s self-stories cannot be viewed apart from the meta-narratives of the Christian faith community. Although a religious person’s narratives are informed by many other narratives, there is an overarching plot, the story of God’s working through the ages and cultures and our plot as part of that grander story (Dueck 1993:259).

Meta-narratives are thus not only oppressive and restrictive in the emergence of identity, but can also be constructive in that process. In fact, it is possible that a Christian meta-narrative that speaks about submission and sacrifice and not about control and imposition can form a basis in narrative therapy for a powerful form of Christian therapy (Lee 1999:291). Faith in an overall story has to a large extent been criticised and broken up, but it still plays a huge role in communities all over the world.

We can revisit these stories and discover that the larger stories are not so rigid or as imprisoning as is sometimes claimed. We can discover that we are able to stand in them to relate to them as our own stories. But we must also make room for the sub-stories within which we live. We can find some of these meta-narratives and small narratives in the Bible.

The meta-narratives of the faith community are to a large extent part of the faith community's interaction with Biblical narratives. The Bible consists of culturally constructed narratives, the story of God in Jesus Christ, giving a voice to God within the narrative contexts, and retold in every new generation. These narratives are open to questioning, contradiction and different interpretations. In our interaction with the text of the Bible, we are confronted with meta-narratives, but also with the subversive stories of the gospel. It is actually not the grand themes of the Bible that are liberating and healing, but the little stories, the acts and utterances that are 'odd, isolated and embarrassing' (Brueggemann 1993:60). This kind of story is especially evident in the stories Jesus told and lived. Amidst a cacophony of rival voices, the Bible is like a compost pile that provides material for new life. The Bible also provides a paradigm for the practice of imagination (Brueggemann 1993:14). It invites a counter-story to modernism, with its emphasis on science, rationality and objectivity, about God, the world, our neighbours and our selves. For Christians, reading the Bible is a way of experiencing God as near, as involved, as speaking.

The ambivalence toward meta-narratives regarding religion/spirituality is especially relevant in the South African context, where religion plays a largely dominant role, but also an ambiguous one (Chapter 2). On the one hand, it institutionalises a discourse that functions on the level of 'the way things are', that which is 'normal', putting pressure on people to conform to ways of being that contribute to people's alienation from their preferred self-stories, or to exclude faith-stories from their lives altogether. Narrative has a critical function in that it can influence religious meta-narratives on people's lives. On the other hand, religion/spirituality can also function as the 'other' way, as doorways to alternative self-stories, speaking of different knowledges, different techniques of the self, different practices of relationship (White 2000:130). Spiritual narratives can form part of the problem-saturated story or could offer choices for alternative stories (Andrews & Kotzé 2000:329).

The influence of the local cultural and religious context of a religious person's life is discussed in Section 4.7, but first I discuss a specific macro-narrative within religion, namely the reciprocal relationship between God and humans.

#### **4.6 SELF-GOD-STORIES AS A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP**

The Reformed tradition in which I am positioned has always maintained that the most important part of self-knowledge of human beings is given in the belief that God has put them, since creation, in a loving relationship with Himself (Du Rand 1982:141-147; Proudfoot 1976:18). The Biblical notion of 'man' being created in the image of God has resulted in volumes of speculation about the qualities of God that can be shared by humankind. In particular, this literature has established the notion of a self that possesses essential characteristics, in line with the modern notion of an autonomous individual with an inner created core (Du Rand 1982:148-155).

Being created in the image of God can also mean that human beings are created to find their deepest meaning in their relationship with Him (not an *analogia entis* but an *analogia relationis*) (Deist 1984:11). The image as relationship is more promising regarding the construction of the self in temporal and contextual terms. Because of the importance of this relationship, the concept of the covenant has always been decisive in the Reformed tradition (Berkhof, 1975; Heyns, 1974; König, 1991). It is an expression of the personal and communal relationship between God and humans, established through faith. The covenant represents a metaphoric handle for beliefs to hold on to, and is also a metaphor of God's commitment to us in spite of our failures. Our relationship with God is a living, dynamic, historical relationship. Although the covenant emphasises the initiative of God in constituting and maintaining the covenant relationship, God works by including the historical events of human considerations, plans and actions (Berkouwer 1950:108). Thus the covenant manifests God's way of working with us as part of our ongoing history (Jonker 1989:181). In this way, the covenant also expresses our ability to respond to His actions. The covenant speaks of an intersubjectivity in which both God's agency and human agency are emphasised. Because of sin, we are dependent on God's grace in the covenant, but we are also valued by God in our being taken up in the covenant relationship as responsible partners. The covenant has the possibility of enhancing a sense of reliability and accessibility in the self's relation with God.



The Christian identity is a relational identity, bound up with the reflection of the life of the triune God. In its reflection of the life of the triune God, one can say that the self is truly ecclesial (Grenz 2001:331); it contains multiple selves, not only in its relationship with God, but also in the form of its interlocutive selves in relationship with the community.

This relationship with God is a central informing relationship for believers which has a vital influence on the way people's self-stories are constructed. Because it is often one of the most significant relationships in a religious person's life, it can have a very powerful constitutive effect (Carlson & Erickson 2000:70). A person's sense of self is shaped by the perceived relationship with God, for example, one can have a self-story of being an unworthy sinner in the hands of a moralistic God, or, a self-story of being the beloved child of a caring God. Religious and non-religious people tend to value themselves in the light of how they think God values them and the experience that He does (or does not do) so. The sense of continuity with God in the reflection of His image, in the reflection of His communion, and in the covenant can affirm a believer's sense of self-value, and enlarge agency in making the person's voice, and those of others, heard. It makes one's relationship with God resilient in troubling circumstances, and encourages one always to re-connect to God, to forgiveness, acceptance and relationship values again. God is not inclined to abandon His people. The stories of the reciprocal relationship of God and self are carrier-stories, stories that carry the promise of the extension of hope through all our self-God-stories. In this research, the idea of 're-membering' God, of promoting God to being a member of the club of one's life, features prominently as a story of hope in the context of a struggle with substance abuse.

I now want to turn to the overflowing of the community within God to the faith community. The relationship with God also informs these relationships; and these relationships constitute the relationship with God.

#### **4.7 SELF-GOD-STORIES IN COMMUNITY**

Life is living together (Bonhoeffer 1954:4). Sometimes a glimpse of this togetherness can be experienced in the faith community; and this makes it a context out of which

hope can emerge. We sometimes lack the language and images to express the self in the social constructionist sense of not being separable from community in any way. However, I found an example of such an expression in the description of this sociocentric view of human experience by John S. Mbiti (1969:108-109): ‘I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.’ This is the African Ubuntu value. A religious self, just like any other self, cannot exist independently of its social context. Social constructionism and religion are therefore in agreement about the constitutive effect of relationality as a counter-narrative to Western individualism (Schweitzer 2002:173; Van der Lans 2002:31).

The post-individualist gospel takes the human person within the context of his/her community seriously (Lee 1999:289). The self is part of families, of generations, of the faith community, and of the broader social context. Faith is inherently relational, because it is shaped within care-giving relationships from our earliest years. Religion is collective (Ozorak 2003:251). Regarding our God-stories, families and faith-communities play important roles as the vehicles for the distribution and building of religious and spiritual traditions and our positioning within them. Christians refer to the faith community as the body of Christ, as Christ existing in community, a complex web of interconnectedness that is both theological and practical (I Cor. 12:12-13,26). The *sanctorum communio* (the communion of saints or faith community) is also a reflection of the perfect communion of the triune God (Marsh 2002:278). The story of God’s trinitarian community overflowing into human community constitutes the self-stories of being in community (Grenz 2001:305). As mentioned above, the self is ecclesial, community within community, multiple-storied. This involuntarily makes one think of the remark by Fenelon (cited by Thomas 1999:64): ‘I am to myself the whole of a great congregation, more burdensome than the outside one, and a congregation which I am incapable of reforming.’

Communities constitute the self by mediating the communal transcendent narratives necessary for the formation of self-stories (Grenz 2001:331). The transcendent sense in family and community is forged through shared memories, values, commitment and mutual support in adversity (Walsh 1999a:22). Community is created through a unity based on a shared confession of our basic brokenness and on a shared hope (Nouwen 1979:93). Community is about a belonging that is constituted through relationship and dialogue. It then becomes a healing community, because wounds and pain become

openings for hope. In the light of this, ‘there are times when a therapist’s most useful role is one in which he or she helps a person to maximize the healing potential of relationships within a spiritual community’ (Griffith & Griffith 2002:191).

Being a member of such a community results in respect for the self and the other, in assistance for those in need, indeed, in being part of a life-giving fellowship. The way after God is to follow Him in such a way that we are freed from our selfishness in order to give ourselves for the need of others. This community also has a constraining influence on possible self-stories that can be deconstructed in therapy. This influence is mostly regarded in a positive way by religious people, as it prevents them from doing things that can hurt themselves or others. This restraining effect of community, as well as the sharing of brokenness and of hope and the sense of belonging, is crucial in the lives of people struggling with substance abuse.

The grace that I am going to discuss in the next section is also experienced in community. Grace-full relationships model forgiveness and values and affirm a person’s identity based on Christ’s behaviour. The role of a person’s faith community, whether it consists of the person’s family, church or other small fellowship groups, in the self-stories of substance abuse, is discussed in the chapters that follow.

Proudfoot (1976) adds another dimension to community that relates to this study as a whole. Both the self and God are interpretive constructions, ‘texts’ with a past and a future that have to be interpreted. This interpretation takes time; it has a temporal dimension; and it has a social character. Community in this sense is not something optional, but the condition for the knowledge and the construction of self-stories and God-stories (Proudfoot 1976:220). As can be expected, he refers to the use of narrative in the community of interpretation: ‘Recent claims for the appropriateness of narrative or story as a fundamental mode of theological discourse draw on the temporal and communal aspects of the social type’ (Proudfoot 1976:221). The community also functions as an audience for the telling and retelling of self-God-stories, the performance of the self-texts and the God-texts of one’s life, in order for self-God-stories to be confirmed and thickly described.

Social constructionism also emphasises the constitutive effect of culture on religion. In the introduction (Section 4.1), I have already referred to religion’s embeddedness in

culture. So, for example, Ozorak (2003:252) mentions that, although Roman Catholics across the world share many aspects of their religious world view, Catholicism looks and feels different in Italy from what it looks and feels like in South America (and for that matter, from what it is like in South Africa). The collective of culture can conflict with the collective of religion, but religion can also thrive where culture and religion can be made compatible with each other.

Differences in the ways cultural and religious groups perceive the relationship between God and humanity have led to the concept of disparate relational schemas (Ozorak 2003:254). Like the term ‘discourses’, the term ‘relational schemas’ describes patterns of relationship within specific communities, scripts for possible interactions and relationship roles between members of the community and between community members and God. These relational schemas constitute the plots of an endless variety of self- and God-stories within community.

The faith community is the primary context for the social construction of self-God-stories. Life is experienced in its sharing, in healing and hoping together in community. Within the faith community, stories about sin and grace can be seen as baseline stories, like primordial narratives, out of which other self-God-stories can be developed and performed.

#### **4.8 SELF-GOD-STORIES OF SIN AND GRACE**

I want to combine the discussion about stories of sin and grace, because they are two sides of our self-God-stories that cannot be understood separately: the one points to the other. Together, these stories can accommodate the contradiction between goodness and badness within human existence: ‘The greatness and wretchedness of man (*sic*) are so evident that the true religion must necessarily teach us both that there is in man (*sic*) some great source of greatness and a great source of wretchedness. It must then give us a reason for these astonishing contradictions’ (Pascal 1669, cited by Thomas 1999:87). It is a theme that is relevant in the context of struggle with substance abuse, because the knowledge of and the will to do the right thing are often in conflict with what a person is actually doing.

#### **4.8.1 Sin as broken relationships**

The first stories in the Bible, after the creation stories, depict the choice of humanity to rebel against God and create their own stories without Him. This is regarded as the origin of sin in the world, traditionally called the 'Fall'. It is a story that communicates our basic alienation from all that is (as the opposite of spirituality). Sin can be seen as a disruption of the whole of creation's relation of dependency on God, in particular the alienation from the transcendence in our self-stories (Heyns 1978:173). It results in estrangement from ourselves and from others.

Sin is sometimes described as an evil power that enslaves human beings (König 1991:112). This indicates a way of speaking about sin as though it is not something substantial within a human being, but an external force with a life of its own. This makes it possible to objectify sin, as I discuss under externalising conversations (see Section 4.15.4). It is much more helpful to talk about sin in relational terms than in substantial terms, as the influence of sin can then be 'experience near' and it can be deconstructed. Sin presents itself in concrete relationships, with God, people and things (Berkhof 1975:200; Heyns 1978:178; König 1991:138).

A distinction can be made between sin as a moral failing, and sin as part of the brokenness that is evident in the whole of creation, a brokenness in which humanity shares. Sin as a moral failure evokes in us the tendency to attach our desire to created things instead of to the Creator (this is often called idolatry in the Bible). It implies living independently from God. Our participation in the brokenness of creation emphasises our limitations and our experience of being victims in many possible ways. In the Christian tradition, the devil is connected to sin in various ways, for example, as the one who incites us to disobey God.

Stories of human frailty and weakness are not only an effect of sin, but also part of our stories of origin, metaphorically referred to as being created from dust. Because of our sinfulness and our being human, we all experience a restless dissatisfaction with ourselves that drives us to despair, that evokes a longing to be 'at home' (more or less fulfilled). Our self-stories include 'weakness that depends on uncommon gentleness and generosity' (Brueggemann 1993:32). Our value, as well as our brokenness and weakness, are part of the story of God with us. Addiction is often regarded as a sin in

the sense of a moral failing, even as idolatry, in that the focus of the addiction takes the place of God in a person's life. The consequence of sin, the loss of life, that is, the experience of lostness, of isolation and meaninglessness, of being ill at ease, can contribute to the search for another life in chemicals. In the quest for life or satisfaction, a person can become enslaved by forces beyond his or her control. Addiction is also regarded as sin in the sense that the person who struggles with addiction is a victim, or that addiction is seen as just as a result of our inborn weakness. This is discussed further in the next chapter (see Section 5.4).

Pastoral therapy wants to expect the most of clients in the light of their God-given value and ability to be responsible, but also reckons with the brokenness for which grace is needed. Indeed, reckoning with human fragility can be liberating in a therapeutic context, for clients, as well as for therapists (Nouwen 1979; Pattison 1988).

#### **4.8.2 Grace as the incarnation of restoration**

Grace comes to us in the form of the epoch-making stories about the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The meaning of these stories for Christians through the ages has been critical, because they bring hope and light in the midst of adversity and darkness. These are stories about a victory over sin, brokenness and the power of the devil, about the possibility of redemption, reconciliation with God, forgiveness and acceptance. His victory becomes ours through faith. The appropriation of grace lies in the performance of these self-God-stories before relevant audiences.

Grace speaks about God's loving and purposeful involvement in our lives, bringing newness, healing and meaning into our self-stories. Grace is thus not an eternal moment above history, rendering history irrelevant, but is God's involvement in our history-making as God's creatures (Marsh 2002:258). Since the incarnation of Christ, incarnation becomes the basic form of communication between God and humans – the dance of heaven with earth. Incarnation is the embodiment of God's grace in the reading of the Bible, in prayer, the sacraments of baptism and bread and wine of the Eucharist, in the worship of the community, in living as a disciple of Christ.

Grace is sometimes described in terms of a homecoming, a place where you feel that all is somehow ultimately well, even if things are not going all that well at any given

moment (Buechner 1996:7). Home is like a place of safety. Grace is also described in terms of the satisfying of all our desires, the satisfying of our deepest thirst (Piper 1996:19) or the table-fellowship, the sharing of a festive meal with God in anticipation of the eschatological meal in the end time (Jeremias 1971:115).

Something such as guilt has real effects in people's lives. Feelings of guilt can result in experiences of being stuck, of hopelessness, of shame, of anxiousness, of darkness. A gospel story that invites us to accept our guilt and sinfulness also brings about the possibility that grace can flow into our lives, the possibility of a radical transformation, a passage from a pervasive self-rejection and self-torture to a new freedom of self-respect, self-acceptance and peace (Vitz 1977:128). The possibility of constructing self-stories that are alternatives to the dominant problem stories, that are new in their effects, is the possibility that the story of grace puts before us. Thus grace maintains and enhances human agency. God's grace in the form of unconditional love is the basis for the construction and performance of preferred self-stories.

#### **4.8.3 Grace versus moralism**

It is possible to contrast stories of grace to stories of moralism. Moralism regards sin as a list of trespasses against religious laws, a list of things that should or should not be done. It is the advocacy of moral behaviour without a religious commitment (Deist 1984:162). It is an attitude and a behaviour that expresses judgementalism and conditional acceptance. Attaching strings to acceptance actually implies non-acceptance. It does not only reject unacceptable behaviour, but also rejects a person who behaves in a certain way. God is then perceived as being conditional, judgemental and condemning. There is no hope in moralism, because no one will ever be good enough. There is only blame, rejection, confusion and guilt, or a self-justification that does not need anything from God. Nothing is expected from God outside the self-made box of do's and don'ts (Keller 1985:59).

The strangeness of the gospel is the good news that God is full of grace. His love, forgiveness and acceptance is total, unconditional and freely given. Grace becomes incarnate in the endless possibilities of the constructions of alternative self-stories. There is a strong tendency in believers to testify to God's grace in the material successes in their lives. From a reflective position, it is evident that this can result in

disappointment, even in a loss of faith, but it is difficult to think of God's grace-full involvement outside of one's physical circumstances. Therefore what we need, our daily bread, is important to God. Moreover, God's grace does not take us out of this world with its pains and sorrows; it does not exempt us from the consequences of sin, brokenness and darkness. But it does enable grace-full living in adverse conditions, like the water lily in the mud.

#### **4.8.4 Grace provides a place to stand**

Grace has a profound equalising effect, because all humanity needs His unconditional love and acceptance in equal measure. Therefore grace dispenses with all social prerequisites, such as merit or achievement, for acceptance, and situates the self in a non-competitive ethic (Marsh 2002:265). Grace makes possible stories of reconciliation, expression of guilt and repentance, a ministry of forgiveness and acceptance. A story of God's grace is a story that excludes any domination, objectification or manipulation of the outsider or other. In this way, grace has overt political aims that connect with poststructuralism and narrative ways of working.

Even if a person struggling with substance abuse does not regard him- or herself as a sinner, he or she still needs grace. It breaks down isolation; it counters feelings of being rejected; it provides a place to stand, even if it is outside what is regarded as normal in a culture; it enables the making of choices. Grace is an opening up of space for other possibilities to come in, to be surprised by joy. In this, grace is a context for hope *par excellence*. I now want to continue from this baseline to the next self-God-story that is made possible by the the story of grace, that of the 'old life' and the 'new life'.

#### **4.9 SELF-GOD-STORIES OF THE 'OLD LIFE' AND THE 'NEW LIFE'**

The concepts that I want to discuss in this section, namely 'old life', 'new life', 'conversion' and 'redemption' can be seen as a metaphoric reaching towards a way to convey some aspects of the Biblical narrative. Although these concepts are pervasive in the Christian tradition, I do not want to assume that everybody who sees him- or herself as a Christian necessarily identifies with these stories and metaphors in the same way. This section is about the Christian self-story of the migration of identity that will be



taken up further in Chapter 5 in relation to a person's journey away from the demands of a substance abuse lifestyle (see Section 5.10.3).

#### **4.9.1 A new relationship with the story of Christ**

The Christian story is a story about redemption from an old way of being to a new way of being. In Christian traditions, the life before and after a person's faith in the story of Jesus Christ is referred to respectively as having an 'old nature' and having a 'new nature' (Heyns 1978:305-306). Although this claim is expressed in naturalistic and essentialist terms, it is possible to reframe it as a conferred identity within the self's historical social context (Gerkin 1984:100). There is talk about a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), but the 'old nature' and 'new nature' are not to be understood as discernible elements of an inner reality inside the human being. It is rather descriptions of the whole person in his or her relationships: "Old person" and "new person" are not, then, ontological but relational in orientation. They speak not of a change in nature, but a change in relationship' (Dockery 1993:628).

The central story of Christians is the story of how their lives become conjoined with the story of Christ's death and resurrection through faith, as a death to the 'old life' and a resurrection into a 'new life'. It is to live contemporaneously with Christ. The transformation of the self through being crucified with Christ does not destroy the self, but reconstitutes it in new life; or, to put it another way, a new personal identity is bestowed on the self *extra se in Christo* through the incorporation of the self in the Jesus story. It involves retelling one's own narrative, and hence making sense out of one's life, by means of the plot of the Jesus narrative (Grenz 2002:329). This redemptive function of the gospel stories is accomplished by the connection of the Jesus-story and the self-story as two sequences within a single larger story (Root 1989:266). The redemptive task is carried out by the augmented retelling of the story of Jesus that makes clear the relation between Christ and the Christian, through the use of patterns of redemption, such as paying off a debt, setting free captives, or raising consciousness.

## 4.9.2 Transformative self-stories

This transformation from the ‘old life’ to the ‘new life’ is also known as a conversion experience. Although multiple kinds of conversion experience have been studied (Pop-Baier 2002), I want to refer to two basic types of conversion experience that are both, in some measure, present in two types of experience. James ([1902] 2002:163) distinguishes between a ‘volitional regeneration’ experience and a ‘crisis of self-surrender’ experience. These two types of conversion experience have also been distinguished as the contemporary paradigm and the classical paradigm (Popp-Baier 2002). The contemporary or ‘volitional regenerative’ type is a gradual process of building up, step by step, a new set of spiritual values and habits. It is more than the acceptance of a set of doctrines or the performance of certain rituals. It is a transforming process, apparently brought about by a divine power in the participation in religious activities, and it can have dramatic results in people’s lives, steering them on a preferred way of life (Davis 1982:171). This type of conversion also includes elements of an instantaneous conversion, for example, times of more radical self-surrender and intense consciousness of God.

The classical or ‘self-surrender’ type is an instantaneous conversion that can be experienced as a crisis of divine intervention. It comprises self-surrender by leaving behind the uneasiness of sin and striving for the Ideal in self-surrender to a Higher Power (James [1902] 2002:165-166). This experience, which has been called a mystical experience, is not limited to the conversion experience, but often plays a decisive role in a more dramatic conversion. At the heart of the mystical experience is a dissolution of the subject-object distinction. It is a dying to oneself and gaining a sense of oneness with God, overcoming all barriers between the individual and the Absolute (Davis 1982:174; James [1902] 2002:324). These experiences can be accompanied by quasi-sensory experiences, such as visions, dreams, sounds, light, heat or pain. (Davis 1982:165). It can involve a deepened sense of the significance of things, a revelation of new depths of understanding, and an emotional state of bliss or serenity. Such experiences have authority for those who have them. From a psychological point of view, this mystical experience can halt the disintegration of the self and help in the appropriation of preferred self-stories (Van Uden & Pieper 2005:38-39). All conversion experiences, even this ‘self-surrender’ type, which involves basic emotions and is often

held to be irreducible, are the result of interpretations (Proudfoot 1976:220), mediated through language. They are stories that transform in the telling.

In James's (2002:186-189) pragmatic approach, there is no difference between the consequences of these two modes of conversion. The transformation from the 'old life' to the 'new life' is experienced as a gift that generates a joy and happiness that is qualified as solemn, because it acknowledges the darkness in creation. It is a kind of experience that cannot be rationally or logically explained. It renders the habitual centre of personal energy, one's spiritual emotions, more energetic towards its purposes (James [1902] 2002:155,324). It also evokes a unifying, reconciling state that relates more to the 'yes' function than to the 'no' function in us (James [1902] 2002:322). The central experience is the sense that all is ultimately well with us, the peace, the harmony, the willingness to be, even though external conditions remain the same, the being 'at homeness' (James [1902] 2002:194).

From a social constructionist and narrative perspective, conversion stories are a special form of self-narrative that consists of the achievement of self-transformation through the referential (general consensus about the meaning of conversion language in a reference group) and constitutive effects of communicative behaviours (Popp-Baier 2002:49-51). A story's actual performance within a religious community is constitutive of the conversion experience. The construction and performance of self-stories of conversion are informed, sustained and restricted by the respective religious group's canonical language. The conversion story includes some of the new religious language. One example is the language of redemption within liberation theology, which implies the restoration of human freedom from oppressive forces, or the language of victory over the limitations brought about by sin and brokenness.

#### **4.9.3 Between the old and the new**

Our recreation is about our personal narratives being taken up into the narratives of Christ's being crucified and resurrected. Through a migration of identity, His story becomes my story. This involves agency as the taking up of a subject position within the discourse about the constitution of a transformed subject through the story of Christ. Everything that has been associated with the 'old nature' is dead, in the sense that it has been transformed in the new relationship with Christ (Dockery 1993:629). The new

relationship with Christ is embodied in new knowledges and practices, but it is not a believer's only experience. In our practical experience of our everyday life, we still remain susceptible to influences of the 'old life'.

The stories of believers in the Bible and in the faith community leave no doubt that faith does not exclude sin. In Christian traditions, this tension between the 'old life' and the 'new life', between being sinners and being redeemed and saved from sin, is expressed in the concept that believers are 'righteous sinners' (Julian 1998:31-33). Our purposes, wishes, commitments, preferences are taken up in the God-stories that surround us, but we will continue to need God's grace in the form of forgiveness and acceptance in re-aligning ourselves with God's story. Struggle will always be part of the Christian life. It can be helpful to remember this on our journey towards freedom from the abuse of substances. We will look further at this when discussing spiritual growth and the therapeutic approach of externalisation.

A self-God-story of being conferred a new life or new identity radically expands the possibilities for the social construction of alternative self-stories. Even though there is an element of acquiring of the new life that must be performed, such a story provides a context for hope, an energy and a vision that can propel a person toward making preferred choices. Next, I focus on one aspect of this new life that is relevant for this research, namely what has been called the emptying of the self (Wallace 2002:93).

#### **4.10 SELF-GOD-STORIES ABOUT THE EMPTYING OF THE SELF**

The self-God-story about the emptying of the self is relevant for this research, because it connects with postmodern ideas about the emptying of the self, as well as with a theme in the addiction recovery movement, namely the surrendering of the self. What is the effect of this story on the social construction of self-stories?

The New Testament is filled with images of the self that are opposed to images of a self-sufficient, self-made individual (Mt. 18:3-4; 20:25-28). One of the consequences of a person's self-story being taken up in a God-story is the identification with Christ's self-surrendering, by denying oneself and taking up one's cross: 'Contemporaneity with Christ involves a *theologica crucis* in which the kenosis of Christ is the paradigm for Christian formation and imitation' (Mosely 1991:112). In Christian traditions, this

struggle against the self is the key to spiritual growth – in the words of Thomas à Kempis: ‘Who hath a greater combat than he that laboreth to overcome himself? This ought to be our endeavor, to conquer ourselves, and daily to wax stronger and to make a further growth in holiness’ (cited by Thomas 1999:39).

For Wallace (2002:93,105; see also Davies 1990:169) there is an analogy between the demise of the modern substantial self and the Christian narrative of self-emptying. It is in the emptying of self, the giving away of the self, that the self is found (Lk 9:24). In the Biblical text, the emptying of the self is intended to allow the divine Other to call a person to service to the human other, to love God and neighbour above all else. Only through losing oneself in and for others can one discover the self so that meaningful subjectivity becomes possible. This idea resonates with the emphasis in social constructionism on the notion that the self is not something complete in itself, something with substance and essence, but is decentred by its being socially constructed. The idea of becoming or gaining a self through self-loss is taken up in the dialogue between theology and constructionism: ‘This ideal of self-discovery through self-loss is the *summum bonum* of all religious life and thought and should be the center of the dialogue between contemporary theology and social construction’ (Wallace 2002:108). Social constructionism can actually help in the recovery of Biblical texts and spiritual practices of self-giving as performances of self-formation.

There has been some criticism of attempts to relate the postmodern decentring of the self with a Christian narrative of self-emptying (Marsh 2002:274). One point of criticism relates to the fact that a Christian’s self-emptying must be described in a theological context. Another fear is the effect that the total disappearance of the self may have on the theological value and meaning of the human being. This criticism can be countered – firstly, from a social constructionist point of view, a theological perspective is just one possible perspective on a social context; secondly, in theology and in narrative, the self is not annihilated, but reconstituted in a new kind of intersubjectivity that emphasises its socially conferred value and meaning. In the light of this research, the theological value and meaning of the self is narratively expressed and constructed, in the same way as all the other stories of the self are. I prefer to uphold the connection between the self-God-story of self-emptying and the narrative decentring of the self, because they both have effects on the social construction of self-stories, which are preferred in narrative therapy.

Our response to God's self-emptying love is a way for us to enter the wounds of the world through our own wounds and the wounds of God (Mosely 1991:127). Self-God-stories about the emptying of the self are also narratives that are contrary to modern cultural narratives about self-fulfilment, self-control and the veneration of the self. The argument for 'the preferential option for the poor' is a call to find in suffering the point of connection between self-stories and God-stories. In this approach, the intention is not for the self-emptying of the self to be a negation of the self, but for it to be the true becoming of the self through a commitment to a call for service to the other (Wallace 2002:107). The self is not destroyed, but constituted in a new subjectivity (Marsh 2002:261). These self-God-stories of self-emptying are contexts for hope, because they allow other contexts, such as one's relationship with God or other valuable relationships, to have a more constitutive effect on one's self-story. Self-surrender as a redirection of one's attachments is also discussed in the consideration of the struggle with substance abuse.

Another self-God-story based on the stories of sin and grace is the story of growth and change in the construction of self-stories.

#### **4.11 SELF-GOD-STORIES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

In this section, I want to explore the effects of the stories of spiritual growth on the social construction of self-stories. In this discussion, I use concepts that are commonly used in modern Christianity, such as growth, wholeness, integrity, etc. These concepts represent disembodied ways of talking about God and the self that promote self-specialisation in order to conform to 'objective truths' or society's expectations. Narrative ways of working are not informed by cultural notions about states of 'wholeness' achieved through 'integration' (White 1995:134.) In fact, narrative practices of externalisation and deconstruction can help people to resist 'authenticity', to refuse 'wholeness' and to protest against isolated 'personal growth' (White 1995:48). Against this background, I use these words as labels or emblems for specific life knowledges and skills (White 1997b:60). In therapy, care must be taken to deconstruct these concepts to find out what knowledges are privileged or rendered irrelevant, and what the real effects of these labels are.

#### **4.11.1 Growth as the restoration of relationships**

Our broken existence here and now is paradoxically a life from a powerful source that changes our existence against all odds. This change, brought about by our relationship with God, has traditionally been called ‘salvation’, the fullness of all God’s gifts, His healing power that is working in all areas of our lives toward wholeness, or what we may call a restoration of our relationships. From a religious, Christian perspective, spiritual growth can be seen as the realisation and appropriation of these gifts, or of salvation, in our self-stories. From a therapeutic point of view, the process of the embodiment of healing can be emphasised. As I am doing here, healing is sometimes used interchangeably with salvation as a kind of ultimate healing (Clinebell 1984:61). This healing is a broad concept that includes the person in all his or her relationships. Salvation or healing, like grace, is earthly; it is realised in our histories and it includes all our functions and experiences. In fact, salvation also consists of the gift of choice (Suggit 1994:122). The ability to choose enables people to participate in God’s ongoing work of re-creation. Although we as people are involved, the healing of brokenness of any kind remains a sign of God’s working towards the renewal of all things. Salvation is a space for growth, the *shalom* that can only be realised through the healing power of Jesus Christ working in and through us.

The appropriation of the fullness of salvation becomes manifest in people’s lives as an unending continuation of ‘conversion’ experiences, that is, a turning away from the ‘old’ stories of being open to the influence of sin to the ‘new’ stories of being open to God’s work. It is God who is reaching His purpose with us through our reconciliation with Jesus Christ, and this reconciliation includes our subjective change (Jonker 1977:208). To grow in grace is to grow in believing and experiencing that our self-stories are taken up in the stories of Jesus Christ, and the living of these new stories in our everyday life. It is the performance of these stories that transforms people’s lives (Epston 1998:12).

#### **4.11.2 Growth, the Spirit and the community**

Christians also believe that the Holy Spirit effects this salient connection between self-stories and God-stories (Jonker 1981:129). The Spirit is at work in the space for growth, the transitional space: ‘The Spirit is always active in the gap between humanly

constructed reality and the new reality God is bringing about' (Gerkin 1984:154). Social constructionism implies that this new reality and God's moving towards it with human beings and with creation as a whole cannot be known directly, but can only be known through linguistic constructions, metaphors and images, stories about God, which change continually with self- and community narratives. Furthermore, as I have already suggested, the Spirit works in a way that necessitates our thinking, planning and working (Furet 1977:175). The Spirit's being on the side of someone struggling with substance abuse still implies making choices and taking practical steps towards sobriety.

Relationality is emphasised in social constructionism and in some theological discourses (Schweitzer 2002:173; Van der Lans 2002:31). Since the Reformation, physical or substantial concepts have been replaced with relational concepts. Spiritual growth is something that happens in the personal relationship of faith between the believer and God (Jonker 1981:95,208). The relationship with Jesus Christ is important in this growth, because His life presents us with a kind of primordial archetype, modelling the power of subversive narratives. Different other relationships, for example, with people inside the faith community and with people outside the faith community, also play a decisive role in growth, because changes in self-stories are social constructions. Growth is a result of communication with and within the religious/spiritual narratives. Growth is constituted in the exchange of knowledges and skills within these relationships.

#### **4.11.3 Growth and the self of modernity**

Christianity has been influenced by evolutionist modernist views about progression. In this framework, spiritual growth is seen as a gradual, continuing improvement, but this is not consistent with people's lived experience. Instead, our growth into God-stories is often characterised by discontinuity, with 'times out', with moving backwards and forwards between the old and the new. Our perception of wholeness must always be tempered by the presence of its opposite (Mosely 1991:76). If salvation is the *telos* of the self, the self is always divided between what is and what can be. The self does not have unlimited potential. Not only are we limited, in the sense that it is difficult to think outside existing knowledge systems, but sin and brokenness are also part of our existence; our humanity as such is subject to limitations. Our hope lies not in natural evolutionistic progression, but in trusting that God will reach His purposes with us



despite other forces' influencing us. This implies that spiritual growth will always be a struggle: it includes effort and a continual re-alignment with preferred God-stories.

Another way in which modernity has influenced Christianity is in the essentialist view of the self. In this view, self-stories of integration and wholeness are meant to bring the self into line with a certain core reality inside the self. Otto Kernberg (1976 cited by Gerkin 1984:145) sees growth as change with regard to integration and wholeness: 'An authentic self can come about only when diverse self-images have been organised into an integrated self-concept'. The road to authenticity is the road to integration of mutually dissociated aspects of the self.

In a narrative approach, concepts such as integration and wholeness have nothing to do with individualistic or intra-psychic processes. Integration has to do with the inner coherence of the plot in the self-narratives. It can be reflected in a continuity between the landscape of meaning and the landscape of action in self-stories. People also arrive at a sense of authenticity in life through multiple performances of the stories of their lives and the affirmation of these stories in the feedback of their audiences. Christians usually find contiguity in their self-stories through the identification with the Biblical stories or the values of the Christian community. The relationship with God-stories can provide a continuity of meaning, even in diverse self-stories: 'Their experience with God touches and transforms the totality of their being and becomes the core around which everything else is integrated and is given its meaning and direction' (Benner 1998:217-218). In this regard, we must always be careful not to think of the self in terms of a solid, timeless inner core, but rather in terms of contextual relationships in which our narratives are constructed. Our wholeness has something to do with living in fellowship with our Creator. Wholeness is also achieved in our relationships in community, not on our own: 'Since wholeness is always relational, self-fulfillment is a psychological impossibility' (Clinebell 1984:31).

Narrative ways of working also do not subscribe to the concept of faith stages in religious development (Fowler 1987), because such a concept is based on structuralist assumptions. A stage of faith is a metaphoric paradigm of the self-God relationship at a particular time in the narrative history of the self (Mosely 1991:57).

#### **4.11.4 Growth as humility, agency and communication**

Spiritual growth also includes the growing capacity to live with paradoxes regarding the spiritual life, to appreciate the relativity of people's own viewpoints, to know that a big part of life relates to experiences and dimensions that cannot be rationally explained (Fowler 1987:71-72). The embracing of paradoxes is a characteristic of a 'conjunctive' or connecting faith. Embracing paradox is sometimes called a mark of spiritual maturity; it is the ability to embrace complexity. It is to make peace with the fact that there are many angles from which to view reality, or many perspectives to truth (Anderson 1999:161). It includes the humility to refrain from absolutising of any kind and to wait in ambiguity for the larger movements of spirit. This ability of faith to live with paradox and complexity is achieved in telling stories and using of metaphors. Cultivating this ability can counter the sense of 'stuckness' often experienced by people struggling with substance abuse.

In a narrative perspective, spiritual growth is thus about the possibility of agency and the possibilities of relationship. Agency is the ability to re-construct self-stories on one's own behalf; and it is made possible by the indeterminacy of the texts of our lives and the indeterminacy of the texts of God. To fill in the gaps, we are recruited into the retelling of our stories; and so our lives evolve through a process of re-authoring (Epston 1998:14). Growth is the development of authorship competencies, which are socially performed. It involves continually re-positioning oneself within preferred empowering discourses. Religious people have an extra mundane resource in this reconstruction and re-positioning, in the new story that is provided for them by their connectedness with the religious tradition. The stories of Christianity, with the values inherent to Christianity, can be incorporated into the co-construction of the self.

As I have mentioned before, growth is relational, constituted in interaction with God-stories that includes the faith community and the culture. Therefore growth involves skills that contribute to the building of relationship, which in turn enhances the communication competencies of the community (Day 2002:80,85). Spiritual growth also involves a co-construction of God-stories within a social context. From the context of our own self-stories, we actively and creatively develop new interpretations of God-stories, revisiting familiar images or stories, or creating new God-images or God-stories (Putman 1998:195). This process is illustrated in the conversations reported in Chapter

6.

The resources for spiritual growth are valuable for narrative therapy, because they present the self as changeable and as being formed over time within relationships. This provides grace-full alternatives to self-stories of being stuck, even in the smallest details of a person's life. Self-God-stories of spiritual growth are a context for hope, as they hold the promise that things can be different, even for someone struggling with substance abuse. These self-God-stories of growth, together with the stories of the 'old life' and the 'new life' and of self-emptying, relate to the migration of identity metaphor that I discuss in Chapter 5 with regard to a person's struggle with substance abuse.

Spiritual growth as the performance of agency and relationship can also contribute to the way a person experiences illness. Next, I want to focus on illness as a specific area in which self-God-stories can make a difference in the social construction of self-stories.

#### **4.12 SELF-GOD-STORIES OF ILLNESS**

In the previous chapter, I discussed the way modern discourses about illness contribute to the pathologising and totalising of people's identities. It can be helpful to look at how God-stories influence self-stories in illness. This topic is also relevant for the next chapter, because problems with substance abuse are often seen as an illness.

The illness narratives of a religious person depend to a great extent on the discourses about illness in which religious/spiritual people are positioned. I want to reframe some of the illness narratives that Kaethe Weingarten (2001) mentions within a faith-context.

The **restitution narrative**, the **stability narrative** and the **progressive narrative** (Weingarten 2001) are congruent with a view that emphasises God's involvement in healing, within processes that develop more or less as expected. These narratives are performed either by following the perceived prescriptions of the religious tradition, and/or by following the medical route as an extension of God's involvement. The basis for these narratives can be the promises of God that healing is possible, or the created inherent healing tendency in all living organisms. A large part of the gospels deals with stories about Jesus' healings.

The **quest narrative** (Weingarten 2001) is related more to the role religion can play in assisting a person in making sense of an illness, and striving to be responsible with regard to helping him- or herself and others in the process of meaning-making, making illness a purposeful experience. Even if a person stays ill, the situation is bearable if it can be understood as part of a larger narrative, if it has meaning in the life of the people involved and thus in the bigger scheme of things.

The **chaos narrative** and **the regressive narrative** (Weingarten 2001) can find resources in religion/spirituality to stay afloat amongst the waves of illness, or to find rest in the eye of the storm, by identifying with these types of narrative in the Bible or in the religious tradition. These narratives relate to interaction with God and God-stories, which can bring acceptance, peace and joy in the midst of destruction. It is the knowledge of being at home, taken up in the stories of God's eternal love.

By contrast to such narratives, modernist illness discourses invite an ill person to see him- or herself as useless, expendable, unable to measure up to society's demands. This point is taken up again in the discussion of substance abuse as illness (Section 5.5). The illness narratives that I have discussed here can provide a vantage point outside the experience of illness, enabling a person to stand back and look at it, to reflect on it, to resist the dominant cultural ideas about illness and normality, such as being abnormal and failing to measure up to standards of success and achievement (Weingarten 2001:1). These narratives can assist a person in seeing the way he or she deals with illness as only one possible and valid narrative amongst many other narratives.

I want to explore the ways in which God-stories can make a difference in the experience of illness stories a bit further. Illness as an experience and having to cope with the symptoms of and disabilities relating to a disease affect spirituality, in the sense that they have the potential to disrupt the relatedness of spirituality. But disease does not only affect a person's spirituality. It can become something that speaks about a person's identity. It can generate self-stories of despair, helplessness, meaninglessness, isolation, resentment and sorrow. This can result in a retreat from purposeful activity, a readiness to stop responding to challenges, a state of vulnerability. Conversely, a person can move to a state of resilience.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from problems both strengthened and more resourceful (Walsh 1999b:37). States of resilience can be described as follows: ‘Hope, agency, purpose, communion, gratitude and joy, on the other hand, represent readiness to move forward with goal-directed actions that care for self and others. They are states of resilience to illness’ (Griffith & Griffith 2002:265). Spiritual ways of being have the ability to influence illness states physiologically toward resilience. In the telling and re-telling of illness narratives, the ill person is moved either toward or away from states of resilience such as hope, purpose and communion with others. A person’s intimate connectedness can sustain him or her in illness: ‘Spirituality and religion provide for many people the knowledge and skills needed to sustain resilience against debilitating or painful medical diseases’ (Griffith & Griffith 2002:275). One example is that God-stories can assist in the externalising of illness, as something partially taken up in the stories about common human frailty and brokenness, and partially taken up in stories about God’s graceful involvement, as having a purpose with illness. Through this externalising, space is provided for people to become protagonists in their life stories, agents rather than patients (Epston 1998:51).

In addition to these states of resilience, faith can also have healing benefits (Walsh 1999b:39). There are more and more references to cases that confirm that faith, prayer, meditation and spiritual rituals can strengthen health and healing by triggering emotions which influence physiological systems (Benson 1996:131; Levine 1987:14; Weil 1997:28-31). Meditation can ease the ‘noise’ in the mind, bring tranquillity to the heart and rid the body of tension and pain. Studies in faith and prayer suggest that faith and the ritual of prayer may trigger emotions that, in turn, may lead to changes in the immune and cardiovascular systems (Benson 1996:126-127, 146-147; Goldberg 1996:49-59; Wright 1999:63).

In addition to illness narratives, storying oneself can be valuable around the sickbed. Other self-stories and God-stories can become enclaves of the self when medicine inhabits the realm of the body (Young 1989:153). The injection of the self in the body through self-God-stories can counter processes of objectification. The telling and re-telling of self-God-stories is a way of inhabiting one’s life, especially if one’s life is limited in various ways. Particularly the place where self- and God-stories meet can be a wellspring of hope – as Louw (1994:77) puts it: ‘The patient’s story must be put in

touch with God's story and vice versa. Where these two stories converge and the patient discovers God's fulfilled promises, hope emerges.'

Self-God-stories contribute to narrative ways of understanding to regard illness as another valid way of being normal. Self-God-stories can contribute to the restoration of relatedness of the ill person with God, other and self. It can bring peace in the conflict with one's own body. Self-God-stories provide more narrative options in which to position oneself, and enable a person to live his or her preferred story in these circumstances. Substance abuse as an illness narrative is discussed in Chapter 5. Living one's preferred story, in illness and health, also includes being oriented within a moral framework.

#### **4.13 SELF-GOD-STORIES ABOUT MORALITY**

In Section 3.7.2, I have already referred to the relevance of the moral-ethical dimension in the social construction of self-stories. It is a dimension shared by spirituality/religion and is also relevant in the context of substance abuse, which is often regarded as a moral illness, or moral failure.

##### **4.13.1 The meaning and worth of self-stories**

A spiritual belief system, representing a friendly continuity with all that is, is closely linked to a moral awareness. Such an awareness relates to an ethical way of living, to doing what is right in accordance with one's conscience, which is informed by specific values: 'Morality involves the activity of informed conscience judging right and wrong based on principles of fairness, decency, and compassion' (Walsh 1999a:6). For a religious/spiritual person, this morality is the extension of God's law of love, and therefore excludes mere moralism, as discussed in Section 4.8.

Social constructionism does not reject claims about the real and the good, but emphasises that our ideas of what is real and good emerge within a contingent and historically located tradition (Wallace 2002:101). The real and the good exist, but they cannot be objectively known. They are known through the contextual social constructions of these knowledges and our commitment to them. Christians commit to belief in an external constitutive good in the love of God, but also in God's love for

humankind. Even in the disenchanted immanent humanism, there is an admission of a higher good that inspires and empowers human beings (Freeman & Brockmeier 2001:89; Taylor 1989:95).

Part of being human is that our lives are not value free, as modern naturalist and utilitarian theories lead us to believe. For Taylor (1989), identity, being a self, is linked with the orientation of the self within moral frameworks. Moral frameworks are about the way we position ourselves in the light of that which is the ultimate good for us (Taylor 1989:34). Conceptions of the 'good life' are woven into the narrative fabric of human identity (Freeman & Brockmeier 2001:75). We own our orientation to the moral good only in terms of the stories of our lives, of how we have become and where we are going. The moral good has the capacity to confer meaning and worth in the construction of our self-stories when we connect our lives to some greater story. It contributes to a 'thick' description of our lives.

#### **4.13.2 Conscience: responsibility for the other**

In the construction of self-God-stories of morality, the role of the conscience is often mentioned (Ricoeur 1992; Wallace 2002). For Ricoeur (1992:341-342), the self is formed through the dissymmetry between myself and the other before me, but also through the voice of conscience that summons me to attend to the needs of others (see also Wallace 2002:106). Ricoeur (1992; cited by Wallace 2002:106) sees the origin of conscience as the voice of God. This does not imply that our conscience is not discursively constructed. Our conscience is derived from communal participation. It is constructed in the same way as the 'mind' (as discussed in Section 3.5.1), that is, through the imposition of local language structures on the human function that we call conscience. The conscience makes possible the subject's moral capacity to receive and understand what is perceived as God's voice through internal dialogue. The conscience is therefore not only constituted in the realm of communication with a community, but the conscience is also a way of communicating with oneself, a forum of the colloquy of the self with the self. Like God self, it is a position of reflection in regard to one's respons-ability towards others.

Conscience is an indispensable condition for ethico-moral experiences. Our conscience provides a relational space for the self to become ethically defined. It is our consciences

that inform us about changes that have to be made in our lives and in society (Schrag 1997:94,98). The self is constituted by this moral capacity, the life of regard for others: 'I have no self – I am not an "I" without the other awakening me to my responsibility for [his or] her welfare' (Wallace 2002:107). The ideas of Levinas and Bakhtin (cited by Hermans & Dupont 2002:251) about the irreducibility of the Other express the argument that the otherness of the other is part of my self-stories, of who I am. Therefore the otherness of the other is the motivation for the moral responsibility of the self for the other, and in that, also the means for the construction of the self.

The consciences of people who struggle with substance abuse are often burdened with accumulated guilt. The God-story of grace, forgiveness and acceptance, as embodied in the faith community, as well as amends to people that have been hurt, can contribute to the healing of a person's conscience. In the faith community, a person's conscience can also be formed in a way that can help a person to re-connect with his or her preferred values. On the journey to freedom from substance abuse, a commitment to things that one regards as the ultimate good can help to minimise a commitment to consumer products that are abusive.

#### **4.13.3 Living ethically: community and therapy**

For Schrag (1997:87), the distinction between society and community lies in the fact that community is indicative of an ethico-moral dimension, as it is a more binding constituent than society. The church can be an example of such a community of moral guidance and formation. The self is not a fixed entity with stable moral attributes. Our moral orientation becomes manifest and is constituted by ethical actions in community. To live out one's story within a community such as the church constitutes moral action according to the standards of that community (Gergen 2002b:17). To live ethically with others in community is to respond in a fitting manner to their discourse(s) and action(s). Freeman and Brockmeier (2001:95) go so far as to see narrative integrity as the coherence and depth of a person's ethical commitments. This is linked to White's idea about spiritualities of the surface that I have already mentioned, as the living of a story that makes a difference. The discourses that the moral self inhabits can also be critical of the communal groups to which a person belongs. This criticism can evolve from a narrative political stance, or from the challenges that gospel stories present to the *status*



*quo*. Absolutist moral language can be divisive and can contribute to conflict. The question is rather what useful ways of living are made possible through moral language.

One of the important movements in narrative therapy is striving towards ethically responsible practices, such as placing clients in the centre and foregrounding their expertise on their own lives, and such as the transparency and self-reflection of the therapist. This kind of therapy is radically collaborative in all its endeavours. It is also political in the deconstruction of power/knowledge relationships, of the real effects of ‘universal truths’ and of cultural discourses that objectify and marginalise people. The construction of knowledges and skills for living in narrative therapy are intended to contribute to morally sensitive environments. Narrative ways of working want to allow morality to become a reality: ‘Knowledge is no longer the subject, but in the service of the subject: its only legitimacy is the fact that it allows morality to become reality’ (Lyotard 1984:36).

In narrative therapy, moral and ethical formation, informed by religion/spirituality, is one context for the construction of preferred self-stories. It is not universal or normalising; and nor does it subjugate ‘truths’ or enforce them. Confronting people struggling with substance abuse in a moralistically judgemental way can result in a need for self-justification and a withdrawal from help. What is morally and ethically fitting for a person must be negotiated within the context of interaction with stories of conscience, stories of God and stories of community. This narrative ethicising is truly participatory (Kotzé 2002:17-21). These kinds of moral self-God-stories are a context for hope, as they provide and motivate people towards a ‘better reason’ for their choices and the possibility of satisfying their needs in a socially constructive way.

#### **4.13.4 Social justice**

Moral awareness can also generate social justice activism. Activism is underpinned by feelings of empathy and anger in response to troubling and painful disorders in the social fabric (Perry & Rolland 1999:273). Cultural tendencies such as individualism, consumerism, violence, professionalism<sup>5</sup> and despair function like counter-spiritualities that are toxic to a justice-seeking spirituality. Our stories and futures are intertwined

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<sup>5</sup> I refer to professionalism here in the sense of the subjugation of local and contextual narratives in favour of dominating grand narratives.

with the stories and futures of the community. Social justice activism is an important expression of spirituality as the fruit of our connectedness with God, humanity and environment. A spiritual passion for the world manifests itself in seeking justice, in giving a voice to the voiceless or powerless, and in working for change so that people might live more abundantly (Anderson 1999:165). According to Henry Nouwen (1979:19), mysticism and revolution are two aspects of the same attempt to bring about radical change. This activism also influences the development of spirituality, as it can contribute to the performance of people's preferred self-stories: 'Moving out of and beyond oneself can be empowering, leading one to find oneself anew' (Perry & Rolland 1999:283).

Next, I focus on more specific areas in which self- and God-stories influence one another.

#### **4.14 SELF-STORIES EMBEDDED IN GOD-STORIES**

In the constitution and living of a religious person's self-narratives, the person's being situated in the narratives of God is vital. People are defined by their being situated in the history of God with the world (Gerkin 1984:66). What follows is a collage of short sketches of particular ways in which self-stories are taken up in God-stories and God-stories are taken up in self-stories.

##### **4.14.1 Meaning**

One of the important possible effects of God-stories on self-stories is the positioning of the self within the frame of a meaningful life. In addition to narratives themselves, as units of meaning, religion has a meaning-making function in the constructions of the self that contribute to the dimension of the 'worthwhileness of life' (Van der Lans 2002:96-97). This meaning can relate to our being purposefully created by God, and to our participation in the advancement of God's Kingdom. Because God is active in history, it means that our lives here and now have meaning (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:74). Our true end is harmonious relations with a spiritual universe (James [1902] 2002:345).

Viktor Frankl (1962:99) is famous for his conclusions about the value of meaning in the worst conditions of life. Because of an attitude that life is worthwhile, a religious person can still say 'yes' to life, in spite of everything that life can bring. Even bad things that happen to a person are bearable if the person believes that they have a purpose. These stories of having meaning and worth counter what is called historical and existential anxiety, an anxiety related to our purpose or place in life and to our heritage of finitude and expendability (Clinebell 1968:72). Having purpose and meaning in one's life can enlarge one's sense of self and reduce the meaning and impact of socially constructed problems in one's life.

In the conversations I had with people struggling with substance abuse, the attribution of meaning to their lives was one of the most consistent motivating factors in the changes they want to make in their self-stories. The possibility of a life that is worthwhile can be a source of hope that things can be different. Worthwhileness or meaning can also contribute to resilience.

#### **4.14.2 Resilience**

Spirituality also includes the belief that we can overcome adversity. More specifically, faith enhances resilience in adversity. As I have already mentioned (see Section 4.12), resilience is the ability to bounce back from problems both strengthened and more resourceful (Walsh 1999b:37), the capacity to endure and grow through suffering. This involves meaning-making in suffering and hardship that can either lead to change or to an acceptance that can transcend adversity.

This meaning-making and change are narratively performed. People can change their attitudes about themselves and about life even if they cannot change what is happening to them, and that can bring hope. Hope, provided by beliefs, is possible, even in the instance of the loss of a loved one, illness, the injustice of racism and poverty. In the telling of their stories of suffering and adversity, people can make sense of their suffering, interpret it, and in this way can find healing (Wright 1999:66). I think it is very important to realise that the resources for interpretation and meaning-making in resilience narratives are much more than just beliefs. Such resources also include being part of an affirmative community, prayer, rituals, and just experiencing God's presence. Spending time in the beams of God's love brings comfort and a sense of being loved

and accepted. It provides new energy to do things. Human beings are vulnerable to forces that threaten us; we are all challenged by and in our vulnerability to pain and distress. In the end, resilience is also a possibility in all of us, and it amounts to holding our limitations and God's grace together, with grace as the last word.

Resilience in the context of this research is the gift to grow through the afflictions caused by the struggle with substance abuse, the gift of being able to continue on one's chosen journey away from substance abuse, in spite of setbacks and disappointments. It therefore contributes to the performance of hope.

#### **4.14.3 Emotional postures**

The added dimension of emotion that religion evokes plays an important part in James's ([1902] 2002) argument. I have already discussed the point that emotions are social constructions (see Section 3.4.2). From a social constructionist point of view, emotions are social performances, and are constitutive of self-stories (Gergen 1994:222). Emotional performances are embedded in broader patterns of relationship. This includes patterns of relationship within the faith tradition and faith community.

In Section 4.9.2, I have already referred to James's observation that religion generates emotional states of solemn joy, happiness and satisfaction, resulting from a self-surrender to God (James [1902] 2002:63,250; see also Pattison 1988:169-192). James also describes the feeling of being lifted up in a friendly continuity with the Ideal Power or 'higher universe'. There is a shift from one's emotional centre toward a temper of peace and loving and harmonious affections (James [1902] 2002:212-213,345). This can be equated to the emotional posture of tranquillity, to which must be added the emotional posture of mobilisation (Griffith & Griffith 2002:144). James ([1902] 2002:345) refers to this posture of mobilisation as a new zest that takes the form of an appeal to earnestness and heroism. Beliefs recruit the person into particular emotional states. Assumptions usually foster emotional postures of tranquillity that are necessary for the desired relatedness with self, others and God. Convictions tend to arouse emotional postures of mobilisation (Griffith & Griffith 2002:145-146).

The emotional states of tranquillity acquired through spirituality can be a valuable resource to counter anxiety and fear, which can result from cultural expectations in a

competitive environment. It can also resolve the tensions that push a person to look for peace and calm in damaging ways, for example, being abused by substances. The emotional states of mobilisation as described above can provide an energy and commitment to carry a person through the performance of preferred self-stories in such adverse circumstances. As contexts for hope, both states provide a space that enables a person to choose a life-expanding or life-enhancing narrative. The ability to choose a life-expanding narrative is constitutive of hope.

#### **4.14.4 Hope**

Hope is mentioned throughout this chapter. It is relevant to my research, because in the study I argue that self-God-stories are performances of hope, especially in the context of people's struggling with substance abuse. Hope motivates human life to achieve its purposes. When human actions are fully pre-determined, there can be no hope, for there is no possibility of shaping the future. When a person has a sense of meaning and purpose, there is hope; and where there is hope, there is the possibility of change (Suggit 1994:122).

Hope keeps us moving towards new life even in the face of corruption and death. Hope is to refuse to accept despair or defeat. Hope is not limited to our own psychological strength, but it is anchored in God's self-disclosure in history, in God's promises of breaking through deterministic forces: 'It is grounded in the historic Christ-event which is understood as a definitive breach in the deterministic chain of human trial and error, and as a dramatic affirmation that there is light on the other side of darkness' (Nouwen 1979:76). Hope is to look into the abyss, together with the community, and to experience there a radical amazement (Weingarten 2000:402). Hope, as the antidote to despair, is thus the sense that things can be different, that there are alternative possibilities. It is the conviction that God will bring things to full, glorious completion (Brueggemann 1993:40).

Hope is an absolute necessity to counter the experience of being stuck in the day-to-day struggle with substance abuse. Hope is the one thing that enables a person to endure, to carry on along a chosen path, and even to start over and over again and again. Hope provides agency; and agency provides hope in the storying of one's life. One resource for hope is prayer.

#### 4.14.5 Prayer

It can be said that prayer, as an intimate conversation with God, is the essence of religion (James [1902] 2002:358). It is a spiritual practice that involves mind and body and expands a person's openness to spiritual experiences. In prayer, spiritual energy becomes active and has effects in the phenomenal world.

Just as we know ourselves in conversation with another (our interlocutive selves), we can know ourselves through the witnessing eyes of God. Prayer provides a position from which to witness and reflect on one's own life: 'One can think of "God" as an epistemological position to which a person moves when it is important to witness the whole of one's life. This self-reflective knowing often takes place through prayer and during meditation' (Griffith & Griffith 2002:10).

In order for prayer to be a dialogue, certain emotional states are also important in letting God's voice enter one's life. This includes emotional state associated with curiosity, reflections, listening and musing. Anger, resentment, blame and shame take a person out of a physiological capacity for entering into dialogue (Griffith & Griffith 2002:116.) This does not mean that one cannot express anger toward God in prayer; there are, in fact, many narratives in the Bible (for example, the story of Job) that can inform our narratives when we feel anger toward God. (I will also say something more about the value of lamenting in the discussion of the worship service, see Section 4.14.7). However, this stance, as opposed to a reflective, listening stance, reduces the opportunities for creative ways of solving problems.

As I show in Chapter 5, a struggle with substance abuse is to a large extent about being limited in one's options for living, about being stuck in the abusive ways and demands of substances. In this context, prayer provides an external vantage point from which to look at one's life. As prayer invites additional contexts for the construction of self-stories, new alternative possibilities for living one's life can be opened up; or one can be re-connected to previously lived preferred self-stories. Most often, prayer is experienced as a surrendering to what is understood as God's will and views, and in this state of mind a person can become aware of preferred ways of being. Prayer is therefore a performance of hope.

Prayer can play a role in self-God-stories about the confession of sin, the appropriation of grace and the gifts of the gospel narratives, empowerment in adversity, increasing spiritual connectedness, thus the centring of the relationship with God. Prayer contributes to the re-remembering of God. It can energise and satisfy intimate relational needs – needs sustained by the isolating effect of substance abuse.

In discussions, people struggling with substance abuse often mentioned the power of prayer to change material circumstances as important in the practice of their faith. However, this also highlights the possibility of disappointment in the power of prayer. In the conversations, it became apparent that prayer as such has more value than its specific material outcomes. Prayer can also contribute to the formation of beliefs, as expressed in the words *lex orandi lex credendi*, which implies that we believe like we pray. It thus has a powerful constitutive effect on the religious person's self-God-stories. Rituals and ceremony also have a constitutive effect on people's self-God-stories.

#### **4.14.6 Rituals and ceremonies**

Turner (1982, cited by Griffith & Griffith 2002:168) defines ritual as the 'prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects'. It involves mind and body, and stages a direct encounter between the person and the numinous. As discussed in Section 3.7.6.3, rituals as processes can be divided into three phases. The first phase is separation from a well-known situation in life. The second phase is liminality, a stage of ambiguity. The third phase is one of reaggregation of a person as belonging to the new position or stage in life. Rituals stir emotions of wonder and openness to new possibilities. The meaning of the second phase of liminality is especially valuable in positioning a person as separate from expected religious or cultural narratives. It provides a way to 'place distress in the context of progress' (White 1995:101).

Rituals can ease us through uncertain transitions and unfamiliar situations, by scripting our actions and responses, and so give us courage in dark hours (Walsh 1999b:45). A ritual can become a dependable source of security and comfort, a way to define

boundaries and confirm identity. Rituals have the ability to hold contradictions together; and they also connect our particular tragedy or transition with all human experience (Anderson 1999:175).

There are covenant rituals, such as the administration of the sacraments, rituals of anointing, rituals of the migration from the 'old life' to the 'new' life, rituals of conversion, rituals of self-emptying, rituals of illness and healing, rituals of growing from one state in life to a different state. Being a lived story, rituals can only be understood within communities' narratives. Rituals become part of and contribute to the thick description of our God-stories and our self-stories.

Griffith and Griffith (2002:170,171), like Turner, distinguish between rituals and ceremonies. Ceremonies involve prescribed social behaviour that proclaims order in the face of life's uncertainties and chaos. Whereas rituals transform, ceremonies evoke emotions of certainty and convictions in the light of what is already familiar and stable. As a declaration or indication of preferred ways of being, ceremonies can affirm and authenticate self-stories.

Rituals and ceremonies are part of the formalisation of people's relationship with God. They confirm other self-God-stories and contribute to their thick description, as opposed to the rituals and ceremonies that accompany the struggle with abuse through substances. In Chapter 5, I discuss the relevance of ritual for the migration of identity metaphor regarding a person's moving away from the authoritative hold that substance abuse exerts on a person's life. I will also refer to the way rituals and ceremonies are used in the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) movement, and how it can be applied in narrative therapy. Rituals and ceremonies, such as prayer, are contexts of hope, because they can contribute to the performance of self-stories that are alternatives to problem stories. The liturgy of a worship service also contains elements of prayer, ritual and ceremony.

#### **4.14.7 Liturgy**

In the context of the interaction between self- and God-stories, the liturgy, in the functioning of a worship service of a local faith community, is relevant as a drama of self-God-stories.



The central issue in worship is the encounter with the God that is present. Therefore it can be likened to the interaction with God in prayer. In a postmodern context, God is present through narrativity, through His-story and His traces in the world. Narratives, metaphors and rituals are the traces that point us in His direction. Not only is the liturgy constituted by narratives and not only are we taken up in the telling of Biblical narratives, the liturgy is a performance of a self-God-story. In a typical Dutch Reformed service, the events start with our praying for God's presence. We go on to sing His praises and confess our sin to God and to one another. We appropriate God's forgiveness and listen to the Spirit's movement through His word, hearing anew the stories of the good news in Christ. We confess our faith together and offer prayers of intercession for one another and the world. We receive confirmation of God's blessings through the sign of the Lord's supper and experience Christ's presence in the Eucharist. We are then sent into the world as witnesses of God's Kingdom, with His blessing.

In a personal communication, Prof. Dirk Kotzé drew my attention to the fact that the Reformed liturgy does not provide an opportunity for people to express their achievements in their spiritual/religious lives, or room to accuse and question God with regard to suffering in their lives. In a Reformed liturgy, God's grace is always seen as constitutive of human achievements, as opposed to the self-glorification of the Pharisee in his prayer to God. Nevertheless, the idea of God's honouring a person for doing the right thing is not strange in Biblical narratives.

Humility implies an acceptance that we are valued by God. This value must also be expressed in the liturgy. It can be acknowledged in prayer, in thanksgiving, in preaching, in an opportunity for a person to witness an achievement, or a ceremony in which we express our appreciation for each other and receive acknowledgement. It can also be part of the conversation about our role in the appropriation of the blessings in our life. There is also a place to realise one's own participation in God's gifts.

We do not do enough to help people to accept and receive God's grace in the liturgy (Burger 1999:209; Wolterstorff 1992:296). The separation of the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments has resulted in a dearth of opportunities for appropriating God's gifts of grace (Wolterstorff 1992:295-296). The use of the sacraments can go a long way in liturgically expressing our reception of and

participation in God's actions. High on the list of required reforms of the service is the need to recover the Eucharist as an important liturgical element. For people whose lives have been disrupted and restricted through a struggle with substance abuse, the experience of participating in God's gifts can be healing and can expand possibilities for living. This is confirmed by how frequently the participants (see Chapter 6) refer to the sacrament of sharing the bread and wine.

Coenie Burger (1999:210) mentions that not many Western believers realise that complaining and lamenting is part of prayer. The modern illusion of control and managing behaviour and emotions may have led us away from celebration, but also from lamenting. God's ethos (how we see and experience Him) cannot be present if human pathos (our experience of suffering) is not present in the church service (Burger 1999:210). God's grace becomes visible in our human need. Of course, there is mostly a relation between our needs and our debts, but lamentation must have a place in its own right. The pain of complaining is about not understanding and not deserving the bad things. Lamenting is a necessary performance of the experience of injustice in the world outside, because the world outside does not seem to correspond to God's promises. It is an expression of faith in the tendency towards the victory of life over death in the long run in the light of Christ's victory. It is a longing for things to be different. Lamenting is necessary, for we need to be honest about our experiences, and the relationship with God needs to be honest. Faith and prayer are more often triggered by suffering than by prosperity (Pattison 1988:167). People whose lives have been touched by substance abuse can experience relief and find strength in being open and honest before God with regard to our pains and perceived misfortunes.

In addition to lamenting, there must also be a place for praise and thanksgiving. Liturgical praise and thanksgiving in the midst of brokenness is an act of hope that a future is possible. In the context of substance abuse, it is a refusal to comply with the demands of substances, a reaching out to something better.

The liturgy or worship service of a local faith community is the performance of self-God-stories that can be alternatives to substance abuse stores. The liturgy is about self-God-stories that are formative in the shaping of identity, the identity of the community and that of the individuals in the community (Smith 1997:9). With such self-God-

stories, the liturgy can and must be continued in the world; the brokenness of the world as well as the possibilities for transformation must be taken seriously.

In this transformation, feminist images can also contribute to transformation at many levels.

#### **4.14.8 Feminist images**

In a cultural and religious environment that is not completely liberated from sexism, a consideration of feminist images in God-stories can introduce alternative subject positions within self-God discourses. These can contribute to the social construction of preferred self-stories. I have already discussed relational schemas (Section 4.7; Ozorak 2003:254) as cultural discourses about the possible patterns of relationship between members in a community and between their relationships with God. Gender differences have an influence on these relational schemas, in that men and women use different patterns of interaction with God and with the faith community. These schemas reflect the wider cultural assumptions of the community, and can be clearly seen in the traditional role differentiation between the sexes in the church.

Since Biblical times, the church has been entrenched in patriarchal ways of being (Bons-Storm 1996:127). These patriarchal values and practices are being challenged through the widespread impact of feminism in society and in the church (Gerkin 1991:38-39). Looking through the lens of feminism provides a range of challenging religious/spiritual subject positions that can be taken up with regard to metaphors, narratives and discourses. What follows are a few examples of the alternative self-God-stories made possible by feminist images.

In Section 1.3.3, I have already mentioned the study of the relationship between God images and self-esteem undertaken by Carroll Saussy. According to Saussy (1991:49), gender distortions contaminate the primary source of God representations, or God *imagos*, namely the images or representations of parents and of self. Even a positive lived experience of God can be subsumed by hierarchical patriarchal claims that restrict men's and women's God-stories.

Language shapes and is shaped by our experience. Therefore, men's and women's ways

of speaking about God must also be informed by women's experience, their community of reference and interpretive tradition (Ackermann 1994:205). Gender-inclusive images, metaphors, adjectives or descriptions of God are necessary, as are more community-conscious concepts. This can include female images of God such as mother, homemaker, a mother eagle, hen, midwife and a woman giving birth (Andrews & Kotzé 2000:325). It can also include Jesus' word for God, 'Abba', which speaks about familiarity, warmth and respect, Jesus' insistence on the connection between the need to love our neighbour and the need to love God, on the necessity of relationship for the realisation of redemption, on God's love as not demanding but as unconditional, on God as friend, lover, and so on. Generally speaking, women tend to construe all aspects or functions of the self more relationally than men: the self is not compartmentalised into 'inner workings' (Ozorak 2003:250).

The self in relationship with God is a self that works and loves and seeks happiness and cares for the eco-system. All these images and descriptions have been central in many women's quests towards more positive self-concepts (Saussy 1991:71-75). Bons-Storm (1996:129-130) also discusses the need for these representations of a God/dess that strengthen women's selfhood.

This re-constructions of God-images and God-metaphors also involve re-visiting the Biblical narratives, re-readings of the text in a different key (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:88). The bottom line is that any interpretation, action or practice that marginalises women and perpetuates hierarchical divisions and ideas of domination is no longer considered normative (Bons-Storm 1996:129).

Although woman's emancipation in faith communities still has a long way to go, there are encouraging signs of spiritual talk that is healing for women: 'The inclusion of women priests and rabbis signifies a broadening in collective Judeo-Christian images of God that makes possible different kinds of stories about God's relationships with persons' (Ozorak 2003:254).

More inclusive ways of talking about God open up the possibility for more varied experiences of God and therefore for multiple self-God-stories. Feminism invites a spirituality that is aware of the ways in which social discourses can be oppressive, that is process-oriented, and emphasises relationality and inclusiveness. This spirituality is a

powerful counter-story to self-God-stories of individualism, isolation, of always being opposed to others, of things being only black and white, with no grey areas, of instant victory, and others, which are part of the support structure of substance abuse. Feminist images thus provide alternative resources for the social construction of self-stories in the struggle with substance abuse.

In addition to the feminist emphasis on relationality, inclusiveness and its discourse critique, feminist images also relate to elements of grace, as discussed in Section 4.8. Feminist images look at grace in the incarnation or embodiment of faith, in unconditional self-acceptance and in the resurrection of marginalised stories. As I discuss in Chapter 5, these grace stories can be the starting point for the construction of alternative self-stories in the context of a struggle with substance abuse. Like grace, feminist images exclude any domination, objectification or manipulation of the other, things that can be part of a culture of substance abuse.

Because of my emphasis on feminist spirituality, I also discuss gender constraints with regard to substance abuse in Chapter 5. In the end, feminist images provide a context for hope, especially for people struggling with substance abuse, because they create a doorway to a spirituality that is different from restrictive religious and cultural norms.

The next section takes the idea of God images further and explores other valuable ways of talking about and therefore experiencing God in the social construction of self-stories. Metaphors are one of the preferred ways of languaging in narrative therapy and in religion/spirituality, because of their potential for constructing our lived realities.

#### **4.14.9 Metaphors and images of God**

The transitional space between the subjective and objective descriptions of reality can best be understood through symbolic ways of speaking (Griffith & Griffith 2002:24). This relates to what I have already mentioned: no human expression can fully contain or refer to God as He is (see Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). In social constructionism, there is no direct or uninterpreted access to reality, and therefore metaphors are important as a way of referring to God and His relation to humanity (Van Huyssteen 1997).

The Christian tradition and community have been sustained to a large extent through the appropriation of metaphors (Gerkin 1991:16). Metaphors are the speaking of one thing/concept as if it were another; one thing is likened to something else (Deist 1984:156). In metaphors, well-known, familiar events or items in daily life are used to refer to the way God is understood (images of God) or the way the relationship with Him is experienced (Griffith & Griffith 2002:64). It includes knowledges and experiences. Some sources for metaphors can be the Bible, the community of faith and its traditions, the family or the cultural context.

Metaphors are a significant way in which self-stories and God-stories are oriented and connected to each other. Metaphors are able to weave self-stories and God-stories into a meaningful relationship. It is able to construct new connections with God without fixing Him in certain formulations, without pinning the self or God down with objective descriptions (Putman 1998:78). Metaphors become part of the network of self-narratives, they become embedded in self-stories like light bulbs on the same electrical cable. It is not only a description of the meaning of a person's relationship with God, but also part of the construction of that meaning. Stories even connect inconsistent and contradictory metaphors as part of the multi-storied nature of self-stories.

Metaphors can enable or can constrain the possibilities for living: 'One task of therapy is to clarify the limitations of the dominant metaphors that influence how a person perceives, thinks, and acts in daily life' (Griffith & Griffith 2002:66). Metaphors must be continually constructed and de-constructed. A new metaphor can create change, and open up new worlds of meaning and experience. In the conversations with participants (see Chapter 6), I noted some old and some new metaphors in the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

Below, I present four tables by three authors as examples of the relation between God-images/God-metaphors and self-stories. It is as if a person's faith is condensed into images of God that play an important role in his or her life. From a narrative perspective, the construction of self-God-stories does not only work in one direction, from the image/metaphor to the self-stories, but there is a reciprocal move: both self- and God-stories are socially constructed in language. The images of God derive their meaning from the context of a person's life story. I include these tables because they

demonstrate examples of the relationship between certain images of God and self-stories, examples of the way God-stories and self-stories influence each other.

Louw (1994:80-81) is a practical theologian. He has written on some of the challenges of illness for pastoral care. In this context, God's involvement can be experienced in different ways. The first table shows how four symbols of God's involvement (punishment, apathy, providence and pathos) can be linked to concepts or images of God and their effects in a person's self-story. Self-stories are constructed from concepts of God and God's corresponding involvement.

**Table 4.1: Symbols and their effects on self-stories**

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Effect</i>
Judge	Punishment	Guilt or guilt feelings
King	Distance/Apathy/Power	Self-discovery/ Self-examination/ Empowerment
Saviour/(Redeemer)/ Friend	Compassion	Comfort/Security/Hope
Father/Creator	Permittance/Providence	Purification/Growth/Faith Education/ Meaning

Source: Adapted from Louw (1994:80)

The next table shows how God-stories are constructed through different perceptions of suffering. It is an example of the way God-stories are constructed through our own experiences and understandings. These understandings are usually acquired through social interaction.

**Table 4.2: Images of God and the related self-stories of suffering**

	<b>Ways of understanding suffering</b>	<i>Image of God</i>
1.	God has planned it thus. It had to happen this way. It is God's will for my life. He has a purpose with everything.	<i>Creation and Providence</i>

2.	I am confused and uncertain. I cannot understand why it happened. I don't know how to reconcile God's will with this suffering.	<i>Paradox</i>
3.	God did not will this tragedy, but allows it. I am still searching for the meaning of it and I'm in torment.	<i>Permittance</i>
4.	I must make peace with and accept the circumstances, as it is of no avail; they cannot be changed.	<i>Omnipotence</i>
5.	We receive strength from above. We know God is there and that faith will sustain us. This suffering has enriched my life.	<i>Confidant/e and Friend</i>
6.	This suffering is a test of my faith. God is testing me.	<i>Fatherhood</i>
7.	I feel so helpless and alone. It is as though God does not hear me and is absent. I feel rejected and deserted.	<i>Apathetic and Absent</i>
8.	My life was reckless and full of sin. Now God is punishing me. We reap what we have sown.	<i>Judge</i>
9.	I feel rebellious and angry. How could a God of love have brought this about in my life?	<i>Unjust/unfair</i>
10.	God understands my suffering and He will sustain me through it. Christ also knew pain and suffering.	<i>Substitution</i>

Source: Adapted from Louw (1994:81)



König (1991) is a systematic theologian who discusses the analogy between attributes of God and of human beings. The table below shows important attributes of God and how that align with attributes of the self. In narrative terms, it can be described as the constitutive effect that God-stories have on self-stories.

**Table 4.3: The effect of attributes of God on self-stories**

<b>GOD</b>	<b>SELF TOWARDS GOD</b>	<b>SELF TOWARDS OTHER</b>	<b>ASSOCIATED ATTRIBUTES</b>
1. Love	Love	Love	Kind-heartedness, goodness, friendliness
2. Freedom	Freedom	Freedom	Patience, self-control
3. Holiness	Holiness	Holiness	Justice, truthfulness
4. Faithfulness	Faith and faithfulness	Faithfulness and trust	
5. Grace	Thankfulness	Thankfulness and grace	Joy
6. Authority	Obedience	Obedience and authority	Humbleness and respect
7. Promises	Hope	Hope and promises	

Source: Translated from König (1991:64)

Putman (1998) is a practical theologian who has done research on the effect of selected God-images on students' self-stories. Putman (1998:147-152) concludes that a person's images of God relate to themes in their self-stories. The study shows the extent to which God-images, in terms of content and effect, are bound up with a person's self-history.

**Table 4.4: God images and its relation to self-stories**

<b>Images of God</b>	<b>Self-stories</b>
God as appeal	The theme of ethical responsibilities
God as eagle	The theme of reliability

God as involved nearness	The theme of involvement with important others
God as friend	The theme of acceptance
God as demanding	The theme of powerlessness and anxiety

Source: Putman (1998: 152)

The tables summarise what the whole chapter is about. I have included them in the chapter as examples of the role of religion/spirituality in the constitution of identity. God-stories, and more specifically metaphors or images, are part of the context for the construction of self-stories. There are also examples of the constructed nature of God-stories, and the fact that different experiences can result in different views on or metaphors for God. Some of these self-God-stories, metaphors or images feature in the remainder of the research report as stories, metaphors or images that are either on the side of the requirements of substance abuse or on the side of the person struggling with substance abuse. In the context of this chapter, the tables function as a metaphor for the way in which God-stories influence the construction of self-stories, and vice versa.

#### **4.15 SELF-GOD-STORIES IN THERAPY**

In Chapter 3, I discussed the social construction of self-stories in narrative therapy. In this section, I turn my attention to the social construction of self-God-stories in narrative therapy. In this section, my intention is to discuss ways in which narrative therapy can be opened up for the introduction of self-God-stories. Involving God in just any way in therapy is not necessarily helpful. For self-God-stories to be a context of hope in narrative therapy, there are a number of approaches that are preferred. In the light of this, I am looking at seven assumptions or points of departure for working with self-God-stories in narrative therapy. These are not a series of steps to follow, but represent helpful places in which to be positioned at different times in therapy.

##### **4.15.1 Self-God-stories and narrative therapy**

The first point of departure in relating narrative therapy to self-God-stories is that self-God-stories, like narrative therapy, are situated within the postmodern context of language, social constructionism and poststructuralism. Therefore God-stories are well-suited for use in therapy using a narrative approach.

I have already discussed the meaning-making function of religion/spirituality in Section 4.14.1; and I referred to the meaning-making function in narrative a few times (Section 3.3.4; White & Epston 1990:10). Both narrative and religion/spirituality are interested in the construction of meaning, and in this way contribute to a multiplication of discourses and narratives (God-stories and self-stories) as sources for meaning-making (Schweitzer 2002:172).

Although God-stories can be part of the dominating socio-political structures, they can also function as the 'other' of modernity and the 'other' of the gospel. I discussed this ambiguity toward religious meta-narratives in South Africa in Section 4.5. Religious narratives that run counter to cultural expectations, gospel stories that are subversive with regard to modernity and provide doorways to alternative ways of being, can adopt a critical stance towards dominating narratives (see Chapter 2 on the Practical Theological methodology) in the same way as narrative therapy does. Both aim to provide alternative locations within culture for the construction of self-stories.

Narrative therapy and faith cannot be separated from political praxis (see Sections 4.13, 4.14.8 and 3.6.2.1). It is clear from the discussions up to this point that narrative therapy and religion/spirituality emphasise relationality and take the constitutive effect of one's social surroundings seriously (Schweitzer 2002:173). Narratives, including religious/spiritual narratives, are socially constructed. Narrative and religion/spirituality counter the reductionism of psychologising by locating problems and self-stories in a larger context and working with agency.

Another area in which narrative therapy and religion/spirituality share common ground, is in the value given to human beings (Lee 1999:279). They are both concerned with being ethical in valuing human beings as responsible agents living their preferred self-stories. Narrative and religion/spirituality are both capable of dealing with contradictions and multiple 'realities' (the whole of Chapter 3 and Section 4.11 are relevant in this regard).

At the heart of this research is the assumption that narrative therapy and religion/spirituality both hold the potential that things can be different, and are therefore contexts of hope. It is not surprising that the Christian tradition, like narrative therapy, is

carried by narratives. All this testifies to the value of God-stories and affirms that narrative ways of working can fit in well with a pastoral context. There is a friendly continuity between narrative therapy and the use of God-stories in therapy. Because of this, in therapy, a context must be established that is conducive to the therapeutic discussion of self-God-stories.

#### **4.15.2 The invitation to self-God-stories**

I have already discussed the implications of a narrative stance in therapy for therapeutic conversations in Section 3.7.2. In order to invite God-stories into pastoral conversations, the second point of departure in working with self-God-stories is that in narrative therapy we do not impose our own views on spirituality on our clients, but rather let them inform us about their preferred views of God (Carlson & Erickson 2000:67). Griffith (1999) has done important work to show how the therapist's certainties can actually constrain conversations about God with clients (the entrapment of knowing), and on the importance of opening certainties up to wonder, in which multiple realities can coexist and relationships can flourish.

Denominational affiliations are poor predictors of a person's experience(s) of God. In therapy one can always expect to be surprised. Even commonly used metaphors, such as God as 'father', have different meanings for different people. Even childhood experiences of God can have different meanings. Stories of similarity between experiences with God and experiences with an early attachment figure, if constraining, can be known as only one of many stories of the person's relationship with God. Forcing one's own understanding of God on a client is a betrayal of the client's own voice and of the purpose of the therapy (Griffith 1999:209-222). When the gospel is forced on people, it actually ceases to be gospel (Dave & Michael 2001:134).

Due to power imbalances, the therapist is called to 'radical listening' that listens first and foremost to what the storyteller thinks about the story he or she is telling (Griffith & Griffith 2002:31). The teller's expertise about the meaning of the story is privileged above the therapist's impressions. The invitation to incorporate God-stories in therapy is a sensitive issue, which needs to be approached subtly, with careful curiosity and a not-knowing attitude. It is the beginning of the social construction of self-God-stories in narrative therapy. This listening includes attention to the client's account of the way he

or she experiences the problem. The position of the therapist in a pastoral conversation is that of service rather than domination or control and is aimed at reciprocal caring (Boyd 1996:222-223).

#### **4.15.3 Problem stories' version of God-stories**

In therapy, one can encounter situations where God-stories as such are the problem. Most of the time, problematic God-stories are God-stories that are part of another problem. Problems have the ability to influence one's beliefs and views on the relationship with God. Sometimes psychology sees the beliefs a person has as being pathological or constraining of his or her life. The third point of departure in narrative therapy is that it is much more helpful to view the problem's version of a person's relationship with God to be constraining, and not the beliefs the person has (Carlson & Erickson 2000:67).

As a person's identity story is socially constructed, the life support system of problems is also relationally constructed. The problem is not the relationships as such, but the way they are experienced as contributing to the life of the problem. Therefore, the stories of these relationships must also be addressed in the practices of externalisation and deconstruction. This is also relevant for the person's relationship with God, particularly the problem's version of a person's relationship with God. The transformative aspects of the relationship with God can be buried beneath the problem's influence on the relationship with God (Carlson & Erickson 2000:74). One example is the way a person struggling with substance abuse can experience the metaphor of God as judge as overwhelming the notions of grace and acceptance.

The successful creation and living of alternative life stories depends on whether people are able to experience their relationships with others, also with God, differently (Carlson & Erickson 2000:70). The research explores the difference that God-stories can make in the context of a struggle with substance abuse. In therapy, before that can happen, the way problems construct God-stories must be deconstructed. The starting place for the construction of alternative experiences of self-God-stories is narrative practices of externalisation and deconstruction.

#### **4.15.4 Externalisation**

The fourth point of departure in relating narrative therapy to working with self-God-stories is that sin and restricting beliefs can be externalised. In narrative therapeutic practices, problems are seen as being presented in discourses and meta-narratives (see Sections 3.4.3 and 3.7.4; Anderson 1995:33). This resonates with the religious concept that sin is not something substantial within a person, but something that becomes manifests in relationships and social structures (see Section 4.8; Berkhof 1975:200; Heyns 1978:178; König 1991:138). Not all problem stories are related to the religious idea of sin. But in the instances where a religious person does connect problems with sin, externalisation is relevant.

The narrative practice of externalisation can help religious people to create a distance from the 'old life' and sin that is foreign to their preferred self-stories, in order to commit to the 'new life' story (Lee 1999:284-285). Externalising conversations can help clients to see the problem as something separate from themselves and as having a life of its own. The ways in which the problem has recruited a person into a certain way of life and into certain ways of thinking in his or her relationship with God can be explored. In this way, it is not only the problems that are externalised, but also the beliefs constituted by the problems, and the effects of the beliefs on the problems. Beliefs are often not consciously expressed, but exist as background assumptions. Therefore, the initial step in working with beliefs in therapy is to help people to articulate their important beliefs. The very act of uncovering the core belief and saying it out loud invites a person to examine the belief (Griffith & Griffith 2002:150).

After that, studying the ecological impact of the belief on the life and relationships of the person through questions is necessary. This enables the possibility for people to engage in the generation of new stories, for alternative descriptions of themselves and their relationships (White & Epston 1990:39).

#### **4.15.5 Deconstruction**

The fifth point of departure in relating narrative therapy to self-God-stories is that God-stories must be located within their broader cultural and political contexts, using deconstruction, as discussed in Section 3.7.4 (White 1991:29). Deconstruction is a way

of unpacking the meaning of a problem for a person, as well as how the problem got a foothold in a person's relationship with God. With regard to God-stories, it is making explicit the interpretative assumptions out of which a problematic belief emerged and the cultural and political discourses that constitute the context of this belief (Griffith & Griffith 2002:151).

Exploring how problems together with discursive practices promote certain impoverishing beliefs allows people to see their relationship with God in a different light (Carlson & Erickson 2000:73). Because the problem, its ecology, and its influence on the self-God relationship are entities that are separate from the self, a person is free to resist the problem's influence in his or her life and re-author the relationship with God. Through understanding his or her relationship with certain beliefs better, and through being exposed to alternative possibilities, a person can be helped to choose a new way of responding to stories that isolate, disempower or demoralise (White 1991:38). It also allows a person to choose the role that a specific belief ought to play in his or her life (Griffith & Griffith 2002:151-152). Through deconstruction, the possibilities for constructing alternative life-worlds opens up.

#### **4.15.6 Re-authoring alternative stories**

The sixth point of departure in narrative therapy is that alternative self-God-stories can be co-authored in which agency, failure and playfulness can be invited (see Section 3.7.5). The construction of a new story in the relationship with God starts with listening for counter-events or -experiences, including the experience of God-stories that contradict the dominant problem story (Carlson & Erickson 2000:74). These unique outcomes can then be explored, given meaning and contextualised through questions. The aim is to co-construct new self-stories and new God-stories from these alternative God-events in people's lives.

Bringing forward to centre stage a story that has gone unnoticed can become the most important step in the therapy (Griffith & Griffith 2002:93). Carlson and Erickson (2000) suggest that the process of internalising agency regarding the blessings of God in their lives can be a powerful resource in constructing an alternative story about people's relationship with God. Re-authoring questions can establish their choice to see the blessings in their lives, in contrast to the problem's tactics to prevent them from seeing

these blessings. This agency in noticing or receiving the blessing can help clients to believe and feel that God does love and value them (Carlson & Erickson 2000:75).

I want to mention two aspects of therapy that can be openings to alternative ways of being. One is the experience of failure. If a therapist is honest about his or her weaknesses, it opens up space to be of service to the other (Pattison 1988:163). It enhances the experience of mutuality. Failure also exposes the limits of our abilities and achievements, and our need for God and others in our lives (Pattison 1988:167). Change must often be forced by crisis and failure. From a narrative point of view, failure can be seen as an act of resistance or refusal and protest against cultural expectations of achievement and normality (White 1995:141). The religious and narrative views on failure can become invitations to self-reflection, to finding alternative sites in culture that make possible other options for living.

The other aspect of therapy is laughter as a mechanism for distancing from adversity. It is a way of seeing reality as it is, of looking at life from God's perspective. It puts a different perspective on life and throws its tragedies into relief (Pattison 1988:181,192). It also enhances mutuality, and helps the therapist to give up the claims to professional earnestness and intensity, in order to be with the other. It helps people to stand outside themselves and become open to other possibilities. Laughter and humour connect with narrative playfulness, the sense of 'as if', that relativises the given, settled certainties of culture and open up new ways to look at our lives and the world (White 2000:17). The co-construction of self-God-stories must be extended through re-remembering practices as discussed in the previous chapter.

#### **4.15.7 Re-remembering and conversing**

A seventh point of departure in relating narrative therapy and self-God-stories is the performance of practices of re-remembering and dialogue with God and other God-related people. As part of the enriching or thickening of a person's relationship with God's story, re-remembering practices play an important role.

In narrative therapy, re-remembering practices are about the downgrading or upgrading of the membership of the 'club' of one's life (see Section 5.10.1; White 1997b:23). The renewing of membership with God can include a revisiting and re-telling of the history



of the relationship with God. It is a way to help religious/spiritual people re-experience their relationship with God in preferred ways. The possibility exists that the meaning of events in the past can be re-defined and re-storied – a revisiting of the history of the relationship with God (Carlson & Erickson 2000:78). Re-remembering God can also be achieved through the re-remembering of other significant people in a client's life. Connectedness and love are often part of the faith stories of religious people, and the renewal of significant others' membership in a client's life add to the strengthening of the relationship with God.

A new voice, including that of God, can help to resolve an *impasse* in relationships. There are three dialogical positions: the speaker, the listener, the reflecting position in which one steps back and observes the interchanges. Questions can move back and forth between positions: the self speaking, listening; God speaking, listening; both reflecting on what they witnessed when standing outside the conversation (Griffith & Griffith 2002:119).

Noticing a monological conversation is important in therapy. Monological conversations are typically empty of fresh ideas; and they support old habits, and sustain problems rather than contribute to solutions. Persistent dialogue is necessary to dissolve problems: 'Many problems in human life, whether involving human or divine beings, will not be solved unless those involved in the problem can stay sufficiently engaged in a serious process of speaking, listening and reflecting together' (Griffith & Griffith 2002:124). Therapy helps people to stay in dialogue long enough for change to occur. The purpose is to extend a conversation beyond the point where it would have ended. It can be helpful to keep questions subjunctive: 'What if...?' 'Has it ever been different from this?' This can help to hear another voice. Questions that introduce curiosity about complexities in God's perceptions, thoughts, intentions or reflections can also contribute to people's hearing a new voice (Griffith & Griffith 2002:119,120).

A part of the re-remembering practices is the addition of new language and metaphors to the pool of words and ideas available for making relationships with others. Words and phrases are tools for building community and therefore also for building preferred self-God-stories (Griffith & Griffith 2002:135). These re-remembering practices can also include the use of rituals and ceremonies as discussed above. In narrative therapy, re-

remembering and conversing practices can contribute to the effect God-stories can have on self-stories.

#### **4.15.8 Summary**

If God-stories are situated in the postmodern context of language, social constructionism and poststructuralism, they can fit well within a narrative approach to therapy. Both are interested in making meaning, relationality and the importance of transformative communication (Schweitzer 2002:173). Both narrative approaches and religion/spirituality are concerned with a broader view of what counts as knowledge, emphasising the subjugated and marginalised knowledges of modernity. This opens the door to narratives that are alternatives to the dominating cultural narratives, especially in the context of substance abuse, as discussed in the next chapter.

Narrative therapy and conversations about self-God-stories are invitations to a co-construction of preferred realities, and not about expert interventions. The teller's expertise about the meaning of his or her story is privileged above the therapist's opinions or impressions. Through narrative questioning, transformative aspects of a person's relationship with God can be rescued from distortions of the self-God relationship due to problems in a person's life. Problems, as well as a problematic relationship with God, can be externalised and deconstructed. Again, this opens up the option of resisting disempowering beliefs and practices and of re-authoring alternative self-God-stories. The self-God-story of re-remembering God (a narrative metaphor) can contribute to the re-experiencing of the relationship with God in preferred ways. This re-authoring can include the idea of being agentive in the gifts or blessings in one's relationship with God, as well as the ideas of failure and laughter as rich narrative resources for the construction of self-stories embedded in God-stories. In a postmodern discourse, there is a friendly continuity between narrative therapy and an exploration of God-stories in therapy: 'Narrative therapy can prove to be a powerful form of Christian therapy' (Lee 1999:291).

#### **4.16 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways God-stories are socially constructed in different contexts. As social constructions, God-stories are interactive constituents in

the construction of self-stories. Identity or self-stories are influenced by God-stories by taking up God-stories into one's self-story or through positioning oneself in preferred God-stories. In this way, I come to talk about self-God-stories.

I have also explored ways in which conversations about God-stories can be opened up and self-God-stories can be constructed in narrative therapy. In the light of this research, the purpose of opening up conversations about self-God-stories is keeping alive the hope that things can be different despite everything that discourages it (White 1997b:142). As have been clear in this chapter, this hope is not something that we do alone, but with others. Its effects on body and soul are too important to be left to individuals. It is the responsibility of the faith community, which can consist of the Christian tradition, the church, friends, family, etc.

In the next chapter and the rest of the research report, self-God-stories as a context for hope are applied to the area of people struggling with substance abuse. The study focuses on the difference self-God-stories can make in that specific context. The self-God-stories are able to infuse hope. Firstly, the story of connecting with God in some way, of incorporating the world of God is an additional narrative resource for the construction of self-stories. Secondly, there is the story of the difference that grace can make in a situation that is experienced as being stuck. Thirdly, there is the story of the change that can occur in one's life, a migration of identity towards a preferred way of being in the world.

Chapter 6 considers the self-God-stories of participants in the context of their struggle with substance abuse. The question is how the God-stories of people struggling with substance abuse contribute to the construction of their self-stories.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**SELF-STORIES AND GOD-STORIES**  
**IN THE STRUGGLE WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The third area of concern in the light of the research question is establishing the social, cultural and political contexts of substance abuse. More specifically, the concern is the way in which self-stories are influenced by stories of substance abuse. I want to consider the dominating substance abuse stories that can totalise and pathologise people's identities. I also explore how a narrative approach to substance abuse can make a difference in someone's relationship with substance abuse. In this way, I discuss problems with substances as a context in which there can be hope.

In the process of establishing the social contexts of substance abuse, I also question some of the discourses about addiction, the knowledges that circulate in social and professional contexts and that define the possibilities and the limits of thinking about and relating to addiction. The narrative metaphor focuses our attention on the addiction narratives circulating in our language communities and the possibility of deconstructing these narratives. The cultural discourses surrounding addiction offer a series of possible positions to take up in these discourses. This is the background for the discussion of the relationship between self-God-stories and problems with substances at the end of the chapter.

I use the word 'addiction' frequently in this chapter. On the one hand, it is widely used in social and professional contexts to refer to the problematic self-stories I want to discuss in this chapter, providing a reference point to invite other voices into this research. It also has the advantage of linking people's lives in some way and indicates shared experiences of life. On the other hand, this chapter also deconstructs the concept of addiction in order to look at the specific knowledges and practices that are metaphorically referred to by this 'label'. I also use other ways of talking about this problem.

In line with the narrative ways of working discussed in previous chapters, this chapter contains a deconstruction of addiction discourses. The deconstruction of dominant accounts of substance abuse and the self positioned within them makes it possible to step into preferred self-stories. The last section of the chapter is about the naming and description of counterplots to substance abuse in relation to self-God-stories, the fourth area of concern in this research.

This chapter is part of the analysis of the social and political context of our living world required by a contextual Practical Theological methodology (see Section 2.3) in its interaction between theory and praxis (see Section 2.9). The context of substance abuse influences our Practical Theological expressions – what we can eventually say about God. I therefore start this discussion with a story about the way addiction could have been socially constructed.

## **5.2 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ADDICTION**

‘Addiction’ is a social construct, an example of the changing of cultural metaphors. It is constituted by the interplay of historical discourses as specific relations of power and knowledge. It therefore represents social knowledges about drugs and not objective scientific facts about the addicted state (Heim et al 2001:62). The use and abuse of particular substances has been culturally shaped into a social problem which has been named addiction (Ettorre 2007:229).

The concept of addiction constitutes substance abuse as a disease or affliction that could take control of the user’s behaviour, and therefore frames it in a medical paradigm (Room 2003:222). This construction relates addiction to psychological or physiological determinism. The conception of addiction as a disease has achieved the status of the dominant framework for understanding drug problems (Reinarman 2005b:308). It emerged at a particular point in history and in a particular cultural context. According to Room (2003:222), this point was reached in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States. More generally, intoxication began to be problematised at the dawn of Western modernity (Lart 2010:2; Rainarman 2005b:310). Before that time, substance abuse was seen as being like any other personal preference or habit over which a person had the capacity to make choices.

Addiction as a label can only develop in a culture where a causal link is made between intoxication and undesirable behaviour or events, when typically there are a variety of potentially contributing causes to bad behaviour or events. It is a culture-specific way of describing a failure to behave rationally, of describing a mystery (Room 2003:224). The idea of loss of control is also a cultural phenomenon. It only makes sense in a culture where social control is external, and where autonomy is subordinated to collective interests (Reinarman 2005b:311; Room 2003:226). The construction of addiction as the neglect of other activities in favour of seeking, using or recovering from the use of particular substances is also determined by cultural views on time and its use (Reinarman 2005b:311; Room 2003:226).

The way in which the concept of addiction is socially constructed can be seen in the enormous amount of data charting the different ways in which consuming the same drugs are perceived and experienced in different cultures and societies (Manning 2007:10). Classic indicators of the 'disease' of addiction, such as tolerance and withdrawal, are not universal amongst users of the same substances (Reinarman 2005b:311). Even the rituals and effects surrounding cannabis (*dagga* or marijuana) use have to be learned in interaction with experienced users. Drugs are experienced through socially learned interpretations available in a specific culture (Gerritsen 2000:13; Reinarman 2005b:316).

The concept of addiction is closely linked to the discourses about consumption. Since the globalisation of liberal capitalism and the rise of the free market system, our realities have been framed between the two poles of production and consumption (Bamber 2009a:2). Consumption is about the fulfilment of a need. It makes us live as if there is a product between every need and its fulfilment. Since late modernity, consumption has been presented as a crucial force in the shaping of identity (Manning 2007:5). It has come to be seen as constituting the self through self-regulation in the freedom to choose. Powerful forces, together with the leisure industry, encourage people to reinvent themselves primarily through consumption and lifestyles associated with it (Manning 2007:24). Therefore, '[i]t could be said that contemporary culture is a culture of consumption' (White 1997a:38).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, there was a shift, away from understanding drug consumption as a symptom of individual illness or moral failure, towards taking

into account the importance of consumption patterns within cultures (Manning 2007:5). If consumption is important in identity formation in late modern capitalism, then drug consumption is part of the same cultural practices (Gerritsen 2000:3; Manning 2007:5). There is little difference between the use of drugs and other patterns of consumption. Therefore, today, drug users are not seen as passive victims of their own physical or psychological inadequacies, but as agents in cultural patterns of consumption (Manning 2007:26).

The industrialisation of the West has brought about an emphasis on industrial productivity and labour discipline, and the elevation of self-regulation and control to personal and social virtues (Reith 2004:287). The Protestant Reformation also contributed to the construction of the autonomous individual, with an emphasis on piety and, in the light of the Protestant work ethic, productivity (Reinarman 2005b:310; Reith 2004:285). In this historical context, the notion that a substance can cause a person to lose self-control became thinkable (Reinarman 2005b:310). Reinarman (2005b:310) shows that this construction did indeed occur – at the same time that the values of autonomy, piety and productivity began to develop, the opposite also occurred: people who lost the capacity for self-control, independence and entrepreneurial activity, which is considered the essence of the autonomous individual, were stigmatised.

According to Reith (2004), addiction can thus be seen as a discursive device that transmits the idea of disordered consumption, accompanied by a sense of loss of control – a subjugation of personal agency to the demands of certain consumer products. This means that addiction is the opposite of the core values of freedom, control and autonomy propounded by neo-liberalism. The notion of the sovereign consumer is turned on its head. Rather than consuming to realise or enhance the self, the self is consumed by consumption, a return to the etymological root of ‘consumption’ from the Latin *con sumere*: ‘to take up altogether’, that is, to use up, to completely destroy (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary* 2004; see also Reith 2004:286).

The values of productivity and control were accompanied by an intolerance of behaviour regarded as disruptive of these values. At the same time, consumer goods and material affluence increased, giving rise to increased levels of consumption throughout the population. However, excessive consumption became a clear threat to the moral and political order of industrial society. At this time, towards the end of the nineteenth

century, the interests of the industrial nation-state and the rise of the medical profession, eager to establish itself as a distinct and superior form of knowledge and authority, converged (Reith 2004:287-288). Against the background of new statistical techniques used in government, a new pathology, the disease of the 'will', was introduced (Hopson 1996:539).

The failure of the 'will' was seen as a condition that left a person unable to control his or her impulses, enslaved by forces beyond his or her control. The relation between powerful substances and weak individuals became known as an 'addiction' (Reith 2004:288). It was at the same time a physical disease and a moral failure (Reith 2004:288), although the emphasis was different at different times, as I discuss below (see Sections 5.4. and 5.5). Initially the disease of the failure of the 'will' related to substances such as alcohol and opium. As the temptations of modern society expanded through unbridled consumerism, the concept of addiction was also expanded to include a range of substances and substance-like activities, from caffeine to shopping, all seen as disorders of consumption. Addiction became a way of describing the rising social tensions generated by the move to industrial modernity, thinly veiled in the language of medicine and morality (Reith 2004:288).

The social construction of addiction is intimately connected to the construction of consumer products (Reith 2004:286-287; White 1997a:38). A consumer product is not only the embodiment of the labour of workers, but it becomes the extension of social values. It is transformed into a desirable object inhabited with social relations. Some commodities, such as drugs, or drug-like experiences, have come to be seen as something with influential powers, with a demonic life of their own.

Just as commodities in general hide the human relations constituting them, particular commodities within addiction discourses also conceal wider social relations. One example is the way in which drugs can function as commodities that provide resources for alternative identity formation, or a passing through the barrier from the 'straight' world of conventional values to the sub-cultural world of alternative values (Manning 2007:25). Consuming such commodities can thus be a form of ideological resistance against authority, or just the consumption of everyday commodities that provide some symbolic resources for the construction of self-narratives. The construction of consumer



products as drugs is complicated by the politics that regard some drugs as legal and others as illegal (see Section 5.2.1).

To say that addiction is socially constructed is not to minimise the seriousness of the experience and its consequences: ‘To argue that a concept is culturally constructed and framed is not to argue that it is wrong or useless’ (Room 2003:232). However, recognising the constructedness of addiction opens up the possibility of alternative constructions and different ways in which that recognition can contribute to the construction of self-stories, and an awareness that the social construction of addiction has also resulted in social constructions of the ‘addict’ identity.

### **5.2.1 The construction of an addict identity**

The medical-moral discourse on addiction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century introduced a new type of person. The consumer is transformed into an addict. This particular subject was made visible in terms of the mechanism that Foucault (as cited by Boyne 1996:110) has called the ‘constitution of subjects’, through the tools of observation and classification, through the creative interplay of power knowledge relations within discourses (see Section 3.2). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the category of addict joined other emergent discursive categories, such as the insane, the unemployed man, the prostitute and the homosexual, as subjects for surveillance and professional control (Blake 2007:36). The ‘addict’ was singled out as a distinct, abnormal personality, someone who failed to manage his or her consumption because of a deviant identity characterised by craving, repetition and loss of control (Lart 2010:2-3). Because such behaviour appears to destabilise the balance between production and consumption, as production was also disrupted through unbridled consumption, it was regarded as a form of madness in an industrial age of reason (Reith 2004:298).

Loss of control became to be associated with the problematic behaviour of particular social groups (Galea, Nandi & Vlahov 2004:48; Reith 2004:289). Not only were consumers critically conceived as a new type of person, patterns of consumption were shaped and controlled in new ways. On the one hand, there was the freedom to choose to construct a lifestyle and identity from the marketed options available to the person; on the other hand, it was also necessary to subjugate oneself to the cultural norms and social institutions regarding consumption. In line with a wider fear of social disorder,

the perception was encouraged that the addicts within certain social groups pose a threat to cultural norms and social institutions, especially productivity. In the West, the self-control of the working classes, women and immigrants was regarded as especially weak (Reith 2004:289). This resulted in disciplinary regimes for those purported to be unable to regulate their consumption, such as moral training, inebriate homes, insane asylums and prisons. Some forms of consumption among the working class, such as the consumption of alcohol, opium and gambling, were outlawed or regulated. In the West, discourses of addiction were especially linked to immigration discourses (Herzog et al 2009:9-10). Immigrants were seen as a threat to the social order of the locals (Gerritsen 2000:5). Similarly, in the 1960s, young people, because of their alleged anti-social tendencies, became the target of establishment legislation (Morgan 1999:20). The addiction discourse expressed concerns about social disorder, connecting the consumption practices of particular groups with broader social trends (Reith 2004:290). The point is that, for two centuries, the construction of an 'addict' identity was narrowly linked to the identity of certain groups in society, in the light of the threat they were perceived to pose to social stability.

In the light of the social construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse, it is important to note that today the focus has shifted, to a large extent, away from the behaviour of groups toward the individual (Galea et al 2004:49; Reith 2004:291). Control of consumption moved away from external restraints towards internal control. This has resulted in the establishment of a causal link between excessive consumption and physiological processes related to genes or chemicals within the individual (Reith 2004:291). These illness discourses are also characterised by an awareness of internal, subjective states identified by individuals themselves. The interest now is specifically in how people feel about their ability to control their behavioural 'loss of control'; and this has become central in the diagnosis of the disease (Reith 2004:291; Walters 1999:157).

The 'addict' identity is thus constructed through deeply subjective criteria. These subjective criteria can expand the notion of addiction to embrace an infinite number of substances and behaviours. New kinds of medicalised identities or patients are continually being added to the list of consumer pathologies (Epston 1993:171; Reith 291-292). In the context of this research, these descriptions of the self are indicative of the modernist immutable and unchanging view on the self, rather than of a narrative of a self that is always in flux, freely constructed through the choosing individual. In

modernist discourses, an addict has an essential identity based on the notion of an incurable pathology located within an individual.

This construction of categories of identity is in line with the requirements of prevalent cultural values and social institutions (Bates 2005:18). For example, the notion of the empty self of individualism that consumes to fill the void perfectly complements the needs of a capitalist society that requires relentless consumption to avoid economic stagnation (Bates 2005:18). The intense emphasis on freedom and consumer sovereignty is the fertile soil out of which ever more addictions grow (Reith 2004:298). The proliferation of pathologies, although indicative of risks in consumption, actually intensifies and expands the neo-liberal values of self-government and sovereign action (Manning 2007:24; Reith 2004:294). The increase in pathologies in turn invites new forms of social control in order to produce identities that can control their consumption through autonomous action (Manning 2007:26; Reith 2004:294).

The addict identity is categorised as abnormal, as the opposite of the free autonomous consumer identity. However, the construct of the individual pathology of addiction disguises these deep tensions within the consumer society, and the ambivalence of controlling the self through freedom of choice (Reith 2004:298). From this discussion, it is clear that the fashioning of an addict identity reveals much about the social and historical forces that shaped it. Furthermore, the constructions of the categories of addiction and addict identities have real effects on people's lives.

### **5.2.2 The effects of addiction discourses**

Whether the term 'addiction' is applied as a medical 'truth', or as a metaphor for the experience of problems with substances or behaviours, it has certain effects. The concept of 'addiction' describes a person's experience as having a problem over which he or she has no control. But this description also creates the experience of 'addiction', the experience of being overwhelmed by a force outside his or her control. The idea of addiction becomes something 'real' to those people who subscribe to its deterministic influence, as well as to those who ascribe it to others (Reith 2004:292). It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bates 2005:17; Jenkins 1990:31).

The growth of self-help groups around forms of problematic consumption testifies to people's identification with behaviour that they feel is out of control. This description can result in people's looking for and finding in their history some support for their construction of themselves as flawed or disabled in some way. But more than this, the identification with behaviour that is out of control is the identification with an essential 'addict identity'. This identity is unchanging, based on an incurable 'disease' experienced as a complete and irreversible loss of control. The more a person's identity becomes tied up with being an 'addict', the more he or she struggles to end the substance abuse (Bates 2005:17).

The language of loss of control is often also a necessary prerequisite for obtaining treatment. The claim of a loss of control can function as an excuse for not taking responsibility for one's actions, such as the preoccupation with and investment in specific ways of thinking and living (Jenkins 1997:45). This addiction discourse requires a person to acknowledge powerlessness over the problem and to place responsibility elsewhere. It promotes a sense of helplessness and reliance upon others to take responsibility (Jenkins 1997:47; Walters 1999:170). It also obscures the cultural restraints that inform the use of substances, as discussed in this chapter (see particularly Sections 5.4-5.8).

The addiction concept provides an explanation of a person's behaviour that is more or less satisfactory; but it is a way of speaking that exacts a high price: it internalises (see Section 3.5.2) addiction within a person (Bates 2005:16). It is an explanation that is deficit-based. The person is described as physiologically or psychologically inadequate, thus not in control of his or her life, disabled or flawed in some way as a person. As mentioned above (see Section 5.2.1), once a diagnosis of pathology is made by an expert, it becomes a non-negotiable reality. This co-determines how self-narratives of addiction are constructed. These self-narratives include the position of being inherently disabled or incapable, and invite reliance on outside intervention for the management of the problem, as I discuss in Section 5.5, on addiction as disease. Metaphors of addiction provide absolution from guilt and responsibility, but can, effectively, also be a process of infantilising and pathologising a person by externalising responsibility and becoming dependent on outside intervention (Law 1997:61; Peele 2004:245). The addiction concept can inhibit change by limiting a person's options and opportunities (Walters 1999:167).

The addiction discourse mitigates against people's experience of confidence and their ability to take action and influence the life of the problem. A focus on pathology also makes it possible to perpetuate western culture's deliberate blindness to the context of a problem in a person's life (Bates 2005:16). If problems with substance abuse are constructed as aberrant, it is not necessary to dismantle the structures and discourses, the ways of being and thinking, that inform substance abuse. Law (1997:61) uses the example of gambling to demonstrate how the gambling industry promotes the constructs of illness and pathology, even provides services for 'addicts'; and so makes it possible to expand the industry while obscuring the socio-political context of gambling.

As I have already mentioned, the term 'addiction' tends to become internalised in the form of the label of a person as an 'addict'. In this way, a problem is confused with a person's identity. This is totalising and makes the problem resistant to change. From the perspective of narrative therapy, these 'truth' discourses lead to 'thin' conclusions about one's life (White 1997b:15). 'Thin description often leads to thin conclusions about people's identities, and these have many negative effects' (Morgan 2000:13). Thin conclusions are 'drawn from problem saturated stories, disempowering people as they are defined in terms of weaknesses, disabilities, dysfunctions or inadequacies' (Morgan 2000:13). Thin conclusions tend to hide other aspects of a person's life: 'Thin conclusions often lead to more thin conclusions as people's skills, knowledges, abilities and competencies become hidden by the problem story' (Morgan 2000:14). They marginalise important other aspects of a person's lived experience.

Labels such as 'alcoholic' restrict a person's options for living (Walters 1999:192). There may be many experiences and interpretations of substance abuse that are different from 'I am an addict', that even contradict it (Monk et al 1997:166). The overpowering, all-encompassing label blinds us to that. It also blinds us to the many social discourses of gender, race and class and to the economic fact that industries which thrive due to the consumption of substances such as alcohol have a vested interest in the consumption of those substances (Monk et al 1997:164; Smith & Winslade 1997:23,28,31). It implies a 'condition' that requires the submission to an expert in order to 'get better' or 'recover' (Monk et al 1997:166). Substances such as alcohol want us to focus on the inner workings of the individual, to believe that there is a deficit, because then it can continue to exert its influence on people. The substance itself is presented as without blame, or as

an evil to be totally avoided, ignoring the social construction of consumption (Monk et al 1997:174).

Part of the effect of the addiction discourse is its influence on the construction of the client-therapist relationship, which I discuss separately.

### **5.2.3 Addiction and the client-therapist relationship**

My purpose is not an in-depth discussion of the client-therapist relationship, but only to show that the consequences highlighted by the narrative critique of dominating discourses (for example, in Sections 3.3.5, 3.6.2 and 3.7.1), are also applicable to therapy in the context of addiction.

There are a range of expressions commonly used in the addiction field, such as alcoholism, addiction, dependency, diagnosis, assessment, treatment, relapse, recovery or tolerance. In this chapter, I refer to these ways of talking about addiction as part of the addiction recovery movement; that is, the movement that puts addiction within the medical and moral deficiency framework. This movement's most popular expression is the twelve-step programmes that include seeing addiction as an illness and requiring an 'addict' to surrender to expert intervention. These now familiar ways of talking about problems with substances or behaviours bring about their own relational positioning within the therapeutic context.

The implication of discourses around 'treatment' or 'recovery' is that a person is described in terms of personal deficits or moral failures, including the accusation of a biological deficit on the one hand, and a lack of will-power on the other hand (Smith & Winslade 1997:16-17). This puts the therapist in a position of power over the client, who then has to submit to the therapeutic intervention. This enhances the perception that the therapist is in possession of the truth about the person, the problem and the resolution to the problem (White 1997b:119). The problem is de-contextualised in favour of the universal truth claims made by the professional discourses. The deficit language serves to enhance the privilege and status of the professional, which can imply the submission of a client to a professional medical process in which enfeeblement rather than empowerment is experienced (Monk et al 1997:160).

It is possible that the professional can see him- or herself as an anchor, a representative of a normal social reality into which the client must grow. In such professional discourses, a therapist is seen as autonomous and detached, enhancing the subject/object dualism (White 1997b:120). This approach hides the therapist's complicity in the maintenance of ways of life and thought that constitute problems (White 1997b:122-123). It avoids the moral and ethical implications of their practices.

Furthermore, the client's own views and experiences can easily be discounted or disqualified. Local, familial or personal knowledges and practices have no voice (White 1997b:129). The problem is taken out of the person's living context. This detracts from the options available to people to intervene in the relationship with the problem (White & Epston 1990:53).

In narrative therapy, the centring of the client as the expert of his or her own story and healing, the contextualising of the problem, as well as collaborative conversations are preferred ways of working (Monk et al 1997:160). In narrative ways of working, solution knowledges are seen to be generated in the interaction between the therapist and client (White 1997b:136) and include a 'not-knowing' position (Anderson & Goolishian 1992; see Section 3.7.1).

Part of the deconstruction of these addiction discourses is the externalising of the problem with substance abuse.

### **5.3 EXTERNALISING ABUSE BY SUBSTANCES**

Narrative ways of working aim to disrupt and challenge taken-for-granted ways of thinking and working in the field of addiction, recognising them as social constructions. In this framework, therapy can focus on the relations within which substance use becomes problematic, the discursive world in which people construct their relationship with a substance. In this process, space can be opened up for a different relationship with substances. This is not presented as the truth about substance abuse, but as one way of languaging the problem of the struggle with substance abuse.

In the light of the social constructionist and poststructuralist context of this research, it would be more helpful to talk about a person with a substance problem, or an alcohol or

drug problem, or to discuss problems of alcohol, drugs, or other substances. It makes possible the discussion of various relationships, instead of seeing the problem as fixed in personality or biological traits. In this research, I prefer the concept of substance abuse, because I want to draw the attention away from the inner workings of the individual, and focus instead on the disrupting influence of the use of substances on a person.

I have already mentioned how substances can abuse a person by subjugating personal agency. The self becomes consumed by consumption, in line with the etymological root of 'consumption' from the Latin *con sumere*: 'to take up altogether', that is to use up, to completely destroy (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary* 2004; see Section 5.2). Substances isolate a person, and can make him or her talk in critical ways to him- or herself and can make a person do dangerous things. Substances can abuse a person by taking away his or her life, health, relationships, work, possessions, self-respect, etc. This way of talking about addiction makes it easier for people to see themselves as separate from the problem, and therefore to focus on their strengths and abilities in their struggle against the abuse of substances. It lays the ground for externalising conversations, for discovering and examining a person's own influence in his or her life instead of being controlled by the substance.

The abuse of the substances can be seen primarily as having a relationship with substances that constrains a person's life. This relationship with substances is an instrument for the manipulation of feeling states, a technology of feelings management (Diamond 2000:11). This technology comes with its own rules and laws that severely restrict a consumer's choices and options for living. The consumer becomes involved in a substance for solace or experimentation or for another reason, establishing a relationship with it to the exclusion of meaningful involvements in the rest of the person's life. This involvement has certain rewards, such as the experience of fun, energy, emotional comfort, a sense of being at ease with him- or herself, as well as easier social interaction. A person can use it to feel good, or to feel better. It can also be a response to suffering and pain, without being a sign of weakness or individual pathology. In this way, the person's desire becomes attached to a specific object or substance.



‘Addict’ in Latin means *toward* [ad] *voice, say* [dict] (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary* 2004). An addict is more inclined to listen to the voice of the substances than to their own or other voices (Diamond 2000:13). Thus, addiction can be seen as being blocked from hearing other voices in one’s life, not as being bad or sick. It is a metaphor for the limiting of choices, like a desert journey, which also speaks of deprivation. It isolates a person from other resources for living. It represents a scarcity of options for living, and not some kind of pathology (Smith & Winslade 1997:22).

Addiction can diminish people’s ability to focus on and cope with other parts of their lives. A person invests in a relationship with the substances, that is, puts energy and effort into that relationship at the expense of other relationships. The abuse of and by the substance therefore impedes human freedom and diminishes the human spirit. In this study, substances are therefore seen as abusing a person by taking away the hope that things can be different, by evoking a sense of being lost, destroyed and having nowhere to go. It is as if the addicted person lacks a sense of agency to self-regulate his or her feelings and behaviour without substances. Being stuck in a scarcity of options does not mean that a person is ill, weak, damaged, bad or inherently irresponsible, or a blank without dreams and hopes. A problem experienced in interaction with cultural and social norms, possibilities and restrictions that are socially constructed and vary over time and place, is not indicative of an inner deficiency or pathology.

Together with this, the study explores the conviction that no problem is hundred per cent successful; substances never succeed in completely blinding a person to other possibilities for living (Monk et al 1997:184; Morgan 2000:55). Even the expression ‘hitting rock bottom’ does not mean that the domination of the substances is complete. There are always areas of resistance to the internalising of descriptions that fit in with dominating addiction narratives. So, for example, it is challenging and exciting to recognise what has traditionally been labelled ‘denial’ as a unique outcome (Smith & Winslade 1997:26). It is a moment of instability in monolithic problem stories. This view on substance abuse positions it as just another aspect of the human experience that people can handle. It is not to minimise the effects of substance abuse. It is to realise that a person can change this area of his or her life, like any other.

As we have seen in Chapter 3, change is about the changing of language, about a discursive re-positioning, about having agency in alternative self-stories. The

performance of hope is about the possibility that a person's self-story in relationship with substances can be re-told; that it can be constructed differently. In the second part of this chapter, I explore alternative self-stories in relationship with God-stories (see Section 5.10).

In the light of this narrative perspective on substance abuse, I want to say a bit more about the central concept of externalisation in narrative ways of working in respect of the construction of substance abuse. It is based on postmodern notions of social constructionism and poststructuralism, in that it sees all aspects of a person's life as situated historically, politically, socially and culturally (see Section 3.7.3). It is a way of situating problems with substances in the wider social context. Externalising is a way of assuming that people are up against a problem, rather than being the problem themselves, as implied by addiction discourses (Diamond 2000:xix). Over the years, a whole lifestyle, a person's identity, has been internalised through the stories of various substances and this can be externalised.

Through externalisation (see Section 3.7.3), the thin conclusions people have about their identities can be unpacked, and this can deprive these conclusions of the truth status that has been assigned to them. In narrative practices, other relevant aspects of the relationship with substances, such as 'craving' or 'undesirable thoughts', 'habit', 'secrecy' or 'addictive thinking', can also be externalised (Man-Kwong 2004:2). The externalising of subplots of substance abuse can then later contribute to the proliferation of counter substance abuse stories. It is done through establishing these 'voices' as belonging to the substances, as external with a life and properties of their own. The problem can be named, and its effects on different aspects of their lives explored, as well as its tactics and strategies. A person's evaluation of these effects on his or her life and the reasons for these evaluations can then be explored. This opens up a space for a person, and other people, to consider their relationship with the substances, the problem and its supporting ideas and practices. Some 'expertise' on the ways in which substances work can accompany a person's stepping into responsibility. Through externalising, people can become protagonists in their life stories, agents rather than patients.

After the evaluation of the influence of the problem on the life of the person, a person's influence on the problems with substances can then be discussed. This is an enquiry that

searches for exceptions to the story of substance abuse, unique outcomes that contradict the problem story (see Section 3.7.4). These alternative events and meanings can then be contextualised and connected to other supporting events and meanings. A person can be asked what these unique outcomes tell him or her about him- or herself as a person. From this, alternative stories about a person's life and identity are co-authored. In contrast to the inclination to listen to the voice of substances, narrative ways of working in this way are aimed at helping a person to access his or her own creative voice as an antidote to the voice of substances (Diamond 2000:xx).

Up to this point I have shown that addiction is a social construction, and I have discussed narrative elements in an approach to addiction. The narrative approach also includes a deconstruction of dominating addiction narratives. I now want to expand on three notions of addiction that I have already mentioned, because each has an enduring influence on addiction narratives. First, I look at the view that problems with substances are a sin or moral failure; then I explore the view of problems with substances as a medical illness; and finally, I examine the dominating character of substance abuse stories.

#### **5.4 STORIES OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS SIN**

The discourses that construct substance abuse as a moral failure, as being bad, can be a social restraint in the struggle against substance abuse that I want to deconstruct. Jenkins (1990) explores the model of restraint with regard to men who are abusive. In respect of abusive behaviour, the model of restraint includes answers to questions about what social and cultural stories (discourses) are stopping a person from behaving responsibly. With regard to substance abuse, restraints are not the *cause* of the substance abuse. It is social and cultural traditions, beliefs and assumptions that influence the kind of relationships a person can have with substances. These restraints can prevent a person from establishing a preferred relationship with substances (Jenkins 1990:32).

I discuss sin in this section in the context of a Christian spirituality that regards sin as a spiritual deviation or moral weakness. The discussion in this section about sin as a spiritual deviation or a moral weakness is not really helpful in identifying the 'root' (in structuralist terms) of problems with addiction. It is also not adequate as a resource for

change. The bottom line is, however, that many people, religious and non-religious, in my experience, tend to make a link between addiction and sin. Many troubled by substance abuse have an image of a God who is preoccupied with punishment and retribution (Albers 1999:153). Irrespective of the way in which problems with addiction begin, addiction is a state that increasingly works to separate us from our relationship with God. If problems with addiction include sinful elements, it can be helpful to look at these more carefully, because in the Christian tradition, sin is dealt with in a way that can be experienced as freeing and opening up new possibilities for living, as I show in Section 4.8.

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, discourses around addiction, and alcoholism in particular, emphasised the religious or spiritual nature of this problem (Hopson 1996:539). This was largely due to the views of the philosopher and proto-psychologist William James and the psychologist Carl Jung and their influence on the beginning of the movement ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’ (hereafter referred to as AA). They both regard alcoholism as a symptom of a spiritual problem (Hopson 1996:539). This view is also expressed by Lyman P Powel (cited by Clinebell 1968:104):

Whatever plan it followed, it would seem to be a calamity which the church need not add to her many other lost opportunities, to allow the cure and care of the drunkard to fall entirely into the hands of science, which admittedly needs all the help that faith in God can give in dealing with an ill so largely spiritual as the excessive use of alcohol.

In Section 4.8, I described sin as something that is not substantial within a person, but that affects our relationship with God and with other people. In this regard, there are discourses to the effect that the relationship with substances or problematic behaviour can take the place of, or at least diminish, the relationship with God (Clinebell 1968:73,154; Mercadante 1996:42). Self-stories of open-ended connectedness to all that is (spirituality) increasingly become reduced to self-stories of being stuck in a dominating relationship with substances or behaviours that masquerade as the ultimate solution. The twelve-step paradigms used by AA and others is based on the assumption that addiction is actually a substitute for a deeper spiritual life (Hopson 1996:535). This understanding is confirmed by the reaction of Jung to a letter from Bill W., the founder of AA:

[The] craving for alcohol [is] the equivalent on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval

language [as] the union with God .... You see, 'alcohol' in Latin is *spiritus*, and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: *spiritus contra spiritum*.

(Jung 1961:21, cited by Hopson 1996:535;  
see also Diamond 2000:75)

For William James ([1902] 2002:300), alcohol's power over humankind is also due to its stimulating of the mystical faculties in human nature, such as faith, a great exciter of the *Yes* function in man. The *Yes* function is the positive taking up of life and its challenges, or, in the words of Bateson (1972b:329), a mindset of complementarity with the universe. It is a desire to be one with the truth for a moment, and not mere perversity to run after it. For Clinebell (1968:73) too, alcohol provides a pseudosatisfaction for the 'alcoholic's' religious needs. The 'alcoholic' satisfies his religious needs by non-religious means, and in doing so tragically magnifies his religious needs in the long run. Addiction is the attachment of our inherent desire for God to an endless variety of other things (May 1988:3). This has been called 'idolatry' in the Christian tradition (May 1988:11). In the light of this longing for a spiritual experience, it has been said that '[a]n addict is a person with a spiritual calling who shows up at the wrong address' (Diamond 2000:xx). For the addict, religion and substances are often functionally interchangeable. In this sense, the temporary satisfaction from using substances can function as a social restraint, as it diverts a person's need for spiritual fulfilment to other relationships.

I agree with the idea that self-stories of problems with substances can be described as sinful when a person allows such problems increasingly to disrupt his or her orientation to God and others, and allows them to rule his or her life. It can be a sinful way of escaping human anxiety, manifesting in self-seeking and false feelings of power and control. Or, as the opposite, it can be a way of giving up of life, of being a self in relation with God, a choice for death (Mercadante 1996:42).

Another discourse regarding problems with substances emphasises self-stories of a person's moral inadequacy. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, addictions were seen as the result of a disordered will, resulting from moral weakness (Hopson 1996:539). In AA, the crux of the spiritual disease of alcoholism is self-will or self-centredness. For this, the addict must take profound responsibility. This construct is adopted in spite of the power that is conferred on alcohol in AA. There is no mention of the social or cultural forces implicated in individual addiction. The only solution is abstinence on a

physical level, and, given the source of the illness, turning one's self entirely over to God. Through surrender of the self-will, the 'Higher Power' commences to make a person capable of controlling the desire for alcohol.

These concepts of addiction as sin or moral inadequacy have been rejected socially, especially regarding addiction, because of a narrow view of sin, as concerned with behaviour, morality, will and choice, and the abuse of this concept within and outside the church (Mercadante 1996:21). Sin has often been associated with moralism, judgementalism and exclusivism. The 'Mission' approach in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is an example of working with problems with addiction as moral weakness, as sin that is only about choice (Clinebell 1968:91). In more contemporary language, this view of sin is described as missing your life goals and not fulfilling your life purpose (Van Vonderen 2004:28). Sin is not found in the use of the substances, but in the effect that you are not the person you could be (Steyn & Verwey 1999:250.)

The view of addiction as a sign of a person's being weak-willed or morally weak militates against the early detection and treatment of addiction, as it increases defensiveness and a lack of access to help: 'To moralize with an alcoholic is the ultimate in counselling futility' (Clinebell 1968:167). It represents a complete lack of understanding of the complexity of the problems associated with substances and behaviours. Moral failure is a social restraint in establishing a more hopeful relationship with substances and their abuse, because of the experience of guilt and shame that can result in isolation and resistance to help. A downward spiral can be exacerbated, with a total loss of any consciousness of self-efficacy or motivation to change.

Behaviour and the will are not central to sin, but our relationship with God is. The consequences of sin are not only relevant on a moral level. They are also manifested in self-stories of human frailty and in disasters and diseases beyond human causation, thus non-moral evil (see Section 4.8). Self-stories about problems with substances may sometimes include storylines that fit into this category of non-moral brokenness and vulnerability, for example, the effects of genetic or biological stories on self-stories. Another terrain outside individual moral failure is the social contexts of self-stories. People are more inclined to addictions in environments where it is difficult to thrive (Peele 2004:217). This social context is discussed in Sections 5.7 and 5.8.

Rather than describe addiction as a personal sin, or as being weak-willed or morally weak, it is useful to see addiction as a social sin, in the sense that we live in a world full of tensions and conflicts (Clinebell 1968:170). Addiction can be a manifestation of the sickness of our society. It is not a moral deviation or perverse habit, but a reaction to social strictures, for example, '[a]lcoholism is a tragic response to areas of tragedy in our culture [...] Through the use of wine, man has anesthetized the sufferings caused by social chaos' (Clinebell 1968:155). I discuss the social context of addiction in Section 5.7 but the view on addiction that it is a social sin can become a social restraint when it results in a passive acceptance of substances as the only way out of this mess.

Our human predicament has two sides. On the one hand, we are faced with choices and possibilities, not all of which can be put into action. This leads to tension, frustration, and insecurity. On the other hand, we become aware of the restrictions on our range of choices, either by inherent finitude, or by the deliberate repressive intervention of others. This tension between freedom and limitation can be the precursor of constructive or destructive behaviour. One possible reaction to this human predicament is the possibility of distraction, that is, the dulling of the ache of discontentment, also through chemical alterations in the body (Mercadante 1996:34). One can say that it is a reaction to being sinned against. Although sin is involved, true victimisation must be acknowledged.

Another development is that the metaphor of addiction has replaced the concept of sin as the universal human predicament (Mercadante 1996:130). The concept of addiction has been broadened to help explain all kinds of problematic behaviour. The powerlessness known by alcoholics, for example, as expressed in these discourses became a general explanation for dysfunction (Mercadante 1996:130). In this sense, May (1988:4,11) argues that we are all addicts: to be alive is to be addicted. This shift has taken place within the larger movements of discursive constructions of the 'medicalisation of deviance', from morals to medicine. It is part of the pathologising of society, as discussed in previous chapters. I expand on this notion of social restraint in the next section, Section 5.5 (on addiction as an illness).

The substitution of the concept of addiction for the concept of sin is problematic, because addiction can be only one of many ways in which sin is experienced. To reduce sin in this way to a biological deficiency is too naturalistic and deterministic. It is also

not possible to dismiss sin as just a volitional matter, or as a moral choice. The human predicament is much more complex; and sin has been described in varied ways in the Christian tradition.

As I have already mentioned, problems with substances are sometimes linked to sin, through the demonisation of alcohol or drugs, which force a craving or an inordinate desire upon a person. In the addiction-recovery movement, alcohol, for example, takes on a life of its own, being a 'subtle foe' that is 'cunning, baffling and powerful' (Mercadante 1996:86). This is to a certain extent consonant with the religious idea of evil as an external power that lures or seduces, and with narrative ways of externalising or personification of the problem. However, externalisation emphasises the consequences of the specific relationship with the substance or behaviour, not whether it is good or bad in itself. Also, in religious circles, there is a broad acceptance that virtually all drugs have both positive and negative effects, and that it is therefore not the substance itself, but the way it is used, that can cause problems. The demonisation of drugs or behaviours also touches on the political issues behind these practices (Raven 1997). This demonisation can become a social restraint in generating stories of powerlessness. The problem with this locating of evil in the substance or behaviour is that it prevents placing the 'evil force' within a larger framework of social systems that inextricably imprison people. It also short-circuits a recognition of the complex relationship between free will and determinism, exempting a person from responsibility.

Self-stories in the context of substance abuse are often influenced by stories of sin or moral failure. The deconstruction of these stories can contribute to the performance of empowering self-stories in the context of substance abuse. On the whole, there is a negative relationship between substance abuse and religion/spirituality which suggests that religion and spirituality may play a role in the struggle against substance abuse (Hopson 1996:551). This is taken up in the later part of this chapter (Section 5.10). I now want to turn to a second notion about addiction that is pervasive in modern society, namely addiction as an illness.

## **5.5 STORIES OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS AN ILLNESS**

Illness stories are a dominating context for the construction of self-stories in relation to substance abuse. The construct of substance abuse as an illness can be another socio-



cultural restraint in the effort to rid oneself of this abuse. In this section, I deconstruct this discourse and discuss the ways in which it can function as a social restraint.

The change from the early concept of addiction as a spiritual illness to the more medical, biological view of addiction as a disease points to a growing acceptance of the disease construct in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Western society (Mercadante 1996:99). The disease concept was seen as the enlightened alternative to a moralistic, punitive and judgemental way of looking at the problem of alcohol abuse. When the concept is used in this way, it is mainly used as a strategy to remove addiction from the punitive sphere of the criminal justice system. The change was fully evident during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1956, the American Medical Association described alcoholism as a slow, progressive and incurable disease (Mercadante 1996:101). By the late 1970s, professionals and the public firmly believed that alcoholism was a disease (Mercadante 1996:101). Especially since the work of Jellinek in the 1960s, the disease concept of addiction has become the predominant contemporary understanding of addiction (see Hopson 1996:540).

In this section, I want to discuss today's strong emphasis on genetic, biological or pharmacological determinism in the addiction recovery movement (Room 2003:222; Reinerman 2005:308). From a constructionist and narrative point of view, these are socially constructed discourses about addiction, one set of stories about problems with addiction amongst many other possible stories (Diamond 2000:7). There is an opinion that the story of pervasive determinism has been constructed in collusion, between fund-seeking scientists, the sensationalist media and an acquiescent public overwhelmed by the contingencies of a changing world (Mercadante 1996:120). The disease concept was embraced when it became evident that political and financial influence could be gained by labelling 'addiction' and related behaviour a disease (Walters 1999:3).

The medical profession has a vested interest in the addiction concept. The medical profession accrues power, influence and financial security from its support of the disease concept of addiction (Bamber 2009b:3). The addiction treatment industry also has much to gain from the disease concept of addiction, which provides opportunities for unlimited and never-ending treatment (Walters 1999:209). The use of the concept of addiction is rigorously defended, because addiction involves behaviour which, in terms of societal values, needs to be explained as a malfunction. The medical concept of

addiction is thus driven by a moral consensus, not a scientific consensus; it justifies the use of a medical framework for a moral issue (Davies 1992:80; Gerritsen 2000:191; Heim et al 2001:62). Regarding it as an illness gives society permission to help people with substance problems, to offer help, rather than punishment.

This change in the prevailing 'language games' leads to the presentation of addiction as an illness, not a sin, a moral weakness or failure. This is comforting to many, as it takes away guilt and self-blame, as well as helps people to come to terms with the reality of their problem (Walters 1999:21). The discursive shift helps people to view themselves differently, not as immoral sinners, but as powerless victims of a powerful disease. This helps them to take responsibility in managing the disease. It encourages people to seek help. AA also uses the illness metaphor to counter the stigma attached to the view of addiction as a moral failing (Hopson 1996:540). Addiction as a disease is a metaphor that contributes to the well-being of millions of sober addicts. It can be constructively used if it can help a person in some way.

What is important in the context of this research, is that the construction of addiction as a disease is not 'wrong' and, in fact, as mentioned, it can be helpful, but it must be remembered that it remains a social construction, one possible narrative amongst many other possible narratives about substance abuse. Although sickness is a metaphor that helps to escape cycles of shame and blame, the metaphor internalises the deficit story and it does not explain the complexity of addiction. Social constructionism and narrative approaches are inclined to propose alternative metaphors that can expand our current understandings and stories about addiction (Monk et al 1997:159).

Although an impression of scientific agreement has arisen, the disease concept has always been only vaguely and variably expressed (Mercadante 1996:102). There is still some confusion beneath the surface agreement that addiction is an illness. An understanding of addiction at the professional level is still in a 'preparadigm state' (Mercadante 1996:102). There is no unanimity about the nature of this 'addictive disease', about what is meant by disease. The addiction concept is sometimes based on four elements: a progression in the intensity of the disease, a preoccupation with the maintenance of the disease, a perceived loss of control and negative long-term consequences or persistence in spite of negative consequences. It is thus said to be a progressively debilitating condition (Walters 1999:10).

The story of addiction as a 'dispositional' disease predominates (Mercadante 1996:101). The classic disease theory sees addiction as a divergence from what is 'normal', rooted in biological and genetically determined factors, such as abnormal brain chemistry or metabolism. It seems to be unanimously accepted that the illness or genetic disorder predisposes a person toward addiction (Mercadante 1996:101). This has become a dominant cultural narrative. The argument is that there is a physiological reaction to the consumption of a chemical substance. Withdrawal of the substance is distressing, and can be resolved by re-introduction of the substance. A person can reach a stage where he or she feels unable to cope without the substance, with a sense of compulsion to consume it. This reaction to substances is predisposed by a physical illness or genetic disorder.

Another argument is more or less that we live according to the neurotransmitters in the brain. Genetic factors determine a person's sensitivity to chemicals in the brain, such as endorphins, serotonin, etc. When there are imbalances in the chemicals in the brain, a person becomes driven by the biochemical need for a given substance, which makes him or her an addict (Steyn & Verwey 1999:31). Thus a person's genetic make-up influences metabolic processes that contribute to a predisposition to addiction. In the light of this discourse, addiction is said to be a progressive, chronic condition. It is irreversible, it cannot be cured. It robs a person of familiar and identity-related roles and requires the development of alternative lifestyles (Steyn & Verwey 1999:97).

Addiction as an illness is also described in terms of a psychological disease, a malfunction of the psyche: 'The great majority of addicts have turned to habit-forming drugs as a result of serious underlying personality maladjustments' (Naramore 1966:21). The emphasis is on inner deficiencies and a total loss of control. In this paradigm, the psychological soil for addiction can be high levels of anxiety in relationships, emotional immaturity, ambivalence toward authority, low frustration tolerance, grandiosity, perfectionism, guilt, low self-esteem, feelings of isolation, compulsiveness. This complex matrix of psychological factors has resulted in the postulation of a personality inadequacy or pathology (Clinebell 1968:57; Diamond 2000:xxii; Naramore 1966:23,35).

In narrative therapy, the many commonalities among alcoholics are seen as the common outcomes of alcoholism, rather than as antecedent conditions or the result of an alcoholic personality (Diamond 2000:xxii). There is no uniform set of personality attributes amongst people struggling with substance abuse: 'Studies assessing the personality characteristics of people who abuse alcohol have failed to identify a core set of personality attributes unique to this group of individuals' (Walters 1999:61). This also applies to other forms of drug use. In the light of numerous studies, there is no theoretical basis for a difference between 'addicts' and 'normal persons' with regard to so-called personality traits, such as cognitive style or locus of control (internal or external) (Davies 1992:68). The psychological characteristics of substance abusers are more likely to be the effect of their addictions or a commonality of lifestyles. Narrative ways of working are not about the discrediting or exclusion of particular narratives, such as addiction as a disease, in favour of other narratives, such as addiction as a social construction, but about an inquiry into the real effects of relevant narratives on the construction of self-stories.

The disease concept has broadened out to include the diagnosis of 'co-dependency'. The concept of co-dependency refers to the way a person can adapt to the lifestyle of a person who abuses substances, and organises his or her life around that person. In many ways the concept is a critique against traditional female sex-role socialisation, but it is suspect in its pathologising of female socialisation. It fails to differentiate between victimisation and responsibility, between problematic self-loss and loving self-giving: 'It pathologizes and homogenizes what is really a differentiated and complex set of sociological and psychological issues, and ultimately spiritual ones as well' (Mercadante 1996:154).

The deterministic approach to addiction as an illness is mostly softened by emphasising the interplay between biological or genetic and acquired behaviour. While genetic factors can play a role in the construction of self-stories, the environment also plays a role (Steyn & Verwey 1999:202). Heredity is not a fate. It does not compel anybody to behave in a certain way; it only creates the possibility of certain behaviours. One is still responsible for not surrendering to one's genetic heritage or environment and for becoming addicted. The argument is that many people have chemical imbalances without becoming addicted (Steyn & Verwey 1999:126). One remains responsible. The challenge is to live constructively with one's God-given abilities.

Assumptions about the genetic or biological determinants of addictions are often taken up in theories as if they were the truth about addiction, and not as socially constructed narratives that are open to review, change and even replacement. It is not yet possible to determine whether a gene or genes play a role in addiction – thus far, a genetically determined predisposition to addiction is not supported by research (Law 1997:58; Reinerman 2005a:33). No gene has been identified that indisputably makes a person lose control of his or her substance use (Peele 2004:181). Research on the genetic components of addiction therefore still has a long way to go. At most, one can say: ‘We will probably in the near future regard addiction as an illness, the same as any other genetic illness’ (Steyn & Verwey 1999:331). But even if geneticists do some day discover a set of genes that makes some people more susceptible to addiction, this susceptibility is neither necessary nor sufficient to explain the presence of the condition (Reinerman 2005a:33).

From a constructionist perspective, science itself is not the product of an accumulation of neutral facts, but a contingent social activity. We story our relationships with chemistry and biology the same way we story those with all other human experience. Scientific and biological discourses about addiction are only part of a larger collection of stories of addiction. Cultural conditioning leaves its footprints on the chemical templates of life (DNA). Humans’ constructed world acts back upon nature. In the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world, the human organism is transformed (Berger & Luckmann 1966:204). It is actually our stories that hold the templates of life: ‘Stories, not atoms, are the stuff that hold our lives and our world together’ (Diamond 2000:5). Biological processes are mediated by their social context (Galea et al 2004:36). Simply put, according to this narrative, society is co-constitutive in the evolution of genes and biology.

I now want to explore further the general conception of addiction as disease. There has been a substantial amount of criticism of the notion of addiction as a disease (Bates 2005; Davies 1992; Manning 2007; Monk et al 1997; Peele 2004; Raven 1997; Reinerman 2005a and b; Walters 1999). Walters (1999:33,44) considers a wide range of studies regarding the disease model of addiction, concluding that the model cannot be applied to addiction in an oversimplified way, and must be viewed sceptically. There is

little evidence that any disease can replace one set of integrated behavioural strings with another set of goal-directed behaviour (Davies 1992:48).

There is also some criticism of pharmacological determinism; indeed, '[t]he critique of pharmacological determinism has been firmly established for at least half a century' (Manning 2007:10). The strongest evidence against biological or pharmacological determinism is the enormous amount of data charting the different ways in which consumption of the same drugs is perceived and experienced in different cultures and societies (Manning 2007:10; Room 2003).

Given that the disease concept is only one narrative amongst others, the important thing is not whether it is 'true' or not, but what the consequences of this narrative are. There are arguments against the construction of addictive behaviours as diseases, because it renders human beings passive victims rather than active agents in the construction of their lives (Hopson 1996:540). The addiction as disease concept can inhibit change by limiting a person's options and opportunities (Walters 1999:167). The disease concept of addiction, or addiction as it is understood in a medical paradigm, is a formidable social restraint. It is formidable because of its apparent simplicity, its popularity and its benefits, as I have already mentioned. People who accept that they are addicted may be denying themselves opportunities for change. In blocking opportunities for change, the paradigm may become life-limiting instead of life-enhancing. It encourages unlimited and perpetual treatment. The addiction concept can also lock a person into the relapse-recovery cycle indefinitely (Walters 1999:170).

The view that addiction is a disease contributes to increased insularity from society, so that a retreat into a stance of diseased individualism is the essence of the problem of addictions. Today, the emphasis is more and more on biological determinism, reflecting culture's 'pathologising' of life and a sense of fatalism (Mercadante 1996:141). This can lead to an immersion in the tragic dimension of life or the perpetuation of fearful self-protective behaviour. It can lead to a culture of victims who refuse to take responsibility for their actions. The emphasis on the physical aspect in addiction can result in a person's experience of being tragically imprisoned in a material reality, being weighed down by a pervasive hopelessness.

The view of addiction as a disease can have the potential of describing someone who is a responsible subject as an object of medical-psychological practice. As I have already mentioned, a diagnosis of and subscribing to a disease can function as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bates 2005:17). The powerful processes of labelling can help to consolidate identification with the role of addict (Manning 2007:18). One study by Peele (2004:38) indicates that a belief in addiction as an illness is the primary factor in the prediction of relapse following treatment. Behaviour is then justified on the basis of an addiction over which the person is powerless (Walters 1999:189). The restraining effect of these discourses is evident. A temporary problem, especially in young people, can be turned into a lifelong disease. It fixes and entrenches a particular non-ideal category of personhood. People are then pushed toward a despairing biological determinism from which there is no escape.

The disease metaphor is not adequate in its expression of human experience that consists of multiple narratives, including alternative stories that lie outside the experience of addiction. The stories of unassisted change challenge the medical concepts of addiction (Walters 1999:143). The disease model cannot explain why many young people simply grow out of the 'disease' (Manning 2007:9). The medical concept of addiction is also challenged by the fact that treatment for addiction has more in common with procedures for attitude change than with medical intervention. The idea of 'loss of control' is also an expression with social-functional value, thus a linguistic device, a metaphor, that captures the moral and behavioural dilemma in which a person struggling with substances finds him- or herself (Davies 1992:62). It is an explanation that serves a function.

The disease metaphor also cannot justify or explain full healing or regeneration, in contrast to the Biblical account of re-creation or new creation (Gal. 6:15). In the disease approach, the bondage of sin is taken more seriously than the power of grace. This is often accompanied by a pessimism regarding God's grace and human possibilities. As will be discussed further on, the possibilities of human freedom and growth in grace must also be taken seriously, a grace vast enough to restore or re-create human nature.

The modernist description of addiction in biological or pathological terms affirms its structuralist and essentialist views of the self. It provides a fixed identity, as the essence of who a person is. Addiction discourses, as one narrative amongst others, are totalising

regarding the person with the problem and present the problem as something static that is difficult to change. In this light, ‘to many people, the term “addiction” implies some sort of extraordinary condition arising from abnormal psychobiological processes, and requiring specialist treatment. Furthermore, there is often an assumption that “addictions” are lifelong problems which cannot be cured, only held in remission’ (Raven 1997:5).

The concept of addiction, that is, the view that substance abuse is a disease, represents a set of narratives that is regarded as valid and that can be helpful in encouraging people to get help in order to get better. However, as discussed, it can also function as a social restraint in limiting the exploration of alternative substance abuse stories. Substance abuse as illness represents ‘truth’ discourses that lead to thin conclusions about one’s life (White 1997b:15). Other areas of a person’s life become hidden by the problem story (Morgan 2000:14). It can potentially fail to promote a client’s confidence in his or her ability to effect a change and undermine a person’s sense of self-efficacy (Walters 1999:173). A language of sickness or weakness also subjects individuals to professional discourses and also renders them politically docile. Like all theories of limitation, it has a self-fulfilling nature (Jenkins 1990:31), also in the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

In narrative ways of working, ‘addiction’ is approached as something that exists in the space between people, in their social interaction within cultures, rather than as a deficit within a person. The third notion of addiction that I am turning towards now, is the idea that addiction speaks about a person’s sense of self, of his or her identity.

## **5.6 SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS A DOMINATING STORY**

In this paragraph, I want to take the social (de-)construction of addiction a step further, and show how its construction, also as sin or sickness, speaks to people struggling with substance abuse about their identities. In the light of the research, it should already be clear that people’s self-stories can be profoundly influenced by stories of substance abuse. The totalising or dominating character of substance abuse stories in the life of a person struggling with substance abuse can also be a social restraint in a person’s journey away from its effects. I want to deconstruct this dominating construction of substance abuse and explore the ways in which it can be a social restraint.



Problems with substances tend to become a powerful voice in the construction of self-stories. In line with the tendency of problems in general (White 2001:1), problems with substances speak to people about who they are as people and about their way of being a self with others; in other words, the problems have a pervasive influence in the constituting of identity (see Section 3.7.3). The use of substances becomes an attempt to answer to the question: 'Who am I'? The experience of an adequate sense of self is seen as contingent on using substances. It becomes a primary factor in organising a person's life and sense of self (Diamond 2000:120; Monk et al 1997:164-165). Because the person's experience of selfhood is at stake, the use of substances gains authority and subordinates all other considerations. This is most evident in the practice of labelling a person an 'addict', an 'alcoholic' or a 'dependent' person (Monk et al 1997:164). These are examples of internalising statements that locate the problem deep inside one's nature (Epston 1993:171). Totalising descriptions such as these impose a big weight on the problem story, and leaving little room for other descriptions of the self. As a restraining influence, they fix a person in a certain position regarding his or her identity and social role – a position that is almost impossible to change. Hence the slogan 'Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic' (Mercadante 1996:119).

Addicts, in a totalising discourse, are often seen as different from other people; they can never become like normal people. They are seen as bodily and mentally constituted differently from their peers. Because they are perceived as different, willpower and morality are not relevant in addiction. Regarding alcohol consumption, it is impossible to stop drinking, and moral urging has no effect. That is allegedly how one can identify a 'real alcoholic' (Mercadante 1996:86).

What are the effects of the stories of substance abuse as sin or as illness on the totality of a person's self-story, in other words, a person's identity? Firstly, what is the effect of substance abuse as sin on the construction of self-stories? Emphasis on these problems as a sign of spiritual failure can have an overwhelming influence on a person's sense of self and the construction of self-stories. If the spiritual problem is seen as reflecting 'self-will' or 'self-centredness', it carries with it a harsh indictment on the self, because it is putting the self in the centre, that is, in the place of God. This is a most basic and serious sin in the Christian tradition (Van Vonderen 2004:17).

If a person involved in these problems regards problems with substances as the result of sinful choices and sinful behaviour because of the person's being inherently flawed, it can have devastating effects on a religious person's views and experiences of him- or herself, especially if he or she does not perceive grace to be present. A failure to measure up to moralistic ideals has kept people captive to self-stories of unworthiness, being lost, guilt, shame and hopelessness for centuries.

Secondly, what is the effect of stories of substance abuse as a disease (psychological or physiological) on the construction of self-stories? Problems with substances and behaviours are often seen as a manifestation of the search for a solution to personality or psychological deficits (Clinebell 1968:57; Diamond 2000:xxii; Narramore 1966:21). This includes relief from or coping with socially constructed problems such as feelings of inferiority, emotional immaturity, compulsivity, high levels of social anxiety, depression, inner conflict or weak impulse control. These become 'characteristics' an addict identifies with, speaking of who he or she is. As I have already mentioned (see Section 5.5), some common behaviours among people who have problems with substances need not be seen as the underlying causes of these problems (as in the modernist or essentialist view of the self), but can be the consequences of organising their lives around these substances.

The presentation of problems with substances as a physical illness, as something inherently wrong with a person, can also influence the person's identity. Who one is can become identified with the naturalistic and deterministic qualities of a biological deficiency, with being abnormal. Therefore a disease can result in a crisis of identity: 'Illness presents a crisis to the human self-image. That is why an identity crisis goes hand in hand with illness. On the sick-bed we must ask ourselves again: 'Who am I?' (Louw 1994:36). Illness brings with it the experience of uselessness and frailty: 'Because he is unable to "work" or "do" anything, the patient feels redundant, useless, in everybody's way and excluded from our pragmatic social system' (Louw 1994:40). This experience of failure that can be brought about by illness is directly related to the cultural values and practices of modern humanism. In our present culture of achievement, illness can be stigmatising:

Against the background of our present culture, with the accent on life, health, relaxation, production, entertainment and success, sickness could indeed be stigmatizing. The emphasis on achievement in a culture of

production and consumption degrades the ill, imparting to them a stigma of uselessness and futility.

(Louw 1994:1; see also Weingarten 2001)

The pervasive deficit language linked to addiction, whether spiritual, psychological or biological, severely restricts the ways of being a self in this world. It therefore imposes a social restraint on establishing a preferred relationship with substances.

Associating substance abuse with identity investments makes it harder to stop (Bates 2005:11). As I have already mentioned, the powerful processes of labelling can help to consolidate identification with the role of an addict (Manning 2007:18). Linking substance abuse with a quest for identity as an ‘addict’ can reinforce and consolidate an addictive lifestyle: ‘The very act of explaining drug use in certain habitual ways might help to maintain and develop a drug problem in those terms’ (Davies 1992:15). Often, people with problems with substances experience their identity as being pushed from one linguistic trench into another in a losing battle where the only consolation lies in being identified with an ‘underground’, marginalised language community. These different addiction discourses operate on our thinking from outside. An addict can become paralyzed through these discourses that internalise personal deficiency (Bates 2005:7). The deficiency is as inescapable as one’s own shadow. The positioning of addiction as deep inside a person’s nature has the same effect as declaring it an illness. It makes invisible the social practices that are the lifeblood of the problem, that promote, sustain and nurture it (Monk et al 1997:164).

Narrative ways of working hope to enable a person to be an agent in his or her own story, and not a puppet of substances, more specifically, of limiting substance abuse narratives. There are gaps in and limits on the influence of substance abuse in a person’s life: ‘The narrative approach is characterized by an unshakable belief in the incomplete nature of all oppressions’ (Monk et al 1997:184).

Substances may have a lot of influence, but there are always areas where they are not in control. There is a part of a person that is kept separate from the influence of substances. The life of a person struggling with substance abuse consists of much more than the substance use. This brings elements of hope to the therapy; and it makes visible resources for dealing with the problem. These are alternative stories (see Section 3.7.4) that can constitute sparkling moments or unique outcomes which can in turn serve as

the beginnings of new stories. The client can be invited see them as meaningful developments of an alternative story, a counterplot to the story of the abuse of alcohol and drugs. Change is the unfolding of a story of a person asserting him- or herself over the powerful demands of alcohol and drugs.

In addition to these three dominating discourses about substance abuse, there are a range of other specific social constructions that contribute to the production of the phenomenon of substance abuse, such as social demands, consumer society, individualism, gender or race.

## **5.7 SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT**

In this section, I deconstruct other socio-cultural restraints, such as social expectations, the culture of consumption and individualism, that a person can encounter in his or her struggle with substance abuse. These socio-cultural factors influence the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

### **5.7.1 Substance abuse and cultural expectations**

In the addiction recovery movement, the focus is on the individual and his or her problems and personal improvement, resulting in a minimising of the socio-cultural structures that produce, exacerbate or promote problems with substances. From a social constructionist point of view, a relationship with substances is part of a larger communal and social pattern of activities, as discussed in the section on the social construction of addiction and cultural patterns of consumption (Section 5.2). The cultural environment is constitutive of a person's life. An individual is a personal expression of the cultural patterns of behaviour produced in language. Life is like a dance in which all are involved; we move together through life like drops in a river, also with regard to our struggle with substance abuse. Our total experience of substance abuse is modelled by our social group. Reactions to and patterns of substance abuse are learned (Davies 1992:x). Therefore, as mentioned, social imperatives are more powerful than a person's biological disposition in establishing a relationship with substances.

As a whole ecological process, addiction cannot be considered outside a person's environment in terms of the symptoms inside a person. Addiction is the result of a

discursive positioning, thus also a manifestation of what is happening in society. As Clinebell (1968:59) reminds us: 'It is a healthy thing to recall that the alcoholic's conflicts are structured by the culture in which he [or she] lives.' A society can be too limited in the possibilities it offers its members to express themselves, so that they do not have a rich variety of self-narratives. Limited social roles can be a restraining influence in establishing a preferred relationship with substances and behaviours (Steyn & Verwey 1999:310.) As a social phenomenon, addiction is therefore sometimes seen as a transgression of society against its own members, an expression of a culture's inability to take care of itself (Steyn & Verwey 1999:382). This can include the social values and assumptions that contribute to the experience of failure or disability, or to the need to cover up or escape from the pain of being different.

In the context of this research, it is important to mention that a description of addiction as caused by social factors is not the same as a social construction of addiction (Walters 1999:80). In social constructionism, addiction does not reside as a cause-effect structure within an individual, but in the space between people in their interaction through discourses (Bates 2005:9).

One restraining socio-cultural influence is the context provided by society and culture in the construction of self-stories of inadequacy or exclusion. We are continually reminded of the importance of being productive and competent. Competitiveness causes a lot of stress in our relationships; there are never winners, only losers, because of the relationship costs involved in winning. We also pressure ourselves to perform to be accepted. When society attaches too much value to work and achievement, we find that love, respect and acceptance become conditional, they must be deserved (Steyn & Verwey 1999:178). Then we are valued and accepted by the way in which we contribute to the achievement of economic prosperity and sustain the ideological interests invested in individualism, capitalism, democracy and technology. The pervasive power of Foucault's 'normalising gaze' has the effect of producing marginalised or subjugated self-stories. A concern with speed, efficiency, quantity and beauty, material possessions, power and status shames and marginalises those who do not qualify. Among teenagers, the opposite can be relevant, where in some groups efficiency, cleverness and success is seen as 'nerdy'. A person can learn from childhood to be chronically dissatisfied with him- or herself. People feel that they cannot live up to social expectations and feel unnecessary guilty, inferior or excluded. Locally, one can add to this the difficulty

people have in adapting to the changing conditions in South Africa, with many people experiencing a loss of physical and career security. This increase in anxiety can lead people to addiction to ease the pain or escape the problems (Steyn & Verwey 1999:310).

Addiction can deceive a person in two ways, as the person uses an argument such as 'I need my drugs and alcohol in order to feel like a valuable and lovable human being', or 'I'm not a valuable and loving human being in the first place'. In this way substances can fill an intolerable emptiness, and come to play a primary role in organising a person's life and sense of self. Substances also help to mask pain, despair and depression (Steyn & Verwey 1999:384-385). The failure to measure up, to take grief, for example, in one's stride, is pathologised. Using alcohol to hide depression is a way of avoiding the risk of being perceived as 'weak' and not acting like a 'man'. These cultural notions support drinking, and must be challenged.

Another socio-cultural restraint is the changes in the role of social structures in providing opportunities for experiencing the performance of self-stories of being accepted, valued and part of something (Van Vonderen 2004:27). Families do not play and chat anymore; children are lonely; and people do not learn to socialise well. They learn to play and talk with machines. Industrial society is incomplete and unfulfilling in many respects (Wright 1995:49). There is a lack of meaningful recreation, ritual and spirituality. Modern life has become so empty that people need to find meaning and excitement in drugs. People look for ways to entertain themselves. Cultural circumstances such as meaninglessness and boredom are important factors in inviting a relationship with substances (Steyn & Verwey 1999:384-385). Thus, one can be susceptible to substances when lonely or bored, or use drugs as a means to get company. We have not learned how to be human and to relate to other humans. We rarely feel at home and welcome with ourselves, others and God. We become defensive about our own needs; and life becomes a struggle. It is therefore not strange that people want to ease their tension and find relief and resolve their frustrations with the use of substances (Steyn & Verwey 1999:388).

The use of substances plays a critical role where there is a sense of exclusion, a lack of connection with life. The popularity of bars, pubs and shebeens may be more about companionship than about intoxication. Bateson (1972b:329) reminds us about the

function of alcohol to make a person see and experience him- or herself as a part of the group: ‘That is, it enables complementarity in the relationships which surround him [or her]’ (Bateson 1972b:329). For Bateson, the complementary state of mind, of a part-whole relationship, is a more useful paradigm than the modern dualisms of mind/matter, God/man, etc. In this way, alcohol use is actually a shortcut to a more ‘correct’ state of mind. This argument suggests that substance abuse as a symptom is a socio-cultural determinant. This approach is consistent with the view of the Salvation Army – that society has greased the slope down which poor creatures slide to perdition (Clinebell 1968:97).

In line with the importance of belonging and companionship, in narrative ways of working, there is also a questioning of the idea of peer pressure (Moss & Butterworth 1999:6). Although a friendship group can be part of the reason why especially young people use drugs, they are usually not pressured to do it. Young people do not think of themselves as victims of peer pressure, but as people who made informed decisions. Young people are capable of making their own choices; and their friends are not always bad for them. A person must not be forced to break up with the only support system he or she has (Moss & Butterworth 1999:6). The peer group is always the most important source of knowledge and information. It is rather the broader historical, political and cultural contexts that produce the kinds of relationship a group can have with substances.

To change his or her relationship with substances, a person must feel that he or she is valued and is allowed to be different, that others are glad he or she is there, and that they are satisfied with the person as he or she is (Van Vonderen 2004:26). The person also needs a self-story that is not dominated by the demands and expectations of others, but is socially negotiated and constructed in terms of his or her own preferences for living (Steyn & Verwey 1999:388).

Some cultural invitations, just like some cultural expectations, are performed in discourses that constitute the context for the construction of self-stories in a relationship with substance abuse.

## **5.7.2 Substance abuse and cultural invitations**

Today's consumer society with its lack of fixed social guidelines for living is also a restraining factor in choosing a relationship with substances. Regarding the cultural use of substances, the tradition of pleasant social intercourse involving alcohol and other substances goes back for thousands of years in most cultures of the world, especially on special occasions like festivals and in rituals anchored in the flow of seasons and the biorhythms of life (Steyn & Verwey 1999:256). In the Bible, wine was part of the Israelites' daily meal, and part of the sacrifices to the Lord, and together with wheat and oil, wine is mentioned as a symbol of wealth and fertility. It is used to signify the blood of Christ in the Holy Communion. It was taken for pleasure, and Jesus himself also drank wine (Mt 26:29). However, the Bible generally disapproves of overindulgence in alcohol (Pr 20:1; 23:29-35; Eph 5:18; 1 Cor 6:10; Gl 5:21). From these examples it is evident that there are cultural models for the skills of moderate consumption. Cultures that insulate people from addiction throughout their lives have the following norms regarding the use of alcohol: drinking is accepted but it socially governed, and people are taught to behave within clear boundaries. A high premium is placed on drinking properly and being responsible for alcohol consumption and behaviour while drinking (Peele 2004:32). Once substances are divorced from rituals and cultural meaning, they easily take over people's lives. One of the ways of caring is the maintenance of a greater cultural context which gives meaning and purpose to our habits.

Cultural ways of thinking, speaking about the use of drugs and alcohol, invite us subtly and continuously to take up addiction's way of life. We are overwhelmed by linguistic and social practices surrounding us every day that train and cajole us into addict lifestyles (Monk et al 1997:170). Alcohol is presented as the guest of honour at social gatherings of different kinds, guaranteed to produce the kind of idyllic outcomes people would prefer in themselves and their relationships. In advertising and other media, the use of substances (especially alcohol) is identified with 'gracious living, warm fellowship and being emancipated and sophisticated' (Clinebell 1968:61). Monk et al (1997:172) remark that alcohol can even be personified as a major cultural hero behind the success of something like a country's rugby teams. The alcohol industry makes use of the diagnosis of the illness of addiction, in that it likes to suggest that, although a small number of unfortunate individuals with this problem cannot drink, the rest of us



can continue drinking, even excessively. Society (or perhaps industry) needs addictions in order to perpetuate itself.

Enticing pictures of substance use are powered by the general culture of consumption that we participate in, as discussed earlier: 'It could be said that contemporary culture is a culture of consumption' (White 1997a:38). The individual's right to private property is enshrined in liberal capitalism; and with it comes the exclusive use of and disposal of anything that is amassed from this property. In the light of modern technology and materialism, the 'good life' has come to imply the uninhibited use of products, either as a means of living or of enriching oneself. Consumerism is the 'seduction that getting and having and using are the main mode of humanness' (Brueggeman, cited by Perry and Rolland 1999:288). This consumerism invites us to live as if there is a product between every need and fulfilment.

The media and marketing industry have the ability to create needs and insist on the satisfaction of the need as the norm. Thus, 'many cultural forces are inciting of an excessive consumption of a range of different substances' (White 1997a:38). Substance use holds the promise of a better life, and the use of various kinds of drugs and alcohol are encouraged around every corner: 'Drug dependence and addiction is epidemic because of the cultural imperative to "feel good"' (Willard 1988:100). It is not strange that these substances, whether legal, illicit or by prescription, can become a problem to a person. In this context, questions such as the following can be considered: Why is it that some people do not take drugs? Why is it that some people do not take more drugs than they do? Why is it that some people do not consume excessive amounts of alcohol? 'How, under these circumstances, is it possible for you to have this desire to break your life from this substance?' (White 1997a:38).

Another 'addiction narrative' circulating in society is the characterisation of contemporary western society as an addictive system. Schaefer (1987:28) persuasively argues that the ground of all addiction is the radically dependent nature of society itself. Substance abuse is symptomatic of the failure of the prevailing cultural values. These values include a reliance on the consumption of substances for satisfaction, and the illusion that we are in control of this consumption. Addictive society is a concomitant of the patriarchal 'White male system' with its ideals of power and control, and the reactionary 'Reactive Female System' with its powerlessness, subservience and

accommodation. Addictions are thus the symptom of a pervasive addiction to power and control or its counterparts, powerlessness and non-living (Schaefer 1987:28). These discourses have an effect on the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

Cultural discourses surrounding expectations, invitations to substance (ab)use and individualism can be social restraints in the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse. The result of tensions within society and unconditioned consumption can be seen in individualism.

### **5.7.3 Substance abuse and individualism**

Individualism, a social theory favouring freedom for individuals over collective control, also restricts the self's choices in its demand for autonomy, independence and performance. It emphasises freedom and consumer sovereignty, uprooting a person from cultural and relational contexts, setting the one up against others, enhancing all kinds of social problem, including vulnerability to disordered consumption (Mbiti 1969:224). Wright (1995:49) refers to the possibility that the increase in depression and anxiety 'the evolution of despair' noted recently is an indication of increasing isolation: 'The problem with modern life, increasingly, is less that we're "oversocialized" than that we're undersocialized or, that too little of our "social" contact is social in the natural, intimate sense of the word.'

Individualism spawns ostensibly universal norms about life, norms that emphasise notions of 'wholeness', of 'self-possession' and 'self-containment' and that encourage people to engage in activities that present themselves as normal in regard to these demands of society. In addition to this, there are the imperatives of 'growth', 'self-actualisation' and 'fulfilment' (see Section 3.6.2.1). All this can contribute to practices related to self-control and self-management, that is, 'the inscription in one's body of the ways of being that are appropriate to the subject positions usually taken up' (Davies 1991:49). Substance abuse can create the illusion that one is an insider of these cultural ways of being, or it can be a way of escaping and refusing these demands. It can be a way to fit in, or a way to hide the pain of not fitting in. This emphasis on practices of the self is exacerbated by the modern dualism of mind/body, which contributes to a

focus on one's inner life at the expense of what is happening to one's body and the environment.

Another effect of individualism is the practice of secrecy. When denial, repression and rationalisation have not been able to cover up the addiction, it becomes increasingly necessary to hide it from other people in order to continue with the addictive behaviour. Secrecy sustains the hold of substances over one's life (Law 1997:64). The necessity of lying consciously results in growing alienation from the self and other people. It would be unbearable to reveal the dark secret one is carrying. The person becomes enshrouded in an atmosphere of depression, guilt and inadequacy. When the secret is opened up, it can result in shame, but also immense relief that the burden can be lifted. Openness, accountability and honesty deprive substances of their power. Secrecy is much more part of male culture, as part of the tactics to deal with one's problems on one's own, as dictated by the dominant western culture of masculinity (Law 1997:64).

In the next section, I consider politics, gender and race as a continuation of the discussion of the social and cultural context of substance abuse and the way it influences self-stories.

## **5.8 SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND POLITICS, GENDER AND OPPRESSION**

Politics, gender and oppression also play a role in the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse. In this section, I want to focus on the ways in which politics, gender and oppression can function as social restraints in a person's relationship with substance abuse.

### **5.8.1 Substance abuse and oppression**

A narrative approach is political in that it recognises that stories are conducive to making connections between oppressive cultural narratives (such as racism or sexism) and the way these narratives shape our experiences. Addiction lifestyles are shaped by multiple discourses about race, gender and class. Contextual factors that extend beyond a family with problems and that are restraining factors in choosing a relationship with substances are attitudes and norms that favour substance abuse, and the availability of drugs and alcohol.

Social attitudes influence the desirability or attractiveness of using alcohol as a means of personality adjustment. In environments where a group's hopes and expectations for the future are diminished, for example, among inner city youths, substances are more available and its abuse is seen as a 'normal' way of 'coping' with circumstances, as a way of constructing self-narratives (Manning 2007:25). Extreme economic deprivation and neighbourhood disorganisation also reduce the possibilities for such choices of living. Substance abuse is often a response to poverty, unemployment and racism (Peele 2004:34). The oppression of minority groups by majority groups involves taking away their prospects for living, making members of minorities vulnerable to the abuse of substances. The central feature of a minority group is not its numbers, but its potential to be stigmatised (Bernard & Goodyear 1992:194). Being disadvantaged by race and class is being deprived of basic human rights, entitlements and dignity; it is being spoken of in derogatory terms; and it is being criticised and excluded from opportunities to develop (James & Perry 1997:12-13).

The tendency in discourses focusing on such deprivation is to put the blame for addiction on the client, to pathologise, while the pattern of substance (ab)use is actually part of the context of the client's lived experience, that is, socially constructed. For such clients, giving up self-will to a Higher Power (as advocated in the addiction recovery movement) is not liberating, because the person is already socially disempowered. It can be more liberating for the client to experience self-efficacy in influencing his or her own life and be empowered by a divine mandate to live a preferred self-story (Peele 2004:38; Smith & Seymour 1999:105).

In therapy with people who struggle with substance abuse, it would be crucial not to fail in dealing with cultural differences, because these differences can play a role in a person's problems (Bernard & Goodyear 1992:204). A basic knowledge of the underpinnings of minority cultures is necessary in order to understand the social construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse better.

### **5.8.2 Substance abuse and gender**

The way in which addiction is culturally constructed can be seen in the view of the addiction of women: the woman alcoholic starts to drink later, most are hidden, and

women are able to stay out of difficulties for longer (Clinebell 1968:37). The social consequences for women, such as social disapproval, are different than for men. This can lead to more oppressive responses to women's substance use in the long term (Ettorre 2007:231; Raven 1997:6). Women are much more likely than men to be prescribed tranquillisers; and it has been argued that this is a strategy for helping women to cope with unjust social practices, even domestic violence (Raven 1997:4). For many women, drug dependency is the only way to continue and endure their place in society (Ettorre 2007:232). Girls and young women are also at risk of the abuse of diet pills, because of the Western cultural association of slimness with beauty (McKeever 1998:6).

The identity-stories that are provided for young men in culture include certain ways of dealing with alcohol. There are discourses that specify alcohol consumption as a means of belonging to certain groups of young men, as well as a means of showing that a male is an adult and a man (Smith & Winslade 1997:18). Alcohol use confirms a masculine identity and confers the status of manhood. Culture also teaches young men that drinking is a way to cope with any kind of stress or anxiety. In addition, steroids are frequently the drug of choice for young males, because of the pressure to perform athletically as a way to experience acceptance. Steroid use also ties in with the abovementioned discourses about appearance and beauty. All these discourses have profound effects on the construction of self-stories in a relationship with substances.

A causal link between alcohol abuse and violent behaviour is also generally assumed (Jenkins 1997:43). It is actually more helpful to see violence as the manifestation of general patterns of thinking that include beliefs about entitlement, privilege and power and expectations of deference and submission from those regarded as inferior or of lesser status (Jenkins 1997:43). Violence and alcohol abuse can rather be seen as parallel issues around responsibility. A person must be helped to discover his own influence in his life, rather than being under the influence of an external condition, disorder or substance.

The cultural restraints on men and women regarding the development and sustaining of relationships can also contribute to a sense of isolation, entitlement and self-justification that invites substance abuse. These cultural restraints can 'promote an avoidance of social and emotional responsibility in men and a reliance on women to take

responsibility for aspects of family life including intimacy, parenting and conflict resolution' (Jenkins 1990:45). Disassociation from oneself and one's environment is fertile ground for seeking the rewards of substance abuse.

### **5.8.3 Substance abuse and politics**

The politics of drug use is concerned with which drugs are legal and which illegal, how their supply and use are regulated, which are perceived as OK and which are really bad. Drug use and supply is strongly determined by political and economic interests, as it is the second most lucrative industry in the world, following the arms trade (Peele 2004:225; Raven 1997:4). In traditional therapies, the politics of drug use are never questioned. It is accepted that some drugs are illegal, and that punishment for their use is appropriate. This lack of political perspective reinforces dominant cultural practices (Anthony 2002:6).

In the West, the first drug laws were aimed at the opium smoking by immigrants (particularly Asians to the United States) and indigenous people in fear of these groups (Denborough 1999:23). One example is the prohibition on the Chinese importing opium for smoking (Knipe 1995:368-369). It has clear racist origins. Alcohol was defended as the drug of choice for the white races. The use of drugs, including those used in medicine, was gradually taken out of the domain of personal choice and put under the control of the medical profession (Denborough 1999:24). Those who used illegal substances came to be seen as ill, as victims of a disease.

The explosion of drug use in the 1960s by young people for recreational purposes challenged medical-legal drug control and sidelined the disease model of addiction (Denborough 1999:26). Young people with their links to alternative values, such as non-conformity and anti-materialism, became a target for the establishment's legislation regime (Morgan 1999:20). These changes in policies confirm the political nature of substance use as a context for the construction of self-stories in relation to substance abuse.

A culture of a 'war on drugs' (Morgan 1999:20) as a way to fight addiction actually shifts the focus away from social practices that support addiction, hinders recovery and sustains those practices. Making drugs illegal contributes to people's becoming

involved in risky behaviour. Some aspects of the drug culture are made worse by the illegality of certain drugs and the sanctioning of others (Moss & Butterworth 1999:4). Heroin use was common in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was found in various patent medications. The current risks associated with heroin use are due to its illegality and route of administration (Raven 1997:4). In Australia, over ninety-five per cent of drug-related deaths can be attributed to the use of legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco (Moss & Butterworth 1999:4).

How can the harm caused by drug policies be reduced? (Peele 2004:240). How do we come to respect people's choices in respect of their preferences with regard to drug use? How is a war on and criminalisation of young substance users going to help them? These are questions that will remain on the agenda of narrative ways of working, because they point in the direction of a deconstruction of the political discourses surrounding substance abuse.

A reduction in living possibilities through marginalisation is equivalent to a reduction in options to choose from for a person struggling with substance abuse. It limits the self-stories that can be constructed as alternatives to substance abuse narratives. Gender discourses in society can also contribute to a construction of self-stories in which substance abuse has its own place. The politics of substance abuse constitutes discourses surrounding a use of substances that becomes a norm – sometimes helpful, sometimes not. A continual struggle is needed to find a balance between honouring the rights of an individual and protecting a community. Discourses with regard to oppression, gender and substance use politics can function as restraining factors in the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

As I have tried to do in a condensed way, these discourses have to be deconstructed in order to open up other possibilities. In the rest of the chapter, I explore self-God-stories as alternative resources and contexts for the construction of self-stories that contradict the limiting invitations of these discourses.

However, before I commence with the discussion of self-God-stories as alternatives to restraining substance abuse stories, I want to say something about AA, because AA and its imitators are a partner in the landscape of people's struggle with substance abuse.

## 5.9 THE CONTRIBUTION OF AA

A short discussion of AA is relevant for this research, as AA is a worldwide movement that influences discourses on substance abuse on many levels. AA reflects an intersection of modernist, narrative and spiritual views on substance abuse and sobriety.

In AA, the prerequisite for a sober life is declaring yourself an addict, and proclaiming the recognition that you will always be an addict (Diamond 2000:124; Hopson 1996:544). In AA, this does not involve an expert pronouncement from someone else, but is a matter of self-diagnosis. Still, the person is bound up with a fixed deficit identity, as being a 'sick soul'. There is an insistence on powerlessness and humble submission of the self that links with the Biblical theme of self-loss as the way to finding oneself. Recovery is made possible at the junction between the surrendered self and the Higher Power (Hopson 1996:537).

The admission of lifelong disability and powerlessness must be followed up by a day-to-day submission to the Higher Power. In fact, any transformation is only possible in the aftermath of 'calamity and collapse' (Walle 1992:95). The hard facts of one's situation can result in healing self-surrender. This self-surrender includes embracing AA's local group. The movement into the twelve-step paradigm is sometimes described as a conversion, a transformation of personal identity comprising an entire change of worldview (Mercadante 1996:4). In AA meetings, one places one's identity within a group bound by a shared pathology or biological vulnerability. This can contribute to a deterministic atmosphere, and can actually further an alienating individualism. The tragedy of lowered sights is already pervasive in our world. This is far removed from the faith community's common empowerment for service, healing and the actualising of the divine vision for humanity.

People feel accepted and welcomed in AA meetings. In an alienated and transient world, it is something special to be so readily noticed, accepted and wanted as people are in AA meetings. The strong ethic of community, of one addict helping another, makes a difference for people struggling with substances (White 1997s:41). The meetings reduce isolation and create community, and are rituals of the performance of stories that are an alternative to stories of rejection or isolation. There a person can find compassion and identification around a common problem and shared experiences. The



bonds of fellowship are the common problem, shared gratitude for the remedy, and a desire to transmit the programme to others suffering (Mercadante 1996:92). Many have found in AA a filling of a spiritual vacuum or a replacement for rejected religion. AA is the prototype for the addiction recovery movement.

AA's spiritual roots in the Oxford Group are often underplayed, because admitting to these origins could detract from AA's tolerance of divergent religious and non-religious views; and it could undermine the scientific demeanour of today's AA. Today, AA reflects the broad view of religion as described by William James (Walle 1992:95). It seems politically correct to refer to more generic spiritual influences than to the evangelical Protestant Oxford Group.

Personal narratives of changed lives constitute a great part of AA functioning (Diamond 2000:128; White 1997a:41). AA was not originally intended as a group experience. Although the group plays an important role today, the emphasis is still on personal change. AA shared with the Oxford Group an emphasis on personal stories of change, a non-coercive organisation, helping others to maintain their own sobriety, and working in intimate and empathetic small local meetings. The view of sin in the Oxford Group was that sin was primarily against the self, the living with the 'I' in the middle of 'sin'. The surrendering of the 'I' results in a life without sin. AA took up this concept of surrendering in addiction as pivotal to recovery process, without the possibility of alcoholism being cured, only controlled. Both groups take a self-initiated process approach to spirituality. Both emphasise individuality, and focus on specific needs and experiences. Neither has a political agenda and both reflect some anti-intellectualism. AA retains a conversion dynamic and hope without the Christological roots. There is also, as in the Oxford Group, an ambivalence towards 'church' religion. The companionship of the group became more valued than broader interests in the Christian community. The sin versus addiction dichotomy further distanced people from religious affiliation. The Oxford Group also provided the introduction into the use of medical metaphors. The sin and conversion theme was the basis for the addiction-recovery model. AA left behind the expectation of ever healing from addiction, as alcoholism is seen as a lifelong disability, a powerlessness over alcohol. Self-will must be given up, followed by a day-to-day submission to God's will. Those who stop drinking but do not pursue the other advocated behavioural standards are known as 'dry drunks'. Undue pressure in this regard is avoided.

AA has kept open the understanding of addiction as something with physical, psychological and spiritual components and resists a univocal causal structure. It includes the understanding of alcoholism as a progressive disease. The so-called ‘allergy’ to alcohol has become important throughout AA.

AA may serve as a humanising adjunct to the increasing professionalisation, bureaucratisation and medicalisation of people’s lives. Notions of purpose, commitment and calling are privileged over psychologising, and therefore AA has resisted turning its services over to the knowledges of the professional disciplines (White 1997:42). AA is significant in the light of narrative and postmodern ways of working: ‘AA’s significance, from the standpoint of narrative therapy and postmodernism is due in large part to its ability to provide healing without healers (i.e. professionals), spirituality (i.e. faith and hope) without religion (religious institutions in particular), and solidarity and community without organization and bureaucracy’ (Diamond 2000:128). Spirituality as interconnectedness must be addressed in order to effect lifestyle changes: ‘In contrast to the prevailing ethos of Western culture, 12-step programs celebrate the reality of human limitations and the necessity of relationship in community. Personal healing must take place in a community infused with a sense of connection with oneself, others, the other, and the world’ (Hopson 1996:553).

The AA programme works because it involves the telling and re-telling of now-sober alcoholics’ stories: ‘The purpose of telling one’s story in the company of fellow sufferers is to find wholeness in limitation’ (Diamond 2000:103). The telling and retelling of stories have become the practice that best embraces the therapeutic process of AA. Indeed, AA has lived in story and lived by story since its inception in 1935. Today, the telling of stories remains the heart of the AA programme (Diamond 2000:128). Through this storytelling, AA is also about a performance of rites of passage, the storying of a separation from substances, the turning points in one’s life, and reincorporation. It provides important support for those who are busy navigating the liminal phase (White 1997a:41) – in this regard, White uses the migration of identity metaphor). The telling of stories is a way to establish a sense of self as experienced through time. It makes change possible, because a person is viewed as efficacious in constructing a story; and thus the story may be reconstructed (Hopson 1996:541). Stories also provide opportunities for connection through the overlap with other

people's stories. They provide a sense of consolidation of the sense of self and identification with others.

Shame as an interpersonal phenomenon is addressed through the telling of stories (Hopson 1996:542). Through reciprocal self-revelation, the addicted may hear stories of others who have done things of which they too are ashamed; in this way, each person may feel less unique and less alienated: 'The structure of AA maintains the necessity of relationships to sustain and regulate the self' (Hopson 1996:543).

Another helpful aspect of AA is the emphasis on the need for restitution and amending relations with those who have been harmed by the addict's destructive behaviour (Hopson 1996:546). This is important, because a healthy life is a group life. The groups to which we belong are constitutive of our self-stories.

AA is not helpful for everybody, but it can inform therapy with almost all clients struggling with dependency (Diamond 2000:116). AA includes narratives about community, unconditional acceptance and transformation that is relevant for self-God-stories in a relationship with substance abuse. In the context of this research, AA incorporates in its programme some of the dominating discourses about substance abuse, for example, that substance abuse is an illness and is totalising with regard to a person's identity. At the same time, AA also functions in the sphere of the socially constructed nature of substance abuse, as expressed in its concern for diverse narratives constituting the addiction experience and the importance of relations in constructing new self-stories. It is especially its emphasis on God-stories as alternatives to stories of being stuck in substance abuse that makes it relevant for this research.

In the final part of this chapter, I discuss self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse as alternatives to dominating substance abuse stories.

## **5.10 GOD-STORIES IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

The fourth area of concern in this study is considering how God-stories contribute to the social construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse. What difference do God-stories make to a person struggling with substance abuse? What is the effect of self-God-stories on stories of substance abuse? I make the assumption that God-stories

can provide alternative self-stories in relation to constraining substance abuse stories, and that self-God-stories are therefore a context of hope regarding problems with substance abuse.

Religion/spirituality can play an important part in the struggle against substance abuse. What Clinebell (1968:18) said regarding alcoholism still rings true: 'There is no area of human suffering in which religion has given a more convincing demonstration of its therapeutic power than in the problem of alcoholism.' A remark by Bateson (1972:332) is also relevant in this context – the survival of the creature is dependent on the highest form of power within which the creature lives: 'If the creature destroys its environment, it destroys itself.' Religion has therapeutic power because it is part of the powerful environment in which humans live and that ensures the survival of this 'creature' (created being).

What follows is a discussion of God-stories in the context of the construction of self-stories that are alternatives to restraining stories of substance abuse. The focus is on a spirituality grounded in a relationship with God, at the heart of which is unconditional acceptance (Rm 8:37-39). As I have said in the previous chapter, we cannot enforce an 'I-Thou' relationship with God in therapy; there is no map for infusing spirituality into our therapy process. We can only remain open and be willing to show up when those moments of contact with the 'presence' of God present themselves. In the social constructionist discourse that this research is embedded in, I want to be open to spirituality, as I defined it in Section 3.1. This can include other kinds of God – such as experiences or overarching commitments that are different from my own God-stories.

Problems with substances cannot be described in only one set of language terms (Diamond 2000:9). The most important contribution of God-stories in working with addiction is an expansion of linguistic resources, the multiplication of metaphors and stories out of which preferred self-stories can be constructed (Griffith & Griffith 2002:134). I now want to discuss three self-God-stories that can be helpful in struggling with substance abuse, that can suffuse or overrun cultural restraints, namely, remembering God, grace and migration of identity. They are stories of being connected to God and others through faith, of the graceful centring of marginalised stories, and of a journey towards a new way of being through an identification with the story of Christ. It

is important to know that this discussion of self-God-stories is presented within the framework of narrative ways of working, as discussed in the previous chapters.

### **5.10.1 Re-membering God**

The first context of hope in a person's struggle with substance abuse is the self-God-story of re-membering God. This section includes God-stories that relate to the incorporation of additional contexts for the construction of self-stories in relationship with substance abuse (see also Section 4.5.7).

#### ***5.10.1.1 An alternative context for self-stories***

In narrative therapy, re-membering practices are about the downgrading or upgrading of the membership of the 'club' of one's life (White 1997b:23). The privileging of the relationship with God is about revisiting and re-telling the history of a person's relationship with God (Carlson & Erickson 2000:78). In the conversations that I had with the participants in this study (see Chapter 6), it almost always included a reconnecting to childhood narratives. It is faith that invites God to become a Co-author of the text of one's life. Re-membering God is about positioning oneself within preferred God-stories, about making God-stories part of one's self-stories (Marsh 2002:258). It is a resurrection of subjugated stories in the face of the dominating substance abuse stories.

In stepping through the door into God-stories, other doorways out of the domain of substances become visible. God-stories offer freedom from the stuckness of substance abuse. We have seen that the self is not fixed into a crystallised, core essence, but can be differently constructed in different social contexts (see Chapter 3). God-stories provide different social contexts that can be alternatives to the dominating social context of substance abuse. As an additional context, it functions as a narrative resource for the construction of preferred self-stories. Multiple contexts contribute to the shaping and thick description of life (White 1997b:17).

As I discuss further below, God-stories can be a partial answer to the narrative search for alternative sites in culture in which to construct self-stories. The relationship with God is also a reflective position that can avoid entrapment in problems such as

substance abuse. In the language of family therapy, communication with God contributes to meta-communication, that is, communication about the communication from a point outside of the system (Berenson 1999:78). The relationship with God creates an external point of reference, a social linguistic world that contributes to the externalisation of problems with substances. It is a stimulus for the deconstruction of addiction discourses, for example, to revise how substance abuse is socially constructed in the history of the relationship of God- and self-stories.

A relationship with God is like the establishment of a lookout platform from which to view the landscape of one's experiences with and without substances (Griffith & Griffith 2002:110). It establishes a context to separate from the dominant ways of being and thinking that inform substance abuse (White 1995:160). The relationship with the external context of God-stories makes possible a re-location of substance abuse as not the only story that speaks about one's identity, and makes visible other self-stories outside the influence and domain of substances. As I have mentioned previously, even the expression 'hitting rock bottom' is an indication that the domination of the substance is not complete; it does not completely exclude other possibilities. The relationship with God is another domain for self-stories, offering other possibilities for living. Interaction with the countercultural stories of the Bible and being part of the stories of the Christian faith community are also doorways to alternative self-stories.

#### ***5.10.1.2 Unconditional acceptance***

By stepping into the story of God's involvement with us in Jesus Christ, a fundamental experience of being accepted through the redemptive work of God becomes part of our self-story (Clinebell 1968:101). We make our images of God; and our images of God make us. Therefore experiencing God's unconditional love and acceptance, a sense that God is for us, that we are beloved of God, can provide a powerful incentive to hope and to change. This is a substitute for the feeling of being rejected by life, either as contributing to substance abuse or as a result of it.

Acceptance is a counter-story to the story of being abused by substances. The struggle with substance abuse is mostly enshrouded in feelings of guilt for harming oneself and others, and isolation because of the choices one has made. An experience of being accepted includes the notion of forgiveness. God's forgiveness for whatever has

estranged us from Him and distorts our relationship with Him provides the possibility for a new beginning. It also provides the opportunity for self-forgiveness, self-respect and self-acceptance. It can be likened to a process of homecoming, of making our home in God. Spirituality contributes to the discovery of being connected with the larger life, the external world, in empowering ways (Diamond 2000:87). It strengthens our connection with ourselves, others and the world around us, and in this way allows us to inhabit our life-world and our self-stories. Stories of acceptance, of forgiveness and of being part of life are starting points for a construction of self-stories outside the domain of substance abuse.

#### ***5.10.1.3 A deeper desire***

A surrender to a beneficent God is a reclaiming of our primary desire for God, as opposed to our attachment to substances, a transforming of our desire toward God (May 1988:95). Re-membering God is an expression of our need for God. He can give us what substances promise, but fail to provide. A person can experience a need for God, because He can satisfy his or her deepest thirst, fulfil his or her longings. A person can experience a need for God because of the consequences of his or her struggle with substance abuse that leave a person weary and shameful, in need of forgiveness and freedom. A person can experience a need for God because of his or her limitations and the abusive power of the substances. He alone can be experienced as strong enough to overcome these binding forces. He is a 'Higher Power' (in the words of AA). As will be seen in the next chapter, people with faith also have the sense that they can only fulfil their life purpose if a relationship with substances is substituted by a relationship with God. Whereas a relationship with substances diminishes life, a relationship with God is life-enhancing.

#### ***5.10.1.4 Meaning and values***

Faith or re-membering God provides a context for stories about ultimate meaning (see Section 4.14.1). Self-stories embedded in God-stories are potentially resilient regarding issues of meaning, providing means of handling ultimate anxiety (anxiety about our place in life in the light of our finiteness), as well as transcending values for the self (Clinebell 1968:162). Re-membering God can make life worthwhile, for then we are taken up in God's purposes and plans, also in the performance of our self-stories. To

find meaning in our relationships with God can enlarge our sense of self and reduce the limiting meanings of the socially constructed problem of substance abuse. Meaning can enable us to pursue a preferred course in life that goes beyond our limiting circumstances.

#### ***5.10.1.5 The faith community***

Problems tend to ‘dis-member’ people from supporting communities through shame and isolation (Griffith & Griffith 2002:208). The re-membering of God also involves the re-membering of the faith community, in whatever form it functions in a person’s life. God is with us in our companions on the journey. The faith community is an important context for the construction and performance of new self-stories outside the domain of substance abuse. Change is a social, dialogical event, embedded in the language and stories of the communities we participate in (see Section 1.3.4). Grassroots communities of recovery represent key sites of resistance against the totalising regimes of addiction discourses (Bamber 2009b:1). The community also models acceptance, the sharing of brokenness and the sharing of hope. The experience of belonging in the faith community is constitutive of identity; and its acceptance and support is an alternative environment for the handling of life’s pressures (Van Vonderen 2004:157).

#### ***5.10.1.6 Agency***

In contrast to one’s life being determined by the struggle with substance abuse, it can be affirming of the self to be an agent in the re-membering of God (see Section 4.15.6). Through faith and faithful actions, one is able to respond to the invitations extended by God-stories, to participate in the redemption stories of Christianity. This can include the performance of stories of overcoming the abuse of substances. Bible-reading is a rich resource for constructing self-stories in the face of restrictions posed by addiction (see Section 2.6). The Bible is full of images that can help one in the struggle against the influence of the substances. Prayer is also an important practice to centre God in one’s life, an opportunity to see oneself from God’s perspective and conform to His stories (see Section 4.14.5).

One can live with confidence if one can picture a future for oneself in one’s imagination. Once there is hope, a livable future opens up. A relationship with God can



introduce such a context of hope in the construction of self-stories in the struggle with substance abuse. New relationships create new worlds in which to live. The focus on this context of hope is sharpened by the stories of grace.

## **5.10.2 Grace**

A second context of hope in a person's struggle with substance abuse is self-God-stories of grace (see Section 4.8). Grace not only affirms a re-remembering of God, but qualifies the relationship with God as a certain kind of relationship. It is, for example, a relationship that is adequate in its presentation of options for living even in the context of very restrictive self-stories.

### ***5.10.2.1 Unexpected goodness***

Grace is a full consideration of our human brokenness, failures and limitations, a reckoning with the consequences of sin, and then declaring that life is good. It is as if to say that everything is all right, even though everything is not all right (Smedes 1999:12,15). Thus grace, as the opposite of moralism, is unconditional love and acceptance. It is not something substantial, but a condensed story (metaphor) about a life-giving God. Grace is the expression of God's love surprising us with undeserved and unexpected goodness (May 1988:125).

Because grace is a radical gift, our most meaningful encounters with grace probably come when we do not expect them. There are obvious places to search for grace, including the sacraments, Scripture, a faith community, prayer and meditation. There are also hidden places where we can search for grace, including times of turmoil and failure and our problems with substances. Problems with substances never completely take away our ability to receive grace. Problems with substances can actually be experienced as a gift (May 1988:28). In more secular terms, chaos and entropy can create rich and fertile possibilities for change (Peck 1978:283). We can be led to come to the limits of our own possibilities in order to turn to grace. Thus hope can come to us through pain. In the end, grace seeks us, but does not control us. We only have to open our clenched fists so that grace can fill up the spaces.

Through grace we are accepted and our guilty consciences are healed. In opposition to the requirements of substance abuse of isolation and rejection, grace provides a basic feeling of acceptance, including self-acceptance, self-respect and peace (Clinebell 1968:101,158). Substance abuse also sometimes requires perfectionism and the misappreciation of our humanness, that is, being dissatisfied. Through grace, we can let go of the need to be blameless or perfect; and we can be encouraged by the sharing of brokenness with humanity. In grace we can release the fear of not measuring up to God's expectations. This can encourage us to refuse to live up to restricting cultural expectations, to learn not to measure ourselves in terms of social achievements, but to live the life that grace allows us to live. In the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse, the God-story of grace can help a person to achieve contentedness in the midst of limitations. This makes the use of substances obsolete.

#### ***5.10.2.2 A place to stand***

Grace creates spaciousness (May 1988:169). Demanding, judging, condemning and failing is replaced by a place to stand, and this enables us to make choices. Grace enables us to choose, to re-construct our self-stories on our own behalf. Hope effected through grace is the opposite of being determined. In narrative language, it puts before us the possibility of self-stories that are alternatives to the dominant problem stories. In the construction of self-stories, previously marginalised stories, like stories of investments, of abilities, of being good enough, can be centred. This brings the possibility of change, that things can be different.

Grace, like narrative ways of working, brings a sense of self-agency as an antidote to the dominant internalising discourse of addiction. Grace works together with narrative ways of working in saying that a person has a problem, but is not the problem. The measure of a person lies outside a person in the space between people and between people and God. Grace and hope bring the freedom of undefended openness to risking that we are good, created in God's image and love, and claiming our dignity. This is in contrast to the messages from addiction discourses that the addict's life is determined, that he or she is bad, hopeless and incapable. Grace is the hope that His mercy is endless and that He will not let us go, in spite of ourselves. Substances are intent on limiting a person's ability to respond to life (see Section 5.3). The spaciousness of grace opens up

the ability to respond to our circumstances, to be responsible partners in the covenant with God.

Sometimes the empowerment of our responses through grace is instantaneous; sometimes it is a gradual process; but it is always miraculous in its creation of new opportunities (May 1988:153). In the addiction recovery movement, there is a tension regarding responsibility. On the one hand, the person is powerless to stop the addiction. On the other hand, the problem is seen as ‘self-will run riot’, implying a certain responsibility. That is why the problem is ultimately spiritual in the addiction recovery movement (see Section 5.9). Grace cuts through this tension in establishing decentred agency. The interaction of grace and responsibility or self-will is a mystery that can only be experienced in stories. In the construction of self-stories, God can become a Co-author of the text of a person’s life.

### ***5.10.2.3 Grace that transforms***

We cannot ignore that we have in some way cooperated with or contributed to our problem-story. If our relationship with God has suffered and addiction is experienced as sinful, the surprising news is that grace dwarfs the reality of sin, because God’s grace restores relationship. Our identities lie not in our sin or our sickness, for we are not forever identified by sin or sickness, but by our relationship with God (Mercadante 1996:173). The Christian hope does not only expect an arresting of the problem, but also God’s grace that transforms. Change or transformation is made possible through our experiencing of the sufficiency of God’s grace: ‘...the transformative process that occasions recovery (whether named, acknowledged, or not) is the grace of God’ (Albers 1999:148). Grace is energy to improve behaviour, it is an infusion of willpower, but it is much more – it is primarily a turning towards the love that is being offered in the relationship with God.

In the construction of self-stories in the relationship with a struggle with substance abuse, stories of grace provide the opening and the ‘spark’ (unique outcomes) to develop self-stories of being beloved and being good enough. It also provides an alternative to the need to consume in order to find fulfilment. It experiences God as a protecting and benevolent presence in one’s life. It can come to us in a delightful tune, a sharp jolt, a painful stumble, a comic grin, a laugh, in many varied ways. It promises

more than we think is possible, because it is beyond human possibilities. Grace is the heart of God, welcoming us back home (see Section 4.8) reconnecting us with our preferred values and purposes, in order to reflect His image, live His stories.

Hope that is founded on grace already experiences how grace is touching and restoring our past, present and future as part of a new creation. Our past becomes accommodated in our lives. Not everything in our past was addictive or diseased. We can, together with God, make something better with the remaining fragments of the past. The history of resistance to addiction and of self-care can become visible and can become part of the construction of alternative self-stories.

#### ***5.10.2.4 Grace-full relationships***

The faith community is suffused by the radiance of grace. Grace comes to us through the network of relationships in which we are embedded. Just as sin is a social reality, so grace is also a social reality, mediated through history and community itself. In this regard, the church can be a place where a person can experience him- or herself as more defective than anywhere else, because law-oriented relations produce shame. But luckily, grace can also come to us in the social form of the groups to which we belong. As mentioned before, unconditional love and acceptance are modelled in the faith community. Grace-full relationships represent a flesh-and-blood experience of what it means to be accepted by God on the basis of something other than personal performance (Van Vonderen 2004:219). They encourage us to join with others in the co-construction of our self-stories.

In the faith community we are surrounded with a context of grace-full relationships in which different ways of being can be explored and risks can be taken without fear of rejection. The faith community can be the audience for the performance of a preferred relationship with substances (see Section 4.8). It can model values such as moderate consumption and responsibility. Being part of and accepted in the faith community means that we do not need drugs to experience feelings of belonging, or to accept ourselves. The faith community also awakens us to our ethical responsibility to our neighbours, to care for others' welfare. Serving other people in community can become a calling that takes a person away from the self-centred lifestyle of addiction. It strengthens our sense of responsibility, interdependence and satisfaction with life.

### ***5.10.2.5 Being surprised by joy***

With regard to the satisfaction with life, grace and hope connects with the ‘as if’, playful quality of narrative (see Section 4.15.6). Playing can be a wholesome experience. It can be helpful to experience the pleasure of playing. Play enhances the feeling of being alive. It requires fearless expansion of ourselves into the unknown. Playing is a source of trust and feeling at home with the self and others. It is the absorption of the self in some activity, completely forgetting about self. Then there is a flow of energy and happiness. We can inhibit the flow of happiness through guilt and inferior feelings. Childlike, trustful and recreational playing can be part of our religion and view of life. Are we not being too serious to really relax? Grace invites us to look differently at life, with lightness and an emotional tranquillity that enables us to inhabit and enjoy our preferred self-stories. Having fun, enjoying life, are powerful counter-stories to substance abuse. They can help to relativise the value of the effects of substances and the self-centred lifestyle of substances. They bring distance from the problem and give a different perspective on life; they are part of having an identity or sense of self that is an alternative to substance abuse self-stories. When we feel that our lives are safe with God, self-God-stories of grace bring hope: ‘Grace is the feeling of hope’ (Smedes 1999:11). The hope that grace provides brings the possibility of constructing preferred self-stories in the face of a struggle with substances. The God-story of grace precedes and constitutes the next God-story of the change in identity. Stories of re-membering and of grace generate new possibilities for attaining a new sense of self.

### **5.10.3 Migration of identity**

A third context of hope in a person’s struggle with substance abuse is self-God-stories of a migration of identity. The metaphor of a migration of identity was pertinently brought to bear on the journey away from the abuse of substances by Michael White (1997a). Today the re-construction of a non-addict identity in relation with substance abuse is well considered in the work with addiction (Bamber 2009a:4). I want to explore the possibilities of this metaphor as contributing to the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

### *5.10.3.1 Changing self-stories*

The limitations of the addict identity have already been discussed in this chapter. Each relapse confirms and is evidence of an 'inner addict' identity. It locates the etiology of addiction within the individual, as a physiological, psychological or spiritual deficit in the person. It obscures social, political and cultural factors contributing to problems with substances. It makes addicts so different from other people that it is difficult for them to extricate themselves from problematic relationships with drugs (Bates 2005:9).

The purposes of God-stories and narrative ways of working coalesce around alternative constructions of identity. In narrative, the therapist is interested in creating in conversations stories of identity that can assist people to break from the influence of the problems they are facing (Morgan 2000:14). Religion/spirituality is also about receiving a new name, about telling and living new self-stories in relationship with God (see Section 4.9). A new identity is bestowed on the self through an identification with the story of Christ. The person's self-story becomes incorporated in the Jesus-story and the Jesus-story becomes incorporated in the self-story (Root 1989:266). His story becomes my story. This incorporation is the formation of a new decentred subjectivity that is contrary to modern cultural narratives about self-fulfilment, self-control and the veneration of the self. This new identity is a social construction of the self that can be an alternative to problematic self-stories. In this section, I discuss these ideas in the context of the transformation of a self-story of being abused by substances.

Michael White (1997a) has suggested that a change in a person's relationship with substances can be equated with a change in one's way of being in the world, that is, a change in the way one relates to with oneself and others, a change in identity: 'For most persons, changing one's relationship with substances requires a break from much of one's life as it is known. It is to break from a familiar sense of being in the world. It is to break from certain ways of relating to one's own life and to the lives of others' (White 1997a:39). He compares this change to a migration of identity, that is a journey towards a new identity: 'Breaking from addictions and/or the excessive consumption of substances usually requires a very major shift, something akin to a migration of identity, an act of intentionally leaving one's life behind in order to make a new life for oneself' (White 1997a:39).

### *5.10.3.2 The journey towards a new identity*

White (1997:39) uses a rite of passage metaphor, which includes different stages of this migration, namely ‘the separation phase’, ‘the liminal phase’ and ‘the reincorporation phase’ for the journey to a new identity. It provides a map of what can be expected. The liminal phase of ambiguity towards the relationship with substance abuse is especially fitting, as it places any kind of setback or ‘failure’ in the context of the progression towards a new relationship with substance abuse (White 1995:101). This migration story makes visible the social process of departing from one place in one’s relationship with substances to arriving at another place, an experience of reality that includes much more than just the physical or biological imperatives of existence. It expresses the hope of journeying towards something different; the doubts, confusions, the stopping points, the changing connections along the way; the building of a new lifestyle. The next quote is a valuable description of the experience of a migration of identity:

It is a spatial metaphor which suggests moments of departure and arrival, the setting-off out of the familiar and routine world into the unknown, the trials to be faced and improvisations needed in any journey, the hopeful focus on what may lie on the horizon, the passing of milestones along the way, and the choices involved in selecting a resting place or a new stopping-point. It also suggests the grief of separation, the company of fellow travelers, and the disorientation and confusion that can accompany being a stranger in a new land. As well as performance aspects of making a journey, there are also the inner experiences that go with the journeying, the moments of reflection when we feel encouraged and full of enthusiasm or discouraged and tempted to turn back, or where we make sense of the episodes we encounter along the way.

(Smith & Winslade 1997:19)

It has been found that the recovery of heroin addicts without treatment was achieved either by reverting to an old identity, by extending an identity present during addiction or by creating a new emergent identity (Bates 2005:20). The majority of heroin addicts in the United States after the Vietnam experience quit without treatment, based on identity concerns (Peele 2004:15). A narrative re-construction of identity together with faith in God’s recreation stories can provide the possibility of a migration to a new non-stigmatised identity. This journey disrupts the ‘thin conclusions’ (see Section 3.7.3) of a person’s lives in favour of ‘thick descriptions’ (see Section 3.7.5) of self that diminish problems with substances.

In a religious/spiritual sense, the migration of identity has to do with a person's being positioned in the God-stories discussed in Chapter 4 in a preferred way. The stage of separation from a relationship with an addict lifestyle can include a revisioning of one's relationship to the God-stories in one's life. I have already discussed the new identity as a conflation of self-stories and Christ-stories (see Section 4.9). Then the stories of reciprocity in the relationship with God, of being a responsible partner, can be told and re-told, contextualised and thickly described. There is the experience of grace, of participating in the stories of Jesus, a striving towards growth in agency and relationship competencies. A new identity brings the freedom of knowing that our needs for security, significance, love, acceptance and worth are always met in Christ (Anderson & Quarles 1996:143). The freedom that comes with knowing who one is in Christ (Gl 5:1) can be contextualised, that is, storied, to include knowledges and practices that relate to a different sense of being a self in this world. This journey includes the enhancement of communication possibilities and competencies that come with the new subject position within the God-discourses (see Section 3.5.2). The expansion of the vocabulary that comes with the new subject position is only possible within a community that shares the values and commitments of that subject position.

Especially in the liminal or in-between and betwixt phase, it is important to remember that we will always be split between what is and what can be. Our journey in constructing and performing our preferred self-stories is always a struggle; there are always setbacks and the need for re-alignment with where we want to go with regard to our God-stories.

Because it is a migration, a journey, a process, there must be appreciation for any signs of progress, not just for complete abstinence (Man-Kwong 2004:7). The idea that a person must reach 'rock-bottom' before he or she will stop using a substance, and that the complete cessation of use is all that matters is then redundant. It is a journey that can consist of cutting back at certain intervals, or just caring for oneself to reduce risks in using the substance. A relapse, or even a series of relapses, is not the end of the process. It is important to clarify to clients that they are not back where they started, because then they can lose hope. It may be that there were gaps in the preparation for the rigours of the liminal phase (White 1997a:40). The differences between when they started and



the current situation can be explored in order to reclaim their competence. It is part of the longer-term journey of migration in which new knowledges and skills are learned.

The journey metaphor also makes clear that the journey is not completed after a few months of sobriety, but that care must continue to be taken in the appropriation of a new lifestyle. However, there is a place of arrival, the reincorporation phase, where one has a sense of being at home with oneself and with a way of life (White 1997a:39). Without a map there is a greater risk of turning back before completing the journey.

### ***5.10.3.3 A negotiated identity***

In narrative terms, it is important to emphasise that this self-God-story of migration of identity is not a relapse into the modernist descriptions of a fixed, essentialist identity. It is an identity that is socially, externally bestowed upon a person, a self that is unstable, socially negotiated; it is a self as experienced in stories. Identity is always a matter of constant contradiction, change and ongoing struggle (Monk et al 1997:38). This self-God-story of migration of identity provides a platform for the externalisation of the struggle with substance abuse. The struggle story does not say who one is, but is located on the outside of the constitutive relationship with God. In this way, it can contribute towards establishing this problem story as something outside a person and not as something fixed inside a person.

The migration of identity metaphor can help to uncover the complicity of substances in arriving at negative self-descriptions, at thin identity conclusions (Smith & Winslade 1997:25). It can contribute to seeing that the problem has not been able to control one's whole life. It makes it possible to see other self-stories that are valid and preferred, for example, one's re-remembering of God and commitment to related values. This migration of identity is not seeing one's past as wasted years, but is a reclaiming of one's history that can be explored for knowledges and skills that can be useful in the present. It allows one to privilege the voice of protest and resistance throughout one's life. Narrative and religious views on failure (see Section 4.15.6), namely that it is part of multiple valid self-stories and refusals of cultural demands, can help a person to discover alternative sites in culture that make possible other options for living. The self-God-story of migration of identity provides a basis for the view that people with

problems with substances have a choice, an idea at variance with the notion of addiction as an illness or the notion of a fixed deficit identity.

#### ***5.10.3.4 New knowledges and skills***

There is a discourse that one's behaviour is always consistent with one's identity, that is with what one really believes about oneself (Anderson & Quarles 1996:120). In a narrative approach, this discourse has meaning when the desires, intentions, purposes, motives, ambitions, goals, values, plans and commitments that support this identity are deconstructed. A narrative approach also takes into account the socially constructed nature and changeability of self-stories. A migration of identity brings about new purposes in life and the making of new choices in line with new self-stories; new self-stories constitute new purposes and choices. It also involves developing thinking and problem-solving skills that indicate a change in one's relationship with oneself. It includes learning constructive ways of handling losses and pressures. It is not just a life of belief or imagination, but a life of the whole embodied person in a social context. Any abilities and skills in any area of life can be applied to the journey away from addiction. Other stories of standing up against subjugating discourses and of developing skills at choosing and living one's own preferences can be applied to this journey. The feeling of being able to respond to any kind of problem is a powerful tool for change (Peele 2004:114). This migration of identity is the journey towards co-authoring and performing alternative self-stories. In a life of self-acceptance and self-care, substance abuse tends to excuse itself and leave the room.

I want to say something more about one constituent of these new self-stories, namely values.

#### ***5.10.3.5 Exploring values***

Identity includes a commitment to certain values. Values are important indicators of one's sense of self. Values influence one's desire and ability to act in line with what one believes in and what one cares about. There is no more important antidote to addiction than values (Peele 2004:27). For example, if one values clear thinking, health and responsibility, one will shy away from regular intoxication. It is to compromise the most important elements in one's self-definition. Another value that is effective in the

struggle with substance abuse is that of self-efficacy, the view that one is able to determine one's own destiny (Peele 2004:38). Entering into treatment in whatever form has meaning as an expression of self-care and self-efficacy which can be built on (Anthony 2002:5). Conveying the idea that change is possible is the most important ingredient in effecting change. This is in contrast to the idea of powerlessness that prevails in the addiction recovery movement (Peele 2004:37). The so-called 'hitting bottom' idea is a value statement that one cannot continue with behaviour that conflicts with important values. It is possible to overcome addiction when one realises it is in one's best interest to do so in terms of one's own values and goals (Peele 2004:60).

Narrative questioning is not about confrontation and judging, but about exploring from a not-knowing position the discrepancies between a person's values and behaviours. It is following the client's lead, as in dancing, and at the same time also mirroring the contradictions in statements or sentiments (Peele 2004:63). It is about using a client's own insights, values and motivations in handling the journey away from substance abuse.

Even to take up caring for oneself and others while taking drugs is a refusal of the type of identity that is being dictated by the broader culture (Butterworth 2005:2). It is to hold on to a preferred sense of who one is. Self-care is a sensitive issue, because people around a person that struggle with substance abuse would usually want that person to stop using the substance in any way. In the light of the tragic drug-related deaths of young people, mostly related to its illegality, the issue cannot be ignored (Raven 1997:4).

If we want to help people, especially young people, we have to start where they are, and that is often not at a place where they want to stop using completely. Self-care involves things such as using clean needles, eating healthily, being in a trusting environment and having a good state of mind before using the substance. It lessens the isolation, shame and guilt in people's lives and keeps hope alive. One way of controlling drug use is to make drug use a ritual, making an occasion of it. It enhances people's sense of taking responsibility for their lives. In the light of all the problems associated with using drugs, criminalisation, health risks such as Hepatitis C and AIDS, a new conversation about 'harm reduction' is underway (Butterworth 2005). Actions of self-care and of care for

others are expressions of the values and beliefs of spiritualities of the surface, spiritualities about ethical living and material changes.

#### ***5.10.3.6 A self-story constructed in community***

The community in which one can establish and experience an alternative identity is important: 'It is through engaging with a community of persons in the telling and re-telling of the preferred stories of one's history and of one's identity that lives are thickly described' (White 1997b:16). The community can be church-related groups, other self-help groups, friends, family or the therapeutic environment. These are the arenas where self-stories must be thickly described, also through the implementation of rituals and definitional ceremonies (see Sections 5.7.5.1 and 5.7.5.3). The struggle with substance abuse is not just about stopping or controlling the use of substances, it is about a new way of being a self in this world.

Therapy is a collection of stories of people's stand against the abuse of substances in their lives. Therapy is about being allies on the journey, about co-authoring and storying the migration as well as possible. It is developing a landscape of action and a landscape of identity with regard to moving out of the colonising influence of substances (Smith & Winslade 1997:19).

Identity is derived in a storying of experience. The results of the proliferation of preferred self-stories is beyond solving problems. Within their new stories, people live out a new self-image, new possibilities for relationship and new futures. Their new self-stories must be affirmed and thickly described through questions such as what these sober experiences tell people about themselves and what they want in life. The new stories must also be told and retold, performed before an audience, because in being performed, these stories shape identity (White 1997b:41). The texts of our lives, also the texts of our struggle with substance abuse, are indeterminate; they must be performed again and again; and the performance of the texts is transformative of our lives, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Writing letters to him- or herself with regard to the relationship with substances can assist a person in the quest for identity and a sense of self (see Section 5.7.5.2). Letter-writing can help a person re-author his or her life story and re-establish a sense of

personal agency (White & Epston 1990:118,120,163). It is a way for men and women to find a voice against addiction discourses that want to silence them. Voice is about agency, identity and self-determination. Letter-writing and -reading is part of an inner dialogue and a dialogue with people's environment.

#### ***5.10.3.7 A new history***

The effects of the migration of identity metaphor can sustain a life without substance abuse. Problems are 'historical'; therefore life is not necessarily an endless cycle of repeatedly acknowledging particular weaknesses, hurts and limitations. Our new sense of self, our new identity, has an influence on the way we experience and react to stories of substance abuse. It is invaluable to hold on to the knowledge that we are not what our experiences with substances suggest, and that we are different from what the addiction discourses claim. Having a new identity is ceasing to think of ourselves as recovering or even former addicts; it is moving beyond an internalised description of ourselves as addicts (Anthony 2002:5). The sense that things can be different inspires hope. I also agree, in the light of the multifaceted and complex phenomenon of substance abuse, that a narrative approach may well be the most adequate way of expressing and experiencing this journey, as Albers (1999:148) suggests.

### **5.11 CONCLUSION**

In the first half of the chapter I argued that the concept of addiction is socially constructed. I also discussed the ways in which the dominating constructions of this problem tend to restrict people in their options for dealing with the abuse of substances in their struggle with it. The stereotype of 'the addict' creates an inflexible prototype narrative that is constitutive of and that shapes people's experiences of drugs (Bates 2005:22). I have also discussed some narrative approaches to the concept of substance abuse. The deconstruction of dominant narratives enables a person to resist the influence of such narratives; and alternative stories about substance abuse can be brought to the fore.

In the second part of the chapter, I argued that substance abuse becomes less attractive when there are other things that are more valued in one's life. Religion/spirituality can contribute to meaningful involvement in the rest of one's life. Religion/spirituality can

contribute to one's attaining the rewards of a productive life without substances. It provides other interests and other contexts for experiencing fulfilment. The more resources of this kind one has, the more likely it is that these resources can counterbalance addiction. The self-God-stories of connecting with God (re-membering), of centring marginalised stories (grace) and of the transformation of self-stories (migration of identity) are counter-stories that provide an alternative to the restraining substance abuse stories in society. God-stories can provide moments of instability in monolithic substance abuse discourses, and can open windows of opportunity for the construction of self-stories outside the domain of substance abuse (Smith & Winslade 1997:26). We have seen how the self-God-stories of re-membering, grace and migration of identity can help to free people from self-narratives that keep them locked into disempowering grand narratives. The telling and re-telling of these self-God-stories are the performance of hope in the relationship with substance abuse.

In the next chapter, I consider self-God-stories that emerged in conversations with people involved in a short-term rehabilitation programme for people struggling with substance abuse.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SELF-GOD-STORIES

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reproduces, with comments and questions, the two conversations I had with each of 12 participants at the RAMOT rehabilitation centre for substance abuse. These conversations in the context of substance abuse were not just conversations, but were conversations informed by narrative practices (see Section 3.7). These conversations assumed a changeable, socially constructed self in interaction with God-stories and with stories about substance abuse. They were conversations that wanted to create space for dialogue, in which clients' own expertise regarding their lives was performed. They were not aimed at gathering information in order to make a diagnosis, but were aimed at generating experience, a move towards the not-yet-said, and thus co-authoring new stories.

Conversations, also in research, are an opportunity for developing new language, and therefore new possibilities for living. We shape each other through our speaking of words. During the conversations, participants spoke themselves into existence and offered each other subject positions. Therefore, even if the conversations were held over a short term and were not intended as therapy, it is not surprising that some conversations storied changes in a person's sense of self and sense of God in the context of substance abuse.

Through careful not-knowing enquiring and exploring, these conversations countered the 'truth' discourses that contribute to the objectification, totalising and pathologising of people's identities (see Sections 5.4 to 5.8). Through these conversations, marginalised and local knowledges became available for the construction of preferred self-stories (see Section 3.7.3). New territories, away from substance abuse, became available towards which self-stories could migrate.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I explored dominating God-stories that are on the side of substance abuse, and that are part of the support system of problems with substance abuse. However, the emphasis or focus was on God-stories that are on the side of the

person in providing alternative stories to being abused by substances. As mentioned before, the primary interest in this research is not change as such, but relating God-stories that are alternative, different or even opposed to substance abuse stories (see Section 3.8). Therefore these conversations also include a fourth concern, as mentioned in the previous chapter (see Section 5.10), namely the contribution of God-stories to the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse. What difference do God-stories make in this context? What is the effect of self-God-stories on stories of substance abuse? Self-God-stories are discussed primarily as a context for hope in relation to a person's struggle with substance abuse. The meanings of these stories in the context of this research are explored in the next chapter.

The discussion of each participant's story is divided into two parts. The first part of the discussion of the stories is a reproduction of the conversations from the audio-tapes, not as a *verbatim* transcript, but in the third person. The participants worked with me to edit these reproductions to ensure that these reproductions are adequate re-tellings of the conversations. This re-telling of the conversations, as well as examples of the consent forms for participation and for the release of this information are included in Addenda B, C and D. This part of their conversations (in the Addendum B) is in the language in which the conversations were conducted, Afrikaans, in order to stay as close as possible to their own experiences.

The second, more reflective part of the discussion of the stories is presented in this chapter. The purpose is not to propose an extensive deconstruction of the participants' self-God-stories, but to present them as stories that are valid and influential for the participants. In line with a social constructionist approach, the purpose of the discussion of the conversations is not to derive some general 'truths' about self-God-stories from the conversations. I am using the participants' stories and their expressions, and the distinction between the stories as such and my own remarks is evident throughout. The reflection in this chapter is limited to a few remarks relating directly to a story, with more extended reflection in Chapter 7. I sometimes make comments, ask questions and deconstruct to a degree, with reference to the relevant literature, only with the purpose of discussing the results of the conversations in a systematic way, focusing on the following relevant themes:

- a short introduction of each participant;
- self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse;



- self-God-stories against substance abuse;
- the effect of substance abuse stories on the person's self-God-stories: restricting and enriching;
- the meaning of the person's God-stories for self-stories about identity in the context of substance abuse; and
- summary.

The reason for discussing the conversations in these sub-sections is that it makes different self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse more evident. This includes, for example, stories maintaining substance abuse, stories opposed to substance abuse, stories of re-membering God, of grace and of migration of identity. In addition to this systematic reflection of the conversations, I also discuss the longer-term effect of the conversations on three participants. In a last round, I take the first step towards the next chapter by discussing three kinds of narratives represented throughout the conversations in more detail. As I mentioned, in the next chapter, I unpack the meaning of these stories in the context of the research further.

## **6.2 CONVERSATIONS**

In this section, I explore the conversations about self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse with 12 participants according to the themes mentioned in the introduction in Section 6.1. The names given are those the participants preferred to be used in this research (see Addendum D).

### **6.2.1 Participant 1: Daan**

Daan is a 44-year old man with an alcohol problem. He grew up in a religious home, but never took religion seriously until now (in rehabilitation). He assumes that he is not worthy of a relationship with God, that God is disappointed in him for using alcohol and *dagga* (cannabis) since his school days. He is HIV-positive and the accompanying uncertainties and questions have further estranged him from God. He experiences God as a distant God who judges our behaviour. For him, his rehabilitation is a symbol of making new choices, of choosing the voice of life rather than the voice of alcohol and AIDS.

### ***6.2.1.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse***

Daan's stories about a distant, uninvolved God reduce the possibilities for relationships that can contribute to a rich description of his life, as described by Barnard (1994:35) and Griffith and Griffith (2002:115). The idea that God is a sovereign authority who demands obedience has resulted for Daan in feelings of failure, disappointment and estrangement from God. Such ideas increase his sense that God's love and acceptance are conditional, and that when one has not achieved those conditions, other ways of managing one's life, even destructive ways, can be justified. Griffith and Griffith (2002:153) report similar comments.

As with Daan, illness can result in the experience of being marginalised, even by death itself. A person can be drawn into anger towards God regarding the illness, or a person can more generally just give up on life and drift with the flow of the illness (Louw 1994:43). In Daan's case, the absence of constructive ways of living with illness resulted in abuse of substances.

An element of identification with male gender stereotypes is also present, in Daan's reference to drinking alcohol with other men and a sense of failure because of his inability to control household patterns (for example, enforcing the rule to eat lunch at 12 o'clock on Sundays – see Addendum B), which for him, enhances substance abuse (see also Smith & Winslade 1997:18).

### ***6.2.1.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

This paragraph contains my own reflection on the ambivalence in Daan's self-God-stories. Being exposed to religion during childhood can sometimes make it difficult to reinvent religion on one's own behalf later. The faith of one's family of origin may not prove satisfactory in the process of a differentiation of a person's own faith. Conversely, it can sometimes make it easier to reconnect to values such as God's love, provision and care, and to practices such as prayer, worshipping and committing to God's purposes. This ambivalence is present in his stories. It can be the result of a transition from a conventional faith that is dependent on the views of significant others to a more self-reflective faith that reassess the values of a person's family of origin in the light of his or her own experience (Kelcourse 2004:82). Alternatively, it can be a transition to a

conjunctive faith that includes a return to images and practices of childhood, as included in paradox and mystery (Kelcourse 2004:46; see Section 4.11). For James Fowler (1987:55), the transition from one position or stage of faith to another is a dialectical process informed by the story (Scripture and tradition) of the faith community. I have already mentioned the criticism of such linear, progressive and cognitively based views of spiritual growth (see Section 4.11). From a narrative point of view, the different faith stories emphasise the temporal character of a multistoried self in its interaction with the stories of a faith community. In the process of meaning-making, some stories are centred, expanded through new language, and lived as preferred positions within relevant faith discourses. New meanings are given to life experiences in the light of the inadequacy of old perspectives. Growth is ultimately the story of God's gift of grace throughout our lives in spite of our shortcomings.

In the discussion, two stories were performed that involve the practice of prayer. The first was when Daan asked God to help him in an examination after he had smoked *dagga* just before the examination. He was not only successful in the examination, but also obtained the 'secret' knowledge that it was God who had made him sober and had helped him in the examination. For Daan, this confirms the existence of a special relationship with God to which he can now turn again.

The second story was about his wife and her friends who prayed for him before the disciplinary hearing where he thought he was about to lose his job. At first, he did not want to go, but after the praying, he experienced a willingness to go as a sensation in his body. Against all the odds, he retained his job, and was given another chance. Afterwards, on reflection, he came to a realisation that the fact that he kept his job, his house and his wife was due to God's giving him another chance, God's helping him.

Through the conversations, a new God-story was generated: the story that prayer is a powerful way of constructing one's reality, a way of asking for help, of coping with one's circumstances, and of giving meaning and sense to one's experiences (see Van Uden & Pieper 2005:40- 41).

Both stories at that time affirmed that God walked with him, and remembering this now gives him hope that God can help him in his present difficulties. His friends remarked that he walks with *stompie*, that is something like magic sticks, or *muti*, because he did

not lose his job, whereas a friend in the same circumstances did lose his job. He uses it as a metaphor of God's grace working in his life. God can make miracles happen as He has in his life. This incident also instils in him a perception of God in control of everything. For him, there is no contradiction between magic and faith, as the magic in popular culture in this instance, for him, is pointing towards the 'Deeper Magic' of the gospel (see Mouw 1994:50). In these instances, Daan experienced grace as very practical – as intervention in his material circumstances. He experienced his relationship with God as a Friend that is with him, and that makes him strong and gives him peace. This is in contrast to the metaphor of God as a distant judge, and these paradoxes can be held together in the stories he told, as Griffith and Griffith (2002:88) explain.

He experiences God's involvement in his life through his ability to smoke less. He also sees his success at table tennis, despite his restricted vision, as a gift from God through which he wants to testify to God's goodness. He has learned lessons in table tennis that he can apply to the game of life, such as becoming fit and practising living a new life. Another lesson is to focus on the game he is playing, remembering who he is and what he is doing, concentrating on doing the right thing. The game of life also requires the ability to move quickly and to make decisions to stay ahead of the opponent. In this way, the abilities that became evident in table tennis can help him to outmanoeuvre alcohol.

The testimony of an HIV-positive minister in a newspaper also helped him to gain the perspective that becoming HIV-positive can happen to anyone and that life can go on. That inspires him to play on the side of life, and not on the side of death, which is promoted by HIV and alcohol. For him, to be part of the life team is a question of identity. He must remember who he is and the game he is busy playing.

In contrast to the limiting of options promoted by substances, his relationship with God promotes an involvement in a variety of contexts, such as the church and church-related support groups.

During the conversations, different God-stories were generated through a deconstruction of his belief that he first has to get his life in order before he can turn to God. The possibility that he does not need to get his life in order before he can turn to God was a new possibility to him. He now understands the possibility that he can turn to God from

wherever he is at the moment, and that the undesirable baggage, like the addiction, will fall away along the road.

### ***6.2.1.3 The effect of substance abuse on Daan's self-God-stories***

The relationship between stories of substance abuse and God-stories can be further unpacked by considering the influence of substance abuse-stories on God-stories. Substance abuse stories can have a restricting or an enriching effect on God-stories.

#### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Daan's self-God-stories:**

Daan's problems with substances invited feelings that God was disappointed with him. For him, God was like a judge who accepts or rejects people on the basis of their behaviour, and he regarded himself as not good enough to have a relationship with God. His illness contributed to his sense of God's being distant and uninvolved in his life. In general, he did not expect anything from God. He assumed that he would first have to stop drinking and get his act together before he could put his trust in God or expect anything from God.

#### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Daan's self-God-stories:**

His illness coalesced with his substance problems to bring him to a place where he experienced his life so far as a choice for death. In his grasping at life, of which his rehabilitation is a symbol, for him, his faith in God represents a choice for life. His substance abuse reawakened his need to serve God. Through addiction, one can be led to come to the limit of one's own possibilities in order to turn to God. Hope can come to us through pain (May 1988:18; see also Section 5.10.2).

### ***6.2.1.4 The meaning of Daan's God-stories for his self-stories about who he is***

Daan felt that God was disappointed in him because of his struggle with alcohol, that he was not good enough for a relationship with God. He assumed that he first had to change before he could be acceptable to God. His illness was also a marginalising factor in his life, cutting him off from life. In contrast to this, he believes that God is with him in a graceful and rescuing way, as experienced in prayers being answered and things working out for him in spite of the consequences of alcohol abuse. Through the conversations and the reflection in between, he has begun to see himself as someone

who wants to be obedient to God and serve Him. He realises that his recovery depends on re-membering God and who he is and in which team he is playing. Due to his upbringing and culture, he sees who he is as related to the performance of religious activities, such as church attendance, Bible study, prayer, etc. He sees these investments as opposing the requirements of alcohol that want to isolate him and take away his options, and he is going to take these investments seriously from now on. He is someone who has chosen for life, against the death wish of the alcohol and the illness. In the end, he related how God's friendship strengthens him and gives him peace.

#### ***6.2.1.5 Summary***

At first, Daan related to God as distant and uninvolved in his life. There was a change after discussing the few miraculous interventions of God in his life, as mentioned. He came to see God's involvement in his abilities regarding his work, sport and his relationships. He emphasised his religious activities and his resolve to serve God as self-stories displacing his illness and substance abuse stories.

### **6.2.2 Participant 2: Marleze**

Marleze is a young woman who has struggled with drug abuse for some time. She was a victim of rape at 14 years old and did not talk about it for four years. She blamed God for allowing this to happen to her, as well as for the death of her father when she was 21. She was angry with God. In the time during her participation in the research, she slowly began to re-connect to God in a more helpful way, and realised that she needed Him. She started to see how her experience of faith is intimately connected to the way other people, such as her father, brother and the school children she teaches experience their faith.

#### ***6.2.2.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse***

For Marleze, the fact that God allowed the things that happened to her when she was 14 years old made her enter a vote of no confidence in God. She may have been exposed to stories of God that depict Him as a kind-hearted God who knows everything beforehand and will not allow anything bad to happen to a person. The God she came to know in her kind and caring father could have contributed to this perception of God. However, in

the light of what happened to her and the death of her father after much earnest prayer, she was not only disappointed in God, she was angry with Him. She blamed Him for the things that happened to her. This anger towards God was accompanied by anger towards the church, in which she saw a lot of hypocrisy. This disappointment with and anger towards God was an important story in her life that surfaced up-front in our discussions about God, invoking bodily states of attack, like the tension in her voice.

Her drug abuse was intertwined with her anger towards God. In this case, I see anger as part of the life support system of substance abuse (White & Epston 1990:3). Fish (1990:168) describes anger as the very springboard of compulsivity, which can therefore result in the making of more familiar choices with regard to substance abuse. Especially the emotional turmoil of suppressed anger can wreak havoc on the self and others, like an earthquake; and it can be conducive to irresponsible and even irrational behaviour. Anger, resentment, blame and shame draw a person away from the physiological capacity for a dialogue with God and with others (Griffith & Griffith 2002:116), and therefore, as in this case, from alternative options in her relationship with substances.

#### ***6.2.2.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

Marleze felt that this anger-story was not working for her, and that it was possible and preferable to fight things out with God. The possibility of fighting it out with God was actually the opening of a door out of the limitations imposed by the problems with substances (see Section 5.10.1). For her, her feeling that she needs God in her life is directly opposed to the need for drugs. She commented: ‘I have been searching for God in drugs, and found hell instead.’ God is in a different place from drugs. The stay in Ramot, as well as her willingness to participate in these discussions, something that was surprising to her mother, is a significant step towards the ‘something else’ provided by her reconnection with God-stories.

She sees her experience of her father’s and her elder brother’s faith as evidence that her relationship with God could be something different, and as such a resource in her struggle against drugs. Her father never blamed God for bad things that happened in his life, and her brother’s demeanour changed visibly after his conversion. Her reflection on their relationship with God, especially on the way her father would have wanted her to

handle his death, brought her to a place where she is no longer angry with God and she does not blame Him anymore. She also believes that everything happens with a purpose, and that she will one day understand why things have happened. She is dismantling the brick wall she built between her and God, not through mere acceptance, but by putting questions and fears on the table.

In her room, she cries, fights, reads her Bible and prays. Her shouting at and scolding of God brought about peace and calm and the use of the word 'grace' for the first time in 14 years. This repositioning in her relationship with God is a re-remembering of the God she learned to know from her father, and that brought about the possibility for more choices for her life than those imposed by substances. For her, this re-connection with God enables her to take responsibility for her life, past and future, the possibility of agency in her present circumstances.

The strengthening of the God-stories in her life through our conversations as the telling and re-telling of the stories, as well as her own performance of them during her stay in the rehabilitation centre brought about a change in what she wants for her life. Although there are still clouds in her life, according to her, she sees the sun, and realises there is hope. Although her life is still like walking in a long dark alley, she now has a torch, which provides light. The torch, the glimpses of God in her life, is important to her, because it helps her not to be afraid of the things that lurk in the dark, the things that were part of her journey with drugs. The opposite of the stories of anger towards God are the moments of peace and calm that she experienced during her rehabilitation, the attitude she describes as a childlike 'letting go and letting God'. For her, tranquillity and calmness are the opposite of the restless and short-tempered lifestyle with drugs. She has also experienced the effect of prayer. She was agentive in bringing grace into the lives of friends of hers that do not believe in God. There was a chance that their baby would be diagnosed with the possibility of Down's syndrome. She cried out to God, and in the end, tests affirmed that the baby did not have Down's syndrome. It is a confirmation to her that prayer makes a difference; and it provided hope that she can overcome the substance abuse and find contentment in her life.

Her experience of faith through the eyes of the children that she works with also connected her with an alternative to the drug story in her life. It is possible to experience faith, and therefore hope, through somebody else's faith. This connects with the



substitutionary stories of the gospel. It also connects with the notion in social constructionism that our communities provide us with our identities, also our spiritual identities (Griffith & Griffith 2002:212). It further connects with the African Ubuntu awareness of the individual that 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti 1969:144). Specifically the experience of their acceptance of her and their love for her in spite of everything was a reflection of God's acceptance and love to her, a force against the abuse of substances. Acceptance and love make the need to feel accepted and loved through the use of drugs obsolete, and the children's love provided a sense of self-worth that can resist the abuse through substances. She wants to continue to be involved with children at a children's home as an experience of God through which the image of the dark alleyway can disappear completely.

Not only her faith, but also the disgust she feels for herself, the shame, is something that is for her specifically related to her father, older brother and 'her' children's knowledge of where she was at this moment in her life. This disgust and shame told her that she was not where she wanted to be in her life, that she has different values that are important to her, things that got buried beneath the drug story, such as honesty, sincerity, love and goodness (see also Van Vonderen 2004:101). This knowledge pulled her towards a different, preferred way of life (see Peele 2004:67).

#### ***6.2.2.3 The effect of substance abuse on Marleze's self-God-stories***

Substance abuse stories have a restricting and enriching effect on her self-God-stories.

#### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Marleze's self-God-stories:**

For Marleze, her anger towards God found an outlet in the use of drugs. In this way, her anger joined forces with her drug problems in distancing her from God. They worked together in separating her from a caring God for many years.

#### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Marleze's self-God-stories:**

She became disgusted with and ashamed of her drug-lifestyle, with the realisation that this is not the way she wants to live her life, and that she needs God in her life. Together with this, she wants to live her buried values and become the person she feels God wants her to be. Although she is in rehabilitation, she is still afraid of the long dark alley

of drug use, the shadows and the things hiding in the dark. According to her, God alone can provide hope and light in this fearful dark drug journey.

#### ***6.2.2.4 The meaning of Marleze's God-stories for her self-stories about who she is***

Marleze experiences herself as someone who has a lot of anger towards God, blaming Him for allowing really bad things to happen to her in her life; and according to her, this has resulted in her self-doubt and drug abuse. She also feels that this anger does not fit in with who she actually prefers to be, namely someone who needs God very much in her life. For Marleze, her shame and disgust about where she is in her life confirm that the person she wants to be is worlds apart from the person she has become as a result of the drugs. Her identity, as experienced in her sense for justice and honesty, encourages her to fight out her disappointments with God. Her fighting and crying, the discussions about God's involvement in our pain, about her values, her father and brother's faith, the children she worked with, her reflections, Bible-reading – all culminate in changing self-stories. In our discussion, she positioned herself in a preferred way with regard to the God-stories and her relationship with God. She used the word 'grace' for the first time in 14 years; she felt that she has started tearing down the wall she had built between her and God, that she is beginning to see light in the darkness. For her, the experience of grace is linked to being calm, accepting and patient. From being the 'baby' in the house that expects others to take care of her, she feels she is now enabled to take responsibility for her own life.

#### ***6.2.2.5 Summary***

Marleze's God-stories are framed with anger, disappointments and demands, but also with hope for something different. She experienced her most helpful God-stories through the faith of important other people in her life, such as her parents, brothers and the children at school and an unbelieving friend. She is agentically involved in removing the brick wall between her and God through religious activities and service.

### **6.2.3 Participant 3: Francois**

Francois is 33 years old and has had a problem with alcohol abuse since his high school years. He was brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church, but he never took religion

seriously. He regards a date a few weeks before these conversations as a turning point in his life, when he started on a new road away from the demands of alcohol. Nothing dramatic happened, but it was a moment when he gained a new perspective on things that happened in his life. Now he is able to see things that happened to him as part of a puzzle of his life that God is putting together in building his new life. Bad things that have happened, as well as other people's faith, have played an important part in his own journey towards re-connecting with God.

#### ***6.2.3.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse***

Francois enjoyed Sunday school and the Bible studies presented by a teacher during his later school years, but it was also around that same time that he started using *hardehout* [hard wood, fortified alcohol]. He describes it as two lines going through his life at the same time, but after school the religious line disappeared and only the alcohol line remained. God and alcohol were set against each other as the two opposing forces, with alcohol getting the upper hand, disabling his desire to answer to God's calling through the years. For him, not answering God's voice became a dominating story on the side of substance abuse. His self- and God-stories were buried beneath the requirements of an alcohol lifestyle.

#### ***6.2.3.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

When bad things happen to a person and to people around him or her, it can easily contribute to the escalation of indulgence in substances as a way of coping with pain and loss (Fish 1990:43). Francois started to interpret bad things that happened in a relatively short space of time as part of a puzzle put together by God in order to bring him to a point where he can hear God's voice. These things include an ultimatum at work, the deterioration of his relationship with his girlfriend, the amputation of his mother's leg, his father's death, which cut off all hopes of one day being reconciled with his father and showing him Francois's children, and his father's rehabilitation 30 years previously in the same place where Francois is now. Other things that seem to him to fit into this pattern are his friend's wife, who died from leukemia, and the same friend's bringing him to the rehabilitation centre on the same date a year later, something that he feels is not something that happened just by chance. He also is starting to feel how his body is suffering, how his organs are busy dying.

For Francois, all these are God-stories; God working through the ordinary daily events. There is no doubt in his mind that it is God who spoke to him and who has brought him to where he is today. When he decided to respond to God's call, he felt as if a mountain was removed from his shoulders, that is, immense relief for arriving at a place where he should be. We did not discuss this, but the fact that he heard God's calling in all the bad things that happened can probably be attributed to his experience of hearing God's voice all these years, and that he is only now able to respond to that voice. The bad things probably forced him to make important life decisions. In this, he reconnected with childhood experiences and with the influence of his parents and other people in his life.

Whereas substance abuse is often accompanied with a search for relationship and self-acceptance, he now experiences the God-story about the power that there is in love in his life. God has given love where there was hostility. He and his sister are friends now. There is also a new relationship with his mother; she cried when he told her on the telephone about his progress. New possibilities became available with his girlfriend. He also learned about grace, that this love from God is unconditional, that he will always be a sinner, and that no life and no relationship is perfect. But he felt he was being accepted as he is, and can live with himself; he does not feel that he needs to seek acceptance from anybody else in a destructive way (see Section 5.10.2). Like Clinebell (1968:101), the basic religious experience of acceptance is contrary to the substance abuse story of being rejected by life.

He likened God and his girlfriend with places of safety for him, like the place of safety the police uses to get somebody out of harm's way. He does not feel safe with liquor, because the devil came to him in liquor. Now the devil does not have a chance of getting near him, because, according to him, the devil is not nearly as powerful as his Heavenly Father. In this way, religion is functioning for him as a haven or secure sanctuary within the tensions and troubles of daily life. Van Uden and Pieper (2005:43) also describe this kind of experience. Francois feels that in God he has a firm foundation and complete safety. His girlfriend is also an instrument in God's hand to be a place of safety for him. She does this mainly by setting boundaries, telling him what she expects from him, like staying away from her when he, ironically, becomes the

devil through alcohol. She tries to deflect him from drinking relationships towards church relationships. She also supports him in household tasks.

Another powerful God-story in his life is the remarks made by a reverend while Francois was still at school. This minister said that once a person was converted, he cannot fall back – it was like a turnstile in Shoprite that turns only in one direction. He wants to apply this image to himself. It has provided him with a sense of security in the performance of a new identity. He knows that he is saved and he is no longer afraid. His life can only turn to one side, with the possibility of one day becoming a witness of God. He is sure that God is supporting him with the new beginning in his life, in the building of the puzzle of his life without alcohol.

He is also busy learning to hand his small bundles (problems) over to God. An aunt who looked after his mother told him to do this, and he has succeeded in handling problems over to God. The evening before our conversation something that had to be done at home bothered him. Suddenly he asked himself: ‘Why worry?’ And he gave it over to God. Together with this training, he also wants to appropriate the disciplines he learned in college in the structuring of his life, such as exercise, healthy living, attending Bible study and other self-help groups.

### *6.2.3.3 The effect of substance abuse on Francois’s self-God-stories*

#### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Francois’s self-God-stories:**

His substance abuse has alienated him from God since his schooldays. God was somewhere in the background, but he succeeded in silencing God’s voice. For him, alcohol was associated with the devil, and he even felt that he was like the devil when he was drunk, so it was the opposite of letting God in. Being immersed in a substance abuse lifestyle took him away from a relationship with God.

#### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Francois’s self-God-stories:**

His experience with alcohol provides Francois with a view that to go on living without alcohol is only possible if you live with God. In the end he has chosen a relationship with God above a relationship with substances. For him, only a relationship with God is

capable of rescuing a person from substance abuse and fulfilling the needs previously artificially satisfied by alcohol consumption.

#### ***6.2.3.4 The meaning of Francois's God-stories for his self-stories about who he is***

Francois's involvement in the church and in alcohol begun at the same stage in school. Then the alcohol helped him to successfully silence God's voice in his life. Through alcohol, he became a partner to the devil, even becoming like the devil when he was under the influence. Then bad things happened to him and other people in his life. It worked together like a puzzle that awakened him to God's voice. He is now living a new life in the ebb and flow of daily existence, practising spiritual disciplines and anxious to learn more about God. He understands his participation in the human condition of brokenness and limitations, knowing that he is a sinner for whom grace is enough. Struggling is part of the Christian life (Julian 1998:155), and knowing that is encouraging for a person who is struggling. In addition, he also believes that he is accepted by God, and also by people who are important in his life; and he experiences God as a place of safety, where he cannot be touched by the devil. He finds security in God, also in the assurance that God will not let him perish. His identification with these God-stories is so thorough that he does not feel constrained by an addict identity.

#### ***6.2.3.5 Summary***

Francois relates his God-stories to his context in everyday living, as God working in a detailed manner towards completing the puzzle He is building. Francois complements this sense by implicating the devil in his struggle against substances – a struggle in which, for him, God will have the upper hand. Because God is not necessarily working only in extraordinary or supernatural ways, Francois sees his responsibilities as pursuing loving relationships and religious activities in building a new life.

#### **6.2.4 Participant 4: Joseph**

At the age of 60, Joseph is already retired, and has struggled with alcohol abuse at various stages throughout most of his adult life. He started drinking at 16 as part of the culture in the fishermen's trade. He is married, and grew up as a believer, serving as an altar boy in the Roman Catholic Church. The progression in his drinking ended in a

period of abstinence for 30 years. He started to work again; and he attributes his relapse two and a half months ago to becoming depressed after resigning from his job. It is also related to trouble at home, especially the grief that their 33-year-old son's behaviour is causing Joseph and his wife.

#### ***6.2.4.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse***

I first want to reflect on Joseph's belief that a person must take the first step towards God. His belief that a person cannot be helped by God if he does not take the first step towards Him can be a motivation to change, but it can also become problematic if it limits God, and makes Him dependent on our actions (Anderson & Quarles 1996:111). A mechanistic relationship with God of 'if I do this, He does that' is born out of legalism and can result in disappointment, especially if God's rewards are expected on a material level, in the form of a job, a new car, a big house, etc. Many people who seek God first are still living in poverty. Conversely, many people who do not seek God at all seem to have all the material things their hearts desire. The resulting disappointment and perceived 'injustice' can work on the side of the abuse of substances, because it creates the perception that how one lives does not really matter; and it can actually contribute to anger towards God (Barnard 1994:34). Substances also provide a person with temporary relief from these negative emotions.

#### ***6.2.4.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

Joseph regards himself as having been a Christian since childhood, having been an altar boy in the church. Even when he started to drink at the age of 16 years, he kept on praying, and his relationship with God stayed with him as a foundation on which he could build later on in his life.

The following pivotal God-story introduced him to 30 years of sobriety: half drunk one Sunday in the church, he felt that the minister was talking about him and to him. Angry and embarrassed, he went home. There, lying on his bed, he heard three loud, unusual knocks. He looked up and saw a beautiful white light. Out of the light, a voice told him to decide whether he wanted to continue drinking or, if he wanted to stop, he had to drink for the last time. He bought liquor from the shebeen, and that was his last binge. He realised afterwards that it was God speaking to him, in the church and in the white

light. It sustained and empowered him to stay sober for years afterwards. He moved from a shack to a house with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a front room, a kitchen, dining room and a large plot. He bought a car cash. For him, it all confirmed God's care after seeking Him first; God added all these things. He became an active member of the church, participating in church activities and prayer groups, and also experienced a special gift of the Spirit when praying for his sick child, who became healthy within 30 minutes.

Joseph's picture of God is pervasively linked to this notion of the material care of God if one seeks Him first. When he relapsed, it was these things that he lost.

Having had a relapse, he knows that God does not get angry with a person, even if the person is a big sinner. He is always ready to help you; you just have to take a step towards Him. At times when he feels deserted by God, he remembers the picture at home he has been making of glass and chocolate wrappers that tells the story about 'footprints on the beach', the times in life when God carries a person while it looks as if one is alone. This is a powerful reminder for him that assures him that God will carry him through this ford, and that motivates him to put God first again.

For Joseph, the house he bought years previously was a sign of God's care. Now he has to build a house again, the house of his life. He has faith that God will also be the most decisive partner in this construction. In the same way that he bought tools for his own business after his retirement, he now has tools to use for the rebuilding of his life. For him nothing is possible without God; his faith is his most valuable tool. Since his decision to come to rehabilitation, he has discovered anew the privilege of conversing with God in prayer, and the house of his life must have a prayer room. He enjoys the Bible study and wants to continue with it at home, together with his family. He is also looking forward to going to a priest for confession. Confession is a way of talking indirectly to God. It brings about a feeling of a burden that is lifted, that results in tranquillity. Confession makes it possible to begin again, to carry on with the rest of one's new life. Added to his tools are regular church attendance and prayer meetings and Communion. The Holy Communion, like the other rituals and sacraments, is a way to experience God in one's daily bodily living. The discussions he already had and is going to have with his wife and son in the warmth of the kitchen of his house, are also part of a re-membering process as an alternative to fighting, stress and depression. In the



sitting room of his house, he will have contact with the outside world, never in a judging way or forcing people into conversion, but in a loving and caring way for anybody that needs help.

He never doubted who he is, a child of God, a Christian, and that has provided a foundation upon which he would be able to build his life-story.

#### ***6.2.4.3 The effect of substance abuse on Joseph's self-God-stories***

##### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Joseph's self-God-stories:**

He sometimes had the feeling that when he experienced difficulties, God had forsaken him. More prominent is his own sense of having forsaken God in relapsing into alcohol abuse. Having turned away from God, he felt he had lost the effects of God's care. Is God's grace conditional, dependent on our behaviour? Like Van Vonderen (2004:101), I see the identity of the believer as gift-based and not performance-based. It is as if God (or Joseph's performance-based relationship with God) was not really capable of helping Joseph to cope in a different way with his household pressures.

##### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Joseph's self-God-stories:**

The relapse into alcohol abuse brought him into contact with his need to be forgiven, to confess his shortcomings and to start over again. It helps him to look with more solidarity at other people in need, like the blind man who came to Jesus, and the Jew cared for by the Good Samaritan. The image of God's carrying him when it did not look as if He was on the surface was imprinted on his mind, as in the story of the footprints on the sand. For him, God never stays angry at a sinner, He still loves him. The relapse, in stark contrast to the 30 sober years, made him more acutely aware of the self-destructive consequences of drinking that he does not want in his life anymore. This draws him closer to God and awakens in him a sense of the necessity for the daily exercise of spiritual disciplines. In short, he has abandoned himself in seeking God first.

#### ***6.2.4.4 The meaning of Joseph's God-stories for his self-stories about who he is***

Since childhood, Joseph's identity has been linked up with being a believer. For me, his problems with alcohol are not pervasive and permanent features of his identity. His alcohol abuse was an excursion, one of the liabilities of his trade. Although he has

sinned and regards himself as a sinner, he knows that God still loves him. God carried him even when he felt forsaken by God. Like his involvement in the church, his relationship with God is a constant factor in his life. He never doubted that he is a child of God with a solid foundation for living his life. His God-stories provide him with a strange calmness, even though he sometimes experiences anxiety. This is the opposite of the demands of alcohol, which is to become identified with being an alcoholic and to find acceptance and calmness in alcohol.

#### **6.2.4.5 Summary**

Joseph constructs his God-stories in a way that sometimes suggests a mechanistic relationship between him and God. God is continually reacting to what Joseph does, either giving him things or taking things away from him. Joseph is aware of the temporal dimension of his experiences with God. He is able to recount in detail what happened when in his life with God. There are stories about God's working in the practical detail of daily life that links with his being a handyman, such as the building of a house. There are also stories about extraordinary things that happened, such as his vision of God and the healing of their son. His involvement in the church is an important context for his God-stories.

#### **6.2.5 Participant 5: Harriet**

Harriet is a middle-aged married woman who has struggled with alcohol abuse for the past two years. Her family experienced hurt in the last two years, especially the destructive behaviour of their 33-year old mentally disabled son. Because of this son, Harriet and her family do not have a social life; her other (married) son and grandchild moved away; and she became rebellious. She has lived in a relationship with God her whole life, but at the moment experiences a wall between her and God because of the alcohol. She experiences guilt and shame for 'failing' her husband and God. During her stay in rehabilitation and the process of the conversations, changes started taking place.

##### **6.2.5.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse**

We did not discuss God's role in Harriet's having and parenting a disabled child because the topic did not come up in the conversations. However, because she is so very

aware of God's presence in her life, it seems to me that her rebelliousness could have been an expression of her uncertainty about God's way of participating in the world or even anger towards God (see Barnard 1994:34; Griffith & Griffith 2002:159). The situation with her son became unmanageable, and the vaguest sense that there is no help from outside, together with anger, can be enough to become attached to a destructive way of finding relief from the anxiety and pain. In her case, the anger and frustration resulted in the abuse of alcohol.

The story of God as judging our behaviour, and the unquestioned assumption that our relationship with Him depends on this behaviour, have an important influence on her experience of the problem with alcohol. I believe that such a moralistic view – the emphasis on moral behaviour without reference to religious commitment (Deist 1984:162) – can assist a person to avoid behaviour that is harmful, but more often than not, it contributes to an overload of guilt-feelings, as in Harriet's case. Moralism is actually non-acceptance, because acceptance of God, of the self and of the other, is conditional (Keller 1985:58). To be aware of one's sin can result in a renewed commitment to God, but to identify with being a sinner to the point of hiding from God with Adam and Eve, as she mentioned, includes the feeling of being bad as a person, and the inability to forgive oneself (Ensor 1997:133; Van Vonderen 2004:102). It is a self-God-story of the improbability of reconciliation between a person and God, because of sin. It seems as if the erasure of the wall between Harriet and God becomes very difficult. This can actually create space for a continuation of self-defeating behaviour.

#### ***6.2.5.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

Harriet's lifelong walking with God on the road of life is her most vital God-story. It provides her with a constant awareness of God's presence in her life, even when there was a wall between her and God. She knows that one can talk to God, at any time and in any place; she can experience His nearness in warm feelings or thoughts – in fact, God is so near that she can almost take His hand. One can struggle with God when necessary, and, as she said, experience forgiveness because Jesus Christ has died for our sins. The visual demonstration of a glass with dirty water that became clean with the red liquid as a symbol of Jesus' blood cleaning us of our sins has stayed with her all these years, and she appropriates it (again) to herself. She has also had experiences of being forgiven in her life, for example, when she got caught up in a conflict between her two

sisters. She confessed her share in the conflict, asked forgiveness, and a pervasive calmness took hold of her. This helped her to know that forgiveness is possible and to know what it feels like, and to look forward to experiencing it again. She believes that God is working on her through this painful self-emptying experience to bring her back to the life with Him, to the 'narrow road' that is the most fulfilling road for her.

Another God-story is about God's intervention before a major operation. According to her, an irrational, extreme anxiety took hold of her in the hospital. At one stage, being tired of the inner turmoil, she gave herself over bodily and emotionally to God. She suddenly saw a picture of God like that in a Children's Bible. She knew that everything would be all right. An indescribable tranquillity flooded through her.

Her God-stories are characterised by the influence they have on her bodily states, whether it is the experience of God's nearness, or forgiveness, or the assurance of His care. This bodily energising or relaxation has the potential to powerfully counter the need to find energy or relaxation in chemicals.

In our second conversation, she described an experience where she received God's grace as forgiveness and love in a concrete way, through other people who are important in her life. She and her husband went on a walk together with their son, and her sister and her husband. She had a time alone with God, during which she decided to forgive herself. At one point, they also made a small circle of acceptance and caring, in which she had the feeling that the wall between her and God was gone. She chose to see the appearance of a bird's feather next to her as a sign of God's involvement with her. Her sister's change towards her was also an affirmation of the belief that God is working in her life. She felt that God would be proud of her for the way she had come. She felt the stirrings of the old Harriet, who for her is actually a new Harriet. In her story, there is an element of finding the self through losing the self (see Section 4.10). Being anchored in God is where she feels she belongs; and for her, it is the route out of the prison. She wants to make her life count by becoming involved in Sunday school, with children or working with old people. She felt that these activities are necessary to fill the space formerly occupied by alcohol. For her, God is the one that has been doing the changing in her, so that He is her way to a new life without alcohol.

### ***6.2.5.3 The effect of substance abuse on Harriet's self-God-stories***

#### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Harriet's self-God-stories:**

Harriet was willing to take all the blame for building a wall between herself and God. She felt completely responsible for the route she has taken in the face of the challenges that life has put before her. Would it not be justified to complement this self-diminishing attitude with the right to ask God and the other important people in her life what part they have played in her difficulties? Was she only a sinner, and not also a victim in some aspects? My opinion is that true victimisation must be acknowledged (Mercadante 1996:34).

#### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Harriet's self-God-stories:**

Harriet's substance abuse confronts her with her limitations and reinforces the sense of her need for God in her life. Through her struggle with the pervasiveness of her guilt feelings, she has come to a realisation that the newness God wants to give is not necessary a quick fix, but can take time. Although she confesses that God is the agent in the changes in her life, her actions speak of somebody who is active in fighting with God, in praying and listening to God, in giving and taking, in the tearing down of the wall between herself and God. She even takes credit for what she has achieved, which enhances a sense of self-efficacy that is necessary for change (Peele 2004:36). She has also learnt not just that God works through her working, but also through the people surrounding her, for example, her husband's and her sisters' acceptance of where she is at the moment.

### ***6.2.5.4 The meaning of Harriet's God-stories for her self-stories about who she is***

Because of the importance of her lifelong relationship with God, Harriet experienced herself as a disappointment for God, her husband and herself. First and foremost there is her view of herself as a responsible mother and grandmother. In the Afrikaner culture from which she comes, this position is often associated with self-sacrificing obedience to God and serving the family's needs. This position enhanced her guilt and shame, but also the resolve to overcome in this struggle. The relating and reliving of forgiveness stories culminated in an experience of forgiveness and of being accepted by God, herself and others in her life. She played a role in the deconstruction of the guilt and shame wall that existed between her and God. Her identity as someone who can touch

God's hand is just as real to her as her identity of being touched by alcohol. She sees herself not as an addict, but as someone living for God through serving others.

#### **6.2.5.5 Summary**

Harriet discusses her relationship with God within the context of her family relations. She is intensely aware of her responsibilities and the divergent expectations of alcohol and God. She has experienced the lack of certain feelings and intimacy with God, and for her the way out of alcohol's dominion is the restoration of the kind of relationship with God that provides acceptance and intimacy. Our conversations centred on relationship experiences that contribute to this breaking down of the wall between her and God.

#### **6.2.6 Participant 6: Hannes**

Hannes is a middle-aged teacher with an alcohol problem. He was divorced ten years ago, and has a girlfriend whom he hopes to marry. His alcohol lifestyle is accompanied by stress, and a search for satisfaction in womanising. Faith has always been an important part of his life; so, some day, he wants to hold office in the church, like his father, who was a priest. He believes that God has a purpose for his life, and that he is an asset to the community when he is sober. He also has some knowledge about forgiveness, and a sense of God's presence in his life, especially when his mind is clear.

##### **6.2.6.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse**

I think it can be helpful to think of God as not somewhere else far away, but within a person, as this will make it more 'natural' to consult with God or take Him into account in daily life. The possible salient effects of this can be diminished if God's presence is limited to one's head – as Hannes puts it, he experiences God in his brain, in his thoughts, helping him to think clearly. There are signs of a lack of emotional and bodily involvement in his relationship with God, as affirmed by his low level of energy and voice intonation (Willard 1988:30,111). Hannes thinks in terms of walking the straight and narrow path, of gritting his teeth and doing God's will, of being faithful to his commitments at a rational level. In my opinion, this can contribute to a separation of mind and body, and to the exclusion of a large part of his bodily life from a spiritual

influence. Such a situation can make it easier to escape anxiety or life itself through chemicals or to look for ways to satisfy other bodily needs when a person's resolve is weakened.

#### ***6.2.6.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

Hannes's identification with faith since childhood and with his father's being a priest, is a strong force pulling against the way alcohol wants him to go. The way he escaped a life-threatening situation when he was a policeman is a story that is important to him, because it has various meanings for him. He believes it is God who put the idea into his mind to mimic gunfire in order to be able to escape (see Addendum B). It also confirms to him that God holds us in the palm of His hand, that our destiny is in His hands. That strengthened the hope in him that God will help him to get through this ordeal in order to become free of the alcohol addiction. The story also holds the meaning that God saved his life for a reason, that God has a purpose for his life. According to him, God can only use him when he is sober, because at times when he is sober, he is an asset to the community, and a good, reliable teacher with many talents who has played a leadership role in different areas of school and church life. He is looking forward to his life's being channelled into these areas, also into the witness evenings and plays the church is involved in. For me, the self-story of taking up activities and commitments is a God-story of living a fulfilling life of service, as opposed to being lived by alcohol.

His knowledge that God's forgiveness is not hard to get is associated with two stories. The one is the Biblical story of the woman who committed adultery, a story that he knows in detail, how Jesus at last told her that he does not condemn her, but forgives her, and that she must not keep on sinning. The other story is the meaning he attaches to the *avondmaal* [Holy Communion]. He participates in Holy Communion regularly, and sees it as a sign of God's forgiveness. This sacrament reminds him and reassures him every time that God keeps on forgiving.

A story that ran through our conversations was how he regularly connects his self-story with mini God-stories in the Bible. He compares his own work as teacher with that of Jesus, who was also a teacher. He likened his own search for humility as the way to greatness to the way Jesus was born in a barn and ultimately exalted. He connects his own experience of forgiveness with the story of the woman who committed adultery.

For Hannes, God's presence in him that helps him to think clearly is directly related to the verse in Ephesians 5 that says: 'And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit'.<sup>6</sup> He sees our own actions as supplementary to prayer, as the way God works in us, as being busy like the ants of Proverbs 6:6. Our works will result in reward, for a labourer is worthy of his hire (Lk 10:7). This becoming part of God-stories provides rich alternative resources for constructing self-stories in the face of the restrictions posed by alcohol-stories.

Another important God-story is that God sends people on one's way to help one to sustain a life of sobriety. Just as he is aware of the danger for him of being surrounded by friends who drink, as he often experienced at home, he is aware of the way our preferred self-stories are co-constructions in interaction with other people in our lives.

His view of God's presence as being within us can become the basis for an identity construction that is an alternative to the cultural notion of an alcoholic identity. God's presence in his mind has the effect of giving him a clear vision, and opposes the effect of alcohol, which impairs his judgment. Another image of God's involvement is that nature is a shadow of the Spirit – Spirit and nature go together. For Hannes, this means that God has an intimate knowledge of our nature and that He will provide in our needs.

### *6.2.6.3 The effect of substance abuse on Hannes's self-God-stories*

#### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Hannes's self-God-stories:**

All his 'theology', all his dreams and all his religious activities did not prevent Hannes from losing control over his alcohol use and the associated behaviours. My question is this: is it just a question of more of the same, more forgiveness, more sacraments, more prayer, more activities, and more commitments? Will more emotional involvement just set a person up for more disappointment in God? It may be that acceptance of our brokenness and surrender to grace are the keys to lasting change (Keller 1985:59).

#### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Hannes's self-God-stories:**

This paragraph is my reflection on Hannes's battle between self-will and God's will. Although the human will is not always against God's will, it can be empowering to

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<sup>6</sup> King James Version (Cambridge) 1769.



know about the existence and the power of self-will that can incite a person into gratifying needs at any cost. It has been discussed that a person's will alone is not capable of freeing him or her from a destructive lifestyle. But bringing one's will in line with God's will can be a resource that creates clarity within the broader framework of re-constructing one's life.

Hannes's struggle with alcohol has brought him to a place of intense awareness of grace in the form of the Biblical notion of God's forgiveness. This is something that he knows about, a refuge he can return to, again and again.

#### ***6.2.6.4 The meaning of Hannes's God-stories for his self-stories about who he is***

For me, Hannes's identity is strongly connected with his faith. He combines the fact that God has saved his life and his leadership abilities into a belief that God has a purpose for his life. His struggle with alcohol is a struggle of self-will against God's will. He keeps God's will near to him through connecting various aspects of his life and experience to Biblical stories, positioning himself on God's side of the struggle. This positioning also includes self-effort in walking on the straight and narrow path, and relating to the people God sends into his life. He has kept his dream of holding office in the church alive all these years. He believes he has left the old Hannes behind in favour of a new lifestyle.

#### ***6.2.6.5 Summary***

For Hannes, the emphasis in his God-stories is on clear thoughts, strong will and appropriate behaviour, things that are against the purposes of alcohol in his life. The context of his God-stories is the lifestyle changes that are necessary. He believes that he has left the old Hannes behind and is living in a new way. Although effort and natural abilities and needs are important in serving God, he also sees relationships, prayer and sacraments as ways in which God can reach His purposes with a person.

#### **6.2.7 Participant 7: Frik**

Frik is 31 years old and married with three children. He struggled with the abuse of alcohol, *dagga* (cannabis) and painkillers. He feels deprived of his childhood, because

his father and mother were, in his words, alcoholics; and his mother died early in his life. He smoked *dagga* from the age of 12. In spite of God's absence in his childhood and his addictions, he believes that God brought him to where he was at the time of our conversation, with a job, a wife and three children whom he loves very much, and being in rehabilitation. He experienced God as answering prayers, and he realised that he needed God in his life. He also fears that God can test his faith by taking away his family.

#### ***6.2.7.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse***

The most prominent God-story on the side of substance abuse in Frik's life is the absence of God in his parent's life, and therefore in his childhood. It represents major limitations on his options for living, without any alternatives to the invitation to follow his parents' lead in the abuse of substances. It appears to me that limited social roles and restricted options for living can lead to addiction, as Steyn and Verwey (1999:310) suggest, diminishing hope for a fulfilling life. People turn to substances for solace when there are no other meaningful involvements in their lives (Peele 2004:16). The absence of God in Frik's early years can be an indication of the absence of his parents in his life. In my opinion, believing that God will take things away from you if you trust Him too much is also not conducive to exploring alternative relationships to the relationship with substances.

#### ***6.2.7.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

A very significant God-story in Frik's life is a story that is told about him, something he did not experience himself at that stage. His father and his sister told him that he suffered from polio when he was small, and that he overcame the illness and miraculously started to walk. Although he is unsure about how factual this account is, because he cannot remember it, on the basis of the possibility that it could have happened, he has constructed a sense of conviction that his life must have value for God. A miracle transpired and therefore his life must have a God-willed purpose. I believe God-given worth and purpose can become avenues for an exploration of alternative ways of being. It can work against the purposes that substances have for one's life (Peele 2004:125,216). His view that his life has a purpose is strengthened by the way his life has developed up to this point, that after everything he endured during

childhood, his addictions and confinements, he has a job and a family, and that he is at this place for rehabilitation.

Although he is only vaguely aware of what this purpose entails, he is very sure of one thing, and that is that his first priority is to provide a childhood for his children that is different from his own. He sees being a good father to them and exposing them to church involvement as opposing the demands of a substance-determined lifestyle. He also has the vague idea that God wants to use him to provide a childhood for other children in difficult circumstances, for them to have other choices than what drugs choose for them. He feels that he has a special knowledge about children's experiences, and that they can identify with his stories. He has already discussed this possibility with his brother-in-law, whom he also wants to help to come back on track after 'sort of giving up' on life. He also has a friend whose child is sick and may need his support.

Frik has clearly defined stories of God answering prayers. The first story is an example of the many times he called on God when he was in trouble, to help him to get off the hook or to prevent even more problems. Once he stole money from his dad for *dagga*. He believed his father would beat him to death, so he prayed that his father would not discover the money in his schoolbook. His father searched through all his books, except the one with the money. He also remembers an experience when the minister prayed for Frik's sick child. The doctors had not been able to establish the cause of the child's illness, even after numerous hospitalisations. A short while after praying, the doctors were able to make a diagnosis, and put in place measures to prevent the child from becoming ill again. All these kinds of experience helped him to decide to pray when he was taken up in the rehabilitation centre. He was afraid that he would not be able to do without the substances, because it was such a part of his daily life. He prayed, and he had already gone without the substances for 16 days.

In my opinion, this is a God-story that is helpful to him and therefore it needs not be questioned. However, through careful questioning Frik can possibly be helped to appreciate his own role in the outcome of the prayers.

Frik has ambiguous feelings and views about having faith and especially about going to church. He says that he discovered that being 'too religious', like going to church regularly, resulted in things going wrong for him, financially and relationally. In

addition to this, there is his distrust of other people and his personal experience of ‘false prophets’ and their hypocrisy. These things make it difficult for him to commit to a church. Then there is also the big fear of his life, his fear of losing his wife and children. He is afraid that his faith will be tested, whether by God or by the devil, by his losing his family, or that God will demand things from him, like his family. He is not prepared to take that route. For me, these views can be seen as helpful, as part of a reality check that is not afraid of reflecting on the consequences of one’s faith, faith community and implicating God in the struggles of life. It can also be seen as the result of a lifelong giving up of other resources in favour of chemicals in the construction of life, thus the lack of life-skills in the foreseen problem areas of his life.

On the other hand, Frik has grown during the interviews into the belief that he needs God in his life. He accepts that God has his best interests at heart, also to help him to overcome the addiction. He had learned quite a lot about God during the time in reformatory school when he was forced to go to church every Sunday. He also talked about positive experiences he had at the church his family attended the last few times, for example, that nobody is above anybody else, and that the minister trod on his own coat to demonstrate that human interests are not as important as God’s purposes. He really wants to link his children to a church, to give them opportunities he did not have. He has the knowledge that the way God changes a person is not by a person’s sitting and waiting for Him, but by doing his part. As he said: ‘*Dit vat tyd maar jy kom daaruit*’ [It takes time, but it works out fine]. Performing stories of being called, of changing, of doing God’s will, can subjugate the stories of being subjugated through alcohol and dagga. Frik does not doubt his having faith and being a Christian.

#### ***6.2.7.3 The effect of substance abuse on Frik’s self-God-stories***

##### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Frik’s self-God-stories:**

God was to a large part not present in Frik’s formative years. He learned to experience God only as a refuge when he needed a miracle, to help him when he is in trouble. For me, his ambiguity towards a commitment to God can be part of the story of God’s absence from a part of his life, when he was young and when he was ‘taken over’ by substances. The distinction between God and the devil is sometimes blurred, as expressed in his fear that something that is dear to him, his family, can be taken away

from him, as he said, or by God or by the devil. It is the fear of a distant, powerful force that can be benevolent, but is also dangerous. He is not sure how to handle that.

#### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Frik's self-God-stories:**

The fact that Frik has been 'successful' in his life, in the sense that he is still alive, not in jail, has a job, a wife and three children whom he loves very much, and dreams, has given him the assurance that God is with him in an active way. Although he accepts his sinfulness, he also knows God's grace, which forgives. A crucial need through the years of his being abused by substances was a God that is approachable. In his times of need, this God was there. Although he has his own doubts about the church, he is sure that his children must be part of that community, for despite some hypocrisy, God is generally working through the church. He hopes that this involvement will provide them with more stories out of which to choose a way of life, something he did not have.

#### ***6.2.7.4 The meaning of Frik's God-stories for his self-stories about who he is***

The experience of not having a childhood puts Frik's current status of being a father and a husband in a defining perspective. He believes it to be God's history with him, throughout his addictions, undergirded by stories of God's *ad hoc* interventions throughout his life in times of crisis. He sees himself as a believer that needs God, but with reservations about the destructive consequences of an over-commitment to faith and the church. His main purpose in life is to provide a childhood for his children (and maybe other children too) that he did not have.

#### ***6.2.7.5 Summary***

God's absence in Frik's childhood becomes apparent in his 'using' of God in times of need. That determined the stories to be told. His main interest in God is in God's helping him to be a husband and a father, enough reason to identify in his awareness with God's purposes and not that of the drugs.

#### **6.2.8 Participant 8: Gilbert**

Gilbert is a young man who drank since childhood. In the last six years he also became addicted to crack cocaine. It started at a time when he blamed God for his father's death

and his girlfriend left him. At one stage, he was still able to control it, but in the last few years he lost all control over the habit. He had a 'passionate love affair' with cocaine. Although he has reservations about the forgiveness of his sins through grace, his re-appropriation of a relationship with God in his struggle against substance abuse is related to his upbringing and the visible effects of faith in the life of his mother and girlfriends.

#### ***6.2.8.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse***

Blaming God for things that had gone wrong in his life, for example, his father's death six years before and the fact that his girlfriend left him a year later, was the beginning of Gilbert's relationship with God going sour. His serious prayers in this regard were not answered in the way he would have wanted. It kickstarted his 'passionate love affair' with crack cocaine.

Gilbert had reservations about the way forgiveness is given and appropriated. He realised his need for forgiveness, but he had never experienced a situation where he asked for forgiveness and felt that he had received it. He related this to his general need for a sign from God that everything is fine, maybe just a hand on the shoulder, the experience of contentedness that his mother talked about. His experience of the way people sometimes live the way they want for years and then suddenly, when there are problems, they repent and want forgiveness, made him doubt whether forgiveness is so easily given and received. One of his God-stories is about the mighty, powerful God that will not let people take Him for a ride. He learned about this God in Sunday school, the God of the Old Testament, as well as on a 33-day trip on a sailboat on the ocean. He never felt as small against the background of God's greatness as on this trip, and that made him realise that forgiveness cannot be cheap. The way people misappropriate forgiveness on the one hand, and the majesty of God on the other hand, makes it difficult for a person to get close to God. It is therefore not difficult for me to understand that he did not feel ready to take this step, to ask God for forgiveness or to accept it. He still felt dirty, and he was not yet able to forgive himself.

This paragraph is my own reflection on Gilbert's reservations about accepting forgiveness. The confluence of these God-stories is commendable for their stance against not taking one's wrongdoings seriously and/or not taking God seriously (Julian

1998:46-48). It wants to protect the value of a person's relationship with God against opportunism, as well as the cost of grace against exploitation. But these God-stories can also prevent a religious/spiritual person from stepping out into the possibilities of a renewed relationship with God, and thus encourage the continuation of behaviour that is cut off from religious or spiritual promptings. The need for justice and the cost of grace is revealed on the cross of Jesus (Keller 1985:71). Through the substitutional work of Christ, justice has been fulfilled and grace is freely given by God. Therefore, through faith, it may be possible to step into God's promise of forgiveness as the basis for the challenge to a changed life. While I respect Gilbert's story, it may be helpful to ask him questions about his understanding of the meaning of the work of Christ and of grace for himself.

The effect of these God-stories on the continuation of substance abuse can be strengthened by two other God-stories. Gilbert believed it is his responsibility to narrow the gap between himself and God. Added to the initial hesitancy to surrendering to God, there is the story that change depends on oneself, that God only helps those who help themselves. For me, this puts a lot of pressure and expectation on the self.

This view was also complemented by another God-story, namely that there are no grey areas, only black and white; there are no half measures in taking God back into one's life. One is either a Christian, or one is not. This is possible within the context of the 'by faith alone' of the Reformation, but Gilbert mentioned this God-story in the context of living up to God's standards (see Julian 1998:52).

I assume that the combination of these stories – that forgiveness is not easily given or received, that change depends on oneself, that there are no in-between half measures in satisfying God – can work on the side of the *status quo*. In such a view, a certain point of boldness towards God must be achieved; one must have some credit with God, of which one can never be sure, in order to rely on His forgiveness and support. Someone still in the throes of substance abuse and its associated behaviour will never have enough or be enough to qualify for change, which is what Gilbert is experiencing.

### ***6.2.8.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

Gilbert's mother's life is a God-story that has influenced his God-stories in vital ways. He longed for the faith, inner peace, love and happiness that emanated from her. He learned about the God of love and forgiveness from her. She talked daily about God and she saw God in everything around her. During his upbringing, he was also encouraged to have a thankful attitude, like his mother. When he was away from home during the night, she prayed and experienced a God-given calmness and contentedness. He wished that he could be touched in the way that his mother was touched, to experience what she experienced when she had a smile on her face. His mother's life with God is the opposite of his life with drugs. The drugs caused the gap between him and God. His mother's faith and his buried values and longings in this regard were constantly calling him towards a different way of life, a life without drugs. Prayer, as the connection with his father, also continually links him to God. He also experienced God in his relationship with his previous girlfriend. Although they were not together any more, he still saw it as a sign of God's involvement in his life that pulled him away from substance abuse. The relationships with his mother, as well as his previous and current girlfriends, have the potential of making him receptive to the changing power of grace.

As a religious person, Gilbert's association of drugs with the devil framed substance abuse within a God-story against substance abuse. He compared his drug use with walking hand in hand with the devil. He experienced his life as a struggle between good and bad, between God and the devil. The more one grows in God, the stronger the struggle becomes. Walking hand in hand with the devil is clearly something that he did not want to do. Therefore reading the Bible was important to him. Bible-reading is a stand against walking with the devil and using drugs, it is walking with God. Gilbert believed that Bible-reading makes him strong against the attacks of the devil. He also expressed the knowledge that walking with the devil and drugs brings only a moment of glory, but it is not a life worth striving for. The glory of God is enduring.

He also told a God-story about a practical way in which the devil's onslaught was resisted. He and his mother wanted to go to church one Sunday morning, but the lock of the front door did not want to open. He stayed calm and unscrewed the hinge, opened the door and went to church. This experience made him feel good and confirmed that



God was stronger than the devil. He also experienced his girlfriend as an angel that God had sent to him to intervene before the devil's hold on him became too strong.

This experience of the power of God was reinforced by the God-story he told about his 33 days on a sailboat on the ocean. Like Job, he experienced God's creation first hand: the majestic night sky, the mighty waves, and his smallness against the overwhelming surroundings. He experienced God's greatness through his whole body, but was never afraid; he felt protected. This experience of a mighty God enhanced the feeling of distance between himself and God, but it also encouraged a trust in Him in his struggle against the influence of substance abuse, knowing that, with Him, overcoming is possible. That is why Gilbert's view that one must act responsibly to help oneself, must, in my understanding, be complemented with a continual dependence on God. According to him, there is a thin line between the two sides. He has an aunt who was converted, and then stopped caring or taking responsibility for tomorrow. For him, that cannot be right, for it makes one a beggar dependent on other people's compassion. His boss, on the other hand, believes that he does not need God, that he is self-sufficient. The awareness of the need for and availability of a powerful God can be crucial in the establishing of alternative ways of being.

Another influential God-story was Gilbert's wish to start giving back to life, in other words, to start participating in life. He wanted to start sharing his life story at the Thursday meetings in Ramot. He felt that he can have some influence among the young people of his own community. He wanted to carry out the message that the 'Jesus Factor' (the title of a movie) is indispensable in becoming free from drugs. He was looking forward to taking on this journey with his girlfriend

#### ***6.2.8.3 The effect of substance abuse on Gilbert's self-God-stories***

##### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Gilbert's self-God-stories:**

Gilbert's substance abuse created a gap between him and God. His substance abuse, together with the experiences of loss, brought him to a place where he knows God is powerful, but feels God is distant, in the sense that it is difficult to relate to God. Our sinfulness and His greatness make forgiveness costly. An all or nothing deal, dependent on our actions, emphasises the improbability of our satisfying God. According to

Gilbert, there is a lack of the experience of the abundance and free flow of grace made possible through Jesus Christ.

**Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Gilbert's self-God-stories:**

His substance abuse awakened in him a longing for the touch of God, for overcoming the pain of his losses and the pain of the gap between himself and God. He was intensely aware of what being at home means, that is, being at the place where his mother is.

***6.2.8.4 The meaning of Gilbert's God-stories for his self-stories about who he is***

Gilbert grew up as a Christian. This did not prevent him from becoming a stranger to God, and walking hand in hand with the devil through using drugs. Having gone so far astray, it was difficult for him to be reconciled with God, to just claim forgiveness and acceptance. Because of his sense of God's majesty and greatness and of his own smallness and sinfulness, narrowing the gap between himself and God will take time, even though he was conscious that the sacrifice of Jesus has already been made. He realised that he needed to take faithful action, depend on God and commit fully. He experienced his God-stories mostly through the God-stories of other people, like that of his mother, whose God-likeness was what he wants in his own life. Also God's gift of a previous and a current girlfriend was God incarnate for him. He felt safe because God is stronger than the devil, and he is certain that God will use him as a witness within his own community.

***6.2.8.5 Summary***

Being a believer, Gilbert's renewed response to stop taking the drugs and his desire to commit to God is a huge re-connecting to what was part of his life. It is an expansion of previous identity conclusions. He is relating his God-stories within the context of theological stories of human nature, and that influences his own re-connection with God. He is also relating his God-stories within the context of other important people in his life, and those God-stories are performed in the ups and downs of daily life.

## 6.2.9 Participant 9: Coreen

Coreen is a middle-aged single mother who struggles with alcohol abuse. She is quite at ease talking about her relationship with God. She grew up in a Christian home and is still actively involved in church activities. She sees her life as being like an ellipse with two focal points: alcohol consumption and religion. Illness, depression and loneliness keep on tripping her up in her struggle against alcohol abuse.

### *6.2.9.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse and against substance abuse*

I include Coreen's story because it contains something slightly different from most of the other stories. Throughout her pursuit of the interests of alcohol, she also pursues the interests of her relationship with God with the same vigour. The one does not preclude the other. She is at ease with her relationship with God, which has been there since her childhood. For Coreen, her faith is a countermeasure to the needs of her mood swings and her vulnerability to the abuse of alcohol. It provides stability, a foundation that is always there, something that makes her strong, gives her peace and helps her to value herself more positively. She keeps on believing in God's goodness and communicates regularly with Him. Especially when she prays, she experiences calmness amid her struggles. She has been a deacon and an elder in her church, and she is a member of a Bible study group. She has an appreciation for and is receptive to church services on the radio; and they strengthen her relationship with God.

It is clear that for Coreen these God-stories are against the abuse of alcohol. I think they can also be viewed in a different light. Self-stories change as new interpretations are made, as new stories are told, as difference is brought into play (see Section 3.7). While any change in a living system is triggered by this 'news of difference' (White & Epston 1990:2), I am not sure whether there was something new in her experience of her religion or spirituality at this stage of her life capable of making a difference in her relationship with alcohol. In the light of Section 3.6.1, the deconstruction of her God-stories can be a way to invite the 'other', the 'not-yet- said' in regard to her relationship with God, into her life.

She mentioned her struggle with the three 'd's' in her life: The devil, depression and drinking. She was also searching for financial security and a life partner. For me, this

struggle and quest raised the question whether her God-stories are adequate as resources for starting a different life. The way her God-stories and alcohol-stories coincided in her life confirms the discourse discussed in Chapter 5 that, at a certain level, religion and alcohol can satisfy the same needs in a person. It may be possible that mixed motivations result in a struggle, and in failing efforts to stop pursuing a substance (May 1988:60-61). Her journey away from alcohol may be less dependent on dramatic interventions and more a question of ‘maturing out’ of the addictive lifestyle (Peele 2004:163).

Coreen’s resolve to break off her relationship with alcohol and its effects revolved more around self-stories than God-stories. Here are a few self-stories against substance abuse that confirm her idea of ‘maturing out’. Coreen did not want to continue living with the destructive consequences of alcohol consumption. Her relationship with alcohol interfered with three other relationships in her life: it interfered with the kind of helping and caring relationships she wanted to be involved in with other people; her relationship with the medical treatment she was receiving (for her, the road with alcohol is an invitation to death); and with her being available for her daughter. Her daughter is an important motivation for her to choose life rather than death.

#### ***6.2.9.2 The restricting and enriching effects of substance abuse on Coreen’s self-God-stories***

I can see that for Coreen, God is part of an environment that is an alternative to alcohol abuse. But the alcohol is not able to dis-connect her from God, just as her relationship with God is not able to dis-connect her from alcohol. She experiences her relationship with God as providing the stability, peace and self-respect that alcohol is taking away from her.

#### ***6.2.9.3 The meaning of Coreen’s God-stories for her self-stories about who she is***

Coreen’s God-stories provide her with strength, peace and positive self-appreciation, in short, stability. The alcohol is not able to alienate her from God. Nevertheless, she was tired of the consequences of alcohol consumption, of fighting against depression, the devil and drinking. It alienated her from other important relations in her life, and was therefore a road to death. For me, her substance abuse and her God-stories were able to

co-exist to such an extent that it is difficult to see how one story will bring about a change in the other story. She probably will have to re-negotiate with God about what difference a relationship with Him can bring in her life.

#### **6.2.9.4 Summary**

Coreen relates her God-stories in the context of assurance of her faith, also as being part of church activities and having leadership responsibilities in her church. She feels at ease with God, living in His presence, but her God-story and her alcohol-story had equal places in organising her life at that stage.

#### **6.2.10 Participant 10: Jan**

Jan was 44 years old at the time of our conversations, a married man with two daughters. His whiskey and coke (CocaCola) habit caused tension and disruption at home, and through the intervention of his family and friends, he came to Ramot for rehabilitation. He had been a school principal, and was working at a communications company at the time. His faith and church involvement have been important to him all his life. His sense of responsibility, also with regard to his family, had played an important part in his decision to change his lifestyle. He has good communication skills and is a musician, emphasising self-stories that are outside the domain of alcohol.

##### **6.2.10.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse**

Jan's God-stories have elements of measuring up to certain standards of behaviour. He and his family attended church regularly, they read the Bible and prayed every evening, and, with his having been a school principal, they were an exemplary family in their community. As is often the case with people with an educational background, rules are part of his life, which includes living up to God's rules. In my opinion, the emphasis on behaviour can be part of a story of separating mind and body and inscribing on one's body the ways of being that are encouraged in culture – in this, I agree with Davies (1991:49). This can include, on the one hand, moralism, as discussed before (Keller 1985:58), and on the other hand, the managing of the self through the use of alcohol to achieve a relaxed state of mind (Peele 2004:111). Moralism and substance abuse can be seen as behaviour without a connection to mind/spirituality. In addition, it can be in line

with the construction of subjectivity according to the demands of the professional discourses in which thin conclusions about the self take the place of the macro-context of a person's life (White 1997b:18). This emphasis on external behaviour can make it possible to persist in activities that undermine one's relationships and one's preferred outcomes, like substance abuse, as long as one's performance is socially or professionally acceptable. I see something of this in Jan's behaviour.

#### ***6.2.10.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

The first picture of God that comes to Jan's mind is that He makes a difference in one's life, and he therefore never starts anything without asking God for His power or His will. He has experiences of the effects of this praying, such as the recommendations he got for posts, the results of the choices he made, and becoming a school principal at a relatively young age. Therefore, for Jan, his trust in God is the most important key to unlocking the door to freedom from addiction. For him, without faith, a relapse is inevitable. The reason Jan gave is that the drinking habit takes hold of one's mind, it is a 'mind game', and therefore the only solution is to focus your mind on the power of God, to let God take your mind off drinking. God also makes a difference through Jan's being situated within the tradition of the Protestant work-ethic and morality. The importance of being productive and responsible in his work, as well as being a role model in his community, helped him to set his own boundaries regarding his alcohol consumption.

The week before he came to Ramot, Jan asked God for a successful week, that everything would be sorted out and go according to plan, to show the people around him that Jan did not need rehabilitation. That week everything went wrong: his computer got a virus; his fax machine broke; other frustrations showed up; he got the message that the branch of the business where he had been working was going to close, etc. The Thursday his house became crowded with caring people that wanted to encourage him to go for help. Everything went contrary to what he asked from God. For him, this series of unfortunate events was God's way of telling him loudly and clearly that his whiskey and coke habit had to change. The week of failure became a powerful voice of God against substance abuse.

Another God-story in Jan's life at this stage is the way God surrounded him with people who care about him. His wife was the first one to experience uneasiness about his drinking habits, and cared enough to involve the Christian Action for Dependency (CAD) and their minister in encouraging him to get help. His children are very dear to him; and the eldest child's remarks about being glad that he did not drink and that they could be together as a family again on the weekend when he was with them touched his heart. He was visited again and again by the chairman of the CAD, the social worker, the minister, family members, and he was even encouraged by his brother over the telephone. He regarded the church as their first line for establishing new relationships. For Jan, all these relationships of caring and acceptance are expressions of God's grace as unconditional love that provides an alternative environment for the handling of life's pressures (see Van Vonderen 2004:204-223).

Since his coming to Ramot, he experienced a different dimension in his Bible reading and praying. It was as if he was more sensitive to what God is saying to him. In James 1 and in the letter to Philemon, he found images that helped him in his struggle against addiction.

### ***6.2.10.3 The effect of substance abuse on Jan's self-God-stories***

**Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Jan's self-God-stories:** For me, the social environment of a school principal can be conducive to a focus on external appearance and behaviour. Even though Jan was not a school principal any longer, outward appearances were one of his concerns regarding the use of alcohol, especially through the eyes of his daughters' friends. In this environment, God can easily be relegated to being a functionary for the smooth running of one's life. To me it seems as if his use of alcohol fulfilled a function that excluded the necessity of exploring the meaning of God for his relational and psychological needs (see Fish 1990:146-148).

### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Jan's self-God-stories:**

His substance abuse did not alienate Jan from God. God has always been important to him; and he was sincere in participating with his family in church attendance and Bible-reading and praying. God has always been accessible to him through prayer. He has learned the lesson that God can also use bad things that happen in one's life like a loudspeaker, an intervention in order for Jan to make changes in his life. Through his

substance abuse he came to a renewed appreciation of the gift of his family and the need to have faith.

#### ***6.2.10.4 The meaning of Jan's God-stories for his self-stories about who he is***

Jan grew up in a Christian home and his faith has always been important to him. His God-stories are always linked to church attendance, which includes his playing in the church band. Together with church involvement, he is living according to specific values, norms and rules in society. His identity, his sense of being in the world, is a matter of how he and his family appear to the outside world. That is why the category of 'alcoholic' is problematic for him, and why it is important to him that he has been able to control his drinking in line with social expectations. His relationship with God, although predictable to a large extent, is something he is experiencing in a new way through praying and Bible reading. Jan's most important self-description at this stage is related to his being a husband and a father.

#### ***6.2.10.5 Summary***

Jan told his God-stories in the context of a traditional Afrikaans-speaking church-going family. He experienced the bad things that happened to him as the way through which God wants to work in his life. His relationship with God has the potential of providing caring relationships, stability, and power and focus to be responsible, disciplined and self-controlled, but the question remained whether that would be enough.

#### **6.2.11 Participant 11: Heiné**

Heiné was 41 at the time of our conversations and had been troubled by alcohol abuse since he started drinking during his university years. Alcohol gradually increased its hold on his life. Alcohol became a friend that took away his loneliness, a loneliness that was, actually, the result of his disordered relationship with alcohol, in his opinion. He lost his first wife and their child, as well as his house, car and money. At one stage he blamed God for everything that had gone wrong in his life. He is currently in his second marriage, and they have a little daughter. Through the re-appropriation of a relationship with God, he felt equipped and determined not to walk the same route as in his first marriage, but to be a husband, father and role model to his new family.



### ***6.2.11.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse***

In these two paragraphs, I reflect on the idea of seeing God as a help in need and as someone to blame for bad things that happen. A God-story that is very effective in promoting the intention of chemicals is that God is someone that we call on when we have problems. This means that if God is not interested in fulfilling our relationship needs or changing our lives, He can be kept at bay. We can thus at least pursue the purposes of the substances for our lives with a clean conscience. God or someone else helping us here and there in a crisis caused by substance abuse can prevent us from experiencing negative consequences, and it is therefore help that is not really helpful. It makes it possible for a person to continue with the substance abuse (Fish 1990:85; Van Vonderen 2004:128-129).

Another God-story that is conducive to the aims of substance abuse is to blame God for the things that go wrong in our lives as a result of the intoxication (Barnard 1994:34). This leaves the substances and the relationship with the substances blameless and ready for the next round. As mentioned before, anger and blame can work together on the side of the justification for substance abuse.

Heiné experienced both these stories at different stages in his journey.

### ***6.2.11.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse***

Two God-stories were life-changing for Heiné. The first God-story is actually the self-story of his wife, with the belief that it was God who was working through her. This is the story of his second wife's persistence in practising her faith. Coming from a family in which alcohol was abused, she had an aversion to alcohol and resistance to his misuse of alcohol, but she stayed with him and kept on supporting him. She was determined to keep on reading the Bible and pray every morning, whether he listened or not. She kept on going to church. Her courageous love and caring eventually contributed to the change in his life.

The second God-story is about their daughter who was born two months too early. She had to be taken to the Panorama hospital for an emergency operation. She was in

intensive care for three months. The doctors came to a point where they could do nothing more for her. Heiné and his wife started to pray. Pastors from their church also prayed. She was cured in answer to prayer. The whole experience shook him, and brought him to realise that a person cannot live without God. This incident brought him to a point where he realised he had to make a choice, either to keep on using alcohol, or to turn to God. He made the choice to turn to God. Although he did not stop drinking immediately, this decision eventually filtered through into his life.

At different stages, Heiné experienced alcohol as a ‘friend’ that brought loneliness, and as a ‘boss’ that controlled his life. He ‘discovered’ God to be a friend that would not take his life away like alcohol. He believes that God is a different kind of ‘boss’, one that does not destroy but gives life, one that actually helps him to be more in control of his life. For him, in order to be able to have a family, to be a friend and a role model for his daughter, he needs to put his religion in the centre of his life. God has to take the place that alcohol has occupied for so many years. In the last three months he had acknowledged that he owed everything that he had to God’s grace. God became the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of his life. He experienced his faith specifically as a power that enabled him to make the right choices regarding alcohol and regarding his family.

The realisation that everything that he had and that he had achieved were given to him by God put him in a position where he could see all the resources that he had, his abilities and achievements, as God-stories. His academic achievements, his being an officer in the army, his upward mobility till he became a school principal, his capabilities in sport – everything provided him with life-skills, with discipline, with a purposefulness that could help him to make a success of his life. He felt that he had enough things going for him, so that he did not need to be tripped up by idleness, so that he could stay in control of his life, and reject the abuse of alcohol. To all these resources can be added the story of God’s working through other important people in his life, such as his wife and daughter, his parents, who have always been there for him, and his sister in New Zealand, as well as other people in his home town who have walked this road with him.

### ***6.2.11.3 The effect of substance abuse on Heiné's self-God-stories***

#### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Heiné's self-God-stories:**

The first effect of substance abuse on his God-stories is that the alcohol made him put God and church attendance aside. Any interest in religion just disappeared. He also used God like an emergency number, in spite of being incited by alcohol to blame God for the things that he lost.

His alcohol abuse filtered out any sense of the contribution of God towards his abilities and achievements, and fixed his focus on himself as a 'superman' that worked hard for what he had achieved. He was able to look good outwardly, in spite of the loss of control over his alcohol consumption.

#### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Heiné's self-God-stories:**

Heiné was exposed to the power of alcohol to control his life. Control was one of his abilities, being a good sportsman and coach, an officer in the army, departmental head, vice-principal and principal. But he was not able to control his alcohol use, in fact, it controlled him. This power and control can only be overcome through a higher power, through God himself. For him, only God can take the place of alcohol in his life. This can be the reason why Heiné immersed himself in God, centralising His constant and powerful presence, and had committed himself to Bible-reading, praying and church attendance with his family.

### ***6.2.11.4 The meaning of Heiné's God-stories for his self-stories about who he is***

During the years when Heiné was controlled by alcohol consumption, he persisted in a relationship with God, in particular through his involvement in church activities. His re-connection with God after the stories of the past few months before rehabilitation was a re-discovery and re-appropriation of the things that he regarded as previously part of who he is. Substance control must be replaced with self-control through God's help. He appreciated his abilities and his family as gifts from God. He did not want to lose his family again. Therefore, for Heiné, his sense of who he is was, to a large extent, linked with the God-given challenges of being a husband and a role model to his daughter. He also wanted God to be the centre, the beginning and the end of his life. This sounded to

me like the description of an externally allocated identity. This included his spiritual disciplines, as well as church involvement with his family.

#### **6.2.11.5 Summary**

Heiné's God-stories have elements of long-term association with God and church, as well as more radical, life-changing encounters with God. He was able to tell the ups and downs of his relationship with God in great detail, always within the context of the role of people who were important to him at a certain stage. The telling of his self-God-story was a performance of who he is and wants to be.

#### **6.2.12 Participant 12: Wolfgang**

Wolfgang is a middle-aged man who has been struggling with alcohol abuse for many years. He was in the process of divorce and selling his house, and his liver was in a poor condition. He had been a Mercedes mechanic, a salesman for an irrigation business, and now had to find a new job. His faith was important to him, and he declared that he would not be able to walk the road away from alcohol without a relationship with God. He was very determined to start a new life. He saw change as coming not automatically but through working hard. He had learned to discern the voice of God at a spiritual seminar that he attended five years previously in Windhoek.

##### ***6.2.12.1 Self-God-stories on the side of substance abuse***

This paragraph is my reflection on Wolfgang's story about the angry voice of God. Wolfgang's God-story about the voice of God, which can be compared to the voice of an angry father, is a story that is sometimes very necessary for a person struggling with problems with substances. Depending on the context of a person's relationship with God, it can function as a motivation to change behaviour, as it did in his case. This story can also result in a fear for God's judgement that is added to a range of possible fears in the life of an addict (Fish 1990:158). This fear can be supplemented with guilt feelings, all the more reason to avoid God or to flee into the welcoming numbness or euphoria that alcohol promises.

### *6.2.12.2 Self-God-stories against substance abuse*

There are two God-stories in Wolfgang's life that were gaining importance as counter-stories to alcohol abuse. The first story is about Wolfgang's being in a head-on collision on the road between Swakopmund and Walvisbaai in Namibia. For him, the fact that he survived the accident was a confirmation that God is in control of his life. He only conferred this meaning on the accident later, when he became religious. As he felt that God was working in his life to save him, God became very important to him.

Another God-story that resulted in his faith in God was his attendance at a seminar five years ago. The seminar was presented by a person who is well known for his spiritual seminars. Friends encouraged Wolfgang to attend the seminar, and there he committed himself to God and God's love. It was a turning point in his life, even though he continued with his struggle with alcohol abuse. Afterwards he also engaged in the activities of a church in Windhoek, and became close friends with the local ministers of the church.

The day before our conversation, he received a letter from one of the ministers in which the minister told him that they were supporting him and were waiting for him to return to continue supporting him. This was a very positive confirmation that there were people that really cared about him and it inspired him to come clean. When he returned to Windhoek, he wanted to become involved in the church and with AA. His girlfriend was also an important partner on his way forward. If she did not stop drinking, he would have to break of his relationship with her, because if she caused him to relapse, it could be fatal to him. Wolfgang believed that he would not be able to overcome his problems with alcohol without this re-remembering of God and other important people in his life. For me, this story confirms the argument that conversion is not necessarily the end of all problems with substances, but that the road to sobriety or control of substances is sometimes a journey over time from one way of being to a different way of being (Fish 1990:20).

To Wolfgang, his view of God's voice as an angry voice like that of his stepfather was, on the one hand, the voice of disappointment in him for continuing to relapse, and on the other hand the voice of love that wants to help him. God can become angry in order to help a person he loves to do what is best. He believed that God never rejects a person.

Even if a person lives in sin ('the broad way') and he or she becomes converted at the end, God will forgive and accept that person. The basis for his assurance was the story of Jesus who paid the price for all our sins. This is a story of God's grace that can come to us in a loud voice like through a loudspeaker, and that opens the way for us to come to Him again and again. For Wolfgang, God's forgiveness and accepting presence were the possible starting point for a construction of self-stories outside the domain of substance abuse. God provides us with the warmth and comfort of being at home without the assistance of chemicals.

Wolfgang was committed to the value of starting a new, 'clean' life when he got back home. For him, that included the view of the changes God is working in one's life, He does that through one's own efforts. It meant paying attention to his job, to getting a house, to his girlfriend, to the church, and to becoming involved with other people that have the same problems that he had. He was tired of relapsing, and felt more equipped than ever to leave substance abuse behind.

#### *6.2.12.3 The effect of substance abuse on Wolfgang's self-God-stories*

##### **Substance abuse stories that have a restricting effect on Wolfgang's self-God-stories:**

Because of his drinking, Wolfgang developed a fear for God's angry voice, which is like the voice of his stepfather, and that can potentially alienate him from God. He believed that God was disappointed in him.

##### **Substance abuse stories that have an enriching effect on Wolfgang's self-God-stories:**

Wolfgang's substance abuse helped him to experience God's love and acceptance more intensely than would have been the case in other circumstances. He was convinced that only his relationship with God can present alternatives to the struggle with substances. He became aware of the importance of the other people in his life that support him and he wanted to be involved in a faith community.

#### ***6.2.12.4 The meaning of Wolfgang's God-stories for his self-stories about who he is***

In spite of the alcohol abuse, Wolfgang saw himself as a child of God, and believed that God was in control of his life. He did not grow up as a Christian, so this was a relatively new identity-story. For me, because of his passionate identification with what Jesus Christ has done for us, his alcohol abuse never alienated him from God. Because of the way God had been with him up to this point in his life, he believed that his life had a God-given purpose.

#### ***6.2.12.5 Summary***

Wolfgang was a new Christian, and therefore he was fascinated by extraordinary events. His God-stories were also dependent on other people in his life. His substance abuse did not really distance him from the newness of his God-stories. He was looking forward to living a 'clean' life with God.

### **6.3 FEEDBACK**

I contacted three participants whom I could reach three years after the conversations, in order to get an idea of any longer-term consequences that these conversations might have had in their struggle with substance abuse. As I have mentioned already, the research itself was not therapy. The context of this research is a short-term rehabilitation programme, and the research interviews were limited to two conversations with each participant. The meaning of the conversations has to be explored within this framework.

The small window on the long-term value of the conversations is to show that these stories can acquire continuity in a therapeutic context and can therefore be described more richly and in a more varied manner over time. These are only examples of the longer-term effect of the research conversations about the difference God-stories can make on the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse. Running through all three cases were the stories of the difference that God-stories had made in these people's relationship with substances, and their stories of being at different stages of a journey towards a migration of identity. These are stories in which they are agents in the co-construction of the plots. These examples also show the acquisition of language skills and vocabulary in order to account for themselves.

Harriet (see Section 6.2.5) was very sure of the way the conversations during her rehabilitation at Ramot had contributed to her accepting forgiveness and starting a new life. Her journey had taken her away from the demands of substance abuse, and she felt completely in control of her relationship with substances. For her, the relationship with substances had been subjugated by her relationship with God. Instead of the language of tearing down the wall between her and God, three years on, she used images of climbing over the wall, actively overcoming the distance between her and God.

The moment Joseph (see Section 6.2.4) heard my voice, his immediate reaction was the expression of a clarity that he was still busy building his spiritual home, although he was not yet at the place where he wanted to be. He felt that his faith, and the conversations about God, did help him to get back on the right track after a relapse. The circumstances in his home were steadily getting better, and he was satisfied with the way things were going for him at the time. He was persisting in his church involvement; and for him that was the key substitution for alcohol abuse.

For Frik (see Section 6. 2.7), the conversations about God and faith were important in helping him to think twice before doing something irresponsible. He realised that there was someone to turn to for help, and that prayer really makes a difference. He did not use drugs anymore, but felt that he still had to realise his dreams for his children to expose them to God-stories.

#### **6.4 SUMMARY**

This chapter, together with Addendum B, presents the conversations with research participants about self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse. Self-God-stories that collude with substance abuse stories generally have to do with aspects of a relationship with God that become unbalanced and limiting, and that make a fruitful dialogue with God difficult (Griffith & Griffith 2002:158-159). This will be explored in the next chapter.

Regarding self-God-stories against substance abuse, three themes or storylines are prominent in the conversations with all participants. These are the stories about remembering God, about grace and about identity concerns. These storylines correlate



with the last part of the previous chapter, and are taken up and discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Re-membering God provides alternative contexts and meanings for the construction of self-stories. All the stories about connecting or re-connecting with God are about the availability of an alternative domain for the construction of self-stories that became stuck in stories of substance abuse. It includes the involvement in God-stories through faith, prayer, Bible-reading, service, community, etc. The stories about grace are about what is possible despite our brokenness and limitations; they are about forgiveness, acceptance, change, miracles, and the hope that things can be different. The stories about identity concerns are about the journey to find a sense of self that is different to that of being an 'addict'. Not one of the participants subscribes to the medical discourse of having an addictive personality (Steyn & Verwey 1999:104). In opposition to the invitations of the professional discourses, we gave a voice to local, familial or personal knowledges and practices in the construction of the participants' preferences for themselves and their lives.

In the next chapter, I explore the effects of the God-stories on the construction of self-stories in the struggle with substance abuse. I integrate the contexts of hope as opened up in the conversations with the previous discussions of the construction of self-stories in a relationship with substance abuse.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **HOPE: SELF-GOD-STORIES**

#### **IN THE CONTEXT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

The research was guided by the four concerns discussed in Chapter 1: the narrative construction of self-stories, the constitutive effect of religion/spirituality on self-stories, modern and alternative substance abuse stories and the contribution of God-stories to the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse. Chapter 7 is an expansion of the latter concern about the contribution of God-stories to the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse, as considered in Section 5.10 and Chapter 6. Chapter 7 integrates the results of the conversations with the four concerns of the research. In line with Chapter 1, Chapter 7 interweaves the results of the conversations with the literature about God-stories and self-stories in the context of substance abuse.

The extrapolation from the previous chapters has resulted in the self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse that are discussed below. This chapter is not about establishing contextless ‘truths’ about self-God-stories in substance abuse, but presents a condensation of the discussions and the conversations in relation to self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse. In the light of the theoretical part of the study, there are stories with a more general or universal meaning. These are stories that tend to be dominating stories in the pastoral care of persons struggling with substance abuse. The themes that are touched upon in the conversations are tied to several very important dogmatic discourses about which much has already been written in theology. Note that I deliberately do not focus on these discourses – instead, I discuss the themes in terms of the participants’ own self-God-stories, that is, in terms of the meaning that the participants bring to the stories. In their own valid religious/spiritual stories they find theological and pastoral answers to the ‘stuckness’ in a struggle with substance abuse.

In this chapter, I start by summarising the way that self-God-stories are socially constructed in the context of substance abuse. Then I discuss God-stories that can sustain substance abuse stories, as could be seen in the previous chapter. Next, I recapture three kinds of self-God-stories that can be alternatives to substance abuse

stories: stories of re-membering God, grace and a migration of identity in the light of the conversations with the participants.

## **7.2 A CONCISE RE-TELLING OF THE STORY OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-GOD-STORIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

In Chapter 3, I discussed the way in which we live our lives and give meaning to our lives through stories. Because this is a re-telling, I do not repeat the references from the literature specified in the relevant chapters.

### **7.2.1 The self as narratively constructed**

The self is a function of narrative. Who we are has to do with things we do together with other people; and even our so-called inner psychological traits are constructed in interaction between people. The stories of people's lives are situated in the larger context of postmodernism and poststructuralism, and can be read as texts. It is typical of postmodern texts for there to be indeterminacy. There is no inherent inner structure in texts that can be said to reveal some universal objective truth. Hence, the meaning of a text depends on its multiple equally valid contexts, interpretations and the constitutive elements of what is absent, but implicit. The texts of people's lives are also situated in the context of social constructionism. Texts are socially constructed, and people's subjectivity is discursively determined. There is no self outside historical, social and cultural determinants.

The interaction between text and context, between self and context, occurs through the dynamic of language, and through the way knowledge and power works in discourses in constituting the self. Language and discourse are mechanisms of power that specify personhood. The self is thus constituted through language and discourse, and is therefore constituted differently in each different context. In narrative terms, this means that our lives are multi-storied, with dominant and alternative stories competing for attention. This self is also constituted in interaction with God-stories and stories of a struggle with substance abuse.

### **7.2.2 The self as a subject position within discourses**

A person has agency in the sense that the person can choose an alternative story to live by. Our life-worlds, and therefore also our problems, exist in language – that is, in stories. People seek help regarding the problem-saturated or dominant texts of their lives, such as the stories of struggling with substance abuse discussed in Chapter 5. Substance abuse is something that exists in the social environment, in the social interaction between people. It can be constructed as a dominant story that contributes to thin conclusions about a person's life, because it does not allow for context, for the complexities and contradictions of life. This is especially relevant when problems with substance abuse are constructed as an addiction, with all the expert definitions surrounding it (see Chapter 5).

Subject positions in discourses about substance abuse usually enhance the internalisation of these discourses, contributing to a sense of having a fixed identity as an addict. The internalising of expert truth discourses leads to a pathologising of identity. It is an identity that is removed from a person's social context, and is a pervasive and inescapable deficit identity. It infantilises the person, undermining confidence and agency. It contradicts or excludes other valid self-stories. People actively participate in operations that shape their lives according to the requirements of addiction discourses. If problems in society can be linked to a deficiency in the individual, society itself can continue to produce its ideologies and human beings that fit into it.

### **7.2.3 Deconstructing and externalising self-stories**

These effects of language and discourses on the self can be deconstructed, in the same way as literary texts, in order to reveal ambiguities and make visible other possible constructions of the self. By means of deconstruction and externalisation, narrative therapy seeks to render visible the alternative texts of people's lives. We have seen that self-stories can be changed and realigned over time as social conditions change, in order for alternative self-stories to be performed. The goal of therapy is to thicken, enrich or multiply the preferred texts of people's lives so that they are inclined to perform the preferred stories of their lives. Unique outcomes are those experiences that fall outside the influence of the dominant story or that contradict the dominant story. These

alternative stories can be thickly described as new, preferred stories outside the colonizing influence of substance abuse. In this sense, I see narrative therapy as the development of stories.

One important advantage of narrative ways of working is its contextualising a person's life. It involves an epistemological consideration, affirming the socially constructed and changeable nature of our worlds. It requires ethical consideration, in taking the person and his or her living environment seriously, as constitutive of the person's life. It regards the person as the expert on his or her life. It is also a therapeutic consideration, in that it makes it possible to map a problem's influence on a person's life, and to map the exceptions and the person's influence on the problem's life. Contextualizing is about the storying of a life, and the storying is about living a life.

#### **7.2.4 Alternative self-stories and God-stories**

Alternative stories to substance abuse stories are about undermining the requirements of a substance abuse lifestyle, about knowledges and skills for establishing a preferred relationship with substances, and about a sense of self and way of life outside the domain of substances. These dominant and alternative texts are metaphorically taken up in a file. The file is the therapeutic process – the binding factor that creates a safe space in which the problematic text can be articulated and investigated and in which new texts can be generated. The space in the file is created by collaboration and the co-authoring of new stories.

I believe that this research is, to an extent, such a safe space for the articulation of problematic stories and the exploration of alternative stories. As qualitative research, it represents the experiences and meanings that the participants bring to the conversations. In line with social constructionist approaches, this research was collaborative and participatory to a limited extent. My work with the participants is transparent. They were involved in the co-authoring of the stories and the presentation of the interviews. Furthermore, the research aimed to have an emancipatory effect on the participants, to achieve alternative understandings and changes towards preferred ways of being in the world for all the parties concerned.

The problematic context of these self-stories is that of problems with substance abuse. I have described one possible substance abuse story as having a relationship with substances that abuse a person (see Section 5.3). This abuse consists primarily in the limiting of a person's choices for living, in a person's being stuck. A person invests in the relationship with a substance or substances at the expense of other relationships. This situation takes away the hope that things can be different. The alternative contexts of these participants' lives and self-stories are related to their God-stories. God-stories are explored as a possible context for the construction of alternative relationships that can counter the 'stuckness' in substance abuse (see Section 5.10). I regard participants' willingness to engage in conversations about God as the most important step in this process. Their opening up to the possibilities of faith stories is vital in this research.

God-stories can also function as part of the support system of the life of substance abuse stories. I first want to say something about God-stories that are not helpful in a struggle against substance abuse, stories that in fact have the effect of sustaining the story of substance abuse.

I discuss the stories told in Chapter 6 in the light of the work in the previous chapters.

### **7.3 GOD-STORIES ON THE SIDE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

As seen in Chapter 6, substance abuse can have limiting or enriching effects on God-stories. Whether a limiting belief or assumption existed before a person's struggle with substance abuse is not as helpful in therapy as the experience that substance abuse can contribute to and sustain these beliefs. Beliefs can also be sustained by substance abuse. Such God-stories are therefore part of the problem's life support system, part of the requirements of the struggle with substance abuse (White & Epston 1990:3). It is clear from the conversations reported in Chapter 6 and Addendum B that addiction does not stand alone; it is not just an isolated biological fact of people's lives, but it is also part of self-stories about people's beliefs, also about a person's views and experiences of God.

I have already discussed the way in which religion/spirituality can be part of universal 'truth' discourses, meta-narratives that can dominate and restrict people's lives. In the light of the pervasiveness of religion in our society, it can be the feeding ground for taken-for-granted norms and truths in society that can be part of the problem story of the

self. To put it differently: if a person experiences religion as contributing to the problem story, this experience often relates to religious narratives that objectify, isolate and limit a person. Some examples are discussed below.

### **7.3.1 ‘God is not involved enough’**

Limiting God-stories are often stories that depict God as distant, as uninvolved in a person’s life, and as a judge that accepts or rejects a person on behavioural grounds (moralism – see Section 4.8). A person who is struggling with substance abuse often experiences God as distant and as uninvolved. I have mentioned earlier that substance abuse works in a way that disrupts a personal relationship with God (see Section 5.4).

In the stories of the participants, there is therefore often a feeling of being forsaken by God, or that the person has forsaken God in choosing the substance(s) (as in Daan’s and Marleze’s stories in Sections 6.2.1.3 and 6.2.2.1). Where substances have the upper hand, there is sometimes a tendency to become careless about God. Some of the participants described this distance as a wall or gap between a person and God. Sometimes this gap or wall is part of a mostly successful strategy of substances to silence God’s voice in a person’s life, so that the substance will be able to continue with its abuse. God may just seem to be absent, or He may be seen as still be there to help in a crisis, to help with the smooth running of one’s life. God can also be experienced as absent if a person looks for signs of His working only in extraordinary events.

But there is also a more radical story of being part of the domain of darkness, of being in alliance with the devil. A person can experience him- or herself as a partner to the devil, and as especially successful when the person is under the influence of substances. The distance to God, whether God is seen as uninvolved, or as the enemy, reduces the possibilities for relationships that are an alternative to the relationship with substances. In the research conversations, the absence of God was mostly related to the substance abuse lifestyle, in line with the need of substances to limit a person’s options for living. Cases where a person experienced God as absent in the life of his or her parents are often related to a story of the absence of the parents themselves in the childhood of the participants, which in itself limited their options in constructing their lives (as in Frik’s case, see Section 6.2.7.1).

### 7.3.1.1 *'I am not good enough'*

There are many possible sub-stories that constitute the stories of a distant God. Together with this God-story of distance between the self and God, there is the God-story of being rejected by God. According to this story, God can be disappointed in a person because he or she is not good enough. Such self-stories are linked to God-stories about God's being a sovereign authority who demands obedience, and judges a person according to his or her behaviour. God's love and acceptance is then seen as conditional.

Other self-God-stories are related to the above story, in that a person believes that a strong will and appropriate behaviour are the necessary requirements to have a relationship with God. Because God 'cannot be taken for a ride', it is impossible to satisfy God's requirements, and the person is left with a sense of guilt and of being a failure (as Gilbert felt, see Section 6.2.8.1). A person could come to this conclusion at any time in his or her life, but the substance abuse cements this belief in line with the dominant deficit discourses about substance abuse. A person comes to experience a deficit-based identity of not being good enough. Because the person feels that he or she can in any case never measure up to God's demands, there is hopelessness, and the *status quo* is encouraged. There is no motivation to change. Even worse – substance abuse can help to blunt the pain of not being good enough, of being a failure.

As I have already mentioned before, if problems in society can be linked to a deficiency in the individual, society itself can continue to produce its ideologies and human beings that fit into it. In addition to this self-God-story associated with moralism and failure, there is the self-God-story that perceives the relationship with God in black and white terms; that is, there are no grey areas in one's relationship with God. Obedience to God's ways is all or nothing. This view denies the tension between the old and the new, as discussed in Chapter 4, between being a sinner, even as one becomes a believer. It contradicts the possibility of the migration of the self, as will be discussed further on, and the struggle that is part of it. The problem with this view is that it encourages the *status quo*, in the sense that a person struggling with substance abuse will never feel adequate for the perceived demands of a relationship with God. In this way, the God-story sustains the story of the struggle with substance abuse.



### **7.3.1.2 ‘God is not good enough’**

Another sub-story relating to the distance between the self and God is that God is blamed for allowing bad things to happen to people, for example, injustice, illness or being addicted (as Marleze initially did, see Section 6.2.2.1). This represents stories of God’s not being good enough for a relationship. Thus, substance abuse can be sustained by self-God-stories of not being good enough for a relationship with God or by stories of God’s not being good enough for a relationship, thus indifference or anger towards God. This can mean that a person believes that God does not care, or that He is active in the conspiracy to let bad things happen to a person.

I have already mentioned the need to hold God accountable, and I discuss the value that anger and blame can have in a grace-full relationship in Section 4.14.7. Often, blame and anger are emotions of deprivation that a person abused by substances is not able to deal with in a constructive way, and so it works on the side of substance abuse. Blame and anger can become justifications for protesting behaviour, such as allowing oneself to be abused by substances. It also contributes to bodily states associated with being under attack and uneasiness. These are actually unbearable states that are not conducive to sustaining an open, intimate relationship with God or others. The use of substances is a shortcut to the temporal resolution of these bodily states.

Related to these stories are self-God-stories based on a mechanistic transactional relationship of the self with God. The argument is that if one does this, God does that; for every action, there is an appropriate re-action from God (see Joseph’s story in Section 6.2.4.1). This severely restricts narrative plots for the self and for God. For example, when we believe that God only helps those who help themselves or who take the first step, that belief can, on the one hand, have a paralysing effect on us and, on the other hand, it can limit what we expect from God, or what is possible for God.

Stories of God’s being there to call on if a person has problems can actually sometimes make it easier for a person not to face the consequences of substance abuse, and to continue with the use of substances, which then undermines relationships and values.

Beliefs that require a person to get his or her life in order first before the person can turn to God for help are typical of moralism’s objectifying, isolating and limiting practices.

It was evident from some conversations that God's involvement is measured in the rewarding of behaviour on a materialistic level, for example, in God's provision of a house, health or a partner, or in God's getting a person out of trouble (as we see in Joseph's story in Section 6.2.4.2). This often results in disappointments that can result in a person's not expecting anything from God any more. In this context, something 'different' has to happen in a person's relationship with God to generate an alternative experience of God. This is where stories of hearing God's voice, of a puzzle coming together, of being touched by another person's care, of experiencing forgiveness, of prayers being answered, and many more, can be relevant in making a difference.

### ***7.3.1.3 'God is not trustworthy enough'***

Another sub-story that tells of a distant God is that of fear of God. This can be a fear of punishment, or a fear of an image of an all-powerful force that can be benevolent, but that can also be dangerous (as Frik sometimes sees God, see Section 6.2.7.3). Some stories indicate a fear of the demands that He can make of a person in exchange for allowing the person to surrender to Him. This can make a person careful not to over-commit to God or His will. This leaves a person in a vulnerable place with regard to the influence of substances.

Some participants told stories of God's presence as His working in one's mind. Although this working for a clear mind is something to be sought after, compared to one's mind being clogged up by substances, there is the subtle danger of excluding one's emotions and one's body from the workings of God. This implies that a person does not trust God with regard to the person's physical and emotional needs. This focus on an 'inner reality' can actually be a way of decontextualising a person's life, a way of separating a person's mind from the rest of his or her life (see Section 5.7.3). In the light of what has been said about the way the 'mind' is a social construction, this is a way of conforming to socially accepted ideals for the specification of personhood. It emphasises rationality, isolation and individualism, to the exclusion of wonder, connectedness and hope. A rational commitment to particular assumptions or convictions alone is a limiting self-God-story that lacks the richness and authenticity of full embodied living. The perception is then that God is not trustworthy enough for a person to commit fully to Him.

### **7.3.2 The relationship with God is not different enough**

One self-God-story that contributes to the survival of the problem is that the relationship with God is not adequate in challenging the relationship with substances. This story is related to a perception of a lack of ‘news of difference’ in self-God-stories before and after a person’s struggle with substance abuse (White & Epston 1990:2). This relates to what I have already said about something ‘different’ that has to happen in a relationship with God, because some participants seemed to experience that to some extent a relationship with substances satisfies the same needs as a relationship with God (as in Coreen’s case, see Section 6.2.9.1). The meaning God can have for a person has to be re-negotiated.

In the light of the conversations, I am convinced that the therapeutic process, as experienced to a limited extent in this research, is a useful context for reflection on and for an exploration of the different meanings that a person can attach to self-God-stories. The temporal dimension of the conversations, the telling and re-telling, the not-knowing curiosity and the co-construction – all contribute to a re-valuing of God-stories in a person’s life.

In the light of the social construction of self-God-stories, people’s experiences in faith communities are important in determining a person’s relationship with God. Unfortunately, this lack of difference is also often experienced in the church. The church often promotes practices such as moralism, exclusivism and hypocrisy (as Frik’s story shows, see Section 6.2.7.2). God-stories in which these practices are seen as normal play right into the hands of a lifestyle of substance abuse, by inviting in experiences of dishonesty, failure, rejection, isolation and meaninglessness that sustain substance abuse.

### **7.3.3 Summary**

The religious/spiritual story of God as distant from and uninvolved in a person’s life limits possibilities for relationship with God. The experience of a distant God can be a result of feeling rejected by God, of not measuring up to His demands. It can also be the result of blaming God for things that went wrong in one’s life. There can also be a lack of trust that God has one’s best interests at heart. Together with becoming stuck in a

restrictive relationship with God, all these experiences leave a person in a vulnerable space with regard to the influence of substances. They can result in patterns of behaviour and feelings that sustain the abuse of substances. In contrast to these stories, there are God-stories that can contribute to a construction of preferred self-stories in the struggle with substance abuse.

#### **7.4 THE NEED FOR GOD IN THE STRUGGLE WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

In this research, I assumed that a person can search for stories that are alternative and contrary to those of substance abuse in the context of God-stories. As social constructions, God-stories are interactive constituents in the construction of alternative self-stories. God-stories can function as part of the subjugated, discontinued, disqualified, illegitimate, neglected, denied knowledges of modernism. In this sense, liberation from the oppression of dominant stories can be found in the margins; God-stories can be alternative resources for co-authoring self-stories. If one of the contributing factors in problems with substance abuse is that the culture does not have enough narratives for people to choose from, God-stories can provide more storylines or templates to take up in the construction of self-stories. They provide a context for separating from the problem. As an added context for the telling of self-stories, they enlarge the range of possible meanings and options for living. Positioning within God-stories makes possible other storylines about substance abuse; it makes it possible to take up preferred subject positions within discourses of substance abuse.

This positioning within God-stories is socially constructed. This does not take away agency. This positioning must be achieved and negotiated. Agency is possible, because the human agent can reflect on discourses and claims, or resist them in the light of the agent's own preferences. We can take up subject positions that fit in better with our preferences. God-stories, and our ability to position ourselves within them, or to take them up in self-stories, are therefore a context of hope for our struggle with substance abuse.

Part of the social context of a person's life is faith, or religion/spirituality, as discussed in Chapter 4. In the current chapter, I focus on God-stories in relation to the three themes or three kinds of story I discussed in the second half of Chapter 5 and explored

in Chapter 6 as religious people's God-stories in the context of a struggle with substance abuse.

The first story is about re-remembering God. It can be linked to the Reformed notion of *sola fide*, or faith alone, as positioning faith as the way in which God and His gifts can be appropriated (see Section 2.7). Narratively speaking, *sola fide* constructs and explores additional contexts that contribute to the constructing of self-stories. By creating membership with God and with the faith community, a world of discourses is added to the repertoire of self-stories.

The second story is about grace. It can be linked to the Reformed notion of *sola gratia*, or grace alone, which argues that salvation is not achieved by any human merit, but only by the undeserved goodness of God (see Section 2.7). Narratively speaking, *sola gratia* brings about the possibility that marginalised texts can be centred. It creates unique outcomes that are a rejection of dominating cultural discourses. Grace provides a platform to stand on, from which to construct one's preferred self-story.

The third story is about a migration of identity. It can be linked to the Reformed idea of *solus Christus*, Christ alone, and *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone, when a new sense of self in the world is related to the life of Christ, as storied in the Scriptures (see Section 2.7). In a narrative approach, *solus Christus* and *sola Scriptura* provide narrative resources for a thick or rich description of identity through the self's taking up subject positions in Christ-stories on its journey to new ways of being a self. The identification with Christ makes the narrative migration of identity possible.

I use the concepts of re-remembering God, grace and migration of identity as metaphors, which are events in daily life that refer in a symbolic way to a way in which we understand or experience God (see Section 4.14.9). For example, grace, with its multiple meanings, is a human way of expressing knowledges and practices with regard to God that can only be described indirectly in human language. Metaphors have the ability to enable or constrain possibilities for living, and can be helpful in the connection of self-stories to God-stories. In contrast to 'closed' language, metaphors tend to open up more possibilities. I use these three metaphors, because I believe they adequately encompass the kinds of self-God-story that has featured in the research up to this point.

In line with the discussion about mind, body and soul (see Section 4.2), I do not see the mind, emotions and body as different parts of a human being, but as different functions and experiences of the self in its relational interactions. Although clear distinctions are not possible, it can be said that the additional context provided by a re-remembering of God puts more emphasis on stories of the mind as new information is added and must be incorporated in the construction of self-stories. Similarly, the self-God-story of grace puts more emphasis on the stories of the heart or emotions, because the new story eventually filters through to a person's feelings. The last self-God-story, the story of a migration of identity, emphasises stories of a new way of embodied living; therefore, it affects our acting in certain ways. In this way, the self-God-stories are related to our whole being, and affect the head, heart and hand (see Section 5.7.3).

Below, I show how all three themes are relevant as stories that provide an alternative to the dominating substance abuse stories of substance abuse as a sin, substance abuse as an illness, or substance abuse as fixing a person in a deficit identity, including issues of gender, oppression and consumption. The deconstruction of substance abuse discourses in Chapter 5 was mainly a deconstruction of stories about sin, illness and identity in relation to substance abuse. This deconstruction made it possible to construct self-God-stories that counter such stories in the context of substance abuse. Self-God-stories that counter dominating stories are stories against substance abuse. Running through all the God-stories there is the self-God-story of being in a place where we need God, perhaps because of our sin, or perhaps because of our limitations, or because of our need for fulfilment and joy. Also, through all the stories, our need for community and relationality was expressed and performed, not just as an epistemological necessity, as discussed in this research, but because life and meaning are found in living together (see Section 4.7). These self-God-stories or metaphors are explored in the next three sections. As I have already said, these self-God-stories are an interweaving of the results of the conversations with the theoretical discussion about self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse. The stories of the participants are the focus throughout.

## **7.5 STORIES OF RE-MEMBERING GOD**

The first metaphor or self-God-story is linked to my previous discussion of the notion of re-remembering of God (see Section 5.10.1). The emphasis is on additional contexts or

narrative resources for the construction of self-stories, more specifically on new knowledges based on God's presence.

### **7.5.1 God's hopeful presence**

I have already discussed the tendency in society to reject the discourse of substance abuse as a sin, because of its inadequacy in explaining addiction, the misuse of the idea in history to condemn and reject people, and its inability to bring about change (see Section 5.4; Mercadante 1996:21). Also, narrative ways of working do not focus on deficits, but want to create opportunities for the performance of hopes, dreams, skills, strengths and possibilities. In spite of this approach to substance abuse, nobody in the conversations with the participants questioned the sinfulness of problems with substance abuse, the notion that a person struggling with substance abuse has in some way transgressed against God, other people and one self. Our brokenness is part of our self-stories.

I have already mentioned the ability of a struggle with substance abuse to disrupt a relationship with God, others and the self a number of times. It is as if the substance abuse relegates God to a small corner where the relationship with Him cannot interfere with a substance abuse lifestyle. The same applies to other relationships. The experience of sin as lostness, as isolation and meaninglessness, as being ill at ease, can actually contribute to a search for life in chemicals (as with Marleze, see Section 6.2.2.1). Abuse through substances can also result in this experience of sinfulness, of being alienated from God, as if a person has opted for a saviour other than God. Some did not feel that there has been a disruption with God, for example Coreen (Section 6.2.9.3). For them the disruption with others was more of a problem.

As with the experience of sinfulness, none of the participants questioned the necessity of being linked to God in some way in this struggle. They expressed a need to re-establish a relationship with God, or metaphorically, to re-member God with regard to the 'club' of their lives (see Section 5.10.1). The participants assume that only God can take the place of substances (as Daan, Marleze and Francois and others said, see Sections 6.2.1.2, 6.2.2.2 and 6.2.3.3, etc.). He alone can provide adequate counter-narratives to substance abuse. It is as if the things substance abuse stands for are the opposites of the things God stands for, such as sobriety, responsibility, being a good

partner or parent, caring love, or ethical living. He alone can satisfy spiritual, psychological, social, emotional and, to an extent, even physiological needs. He alone can provide what the self needs; He alone is stronger than the power of substances. The overall message the conversations reveals is: 'WE NEED GOD. We can't do without God in the struggle against substance abuse.' It is interesting that in most of the conversations, the struggle with substance abuse awakened in the participants a need for a relationship with God (for example, in Harriet and Gilbert, see Sections 6.2.5.3 and 6.2.8.3).

The hope that God can make a decisive difference for the better is expressed and storied by all the participants, in particular, by Daan, Marleze and Wolfgang (see Sections 6.2.1.2, 6.2.2.2, 6.2.12, etc.). He is seen as the way to a new life, as the key to unlocking the door of freedom from addiction. Most stories are therefore about confirming God's involvement in a person's life. IF GOD IS IN IT, THERE IS HOPE. This unanimous insistence on God's presence and involvement can probably be explained by the fact that people can choose freely to participate in this research project (thus, people who had no interest in being involved with God would probably not agree to participate). Furthermore, the time that people spend in the rehabilitation programme is a time of high hopes, high expectations and positive commitments and dreams. Nevertheless, these *caveats* do not detract from the relevance that a relationship with God as a partner in the struggle with substance abuse can have.

### **7.5.2 God's freeing presence**

Self-God-stories about re-remembering God are stories about God's presence and involvement in our lives. From a human point of view, this re-remembering of God is through faith. It is a surrendering to God. It is to invite God in as a co-author of our self-stories, to step into God-stories and make them part of our self-stories. The story of *sola fide*, of re-remembering God, is especially fitting as a counter-story to the restraining story that substance abuse is a sin. As opposed to the intentions of sin and substances, which want to alienate us from God, re-remembering is about the re-storying of an empowering relationship with God. It counters the restraining story of sin that keeps God at a distance, as a stranger, and that enhances the passivity of being 'stuck'. Re-remembering God is a doorway out of the 'stuckness' of substance abuse, a doorway to freedom from the dominating ways of substances.



Sometimes there is a need to fight it out with God in order to walk through the door, out of a restricting relationship with substances, as Marleze did (see Section 6.2.2.2). It provides a reflective position from which to avoid entrapment, a context to separate from dominant stories informed by substance abuse.

In a therapeutic context, it is important to emphasise people's agency in re-membering God, because taking back agency disrupts the 'stuckness' of substance abuse. God-stories that are capable of expanding or enriching self-stories are stories about God as always being present, as accessible, at any time, in any place (see Harriet's story in Section 6.2.5.2). This argument relates to the discussion about God's commitment to us through the covenant (see Section 4.6), although it was not expressed in those terms in the conversations. The argument also relates to feminist images that emphasise relationality and inclusiveness (see Section 4.14.8). In therapy, such images or stories are narrative resources that can be explored.

God's reliability in His inability to reject those who believe has contributed to people's turning to God again and again in their struggle with substances. They experience God as so near to them that they can feel His presence, like holding His hand or His hands holding us (as in Harriet's story in Section 6.2.5.4). Some experience Him as a stable foundation that is always there, that makes them strong and counters their mood swings when they are under the sway of substances (see Coreen's story in Section 6.2.9.1). One of the participants, Harriet, chose to see the appearance of a bird's feather next to her as a sign of God's presence (see Section 6.2.5.2).

### **7.5.3 God's lifelong presence**

The conversations indicate that stories about being exposed to religion/spirituality in childhood make it easier to re-connect with God and with religious/spiritual values and ideas, such as God's love, provision, prayer and God's purposes (see Hannes's story in Section 6.2.6.2). Such stories imply exposure to linguistic constructions, a working vocabulary, that is available for re-introduction into one's life. Thus early exposure provides a foundation on which to build one's life in faith later on. A person can learn a lot about God, even when he or she is forced to go to church (as Frik found, see Section 6.2.7.2). If God is a life-long companion on one's journey through life, with all the

detours and shortcuts, it provides alternative stories and alternative contexts pulling one away from the abusive context of substances. Joseph's story of the 'footprints in the sand' also demonstrates an assurance that God is carrying a person, even when the person is not aware of it (see Section 6.2.4.2). This lifelong presence is given a new meaning by the story that a person's life, after conversion, can turn only in one direction, like a small Shoprite turnstile can turn only in one direction (to use Francois's image, in Section 6.2.3.2). This assurance that a converted person will never perish provides a sense of security in the performance of a new identity.

#### **7.5.4 God's friendly presence**

One of the preferred ways in which the participants talk about their relationship with God is seeing God's presence as the presence of a 'friend' (as in Daan's and Heiné's stories in Sections 6.2.1.2 and 6.2.11.2). But some qualify Him as a friend that will not take their life away, like the 'friends' drugs or alcohol. He is a friend that has a strengthening and calming effect on a person. One participant, Heiné (see Section 6.2.11.2) sees God as a 'boss', but then also qualifies this: substances are heavy duty masters that want to control and destroy one's life, whereas God is a 'boss' that does not destroy, but gives life and helps a person to be more in control of his or her life. The participants experience God's involvement in their lives as God's being a 'team-member' in the game of life (as Heiné puts it in Section 6.2.11.2). Having God on one's side in this game is empowering, because God is on the side of life, unlike the substances, which are on the side of death because of the way they abuse a person, as discussed in Section 5.3. From this, it is evident that God is also seen as the most valuable partner in the construction of a person's life-story.

#### **7.5.5 God's centred presence**

There are many stories of ways in which people seek to enrich their relationship with God as counterplots to their relationship with a substance, thereby enhancing or upgrading the membership of God to the clubs of their lives.

In the conversations with the participants, it became evident that prayer is one way of centring God in one's life (see Daan's and Gilbert's experiences in Sections 6.2.1.2 and 6.2.8.2). It provides a position from which to look at one's life from God's perspective;

it is a way of satisfying intimate relational needs, of committing to God's purposes and of affecting one's material circumstances. In spite of disappointments, prayer consistently promises an escape from substance abuse, in the light of the many examples of what praying has achieved in participants' lives, even getting a person out of trouble (like Daan and Frik, see Sections 6.2.1.2 and 6.2.7.2).

In most of the conversations, the participants also indicated Bible-reading as a practice in which the self is inserted into stories of resistance to the demands of substances and the living of preferred self-stories (see Hannes's and Jan's stories in Sections 6.2.6.2 and 6.2.10.2). They experience Biblical stories as encouraging them in their struggle against stories that subjugate a person, as well as providing knowledges and skills for coping with life. Thus the Bible is a rich resource for constructing self-stories in the face of the restrictions imposed by addiction.

In addition to prayer and reading the Bible, the sacraments, such as Confession and Holy Communion, are experienced as rituals that can result in a reincorporation of one's life into God's story, as for Joseph and Hannes (see Sections 6.2.4.2 and 6.2.6.2).

In the Christian tradition, narratives about a disciplined life are about enriching the relationship with God. In the conversations, this kind of discipline surfaces as a set of practices that are refusals of the abusive ways of substances. This includes exercise, healthy living, giving life a spiritual meaning, and attending Bible study and self-help groups. Opposed to the rigid disciplining through substances, spiritual discipline centres God and enhances a sense of agency, of investment in a meaningful relationship and connectedness.

### **7.5.6 God's powerful presence**

A variety of other self-God-stories are performances of the re-remembering of God. There are experiences of His presence in creation, or in a vision of a white light, a strange voice, a picture from a children's Bible or a drifting feather. These stories may fall within the category of 'popular religion' (Mouw 1994:28), and have the ability to sustain a person for years with regard to a commitment or the knowledge that everything is okay. These stories sometimes carry with them a sense of God's greatness and majesty and are therefore assurances of His power (as Gilbert indicated, see Section

6.2.8.2). Overcoming substance abuse is therefore possible if one stays dependent on Him. In some of the participants' stories, for example, Frik's and Gilbert's, the presence and activity of God in the practical detail of daily life was emphasised (see Sections 6.2.7 and 6.2.8.2). This encourages an openness to becoming a witness to the way God is working in our best interests, and to co-operating with Him in this work, instead of being co-opted by substances for their own interests.

### **7.5.7 God's embodied presence**

The participants also experience God's presence in a person's mind and body (see Hannes's story, Section 6.2.6.1). In the light of the effect of substances on one's body, it can be helpful to look at ways in which faith stories can diminish the need for substances to have these effects. God's nearness is felt as a warm feeling, as if He can be touched. Or His presence is like the lifting of a burden, bringing lightness and tranquillity, a peace and calm that is the opposite to the restlessness and short-tempered life-style associated with substances (see Marleze's story, Section 6.2.2.2, and Coreen's story, Section 6.2.9.1). One example is the way a mental picture of God, like a picture in a children's Bible, brought about an indescribable tranquillity (as Harriet describes, see Section 6.2.5.2). God's presence also energises and mobilises a person for commitment and action when necessary (as in Hannes's story in Section 6.2.6.2).

We need these states of calmness and mobility in our interactions in daily life, and we can learn to access them through a relationship with God. The need for substances to control these states or feelings can become obsolete. In contrast to substances' distortion of our thinking, God's presence in our mind helps us to think clearly. For religious/spiritual persons, God provides a link with real life stories, in contrast to the illusory productions of substances. For the participants, having a clearer picture of their lives and a vision for their future is an outcome that is preferred to a hazy struggle for survival, as Hannes explained (see Section 6.2.6.2).

### **7.5.8 God's purposeful presence**

One of the recurrent self-God-stories in the conversations was that of God's having a purpose in people's lives. A re-remembering of God assumes a re-remembering of God's dreams for us. Narrative ways of working are sceptical towards the idea of purposes, but

because the term can have connotations of arising from inner depth structures, I use the concept here as an indication of knowledges and skills that people can aspire to in the context of their socially constructed self-stories. One way to make sense of bad things that have happened in people's lives is to confer meaning on these events.

Thus, the participants assume that God is in control of everything, and therefore everything happens for a reason. The implication of this is that God can use bad things in order to help us. A series of unfortunate events is sometimes interpreted as God's powerful voice to make us listen to Him, to get us back on the right track (see Francois's story in Section 6.2.3.2 and Wolfgang's in Section 6.2.12.2). Furthermore, the belief that a person has been healed from an illness, or has been rescued from a calamity, or even that he or she is in rehabilitation confirms that God wants to use us for something that is beyond the interests of the problems (for example, see Francois's and Frik's stories in Sections 6.2.3.2 and 6.2.7.2). Surviving an accident is a confirmation that God is in control of a person's life and has a purpose for one's life (as Wolfgang felt, see Section 6.2.12.2). It can even provide a bit of sanity to believe that something good can eventually come from the struggle with substance abuse. One's life is saved for a reason.

An idea that was expressed in almost all the conversations was that the participant believed that he or she was called to become a witness to God's work, to help other people struggling with substance abuse, or to serve in the community in some way (for example, Hannes's, Frik's and Gilbert's stories in Sections 6.2.6.2, 6.2.7.2 and 6.2.8.2). In these cases, it was a calling to be a good father or mother, a role model and a friend to the children.

These self-God-stories are contradictory to a substance abuse lifestyle that wants to keep a person disabled, without agency, disconnected from any context, pandering only to the needs of the substances. God's dreams for a person are opposed to the dreams of the substances for a person. A fulfilling life of service is against being lived by substances. Having a purpose is an avenue for the exploration of alternative ways of being – ways of participating in life. If one's life is saved for a purpose, it also means that one must have value, that one's life has worth, in contrast to what the substances want one to believe. A worthwhile life reduces the need for substances, because then there is some living that needs to be done.

### **7.5.9 God's empowering presence**

The participants also experience God's involvement in our struggle with substance abuse in the abilities that He gives them. Abilities and achievements are gifts that provide people with the resources, life skills, discipline and purposefulness they need to make a success of one's life. This is the opposite of being stuck in investing in substances. A wide variety of abilities, achievements and gifts were discussed as contributing to the journey away from abuse through substances, for example, in the stories of Harriet (Section 6.2.5.2), Hannes (Section 6.2.6.2), Frik (Section 6.2.7.2) and Coreen (Section 6.2.9.4). This affirms that God's involvement with us is made manifest in our human considerations, plans, capabilities and actions.

The experiences of focusing, practising to reach goals, being disciplined, exercising authority, and making decisions are all applicable to one's relationship with substances. This includes one's capabilities in something such as playing table tennis, which requires focus, the ability to move quickly, to think ahead and make decisions (see Daan's story in Section 6.2.1.2). The availability of these skills and implementation of these 'tools' are related to the self-God-story that God helps those who help themselves. Although this story can be limiting where people expect nothing from themselves any more, it can be empowering in motivating a person to take the steps toward a new life.

There is a sense that one cannot 'sit around' and wait for God, but must act responsibly to help oneself. God works through one's own efforts and one's own competencies. The participants felt that they had played a role in dismantling the wall between them and God, for example, Harriet (Section 6.2.5.4), Frik (Section 6.2.7.2) and Wolfgang (Section 6.2.12.2). The 'Protestant work ethic' can be an instrument in modern society to categorize and subjugate people, as discussed in Section 5.7. Conversely, it can also be an invitation to be responsible and productive, and helps people to not be tripped up by being a beggar or by being idle. This correlates with the story of being a responsible partner in the relationship with God (see Section 4.6). Using one's own God-given abilities is not just part of reclaiming of one's own life from the abuse of substances, but also allows one to inhabit a new life-style of one's own choice.

### **7.5.10 God's serving presence**

The two sections above about stories of having a purpose in life and of having gifts and abilities to serve cast a new light on the self-God-story of self-emptying, the surrendering of the self to God (see Section 4.10). The re-remembering of God does not consist in a disappearance of the self, but in the redirection of our attachments from substances to God. This is done, not by being subjugated to nothingness, but by taking up a subject position of responsibility, by accepting a calling to serve with one's abilities in whatever capacity or position one is needed. For all the participants this concept inspired dreams of a life without substance abuse, for example, for Daan (Section 6.2.1.3), Harriet (Section 6.2.5.2) and Hannes (Section 6.2.6.2). Substances reduce a person's ability to be of value to other people, to serve. This ethical commitment to the good of the other can work towards a healing of a conscience shattered by broken promises, and it can minimise a commitment to substances that abuse.

### **7.5.11 God's relational presence**

There are self-God-stories that explore the social constructionist challenges behind this research in a refreshing way. One such self-God-story is the way the participants invariably experience the presence and ways of God through other people's relationship with God. In another person, I can learn how to handle loss. Through a spouse's persistence in practising faith, changes can come about (see Heiné's story in Section 6.2.11.2). So, for example, in a mother's faith, love, peace and happiness, a son can see a life that is the opposite to a drug-lifestyle (as in Gilbert's story in Section 6.2.8.2). Through children's eyes, a teacher can experience unconditional acceptance and love (as in Marleze's story in Section 6.2.2.2). In the gift of friends, the thrall of substances can be broken. There is no doubt: 'I' am also what is 'not I'. I can be a believer through the people around me. Is that not what happened to the criminal on the cross next to Jesus? Other people's faith and God-stories are part of one's own story.

### **7.5.12 God's comforting and protecting presence**

Re-remembering God is finding a place to be at home, a place of safety (see Section 4.8). To be at home is to have a place where one can belong, a place of warmth and comfort,

that contradicts the stories of isolation and the discomfort of not fitting in that can accompany stories of substance abuse. It also is a place where the devil does not have a chance, where a person is protected from the approaches of the devil (see Gilbert's story in Section 6.2.8.4). The relationship with God can also be likened to having a torch in hand that helps one not to be afraid of what lurks in the dark (see Marleze's story in Section 6.2.2.2).

This experience of being at home also includes the company of fellow travellers on one's journey away from the abuse of substances. Most participants experienced and told their self-God-stories in the context of their interconnectedness with significant others in their lives, for example, Marleze (Section 6.2.2.2), Gilbert (Section 6.2.8.2), Heiné (Section 6.2.11.2) and Wolfgang (Section 6.2.12.2). This includes family, friends, a therapeutic environment or church-related groups. Re-membering God includes the re-membering of other people in a person's life that can be an audience for the performance of preferred self-stories, that can support a person in the disruption of any experience of isolation or rejection.

One's community has a restraining effect regarding the abuse of substances, because of the encouragement to invest and find satisfaction in other relationships. It provides a sense of belonging and being cared for, rather than being abused, and consists of the sharing of brokenness and of hope in dealing with life's contingencies (as in Wolfgang's story in Section 6.2.12.2). These practices of community unsettle the practices of individualism and of secrecy, both of which increase a person's vulnerability to disordered consumption. So, for example, the experience in the rehabilitation environment makes individualism and secrecy redundant, and there is a sense that some aspects of this communal experience must continue after rehabilitation.

### **7.5.13 Summary**

God-stories that relate to a re-membering of God are stories about God's presence that provide the hope that things can be different. God's presence constitutes additional contexts that serve as narrative resources for the construction of preferred self-stories in the struggle with substance abuse. A re-membering of God includes a commitment to His stories and His people in the lives of the participants. The re-membering of God opens up the possibility that grace can become a reality in a person's life.



## **7.6 STORIES OF GRACE**

The second metaphor or self-God-story links to the discussion of the grace story discussed in Section 5.10.2. The emphasis is on the centring of marginalised stories, more specifically on grace filtering through to change subjective experience.

### **7.6.1 The experience of unconditional acceptance**

Although in the conversations I did not encounter any participant who subscribed to an addict identity in so many words, there was an acceptance that one will always be a sinner, that one will never be perfect (for example, in Francois's and Joseph's stories in Sections 6.2.3.4 and 6.2.4.2). This acknowledgement can be experienced as a relief and makes it more possible to accept oneself. It connects with the idea of how failure can contribute to experiencing being part of the human race. It enhances the experience of mutuality, which in itself challenges the substance abuse stories of being excluded and different from other people. It is possible to come to this point because of God-stories about grace (see Section 5.10.2). Grace is about God's surprising us with undeserved and unexpected goodness (see Section 4.8). God's acceptance of us is unconditional; we can come to Him as we are; we do not need to change first – the change will come afterwards (as Daan explained in Section 6.2.1.2). By accepting one's brokenness, one can let go of perfectionism or chronic dissatisfaction, and refuse cultural expectations that restrict one's life. This acceptance is the opposite of being abused by substances.

The experience of rejection is part of the social construction of substance abuse, in the sense that people can learn to react to rejection by taking refuge in substances; or people can be recruited into the experience of rejection because of the substance abuse. For the participants, grace, as the complete acceptance of God, can make a difference by countering those experiences, as Daan and Francois said (see Sections 6.2.1.2 and 6.2.3.4). A person then also does not need to seek acceptance, from the self or from others, or a sense of belonging, through substances.

Narrowly linked to this acceptance are self-God-stories about forgiveness. Forgiveness is the story about dissolving the barrier between the self and God that results from being stuck in an attachment to substances. There is an understanding among the participants

that this forgiveness is established on the basis of the story of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins (as Harriet and Wolfgang commented in Sections 6.2.5.2 and 6.2.12.2). An inquiry about other experiences of forgiveness is valuable, because previous experiences of forgiveness make forgiveness more available, and makes it easier to hope for it and to expect and experience it. The appropriation of this forgiveness is experienced in taking up subject positions in Biblical narratives such as the story of the adulterous woman, or in religious rituals such as confession, baptism or Holy Communion (see Joseph's story in Section 6.2.4.2).

God's forgiveness and acceptance are the starting point for the construction of self-stories outside the domain of substance abuse (as in Joseph's story in Section 6.2.4.2). Abuse by substances requires self-rejection, guilt and turmoil in order to survive. For the participants, grace promotes self-acceptance, self-respect and peace.

### **7.6.2 The experience of miracles**

The presence and involvement of God in our history-making opens the door to the possibility of miracles, to the impossible becoming possible (see Section 3.8). The participants' stories of overcoming addiction are interwoven with stories of miracles. Participants mentioned past experiences of God's taking care of troubling or life-threatening circumstances. These include being successful in an examination in spite of having smoked *dagga* (as in Daan's case, see Section 6.2.1.2), not being caught out by a father for possessing drugs (as in Frik's case, see Section 6.2.7.2), having a house and a job (as in Joseph's case, see Section 6.2.4.2), or a child's being healed after prayer (as in Heiné's case, see Section 6.2.11.2). This results in the expectation that God will help a person to become free of the abuse of substances.

There is a knowledge that God does not always work in the same (miraculous) way. Therefore the expectation of miracles is actually more relevant in regard to other problems that operate on the side of substance abuse: God can take away extreme anxiety; He can take care of our worries; He can help us overcome illness; He can take away the barriers to self-appreciation; He can restore broken-down relationships; He can provide a place to stay, a job, etc. All the participants related experiences that they regard as miracles. In Daan's story, God's grace works like 'magic sticks' or *muti*, helping in difficult circumstances, helping him not to lose his job like other colleagues

did (see Section 6.2.1.2). Grace was often expressed in the conversations as being experienced through God's intervention in participants' material circumstances. From a therapeutic point of view, the expectation of overcoming is empowering, and must be accompanied by a deconstruction of a person's own participation in the realization of the miracles.

### **7.6.3 The experience of being good enough**

The self-God-stories of the participants that are hope-inspiring speak of the belief that God will not let a person perish. He is committed to us in the sense that He never rejects anybody, and that He will never desert us (as Joseph and Wolfgang found, see Sections 6.2.4.3 and 6.2.12.2). Even when we seem to be alone, He is carrying us. But more than this, through grace we can all claim undeserved value and worth. There is security in His commitment to us because it does not depend on our successes or failures. For grace, one is always good enough. His unconditional, surprising acceptance disposes of prerequisites such as merit or achievement, and positions us within a non-competitive ethic (see Section 4.8). In the light of this, grace is a profound embodiment of the resurrection of subjugated, marginalised knowledges and ways of living.

Grace is thus opposed to self-stories of cultural inadequacy and exclusion that accompany substance abuse stories. Grace does not subscribe to the idea of modernism that any deviation from socially accepted norms, such as struggling with substance abuse, is abnormal and must be treated as an illness or a deficit. To see substance abuse as an illness hides other possibilities for living and renders people passive victims rather than active agents in constructing their lives (see Section 5.5). It functions as a self-fulfilling prophesy. Grace, as the interaction with God-stories, suggests, like narrative ways of working, that we are primarily living through our stories, not through our biology. Grace turns our cultural conditioning on its head and makes the impossible possible. It relativises things usually regarded as abnormal, such as disability, illness, differentness or pathology. For this reason, the *sola gratia* story or grace story is fitting as a God-story that is contrary to the restraining story that substance abuse is an illness. Whereas substances and illness cooperate in the marginalisation and objectification of a person, grace unconditionally accepts, relativises deficit and centres a person as efficacious in his or her self-story, as in the case of Marleze (Section 6.2.2.2), Francois (Section 6.2.3.2) and Joseph (Section 6.2.4.4).

The conversations confirm that in grace, and in narrative ways of working, there are many different and equally valid ways of being normal and valued. The Gospel stories are to a large extent about subversions of socially established norms and ways of living in preference of local, contextual performances of unconditional acceptance. In narrative terms, all self-stories are socially constructed and equally valid. As an expert of one's own life, a person decides for him- or herself what stories are preferred within the discourses he or she is embedded in. The issues of gender and race are more specifically related to identity discourses, but are also relevant with regard to grace. It is grace as unconditional acceptance that makes it possible for a person to be what he or she wants to be without abusing substances; whatever the person's race or gender, a person is good enough. This stance involves people in politics, in working towards a just society, as an important way to subvert the requirements of substance abuse.

#### **7.6.4 The experience of living a unique alternative story**

Grace centres what is termed as 'unique outcomes' in narrative therapy; that is, stories of knowledges and skills that can help to constitute a preferred sense of self that can oppose dominating problem stories. Grace creates space for living these alternative stories, such as Daan's story of *muti* (see Section 6.2.1.2) or of Marleze's fighting with God (see Section 6.2.2.2) or of the Shoprite turnstile in Francois's story (see Section 6.2.3.2) or of the vision of a white light in Joseph's story (see Section 6.2.4.2), etc. Grace, like narrative, works with the subjunctive 'as if' and the playfulness of wonder, and thereby relativises the fixed certainties of culture (see Section 4.15.6). As I have already mentioned, grace provides an emotional posture of tranquillity and lightness that counters the anxiety and fear resulting from cultural expectations. Through grace, one can enjoy life through living one's unique alternative story. It resolves the tensions that can incite one to look for peace and calm in damaging ways. Grace disposes of the need to use substances in order to comply with social expectations, or to escape from the pain of not measuring up. It positions people as protagonists in their differentness, rather than as victims or patients. Grace and narrative ways of working affirm the goodness and dignity of a person in spite of any kind of differentness.

The conversations render visible sub-stories of the presence of illness in the lives of the participants or other people in their lives (see Section 4.12). As already mentioned,

through grace, the miracle of healing is always a possibility, as with Heiné's daughter, who was born two months too early (see Section 6.2.11.2).

But grace is also a narrative that provides a lookout point from whence to reflect on and fit one's illness into the bigger picture of one's life. Grace relativises the destructive influence of illness in one's life, because God will not let a person perish, and one's life can still have meaning beyond self-interest, beyond illness, even beyond death (as Daan recognised, see Section 6.2.1.4). It enables a person to accept illness as a different way of being normal. Through grace one can stay in touch with the meaning and goodness of one's life and continue on one's life journey with resilience. In this way, people are still protagonists in their own lives and authors of their self-stories, even in illness. The story of grace is a counterplot to the dominant cultural restraint that implies that our lives are biologically determined, and that problems with substance abuse can only be managed in a medical environment.

#### **7.6.5 The experience of space for making choices**

The spaciousness that grace creates is evident in the results of all the conversations. Where there is grace, there is no need for self-defence, self-justification or self-annihilation. There is a place to stand, from which to respond, to choose. Grace is like the provision of a scaffolding from which to construct one's life. It is an antidote to the internalising and the opposite of the determinism of addiction discourses. The self is not the problem; the problem is the problem; and one can respond through decentred agency. Just by letting their voice be heard, the participants step into the possibilities provided by agency. To be able to tell, reflect on, revise and re-tell their stories was the performance of preferred self-stories, thereby influencing their own lives on their own behalf.

Self-efficacy is best seen in the small steps taken in a short time to counter the abuse through substances, especially the small changes that occurred from the beginning of the first conversation to the end of the last conversation. Countering biological determinism and countering the limiting of choices in the struggle with substance abuse, God's grace gives us more choices; and it is a power that infuses us with the energy to make the right choices with regard to substances and with regard to being responsible.

### **7.6.7 The experience of learning to trust God through conversing with Him**

In the conversations, it became clear that God also needs grace. As we have seen in the God-stories on the side of substance abuse, God is sometimes experienced as distant or uninvolved. God is often blamed for traumatic experiences, or at least for not stepping up to the plate. God is also experienced as a judge who is difficult to satisfy. Because of the space, the room that grace provides in the relationship with Him, this relationship is able to absorb our criticism of God and our anger towards God. Grace allows us to experience and express our disappointment towards God, to converse with Him about these issues. Holding God accountable and struggling with Him in this sense can actually expand the range of possible experiences in our relationship with God, making it resilient with regard to the contingencies of life (as in the stories of Marleze and Heiné, in Sections 6.2.2.1 and 6.2.11.1).

Whereas the struggle with substance abuse takes a person away from the need to experience hurtful emotions, for the participants, grace counters this withdrawal from life by making it possible to ask God some tough questions. This is empowering, as it enhances a person's ability to give meaning to the events in his or her life and arrange a person's experiences in a preferred story. Some of the stories indicate an acceptance of God, after a struggle, in a relationship with Him that is beyond good or bad things that happen to a person (as in Marleze's story in Section 6.2.2.2).

The story of Christ's thirst on the cross is metaphoric of God's longing for our love and acceptance of Him. He needs grace. That is why He will not let us go. In this way, grace begets grace. As dispensers of grace, to God and to other people, we have a calling and responsibility that counter the way substances trap a person in self-seeking, or rather, in satisfying the needs of substances. In contrast to the stories of anger towards God and blaming God, there are stories of thankfulness towards God, the knowledge that one owes everything one has to the grace of God. A mindset of thankfulness contributes to the experience of being satisfied with life, therefore being able to limit the disrupting effects of disordered consumption.

### **7.6.8 The experience of constructing a life together**

Because a person's self-God-stories are socially constructed, being part of a community that models the experience of unconditional acceptance can be decisive. God's forgiveness can be experienced in a circle of love and care. For the participants, a community can represent flesh and blood experiences of being accepted and loved on the basis of something other than personal performance or compliance with social expectations (as Harriet found, see Section 6.2.5.2).

Rugged individualism and secrecy enhance one's vulnerability to disordered consumption; it alienates one from other people and in this way sustains the habit. In a community of grace, both these restrictions dissolve in a language community that promotes openness, honesty, acceptance and inclusiveness. This can help a person to forgive and accept him- or herself. A grace-full community is able to counter relationships that thrive on substance abuse. It supports a person in a new way of life, helping to sustain a life with boundaries or sobriety and explore different ways of being a self. The stories of the participant's struggle against substance abuse are socially co-constructed with other people, for example, for Marleze (Section 6.2.2.2), Gilbert (Section 6.2.8.2) and Heiné (Section 6.2.11.2). The hope that accompanies being in rehabilitation and the separation from their families resulted in a new appreciation for the families of the participants.

The participants are aware of the hypocrisy and moralism that threaten church communities. Nevertheless, there is an overall acceptance that the church is often the first line for establishing relationships outside the influence of substance abuse, for example, in the stories of Jan (Section 6.2.10.4), Heiné (Section 6.2.11.4) and Wolfgang (Section 6.2.12.2). It provides an alternative, grace-full environment for handling life's pressures. Grace-full relationships enhance overall satisfaction with life. The value of the church context is most clearly visible in participants' aim to expose their children to the church, so that their children can have additional life-supporting opportunities that the participants themselves did not use or lacked access to.

In spite of all the struggles, the momentum of one's life is towards the salvation that God intended – the restoration of all our relationships. As already mentioned, salvation

can be likened to the satisfaction of a homecoming, an experience that all is well, even though we live in a broken world.

### **7.6.9 Summary**

God-stories that relate to grace are stories of unconditional acceptance that include the subjective experience of being good enough in relation with God, the self and the other, despite the marginalising effects of dominating discourses. Grace creates a space or a platform from which to choose preferred self-stories, also a preferred relationship with substances. This opens up the possibility of a migration to a new way of being a self outside the domain of substances.

## **7.7 STORIES OF MIGRATION OF IDENTITY**

The third metaphor or self-God-story links with the discussion of the migration of identity (see Section 5.10.3). The emphasis is on a thickening or enriching of self-stories through the identification with the stories of Christ, and particularly on a changed life, a new way of full, embodied living.

### **7.7.1 Living the different, new life**

The story of the migration of identity is a counter-story to cultural stories that see a struggle with substance abuse as implying a fixed deficit identity, which totalizes and pervades a person's life, and cannot be changed. Such thin identity conclusions restrict the ways of being a self and can paralyse a person in the knowledge of personal deficiency. It hides the social and political aspects of addiction and other aspects of identity outside the influence of a struggle with substances.

I have already discussed the way narrative work and God-stories coalesce around alternative constructions of identity (see Section 4.15.1). The God-stories of *solus Christus* and *sola Scriptura* correlate with the self-story about the migration of identity. The migration of identity story, like the identification with the stories of Christ in Scripture, is relevant as a story that counters the dominating restraining substance abuse story that aspires to trap a person in a fixed, totalising pathological identity. A migration implies that one's life is multi-storied, that new self-stories and a new sense of self can



be achieved. In the narrative context, our alternative self-stories are about not being fixed in a deficit identity, about our lives being multi-storied with experiences outside the dominating substance abuse story. They are about a migration or journey that consists of a separation from a substance abuse self-style, and the rigours and challenges of settling in a new landscape of identity and action.

In the Christian tradition, an alternative sense of self has a specific context, namely the story of Jesus Christ. A new life, a new identity, is bestowed upon a person through a person's identifying with the story of Jesus, especially the story of His transformation through His resurrection into a new life. A transformed subject is constituted through taking up a subject position in the story of Christ. Henri Nouwen (1990, 1992) has popularised the idea that the words spoken to Jesus at His baptism ('This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased' Mt 3:17<sup>7</sup>) are applicable to the followers of Christ. In opposition to any voices of rejection or dissatisfaction, we can claim our identity as being the beloved of God. In narrative ways of working, this has no meaning as a contextless proposition. It is a metaphor that must be storied in the performance of certain knowledges and practices, as became evident in the conversations. As a source of joy and peace, this story 'has to become visible and tangible in the ways we eat and drink, talk and love, play and work' (Nouwen 1992:40).

### **7.7.2 Living your preferences**

What was necessary for most of the participants was a re-discovery, a re-appropriation or re-remembering of things previously regarded as part of who they were (as in Francois's case, see Section 6.2.3.2). For some, the change was evoked through hearing God's voice (as Joseph reported in Section 6.2.4.2), in one way or another, through the surprise of a puzzle coming together (to use Francois's image in Section 6.2.3.2), through the answering of a prayer (as in Heiné's case, see Section 6.2.11.2), or through an overwhelming knowledge that something had to change (as Jan felt, see Section 6.2.10.2).

There are stories that confirm that one does not need to feel constrained by an 'addict identity' (as Francois says in Section 6.2.3.4). The problems with substances are

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<sup>7</sup> *The New Revised Standard Version*, 1989 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson).

regarded as not necessarily a permanent or pervasive feature of one's identity (see Section 5.6).

Most of the participants relate their self-God-stories with the assurance they have of who they are, namely Christians, believers, having faith, that God loves them, etc. It became clear in the conversations that people tend to hold on their identities as being believers, or people living for God, people serving God in the church, people blessed by God in spite of their destructive excursions with substances, in spite of having become strangers to God, even in spite of walking hand in hand with the devil, for example, as in the stories of Joseph (Section 6.2.6.4), Gilbert (Section 6.2.8.5), Coreen (Section 6.2.9.4) and Wolfgang (Section 6.2.12.4).

While people may sometimes doubt the value they are getting from a relationship with God, they rarely doubt the existence of a kind of relationship that has an effect on their sense of self. For the participants, the misuse of and struggle with substances are not able to completely alienate a person from God; in fact, they can impress the need for God on a person. Through the *impasse* of being 'stuck', a doorway can become visible through the need for God. It may be only a vague possibility in the beginning, but just the sense of a need for something different can bring a flicker of hope. It is an expression of the incomplete nature of the effects of substances, of the fact that substances are not hundred per cent successful in colonizing and compromising a person's identity. The conversations indicate that the participants have knowledges of their own and can consider practices of the self outside the domain of the substances, such as being a husband, a mother, serving in the church or community, etc. It is possible to live according to one's preferences. The sense of a need for something different is contrary to the voice of substance abuse that promises the satisfaction of all one's needs and then continues with the same abuse.

### **7.7.3 Living from your strengths**

There are self-stories in which a person chooses to resist the abuse of substances out of a sense of who he or she is, from a discursively positioned identity story, as discussed under the migration of identity metaphor (as in the stories of Frik and Gilbert, see Sections 6.2.7.4 and 6.2.8.5). This metaphor is consistent with the experience that even a conversion story is not always an immediate resolution, an end to all problems, but

part of a journey away from the influence of substance abuse. Then it is important to remember who one is, for example, stories of someone fully loved and lacking in nothing, or someone that wants to serve God, or someone who is playing on God's team.

The positioning within a subject position in discourse, such as identifying with the stories of Christ, brings with it the views, images, metaphors, storylines and possibilities relevant to that position. It shapes a person's choices about life events that can be storied and how they should be storied. These self-stories can relate to a choice for life, as opposed to the death wish of substances and illness. Other identity-related values, such as honesty, sincerity, love and goodness, tend to become buried beneath the stories of substance abuse, and became visible in the conversations. These knowledges of oneself are actually the performance of stories that are alternatives to problem stories, and its re-appropriation and re-enacting includes a proliferation of new skills and a new confidence. Guilt, shame and disgust can be an indication of values that are important for the person's sense of self, of concerns that became distorted through substance abuse, values and concerns that must be foregrounded in the co-authoring of new self-stories (as we found in Marleze's case, see Section 6.2.2.2).

In therapy, the discrepancies between identity values and risky behaviour can be explored as a means to a re-commitment to what is important to a person regarding his or her preferred self-story. Having a new, God-contextualised sense of self is also evident in the participants' overwhelming concern about having God-given purposes in life. These purposes include an opportunity to testify about God's goodness through success in table tennis (for Daan, see Section 6.2.1.2), being involved with children in need (for Marleze, see Section 6.2.2.2), becoming involved with Sunday school and working with old people (Harriet, see Section 6.2.5.2), holding office in the church (for Hannes, see Section 6.2.6), being a husband and a role model for a child (for Heiné, see Section 6.2.11.4), etc. One can talk about a positioning on God's side of the struggle with substance abuse in these conversations, also in helping others who struggle. Often this self-story of a new way of being in the world is indirectly related to God through the God-given roles a person has taken up in life, such as being a wife, husband, father, and mother or leader in the church or community. There is an assumption that a relationship with God is necessary to fulfil these God-given identity descriptions.

#### 7.7.4 'Living critical'

One's self-story, identifying with gender stories, can be important in determining one's relationship with substances (see Section 5.8.2). There were stories of young men that identified with their peers through the way they were able to consume alcohol (like Daan, see Section 6.2.1.1). Through a critical deconstruction of gender discourses, young males can become aware of preferred ways of stepping into manhood rather than to subscribe to the restrictive ways of consuming of substances. At least one story, that of Harriet, suggests the link of substance abuse with women's efforts to cope with the potentially subjugating traditional social roles of women (see Section 6.2.5.4). Again, through deconstruction, women can become aware of their own voice, and appropriate their own preferences for being women. Feminist images are then a doorway to a spirituality that is different from cultural norms and that emphasises processes, relationality and inclusiveness.

The effect of the conflation of self-stories and Christ-stories is a socially constructed experience of a new sense of being a self, for example, by identifying in a preferred way with Biblical stories (as Hannes has, see Section 6.2.6.4), as seeing oneself as living for God through service to others (like Harriet, see Section 6.2.5.4), or as feeling safe and protected in God's presence (like Gilbert, see Section 6.2.8.4). This can assist in further separating from the substance abuse life-style and demands and in opening up other possible options for living.

One's self-story as identifying with disadvantaged groups of people can also co-determine one's relationship with substances. Social and economic marginalisation (see Section 5.8.1) did not feature prominently in the conversations in this study, because the participants see a future for themselves with many possibilities to thrive. Nevertheless, marginalisation can also be a social restraint that one has to be critical about, that one can separate from through a migration of identity. History is full of examples of people who chose to see themselves not as victims of a system, but as agents in their own lives. Agency and self-efficacy are values that overcome the subjugation through substances and are important ingredients in change (Peele 2004:36). Identifying and living with the stories of Christ can enrich this migration. As already mentioned, the subversion of the requirements of substance abuse with regard to gender discourses and disadvantaged

groups also requires social involvement and political activity. It is the creation of a country to which identities can migrate and in which they can settle.

### **7.7.5 Living with freedom**

A person's self-story constitutes a person's relationship with consumer goods, just as a relationship with substances influences the constitution of self-stories. This self-story of a relationship with consumer goods is about how a person wants to live, what he or she wants to do and what he or she has to do in order to do it. To some extent, a sense of self-will determines a person's needs, and therefore patterns of consumption. The problem is that a consumer society creates needs and promotes satisfaction of the needs as the norm. We are incited to indulge in excessive consumption of a range of different substances.

In the conversations, it became evident that the participants regarded a person's relationship with God as the only adequate substitute for unbridled consumption (see Heiné's story, Section 6.2.11.3). He alone can satisfy spiritual, psychological, social, emotional and physiological needs. He alone can provide what the self needs; He can quench our deepest thirst, providing what substances take away: stability, peace, self-respect (as Coreen pointed out in Section 6.2.9.2), providing the warmth and comfort of being at home without chemicals (as Wolfgang found, see Section 6.2.12.2). Having a new self-story with Christ means: 'The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want' (Ps 23:1).<sup>8</sup> This is an effect of being a beloved of God, of His care without a dark side. A migration of identity includes changes in the way a person consumes substances, a freedom in the use of substances, because a person's deepest needs are met. This can include limiting the intake of certain substances, the excluding substances, using different substances, according to values that are in line with a person's sense of self.

### **7.7.6 Living your values**

I want to expand a little on identity-related values. In the conversations, identity-related values were storied that contradict serving substances. Values are knowledges and practices that aspire to realise the best possible outcomes for all concerned, in line with

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<sup>8</sup>*The King James Version 1769* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

the plot of a person's preferred self-story. Some see themselves as servants of God through taking up a ministry in the church or becoming involved in community projects (like Daan and Harriet, see Sections 6.2.1.4 and 6.2.5.2). Values such as honesty, sincerity, love and goodness pull a person away from a substance lifestyle that requires lies, secrecy and a pre-occupation with substances. The change from being a baby that must be cared for to a responsible adult brings with it the need to live one's preferred story, which is to influence one's life on one's own behalf. It brings the need to be aware and knowledgeable in making choices, and the need to pursue meaningful interests and to contribute to establishing reciprocal relationships. The value of love that God gives is in some instances diametrically opposed to the search for relationship and acceptance through substance abuse (as in Marleze's and Francois's story, see Sections 6.2.2.2 and 6.2.3.2).

Discipline, like structuring one's life, exercising, healthy living, attending Bible study or self-help groups are ways of expanding and enriching one's sense of self. These are stories of living according to what is important to a person. In this regard, stories of proficiency in other areas of life, such as being successful in table tennis (like Daan, see Section 6.2.1.2), can contribute to a person's having life-skills and being focused and disciplined in his or her struggle against substances. The value of aligning one's will with God's will only has meaning in the context of a lived self-story, and not in a theoretical, decontextualised sense. For the participants, this is their vision in line with their sense of self, but they need discipline in order not to be tripped up by carelessness or indifference that plays into the hands of the abuse through substances. Discipline can create clarity on the direction a person wants to take and strengthen the momentum in that direction.

The value of investing in being a mother, father, wife, husband, friend, child, role model, etc. also counters the interests of substance abuse. These investments require the need to be available and the ability to respond, in contrast to the imprisoning ways of substances. An abusive relationship with substances interferes with these identity values.

### **7.7.8 Living the journey**

Part of the identity stories involve an identification with the human condition of brokenness and limitations, so that a new sense of self is no free pass to avoid struggling with life's issues. I have already discussed the therapeutic value of 'failure' (see Section 4.15.6). Our sense of self will always be ambiguous; our self-stories are varied and contradictory. We have to make peace with grey areas in all our relationships. The most adequate description of our identity is that we are on a journey between the 'old life' and a 'new life' (see Section 4.9). We will always be influenced by the old and the new. The journey metaphor implies that we are travelling or migrating towards a new sense of self. The concept of spiritual growth is consistent with the migration metaphor with regard to temporality, meaning-making and social embeddedness. It tells stories of time out, moving backwards and forwards, of continually re-aligning with preferred God-stories.

The journey towards a new identity makes visible a person's history of protest and resistance of the abuse of substances, for example, Joseph's story of being sober for 30 years after experiencing God's presence in a white light and in a clear voice (see Section 6.2.4.2). It brings to the fore other his-stories and her-stories outside the influence of substances on which a person can build a life.

This is where the faith community plays an important role in the development of new stories. The identity of being religious/spiritual is constituted in one's faith community. All the research participants experienced their own sense of having a new identity to some extent in their connection to God through the faith of other important people in their lives. These include the calming faith of a father and brother (for Marleze, see Section 6.2.2.2), a girlfriend's presence as a place of safety (for Francois, see Section 6.2.3.2), the peace and happiness of a mother's faith (for Gilbert, see Section 6.2.8.2) and the need to provide a childhood for one's children (see Frik's story, Section 6.2.7.4). These people co-constituted their self-God-stories. Their connectedness with other persons coloured the style of their relating the substance abuse stories and the self-God-stories. This faith community can include one's family, friends or therapeutic environment. Furthermore, church and church-related activities almost invariably play an unquestioned role in the lives of religious persons struggling with substance abuse,

as some participants found (see Joseph's and Daan's stories in Sections 6.2.4.5 and 6.2.12.2).

Alternative identities are texts that must be performed again and again before an audience like the faith community. It is an arena for the experimenting with agency and relationship competencies. The church liturgy, which incorporates a place for lamenting and celebrating, also of our own achievements, can function as a ritual that is constitutive of the migration of identity and can serve as an affirmation of our being the beloved of God. For some, confession and the Holy Communion are instrumental in the ability to carry on with their new life (see Joseph's story in Section 6.2.4.2).

### **7.7.9 'Living hopeful'**

The migration of identity is about hope. Hope is about the possibility that things can be different, that there are alternatives to a lifestyle of substance abuse. Hope is absolutely necessary to persist on a chosen path, and it counters the experience of being stuck in substances. It enables a person to start over and over again. The discussion of the self-God-stories started and ended with the reference to hope, with the implication that our self-God-stories extend hope through all our stories. It sustains the possibility of alternative stories that counter the story of substance abuse. The journey to an alternative way of being is to move beyond the internalised description of oneself as being an addict and to be, together with others, fully present in a preferred self-story. A hope that is derived from the connection with God is present in all the participants' stories. It is not a journey of recovery, but of re-membering. The journey can lead to a place where a person's self-story is expanded by being a beloved of God, by being fundamentally adequate, and where a person can feel that God will be proud of the way he or she has come.

### **7.7.10 Summary**

God-stories that relate to a migration of identity are stories about how a sense of being a self and a way of life can be changed through the identification with the story of Jesus Christ. The thickening of a new self-story includes interaction with other people on the journey and a commitment to preferred purposes and values. Being a new self and



living a new life powerfully counter the need for substances to keep one stuck in a restricting relationship with substances.

## **7.8 CONCLUSION**

We are lived by our stories. The stories we have about our lives constitute and shape our lives. Stories about the struggle with substance abuse can keep a person disempowered and can restrict a person's options for living. We have discussed self-God-stories that can sustain a substance abuse lifestyle. The majority of self-God-stories that were performed in the conversations brought hope in the struggle with substance abuse. It is not accidental that the first and last story are about hope, because hope is what has been performed throughout the conversations, in all the stories. They are alternative stories about undermining the requirements of a substance abuse lifestyle, about knowledges and skills for establishing a preferred relationship with substances, and about a sense of self and way of life outside the domain of substances. This chapter contains a library of self-God-stories that can make a difference in the life of a person struggling with substance abuse.

Table 7.1, below, summarises how the stories of substance abuse as sin, as illness and as dominating are connected to relevant narrative practices and the hopeful self-God-stories of re-remembering God, grace and a migration of identity to make the connection more easily visible, and thus easier to follow.

**Table 7.1: A summary of self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse**

<b>Substance abuse stories</b>	<b>Narrative practices</b>	<b>Hopeful self-God-stories</b>
<p>The story of substance abuse as a <b>sin</b> disrupts the relationship with God, is abusive, provides limited options for living, and goes hand in hand with isolation and rejection.</p>	<p>Re-remembering practices establish additional narrative resources, alternative contexts for self-stories. They provide more choices for living, more cultural templates to consider. They enhance inclusiveness and relationality.</p>	<p>These include re-remembering God – <i>sola fide</i>, and re-directing investments and commitments. They provide alternative contexts for constructing self-stories outside substance abuse stories. They give meaning to one’s life, and gifts and abilities to serve, taking one away from the demands of substances. They can involve re-remembering supportive relationships, being accepted, being cared for, and being included in meaningful relationships. They invite an audience for alternative performances and emphasise additional and new knowledges in the context of God’s presence.</p>
<p>The story of substance abuse as an <b>illness</b> subjugates and marginalises the self, implying being abnormal and stigmatised. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy and allows no self-efficacy.</p>	<p>Narrative practices generate unique outcomes, centring marginalised texts. They deconstruct and refuse dominant subjugating discourses. So-called illness is then just another way of being and living a valid self-story. They allow a performance of agency in a person’s self-story.</p>	<p>Grace – <i>sola gratia</i> – refers to God’s unconditional, undeserved, surprising goodness, forgiveness and care. It creates miracles at many levels. It relativises deficit, gives value to a person’s own stories as good enough and worthwhile. It provides a place to stand and to live outside diminishing cultural expectations and restrictions. It emphasises a change in experiences in the context of the centring of marginalised stories.</p>
<p>The story of substance abuse as being <b>fixed in a totalizing deficit identity</b> leads to thin identity conclusions that exclude and hide other self-stories. Complicit with substance abuse stories are stories of gender and being part of disadvantaged groups, as well as the social environment of disordered consumption.</p>	<p>Narrative resources invite interaction between texts to provide for a thick or rich description of identity. Alternative self-stories are possible through interaction with one’s social environment, or texts. The performance of alternative self-stories constitutes a migration of identity. It can be ritualised in order to provide a map for the journey.</p>	<p>A migration of identity is possible through taking up a subject position in the stories of Christ – <i>solus Christus</i> and <i>sola Scriptura</i>. I become part of His stories, His stories become part of my stories. It is a journey to a new way of being a self in Christ. There is a need not to be limited by gender discourses or being part of disadvantaged groups, or social practices surrounding consumption. It empowers a person to make his or her own choices and live a preferred story. A person can experience satisfaction in being a beloved of God and in pursuing Scriptural values. A person can negotiate and inhabit a new sense of self and new way of being outside the domain of substances. It emphasises a preferred way of full embodied living in the context of having a new sense of being.</p>

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the research, I ventured into the realm of a search for a sense of being in the context of substance abuse. I have already discussed some of the ways in which substance abuse narratives can limit a person's choices, and restrict options for living (Chapter 5). I made the assumption that self-stories that relate to a re-connection with helpful God-stories can provide alternative resources for the construction of self-stories. I argued that they can provide more opportunities to choose from, a library of templates for living in a preferred relationship with substances (see Section 1.3.5).

In this last chapter, I reflect on the research process. I first highlight what I have learnt in terms of the four concerns related to the research question in Section 8.2. Then I discuss the ways in which my epistemological, methodological and practical theological positions influenced the research and vice versa in Sections 8.3, 8.4 and 8.6. In Section 8.5, I also discuss the ways in which the research challenges pastoral care to assist people struggling with substance abuse. I also focus on the advantages of narrative ways of working in Section 8.6 and 8.7. The concept of stories opened up possibilities for movement, for change, for the telling of new stories. I evaluate and reflect on the conversations with the participants in Section 8.8. Finally, I consider the outcomes of the research and the research results in terms of the research question in Section 8.9 and Section 8.10. I reflect on the way in which self-God-stories have influenced people's relationship with substance abuse stories. In reflecting on the research process, I do not repeat references to the literature, but I do refer the reader back to the sections where the relevant issues are discussed.

#### **8.2 REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND CONCERNS**

The research question, in the light of the research proposal and the title of the research, was formulated as follows:

## **How do the God-stories of persons troubled by substance abuse contribute to the construction of their self-stories in relation to substance abuse?**

The research was informed and guided by four areas of concern, as contained in the research question.

The first area of concern regarding this research was to argue that identity is socially constructed, that self-stories are constituted in the ever-changing social, cultural and political spheres. This concern was carried by the overall interest in narrative ways of working, more specifically, narrative therapy. In Chapter 3, I considered how self-stories are socially constructed, starting with the postmodern context of self-stories in general and moving on to narrative therapy as a context for self-stories in particular. I also argued that self-stories can be a context for hope, because if self-stories are socially constructed, they can be changed – they can be constructed differently. The value of a narrative approach to identity is the possibilities for change that the approach invites. Possibilities for change are opportunities for therapy, and therefore contexts of hope. Because self-stories are socially constructed, it also means that they are open to the influence and effects of other social constructions, such as religion/spirituality (Chapter 4) and substance abuse (Chapter 5).

My exposure to social constructionism and narrative ways of working was life-changing. It opened my eyes to the contextual and changing nature of our existence, and enabled me to interact with different knowledges and practices in a more productive way. It impressed on me the importance of the language we use and the stories we tell: the words we use and the context in which we use them do matter. They are constitutive of our realities. This knowledge is especially relevant for pastoral care, where realities are precariously constructed.

The second area of concern in this research was the constitutive effect of religion/spirituality on self-stories. In Chapter 4, I explored the notion that God-stories are social constructions that can be part of the context for development of self-stories. I showed in what ways God-stories can make a difference in self-stories. In this discussion, I considered God-stories as a context for hope, thereby linking them to the social construction of self-stories in narrative therapy. The chapter also set the stage for the next chapter about self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse. The God-

stories that I discussed were mostly influenced by my own theological position. They were also influenced by my participation in a community of people who had been struggling with substance abuse for many years. It became evident in the research that there is some interaction between the meta-narratives of the Christian tradition and contemporary, local self- and God-stories (see Section 2.7), as can be seen in the stories depicted in Section 8.9. The most important aspect of God-stories was the way in which God-stories and self-stories can interact in order to bring about difference in the construction of self-stories.

The third area of concern in the light of the research question was an enquiry into the social, cultural and political contexts of substance abuse. More specifically, it was an exploration of the way self-stories are influenced by stories of substance abuse. In Chapter 5, I looked at dominating substance abuse stories that can totalise and pathologise people's identities. I also explored how a narrative approach to substance abuse can make a difference. In this way, I wanted to discuss problems with substances as a context for hope. The deconstruction of the dominating substance abuse stories was informative and opened up the possibility of more movement with regard to these discourses. It made possible other ways of relating to a struggle with substance abuse, for example, that a person is not fixed in a deficit identity, that the substances are doing the abusing and that a person can make different choices (see Section 5.3).

The fourth area of concern in this research was considering how God-stories can contribute to the social construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse. What difference do God-stories make for a person struggling with substance abuse? What is the effect of self-God-stories on stories of substance abuse? I operated on the assumption that God-stories can provide alternative self-stories in relation to substance abuse, and that self-God-stories are therefore a context of hope regarding problems with substance abuse. This was mainly the content of Chapter 6, as it reflected on the conversations with the participants. It was also included in Chapter 7, which consisted of the interweaving of the results of the conversations with the literature about God-stories and self-stories in the context of substance abuse. It was an enriching experience to explore how religious/spiritual narratives can be a source of hope and of transformation in the context of substance abuse. I expand on and reflect more fully on these outcomes in Section 8.9.

### 8.3 REFLECTION ON THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION

The research was done within a postmodern epistemology (see Section 2.2). The postmodern broader view of rationality and taking seriously the notion of multiple perspectives allowed me to adopt a critical stance towards totalising meta-narratives and to explore the possibilities of marginalised stories, for example, with regard to substance abuse (see Sections 5.2 to 5.8). In this research, I did not reject the meta-discourses of the Christian tradition, but emphasised an imaginative, metaphoric and narrative way of knowing these discourses, as suggested by Brueggemann (1993:18). Postmodernism also allowed me to take seriously the stories of the research participants that include contexts and experiences as valid contributions to the research (Chapter 6).

As part of the postmodern context, the research was also done within the paradigm of social constructionism and poststructuralism.

This research was socially constructed and influenced by the following ‘participants’:

- My own stories, environment and relationships influenced the research. This includes my own interests, as I mentioned in Chapter 1. Two important issues resulted in the research question and direction of the research. The first was my being a minister in the church, and the second was my work with people struggling with substance abuse.
- The Narrative Therapy study group run by Elize Morkel that I attend because I am a student at Unisa informed my thinking.
- Numerous conversations with my supervisor, Prof. Dirk Kotzé, led to me to explore more widely.
- The co-research with participants and personnel at Ramot Rehabilitation Centre were a vital part of the research.
- Conversations with members of Christian Action for Dependency (CAD) about the effect of faith on their substance abuse stories were insightful.
- Therapy with many people struggling with substance abuse over an eight-year period alerted me to a number of issues.
- The consultation with academic conversational partners through the relevant literature expanded the research.

The main focus of the research was on the theoretical discussion of the social construction of self-stories, God-stories and substance abuse stories and their relationship with each other. This includes the deconstruction of dominating substance abuse discourses and a search for hope in the discovery and telling of alternative self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse. My positioning in social constructionism is neither radical nor absolute, because I accept a reality that exists outside the symbolic system (see Section 2.5). More needs to be said about the notion that language also has a referential function and that reality does not exist only in language. In the theoretical part of the study, I attend to the referential function of language, while the conversations contain stories that have been constructed in the interaction between myself and the participants. Meaning has been attributed to self-God-stories within the context in which the conversations took place, namely the context of a struggle with substance abuse. This context made possible unique self-God-stories that I refer to again in Section 8.9.

The poststructuralist effect on the research is evident in the view on language as constituting our realities, as was seen in the theory and in the conversations. This includes the way the self is discursively positioned within God and substance abuse discourses. Poststructuralism sees the therapeutic process as a dialogical creation: ‘the God who is active in human history is active in human language’ (Boyd 1996:221). The poststructuralist effect is also evident in the way I treated consultations with literature as part of an intertextual conversation process in constituting alternative understandings.

One of the important consequences of the postmodern approach is the way it enabled me to work with a self that is not fixed and static, but is changeable in the interaction with different discourses or narratives (see Section 3.3.5). This approach is a key factor in the research, as it makes possible the shifting of self-stories towards preferred tellings. This made it possible to construct self-stories, even in a short space of time, that are alternatives to the dominating substance abuse stories, and to see how God-stories made a difference in these circumstances. Self-God-stories, as discussed in the research, provide counter-narratives to the modern narratives that objectify people. This is evident in Chapter 7 and is discussed again in Section 8.9.

#### **8.4 REFLECTION ON THE EFFECT OF MY PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL POSITION**

In this research, Practical Theology was a conversational partner that engaged the context of the struggle with substance abuse and offered religious/spiritual perspectives on this reality (see Section 2.5). My Practical Theological position determined the research question and other questions I asked and especially the self-God-stories that I focused on. Examples of this positioning were evident in the assumption that God-stories can make a difference in the context of a struggle with substance abuse, the self-God-stories of interaction with Biblical narratives, of relationality and community, of sin and grace, of a new identity and growth, of political action and ethical caring, etc. In the research, I was exposed to different ideas – pre-modern, modern and post-modern religious ideas – but my postmodern Practical Theological point of departure allowed me to listen to all the different voices in this research as valid constructions of self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse stories.

With regard to the contextual nature of Practical Theology (see Section 2.5), the research was mainly theoretical, although I explored the social and political context of substance abuse in which God-stories can make a difference. I explored the praxis around the ways of talking about substance abuse and its interaction with self-God-stories. The boundaries of cultural narratives about substance abuse were explored with a view to finding places where God-stories can be performed. Narratives of substance abuse as sin invite self-God-stories of re-membering God. Narratives of substance abuse as illness invite self-God-stories of grace that create a space for being different. Narratives of substance abuse as dominating stories invite self-God-stories of the possibility of a migration of identity. The context and experiences of the research participants were also taken seriously through the stories they told, and that had an influence on the result of the research as it co-determined the stories told in Chapter 7.

The contribution of feminist theology (see Section 2.4) on the research was mainly an emphasis on relationality and a preference for full, embodied living in contrast to the modern dualisms between mind, body and soul. In the research, feminist theology made me sensitive to the many references to the way self-stories and God-stories are co-constructed in interaction between different people. It also helped me to focus on landscape of action issues in the performance of alternative stories. The gender issues



that I discuss in Section 5.8 with regard to the struggle with substances are also raised in the light of a feminist critique. Feminist theology, like contextual theology and narrative theology, is concerned with the politics of discourses and the better praxis that it promises for the future. This became a reality in the literature study and in the conversations, as the domain of God-stories was opened up as an additional context for the construction of self-stories in the context of substance abuse. In the light of the Practical Theological concern for a better praxis for the future, this research can contribute to more effective engagement by the faith community with people struggling with substance abuse.

In interaction with religious/spiritual narratives, mostly in relation to the Biblical text, this research is a theological communication about the social construction of transformative self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse. The research is therefore a communicative action in service of the gospel (see Section 2.9). The research involved continual interplay between practical and theoretical concerns. It first analysed the discourses and praxis that constitute the struggle with the abuse of substances through a literature study. The research was then concerned with ways in which theology can be practical in these circumstances, and with how religion and spirituality can make a difference. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 communicate religious/spiritual narratives that can make a practical difference in people's lives by opening doors leading out of the 'stuckness' of a struggle with substance abuse, by enabling people to stay in language for longer (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:381). New meanings and new narratives can be created in interaction with God-stories, and that actually give rise to change. In the theoretical study and in the conversations, the research confirms that meaning arises in ongoing dialogical communication (Anderson 1995:32; Anderson & Goolishian 1988:379).

## **8.5 THE CHALLENGES FOR PASTORAL CARE**

The research is also embedded in the domain of pastoral therapy. This implies that the research was not only informed by the Christian tradition and Christian values, but is, like pastoral therapy, ultimately aimed at ethical care for those in need in the light of God-stories (see Section 2.10). The research indicated to me that therapy and research are nearer to each other than I had anticipated. I have described the therapeutic changes that were brought about by the conversations without the intention of doing therapy

(Chapter 6), and I hope that the research will result in more options for therapeutic involvement with people struggling with substance abuse. I believe that through the research, people can be helped to construct new and better stories that are healing and liberating. From the viewpoint of pastoral therapy, conversations about God-stories can be opened up through introducing curiosity (Griffith 1999:127). The conversations can be surprised by more options to choose from in stories of re-membering God, by being accepted – as one is in stories of grace, by being able to mature out of a substance abuse lifestyle in stories of a migration of identity.

The core contribution of the research is to show how God-stories can make a difference in the construction of self-stories in the context of a struggle with substance abuse (see Section 8.9).

In order for God-stories to make such a difference, the pastor has to be able to put his or her own theology on hold in order to hear the voice of the participant. He or she must actually be able to participate in the stories of the participants. What is required is turning toward a participatory mode of consciousness (Heshusius 1994:15), an attitude of profound openness and receptivity towards the other, in the light of the social constructionist assumption that there are multiple realities. It involves cultivating a kind of hospitality that will welcome all stories (Griffith & Griffith 2002:33).

In the research, I was exposed to different, as well as to modern and pre- modern religious ideas, but my postmodern Practical Theological point of departure allowed me to listen to all the voices as valid constructions of self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse stories. I do not attend to my own theological or dogmatic viewpoints. Part of the research as social constructionism means that it was important not to enforce my own themes or stories on the participants. I have taken the stories of participants seriously, because they are the experts on their own lives and meanings.

For me, the integrity of the research lies in taking seriously the stories of the participants. In narrative therapy, we as therapists make a conscious effort not to impose our own views on spirituality on our clients, but rather let them inform us about their preferred views of God (Carlson & Erickson 2000:67). Narrative ways of working emphasise the uniqueness of each person and his or her stories. In fact, because the client is the expert of his or her life, the client's experience and meanings are privileged.

That means continually refusing unwarranted assumptions, and fostering an attitude of curiosity (see Section 3.7.2). I discuss self-God-stories in terms of the meaning the participants brought to their stories. In their own valid religious/spiritual stories, they find theological and pastoral answers to the ‘stuckness’ in a struggle with substance abuse (see Section 7.1).

Pastoral care is challenged by this attitude and this kind of pastoral interaction, because there is another tradition in pastoral care. Eduard Thurneysen laid the foundation for a pastoral conversation that was seen as an extension of the authoritative preaching of and confrontation of individuals with the Word (Unisa 1984:147). Jay E. Adams (1973:11) also took this position, emphasising the shepherd function of the therapist. He used the New Testament word for counselling (*nouthesia*) to claim that pastoral care is directive in nature (Adams 1973:17). However, according to Clinebell (1984:85), interpretations or advice tend to block the flow of feelings. From a narrative point of view, they also tend to terminate the conversation, and are counterproductive with regard to the ‘not knowing’ position of the therapist and the ‘not-yet-said’ in the co-construction of stories in therapy (see Section 3.7.2). Griffith (1999) has done important work to show how a therapist’s certainties can actually constrain conversations about God with clients (the entrapment of knowing), and on the importance of opening certainties up to wonder, in which multiple realities can coexist and relationships can flourish (see Section 4.15.2).

In this research, the telling of people’s stories resulted in their organising their experiences in sequence across time. In this way, marginalised stories became centred and available for the constitution of their lives. Without storying, telling and witnessing, these experiences might have been lost for therapeutic purposes. In the words of Prof. Dirk Kotzé, in a personal communication, I see pastoral care as the creation of space for the storying of God and the self. In this research, the narrative approach resulted in multiple stories that are really helpful to people struggling with substance abuse.

Because research is socially constructed, pastoral therapy is also narrowly linked to a community of concern that can sometimes include the faith community, as became apparent in the conversations and in the self-God-stories discussed in Chapter 7. One of the things that constitute therapy as ‘pastoral’ is the context of the church (Gerkin 1991:12-13), or ‘care as carried out in or on behalf of the Christian community’ (Pattison 1988:14). In the light of the importance of community from a social

constructionist perspective, as well as from the viewpoint of the Christian tradition, it is one of the challenges of the faith community to establish a community of care for people struggling with substance abuse. It is much more difficult to make the right choices in normal daily life than in the protected environment of a rehabilitation centre. People should therefore not be left to their own devices after being in a rehabilitation centre.

The way self-stories can be differently constructed in different social settings has been discussed throughout the report, especially in Section 3.8. The self as a process that occurs in the space between people implies that self-stories can be realigned or reconstructed differently as social contexts change. The implication of this is that people who struggle with substance abuse are dependent on interaction within a community that supports them in the construction of their preferred self-God-stories. Within these communities, people can find their voice to position themselves in a preferred way in relevant discourses. Davies (1991:50) claims that dramatic changes become possible by taking on different subject positions within discourses. I have repeatedly referred to these kinds of grace-full community – they can be church-related, part of a therapeutic environment, or of independent organisations such as AA (White 1997:41) or the Christian Action for Dependency (CAD) in South Africa.

These caring communities are not only relevant as a context for change, but also as a context for continuity. Self-stories can be stabilised by the culture in which we perform our self-stories (see Section 3.4.4). We need to acknowledge each other's subjectivity. A person's positioning within a community of discourse also provides the language of the self, which is also a stabilising factor (see Section 3.5.2). The positioning in or emotional commitment to a subject position brings with it the views, images, metaphors, storylines and possibilities relevant to that position and that enables the living of a life. From a pastoral care perspective, a community of care is indispensable for people struggling with substance abuse.

The question of faith and pastoral theology in a postmodern world is something that needs much more attention in the light of the impression that many religious people understand and experience their faith in a modern or pre-modern paradigm.

## **8.6 REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The main focus of the research was on the theoretical discussion of the issues relating to the research question (see Section 1.7). I consulted literature on postmodernism, social constructionism, narrative ways of working, narrative therapy, the relationship between psychology and pastoral therapy, religious/spiritual knowledges and practices, dominating substance abuse stories, etc. In my consultation with literature, there was a search for more general or universal tendencies (see Section 1.7). The theoretical part of the research included definitions in order to use concepts in a more specific way, such as definitions of the self, religion, spirituality, social constructionism, poststructuralism, identity, addiction, etc. As I have mentioned (see Section 1.7), I also made use of a research proposition that I evaluate in this chapter. Regarding the theoretical part of the research, I also controlled the observation of data to a large extent by imposing my own structure on the research. The theoretical positions referred to in the literature are overwhelming in their diversity. My own perspectives co-determined the themes I developed in the theoretical discussion. I hope that I have succeeded in making clear my own theoretical position with regard to the issues discussed.

The empirical part of the research was qualitative in nature, because the narratives that were drawn from the conversations were presented as the understandings of the people who told them, without trying to derive quantitative data or universal ‘truths’ from them. The collaboration or participation that I intended (see Section 1.7) was limited, because the conversations were limited to two sessions with each participant (thus 24 conversations). Most of the themes uncovered in the conversations resonated with themes in the theoretical discussion, for example, forgiveness, grace and praying. I will say something more about the value and the qualitative outcome of the conversations in the following sections. I believe that, as I anticipated in Section 1.7, the literature study, together with the conversations contributed to more adequate results because more than one indicator was used. The literature study created a framework within which the conversations took place. With regard to self-stories, God-stories and substance abuse stories, there was some interaction between the more general findings of the literature and the micro-stories in the conversations. In the end, both indicators convey the message that God-stories can make a difference in self-stories in the context of substance abuse (see Section 8.9).

I also privileged a narrative methodology in my approach to the research as a whole and the conversations in particular (see Sections 1.3 and 1.7). The view of the narrative self correlates with the Reformed theological view of the self with regard to the value and uniqueness of the self and the ability of the self to be responsible (see Section 2.8). In narrative, the self is seen as an agent in the construction of preferred self-stories. According to a Reformed theological view, the self was made in the image of God and put in a position of being able to respond to God's initiatives in the covenant relationship (see Section 4.6). A narrative approach opens up possibilities for preferred self-constructions that are alternatives to problem-saturated constructions. The narrative approach is much more adequate in overcoming structuralist dualisms, for example, between life and religion/spirituality, by incorporating faith stories into the self-stories of the participants than working with overarching theories of human nature and human difficulties (Section 3.7.1). A narrative approach does not work in a pathologising way, and is therefore well-suited to the ethics of a pastoral therapy (see Section 2.10).

Another important contribution of narrative ways of doing research is their tendency to be critical towards the influence of meta-narratives on constructions of the self. In line with the influence of Foucault and narrative ways of working, I considered meta-narratives regarding substance abuse in a critical way in this research. I have deconstructed the dominating substance abuse discourses that are restricting and limiting in their effect on people's self-stories. This is the start of the road towards the performance of hope. My narrative research methodology, with its accompanying epistemology (such as social constructionism and poststructuralism), was the key to the outcomes of the research, a key to hopeful pastoral action. The narrative approach invited the telling of stories.

## **8.7 THE USE OF THE CONCEPT OF STORIES**

I have shown that self-stories and God-stories are social constructions, with the implications of that knowledge for alternative constructions. Regarding the metaphor of stories, I have discussed the reasons for my use of the concept of story, either as self-stories or God-stories (see Section 1.3.1). God, as we know Him, and our experiences of Him, are socially constructed. Although God refers to a reality outside language, it is not possible to make objective and universal statements about God. As I have done in this research, the 'Christian life' is best communicated to persons in the language of

metaphor, image and narrative (Gerkin 1991:18). Furthermore, rather than talking about 'truths' about substance abuse, I discussed stories about substance abuse. I have therefore chosen to talk about God-stories and substance abuse stories that have constitutive effects on self-stories.

Modern discourses about addiction tend to provide a pervasive, fixed deficit identity to a person struggling with substance abuse. The choice of the concept of stories enhanced the perspective of multiple 'realities' that contribute to the construction of a person's self-story and to the lives we live. Unlike universal 'truths' that objectify people, stories centre people's own meanings and understandings. In this study, this resulted in a contextualising of knowledge. As knowledge that is experience-near, it was more capable of making a difference than the contextless normative 'truths' of modernity. The concept of stories made visible the interplay between different discourses and narratives. It opened up possibilities for movement, for change, for making new stories. Narrative made it possible to question 'grand' narratives and enhance agency in the construction of new stories.

In the research, the concept of 'story' was also more capable of expressing the complexity and multiplicity of life, since all our lives are multi-storied, with dominant stories and alternative stories. Different stories can be lived simultaneously. This notion correlates with the lived experience of the research participants. The concept of story also contributed to the telling of the involvement of other people in a person's life that contributed to the rich description of a person's life. The concept of story also overcomes the separation between the spiritual and the everyday experiences, or between body and soul, because they are all part of the same multi-levelled reality (see Section 2.2).

I have argued how self-stories, God-stories and substance abuse stories are interrelated. They are social constructions that interact with each other, like conversational partners or texts that enrich and influence each other. Self-stories can be embedded in God-stories, and God-stories can be inserted into self-stories. God-stories and self-stories grow together in our social interaction and influence each other through continual contextual interpretation and meaning-making. In the same way, our substance abuse stories influence our self-stories and our God-stories, and our self-God-stories can thus interact with and change our substance abuse stories. The research has shown that thick

or rich descriptions of the multi-storied self, embedded in additional (Christian) narratives, create space for different possible ways of being in the context of a struggle with substance abuse. Because of this, working with stories holds many advantages, compared to working with fixed universal ‘truths’ that are contextless.

## **8.8 THE CONVERSATIONS WITH PARTICIPANTS**

The research did not focus on people’s internal psychological processes, but on the context, especially the God-context and substance abuse environment, in which they live. In the conversations, I created space for the introduction of people’s God-stories and how these stories relate to their lives in the context of stories of substance abuse. In the light of the emphasis on the stories of the participants, perhaps using 12 participants was too ambitious. So many stories were told that it became impossible to discuss all the stories in depth. A different route would have been to involve fewer participants in more conversations over a longer period. This could have resulted in more reliable outcomes in terms of the effects of self-God-stories on substance abuse stories.

I am satisfied with the diversity in participants. The participants came from different cultures (they were people of colour, Afrikaners and a German-speaking Namibian), genders (nine men and three women) and age-groups (their ages ranged from 26 to 60). The participants also struggled with different substances (ranging from alcohol to crack cocaine). The religious orientations of the participants include a range from the Roman Catholic, Pentecostal and Reformed traditions. More diversity contributes to an increased range of restricting or helpful self-God-stories in the context of substance abuse. More diversity with regard to religious orientation could have been valuable, but I am not sure whether it could have been accommodated, given the limited scope of this kind of research. As I have indicated, I invited a variety self-God-stories to provide a wide range of meaning-making possibilities – self-God-stories that were also linked to the three kinds of stories or metaphors that I highlighted: the stories of re-remembering God, grace and the migration of identity. The qualitative outcome of the diversity of stories that have been told (also see Section 8.9 for my reflections) met my expectations.

The conversations were conducted in line with to the ethical requirements of a narrative methodology (see Section 3.7.1). Although the long-term effects of the conversations is



not known, I refused to impose any judgement and did not manipulate the participants through normalising humanistic or religious discourses. Part of the research in a social constructionist paradigm means that it was important not to force my own themes or stories on the participants. I took the stories of participants seriously, because they are the experts on their own lives and meanings. The integrity of the research lies in taking seriously the stories of the participants. Narrative ways of working emphasise the uniqueness of each person and his or her stories. The results are not objective, universal truths, but the results of this research only. However, in the light of the theoretical part of the research, I hope that general tendencies that have been explored can contribute to more options in the engagement with people struggling with substance abuse.

In the end, I followed the structure of the questions mentioned in the first chapter in a tentative way. The fact that the conversations were not highly structured encouraged the telling of different stories – stories that would otherwise have been regarded as irrelevant. Two examples are the story about Daan’s use of the term *muti* as a way to refer to God’s intervention (see Section 6.2.1.2) and Francois’s metaphor of the Shoprite turnstile that only turns to one side as a way to express the belief that God will never let a person perish (see Section 6.2.3.2). The unstructured nature of the conversations opened up the possibilities for the introduction of different, and marginal stories. I established a dialogical situation in which participants told new stories or gave new meaning to old stories. They participated in the creation of opportunities for making choices. This indicates that the process of research and that of therapy are close together, in that therapy is also concerned with a resurrection of marginal stories.

## **8.9 SELF-GOD-STORIES IN SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

The main focus of the research was to see how self-God-stories influence people’s relationship with substance abuse stories. This is the critical part in the evaluation of the research. In the light of the struggle between psychology and religion/spirituality (see Section 4.4.1), this research contributes to a growing appreciation of the importance of religious and spiritual dimensions in a therapeutic context (Adams 1995:204). God-stories that contribute to the support structure of a struggle with substance abuse were told and discussed (see Section 6.7.3). These stories were mostly related to the perception or experience of restrictions, stories that limited options for living. God’s or the person’s contribution to their relationship is perceived as not adequate, or the

relationship with Him does not invite a new vision. These stories generally either motivate or sustain the abuse of substances. They contribute to a sense of ‘stuckness’ in the *status quo*.

The overriding concern in the research was God-stories that contribute to the construction of alternative or preferred self-stories in the context of a struggle with substance abuse. Problems with substances cannot be described in only one set of language terms. The most important contribution of God-stories in working with addiction is that they can expand linguistic resources, multiplying metaphors and stories out of which preferred self-stories can be constructed (see Section 5.10). God-stories function as an interactive constituent in the construction of self-stories in the context of a struggle with substance abuse. The research indicated ways in which God-stories provide openings in the ‘stuckness’ of substance abuse, and therefore provided hope that things can be different. In the research, I presented a repertoire of God-stories that contribute to a construction of preferred self-stories in the context of a struggle with substance abuse (see Sections 7.5, 7.6 and 7.7).

In Chapter 7, I discussed three kinds self-God-stories that presented themselves during the research, stories that can be helpful in struggling with substance abuse. They are stories that I described as metaphors in Chapter 7, the metaphors of re-membering God, grace and a migration of identity. These are three kinds of story that can suffuse or overcome constraints imposed by a relationship with substances, as well as cultural or religious restraints that support substance abuse. They are stories about being connected with or in a relationship with God through faith, about the difference that grace makes to the quality of life experiences and about a journey to a new way of being through identification with the story of Christ.

The stories about the re-membering of God were often related to stories about the difference that the presence of God can make in the struggle with substances. These stories brought hope and undermined the requirements of substance abuse, like feelings of rejection, isolation, powerlessness and a need to be committed to the needs of the substances. These are stories that can overcome the dominating story of separation from God through sin. These stories provided new knowledges and a context from which to separate from dominant stories informed by substance abuse narratives. One example is the many stories of prayer (for example, Daan’s story in Section 6.2.1.2; also see

Section 7.5.5) that provided a way to connect to the transcendent, a way to satisfy intimate relational needs. They provided a way of committing to God's purposes for one's life, a way to tap into a powerful resource that is capable of altering one's own self-stories, including even material circumstances.

The stories about grace were often related to surprising experiences that confirm a person's preferred self-stories. These experiences are enabling in establishing a preferred relationship with substances. Grace, as God's unconditional acceptance, makes possible the resurrection of marginalised stories. They are stories that can overcome the dominating story that a person struggling with substance abuse is abnormal or ill. One example is the many stories of being good enough, in spite of many failures and disappointments (see Sections 6.2.4.4 and 7.6.3). A person need not be restricted by dominating cultural or religious narratives, for example, narratives that privilege merit and achievement, or narratives that coerce a person to adopt ways of living that are not in line with local or personal preferences. These narratives can support the abuse of substances, or a person can be isolated and pathologised by the abuse of substances. Grace made such narratives obsolete and created space for new choices.

Stories about a migration of identity were often related to a changing self-story through the interaction with the story of Christ. It is a story that is capable of revealing a new way of being that is in many ways contrary to the story of struggling with substance abuse. The stories about a migration of identity are stories about a sense of self and a way of life outside the domain of substances, a self-story that needs to be enriched and thickened. They are stories that can overcome the dominating story that a person struggling with substance abuse has a fixed deficit identity, which totalises a person's life, and implies that the person can never change. One example is the many stories of people that had taken up leadership and serving roles in families, in communities and in churches (like Hannes, see Sections 6.2.6.2 and 7.7.3). These narratives have been shown to contradict substance abuse lifestyles in many ways. They are narratives of being involved in life in a way that can make a life without being labelled an 'addict', a life without a struggle with substance abuse, a living possibility.

It must be remembered that the participants in the research have just started on this journey. Hence, the long-term effects of these stories could not be established in this

research, with the small exception of the three cases discussed in Chapter 6. I mentioned in Section 7.4 that to struggle with substance abuse is, according to all the stories, to be in a place where a person needs God and needs connectedness with other people. These two themes ran through all the stories and functioned as beacons of hope for people in distress.

Given that the core contribution of the research is an acknowledgement of the difference that God-stories can make in the construction of self-stories in the context of a struggle with substance abuse, in looking back, I want to add a few more examples of the movement or shift in self-stories that is made possible by God-stories. These movements are the result of the deconstruction of the dominating substance abuse discourses (Chapter 5) and more specifically of the externalisation of substance as having a relationship with stories of substance abuse that can be changed (Section 5.3).

From the ‘stuckness’ in limited options in a struggle with substance abuse, God-stories open up additional contexts for the construction of self stories (see Section 5.10.1.1). An example is Marleze, who decided to fight out her anger with God and re-connect with the God-stories she had learnt from her father and brother (see Section 6.2.2.2). Gilbert experienced the greatness of God on a 33-day trip on the ocean on a sailboat. It encouraged a trust in God, knowing that with Him, overcoming is possible (see Section 6.2.8.2).

From isolation and rejection in self-stories of substance abuse God-stories resulted in stories of forgiveness and acceptance (see Sections 5.10.1.2 and 5.10.2.1). Harriet, for example, had experiences of being forgiven in her life, like when she got caught up in a conflict between her two sisters. She confessed her share in the conflict, asked for forgiveness, and a pervasive calmness took hold of her. This helped her to know that forgiveness is possible and to know what it feels like, and to look forward to experiencing it again (see Section 6.2.5.2). Hannes connected his own experience of forgiveness with the story of the woman who committed adultery, as well as with the meaning he attaches to the *avondmaal* (Holy Communion) (see Section 6.2.6.2). He participates in this sacrament regularly, and sees it as a sign of God’s forgiveness. This sacrament reminds him and assures him every time that God keeps on forgiving.

From a life-diminshing attachment to substances God-stories can change a person's life to a life-enhancing desire for God (see Section 5.10.1.3). For Coreen, her faith is a countermeasure to the needs of her mood swings and her vulnerability to the abuse of alcohol. It provides stability, a foundation that is always there, something that makes her strong, gives her peace and helps her to value herself more positively (see Section 6.2.9.1). For Jan, the key to sobriety is trust in God, and therefore the only solution is to focus his mind on the power of God, to let God take his mind off drinking (see Section 6.2.10.2).

From limitations and the restricted options of a struggle with substances, God-stories bring contentedness and fulfilment (see Sections 5.10.2.1 and 5.10.3.2). Gilbert longed for the faith, inner peace, love and happiness that emanated from his mother's life. During his upbringing, he was encouraged to have a thankful attitude like his mother. She experienced a God-given calmness and contentedness. He wished he could be touched in the way that his mother had been touched, to experience what she experienced when she had a smile on her face. His mother's life with God is the opposite of his life with drugs. His mother's faith constantly calls him towards a different way of life, a life without drugs (see Section 6.2.8.2).

From being dominated by stories of substance abuse, God-stories make possible the resurrection or centring of marginalised self-stories (see Section 5.10.2.2). Harriet chose to interpret the appearance of a bird's feather next to her as a sign of God's involvement with her (see Section 6.2.5.2). After many years of ignoring God's voice, Francois experienced bad things that recently happened in his life as a puzzle that God is putting together in order to bring him to a point where he can hear God's voice. For him, it confirms God's unconditional involvement in his life, with the experience of being accepted (see Section 6.2.3.2).

From the 'stuckness' and hopelessness of being an 'addict', God-stories enable the ability to respond (see Section 5.10.2.2). Although Harriet confesses that God is the agent in the changes in her life, her actions speak of somebody who is active in fighting with God at her side, in praying and listening to God, in giving and taking, in the tearing down of the wall between herself and God (see Section 6.2.5.3). A series of unfortunate events, a week of failure and mishaps, became a powerful motivation for Jan to change his coke and whiskey habit (see Section 6.2.10.2).

From being abnormal as an ‘addict’, through God-stories, there is a movement to graceful relationships (see Section 5.10.2.4). For Heiné, his wife’s persistence in her practising of her faith eventually contributed to a change in his life (see Section 6.2.11.2). Wolfgang received a letter from the ministers of the church he was involved with in his home town, telling him they were waiting for him to return to continue supporting him. This was a very positive confirmation that there were people that really cared about him and it inspired him to ‘come clean’ (see Section 6.2.12.2).

From being an ‘addict’, God-stories make possible a journey towards a new sense of being a self, to getting a new identity (see Section 5.10.3.2). Joseph compared his different identities or different ways of being with the different rooms in a house, and he spent time in each room, as the circumstances require (see Section 6.2.4.2).

From fear and anxiety, God-stories invite the experience of security and peace (see Section 5.10.3.2). Being extremely anxious before an operation, Harriet gave herself over to God. She suddenly saw a picture of God like that in a Children’s Bible. She knew that everything would be fine. An indescribable tranquillity flooded through her (see Section 6.2.5.2).

From being abused by substances, God-stories empower a person to choose differently (Section 5.10.3.4). Frik was afraid that he would not be able to do without substances, because it was so much a part of his daily life. In the light of previous experiences of God’s answering prayers, Frik prayed when he came into rehabilitation; and he had already gone 16 days without the substances at the time of our conversations (see Section 6.2.7.2).

From powerlessness over substances, God-stories enable self-efficacy (see Section 5.10.3.5). An example of this was God’s helping Daan to pass an examination in spite of smoking *dagga* and of keeping his job after difficulties. He experienced God’s help as walking with magic sticks, or *muti* (see Section 6.2.1.2). He also believed that his abilities in table tennis could help him in his struggle against substances. These are abilities such as being fit, focused, able to move quickly and stay ahead of the opponent (see Section 6.2.1.2).

From satisfying the demands of substances, through God-stories there is a movement towards being motivated by preferred values (see Section 5.10.3.5). For Marleze, her disgust at where she was motivated her towards preferred values that had become buried beneath a struggle with substance abuse (see Section 6.2.2.2).

From being lived by substances, God-stories make it possible for a person to become part of life (see Section 5.10.3.4). Harriet wanted to make her life count by becoming involved in Sunday school, with children or working with old people. She felt that these activities are necessary to fill the space formerly occupied by alcohol (see Section 6.2.5.2). Also, for Hannes, the self-story of taking up activities and commitments is a God-story of living a fulfilling life of service, as opposed to being lived by alcohol (see Section 6.2.6.2).

The research shows that self-stories can be changed and constructed differently in different contexts (see Section 3.4.3). The language of God-stories as a context for hope, as counter-stories to the dominating narratives of modernism, is able to create alternative worlds and lives. Through the literature study and conversations, the research provided support for the proposition that God-stories can provide material for alternative constructions of self-stories in the struggle with substance abuse. God-stories can provide alternative self-stories in relation to substance abuse, and self-God-stories are therefore a context of hope regarding problems with substance abuse. As I have already mentioned, this research contributes to the growing appreciation for the importance of religious and spiritual dimensions in the therapeutic context (Adams 1995:204).

From a pastoral care point of view, I would say that ignoring God-stories in people's lives would be a serious reduction in the possibilities for therapeutic involvement with people struggling with substance abuse. This is especially true in the light of the importance of religion/spirituality in the lives of many people (see Section 1.6). From a secular point of view, I would say that therapists should at least stay open to God-stories as a possible solution for some people who struggle with substance abuse.

## **8.10 THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

The research had results on different levels. I first want to mention the result of the research in my own life: the research provides me with a place to stand from which I do not need to be intimidated by fixed identity conclusions. My self-stories are responsive to and constitutive of my social environment. My self-stories can be transformed to incorporate my lived experience more adequately. Although I have long taken the movements in social constructionism, feminism and theology from dualism to relationality, from separation to mutuality, seriously, I was still surprised by the importance of relationships, meta-narratives and the faith community in the lives of the participants in the conversations (this relates to the 'social conception' as discussed in Section 1.3.3). This committed me to a more extensive exploration of relational and contextual issues in my own work.

The research provided me with a broader understanding of the social, cultural, language and power issues relevant in the domain of the struggle with substance abuse. This will radically expand the possible ways of my pastoral involvement with people troubled by substance abuse. The study has also impressed on me how working with issues of faith can complement postmodern and narrative ideas in areas such as being accountable about one's beliefs, the interest in the other and in the marginalised of society, ethical care and the value of different perspectives.

The conversation participants have been touched by the research. Although the conversations were not therapy, in the short term, there were changes as a result of the conversations. They contributed to a re-connection to God-stories in their lives and to their positioning themselves differently with regard to substance abuse stories. The long-term effect of the research is not really known, except for the three examples mentioned. I became aware of the fact that research and therapy are not that far apart from each other.

More generally, it is my hope that the research will become part of the body of circulated knowledges in the therapeutic domain, notwithstanding the fact that it does not represent universal truth claims. I hope that it will contribute to an understanding of and effectiveness in the ministry to and with the faith community.



This research shows that additional research on the therapeutic process from a narrative perspective with people troubled by substance abuse is necessary. The effectiveness of narrative therapy with people struggling with substance abuse needs to be verified, as well as the long-term value of God-stories in the context of substance abuse.

The results of the research in terms of the stated purposes (see Section 1.4) is the following:

- With the research, a text has been constructed that can contribute to the language of the idea that the self is a construction, and that in itself can create room for the construction of preferred self-stories.
- I have deconstructed prevailing addiction discourses and in this way have opened up other possible ways of understanding substance abuse.
- I have identified God-stories that contribute to the support system of substance abuse.
- **In the end, I have shown how the God-stories of people troubled by substance abuse can contribute to a construction of alternative self-stories in relation to and about the relationship with substance abuse. The research has provided a library of self-God-stories that can affirm and strengthen people's preferred self-stories in the context of a struggle with substance abuse. These stories confirm the hope that things can be different and can be instrumental towards more adequate pastoral action.**

I am thankful and glad for the opportunity I had to do this work, as it was, if nothing else, a performance of hope.

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## ADDENDUM A

### Letter to Ramot Rehabilitation Centre

Sarel Cilliersstr 5

STRAND

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11 Oktober 2004

**Beste ds. Petrus Theron**

#### **RE : MOONTLIKE NAVORSINGS GELEENTHEID BY RAMOT**

Ds. Riaan Verster se gesprek met u verwys.

Ek is tans besig met verdere studies in pastorale terapie by Unisa, spesifiek by die *Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD)*. Ek was aktief in die bediening vir 16 jaar tot Des. 1996. Weens 'n ernstige longsiekte moes ek aftree en is sedertdien met ongeskiktheidspensioen. Die pastorale terapie studies bied aan my die geleentheid om nog steeds by mense in nood betrokke te kan wees en 'n bydrae te kan lewer, ten spyte van my fisiese beperkings.

By ITD word die narratiewe benadering in pastorale terapie gebruik. Dit is 'n respekvolle omgaan met die kliënte op 'n eties –verantwoordbare manier. Dit maak ook erns met die sosiale faktore waarin 'n probleem ingebed is. My navorsing, onder leiding van my promotor, Prof. Dirk Kotzé, handel oor die manier waarop 'n mens se God-stories jou self- stories konstrueer. Die onderwerp van my skripsie is: "Die konstruksie van 'n persoon se self-stories in die lig van sy/haar God-stories en persoonlike verantwoordelikheid". ("The construction of a person's self-stories in the light of his/her God-stories and personal agency".) Die klem val dus op identiteit en die vorming van identiteit, ook in die lig van geloof. Eenjaar internskap, gevalle studie en mondelinge eksamen is reeds met sukses afgehandel. Vir die skripsie se navorsing moet ek met 15

persone individuele gesprekke oor die onderwerp voer. Ek sal baie graag met 15 persone in Ramot oor 'n tydperk 'n pad wou loop, en wel om die volgende redes:

1. Dit sal my help om my navorsingsarea af te baken om meer hanteerbaar te wees.
2. Dit kan daartoe meewerk dat die navorsing nie net deskriptief van aard is nie, maar dat die persone met wie ek gesprekke voer daadwerklik kan baat by die navorsing. Ek wil die navorsing so doen dat dit van persoonlike - en geloofswaarde vir die deelnemers sal wees.
3. Ek glo dat Ramot self ook sal baat by die navorsing, oa omdat dit die poel van bronne vergroot en die sirkulasie van kundigheid verhoog.
4. Ek het 'n besondere belangstelling daarin om met mense te werk wat middelafhanklik is en het as lid van die CAD ook reeds Ramot 'n paar keer besoek.

Die gesprekke wat ek met die deelnemers sal hê, sal relatief spontaan plaasvind rondom persone se stories oor hulle self, wat ook die middelmisbruik se weergawe kan insluit. Dit kan ook handel oor die rol van God-stories in hulle eie lewens, en op die moontlikhede wat daar is om veranderings in 'n mens se lewe te kan maak. Die gesprekke sal veral daarop fokus om persone te help om hulle voorkeur self-stories te identifiseer sodat dit ryker beskryf en uitgeleef kan word.

Presies met wie ek gesprekke sal voer en hoe die persone geselekteer gaan word, is iets wat ek graag in samewerking met die span daar by Ramot sal wil doen. Op hierdie stadium is dit net vir my belangrik om te noem dat ek graag sal wil hê dat 'n aantal jongmense ook aan die navorsing sal kan deelneem.

Indien u meer inligting verlang, is ek beskikbaar vir 'n onderhoud.

Baie dankie vir u gunstige oorweging van die versoek.

Ds. GJ Engelbrecht

Verwysings:



Prof. Dirk Kotzé – Unisa

Dr. Burrie du Toit – NG Gemeente Strand

Dr. Maruis Wolmarans – Welbedacht Sentrum –PE.

## ADDENDUM B

### Reproduction of audio-taped conversations with research participants

#### Deelnemer 1: Daan

#### Hoe sy God-stories sy self-stories konstrueer

Daan is 'n 44 jarige getroude man met 'n alkohol probleem. Hy is geneig om angstig en gespanne te wees. Alhoewel hy in 'n Godsdienstige huis opgegroe het, het godsdiens nie 'n groot plek in sy lewe ingeneem tot hiertoe nie. Hy het sedert skooldae af al alkohol en dagga misbruik, ingetrek deur idees rondom manlikheid, en dit het daartoe gelei dat hy gevoel het hy is nie goed genoeg om 'n verhouding met God te he nie, dat 'n mens eers vir God kan leef en op hom kan reken as jou lewe reg is en jou probleme uitgesorteer is. Hy dink dat God terleurgestel is met hom, en dat hy daarom nie werklik iets van God verwag het in sy lewe nie. Sy ervaring van God is verder gemarginaliseer deurdat hy MIV Positief is met al die vrae en onsekerhede wat dit gebring het. Hy beskou die ontdekking dat hy HIV positief is as die rede waarom hy begin drink het.

Daan: "Ek kan dit nie vat nie, dit was 'n groot slag".

Gerrit: Hoekom is die HIV positief vir jou swaar?

Hy: Dit beteken ek kan enige tyd doodgaan.

Daarby is hy ook 'n epilepsieyler. Sy vrou se betrokkenheid by 'n pinksterkerk het ook weerstand in hom gewerk omdat dit daartoe gelei het dat hy nie altyd sy huis kon beheer soos sy pa gedoen het nie, soos bv dat hulle nie Sondag 12 kan eet soos dit hoort nie, omdat die pinksterkerk van 10uur tot 1uur duur. Die beeld van God wat deur sy alkoholisbruik en lewensomstandighede vir hom gegee is, is dat God eintlik 'n veraf, onbetrokke God is, 'n God wat meer soos 'n regter is wat ons veroordeel of aanvaar op grond van die manier waarop ons leef.

Vir hom is hierdie pad wat hy geloop het tot hier, 'n keuse vir die dood. Die alkohol takel sy siek liggaam verder af en hy verval in wanhoop. Hy is juis hier by Ramot omdat hy 'n ander pad wil loop, omdat hy kies om te lewe. Hy moet eers ontslae raak van die alkohol, omdat dit aan die kant van die HIV is. Dit breek sy liggaam se weerstand verder af.

Op grond hiervan en op grond van die feit dat godsdiens wel 'n faktor in sy lewe was, al was dit 'n kantlynsaak, het ek vir hom gevra om vir my te vertel van 'n ervaring wat hy met God gehad het, 'n storie oor God wat vir hom uitstaan, iets wat hom gehelp het of kwaad gemaak het.

'n Maand voordat hy Ramot toe gekom het, sy derde rehabilitasiepoging, het sy baas gesê hy is more klaar met sy werk. Hy moes na die hoofkantoor gaan om voor te kom, maar hy wou nie gaan nie. Sy vrou, 'n gelowige, en vriende het vir hom gebid. God het hom so verander, tot die gevoel in sy liggaam verander, dat hy wel gegaan het. Die groot baas gee hom toe nog 'n kans, maar hy moes sentrum toe kom vir rehabilitasie. Nou beseft hy dat hy uit sy huis, sy vrou, sy werk sou gewees het, en hy sê vir God dankie dat Hy hom nog 'n kans gegee het. Die mense vra soms vir hom waarna hy staar; hy dink na oor wat God vir hom gedoen het. Twee jaar terug het 'n vriend dieselfde pad geloop en is afgedank. Hoekom nie hy nie? God loop saam met Hom.

In standard 8 het hy en sy vriende dagga gerook voor hulle Afrikaans sou skryf. Hy het beseft dit was 'n groot fout, die dagga maak hom stadig. Hy het toe badkamer toe gegaan en God gevra om hom nugter te maak. Hy het gaan skryf en goed gevoel en goed geskryf. Sy vriende het gesê dit is danksy die skyf, maar hy het beter geweet, hy het geweet God het hom gehelp, hy was nugter.

Gerrit: Wat het gemaak dat jy na die Here toe gegaan het, dat jy gebid het?

Daan: Ek het van kleins af geleer dat 'n mens na die Here toe kan gaan. My ma het my geleer om na God te roep, Hy sal voorsien.

Hierdie stories oor God het meer sentraal kom staan in sy lewe. Hierdie ervarings sê vir hom daar bestaan 'n God en Hy is in beheer van alles. Hy moet aan hierdie God onderdanig wees en Hom gehoorsaam. Waar hy altyd gedink het 'n mens moet eers sy lewe regmaak voordat God jou sal liefhe, voordat hy hom aan God kan commit, het hy tydens die eerste gesprek begin dink aan die moontlikheid dat God dalk nog altyd by hom was en vir hom vra om te kom soos hy is in sy gebrokenheid, net soos hy is, soos die moordenaar aan die kruis. Aan sy stemtoon kon mens agterkom dat dit vir hom 'n nuwe gedagte was, dat hy nie eers hoef reg te maak en dan na God toe te kom nie, maar dat jy nou reeds na God kan draai. Dit het nou vir hom nuwe waarde dat die manne sê

hy "loop met stompie, met toorgoed". 'n Voorbeeld daarvan is die feit dat hy nie sy werk verloor het nie, terwyl iemand anders in dieselfde situasie wel sy werk verloor het. Hy weet egter dit is die "grote toorgoed, God self, wat saam met hom loop". Daan se God is die God wat wonders laat gebeur, maar tog is God daar bo, is daar nog 'n afstand wat dit moontlik maak om God maklik eenkant toe kan skuif, soos hy al baie gedoen het. Tydens die tweede gesprek was Daan baie meer positief dat God nou met hom is, dat hy vir God gaan begin leef, God se pad gaan loop, en miskien val die ander dinge langs die pad af.

In die gesprekke het God 'n al belangriker werklikheid vir hom geword:

Gerrit: Wat is die goed wat jy die graagste sal wil hê in jou lewe? Die ding binne in jou waarmee jy deur die lewe sal wil gaan?

Daan: Om my God te dien.

Gerrit: Hoekom wil 'n mens God dien, wat bring dit vir jou, wat kry jy daar uit?

Daan: Jy kry die hiernamaals.

Gerrit: Ja, en terwyl jy nog hier op aarde is, hoe baat jy daarby om skoon te leef, vir God te leef?

Daan: Stilte

Gerrit: Wat werk dit in jou hart?

Daan: Dis lekker om die Here te dien.

Gerrit: Dis lekker om die Here te dien. Is dit amper dieselfde as die woorde soos vrede en geluk?

Daan: Dis reg.

Hierdie nuwe vertelling van sy verhouding met God en hoe dit hom beïnvloed, het dit moontlik gemaak om 'n klomp ander dinge in sy lewe in 'n nuwe lig te sien, as dinge wat bevestig dat God aan sy kant is in sy keuse vir die lewe.

Daan het alreeds sy werk vir 24 jaar behou. Ek het vir hom gevra wat dit vir hom van hom sê. Hy het gemeen dat dit God se genade is, maar hy moet ook sê hy is 'n goeie werker, al is hy onder invloed, hy is betroubaar, hy doen wat van hom gevra word, en hy is gedissiplineerd, altyd betyds by die werk as hy nugter is. Sy vrou staan ook na 19 jaar se getroude lewe nog agter hom, en is bereid om hom voluit te ondersteun. Sy, soos

God, is deel van sy span vir die lewe. Dit sê dat Daan ook die vaardighede besit om 'n verhouding te kan handhaaf en te laat werk, soos volwassenheid en omgee. Dan is daar Daan se suster, 'n vrou wat 'n sterk pad met God loop. Hy het 'n ruk voor hy getroud was by haar gebly, en hy het geweldige respek en waardering vir haar. Hy sien op na haar as 'n rolmodel, iemand wat vir hom 'n verdere motivering is om te kies vir die lewe.

Dat God met hom is sien hy ook in die feit dat hy dit regkry om minder te rook. Dit is baie moeilik, maar hy kry dit soms reg om weg te bly van die plekke waar daar gerook word. God is vir hom ook betrokke deur die tafeltennis wat hy baie geniet. Hy speel al sedert 1994, en het nou eers die golf gelos as gevolg van die 19de putjie. Hy is, ten spyte van net 70% sig in een oog, die beste speler hier in Ramot. Dit is iets wat hom konstruktief besig hou en hy beskou dit as 'n talent wat hy ook wil gebruik tot eer van God. Hy wil dit gebruik as 'n geleentheid om te getuig van die goedheid van God. Hy pas die lesse van tafeltennis ook toe op die spel vir die lewe: Hy moet fiks wees en daarom oefen, wat vir hom oa beteken dat hy weer gaan betrokke raak by die CAB en met God gaan leef deur Bybellees, bid en kerk toe gaan. Trouens, een gevolg van die verandering in sy geloofslawe is die feit dat hy daarna uitsien om weer kerk toe te gaan. Hy sien ook uit na videos Sondagaande. Hy het voorheen daar gesit maar niks het ingegaan nie. Nou sit hy voor, na 'n preek gaan lees hy die hele hoofstuk op sy eie, hy bid, praat met die Here en daar is groter vrede tussen hom en die Here. Soos met tafeltennis moet hy gefokus wees, ten spyte van dinge wat soms sy sig belemmer. Hy moet onthou wie hy is en met watter spel hy besig is, en konsentreer om die regte dinge te doen. Dit vra ook die vermoë om vinnig te kan beweeg, vinnig besluite te kan neem en die vyand altyd 'n bietjie voor te wees.

Hy het ook 'n artikel in die koerant gelees van 'n ds. wat ook HIV Positief is. Die ds. se getuienis het vir hom perspektief gegee, dat dit met enige iemand kan gebeur, hy gebruik sy pille en sy vrou steun hom. Dit laat hom besef dat die lewe kan aangaan. Hy sien nou sommer meer kans om aan die lewe se kant te speel. Die opbouende ondersteuning wat hy hier by Ramot kry, 'n suster wat sonder dat dit nodig is vir hom persoonlik vra hoe dit met hom gaan, help hom baie om te besef dat hy waardevol is en dat hy sê: "ek wil nie doodgaan nie, ek wil lewe".

In die loop van die gesprekke het die veraf onbetrokke God verander in 'n veraf betrokke God wat gehoorsaam moet word. Sy manier van praat oor God het verder verander sodat hy dit nou beleef dat hy in 'n verhouding met God staan, dat God soos 'n Vriend by hom is, en dit maak hom sterk en gee hom vrede.

## **Deelnemer 2: Marleze**

### **Hoe haar God-stories haar self-stories konstrueer.**

Die dominante of hoofstorie wat Marleze oor God het is dat sy kwaad is vir Hom. Voorop is die feit dat sy nagte opreg gebid het dat haar pa moet gesond word, maar dit het toe nie gebeur nie, hy is dood toe sy 21 was. In haar moeilikste tyd het God haar teleurgestel. Sy was baie lief vir haar pa. In die weke wat sy hier is, dink sy haar vervreemding van God het reeds begin met dit wat op 14 jarige ouderdom met haar gebeur het. Sy is verkrag en het vir vier jaar, tot matriek, nooit daaroor gepraat nie. Sy voel haar lewe het soort van vasgesteek op 14, en sy het in baie opsigte aan haar self begin twyfel en begin drugs gebruik. Tot vandag voel sy die effek van die gebeure in haar swak selfbeeld en ongemaklikheid in sosiale situasies. Sy het vroeë begin vra oor waarom God dit toegelaat het, en haar begin onttrek van God. Sy het God 'n laaste kans gegee om Homself te bewys deur haar pa gesond te maak. Haar pa het haar getroos, beskerm en ondersteun, en sy dood was die laaste strooi. Saam met die kwaad vir God gaan ook 'n antagonisme teenoor die kerk, spesifiek die NG Kerk waarin sy 'n klomp skyn raakgesien het.

Sy sê dat sy diep in haar besef dat sy egter nie so wil leef nie, nie hierdie gevoel in haar wil he nie, dat sy dinge "met God wil uitbakei", dat sy Hom nodig het in haar lewe, veral die God wat sy in haar pa leer ken het. Hierdie kwaad wees vir God werk nie vir haar nie, dit help haar nie. Die behoefte aan God was daar, maar sy was teleurgestel. Die groot ding was net dat sy eerlik met God en oor God wil wees, en daarom nie net voorgee alles is reg nie. "Ek het God in my dwelmmiddels gesoek, en hel daaruit gekry". Die feit dat sy hier in Ramot is, maar ook dat sy vrywillig met my kom praat het oor haar geloof, iets waaroor tot haar ma verbaas was, sê vir haar dat sy na iets anders soek.

Sy is seker haar pa sou beslis nie wou gehad het dat sy kwaad vir God moet wees omdat hy dood is nie. Sy sê dat haar pa iets sou gesê het soos: "Wees eerder dankbaar dat jy 'n

pa gehad het vir 21 jaar wat baie ander nie het nie, daarby 'n liefdevolle pa". Sy besef ook dat haar pa ten spyte van krissise in sy eie lewe, tog bly glo het en nie vir God verwyf het nie. Dan is daar haar broers, veral die oudste broer, wie se lewe baie verander het vandat hy 'n paar jaar terug tot bekering gekom het. Sy sien God werk in sy lewe, in sy rustigheid en innerlike kalmte. In die week tussen die twee gesprekke het sy heelwat gedink oor hoe pa sou wou gehad het sy sy dood moes hanteer. Sy sê dat dit die maklikste uitweg was om vir God te blameer. Alles is nog nie wonderlik met God nie, maar sy is nie meer vir Hom kwaad nie. Sy blameer Hom nie en het beter begrip.

Tydens die tweede gesprek het ons gepraat oor haar persepsie van God wat verander het. Sy voel dat die verandering toe te skryf is aan die feit dat sy haar vroeë en vrese op die tafel gesit het en daarvoor "met God baklei het". Sy praat met Hom "soos met 'n ander mens, en sê wat pla, sy huil en skree, lees en bid". Sy kies nou om te glo dat daar 'n doel is met alles wat gebeur, en dat sy eendag sal terugkyk en sê dis hoekom dit met my gebeur het. Sy sien haar pa se dood nou in ander lig, nl. dat daar ook 'n doel aan was, al weet sy nie presies wat dit is nie. Sy weet net sy sou dit nie kon hanteer as hy haar moes sien soos sy nou is nie.

Haar ervaring met haar kinders vir wie sy skoolgehou het, is ook iets wat sy graag naby haar wil hou. Sy het godsdiens met die kinders gehou, en sy het die kinderlike geloof in hulle oë gesien, amper asof sy haar eie geloof in hulle geprojekteer het. Sy sê dit was ongelooflik om geloof weer te kon ervaar, maar dan as buitestaander, deur die kinders. Die vreugde wat sy geput het uit haar omgang met die kinders, is iets wat vir haar teenstrydig is met haar distansiëring van God en haar middelmisbruik.

Sy sê ook dat sy walging voel vir hoe sy nou leef, dat die mens wat sy wil wees en die mens wat sy geword het, wêreld uitmekaar is. Sy is verskriklik skaam om te weet haar pa weet en haar ouer broer weet waar haar lewe nou is. Marleze verstaan ook dat hierdie gevoelens dalk juis vir haar wil se dat sy nie is waar sy eintlik hoort nie, dat sy ander waardes het wat vir haar belangrik is. Sy glo dat daar nog dinge soos eerlikheid, opregtheid, liefde, goedheid, my woord is my eer, in haar is wat net weggeraak het onder 'n drug lewensstyl. Sy wil 'n hoër hand in haar lewe he. Die feit dat sy hier is in Ramot, en hierdie gesprek voer, bevestig dit vir haar.

Sy lees nou stukkies uit Bybel wat 'n nuwe ding is vir haar. Die antwoorde op so baie vrae is daar, en dit waaraan sy behoefte het kry sy ook daar. Die kinders van haar skool het gebel en dit het haar baie ontstel omdat sy skuldig voel omdat sy daar weg is onder hierdie omstandighede, sonder om te groet. Sy het dit uitgehuil en uitbakei in die kamer. Sy het begin beseft hoe wonderlik dit is dat die kinders nog vir haar omgee ten spyte van alles, dat hulle haar nie verkwalik nie en vir haar lief is. Later het sy in Matteus stukkies gelees, en antwoorde gekry op vrae oor vergifenis en kinderlike geloof. Sy het ook begin bid. Sy het die naweek by die huis ook gebid. Haar beste vriendin is vier maande swanger en die baba het moontlik down sindroom – toe het sy gebid, Here asb., 'n hulpkeet. Hulle ken nie vir God nie. Iewers moet God se genade in hulle situasie ingebring word. Toetse wys toe uiteindelik dat die baba nie 'n down sindroom is nie.

Gerrit: Waar het jy geleer van God se genade?

Marleze: Ek weet nie. My ouma en my ma het altyd gepraat van God se genade, en dit is in die huis maar gebruik soos asb en dankie. Eerste keer in 10, 14 jaar dat ek weer die woord gebruik. Ek is nie meer afsydig nie. Daar is 'n rustigheid by my. Dinge wat my andersins sou ontstel, wat iemand sou of vra of sê, nou 'n rustige aanvaarding, geduld wat nie vantevore gehad het nie. Ek was altyd kort van draad. Ek dink dis omdat ek eerlik was oor hoe ek voel oor God, "face your fears", my vrae en vrese op tafel te sit. Om van my frustrasie ontslae te raak, my raas te raas en my skree te skree, dit het rustigheid en kalmte gebring. Dis lekker hierdie rustigheid, teenoor die gevoel dat ek in lang donker straat af stap en weet nie wat om volgende hoek gaan uitkom nie. Stap nog steeds in straat af, in die donker, maar ek het 'n flits by my, ek het 'n gerustheid wat nie voorheen gehad het nie. Dis lekker. Ek hoef nie meer weg te hardloop vir goed waarvoor ek bang is nie.

Alles in verband met haar koms vir rehabilitasie was negatief : sy moes die werk los, vriende los, blyplek los, alles was net veranderings. Dit is vir haar verskriklik. Sy het verontreg gevoel. Gister het sy 'n prent geteken van die son; daar is egter wolke agter. Sy sien nog nie net die son nie, die wolke is ook nog daar, maar daar is positiewe dinge, daar is 'n doel waarom dinge so gebeur het. Daar is dinge wat moet verander, sy moet verantwoordelikheid vir haar lewe aanvaar. Sy sien lig.



Haar ervaring met God was moontlik in konflik met 'n storie wat sy van God gehad het as die goehartige God wat alles vooruit weet en niks slegs oor 'n mens se pad sal laat kom nie. In die gesprekke is stories oor God ontwikkel wat meer aspekte van haar ervarings kan akkomodeer. Niks is afgesluit en finaal nie, maar daar is 'n soeke na ryker beskrywings van God –stories en self-stories vanuit die basiese ervaring dat God dit lig maak in die donkerte, dat sy hierdie God en sy genade nodig het in haar lewe. God vat ons nie noodwendig uit die wêreld nie, maar wil in hierdie wêreld met al sy hartseer en pyn vir ons hier wees. Waar sy altyd die "baba" in die huis was wat verwag het dat ander na haar moet omsien, het sy nou beter insig in haarself, en kan sy nou hoopvol self verantwoordelikheid aanvaar vir haar verlede en vir haar toekoms. Sy is besig om die "bakstene" wat sy self tussen haar en God gepak het, een vir een los te maak.

Sy vertel met 'n glinstering in haar oë van haar planne om die kantlyn stories van die beleving van haarself in haar betrokkenheid by kinders te laat herleef. Alhoewel sy meer rustigheid en pespektief het, 'n meer die kinderlike "let go let God" houding, wil sy die beeld van die donker gang mettertyd laat verdwyn deur betrokke te raak by 'n plek soos die Danone kinderhuise. Sy wil iets doen, iets gee, sonder om terug te verwag.

### **Deelnemer 3: Francois**

#### **Hoe sy God-stories sy self-stories konstrueer.**

Hy is 'n 33 jarige jongman met 'n alkohol probleem. Hy koppel sy gedagtes aan die 16e Mei ('n paar weke voor die gesprekke) as die begin van die stap op 'n nuwe pad. Op skool in NG kerk in Worcester opgegroeï maar dit nooit ernstig opgeneem nie. Hy het dit wel geniet om van st. 8 tot matriek elke Donderdagaand na 'n Bybelstudiegroep van Juf. Stone, die Afrikaanse onderwyseres, te gaan, dit was vir hom goed om die regte ding te doen. St. 8 was ook dieselfde jaar wat hy die eerste keer "hardehout" begin gebruik het, die twee lyne in sy lewe het hier saam geloop, en na skool het die godsdienstige dinge weggeval en net die drank oorgebly.

Deur die jare het hy God se roep gehoor, maar nie geantwoord nie. Sy geloof is nou vir hom belangrik, dit staan vir hom uit, veral omdat daar 'n klomp dinge gebeur het wat vir hom soos 'n "puzzle" inmekaar pas. Dit het hom by 'n punt gebring waar hy God se roep

kon hoor: "God het my kom haal deur die slegte dinge wat met die mense om my gebeur het".

Hy het by sy werk, in die polisie, 'n ultimatum gekry wat sy werk in gevaar stel. Sy verhouding met sy meisie het begin vou. Die erkenning van die probleem en die behandeling wat hy nou deurgaans het ook nuwe moontlikhede oopgemaak vir die verhouding met sy meisie. Sy ma se been is geamputeer agv diabetes, en in sy woorde, het dit hom oormatig laat drink. Hy meen dit het hom baie depressief gemaak, soveel so dat hy besluit het die drinkery is klaar. Hy het besef hy sal van nou af sy ma moet versorg, en daarom moet sy lewe reg wees. Sy pa se dood is ook vir hom erg omdat hy altyd gehoop het dat hy en sy pa weer bymekaar sal wees, dat hy eendag sy kinders vir sy pa sal kan wys; al die hoop is afgesny. Hy het nooit 'n vaderfiguur in sy lewe gehad nie. Sy pa was 30 jaar gelede ook hier. Sy vriend se vrou is dood op 24 Mei 2004 aan leukemia, en op 24 Mei 2005 bring sy vriend hom hier na Ramot toe. Dié datums wat ooreenstem, en sy pa wat hier was, is nie vir hom toevallig nie. Hy glo dat hy hier moet wees vir behandeling. Verder het hy ook begin voel hoe sy liggaam begin ingee, hoe sy organe doodgaan.

Francois ervaar God se werk dus in die sameloop van omstandighede, dit is 'n God wat direk gemoeid is met die gewone dinge wat elke dag kan gebeur. Hy het begin om dinge te interpreteer as deel van die "puzzle" wat God besig is om inmekaar te pas. Daarom is hy dan ook voortdurend met praktiese planne van aksie besig, soekend daarna om te bou op die dinge wat tot sy beskikking is in die gewone loop van die lewe as gelowige. Hy besef dat hy maklik impulsief optree, maar hy glo dat hy hierdie nuwe pad sonder alkohol en saam met God sal kan volhou. Hy het nou, volgens hom, 'n sterk wilskrag en meer strategieë, asook bronne, beskikbaar om die duiwel tee te staan en reg te leef. Hy weet hy sal nie op sy eie die pad kan loop nie, maar het sy meisie, sy familie en God nodig. Hy leer God beter ken deur kerk toe te gaan, deur die Bybel te lees, en ook 'n dagboek van Solly Osroveh te lees wat hy by Kobus gekry het. Hy raak honger vir meer, en dit is vir hom 'n nuwe ervaring. Die Bybelstudie wat hy saam met Ds. Theron gedoen het, was vir hom baie spesiaal, omdat hy angstig is om meer van God te leer.

Gerrit: Brei 'n bietjie uit op die gedagte dat jy nuwe kennis het, dat jy beter weet, meer wysheid het as wat jy voorheen gehad het?

Francois: Ek moet nooit twyfel aan my Here nie. Kyk wat die krag van Here gedoen het tot vandag, waar ek is vandag. Niks of niemand kon my help om tot hier te kom nie. Onthou: dit was nie heeltemal my eie besluit om hiernatoe te kom nie. God het vir my gesê om te kom. Daar is krag. Wat nog anders is, dat Here vir my liefde gegee het op plekke waar vyandskap was. Ek en my suster is nou vriende, daar is ook 'n nuwe verhouding met my ma; sy het openlik gehuil op die telefoon. toe ek gesê het ek voel ek groei geestelik. Daar is krag en liefde. Liefde is 'n groot krag. En die manier waarop ek na die Bybel toe kom en dit nie net oopmaak en lees nie, maar probeer verstaan.

Hy leer ook om sy "bondeltjie" (probleme) vir die Here te gee. 'n Tannie wat die naweek by die huis sy ma versorg het dit vir hom gese, en hy kry dit reg. Nog die vorige aand was daar iets wat by huis gedoen moes gewees het, en hy het gevra : "Hoekom worry?" Hy het dit vir God gegee. Hy het nou ook so gegroei dat hy dinge nie net vaagweg oorgee sonder om te weet wat hy doen nie. Hy is baie meer spesifiek in wat hy van God vra, en hy weet wat dit is wat hy verwag.

Hy het in die polisiekollege geleer om gedissiplineerd te wees en hy kan daardie kennis nou gebruik in sy lewe, deur te oefen, reg te eet, gesond te leef en sy brein helder te hou. Hy is van voorneme om in Worcester weer na 'n Bybelstudiegroep te gaan soek en by die CAD in te skakel om so weer ander te help.

Na 'n preek waarna hy oor die radio geluister het, weet hy dat sy verhouding met God, en met sy naaste, in sy geval sy meisie, nooit perfek kan wees nie, want niks is volmaak nie. Hy sal altyd 'n sondaar bly. Hy kan nou met homself saamleef en hoef nie op enige manier na ander se aanvaarding te soek nie. God en sy meisie is egter vir hom 'n "plek van veiligheid". Hy is veilig by God, en by sy meisie. Hy voel nie veilig by drank nie. Hy wil ook nie in toekoms naby dit veilig voel nie.

Gerrit: Watse gevoel ervaar jy as jy sê dat God 'n plek van veiligheid is?

Francois: As daar gesinsgeweld is, word iemand in 'n plek van veiligheid geplaas. Vir my is dit 'n plek waar die duiwel my nie kan bykom nie. Hy het nie 'n kans om naby my te kom nie. Die duiwel kom deur drank na my toe.

Gerrit: Hoekom het die duiwel nie daar 'n kans nie, wat is op hierdie plek by God wat nie op 'n ander plek is nie?.

Francois: Ek glo dat die Satan op geen manier naby die krag van ons Hemelse Vader kom nie. Ek is fondasie -vas, volkome veilig.

Francois sien ook sy meisie as 'n "plek van veiligheid", en dit beteken vir hom dat sy meisie 'n instrument in die Here se hande is om vir hom so plek te wees:

Gerrit: Wat beteken dit? Wat bedoel jy daarmee sy?....wat doen sy?

Francois: Ons is besig om na videos te kyk oor "baby and the caretaker", ens.

(Sinspeel op 'n eksplorering van 'n verhouding van afhanklikheid)

Gerrit: Sy.....?

Francois: Dis 'n geestelike ding. Sy is in my lewe met die doel om my op die regte pad te hou, maar ook dat ek iets vir haar wil beteken. 'n Verhouding is 'n tweerigtingsaak.

Ek het geskrik oor die videos hieroor; ek wil 'n eerlike medepartner in hierdie verhouding wees.

Gerrit: Wat doen sy om 'n instrument te wees?

Francois: Sy skel my, sy sê wat sy van my verwag. Sy probeer my trek na die kerk.

Sy het ook my "verkeerde drinkmaatjies" soos ek hulle noem, aangevat om uit my pad te bly omdat hulle my vernietig. Sy het my ook gestraf: ek moet wegbly van haar af as ek dronk is, ek kan haar dan nie sien nie. Behalwe die straf is daar by haar ook 'n element van vrees, ek het duiwel geraak by inname van drank. Ek en drank is soos vuur en petrol. Verder ondersteun sy my met probleme by die huis, soos om na my ma te kyk as ek weg is.

Dit beteken vir Francois baie dat sy meisie hom vertrou ten opsigte van ander verhoudings. Hy glo dat sy die teenvoeter is vir sy neiging om te selfstandig en onafhanklik te wil wees. Sy beheer nou hulle geldsake, en dit bring vir hulle altwee groter gemoedsrus.

Noudat hy op God se roepstem gereageer het, voel dit of 'n berg van hom af is. Hy wil nou op homself toepas wat Ds. Roux van Worcester gesê het toe hy nog op skool was,

nl. dat 'n mens na jou bekering nie weer kan terugval nie, dis soos 'n "shoprite hekkie" wat net eenkant toe kan draai. Hy weet hy is gered, hy is st. 8 deur die hekkie, en dit beteken onder ander vir hom dat hy nie meer bang is nie. Vir hom is dit net eenkant toe, miskien met die roeping om eendag vir Hom te getuig, of ander mense met alkohol probleme te help. Vanuit die "embrio" van hierdie nuwe begin wat hy maak, het hy die ondersteuning van God in die bou van die "puzzle" van sy eie lewe.

#### **Deelnemer 4: Joseph**

##### **Hoe sy God-stories sy self-stories konstrueer.**

Joseph is 'n afgetrede man met 'n drankprobleem. Hy is getroud en het grootgeword as 'n gelowige, trouens, hy was 'n "altar boy" in die Rooms Katolieke kerk. Sy verhouding met God is die krag in sy lewe en verrykend vir die met wie hy daarvoor praat. Dat hy op 16 jaar begin drink het, was, volgens hom, omdat dit 'n visserman se "ambag" is om te drink. Sy drinkery was al meer en meer, maar hy het altyd steeds gebid. Sy 30 jaar van soberheid vertel van kennis en vaardighede waarvoor mens net respek kan hê.

Ons het verder hieroor gesprek gevoer, veral hoe hy dit kon regkry om vir 30 jaar sober te bly.

Hy vertel van een Sondag, 17 Mei, kan nie onthou watter jaar nie, het hy in die kerk gesit en ervaar dat die ds. vir hom preek. Hy was half dronk en is huistoe, ontstel dat die ds., wat hom glad nie ken nie, so van sy goed kon praat. By die huis het hy dronk op die bed gelê. Skielik het hy 3 kloppe gehoor en 'n helder spierwit lig gesien, met 'n stem wat sê: Besluit nou of jy wil drink of nie. As jy wil ophou, drink nou die laaste keer. Hy het toe die laaste drank by die sjebeen gaan koop. Sy vrou het gelag en gesê sy eet haar hoed op as hy nie weer drink nie. Hy het toe nie weer daarna gedrink nie. Hy het besef dit was God wat met hom gepraat het, ook in die kerk. Hierdie ervaring van God het hom vir jare gedra en krag gegee. Hy is uit 'n sinkhuis na 'n groot huis met 3 slaapkamers, 2 badkamers, voorkamer, kombuis, eetkamer, groot grond, ens., het 'n motor kontant gekoop, en dit alles is vir hom bevestiging van God se sorg toe Hy God eerste gesoek het. Alles is hom bygevoeg. Hy was toe ook aktief in die kerk en deel van "prayer groups". Hy vertel ook van besondere gawes wat die Gees in hom gewerk het, bv. toe hulle kind tamatierooi van koors was, en hy en sy vrou met handoplegging vir die kind gebid het, en binne 'n halfuur was die kind gesond.

'n Belangrike vertrekpunt in sy godsdiens is die stukkie in Mat 6:3 wat sê dat ons eers die koninkryk van God en sy dinge moet soek, dan sal al die ander dinge vir ons bygevoeg word. Joseph se prentjie van God is sterk gekoppel aan hierdie gedagte van God se materiele versorging as mens Hom eerste stel. Toe hy teruggeval het, het hy juis hierdie dinge verloor. God het hom 30 jaar gedra, en toe hy sy rug op God draai, loop alles skeef: "automatically life fall apart".

Nou het hy weer kontrole verloor. Hy het begin stress ervaar by sy werk, en ook depressief geraak omdat hy sy werk bedank het. Hy het so maand en twee weke gelede tot breekpunt gekom met probleme in huis. Sy seun, wat 33 is en nog by hulle bly, het die meeste probleme veroorsaak. Hy drink en rook en vang katterkwaad aan. Dit lei tot 'n geraas en 'n geskreeu. Joseph is nou in Ramot want hy wil sy drinkery los en weer reg leef. Hy is bang hy ry iemand dood of beland in die tronk.

Gerrit: Hoe dink jy, dink God oor jou, nou dat jy weer te veel gedrink het?

Joseph: Die God wat ek ken is 'n God wat nie kwaad is vir 'n mens nie, al is jy hoe groot sonbaar. Hy is vir almal ewe lief. Hy is altyd daar om te help. Jy moet net 'n tree na hom toe gee.

Daarom aanvaar hy dat God ook nou vir hom hierdeur sal dra. Hy wil God weer eerste soek. In hierdie tye van swaarkry lyk dit vir hom of die Here hom verlaat het, dan onthou hy die prent in die portaal by die voordeur, gemaak van glas en "chocolate" papier wat vertel van "Footprints on the beach". Dit is 'n prentjie van een ry spore in moeilike tye wat beteken dat God hom gedra het toe dit gelyk het of hy alleen is.

Gerrit: Watter praktiese goed sal jy doen om nie weer te drink nie?

Joseph: Ek het nie lus vir drank nie, wil nie, want ek ken nou die konsekwensies daarvan. In 30 jaar wat ek nie gedrink het nie, het ek 'n goeie lewe gehad. Drank breek af. Nou het stress, depressie, hand uit geruk, te veel geraak.

Gerrit: Wat gaan jy doen as jy weer in so situasie beland soos depressie of as jy stress ervaar?

Joseph: Ek het klaar met my vrou sit gemaak, my seun sit gemaak, en vir hulle verduidelik hoe ek weer beheer van my huis gaan oorneem as ek terug

is. Behalwe dat ek besluite geneem het tov die probleme by die huis, dink ek ook aan die slegte gevolge daarvan as ek drink.

Gerrit: Sal geloof jou ook help?

Joseph: Niks is moontlik sonder God nie. As God nie eerste kom nie, gaan niks gebeur nie.

Sy vrou en sy seun weet waar hulle staan. Sy seun het nou goeie werk, en hy het reeds gewys dat hy verander het deur hom hier te besoek in Ramot, en hom te verras met die konkreet blad wat hy by die huis se oprit gegooi het. Die seun gedra hom tans goed, en dit lyk of hy dankbaar is.

Sedert hy hierdie keer besluit het om te rehabiliteer, is hy nader aan God, bid hy gereeld elke aand, praat met God en lees 'n geestelike boek. Die Bybelstudie geniet hy baie omdat dit vir hom groter agtergrond van die prentjie gee. Soos dat die blinde man in Mattheus, en Johannes se man langs die straat eintlik dieselfde ding wil sê, nl. dat ons ons medemens moet liefhê, maak nie saak hoe hy lyk of wat hy is nie. Almal is gemaak volgens Sy gelykenis. Dit is nie vir ons om ander te oordeel nie. Ons moenie direk probeer om iemand te bekeer nie. Ons moet eerder versorg en help, en so kan ons 'n mens se siel vir die Here wen. Jesus het meer met die sondaars, swakkes en armes gemeng, nie eintlik met die rykes en hooggeleerdes nie. Hy wil vir Kobus vra waar hy die Bybelstudie boek gekoop het, sodat hy sy familie ook betrokke kan kry by Bybelstudie by die huis. Hierdie God sal hom ook deur hierdie "dippie" dra, Hierdie God met wie Hy kan praat soos met 'n Vader. Hy luister as 'n mens praat.

Joseph sien ook nou daarna uit om by 'n priester te gaan bieg volgens hulle kerk se gebruik. Hy moet wag totdat daar weer 'n priester kom. Om te bieg is vir hom iets wat hy maklik doen, en dit is vir hom eintlik 'n indirekte manier om met God self te praat. Die bieg bring verligting, dit neem die drukking van die sonde weg, 'n mens voel dan meer vreedsaam. Bieg maak dit moontlik om weer van vooraf te kan begin en te kan aangaan met jou nuwe lewe. Dan kan hy ook begin Nagmaal gebruik. Hierdie godsdienstige rituele, wat ook kerkbesoek, gebedsbyeenkomste, huisgodsdienst, ens. insluit, is 'n betekenisvolle deel van Joseph se God-storie. Dit bring God op 'n liggaamlike wyse in die bestaan van elke dag in.

Joseph het oor jare baie ervaring en kennisse opgedoen oor God wat maak dat hy met groot vertroue en gemaklik oor God praat en dat God die belangrikste konstante faktor in sy lewe is wat aan hom tog 'n vreemde rustigheid gee, ten spyte daarvan dat hy soms met angstigheid sukkel. Die storie van Joseph se God skep ook die indruk dat hierdie God heel gemaklik met Joseph is, al het hy soms die rol van sondebok op hom geneem. Net soos wat Joseph na sy aftrede allerhande gereedskap gekoop het om sy eie besigheid mee te begin, het hy ook heelwat gereedskap om mee te gaan werk aan sy lewe. Vir Joseph is sy geloof en kerklike meeleving sy belangrikste hulpmiddels.

Die huis wat hy vroeër jare gekoop het was vir hom God se versorging. Hy moet nou weer 'n huis gaan bou, die huis van sy lewe. Die Here sal ook help om hierdie nuwe huis van sy lewe te bou. Die huis moet 'n gebedskamer hê waar hy God kan ontmoet, 'n sitkamer waar hy kontak met die wêreld maak, kombuis waar hy liggaamlik versorg word en warmte van God en gesin ervaar, ens. Die fondament is klaar daar, hy moet net bou.

## **Deelnemer 5: Harriet**

### **Hoe haar God-stories haar self-stories konstrueer.**

Harriet is 'n middeljarige getroude vrou en het die afgelope 2 jaar 'n probleem met alkohol ontwikkel. Slegte dinge het die afgelope 2 jaar met hulle gebeur. Een van die dinge wat vir hulle gesin 'n probleem is, is dat hulle 'n 33 jarige bringestremde seun het. Hy kom met niemand oor die weg nie, neem die huishouding oor en het aggressiewe neigings begin toon. Sy het begin opstandig raak en hulle het nie 'n sosiale lewe nie. Haar jonger getroude seun het selfs weggetrek as gevolg van die gestremde seun en met die kleinkind weg het Harriet se probleem net vererger. Daar is nou 'n moontlikheid dat die seun na 'n versorgingsplek sal kan gaan. Sy het self besluit om vir rehabilitasie te kom omdat die alkohol haar baas geraak het.

Harriet loop reeds lewenslank 'n pad met die Here. Selfs in die tyd waarin die alkohol haar lewe in beslag geneem het, het sy nog steeds "Bybel gelees, gebed en nie gevloek nie". Tans ervaar sy dat daar 'n "muur" tussen haar en God is, 'n muur wat sy self gebou het deur haar verslawingsprobleem. Sy is baie bewus van haar sondes en foute met die val in drank. Sy wil soos Adam en Eva wegkruip. Sy voel sy het haar man en God



terleurgestel. Sy het baie met die Here geworstel voor sy hiernatoe gekom het, en sy praat baie met Hom. Sy voel tog dat die muur besig is om al dunner te word. In ons gesprek oor hoe hierdie muur heeltemal kan verdwyn, het sy drie stories vertel wat haar aanmoedig om nader aan God te kom.

Die eerste storie is van die les in die Sondagskool wat 'n indruk op haar gemaak het. Vuil water in 'n glasier het helder geword sodra die rooi vloeistof in 'n ander glasier, wat Jesus se bloed voorstel, daarin gegooi word. Sy het met hierdie beeld in gedagte die vuil glasier van haar lewe ook soos in die visuele voorstelling vir die Here gegee om skoon te maak. Die tweede storie is 'n ervaring van God se vergifnis wat sy daadwerklik gevoel het toe sy betrokke geraak het by 'n onenigheid tussen haar susters. Sy het ernstig om vergifnis gevra, haar aandeel bely en sy het vrede gekry, 'n totale kalmte wat van haar besit geneem het. Sy voel dat sy nou weet wat vergifnis is, dat dit moontlik is om vergifnis te kan ervaar en dat sy daarna kan uitsien.

'n Derde storie is van die Here se hulp terwyl sy in nood was. Sy was irrasioneel vreesbevange voor 'n groot operasie. Sy het haar ast'ware voorberei vir die einde. Sy was moeg baklei. Op 'n stadium het sy egter haar liggaam en emosies oorgegee aan God, en sy het 'n prentjie van God gesien soos in 'n kinderbybel. Sy het skielik geweet dit sal goed gaan. 'n Onbeskryflike gemoedsrus het deur haar gespoel. Hierdie ervarings van God het die effek dat sy geen twyfel het aan God se werklike betrokkenheid by haar lewe nie. Sy praat spontaan met God, hardop of sag, sy ervaar dat God met haar terugpraat, en ervaar God se teenwoordigheid deur 'n warm gevoel in haar hart of deur gedagtes wat by haar opkom.

Die uitdaging wat vir Harriet voorlê, is om God se vergifnis te aanvaar te midde van haar gevoelens van onwaardigheid, en om haarself te vergewe. Sy glo God vergewe op grond van wat Jesus aan die kruis vir ons gedoen het. Omdat die skuldgevoel so groot is asgevolg van die baie beloftes wat verbreek is, aanvaar sy dat dit tyd sal neem. Sy glo egter dat God verstaan, en hierdie hele situasie gebruik om haar weer terug te bring na waar sy was. "Die smal paadjie is so lekker. Ek wil weer so lewe hê".

Harriet het die naweek wat sy huistoe is, 'n besondere ervaring met God gehad. Sy en haar man en seun het met haar suster en haar man 'n staproete gaan stap. Sy het op 'n stadium 'n kans gekry om alleen te wees op 'n heuweltjie, waar sy besluit het om

haarself te vergewe. Later in die groep is 'n kringetjie gevorm waain sy God se aanvaarding en liefde tasbaar gevoel het. Daar het ook 'n veertjie by haar kom val, wat sy as 'n teken van God se betrokkenheid by haar sien. Sy sê dat dit voel of die muur tussen haar en God weg is. Sy is veral dankbaar vir die verhouding met haar suster wat oopgegaan het en wat vir haar 'n bevestiging van God se pad met haar is. Sy dink God is trots op haar vir die pad wat sy tot hiertoe geloop het. Sy voel al meer soos die ou Harriet, wat "uit haar kassie kom". Sy wil nou graag by meer dinge betrokke raak, soos die Sondagskool of kinderkrans, of om met ou mense te werk. Sy verstaan dit so dat ander dinge nou die plek moet inneem wat alkohol vooreen gevul het. Harrit is baie oortuig van die feit dat God 'n groot rol speel in die soort verandering wat sy in haar lewe ervaar. Sy voel of sy God se hand kan vat, so naby is Hy aan haar.

### **Deelnemer 6: Hannes**

#### **Hoe sy God-stories sy self-stories konstrueer.**

Hannes het 'n drankprobleem en is tien jaar gelede geskei. Hy het tans 'n meisie met wie hy hoop om te trou. Daar is twee dinge wat saam met die drankgebruik gaan wat deel van 'n lewensstyl is wat hy wil agterlaat. Die een is dat hy ly aan stress, en die ander is dat die alkohol hom onrustig maak sodat hy agter vrouens aanry, meisies opsoek en uitslaap.

Hannes is 'n mens in wie se lewe geloof nog altyd 'n groot rol gespeel het. Sy pa was 'n "priest", en hy het die droom om self nog eendag 'n "priest" te word. In die gesprek oor God se betrokkenheid in sy lewe, vertel hy die storie van toe hy nog 'n polisieman was. Vier booswigte wou hom doodmaak. Hy was vassekeer, en hy was dronk. Hy het skielik die idee gekry om soos 'n geweer te maak: "ba, ba, ba!". Die boewe het geskrik en hom so 'n kans gegee om weg te kom. Hy glo dat dit God is wat hom bewaar het en sy lewe gespaar het. Hierdie gebeurtenis sê vir hom dat God 'n mens in die holte van Sy hand hou. Hy bepaal jou lewe. Dit is so dat daar 2 "wille" in 'n mens is, jou menslike wil en God se wil, bv God sal wil hê hy moet kerk toe gaan, terwyl hy allerhande verskonings het om nie te gaan nie. Hy kies egter om God se wil te doen, dat God se wil al groter word en sy wil al kleiner, en hy glo dat God hom ook sal help om hierdie pad te loop om los te kom van die verslawing.

Hannes glo dat God hom om 'n rede gespaar het, dat God 'n doel met sy lewe het en hom wil gebruik. Hy weet dit, want hy kan self getuig van hoe God hom gebruik as hy nugter is. Dan is hy 'n bate vir die samelewing, 'n goeie onderwyser, betrokke by baie dinge in die skool, talentvol en beginselvas. Hy meld dat die Here self ook 'n onderwyser was en dit laat hom goed voel oor homself.

God se vergifnis is iets wat vir hom 'n werklikheid is wat maklik kom. Hy ken die storie van die vrou wat owerspel gepleeg het in detail, hoe Jesus uiteindelik vir haar gesê het dat hy haar vergewe, maar dan moet sy nie verder sondig nie. Sy ervaring van vergifnis spruit ook uit die feit dat hy gereeld die "avondmaal" gebruik, wat 'n teken is van God se vergifnis. Die sakrament gee aan hom elke keer die ervaring dat God aanhou vergewe. God is juis besorg oor die een wat siek is, en nie oor die wat gesond is nie.

Hannes ervaar God se teenwoordigheid in sy lewe nie dat God daarbo, ver is nie. Die hemel is maar net 'n aardrykskundige beskrywing. God is hier in ons, in hom. Hy ervaar God se teenwoordigheid veral in sy denke, in sy verstand, dat God hom lei om reg en helder te dink. Dit staan teenoor die alkohol wat sy oordeel aantast en tot 'n lewensstyl lei wat hy wil agterlaat, die lewe van die ou Hannes. Dit sluit vir hom aan by die oproep om dronk te word van die Gees en nie van wyn nie. Hy wil graag in God se oë 'n nederig mens wees, soos Jesus wat in 'n stal gebore is. Juis daarin lê 'n mens se grootheid.

Die naweek wat Hannes uit was, was dit vir hom moeilik om omring te wees van vriende wat drink. Waar hy bly, drink almal, ook sy suster en haar kêrel. Hy was bang vir die alkohol. Gebed het hom deurgedra. In gebed sê mens nie vir God nie, jy vra vir Hom. Hy glo dat 'n mens egter nie net moet bid nie, maar ook jou kant moet bring. Soos 'n mier wat altyd werksaam is, so moet 'n mens jou deel doen. Aan die einde sal jy jou beloning kry, want die arbeider is sy loon werd. Daarby kom ook die feit dat God mense oor jou pad stuur om jou te help op die regte pad, vandaar die uitdrukking, "deur die mens, vir die mens".

Hannes besef daarom dat hy op die langer termyn sy eie huis sal moet kry, en hy hoop ook om weer te trou en dat God hom sal gebruik. 'n Mens kan net in 'n amp dien as jy getroud is. Vir hom is die natuur 'n skaduwee van die Gees, die Gees en die natuur loop saam, waarmee hy bedoel dat God sy natuurlike behoeftes ken, en dat die legkaart van

sy lewe al meer inmekaar sal pas. Hy wil God se wil groter maak in sy lewe deur die smal weg te loop, deur sy betrokkenheid by die getuienisaande waar hulle huise "gaan oopmaak vir die Here", asook by toneelstukke wat hulle eenmaal per maand by die kerk opvoer wat hy baie geniet. Wat nou in sy guns tel, is dat hy nie huweliksprobleme het nie, en hy speel sokker en draf lang afstande om die stress te help oorkom. Hy is gemotiveerd om sy pligte na te kom.

## **Deelnemer 7: Frik**

### **Hoe sy God-stories sy self-stories konstrueer.**

Frik is 31 jaar oud en getroud met drie kinders. Hy is verslaaf aan alkohol, dagga en pynpille. Frik het baie swaar grootgeword. Hy het die gevoel dat sy kinderjare van hom weggevat is. Sy pa en ma was volslae alkoholiste, en sy ma is vroeg dood. Hy rook dagga al vandat hy 12 jaar oud is.

Tog glo Frik in God en is hy oortuig dat die feit dat hy vandag is waar hy is, anders as van sy maats wat al dood of in die tronk is, daarvan getuig dat God hom tot hiertoe gebring het. Hy het 'n werk, asook 'n vrou en drie kinders vir wie hy baie lief is. In die lig van sy kinderjare wil 'n mens vra waar sy geloof vandaan kom?

Volgens Frik se pa en sy suster het hy polio gehad toe hy klein was, en hy het wonderbaalik weer begin loop. Hy kan dit nie self onthou nie, maar sê dat as dit so was, het 'n wonderwerk gebeur. Frik gee heelwat waarde aan hierdie storie, want dit het in hom die oortuiging laat ontwikkel dat sy lewe 'n doel het, dat hy herstel het omdat sy lewe betekenis vir God het. Op hierdie stadium is hy nog nie seker wat die doel is nie, hy moet nog agterkom wat dit is. Hy is wel seker daarvan dat hy wil sorg dat sy kinders nie soos hy word nie. Daarvoor het hulle 'n goeie pa nodig, en wil hy hulle by 'n kerk laat inskakel om hulle bloot te stel aan ander maniere van lewe wat hy nie as kind gehad het nie. Hy het ook die gevoel dat die Here hom dalk wil gebruik om ander kinders in moeilike omstandighede te help om die kinderlewe te hê wat hy nie gehad het nie. Hy het al tentatiewe gesprekke met 'n swaer van hom hieroor gehad. Sy swaer het egter self die pad byster geraak, en dalk is dit sy doel om hom weer op die spoor te help. Dan is daar ook 'n vriend van hom wie se kind 'n siekte het wat hom op 'n vroeë ouderdom kan laat sterf. Dit kan dalk die doel van sy lewe wees, om die pa in hierdie tyd by te staan.

'n Tweede storie wat vertel van waar sy geloof vandaan kom, is van die tyd in die "reformatory" skool in Rustenburg. Daar is hy gedwing om kerk toe te gaan. As jy die week aan sekere vereistes voldoen het, kon jy na die dorp se kerk toe gaan, so nie moes jy na die kerk op die terrein gaan. Al was dit in sulke gedwonge omstandighede, voel Frik vandag dat hy baie van God geleer het in daardie tyd en dat dit bygedra het tot die feit dat hy 'n gelowige is.

'n Derde storielyn wat deur sy lewe loop wat vertel van waar sy geloof vandaan kom, is die van gebedsbeantwoording. Hy was baie keer in situasies waar hy gebid het vir uitkoms, en dan het dit gekom. Meestal was dit dinge wat hy oor homself gebring het, maar hy sou in nog baie groter moeilikheid gekom het as daar nie uitkoms was nie. Hy verstaan dit so dat mens God nie maar net kan gebruik as 'n hulp in nood nie. Tog was daar sulke situasies. Hy het eenkeer daggageld van sy pa gesteel, en sy pa sou hom sekerlik doodgeslaan het as hy hom uitvang. Frik het gebid, en sy pa het nie in die skoolboek gekyk waarin die geld weggesteek was nie, wel in al die ander boeke. Nog 'n voorbeeld van gebedsverhoring is toe een van sy kinders siek was. Die kind moes gereeld hospitaal toe gevat word, maar die doktors kon nie vasstel wat die fout is nie. Eendag het die dominee vir die kind gebid, en net daarna kon hulle 'n diagnose van die siekte maak. Dan was daar ook nog gebedsverhoring met sy opname in Ramot. Toe hy opgeneem is, was hy bang dat hy nie sonder die middele, die drank en die dagga, sal kan klaarkom nie. Hy het gebid, en God het hom gehelp om nou reeds 16 dae sonder dit te kan bly.

Frik het ook 'n God-storie vertel wat ambivalente gevoelens oor geloof by hom wakker hou. Hy het in sy lewe agtergekom dat as hy "te gelowig raak", as hy gereeld kerk toe gaan, begin dinge in sy lewe skeefloop, soos bv. dat hy finansieel vasbrand en die verhoudings in sy lewe versleg. Sodra hy ophou kerk toe gaan, gaan dinge weer beter. Daarby is daar ook nog twee ander faktore wat sy oorgawe aan God en kerklike meelewing terughou. Die een is dat hy 'n wantroue in mense het. Hy het ervaring van "valse profete", van skynheiligheid. Die ander faktor is dat hy bang is dat sy geloof "getoets" gaan word of dat God of die duiwel eise aan hom kan stel. Sy grootste vrees is dat hy sy vrou en kinders kan verloor. Dit is 'n "toets" wat hy nie bereid is om deur te gaan nie.

Ten spyte van hierdie "nee" gevoelens, glo Frik tog dat hy God nodig het. Sy God-stories het in hom 'n vertrouwe in God laat groei. Hy aanvaar dat God sy beste belange in die oog het en dat God hom help in alles in sy lewe, dat God hom ook sal help om die afhanklikheidsprobleem te oorkom. Slegte versoekings en slegte bedoelings kom van die duiwel af, God wil nie skade aan ons doen nie. Hy het begin om van positiewe ervarings te vertel wat hy gehad het by die gemeente wat hulle die laaste paar keer besoek het, nl. dat niemand daar belangriker as 'n ander is nie, en dat menslike dinge ondergeskik aan God se wil is, gedemonstreer deur die dominee deur op sy baadjie te trap. Na 'n teleurstellende gesprek met sy vrou die vorige aand, het hy sy toevlug tot Bybellees en bid geneem om hom weer op te help, en dit het gewerk. Die manier waarop God 'n mens verander, is deurdat jy self jou deel moet doen. Jy kan nie net sit en wag nie. Soos hy sê: "Dit vat tyd, maar jy kom daaruit".

### **Deelnemer 8: Gilbert**

#### **Hoe sy God-stories sy self-stories konstrueer.**

Gilbert drink reeds van kleins af, maar het die laaste 6 jaar crack cocaine gebruik, en alhoewel daar tye was wat hy dit kon beheer, het hy die laaste jare totaal beheer daarvoor verloor. Hy noem dit 'n "passionate love affair" wat hy met cocaine gehad het. Sy ouers het hom as 'n gelowige grootgemaak. Sy verhouding met God het begin skeefloop met sy pa se dood. Hy het God verkwalik vir sy pa se dood, asook vir die meisie wat hy 'n jaar later verloor het. Sy was vir hom 'n "blessing" van God en hy het op sy kniee vir haar gepleit by God. God het haar egter nie vir hom gegun nie. Hy het nog nie vrede daarmee gemaak nie, maar verstaan nou na 5 jaar beter dat hy eintlik bederf was omdat hy alles gekry het wat hy wou gehad het en dat God nie net daar is om sy behoeftes te bevredig nie. Die 6 jaar van drugs het ook die gaping tussen hom en God vergroot. Hy vergelyk sy "drug use with walking hand in hand with the devil".

Tog is God vir Gilbert belangrik, en hy weet, deur sy opvoeding, dat hy God nodig het vir sy toekoms. Veral sy ma se geloof en die innerlike vrede, liefde en geluk wat uit haar gestraal het, is iets waarna hy smag in sy eie lewe. Hy het by haar 'n God van liefde en vergifnis leer ken. Sy het daaglik oor God gepraat en God in alles raakgesien. Sy is oor alles dankbaar. Gilbert het God se teenwoordigheid ook ervaar in sy verhouding met die vorige meisie wat hy gehad het. Alhoewel hulle nie meer bymekaar is nie, is dit nog

steeds vir Gilbert 'n teken van God se bemoeienis met hom. Alhoewel sy pa nie so gelowige soos sy ma was nie, het hy tog in sy pa ook geluk en liefde leer ken, veral in die manier waarop hy vir sy vrou geleef het. Gebed is vir hom 'n manier om nog steeds verbind te wees aan sy pa.

Gilbert het voorbehoude rondom die moontlikheid van vergifnis en 'n nuwe begin. Hy glo dat God 'n mens kan vergewe as hy regtig berou het en eerlik sonde bely. Hy self het egter nog nooit so ervaring gehad van God se vergifnis nie.

Gerrit: Het jy al God se vergifnis ervaar? 'n Keer wat jy om vergifnis gevra het en die gevoel gekry het dat jy vergewe is?

Gilbert: Nog nooit. Ek het al vir God gevra hoekom, hoekom het ek nog nie die gevoel gekry nie.

Gerrit: So ervaring sal dus vir jou iets nuuts wees?

Gilbert vra: Hoekom kan u nie ook vir my laat weet dat alles orraait is nie? 'n Hand op die skouer- 'n gerustheid soos my ma van praat, wat kalmte oor haar bring as ek 'n nag uit was, en 'n smile op haar gesig?

Hy verwerp ook enige gedagte dat 'n mens vir 'n sekere tydperk kan leef soos jy wil, en dan as jy probleme kry, tot bekering kom en vergifnis wil hê. God laat Hom nie vir 'n "ride" vang nie. Verder voel hy self nog te vuil, hy voel hy is nog nie by 'n punt waar hy God om vergifnis kan vra nie. Dis nie vir hom reg nie. Hy kan homself ook nie vergewe nie.

Gilbert het nog 'n prentjie van God wat hierby aansluit, wat hy in die Ou Testament gekry het, 'n prentjie van 'n God wat magtig is en nie oor Hom laat loop nie. Sy vertelling van sy ervaring van God op 'n seilboot op die see bevestig hierdie prentjie. Soos Job het hy God se handewerk eerstehands leer ken die 33 dae op die see: die ontsaglike sterrehemel, die magtige golwe, die son en maan op die see, en tog was hy nooit bang nie, het hy veilig gevoel. God se grootheid was oorweldigend en hy het dit deur sy hele lyf ervaar. Hy het nog nooit so klein gevoel nie. Hierdie siening van God wat magtig is, laat hom ook beseef dat vergifnis nie goedkoop is nie.

Gilbert meen dat dit tyd sal vat om die gaping tussen hom en God kleiner te maak. Dit is nie iets wat sommer net gebeur nie. God help nie mense wat nie hulleself help nie.

Verandering begin by jou. Jy help jousef deur God. 'n Tante het tot bekering gekom, en nou gee sy alles wat sy het weg, en sê net dat God weer vir more sal sorg. 'n Mens moet werk, anders word jy 'n bedelaar wat van ander se liefdadigheid moet leef. Daar is egter 'n fyn lyn, want dit kan ook gebeur dat 'n mens te veel jousef begin dink. Sy baas het reggekom van 'n siekte, en hy glo hy het nie vir God nodig nie, dat jy enige iets self kan doen. Hy lag vir Bakkies Botha oor sy geloof. Hy glo 'n mens moet afhanklik van die Here bly.

God is beskikbaar, altyd, en die "sacrifice" is gemaak. Hy glo hy sal nie hierdeur kom as hy nie vir God terugvat nie. Vir hom is daar ook nie 'n grys area nie, geen "half measures" nie, net swart of wit. 'n Mens is 'n Christen, voluit, of jy is nie een nie. Hy ervaar God se teenwoordigheid in die meisie wat Hy vir hom gegee het. Sy is vir hom soos 'n engel wat ingegryp het voordat die duiwel hom te styf vas het.

Gilbert het 'n interessante tema wat deur sy lewe loop: die lees van die Bybel. Dit is iets wat hy voortdurend doen, en dit help hom. Op die boot het hy die Nuwe Testament deurgelees, en hy lees nog elke dag die Bybel. Die lewe is vir hom 'n stryd tussen die goeie en die slegte. Waar hy met die duiwel hand aan hand geloop het toe hy drugs gebruik het, help die Bybellees hom om aan die kant van God te loop. Hoe heiliger 'n mens word, hoe groter die stryd. "Die drugs se glorie, die duiwel se glorie", is net vir 'n oomblik, maar dis nie 'n lewe nie. God en liefde is baie beter. Die Bybel maak hom sterk teen die duiwel se aanslae. Hy vertel ook die storie van 'n praktiese manier waarop hy 'n aanslag van die duiwel teengestaan het. Toe hy en sy ma wou kerk toe gaan verlede Sondagoggend, wou die voordeur nie oopsluit nie. Hy het egter rustig gebly en eenvoudig die skarnier afgeskroef en hulle is kerk toe. Die ervaring het hom goed laat voel en vir hom bevestig dat God sterker as die duiwel is.

Gilbert voel dat hy wil begin teruggee aan die lewe. Hy wil bv. sy storie kom deel op Donderdagaande hier by Ramot. Hy sien dat hy veral onder sy eie gemeenskap se jongmense 'n invloed kan uitoefen. Hy wil die boodskap uitdra dat die "Jesus Factor" - die tema van 'n flik - onmisbaar is. Hy sien uit daarna om die pad met sy meisie te loop as bondgenoot.



## **Deelnemer 9: Coreen**

### **Hoe haar God-stories haar self-stories konstrueer**

Coreen is iemand wat baie gemaklik is oor die feit dat sy in God glo en 'n verhouding met Hom het. Deel van haar storie is dat sy uit 'n Christelike ouerhuis kom en sy is tans aktief in die AGS Kerk. Sy was ook alreeds 'n diaken, 'n ouderling en 'n lid van 'n Bybelstudiegroep in die kerk. In die lig van haar alkoholmisbruik en haar wisselende gemoedstoestand is haar geloof vir haar belangrik. Dit is 'n vastigheid, iets wat altyd daar is, wat haar sterk maak, haar vrede gee en haar help om haarself meer positief te waardeer. Dit is veral as sy bid – dit is iets wat sy vertel dat sy voortdurend doen – dat sy 'n kalmte ervaar. Een van die belangrikste maniere waarop sy haar lewe met God sterk maak is deur na die kerk oor die radio te luister. Sy het 'n openheid en 'n ontvanklikheid vir dit wat sy oor dié meduim ontvang, en sy koester dit.

Vir Coreen sluit haar alkoholmisbruik en haar godsdiens mekaar nie uit nie. Selfs in die tye wat sy alkohol misbruik het, het sy nog steeds in God se goedheid bly glo en met Hom gekommunikeer. Dit bevestig die ou gedagte dat alkohol en godsdiens op 'n sekere vlak dieselfde behoeftes in die mens vervul. Coreen wil nie meer met die vernietigende gevolge van alkohol saamleef nie, en sien haar geloof as een van die dinge wat haar kan help om sober te bly. 'n Ander aspek van haar lewe wat haar kan help op die pad sonder alkohol, is die feit dat sy graag betrokke wil wees by ander mense. Sy sien betrokkenheid by ander mense as 'n teenvoeter vir dit wat alkohol van haar wil hê. Sy sien haarself as 'n liefdevolle mens wat ander wil help. Een voorbeeld was die vriendin wat aan haar geld geskuld het, wat sy uiteindelik afgeskryf het. Haar dogter is ook vir haar belangrik in haar lewe, en sy wil graag vir haar beskikbaar wees. Haar dogter is vir haar 'n motivering om te kies vir die lewe teenoor die pad van die dood waarna alkohol haar uitnooi. Sy ervaar die tydperk in Ramot as nog 'n kans wat sy gekry het wat sy nie wil laat verbygaan nie. Sy wil geen drank meer gebruik nie, omdat dit ook inmeng met die ander mediese behandeling wat sy ontvang.

Verandering is iets wat kom deur jou eie wil, jy is die een wat moet keuses maak. Sy genade en hulp is nodig, maar jy moet verantwoordelikheid vir jou lewe aanvaar.

Te midde van al die uitdagings in Coreen se lewe, soos die "duiwel, depressie en drank", maar ook soos oa ook finansiële sekuriteit, die gemis van 'n lewensmaat, ens., is sy dapper en sien sy kans vir wat die lewe vra. Sy is alreeds deur baie lewenservarings, en skep die indruk van iemand wat tog reeds baie lewensvaardighede bemeester, ten spyte van die beperkinge wat die middelafhanklikheid op haar geplaas het. Sy is gevorm en toegerus om, ook met die krag wat sy uit haar verhouding met God put, te kan bereik wat sy graag wil en waarop sy haar toespits.

## **Deelnemer 10: Jan**

### **Hoe sy God-stories sy self-stories konstrueer**

Jan is 'n 44 jarige getroude man met 2 dogtertjies. Vir Jan was sy geloof nog sy hele lewe 'n belangrike faktor. Hy kom uit 'n Christelike ouerhuis en hy en sy gesin is ook kerklik meelewend. Met hulle intrek in Worcester was die kerk hulle eerste linie van verhoudings aanknoop met ander mense. Anders gesê, Jan het sonder moeite met sy kitaar ingeval by die orkes van die gemeente. Dit is teen hierdie agtergrond dat dit dan ook nie vreemd is dat die CAD 'n groot rol gespeel het in die feit dat Jan wel Ramot toe gekom het nie. Hulle het oor 'n lang tyd vir Jan aangemoedig om vir hulp te kom. Jan ken God as iemand wat werklik 'n verskil maak in die gang van die lewe. As hy dink aan God, staan voorop dat hy geleer het om niks te doen sonder om die krag van die Here te vra of om na die wil van die Here te vra nie. Dit het 'n effek, dit werk, soos by rondom al die aanbevelings vir poste wat hy al gekry het, die keuses wat hy al moes maak, ens. Die feit dat hy reeds op 'n jong ouderdom skoolhoof was, is vir hom 'n bevestiging van God se werk in sy lewe.

Juis in die lig van hierdie amper voorspelbare pad wat hy met God sy lewe lank loop, was die "week van nederlaag" vir hom 'n helder stem van God, 'n konkrete bewys vir hom dat hy veranderinge in sy lewe moet maak tov sy "whiskey en coke gewoonte". Hy het die Sondag vir die Here gevra dat daardie week suksesvol sal wees, dat alles sal werk wat moet werk, dat dinge uitgesorteer sal wees. Net mooi daardie week loop alles verkeerd wat verkeerd kan loop. Die rekenaar kry 'n virus, die faksmasjien breek, ander frustrasies duik op en daar is 'n boodskap dat die tak waar hy werk toegemaak gaan word. Die Donderdag word hy "toegesak" deur mense wat hom wil laat opneem by Ramot. Dinge het die teenoorgestelde geloop as wat hy gevra het. Vir Jan was dit God

se manier om vir hom te sê dat iets moet verander. God se manier om te sê: "Jy't gevra vir verandering, hier is dit nou".

Jan het kort kort daarna verwys dat hy nie so drink soos ander alkoholiste nie, dat hy nie in daardie kategorie val nie. Hy is onseker of hy rehabilitasie nodig het. Tog het hy uiteindelik gekom. Sy "whiskey en coke gewoonte" het sy vrou baie gepla, en sy kinders was bang om maatjies te nooi en hy gee dan aanstoot met sy "dop". Dit was vir hom 'n manier om af te skakel na 'n dag se eise. Hy het ook gesê dat die gewoonte hom soms skelm laat drank koop, en dat hy so 'n opportunistiese drinker geword het. Die feit dat hy hier is, laat hom tog voel dat hy geëtiketteer word, veral deurdadig dat sy gesin na 'n vriendin se verjaarsdag kon gaan terwyl hy hier is en nie kon gaan nie.

Vir Jan is dit asof sy roetine van Bybellees en bid vir hom nuwe betekenis gekry het sedert hy in Ramot is:

Gerrit: Die feit dat jy Bybellees en bid, wat beteken dit vir jou?

Jan: Ek lees die Bybel anders, dieper, vandat ek hier is. Dit voel of die Here spesifiek met my praat. Ek lees bv nou die aand uit Jak. 1 vanaf vers 11, en ek sien myself heeltemal in daai prentjie.

Sy omgang met sy Bybel, wat hy as 'n "tool" gebruik, wat vol geskryf en gekrap is, gee vir hom beelde van die implikasies van die nuwe lewe van helderheid in die lewe volgens God se "reëls". As gevolg van sy opvoedingsagtergrond is reëls vir hom deel van sy lewe en is dit iets wat daar is om mens te help, iets waarby mens kan baat vind. Hy kry ook beelde wat hom help in die struggle waardeur hy tans gaan, soos bv. in die boek Filemon wat hy nou eintlik vir die eerste keer gelees het. Vir Jan is hierdie beoefening van geloof die sleutel wat die deur oopsluit om te kan uitgaan, die belangrikste faktor om los te kom van verslaafdheid. As 'n mens se geloof nie sterk genoeg is nie, gaan jy dadelik weer drink as jy uit Ramot kom. Vir hom is die drankgewoonte 'n "mind-game", en juis daarom moet die "mind" op die krag van God gerig wees, God help 'n mens om jou "mind" op 'n ander plek te sit, anders gaan mens weer drink.

Jan se Christelike waardes kom duidelik na vore in sy verbintenis aan sy gesin. Sy besluit om wel tog Ramot toe te kom, was ten diepste 'n keuse wat hy gemaak het omdat

hy nie bereid was om sy gesin te verloor nie. Sy interaksie met sy vrou en twee dogters, ook hulle betrokkenheid by die rehabilitasieproses, is temas wat prominent in sy vertellings na vore kom. Die woorde van sy oudste dogtertjie toe hy 'n naweek huis toe is verwoord in 'n sekere sin die pyn wat hulle as gesin tans ervaar met sy weg wees van die huis af en die rehabilitasie-proses, maar ook die "geboorte" wat die pyn aan nuwe moontlikhede kan gee: "Dankie, pa, dat pa nie iets drink nie. Nou kan ek veilig voel om maatjies huistoe te nooi. Dankie dat ons lekker as gesin weer kan saam wees".

Jan het baie lewensvaardighede as bronne tot sy beskikking om die lewe te kan lei wat hy graag wil lei. Hy is 'n mens met lewenswysheid en lewenservaring. Verantwoordelikheid, dissipline en self-kontrole was nog altyd sterk eienskappe in sy lewe, ten spyte van die beperkende gewoontes waarvan hy nou wil ontslae raak. Hy het gekies om te breek met die houvas van alkohol, en met hierdie eienskappe, veral ook met sy geloof in God en met die ondersteuning van sy gesin en ander mense in die gemeenskap, is hy oortuig hy sal die nuwe pad van soberheid kan loop.

## **Deelnemer 11: Heiné**

### **Hoe sy God-stories sy self-stories konstrueer**

Heiné is 41 en is tans in sy tweede huwelik. Hy het sedert universiteitsdae begin drink. Heiné het die pynlike storie vertel van hoe alkohol sy lewe al meer oorheers het sedert sy eerste jaar na skool. Op 'n staduum het hy alkohol beskryf as 'n "maat" wat die alleenheid weggevat het, 'n alleenheid wat in die eerste plek juis deur alkohol veroorsaak is. Hy het op 'n staduum gemeen hy het nie ander maats nodig nie, sy eerste huwelik het verbrokkel en hy het uiteindelik sy vrou en kind verloor. Daar was jare wat hy as 'n alleenstryd beskryf, waarin alkohol sy enigste toevlug was. Later het hy alkohol beskryf as sy "baas". Hy self ken die ervaring van "baas" te wees, deurdat hy 'n akademiese presteerder was, 'n leier op die sportveld, 'n offisier in die weermag, en deurdat hy vroeg in sy loopbaan goeie opgang gemaak het tot op die hoogste vlak en ook 'n skoolhoof was. Hy was 'n "superman" wat hard gewerk het vir wat hy bereik het. Tog was daar verlies aan beheer in sy eie lewe, ten spyte van 'n goeie indruk wat hy steeds na buite kon vertoon. Hy het nooit by sy werk probleme gekry nie, alhoewel die drinkery dinge soos sy belangstelling, motivering, beplanning en konsentrasie negatief beïnvloed het. Teen die tyd wat hy kon erken dat hy 'n probleem het, het alkohol sy lewenswyse heeltemal beheer. Hy het sy gesin, sy huis, sy motor en sy geld verloor.

Twee dinge staan vir Heiné uit wat die afgelope maande gebeur het wat 'n groot verandering in sy lewe gebring het. Die eerste is sy tweede vrou, Christine, se volharding in haar godsdienst. Haar vasberadenheid om te bly Bybel lees al luister hy nie, om aan te hou kerk besoek, haar liefde en omgee het 'n invloed op hom gehad wat bygedra het tot 'n verandering in sy lewe. Die tweede is die gevolge daarvan dat hulle dogtertjie 2 maande te vroeg gebore is. Sy moes 'n noodoperasie in Panorama hospitaal kry en was drie maande in die ICU. Te midde van die dokters se magteloosheid het die kind wonderbaarlik genees. Hy weet dat haar genesing die antwoord op gebed was. Pastore van die kerk het ook vir haar kom bid. Die hele ervaring het hom geruk. Dit het hom laat beseef dat 'n mens nie sonder God kan lewe nie.

Gerrit: Beskou jy dit as God wat haar genees het?

Heiné: Ja beslis. Dit het my weer terug op die regte pad gebring.

Al het hy daarna nog steeds alkohol gebruik, was die gebeurtenis vir hom 'n toets waarin hy moes kies om alkohol te gebruik of om na die Here te draai. Hy het daar besluit om na die Here te draai, 'n besluit wat mettertyd deurgewerk het in pad wat hy sedert daardie tyd geloop het. As gevolg van sy middelmisbruik het godsdienst uit sy lewe verdwyn. Hy was op 'n stadium aktief in die kerk, hy was 'n diaken en saam met sy eerste vrou in die sanggroep van die gemeente. Die alkoholmisbruik het egter gemaak dat God eenkant toe geskuif is en net in nood geroep is. Hy het trouens op 'n stadium vir God kwalik geneem vir alles wat verkeerd is in sy lewe. Nou het hy egter weer vir God ontdek as die "maat wat hom nie verder vereensaam nie". Daarby het hy opnuut waardering vir dit wat hy ontvang het in sy nuwe vrou en die dogtertjie. Hy het begin dink oor hoe dinge skeef geloop het in sy eerste huwelik, met die oog daarop dat hy nie weer dieselfde pad wil loop nie. Hy wil ook vir sy nuwe dogtertjie die maat en 'n rolmodel wees wat hy nie vir sy eerste dogtertjie kon wees nie – hy wil nou regtig 'n gesinslewe hê. Hy het in God ook nou 'n ander soort "baas", een wat nie vernietig nie maar ophef en lewe gee, een wat hom instaat stel om self meer in beheer van sy eie lewe te kan wees. Hy beseef nou dat die feit dat hy in sy lewe bereik het wat hy wel bereik het, danksy God was. Verally lees van Psalm 39 het hom gehelp om te beseef dat dinge in sy lewe skeef geloop het onder andere ook omdat hy God net in tye van nood geroep het. Die afgelope drie maande gee hy elke dag aan God erkenning vir alles, en dank hy Hom vir wat hy het. God is nou vir Heiné die begin en die einde, die Alfa en Omega.

Hy lees en bid elke oggend en aand, hy het ook begin om gereeld saam met Christine kerk toe te gaan. Sy godsdiens is vir hom sentraal in sy lewe. Dit kan die sentrale plek in sy lewe inneem wat alkohol soveel jare ingeneem het. Hy ervaar sy geloof inderdaad dan ook as 'n krag wat hom instaat stel om die regte keuses oor alkohol en oor sy gesin te bly maak. Daarby is hy ook 'n mens wat baie lewensvaardighede het soos wat gesien kan word in dit wat hy al bereik het in die lewe. Dit is amper half 'n storie wat heelyd in die agtergrond is, wat sterker na vore kan kom soos wat die alkohol storie vervaag. Dissipline, doelgerigtheid en 'n sistematiese manier van werk is deel van sy mondering, alles wat met die regte aansporing en ondersteuning vir hom kan help om 'n sukses te maak van sy lewe.

Heiné loop oor van sy nuutgevonde verhouding met God en die herstelde eienaarskap van God oor sy lewe. Hy is oortuig dat hy weer 'n kans gekry het wat hy nou met beide hande aangryp. Hy glo hy het nou genoeg bronne tot sy beskikking om hom nie te laat vang deur dinge soos ledigheid wat hom kan pootjie nie, maar om self in beheer van sy eie lewe te wees, en alkohol se beheer finaal te stop. Deel van die bronne is, naas sy vrou en dogtertjie, ook sy ouers, wat hom baie ondersteun het en intense bemoeienis met hom gemaak het, soos net ouers kan, en sy suster in Nieu Zeeland, asook ander mense in die gemeenskap van Worcester, soos Basie, die kerkbyeenkomste wat hy nou geniet, almal mense wat hierdie hele pad saam met hom geloop het, as instrumente van God.....

## **Deelnemer 12: Wolfgang**

### **Hoe sy God-stories sy self-stories konstrueer.**

Vir Wolfgang is God baie belangrik in sy lewe. Hy was in 1990 in 'n kop aan kop botsing op die pad tussen Swakopmund en Walvisbaai. Die feit dat sy lewe daar gespaar is, is vir hom die bevestiging daarvan dat God in beheer van sy lewe is. Op daardie stadium was hy nog nie 'n gelowige nie, maar het later, toe hy tot geloof gekom het, besef dat God daar aan die werk was om sy lewe te spaar.

Hy kan sy geloof herlei na 'n spesifieke gebeurtenis in sy lewe, wat dan ook 'n keerpunt in sy lewe was, al het hy daarna teruggeval. 5 jaar gelede het vriende van hom hom na 'n kursus geneem wat deur Adriaan Kruger, 'n bekende in seminaarkringe, aangebied is.

Daar het hy homself verbind aan God en God se liefde aanvaar. Hy het daarna ook ingeskakel by die NG Kerk Moedergemeente waar Ds. Thys van der Merwe en Dirk Louw die dominees is. Hy is baie opgewonde omdat hy gister 'n boodskap van Ds. Dirk Louw gekry het waarin die vir hom sê dat hulle agter hom staan en wag vir hom om terug te keer na Windhoek om hom daar verder te ondersteun. Hulle wag vir hom om hom weer "kerkfiks" te kry.

Gerrit: Wat beteken die brief vir jou?

Wolfgang: Dit se dat daar regtig mense is wat vir my omgee. Dit inspireer my. Ek gaan hulle definitief opsoek as ek terug is.

Daar is twee uiteenlopende stories oor God wat altwee belangrike konsekwensies vir hom het:

Gerrit: Hoe lyk die God wat jy by die kursus leer ken het, watter prentjie het jy van Hom?

Wolfgang: Hy moet Almagtig wees. Het al God stem gehoor en dit was vreeswekkend, 'n mens raak bang. Ek het gedroom dat ek alkohol gebruik, lekker vir my 'n dop skink. God se skielik vir my "nee!". Die stem was amper soos 'n kwaad pa. Ek het regop langs die bed gestaan soos ek geskrik het.

Gerrit: Was jou pa kwaai?

Wolfgang: Nee. Hy was ook 'n alkoholis.

Gerrit: Het jy op 'n ander plek van 'n kwaai pa geleer?

Wolfgang: Ja, my stiefpa was wel kwaai.

Gerrit: Hoe dink jy voel hierdie almagtige God oor jou wat nou weer gedrink het daarna?

Wolfgang: Ek weet nie hoe dink God nie, maar van 'n menslike kant gesien moet Hy seker terleurgesteld wees dat ek elke keer weer dieselfde pad loop.

Hierdie prentjie van God as magtige regter wat streng optree moet egter gesien word in die lig van sy ander oortuiging.

As God hard praat, is dit terleurstelling maar ook om 'n mens reg te help. Hy is kwaai juis omdat Hy liefhet.

Gerrit: As jy dan nou weer gedrink het, dan verwerp Hy jou nie?

Wolfgang: Ek persoonlik glo God verwerp niemand nie.

Gerrit: Waar kom jy aan hierdie geloof, waar het jy dit gesien of geleer?

Wolfgang: Ek weet nie waar ek dit gesien of geleer het nie. Ons is mos almal kinders van die Here. Op die ou einde bly dit nog steeds jou keuse watse pad jy loop, die smal of die bree weg. As jy die breë pad loop en eers op die einde tot bekering kom, sal God jou weer aanneem.

Gerrit: Help dit vir jou in jou lewe om so te glo, motiveer dit jou dat jy elke keer weer kan terugkom na die Here en dat jy vrede met Hom kan maak?

Wolfgang: Ja.

Gerrit: Wat is die rede waarom God ons altyd maar weer kan vergewe?

Wolfgang: Omdat Jesus klaar vir ons sondes betaal het.

Die God-storie van Jesus se betaling vir ons sondes het belangrike gevolge vir Wolfgang, nl. dat hy nou daarop kan reken dat hy vergewe is en dat God aan sy kant is op die pad wat vir hom voorle.

Wolfgang het nie op die oomblik werk nie, hy is besig om sy huis te verkoop en hy is besig om te skei. Sy lewer is ook nie reg nie en hy het 'n 50/50 kans om lewersirroze te kry. Hy is egter oortuig dat hy hierdie probleme sal kan oorkom, en hy is vasberade om 'n nuwe skoon lewe in Windhoek te gaan leef. Hy was in Windhoek ook in 'n rehabilitasie sentrum, maar hy voel dat hy "gatvol" is vir die aanmekeer terugval, en dat hy hierdie keer baie beter toegerus word om die drankmisbruik finaal te los.

Wolfgang sien die verandering wat in sy lewe moet kom as iets wat God op so manier doen dat hy self ook hard moet werk. Trouens, hy wil met die begin van 'n nuwe lewe nog harder as ooit werk. Verandering kom nie vanself nie. Hy was 'n Mercedes "mechanic" en toe 'n "salesman" by 'n "irrigation" besigheid en sal nou nuwe werk moet soek. Hy sal ook moeite wil doen om so in te skakel by die kerk dat dit sy lewe sal volmaak en hom sal laat groei. Hy voorsien dat hy ook by die AA betrokke sal raak. Hy glo dat sy lewe betekenis het, 'n doel het, in die lig van die manier waarop God hom tot hier gelei het, en dat hy heel moontlik betrokke sal raak by ander mense wat hulp nodig het met middelafhanklikheid. Verder gaan hy ook werk aan sy verhouding met sy meisie met wie hy saam vorentoe wil gaan. As sy nie ophou drink nie, sal hy die



verhouding moet verbreek, omdat 'n volgende terugval vir hom dodelik kan wees. Hy hoop egter dat sy ook sal kan ophou drink.

Hy sien homself as iemand wat nie maklik uitreik na ander nie en terughoudend is. Tog besef hy dat kontak met en ondersteuning van ander mense noodsaaklik is om sober te bly en om te groei in sy geloof, en daarom is hy dankbaar vir sy meisie, Ds. Dirk Louw en Ds Thys van der Merwe wat ook sy buurman is met wie hy daagliks kontak het. Trouens, Wolfgang se God-stories en self-stories bevestig die verhoudingsaard van ons geloof en ons identiteit.

Hy is oortuig daarvan dat hy die Here nodig het op sy pad na herstel en dat hy dit nie sonder God sal kan maak nie. Die warmte wat hy nie altyd by sy ma gekry het nie, is iets waarna elke mens maar altyd soek. Ietsie daarvan kry hy definitief by die Here. Alhoewel hy in die tyd van rehabilitasie nie 'n verandering of verdieping van sy geloof ervaar het nie, en die dominee se preek oor die radio hom aan die slaap maak, is hy nie afgesny van God nie en praat hy voortdurend met Hom.

## ADDENDUM C

### Example of consent form for participants

The performance of hope: The social construction of self-stories embedded in God-stories in the context of a short term rehabilitation program for addiction.

#### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I am satisfied that I know what this project is about.

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

I am willing to participate in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witness

**ADDENDUM D**

**EXAMPLE FOR CONSENT FORM FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION**

The performance of hope: The social construction of self-stories embedded in God-stories in the context of a short term rehabilitation program for addiction.

**CONSENT FOR FOR PARTICIPANTS FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION**

I have read the summary of the conversations.

I had the opportunity to make changes to that information, including suggestions, corrections or comments.

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

I prefer the following name (either own name or pseudonym) be used in the research report: .....

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witness